SWILING: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND SEAL HUNT

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GUY DAVID WRIGHT

SWILING: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT OF THE NEWFOUNDLAND SEAL HUNT

by

© Guy David Wright, B.A.

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of Anthropology
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ABSTRACT

This thesis describes the social and cultural meaning the Newfoundland large vessel seal hunt has for the men who participate in it. Large vessels have been taking harp and hood seals off northern Newfoundland since 1793. Although technologies and economic emphases have changed over the years, the actual work of killing, skinning and harvesting the pelts and meat of seals on the ice remains little changed in nearly two centuries. The extremely harsh conditions and inherent dangers have made the seal hunt an important rite of passage and renewal for men who are able to participate. Several major disasters associated with sealing have amplified cultural attachments to the seal hunt within Newfoundland.

The seal hunt has become a major issue in a dialogue between those who regard it as cruel and ecologically dangerous, economically unimportant and culturally indefensible; and those who feel it is a humane, economically important and legitimate industry. The hunt has come under a barrage of criticism from environmental preservationist groups in the past two decades and it appears these lobbyists

may be successful in stopping or severely restricting the annual hunt. Sealing is important to the men for cultural, social and, ultimately, personal reasons which are extra to the more concrete economic importance it holds for them.

Following the Introduction and a brief history of sealing in Newfoundland, the body of the thesis presents the ethnographic detail of a voyage to the hunt, using participant observer techniques. This description gives close detail of the sealers' interactions with each other and relates, largely through dialogue, the feeling the sealers have for and about the hunt. The final chapter deals with the sealers' motivations for persuing the hunt. An epilogue suggests some possible implications should the hunt be ended.

No major study of modern sealing has been undertaken by an ethnographer who has participated in the hunt. Recent events are seriously threatening sealing in Newfoundland; this thesis may be viewed as salvage ethnography. It is an empirically oriented work which aims to show how an economic activity may be embued with cultural meaning.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The ethnographer strives to apprehend social phenomena and organize them into a comprehensible and meaningful framework. Bits of seemingly random human interaction become patterns of behaviour which are described in an intelligible fashion for others.

This thesis attempts to describe the experience of thirty men as they participate in the annual seal hunt at the "Front" off northern Newfoundland and southern Labrador during the spring of 1979. The thesis gives a sense of the importance of the hunt to the sealers through a detailed account of the events of a sealing voyage.

The seal hunt has become a major issue in a dialogue between those who regard it as unnecessary, cruel and ecologically dangerous; and those who feel it is a legitimate, humane and economically important industry. This dialogue is most often played out between large environmental groups and their followers, the commercial media, and the politicians of Canada and Newfoundland. All speak with varying amounts

of authority about the economic, cultural and social meaning the hunt has for the sealers. But the sealers themselves are usually left out of the discussion. The aim of this thesis is to present an examination of the hunt based upon data gathered by participant observation at the Front and follow-up discussions with sealers over a period of several years.

My hypothesis is that the seal hunt has meaning beyond the obvious economic rationale. Although the hunt is economically very important to many of the sealers, there are social and cultural attachments that also make it a personally meaningul experience.

My primary goal, however, is not to test a hypothesis in a conventional scientific manner. I believe, with Clifford Geertz, that Anthropology is "...not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (1973: 5). I wish to identify and describe those aspects of the seal hunt which make it a meaningful event for those who take part, and, thus provide an interpretation based on anthropological principles.

Recently some economic anthropologists have

turned away from the purely rational forms of means/ends relationships and are beginning to go back to the socially and culturally meaningful aspects of economic activity, an approach that began, in Anthropology, with Malinowski. For example, Maurice Godelier (1966) and other structural Marxists have argued that many traditional Marxist economists have placed too much emphasis on the purely economic processes, disregarding the important influence of social relations. More recently, Marshall Sahlins has been critical of "...the idea that human cultures are formulated out of practical activity and, behind that, utilitarian interest" (1976: vii). This thesis follows the spirit of these suggestions, arguing that people's motives for participating in an economic activity cannot always be explained solely in economic terms.

I first became interested in sealing when I entered the Master of Arts programme at Memorial University of Newfoundland in January, 1978. At that time the provincial government was mounting a campaign to counter criticisms which were being made by large international "save the seals" protest

organizations such as the Greenpeace Foundation and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). The arts community was in the fray, as were the churches, schools and other institutions within the province, and this counter protest was supported by a great many people at the grassroots level. It has been documented by Cynthia Lamson in "Bloody Decks and a Bumper Crop": The Rhetoric of Sealing Counter Protest (1979), a revised version of her Master of Arts (Folklore) thesis.

During this time a great deal was said about the men who depended upon the hunt for an important part of their livelihood, and references were made to those aspects of the hunt that make it important for the sealers beyond simple economic motives. As a Canadian government pamphlet designed to explain the hunt in laymen's terms states: "It should be realized at the outset...that dollars and cents do not tell a full story. Sealing is an enterprise which tests the mettle of its participants. It is part of a cultural heritage" (Mercer, 1977). Yet no one who had been to the ice had provided an indepth study of those aspects of the modern hunt which make it important to its participants.

