

Tom Crean was born in Gortacurraun, Annascaul Co. Kerry on the 20th of July 1877. In 1893 shortly before his 16th birthday he enlisted in the Royal Navy, leaving Minard aboard a cargo ship bound for England.



In 1901 while serving as an able seaman on board HMS Ringarooma in New Zealand, Crean encountered Commander Robert Scott who had called on port to refit his ship Discovery while on route to the Antarctic. Crean volunteered to join the Discovery and was accepted for the expedition. It would be the first of three major expeditions to be undertaken by the young Kerryman.

Though his name appears only rarely in the records of the first expedition, Crean made his mark with Scott and the rest of the crew. He was a strong sledger, a hard worker and a cheerful companion. Upon completion of the expedition and on the recommendation of Scott, Crean was promoted to Petty Officer 1st Class and served with Scott between 1906 and 1909.

In May 1910 Crean joined the Terra Nova under Commander Scott on another Antarctic adventure and this time achieved greater prominence. Having trekked with Scott to within 150

miles of the Pole, Lt Teddy Evans, William Lashly and Tom Crean were instructed to return to base camp. Their 800 mile return trip across the Polar plateau in extreme conditions proved a daunting task. Having found their way to the Beardmore Glacier by sliding down hundreds of feet of icefalls they found their way blocked by huge crevasses. They were left with no option but to venture along “the crossbar of the H of Hell” by crossing the precarious snow bridges between each crevasse. As they reached the barrier Lt. Evans developed scurvy and 100 miles from base camp was no longer able to stand unaided. Lashly and Crean pulled him on a sledge to within 35 miles of safety whereupon, weakened by fatigue and hunger, Crean left a dying Evans in the care of Lashly while attempting to cross the final 35 mile journey alone in an attempt to reach help. Following an 18 hour non stop march Evans was saved and he never forgot the courage of the two men who had as he later wrote “Hearts of Lions”. Crean and Lashly were awarded the Albert Medal for their courage.

In December 1913 Sir Ernest Shackleton announced his intention to sledge across the Antarctic. Crean was selected by Shackleton to be one of six who would make the journey across the continent. Sadly, the plan went awry when the pack ice quickly closed in around their ship the Endurance in the Weddell Sea. In October 1915 the crew were forced to abandon. After two failed attempts to march over the ice to land, the crew resigned to surviving on the ice floe while they waited for the pack ice to break up so they could launch the ships rescue boats. The drifting ice remained their home until April 1916.

On April 9th Shackleton decided to launch the three lifeboats in an effort to reach either Clarence or Elephant Island about 100 miles to the North. Suffering from exposure, exhaustion and seasickness they reached Elephant Island on April 15th. It was their first time on land in nearly 16 months. Elephant Island was a desolate rock and offered no chance of rescue to the stranded crew. Their only hope of survival would be to attempt an 800 mile journey in an open boat across treacherous waters to the whaling station in South Georgia. Shackleton chose five other to accompany him including Tom Crean. The others would remain behind awaiting rescue should the journey prove successful. On April 24th Shackleton launched the largest boat the James Caird in an attempt to reach South Georgia. On their seventeen day journey the men endured constant gales, freezing temperatures and enormous swells. Water ran short and dehydration nearly crippled their efforts.

They managed to make land on the south side of the island but were faced with a trek over mountains and across an uncharted interior in order to reach the whaling station to the north. Shackleton was reluctant to risk a further boat journey given the conditions they had experienced, so leaving three on the shore where they landed, Shackleton, Crean and Worsley set out to navigate their way across the island. They took three days provisions and no sleeping bags as they intended to march straight through. Weak, poorly equipped and inadequately clothed they travelled for 36 hours without rest and arrived at the whaling station at 4pm on May 20th.

In the next four months Shackleton, Crean and Worsley made three unsuccessful attempts to rescue the men on Elephant Island. Finally at the end of August the ice opened long enough to allow the Chilean Yelcho in and all twenty two men were rescued.

Crean retired from the Navy in 1920 and returned to Annascaul where he married and settled. He and his wife Ellen bought and rebuilt a public house by the river and named it “The South

Pole Inn". He spent the remainder of his days enjoying family life and eschewed the many attempts by visitors to engage him in tales of his exploits in the Antarctic.

Tom Crean died in 1938 from a ruptured appendix. His funeral was the largest ever witnessed in Annascaul. This seemingly indestructible man was finally laid to rest in the tiny cemetery in Ballynacourty, in a tomb he built himself, overlooking the hills of Kerry.

The determination, courage and perseverance of Tom Crean is an inspiration to all and we at the Tom Crean Business Centre are proud to have been granted the right to use his name as a badge of intent for the new ventures that will be undertaken within.