# THE ROYAL NAVAL EAST GREENLAND EXPEDITION, 1966 

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## II

(Four illustrations: nos. 46-49)

## main expedition (by Dr. R. H. Wallis)

AT 9 a.m., July 13, Mike Thomas hobbled across the expanse of tarmac at R.A.F. Lyneham, waved his aluminium crutch in salute and suddenly, very quietly and smoothly, the Transport Command Britannia was up and away, green fields tilted past, chalk downs undulated below and we were diverted by coffee and biscuits. The first excitement came when the clouds opened and there in the long swell of a turquoise sea was an isolated conical island puffing out great clouds of steam, Surtsey, Iceland's youngest volcano. The south-west coast of Iceland soon followed; a long line of green terraces, black basaltic scarps and moraines with isolated, painted farms to give relief. The plane followed the coast westwards and we dropped down to a huge sign, 'Welcome to U.S. Navy Base, Keflavik'-at least we knew where we were.

The U.S.N. generously provided accommodation, and a driver and a bus, and next day we drove down to Reykjavik to await our hired DC 3. In the late afternoon we ambled across to the plane, strapped ourselves in and waited patiently but nothing happened. Eventually the pilot indicated that we might as well have a few more rounds of coffee whilst he obtained a plane that would work! Naval discipline restricted comment to the politely derisive. Hours later the DC 3 re-appeared, now working, and the air hostess assured us that we would enjoy our flight; public opinion was sceptical.

It was fairly dark by now but we were chasing the sun, and after a few hours the clouds broke up and across a dark grey Atlantic lay a fragmented pattern of white--the East Greenland pack-ice. Our eyes strained hard at the horizon and far to the north a faint line of darkness hardened into discrete summits and glaciers. Suddenly below us were enormous icefloes, brown islands, scree and ice; the plane banked steeply and across the fjords lay Kulusuk air-strip. It appeared as a murky grey line at the north-east end of the island, apparently running straight into the mountains; disbelief from our R.A.F. representative, 'That's not an airstrip'.


Fig. 2. Activities of the 1966 Expedition.

Two days from U.K. and we were in East Greenland, only sixty miles from Schweizerland if we had brought some Navy helicopters, but it was to be another four weeks before we were able to establish a base camp there; as yet Greenland possesses a pain potential!

Herr Carlssen met the plane and drove us down to the base for coffee and provided us with a hut. Matches were drawn and the few bunks and more extensive floor space allocated; after the demarcations of military establishments democracy was at last at hand. Herr Carlssen had arranged for us to be picked up by the m.v. Aarvak which would take us the twenty miles up Angmagssalik fjord. From him we also learnt that a Japanese expedition was somewhere in the region and that Sigi Angerer's Swiss and the Imperial College air-drop advance party were already ahead of us on their way inland. The route to Femstjernen (see map, Fig. 2) sounded more like the téléférique to the Torino.

On a beautiful morning Aarvak took us out through close fjord ice into Angmagssalik fjord, a wide stretch of open water leading north into the mountain country. We soon left the low coastal islands and mountains and glaciers came down to the water's edge. A pause was made at Kungmiut to collect gear left by Thomas and Banks in the spring. Here the local Greenlanders were as interested in us as we in them and our every movement was accompanied by dogs howling, children tumbling in and out of our way together with smiles of tolerance and incomprehension from their elders; all these strange men from all over the world--Japanese, Swiss and British coming to climb mountains, but no hunting, no fishing-no point!

We passed the narrow, tortuous entry to Tasissarssik fjord and the Trillingterne towers rose in one superb yellow leap for 6800 ft . from the water; at last everyone believed that there were mountains to be climbed. Aarvak put us ashore two miles from the head of the fjord, a traditional spot, for we soon found relics from the Austrian party of 1959 and of the 1963 Swiss and Scottish expeditions. We left behind three men to check the tents and skis and cache our return supplies whilst the rest made an initial carry up the ice-fall, five miles away and 2600 ft . above.