J.B. Jukes, a nineteenth century geologist and traveller wrote a short, insightful description of the sailing vessel hunt of 1840 (Jukes, 1842: 250-322). A comprehensive description of life at the seal hunt was written by George Allan England (1924) about the 1922 hunt. Vikings of the Ice, republished as The Greatest Hunt in the World (1969) is a vibrant and ethnographically rich description of daily life aboard a "wooden wall" steamer, the S.S. Terra Nova. A less rich description, The Wooden Walls at the Ice Floes was published by W.H. Greene in 1933. Other books, such as Cassie Brown's Death on the Ice (1972) and Farley Mowat's and David Blackwood's Wake of the Great Sealers (1973) are excellent reconstructions of the historical seal hunt, but they concentrate primarily on major events, especially the disastrous season of 1914. Two Master of Arts theses have been written about the seal hunt and are in the Queen Elizabeth II Library at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Chesley Sanger, a geographer, participated in two seal hunts, but his thesis, "Technological and Spatial Adaptations in the Newfoundland Seal Fishery During the Nineteenth

Century" (1973) deals primarily with the demographic changes wrought by the change from sail to steam in the sealing industry of the last century. John Scott, a folklorist, tried to gain a berth on a sealing vessel but failed to do so. His thesis, "The Functions of Folklore in the Inter-Relationship of the Newfoundland Seal Fishery and the Home Communities of the Sealers" (1975), uses current and historical references from sealers and former sealers to explain how participation in the seal hunt has a significant effect on the way the men who take part in it are viewed in their home communities.

My own attempt to get a berth on a sealing ship constituted a year long process of hounding the captain of one of the vessels at every possible opportunity and ignoring his rebuffs. I was given numerous hints that my efforts would likely be futile and that I was being an unwanted nuisance. But in Newfoundland one does not always give direct negative responses if they are avoidable (Chiaramonte, 1970). Being a mainlander, I was simply too "stunned" to know the difference and kept up my pestering. The captain, perhaps in a moment of

weakness, finally relented only the night before the ships were due to sail, March 4, 1979. I had told him I would like to work as a sealer but did not expect remuneration since my purpose was to gather material for my Master of Arts thesis. It was difficult for me to explain exactly what it is an anthropologist does, and he was likely wary of my motives. He was finally kind enough to accept me as a student and offer the experience of a trip on a sealing voyage.

Berths on sealing ships are valued positions. In 1979, one hundred ninety-eight sealers crewed seven ships, with another seventy or so participating as ships officers and engineers. Many more men apply for berths than can possibly be accommodated. Crew size is limited both by available space and the need to keep the crew relatively small so that shared profits of the voyage will provide each sealer an adequate return for his effort.

The captains normally begin forming up their sealing crews shortly after the new year. Those who were out the previous year and had been good workers get the first chance and are notified by telephone, usually after they have sent a letter

asking to be considered again for a berth. Others who have been out previous years may also be called, as are men who have worked on the ship at various times during the year and expressed a desire to go to the hunt. These men represent a pool of sealers and seamen whose abilities and personalities are known by the captain.

Those who are unknown have a considerably more difficult time and need to stand out from the mass of applications in some way. Most sealing captains want to take some new people each year in order to initiate new men to the hunt and to increase the pool of potential experienced sealers. Most of the new men will need to have some kind of recommendation from a person known by the captain in order to have a chance at a berth. One of the more experienced sealers might have a son who wants to go out, another might have a brother or friend who has persuaded him to ask the captain for a berth. Others may have met the captain on different occasions and impressed him as being potentially good sealers. For example, two men on the ship were from a small community on the Northern Penninsula. When the ship was

in their harbour the previous summer they went aboard to meet the captain and ask him for a berth. He liked them and remembered them the next winter. Two men from Fogo Island knew the man who acted as first mate on the ship since he used to live in their community. They had been sealing before on different ships but had not been to the ice in several years. They requested the mate to ask the captain if they could get berths.

Some may have a burning desire or need to go sealing but do not have a contact or any other means of making an impression. Sheer, dogged persistence is the only way and it is not often successful. Billy, a young fisherman from St. John's was one of the rare people to obtain a berth in this way. Like me, he simply hounded the captain on any occasion he could, in a polite way, and ignored rebuffs until the captain finally gave in, perhaps feeling that anyone with so much desire should be given a chance.

Chapter two briefly reviews the main points in the history of Newfoundland sealing. The latter portion of the chapter concentrates on the development of regulations during the post World

War II era and the beginnings of the protest movement. Prior to the war there had been very little regulation of the seal hunt, particularly in terms of resource management. The development of these regulations and the social pressures that helped bring them about have received scant attention in much of the sealing literature and have made the modern seal hunt significantly different in several respects from the historical hunt. Therefore I have included a review of some of the main features of seal hunt management and humane society activity during the past three decades. The chapter ends with a brief examination of the protest and counter protest.

