

H.W. Stallworthy (1895-1976)

Sergeant-Major Henry Webb Stallworthy of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police came to prominence following an arduous 1400-mile (2250-km) dogsled journey in search of the German explorer Dr. H.K.E. Krueger in 1932, during which he circumnavigated Axel Heiberg Island. Much of Stallworthy's 31 years with the R.C.M.P. was spent in isolated parts of northern Canada. He was tough, energetic, unassuming, devoted to duty, and expert at arctic travelling — qualities that led to his secondment to the 1934-35 Oxford University Ellesmere Land Expedition.

H.W. Stallworthy ("Stall" to his friends) was born in Winsor, Gloucestershire, on 20 January 1895. After schooling at Cirencester Grammar School he came to Canada in 1913 to visit his brother, who had taken a homestead south of Calgary. Joining the Royal North-West Mounted Police the next year, he trained in Regina before being posted to Calgary, and later, to Dawson and Vancouver. He served overseas with the R.N.-W.M.P. contingent of the Canadian Expeditionary Force from May 1918 to March 1919, and after leaving the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 1921, he rejoined two years later. His subsequent postings included Chesterfield Inlet, Jasper, Bache Peninsula, and Fort Smith, as well as other locations, and he steadily advanced to the rank of sergeant-major in 1943.

His career in the North was outstanding. He volunteered for the famous winter mail patrol between Dawson, Y.T., and Fort McPherson, N.W.T., under the stern leadership of Sergeant Dempster in 1921 — a severe initiation into northern dogsled travel. In 1923 he went to Chesterfield Inlet, where, under the tutelage of Nowya, his Eskimo travelling companion, he learned to drive dogs in the "fan hitch", cook on the trail, and hunt large marine mammals for dog food. In his second year at Chesterfield, a tragic event occurred that left a permanent mark on his nature. Maggie Clay, young wife of the staff sergeant in charge of the detachment, was attacked by dogs while walking on the beach. The flesh was stripped from her lower leg, and she was bleeding profusely. Stallworthy, Father Duplain, and Norman Snow of the Hudson's Bay Company were forced to operate, removing her leg at the knee. Although she survived for three days, severe loss of blood and lack of proper facilities resulted in her death. During this incident, Stallworthy proved his coolness in adversity and showed great inner strength.

In 1930 he was posted to Bache Peninsula, Ellesmere Island, the most northerly detachment in Canada. Nothing could have suited him better. He was in the land of such famous explorers as Cook, Peary, and MacMillan. With him were Eskimos who had travelled with these men, and those same Eskimos would become his friends and companions on long, hazardous patrols. After his first winter, Stallworthy made a gruelling trip over rough sea ice to Craig Harbour on southeastern Ellesmere Island, only to find that the German explorer Dr. H.K.E. Krueger, for whom he was searching, had not passed

that way. While hunting a polar bear on the return trip, he fell into a snow-covered crevasse, becoming wedged in about 7 m below the surface. He was extricated by his Eskimo companions, who dropped him a harpoon line.

The highlight of his career came in 1932 during his continued search for the Krueger expedition. Following Inspector A.H. Joy's search-plan, Stallworthy and Constable R.W. Hamilton left Bache Peninsula on 20 March 1932, with seven Greenland Eskimos, eight sleds, and 125 dogs. Hamilton's party returned on 7 May, after a 900-mile (1450-km) trip to Amund Ringnes and Cornwall islands. Stallworthy, with three Eskimos, travelled along Eureka Sound to the northern tip of Axel Heiberg Island, where he found a record indicating that Krueger was heading for Cape Sverre on the northern tip of Amund Ringnes Island. Except for a record found on Meighen Island in 1957, no further trace of the Krueger expedition has been found. Although Stallworthy was unable to reach Meighen Island (where he suspected Krueger had gone) because of poor ice conditions and a shortage of food, he completed his journey around Axel Heiberg Island and returned to Bache Peninsula on 23 May — an epic 65-day trip of 1400 miles. During the journey, he confirmed that Schei "Island" was a peninsula, and learned from his chief hunter, Etookashoo, that Dr. F.A. Cook, who claimed to have reached the North Pole in 1908, had actually taken his photographs of the "Pole" within sight of northern Axel Heiberg Island at about 82°N. Stallworthy's party faced starvation on this journey and had to kill some sled dogs to survive. As Edward Shackleton later commented, Stallworthy "would be the first to admit, if it had not been for the skill of his Eskimos, he might never have returned."

In 1933 he married Hilda, a schoolteacher, and after a brief honeymoon in England was seconded by the R.C.M.P. as a technical advisor to the Oxford University Ellesmere Land Expedition (1934-35). Between 3 April and 26 May 1935, Stallworthy, A.W. Moore, Nookapingwa, and Inutuk penetrated Grant Land (the main goal of the expedition) via Fort Conger and Lake Hazen, from their base in Etah, Greenland. Stallworthy's unfailing energy, enthusiasm, and willingness to sacrifice were demonstrated when he agreed to remain at Lake Hazen to fish for critically needed dog food, while Nookapingwa and Moore explored inland via the Gilman Glacier, reaching 82°25'N. Stopping at Fort Conger on the return trip, Stallworthy left a record of this most northerly sled journey ever made by an officer of the R.C.M.P.

Following his retirement from the Force in 1946, Stallworthy was called on to act as supervisor of security for the DEW Line — a string of radar stations crossing northern North America. Eventually, he and Hilda moved to Vancouver Island, where they built with their own hands "Timberlane", an exclusive resort on Saratoga Beach, and ran it for 21 years. Stallworthy died at Comox, British Columbia, on 25 December 1976.



Acting Sergeant H.W. Stallworthy (extreme right) with four members of the Oxford University Ellesmere Land Expedition in 1934 (left to right: A.W. Moore, E. Shackleton, R. Bentham, Dr. G.N. Humphreys).

For outstanding service to his country he was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1973. Other honours included election as a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in 1935 for his contribution to the success of the Oxford University Ellesmere Land Expedition, and the naming of Cape Stallworthy — the northernmost tip of Axel Heiberg Island — after him.

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