This was a delightful afternoon with a light breeze, warm sunshine, springy vegetation and the Trillingterne towers impressive ahead. We paused on the moraine and discussed the best line up to the glacier; everyone seemed of the same mind for we soon found the footprints of the Imperial College (I.C.) advance party in the outwash sands and, having crossed the lower glacier, we saw that the moraine still possessed marks from 1963 . The slabs above the ice-fall were soon draped with 600 ft . of fixed rope and we panted on to 'Sodom', the initial camp of the 1963 expeditions. The glacier stretched ahead with easy slopes still snowcovered, a fine route inland.

The next afternoon, July 16, the expedition began the first stage of


Photo: R. H. Wallis]
The Sølverbjoerg Cwm, from Conniatsbjoerg No. i. Left to right : 'Little 'Thumb', 'The Wedge', 'Big Thumb', Sølverbjoerg.
(No. 46)


Photo: T. Kirkpatrick]
Laupersbjoerg ( 2580 m .) from Femstjernen.
phase one, the sixty miles plus five thousand feet of climb from Tasissarssik to Conniatsbjoerg. Twelve hours of continuous rain revealed that Royal Marine arctic tents are meant for the real Arctic, not the 'oceanic temperature zone' of the botanists. The ice-fall was covered in running water and the top camp-site in new wet snow, an unpleasant start, and more rain that night allowed morale to ebb as the tide flowed in; but once the water was inside the tents they were certainly waterproof!

The first day of glacier travel was by far the worst, soft wet snow and a thick, cold mist, much too heavy loads (over 75 lb . per man) and nonexistent skiing muscles. Thus, with continual adjustments to skis and loads and some double-tracking we only advanced five miles. This was just not far enough for an average day's travel and as the glacier surface did not freeze that night a re-appraisal was made of loads, all the luxury food being left together with any excess personal gear. However, this still left each of us with three man/days food and fuel, all our personal gear for the entire summer and our share of the communal equipment, about 60 lb . per man. In glorious sunshine we plodded across the upper Karales glacier below the superb peaks of Pikklehuen and Rytterknaegten, the party spread out across the glaciers, little isolated black specks moving across a vast panorama of snow and mountains. Similar progress was maintained during the next three days, up and over the "Bealach Kelpie' and across the upper Sermiligaq glacier to 16 September and so to the Intermediate Depot. Much of this journey was complete agony for unfit, inexperienced skiers but fine moments intervened, as on the summit rocks of the 'Bealach' which provided a warm, comfortable viewpoint over the Scots area of 1963 . Beautiful country with wide, gentle glaciers surrounded by shapely rock towers, all of which possessed eminently reasonable routes and none very long.

Though we arrived above 16 September glacier in thick fog, we awoke in glorious sunshine, surrounded by magnificent mountains. Tupileq (Pt. 2264) dominates the scene, one of the few great peaks in the area which André Roch's superbly successful 1938 expedition did not attempt. However, one peak was climbed by Hans Gellmann's 1959 Austrian party and both were traversed by Angerer's 1963 Swiss. Our admiration for our predecessors increased considerably, this was indeed big country.

The glacier intersection was a crevassed maze but eventually the depot was sighted and there the food, fuel, 12 ft . Nansen and harnesses were, swinging happily in space for 15 ft . of snow had melted since April. A depot on the rocks is worth any number in the crevasses.

Though forewarned, the expedition now suddenly seemed to believe that the sledge would solve all agonies. Next day, however, when only three miles were gained after five hours of effort through the complicated crevasse network most were agreed that the latest form of 'character-


Fig. 3. Access to schweizerland-The problem.
training' was quite as satisfactory as back-packing! Once through the crevasses and out onto the wide trail of the Haabets glacier with the human dog team going well, the advantages of sledging were soon evident in the freedom from shoulder- and back-aches and in the possession of a group activity. A steady 2 m.p.h. represented real progress, the evening rain cycle ended and the last two days to Conniatsbjoerg became almost enjoyable.