Chapter three begins the description of the seal hunt from shipboard. Written in narrative form, it deals primarily with the formation of bonds between crew members as the ship pushed north in search of seals. Chapter four documents one day spent at the white coat hunt. It uses, in part, my own experiences in an attempt to recreate some of the emic level experiences common to any neophyte sealer. Chapter five continues with a description of the hunt for

hood seals. Chapter six has two themes, both of which are centred around the idea of returning: the ship is returning from the hunt, and the men discuss returning for other hunts.

Chapter seven presents an analysis of the men's motivations for becoming sealers in the spring of the year. It includes a cross cultural comparison with another group of people, the Basseri nomads of South Persia (Iran), whose life style was threatened by the prevailing values of a larger society. An epilogue concludes the thesis.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

HARP SEALS

There are three major herds of harp seals which inhabit arctic and sub-arctic waters. These herds mingle very little and are usually distinguished by their breeding areas: the White Sea; near Jan Mayen Island; and in the western North Atlantic off eastern Canada. The western herd breeds in two areas: the Gulf of St. Lawrence west of the Magdalen Islands and at the "Front", off southern Labrador. The Gulf stock "whelps", or bears its young, on newly formed ice, while the larger northern Front stock whelps on the edge of arctic pack ice which is drifting south in the Labrador current.

These Canadian stocks mix and are considered part of the same herd. In the summer they range as far north as Thule, Greenland, Ellesmere Island, and around Baffin Island, and some find their way into Hudson Bay. As winter approaches they migrate southward into the waters off Newfoundland, feeding heavily in preparation for the whelping and breeding season. In late February the whelping patches begin to form, first in the Gulf and

somewhat later at the Front.

March 10 is usually considered the "seals' birthday" at the Front. The pups are born with a yellowish foetal coat which quickly turns bright white. The "whitecoats" remain on the ice for three to four weeks, suckling the rich milk of their mothers. The mother's milk has ten times as much fat and over three times as much protein as cow's milk (Templeman, 1966: 131) and on this rich nutrition they gain weight very rapidly. From a birth weight of about seven kilograms they will reach nearly thirty-two kilograms within two to three weeks. Two thirds of their weight is blubber, skin and hair. Very little muscle tissue develops and most of this is concentrated in the shoulders of their fore flippers.

After weaning, the pups moult their white coat, turning briefly to "raggedy-jackets" and then take to the water as "beaters" with a softly spotted grey coat. Since the ice has been drifting south they must now beat their way north, against the current, feeding alone.

Once the young have left, the females mate

with the males who have been swimming nearby. Actual implantation is delayed by eleven to twelve weeks which allows mating to occur while the seals are all congregated at the whelping patch.

Harp seals normally live about thirty years. They reach sexual maturity in four to five years (Templeman, 1966: 133).

HOOD SEALS

Hood seals live to be about twenty-five years. They breed and whelp in family units and, like the harp, produce one pup per mature female. They whelp on heavier pack ice than the harp and are much more widely scattered. The major concentration of hood seals whelp on the pack ice off Jan Mayen Isand, but smaller numbers of whelping hoods are found off northeastern Newfoundland and in the Davis Strait (Pinhorn, 1976: 51). The pups moult their foetal coat in the womb and are born with a bluish grey hair. These "bluebacks" are able to swim very shortly after birth. They remain on the ice two to three weeks, suckling, and it is during this period that they are hunted.

EARLY HUNTING

The first people to live in what we now call

the province of Newfoundland and Labrador almost certainly killed harp and other species of seals. People of the Maritime Archaic Tradition inhabited the coastal regions of southern Labrador and the west coast of the island of Newfoundland from probably 9,000 years before present until about 3,000 years ago (Tuck, 1976: 12-14). These people had both barbed harpoon tips and an ingenious toggled harpoon tip designed to detach from the spear shaft, twist inside the wound in a sea mammal and hold a line (Tuck, 1976: 23). These and all succeeding peoples who have had access to the migrating and whelping herds of harp seals must have taken advantage of this plentiful resource. They used methods which were the same in concept, albeit different in design, as those in use today.

European interest in the harp seal herds began shortly after discovery of the rich marine resources of the North West Atlantic. Basque seamen hunted whales and probably seals off northern Newfoundland and southern Labrador in the late sixteenth and into the seventeenth centuries (Tuck, personal communication). French and English settlers were taking seals in commercial numbers in northern

Newfoundland at least as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century. Primarily during the month of December the seals would be caught in nets strung from headlands to offshore rocks or islands (Head, 1976: 223). This winter inshore sealing took place mainly north of Bonavista Bay and expanded in a northward direction throughout the eighteenth century so that by the 1770's southern Labrador became the most productive sealing area. These people were primarily hunting adult harp seals, much as landsmen sealers do today on the northeast coast of Newfoundland and in southern Labrador.

