

## [Northwest Passage 100th Anniversary](#)

### From seal flipper fat to prime rib, Arctic cooks have served and satisfied

by Al Martin and John Trone

Aboard USCGC HEALY, August 22, 2003 - Exactly 100 years ago when the sloop GJOA was making the first successful transit of the Northwest Passage, Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen was introduced to such local delicacies as filet of Arctic fox and uncooked seal blubber. Native Inuits living at the top of the North American continent are especially fond of these dishes that are served with frozen reindeer marrow for dessert. Amundsen credited these staples with helping his expedition survive three grueling years in one of the world's most unforgiving environments.



*Senior Food Services Chief Karl Kaniss carves prime rib for the crew of the Coast Guard's polar icebreaker HEALY, currently transiting the Northwest Passage across the top of the North American continent. Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen began the first successful voyage through this ice-choked waterway 100 years ago aboard his sloop GJOA.*

Time after time, Amundsen praised his cook for helping his small band of seven explorers on the sloop GJOA get through their ordeal. He once referred to him as the most important member of the expedition.

Today, the Coast Guard polar icebreaker HEALY is making its way along much the same route that was taken by Amundsen in 1903. The HEALY cruise is helping mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Amundsen's historic feat and it seems that some things haven't really changed. While the menu aboard HEALY reads differently with items like eggs benedict, prime rib and fried shrimp, good victuals and good cooks are as necessary today as they were in Amundsen's time, both for morale and survival.

Though HEALY's Northwest Passage transit will be about 12 days and not three years, this icebreaker / research vessel deploys regularly to remote polar regions for scientific missions that may take months. Its crew and visiting engineers and scientists have recently completed a variety of research projects off the northernmost coast of Greenland and are currently headed west through Canada's frigid Arctic archipelago to Alaska. More months of science will follow when they get there.

The Coast Guard seems to share Amundsen's high esteem for cooks and the need to be sure hardy polar appetites are satisfied. Amundsen wrote after his conquest of the Northwest Passage that, "It is an invaluable quality in a man on such an expedition to be able to eat anything." The Coast Guard may not go that far but it has provided the optimally-manned HEALY with generous food service support.

In 1904, near the midpoint of his expedition, Amundsen established The Society. The goal of The Society was to taste "all the production of the land." Arctic fox (tastes like rabbit) was considered "one of the Society's finest dishes." If explorers were off on a remote sledging trip away from the ship, "the best dish of all was frozen reindeer tongue which melted in the mouth," to quote Amundsen. Eider duck were "plump and of a very fine flavor. The fat meat around seal flippers is excellent," he wrote, "especially as a soup. When prepared this way it does not taste of fish oil, but rather reminds one of mutton fat." The Society's list included fish - especially salmon and trout, raw or slightly warmed over a blubber oil lamp - reindeer joints and ptarmigan, an Arctic grouse.

Not all of Amundsen's eatables were gathered locally. Rations brought from home included that traditional polar expedition standby pemmican, a mixture of half beef fat and half horse flesh which was dried, crushed, melted together and formed into one pound bricks. It could be roasted, boiled or eaten raw.

About the only thing raw on the HEALY are the nerves of the crew if meals aren't on time. Senior Food Services Chief Karl Kaniss and his assistants try to see that this does not happen. Their resources include a large cache of refrigerated meats, fruits, dairy products and vegetables; assorted packaged goods and a long list of juices and beverages. The galley boasts six ovens, steam kettle, charbroiler, microwave and a tilt skillet to mention a few items found in the pots and pans department.

In addition to regular meals, the HEALY galley is available 24 hours to the ship's visiting scientists who may be conducting round-the-clock research experiments and to the 80 or so members of the crew assisting in marine science projects or managing the ship's movements through treacherous ice passages. It should be added that on the HEALY everyone eats in the galley there being no separate dining facilities for officers or senior enlisted personnel.

HEALY has other amenities not available to Amundsen. A well-equipped and staffed sick bay attends to the medical needs of those on board. There's a barber shop where haircuts are \$4.00. The HEALY gymnasium, outfitted with weight lifting equipment, treadmills and stationary bicycles, is noteworthy. It is often overrun with visitors and crew alike. Some visitors to the HEALY have quipped that if the galley were not so popular, the gym would be less crowded.