On July 23, Conniatsbjoerg-the mystic mountain-appeared over a rise and Kirkpatrick skied on to locate the depot. Soon he was racing back down the slope, 'Imperial College is here, with an injured man, they are living off our food'. More complications loomed, and there were enough anyway, but at least phase one was over and all the party were fit and knew one another-both great gains.

As described by Thomas, the expedition had various aims; (1) reach Schweizerland-a problem of unknown complexity, (2) climb new peaks there and on the way, (3) give junior Service personnel a chance to climb and explore in an unknown area, (4) botanical and (5) geological collections. When Thomas had to opt out of the summer party the only two members who had previously been on expeditions were the two civilians, Dilly to Minapin and Wallis twice to South Greenland and twice to Spitsbergen; but they had both come on the expedition in their specialist capacities.

Thomas had originally hoped to make the main depot near point X (map, Fig. 3) which would make an ideal launching off point to east and north Schweizerland with just the crossings of Femstjernen and the Franche-Comté glacier to negotiate. However, as already explained, the depot had to be left at Conniatsbjoerg. Thus it seemed as if the logical entry would be via route (B) to point (Y) in S.E. Schweizerland, a fifteen mile journey involving crossing the Midgaard glacier but with the great advantage of being downhill. If the Midgaard crossing proved a major obstacle it was realised that not all the party might make Schweizerland, or that some might only be able to stay for a short while. In fact, we faced the Himalayan pyramid problem in a horizontal plane.

These theoretical calculations had been left to Conniatsbjoerg but here two major complications arose. One was Pert's (I.C.) broken leg, now set in plaster by Dilly, and his food/fuel supply over the next four weeks. The other emerged from conversations with Pert. We knew that a Japanese expedition had visited the area in 1965 with the intention of climbing Mount Forel but that they had not succeeded. What we did not know was that they had tried Roch's routes (B) and (C) and found them quite impractical in present conditions. They had also found that the Midgaard glacier was quite un-negotiable. They had therefore tried to find a route via the glacier de France. Their first attempt was by col (D) but this was not feasible and they had finally succeeded over col (E).

Thus, this year both Japanese and I.C. parties were travelling by way of $\operatorname{col}(\mathrm{E})$, the glacier de France and Femstjernen. The Swiss, heading for the Pourquoi Pas glacier, used route (F).

Next day, with this disconcerting news in mind, Stocken, Twigg, Kirkpatrick and I made the second ascent of Conniatsbjoerg IV to survey all these possibilities. Pert's comments were completely confirmed, route (B) and the Midgaard crossing were out and our route to Schweizerland would have to lie over $\operatorname{col}(\mathrm{E})$, thirty-five miles plus feet of climbing to Femstjernen. The mind takes time to adjust, especially when the logistics of our fifteen mile downhill sledge run were so clear and the substituted thirty-five mile switchback led apparently to nowhere. The prospect was depressing. We were back to plain logistics; get so many men to Schweizerland for so long, based on so many intermediate camps.

However, Pert's broken leg, so tragic for him, suddenly lent itself to a mutually advantageous bargain. R.N.E.G.E. would provide food and fuel at Conniatsbjoerg for Pert and his companion and I.C. would sledge a similar quantity down from their air-drop on the Paris glacier to an agreed point on Femstjernen (Z). This was a master move, the agreed quantity was 90 man/days and thus we could keep a party of four for three weeks in East Schweizerland. This move would be supported by the other eight members who would then retire in phases to the main depot and climb from there. Air-drop logistics replaced those of the Himalayan pyramid.

The decision to put in just a team of four was not without criticismwhy split up the expedition? What was so special about Schweizerland? As there were plenty of unclimbed mountains around Conniatsbjoerg why not stay there and run the expedition in the intended balanced teams of four thus satisfying the aims of climbing new peaks and gaining experience? What would Thomas have done? A good question.

However, Service training and discipline are not for nothing; the 'Leader's Brief', a foolscap fund of all knowledge, stated that the No. I objective was to reach Schweizerland and so to Schweizerland we would go. Stocken reasoned that if this was the objective and not everyone could reach it, then the logical step was to take the strongest possible party to make the maximum use of the opportunity. Thus the three original teams were scrapped and Stocken decided on an R.N./R.M. foursome of Corner, Keelan, Twigg and himself ('A' team) to utilise the I.C. depot with Dilly, Agnew, Collins and Kirkpatrick acting as support ('B' team) and Wallis, Dearman, Garden and Rowe acting as base (' C ' team).