In the late eighteenth century men from the south portion of the northeast coast, from St. John's, from the Southern Shore, and from Conception and Trinity Bays began sealing from small boats, searching for the southward drifting whelping patches.

THE SAILING ERA

In 1793 two small sailing schooners of about forty-five tons each left St. John's in search of whelping seals (Wilson, 1866: 287). This was the beginning of the large vessel Newfoundland seal

hunt. By 1851 seal products would account for approximately thirty percent of the total value of Newfoundland's exports (Ryan, 1971: 237). This development coincided with an increasing interest in the Labrador cod fishery. The ships used for the Labrador fishery in summer were refitted for the spring seal hunt after the winter lay up. It was the prelude to the season's economic activity.

A symbiotic relationship developed between the Labrador cod fishery and the seal hunt. The Labrador fishery was an expensive and only marginally viable operation, but it made economic sense for those vessel owners involved in sealing(Ryan, 1978).

The apex of the sealing industry occurred about the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1831 a record of 610,742 seal pelts were brought ashore and 1857 "...the peak of Newfoundland's participation was reached when 370 ships and 13,600 men were involved" (Ryan, 1971: 19). This heavy exploitation resulted in a decline in the number of seals taken after the initial boom and a rough plateau of somewhat more than 400,000 pelts landed annually was reached in the 1840's.

This probably represented a maximum sustainable yield for that time (Ryan, 1971: 226). Although considerable fluctations occurred, this plateau lasted until the 1860's when the introduction of steamers considerably altered the entire industry.

Sealing on a sailing vessel usually meant living in crowded conditions and working very hard, not only at sealing but also at sailing, which often included prying and pulling the ship through ice (Jukes, 1842: 261). The crew of between fifteen and fifty men was quartered in the forecastle (forward of the main hatch) in a space intended for a much smaller crew. Regular meals were not always served and water was rationed, but men were able to supplement their diet with fresh seal meat when "in the fat".

The sailing vessel owners were usually rural merchants, often the local fish merchants, who had enough capital to own one or two schooners or square rigged ships. They supplied all necessary gear in return for one half the product of the voyage. The crew shared the remainder equally among themselves. The owner, if he did not captain the vessel himself, would pay a captain a fixed

rate per seal. The men, who were usually clients of the merchant, would be paid their half share in cash or goods. Profits made sealing could be deducted from the merchant's debit ledger if the fisherman/ sealer owed for the previous season's outfitting; or profits could go directly toward outfitting for the summer fishery. Clifford Head (1976: 226) believes that the early nineteenth century wages of £5.00 to £25.00 each sealer might expect to receive for his efforts would have considerably offset his supply costs for the fishery, although Chesley Sanger (1973: 185-186) suggests individual earnings dwindled throughout the century.

To cover any expenses the merchant might incur by providing board for his crew the sealers were required to pay a fee for their berths. In addition to the berth money, the sealers had to buy their own "crop": knife, hauling rope, gaff, sharpening steel, and guns if necessary and also to supply firewood for fuel on the voyage.

The potential for profit in the sailing vessel enterprise must have been considerable since the risk to life and property was enormous. Twenty-five

boats were lost in 1804 (Head, 1976: 226) at the very beginning of an industry which must be unrivaled in the hardships it caused to its participants. During this period the Newfoundland fishery was regarded as a "nursery" for young British seamen pressed into naval service. A report written to Governor Waldegrave from Harbour Grace in 1795 gives an indication of the rigours the hunt demanded of men:

> The account of the decked vessels and open boats employed in the seal fishery, I concieve will attract Your Excellency's attention, when you consider not only the great advantage of the seal fishery, and the adventurous undertaking in their boats of about thirty or forty tons burthen, manned with from eight to ten hands, who encounter the storms in the months of March and April, thirty or forty leagues from land, which I am convinced makes more and better seamen in one season than the cod fishery does in seven... (Pedley, 1863: 194).

Throughout the nineteenth century the toll of men's lives the seal hunt demanded continued to grow with shocking regularity. Levi G. Chafe, who chronicled comprehensive statistics on the historical seal fishery, gives the following account for the year 1845:

- Barque Ringwood. Henry Norman lost

with all hands.

- Brig. Peerless. Capt. John Nagle and 40 men lost.

- Brig Eliza Margaret. Capt. and 15 men lost. One man, Frank Wiseman, went from Jib stay to top gallant yard hand over hand and saved his life.

- Brig. Mary belonging to Ridley had the misfortune to lose all her crew, who were out in boats with the exception of six men.

