

“TERROR”

THE HMS “TERROR” & LOUGH SWILLY



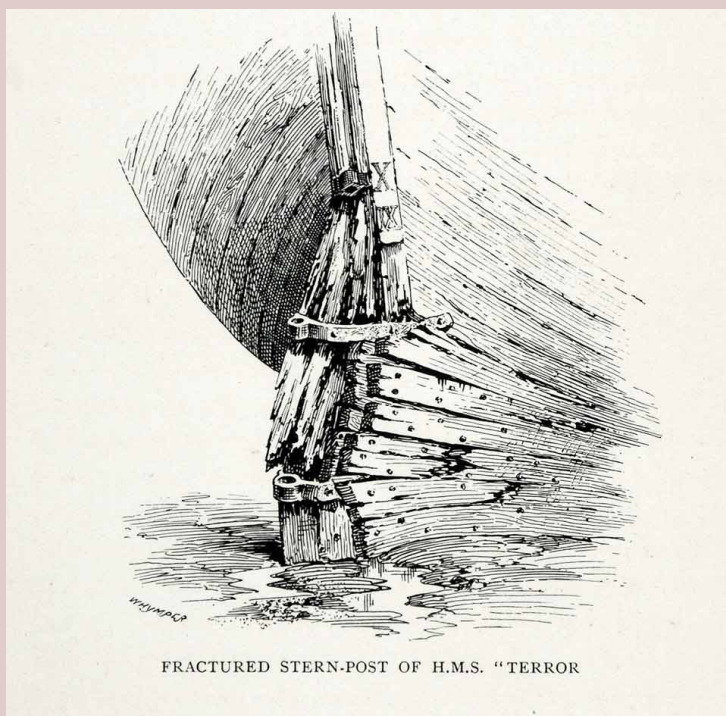
HMS Terror was launched in 1813. It was designed by Sir Henry Peake who was one of the Royal Navy's foremost shipwrights and designer of HMS Erebus with whom the Terror would be forever linked.

HMS Terror was a vesuvius class bomb ship, one of three built in 1813 to the same specifications. Her sister ships were HMS Vesuvius and HMS Beelzebub. In 1814, she took part in the battle of Baltimore under the command of Captain John Sheridan where she bombed Fort Mc Henry on the 13th and 14th of September. Her actions are immortalised in “The Star, Spangled Banner”. The “bombs bursting in the air” actually came from the Terror. Like all such bomb vessels or mortar ships, she spent long periods in “ordinary” or storage. After an extended period in ordinary, she was recommissioned for service in the Mediterranean in 1928 where she was almost wrecked in a hurricane.

After returning to England, she was salvaged by James Fitzjames who perished with Franklyn and The Terror many years later in search of the fabled North West Passage. In 1835, the Terror and her sister ship Erebus were quickly outfitted to resupply 11 whaling ships trapped in ice near the Davis Strait but the whalers escaped before the terror and Erebus set to sea. In 1836, the Terror was further refitted for extended polar exploration and, under the command of George Beck, spent the winter of 1836/37 in severe ice conditions off Southampton Island. The ship was under such tremendous pressure from the ice, Beck reported that resin (turpentine) was squeezed from her timbers and her bolts “wept”. She was repeatedly thrown on her beam ends and eventually her stern post shattered - damage that would have been fatal in a less sturdy vessel. Captain

Beck described in a letter to the Royal Geographical Society that the ship suffered greatly.

“February 18, early in the morning, thermometer at 33 degrees below zero, a disruption of the ice took place. The waves of ice, 30 feet high, were rolled towards the ship which complained much. The decks were separated, the beams raised off their shelf pieces, lashings and shores, used for supporters, gave way; iron bolts partially drawn; the whole frame of the ship trembled so violently as to throw men down”.



In a remarkable display of skill and nerve, Captain Beck sailed the Terror across the Atlantic with as much as 5 feet of water pouring into her hold every hour. Her crew utterly exhausted from working the pumps, the Terror was beached in Lough Swilly. Beaching the vessel allowed for a full inspection of the damage, as Beck described in his report.

"It was found that upwards of 20 feet of the keel, together with 10 feet of the stern post, were driven over more than three and a half feet on one side, leaving a frightful opening astern for the free ingress of the water. The forefront was entirely gone, besides numerous bolts either loosened or broken; and when, besides this, the strained and twisted state of the ship was considered, there was not one on board who did not express astonishment that we had ever floated across the Atlantic."

Beck reports

"I beg to lay before you a sketch of the fractured stern post and run of the ship, copied from an outline taken with great accuracy by Lieutenant Smyth with a camera lucida, feeling sure that such a representation will give a better idea of the nature of the damage than anything short of actually seeing the ship" (1837).

Having rough weather in the North Atlantic – they passed Rockall at less than 10 miles but couldn't see it because of bad weather. They sailed into Lough Swilly at 2am. They tried to obtain a pilot. Rockets, "blue lights" and canons were fired for that purpose but no one came. So, they trusted to soundings and "glided silently past the lights of the fishermen's cottages" and near midnight safely anchored in Lough Swilly.

"with indescribable delight, did we inhale the fragrance and contemplate the beauty of the land. Imagination could scarcely picture a scene so enchanting as to our weary and frost dazzled sight appeared that soft and

lovely landscape, with its fresh green tints and beautiful views".

Those among the crew who were sick were committed to the care of Dr Evans at Buncrana "from whose judicious treatment, the greatest benefits were derived". The ship was appraised, then hauled off to anchorage for repairs.

"I must not omit to mention the hospitality displayed by many estimable families in the neighbourhood of Lough Swilly. To their attentions, indeed, may be attributed the speedy restoration to health of many of the officers, who equally with myself, will ever retain a lively recollection of their kindness"

(from A Narrative Of An Expedition in HMS Terror Undertaken With A View to Geographical Discovery On The Arctic Shores).

A dance was held on board the ship while at anchor in Buncrana, attended by many people of note from the area which lasted long into the night. Following her repair, Terror and Erebus were next assigned expeditions to the Antarctic. Later still, achieving fame as the lost expedition of Franklyn.

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