The dash to the I.C. depot became a frustrating, wearisome battle, even to reach the corner of the glacier de France, for soft snow together with large, close and poorly bridged crevasses slowed up sledging to literally a crawling pace, so many yards per hour. The sledge and

Dilly's support group were abandoned after two days and the ' $A$ ' team pack-carried on up the glacier de France to Femstjernen on their own.
I.C. had agreed to sledge their food down the Paris glacier from their dropping ground to a dump which was the ' $S$ ' in Femstjernen. Neither party had at this time seen Femstjernen so neither knew what each had let the other in for. A crevassed maze of over fifty sq. miles of undulating H-bomb territory was not the ideal spot to locate five boxes and two jerricans. The 'A' team arrived with two days' food but after one day's searching had failed to locate the depot. They went onto half-rations and, while Corner and Twigg ascended the nearest Schweizerland peak to ensure that one at least was climbed, Stocken and Keelan trekked off up the Paris glacier in an attempt to find the depot or the parachutes or the I.C. After thirty-six hours they had failed to find any of these and so, joining up again with Corner and Twigg, they retreated, very tired, very hungry and very dispirited to Dilly's ' $B$ ' team twenty miles away on the Devauxbjoerg col. Here the combined ' A ' and ' B ' teams climbed and recuperated until their food ran out when they fell back to Conniatsbjoerg to re-think and await news of I.C.

Meanwhile, ten days earlier, Dearman, Rowe, Garden and I had left the others at Devauxbjoerg, they to go on to the promised land and we to return to Conniatsbjoerg. After recovering from our twenty-three-hour day we decided to attempt to climb out the Conniatsbjoerg area and then to venture across the glacier de France. So, combining with Taylor, Pert's medical attaché, we climbed Sølverbjoerg, the 'Big Thumb', Badeuilsbjoerg and Conniatsbjoerg I. An attempt to climb Pt. 2000 which would have involved six hours' skiing was abandoned from our sleeping bags when the névé failed to freeze, and another on Rødbjoerg fizzled out in the séracs leading to the North face. However, this last fiasco did enable us to discern a line on Pt. 1850 south of Conniatsbjoerg.

An approach to this peak was made on skis to a high col below the North face, the bergschrund was crossed and a snow gully followed to the rock above. We divided into two ropes, Dearman and Rowe, Garden and Wallis. Approximately 200 ft . up the face Dearman sustained a 40 ft . fall whilst leading but was well held and suffered no more than severe shock. Garden, whose experience of mountain rescue was very extensive, quickly and efficiently organised Dearman's safe descent down the face and back to the skis on the col below. From there Garden escorted Dearman down the glacier whilst Wallis and Rowe sorted climbing gear. About a mile from base camp Garden moved ahead of Dearman to probe a slight steepening of the slope and fell vertically for over 80 ft . to the bottom of a crevasse. He suffered multiple head injuries and died instantly. With the help of Dearman and Rowe assisted by Taylor, who had been summoned from base. Garden's body was examined by Wallis and his rucksack recovered.


Photo: R. H. Wallis]
Eastern Schweizerland: Pt. 2150 m. from the North cwm of Pt. 2220 m.
(No. 48)

-Photo: R. H. Wallis]
East Greenland: West summit of Pt. 2500 M., seen from East summit.

The possibility of a tragedy had been discussed at Keflavik by the whole expedition and we had decided that the enterprise should continue even if such an event did occur. Therefore, as Rowe and I were left at base with a shocked and bruised Dearman, I decided to wait until Dilly's ' $B$ ' team returned when their food ran out in two days' time. This would give a combined strength of seven, of whom four would remain at Conniatsbjoerg and three go to the coast to telegraph. With luck the round journey could be accomplished in twelve days.