(Chafe, 1923: 37)

STEAMERS: 1863 - 1943

In 1862 two steam powered Scottish ships stopped in Newfoundland to kill seals on their way into the Davis Straits to hunt whales. Local entrepreneurs quickly saw the potential advantage in the new steam technology and in 1863 two steam powered vessels cleared for the hunt. The S.S. Bloodhound, owned by Baine, Johnson and Company, and the S.S. Wolf, owned by Walter Grieve and Company, returned later in the spring with only a very modest catch of 4,340 pelts between them (Chafe, 1923: 48). Nonetheless, the idea of steam powered vessels took hold. The new ships were more efficient than sail. They could ram through ice and had much better manoeuvrability, thus minimizing the chances of returning empty

because the ships could not get near the seals.

By 1863 the sailing ships had long since peaked in terms of the maximum number of seals available to their technology. Although roughly the same number of men and ships were hunting, catches were slowly declining, indicating that the harp seal herds were being depleted. The steamers had power to get into places the sailing ships could not reach due to adverse ice conditions, and would have been expected to kill more seals. But they did not. The total number of seal kills continued to decline slowly through the latter part of the nineteenth century and the steamers took a larger proportion of the available catch, contributing to the dwindling of stocks.

Because the steamers were the most successful ships and initially offered better working conditions, the best sealers opted for them knowing that they gave the best potential return for their labour. Thus, deprived of the best sealers, faced with depleting stocks and unable to afford both the initial capital outlay and maintainence costs for steamers, the smaller merchants and their sailing vessels were forced out of the trade.

By 1882, out of a total catch of 178,812 seals, 137,864 were killed from twenty steamers which were owned by only eight merchants (Ryan, 1972: 227). The industry became centralized in St. John's where the most prosperous family interests were located.

The key to successful competition in the steam sealing industry was to have a healthy and diversified financial base that could withstand the strain of disastrous seasons. Smaller merchants who were successfully able to compete in the broadly based sailing enterprise soon found themselves driven out of large vessel sealing by the handful of most powerful mercantile families who had the resources to absorb occasional losses and direct the huge profits of good catches into other, less volatile interests. By the turn of the century four family companies had by far the most impressive records for consistent participation in sealing: Bowring Brothers Limited, Baine Johnson and Company, Job Brothers and Company, and A.J. Harvey and Company (Chafe, 1923). The enormous profits these companies were able to extract from the oil of seals and toil of men were diverted into other concerns and they built huge and

lasting empires. Each of the four are easily recognizable today to anyone living in Newfoundland as among the most prominent local retailing, insurance and shipping companies.

Concentration of the sealing industry in St. John's during the latter part of the nineteenth century meant that many of the men from northern areas, such as Bonavista Bay and the Straight Shore, were at first excluded from the steamers since there was no efficient means of travel to the capital city in winter. Men from these areas were the most experienced sealers however, and they kept up their skills while working in the declining sail enterprise. By 1876 the steam industry started taking advantage of these experienced sealers by allowing some of the older vessels to leave for the seal hunt from northern communities such as Greenspond. After completion of the railway to Gambo in 1891, men from the northern communities were again able to dominate the seal industry (Sanger, 1977).

The steam vessel owners had a preference for northern captains and these men built up considerable reputations as ice masters. The

most famous captains, although often despotic, were highly regarded men with charismatic personalities. Nearly all came from the same area on the northern shore of Bonavista Bay which tended to intensify kindred, sentimental and paternalistic links between them and their men. The seal hunt, because of its history of hardship and disaster, lends itself to romantic interpretation. Part of this romanticism can be attributed to the tough, colourful sealing captains who became local heroes (Scott, 1975).

In much of the literature about sealing it appears the men thought an opportunity to seal under one of the great captains was as much an honour as an economic contract. George England recorded a situation in which a group of men had been forgotten on the ice by Abram Kean, undisputedly the most successful sealing captain ever. It was after dark before Kean remembered he had men left out and decided to start looking for them. After being picked up, the master watch, when he met the captain said "...'we'm ahl rate sir'... He seemed almost apologetic for having nearly lost his life through the old man's forgetting him

to go after him by daylight" (England, 1969: 160).

The men were dependant on the St. John's merchants for the opportunity to work under one of these great personalities. This, and the need to get cash into a cash-starved marginal economy, played into the hands of monopolistic family merchants who were never short of men to crowd their often less than seaworthy ships. Because good men were always available, and in fact competed for their berths, they could manipulate seal prices and fail to provide adequate working conditions in the knowledge they would have a surplus of labour.

STRIKES

There were several strikes among the sealers, usually involving demands for limiting or abolishing berth money. The first recorded strike occurred in 1842 when the sealers succeeded in having their berth money reduced from £3.00 to £2.00. In 1843 this was lowered further and the cost of the "crop" or sealing gear was also reduced (Murphy, 1916). The last strike took place in 1902 when three thousand men, mostly from the Bonavista Bay area, demanded better prices for their one third

share of the voyage. The world market price for seal oil was $6.50 per quintal, but the merchants were only paying $3.25 per quintal locally. The men demanded they receive shares based on a price of $5.00 per quintal for fat; that the "coaling" charge of $3.00 per head be abolished; and that the thirty-three percent markup on the crop be abolished. Their strike lasted three days. The sealers were forced to compromise since they could not afford accomodation in St. John's and because the railway refused to give them free transport home. The men finally accepted a price of $3.50 per quintal for fat, reduction of the crop money and abolition of the coaling charge. Governor Boyle asked the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Bond to set up a commission to investigate the causes of the strike. Bond refused on the grounds that such an inquiry might "...result in a disturbance of the regulations between merchants and fishermen in regard to the cod-fishery" (Sir Robert Bond to Governor Boyle, Governor's Local Correspondence, March 21, 1902).

