

Antarctica — British Radar Ice Survey

Title 201

When I realised that the National Science Foundation in Washington had exercised censorship of an important science story through Admiral Welch and had stopped its transmission to the *Daily Telegraph* in London, I had only two possible actions open to me: To demand an interview with the Admiral and insist on an immediate flight back to Christchurch, or alternatively refuse to report any further American science to London. I did the latter, and concentrated exclusively on the British Radar Ice Survey. I was of course furious then, and am no less so now, after more than 30 years, that bureaucracy could suppress scientific news of greatest importance.

I had followed for years the work of Robin and Evans at the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge, and it was through this work that I had received an official American invitation to the Antarctic. However, there had been no test flights and therefore nothing to report. All the minor technical faults of the complicated electronic radar equipment had to be rectified before any flight testing could be started. Perhaps fortunately, a blizzard was then roaring over McMurdo, making all flights impossible. I had time to 'cool down' after the serious blow to my ego, and I found some solace in tumblers of Drambuie at the US Air Force bar.

Finally on 9 December, Hercules LC 320 took off for its first test flight of ten hours, covering a distance of 3600 km. Years of research, months of preparations, and days of delay through snow storms, finally led to this great flight. I was happy to be aboard as an observer. On the 19 December, after several more flights, I wrote my report for the *Daily Telegraph* which was transmitted without any difficulty to London. It was published on 29 December, headlined: "Science in the Antarctic — British Survey of the Ice". It was given only 18 column-centimeters. Indeed, the wheels of science writing rarely grind as poorly and as slowly as this.

What the published report did not contain was a description of the interior of the aircraft. Like the Starlifter aircraft, the Hercules is an empty shell which can be furnished with any necessary equipment, material or personnel. In our case it had been converted into an electronic laboratory with its own miniature television screens. On these Robin and Evans, as well as I, followed for hours the blue electronic graphs which spelled out the two echoes from the radar pulses broadcast vertically downwards from a height of 9 km. One graph reflected the echo from the surface of the ice, the other the echo from the underlying rock surface, the difference being the ice thickness. On this inaugural flight the ice thickness was found to be as much as 1372 meters. The results were considered excellent, and many similar flights followed in which I participated. The utilitarian structure of the LC 320 does not provide any windows or portholes, and the uniform white ice below never changed.