Next day these calculations were negated by the return of all eight members of ' $A$ ' and ' $B$ ' teams. We recounted the news of Garden's death and learnt in turn that Schweizerland had been reached, a peak climbed but no depot found.

On August 6 the expedition built a cairn and plaque for Peter Garden, on an outcrop 200 yards from where he lay and conducted a simple service to mark the passing of a fine man.

Stocken was now presented with (a) the necessity of getting a team to the coast, (b) the necessity of finding and reaching the Femstjernen food depot, and (c) the necessity to give everyone a rest. However, until we obtained a specific locality for the depot we had to remain at Conniatsbjoerg. We spent a day on the climbing episodes of the expedition film and a further two climbing-Conniatsbjoerg III, the outstanding rock peak of the group, Henri Leonsbjoerg West, the second ascent of Pt. 2000 and the first of a series of attempts on the 'Little Thumb'. All this took place in superb weather and morale began again to rise.

On August 9 the I.C. team returned from Femstjernen with news of our depot. Apparently between the actual airdrop and their delayed arrival in the dropping zone the parachutes had been dragged by the wind into a heavily crevassed area and had to be individually located and rescued. This had cost four days and meant that 'A' team and the I.C. failed to meet by just twenty-four hours.

Stocken was now faced with another series of very difficult personnel decisions for of the eleven at Conniatsbjoerg, three must go to the coast and, with three weeks to go, the $90 \mathrm{man} /$ day depot was insufficient for eight but too large for four. Stocken slept on it and then announced that, Agnew having volunteered to lead the coast party, Dearman and Collins would go with him, Twigg and Corner would remain at Conniatsbjoerg and the remaining six return to Schweizerland. It was arranged that the coast party, after telegraphing England, would return to the top of the Tasissarssik ice-fall, or further if they could, to meet the rest of the expedition and, in the meantime, climb amongst the fjord-side mountains. Corner and Twigg would combine with Pert's companion and climb in the base area and organise things for evacuation at the end of August when the Schweizerland party would return.

The Schweizerland party left Conniats on the night of August 10 and
travelled all night reaching the glacier de France next morning. Here we rested and left a food depot for our return. Restarting at to p.m. we made rapid progress to Femstjernen and then, following the ' A ' team line, made Schweizerland in only twenty hours' travelling time from Conniats. The next move-locate the food depot.

Stocken and Keelan went on reconnaissance into the chaos of Femstjernen and Keelan's sharp eyes eventually located the tiny pile, lost in the wilderness of crevasses. Already carrying 60 lb . each, we had now gained another 60 lb . per back, so doubled-tracked to the corner of the first major glacier debouching out of north-east Schweizerland. Here we were fortunate to find a superb camp site, a comfortable rock-ridge providing an eyrie high above the Jura glacier, full in the sun from 3 a.m. to 6 p.m. and adjacent to a small half-frozen lake. At last on August 12 we were based on the edge of the promised land.

The I.C. food, being air-dropped instead of sledged, was full of welcome variety and we lingered over an enormous day-long feast. Then Stocken and Kirkpatrick climbed 'Prospect' and Rowe and I climbed Pt. 2150 while the doctor recovered from stomach-ache. The next two days were overcast and miserable so we took six days' food and pushed the camp another ten miles west, up from 1300 m . to almost 1800 m ., our ultima thule. The previous fine weather returned and, now established at 6000 ft .-well above the ablation line, the party went quietly mad and climbed thirteen peaks in the next five days, including getting all six men on top of the highest, Pt. 2520, and four on the second highest, Pt. 2500. The latter was in fact our last successful climb and ended fittingly with Stocken stepping neatly on top of the double cornice, a last fine peak for a fine man.

We abandoned the top camp to attempt the two outstanding rock peaks lower down, Pts. 2220 and 2150 . However, the weather broke and in snow showers and thirty knot winds Rowe and I abandoned Pt. 2150 at 1900 m . and retired to camp. The other four were still out on Pt. 2220 but at five o'clock a whistle blast came out of the howling gale and three figures loomed out of the snow flurries-' Chris is dead'.