CONDITIONS

Working conditions on the steamers were at

first better than those on the sailing ships. Except for carrying coal to stoke the burners, the sealers were freed from working the ship. Since the steamers handled better in the ice the men did not have to use their own muscle power so much to pull the ship through tight ice. Water still had to be rationed, but the steamers were able to hold more, both for the engines and for drinking, if not for washing. No matter which account of the seal hunt one reads, from whatever period, the general picture of filth and overcrowding remains the same. Sanger quotes from Dr. David Lindsay, a surgeon who visited a sealing ship in 1884:

> I looked into the 'tween-decks and saw a horrible mess. The bunks were full of men, many playing cards, as each bunk held four. They must have been stifled. For light, lamps burning seal oil were used, and the reek comming from the main hatch would almost have suggested fire (Lindsay, 1911: 47).

Near the turn of the century up to three hundred fifty men were being crowded into the holds of ships as small as four hundred fifty tons. In 1898, government enacted legislation to limit the number of men a ship could carry to

the seal hunt:

> It shall be unlawful for any steamer... to have on board a greater number of men as crew than three men for every seven tons of...such steamer (no more than 270 men in any case)... (An Act Respecting the Prosecution of the Seal Fishery, 1898: 61 Vic. Cap. 4: Section 5).

To get to St. John's to sign aboard a sealing ship, the men from Bonavista Bay would walk thirty to fifty kilometres into Gambo station from their homes, carrying their gear on a small wooden "slide". The trip often took two days or more. Once at the station they received a reduced seaman's fare for the trip to St. John's. When they arrived in the city they would then collect wood shavings or some other stuffing for the home made mattresses they brought with them. The mattresses were placed on boards nailed into the ship's hold, a few "bogey" stoves were added for heat and cooking. The accomodations were such that as the ship began to fill with seals, the bunks were removed and the men [redacted] on top of the pelts and fat.

The owners, loathe to incure extra expenses, were unwilling to provide adequate food or personnel to cook it. One hot meal was provided on alternate

days--Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday. These meals usually consisted of salt fish or meat and "duffs" of steamed flour (Sanger, 1973: 181). Sweet duff--steamed flour with a bit of molasses--was served Sundays. Other than this frugal fare a sealer's diet consisted of hard bread (tack), butter and tea, and seal hearts and livers when available.

It was not until 1916 that legislation forced owners to supply minimum provisions:

> The following regulations shall apply to all steamers prosecuting the seal fishery:
>
> (1) In addition to the food usually supplied, not less than one pound of soft bread shall be served out to each member of the crew three times each week;
>
> (2) Beef, pork, potatoes and pudding shall be supplied for dinner three times each week;
>
> (3) For breakfast stewed beans and fish brewse shall be supplied alternately;
>
> (4) Soup shall be supplied on Saturdays, in which onions, potatoes, and turnips shall be ingredients;
>
> (5) Fresh beef shall be supplied to each member of the crew once each week and when fresh beef is not available through circumstances over which the owner has no control, canned

beef shall be substituted therefor.

(Of the Prosecution of the Seal Fishery, Chapter 162, Consolidated Statutes of Newfoundland, Volume III, 1916, Section 3)

For all their trouble in getting to St. John's and the harsh conditions under which they laboured at the seal hunt, the men were not guaranteed a wage. They were paid a small percentage of the vessel's catch, which for an exceptionally good voyage could be $100.00 or more--no small amount. But it was more likely they would arrive home with between $20.00 and $40.00 for an average trip (Chafe, 1923: 62-85).

Death and disaster have always been an integral part of the seal hunt. During the sailing era most of the disasters seem to have involved entire ships being lost, often with all hands, because they could not stand up to the rigours the ice and March storms demanded of them. The risks were enormous but probably well understood by all those involved. Furthermore, the crews were small enough that the men would be less alienated from their captain, who would be well known by his men and unlikely to act autocratically in a situation that

would put them in danger. The large steamers, on the other hand, were filled to overflowing with nearly three hundred men each, and the captains had a difficult time simply keeping track of men. The most famous and telling event of the steam era was the Newfoundland disaster of 1914. Its story is famous enough due in large part to Cassie Brown's book Death on the Ice. But the events of 1914 are of utmost importance in any understanding of the seal hunt, past or present.

