

Polar Do's and Don'ts

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Following the briefing by Admiral Welch, Commander E.G. Lightsey USN, the Officer in Command of Advanced Headquarters, gave us a stern talk on 'Survival in the Antarctic'. He started by describing our clothing issue of four pairs of trousers, two always to be worn on top of each other, two shirts also to be worn on top of each other, one coat and one anorak of brilliant orange colour, two fur lined caps, three pairs of gloves all to be worn on top of each other and one white pair of 'bunny' boots.

He went on to warn us that emergency landings were by no means unusual, especially by helicopter, and that then life depended on wearing full antarctic survival clothing. Normal procedure was the wearing of comfortable clothing inside the aircraft, but it was an absolute order, that the remainder of the issue be stored in the kit bag and that it must accompany each passenger on all flights. As far as I could see when flying, everyone obeyed these orders.

Commander Lightsey gave an interesting explanation of the gloves. The inner one was of wool, the middle one of leather and the outer of fur, the so-called bear glove, to 'wipe up a dripping nose'. The fur was natural animal fur, which does not freeze, whereas synthetic fur does, he said. I had developed my own standard of 'cold', when the drip from my nose froze in my moustache. The hood of the anorak was similarly lined with natural fur.

The 'bunny' boots consisted of one inner and one outer boot, both of white rubber with thick foam rubber between them, the combination forming one single unit. Thus all natural heat generated by the feet was preserved. He warned us that four or five breaths, without prior heating of air, at -50 °F or -45 °C, would lead to freezing of the lungs, and perspiring was to be avoided at all costs.

The excellent leaflet *Polar Do's and Don'ts* was certainly warning enough to be careful in any emergency. The margins contained drawings how to communicate with low flying rescue planes by signals stamped into the snow:

F = food needed; W = engineer required; K = showed direction in which to proceed and LL = all well. Other geometrical figures had many other meanings. On the other margin of the leaflet were semaphore signs to be made by either still or moving arms and, lying flat on the ground, meant that a doctor was urgently needed.

The text of the leaflet could not have been more explicit. "The Polar Regions are not tolerant of mistakes". "Dares are neither offered, nor taken. Necessary risks are bad enough". "Do not touch metal with bare hands. If your hand should inadvertently stick to cold metal, urinate on the metal to warm it. If you stick both hands, you better have a buddy along".