High on the North face of Pt. 2220 the team of four, Stocken and Kirkpatrick, Dilly and Keelan, had also decided to give up their climb in face of the rapidly worsening conditions but, in the first moments of descent, a rock-fall occurred that crushed Stocken's helmet and fractured his skull. In white-out conditions the other three lowered his unconscious body for 700 ft . down the face and across the bergschrunds to the névé but, four hours after the accident, Chris Stocken died in the high northern cwm of Pt. 2220.

On the following day we went back up into the cwm, conducted a short service and buried Stocken in a crevasse. Below, at the Schweizerland base, we built an enormous memorial cairn, surmounted by his ice-axe.

The cairn looks outwards across the Femstjernen to the unknown north, and upwards to 'Prospect' his first climb in Schweizerland, the land he gave so much to reach.

Two miserable days of back-packing in fresh snow, torrential rain and poor visibility took us down the glacier de France, where our return food depot had been ravaged by animals (foxes ? bears ?), so we continued on, up and over the Devauxbjoerg col. The trail to Conniatsbjoerg was now well marked as the returning Japanese, Swiss and I.C. expeditions threw out their litter across the grey-brown autumn slush.

Conniats ice-fall was even more chaotic than when we had left it sixteen days before and the base camp was buried under three feet of new snow. Twigg and Corner greeted us with their news. They had climbed two peaks down the Haabets glacier and had succeeded on the 'Little Thumb' on their third attempted route. They also told us that it had been snowing at Conniatsbjoerg for over a week. As we now numbered seven and had over 1000 lb . of gear to sledge out through three feet of unconsolidated snow we went to bed for two days to await developments.
I.C., sharing the same camp, decided that they had had enough inactivity and, after protracted discussion, set off on a lightly loaded dash for the coast. As they disappeared into the mists the Navy, true gannets, selectively salvaged their abandoned gear. We were now last on the trail but there were obviously plenty of pickings to be gained on the way.

On August 3I it seemed as if the weather might clear and the snow had packed down a little, so we left Conniatsbjoerg and said our last sad farewells to Peter Garden as we passed by on the way to the Col des Esquimaux. The weather had not really improved but we made the thirteen miles to the corner of 16 September glacier and gained another eight towards the Col des Poulies on the following day. However, on the third day the half-mile to the top of the col took five hours-at which moment of despair the clouds broke, sun appeared and after ten days of wet clothing, wet tents, wet sleeping bags we could at last get warm and dry.

As the sun rose overhead so did morale and all went well on the following three days to the coast. As we lowered away down the Col des Poulies we met the coast party who came with news of England's World Cup win; incredulity all round! Next day we had covered fourteen miles by lunch time and the following evening the coast party initiated us in the delights of fried fresh salmon. The return from Conniatsbjoerg had taken six days compared to nine on the inward journey via the longer Haabets route, the gain in fitness being offset by the new snow and heavier load on the return.

As pre-arranged, the Greenlanders from Kungmiut sailed up the fjord at 6 a.m. on September 6 and we chugged down to Kungmiut for coffee with the Swiss expedition. Then on to Kulusuk, to a world of
chairs and tables, of showers and fresh Danish food, and to an outside world of authority. Dilly spent the next two days putting in twentyhour shifts at Angmagssalik hospital assisting the Danish staff whilst, with the help of the DEW-line station, we rang up Keflavik to arrange to be met on arrival in Iceland.

On September 9 a chartered Fokker Friendship flew I.C., the Swiss and ourselves from Kulusuk to Reykjavik and next day Mike Thomas flew up with the R.A.F. Transport Command Hastings to tell us the news and guide us back to the press and television. Schweizerland and the silent snows were now far, far behind and, faced by the inevitable questions, now out of context, our memories and viewpoints already distorted, we dispersed. The expedition was over.

## LIST OF CLIMBS ${ }^{1}$

(All climbs are first ascents except where otherwise stated)
(A) Climbs in Schweizerland


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[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ See map, Fig. 2, for numerical references.