In 1914 A.J. Harvey and Company sent four ships to the ice. The oldest of these was the forty-two year old S.S. Newfoundland. She carried a crew of one hundred eighty-nine men. Her captain, for this and the three years' previous voyages, was twenty-nine year old Westbury Kean, the youngest son of Abram Kean, O.B.E. Most ships at that time were fitted out with wireless sets. The Newfoundland's wireless however, was removed shortly before going to the ice, because the owners thought it an unnecessary expense on such an old ship.

The ice was unusually heavy in 1914 and the Newfoundland spent much of its time jammed in it,

unable to get to the seals which were only a few miles away. March 31 dawned a fine, warm morning. Westbury Kean put his men on the ice with instructions to walk the five miles between their ship and his father's ship, the S.S.Stephano. The men were told that, once aboard the Stephano, Abram Kean would give them food and put them near some seals which they would be able to kill and collect in pans. The Newfoundland would be able to pick these up when she got free of the ~~ice~~ jam. The men and Westbury Kean were under the impression that they would be invited to spend the night aboard the Stephano, since the eight kilometre walk was over very rough ice and took much longer than expected. Thirty-four men returned to the Newfoundland when the weather began to deteriorate near noon, citing premonition of danger as their excuse. The rest continued on and boarded the Stephano at 11:20 a.m. They were fed and put on the ice near a patch of seals half an hour later. The barometer was falling and the men watching the sky thought it was obvious there would be bad weather coming. Abram Kean took no notice. The men were instructed by him to return to their

own ship. Many of the men had serious reservations about spending more time killing seals when they knew darkness could well fall before they were able to walk the distance back to the Newfoundland, but Abram Kean's orders carried perhaps more authority than their own captain's, and the men did as they were told. The patch of seals was further from their own ship than they had been told and when they finally started back to the Newfoundland they were caught in a storm. Westbury Kean was certain his father had kept the men aboard the Stephano. Abram Kean was confident the men had returned to their own ship. As a result, no one searched for them. Since there was no wireless aboard the Newfoundland neither captain was able to conf[illegible] the position of the men.

The storm and blizzard lasted two days. Accounting for the wind chill factor, the temperature was about -34°C for much of the time. The men were dressed for a warm day. Seventy-eight of the men died in unimaginable agony. Some were driven insane and simply walked off into the sea. Many died on their feet, walking to stay awake. A man and his two sons froze with

their arms around each other. Many of the forty-six survivors lost limbs to frostbite.

The same storm that took the lives of seventy-eight men of the Newfoundland also claimed the steamer S.S.Southern Cross and her crew of one hundred seventy-three men. She was making her way back from the hunt in the Gulf of St. Lawrence with a full load of seals and was last sighted west-southwest of Cape Race, where she barely escaped a collision with the S.S.Portia. Some identifiable flotsam washed ashore on the west coast of Ireland later that summer. This disaster brought the total number of men lost in the seal hunt of 1914 to two hundred fifty-three men. One survivor died later in hospital, and a man was killed in an unrelated incident aboard the S.S. Bonaventure when he fell through an open hatch (Brown, 1972: 259). Virtually everyone on the northeast coast lost a family member or friend.

At the beginning of the 1915 hunt, Abram Kean

> ...was offered a body guard to escort him to his ship...the Old Man refused. Hundreds of sealers blocked the street as he approached the Florizel. But he walked straight through them in his long sealskin coat and fur hat, nodding as he went to those he knew. They made

> way and touched their caps in salute. Not a hand, not even a voice was raised against him (Brown, 1972: 264).

Many of the Newfoundland men had the 1898 disaster of the S.S. Greenland on their minds during their ordeal. During a storm at the ice a gust of wind heeled the Greenland over so far that her cargo of pelts shifted and the fires were doused. Half her men were caught on the other side of a lake of open water with no way to reach the ship, although it was within sight. They too were on the ice for two days before the few survivors were rescued.

In 1931 the wooden wall steamer S.S. Viking, carrying an American film crew who were making a Hollywood movie based on the hunt, blew her blasting powder and dynamite which had been stored carelessly. Twenty-nine men were killed, including the film's producer Varick Frissel. The Viking was the last major disaster in which large numbers of men died at the seal hunt, but the merchant families continued to send men to the ice in unseaworthy ships which continued, on occasion, to sink.

During World War II very few seals were taken, due to a decreased effort and the inability of the

few remaining ships to find large concentrations of seals. The best ships of the sealing fleet were pressed into war time service, leaving only a few of the most ancient wooden walls. Only three ships went to the ice in 1942, all of them old wooden steamers: the S.S. Terra Nova, the S.S. Eagle, and the S.S. Ranger. There was no hunt at all in 1943. The average annual take of seals during 1940 to 1945 was only 37,549 (Andrews, 1973: 18).

POST WORLD WAR II

The end of the war marked a significant change in the seal hunt. With two exceptions, the old steam fleet was gone and replaced with a greater number of much smaller motor vessels. By 1948 there were twenty-five Newfoundland based ships participating in the hunt, with an average size of only one hundred seventy tons. The new ships carried small crews of between twenty and fifty men (Andrews, 1973: 18).

Norwegians took small catches in 1938-39 (Templeman, 1966: 134). With the end of the war the Norwegians became much more active in western Atlantic sealing. By 1948 twenty Norwegian ships hunted seals at the Front, as did a much

lesser number of vessels of other nationalities including the Soviets (Andrews, 1973: 18). Norwegians took more than half the catches at the Front from 1952 into the 1970's (The Atlantic Seal Hunt, 1976), when they were restricted by the introduction of quota management and the imposition of the Canadian two hundred mile economic zone. This severe competition by the Norwegians was combined with the introduction of Nova Scotia based vessels after 1949, many of which were owned by Norwegian-Canadian interests. During this same period there was a lessening of Newfoundland entrepreneurial interest in the hunt. Norwegian companies took over most of the pelt processing and marketing. By 1954, the Nova Scotian vessels were taking considerably more seals than the Newfoundland based vessels. But since Newfoundland had joined Canada in 1949 the Nova Scotia vessels were easily able to employ experienced Newfoundland sealers, who would sign on in St. John's as the ships headed north to the Front. Through the 1950's and the 1960's about five hundred Newfoundlanders formed the bulk of the sealing crews aboard the Nova Scotia fleet of ten to

twelve vessels. By 1969 there was only one Newfoundland based vessel at the hunt and in 1972 no Newfoundland ships participated.

CONSERVATION

From the 1830's until the second World War the harp seal herds were consistently over exploited. Limitations on the available technology and, it must be assumed, on the willingness to invest more high risk capital prevented this over exploitation from exceeding the point where the stocks could not sustain themselves. After the huge catches of the 1830's and 1840's the annual harvest slowly declined. Nearly a century later the average catch between 1912 and 1949 was only 134,250 despite considerable improvements in technology (McLaren, 1977: 71). Sanger sums up:

> The historical development of the Newfoundland sealing industry can... be seen as one of evolution through several overlapping stages characterized by the acceptance of new technology, adaptation of strategies and techniques, changes in capital investment and ownership, a general reduction in personnel, shifts in the pattern and intensity of regional involvement, and a stage-by-stage reduction in the total catch per year. The overall decline of the industry indicates that the evolution of the venture from 1793 to the present has been a process of imbalance in which

> new technology and concomitant strategy in the use of capital and personnel have progressively reduced the basic resource upon which the industry depends (Sanger, 1973: 26).

The much reduced hunt of the war years allowed the stocks to rebuild. Following the typical pattern however, herd replenishment met a much increased effort with better equipment following the war. Consequently, catches soared to near the damaging levels of the 1840's. An average of 283,000 seals were taken each year during 1951 to 1960, and 280,000 between 1961 and 1970. Peaks of more than 400,000 were seen in both 1951 and 1956 (The Atlantic Seal Hunt, 1976).

In the early 1950's the Soviet Union realized its whelping herds of harp seals in the White Sea were dwindling and imposed a kill limit of 100,000 seals per year. It was not until 1965 however, that the Canadian and Norwegian governments began to seriously tighten the regulations on the western Atlantic harp seal hunt. They began by setting a quota of 50,000 beaters and pups for the Gulf hunt; limited use of aircraft (which were used in the Gulf hunt to ferry pelts from the ice to land); stationed fisheries officers on all large vessels

and landing points; and limited the season and required sealers to remove the pelts from the ice within twenty-four hours.

In 1966, international management was turned over to a sealing panel of the International Convention for Northwest Atlantic Fisheries (ICNAF). Total allowable catches (TAC) for harp seals were first established in 1970 at 245,000 harp seals for the Gulf and Front combined, to take effect in 1971. This was considerably reduced the next year to 150,000 pelts. A special advisory committee set up by the Canadian Minister of the Environment, the Committee on Seals and Sealing (COSS), recommended a phased six year moratorium on all sealing except by aboriginals. Neither ICNAF, which had no enforcement authority in any case, nor the Canadian government ever seriously considered a moratorium on sealing (Reeves, 1977: 27). In 1975 ICNAF introduced a TAC of 15,100 hood seals to be taken at the Front, and in 1976 the harp seal allocation was reduced further to 127,000 total. The distribution of these quotas reflected the strong Norwegian presence in the industry. Canadian vessels were allowed 44,667 seals and

Canadian landsmen 30,000 seals, while Norwegian vessels were given 52,333 seals. One hundred seals were left unallocated, presumably to account for possible overkill, but in 1976 Canadian landsmen actually took 30,000 more seals than they had been allocated (Reeves, 1977: 24).

There have been myriad of different techniques used to estimate the total size of the seal herds and to establish rates of pup production. They range from simple visual estimates to tremendously complex population projection models which seem to be more theoretical than pragmatic in nature. Two methods appear to be commonly used, first by ICNAF and more recently by the Canadian Ministry of Fisheries, in determining quota allocations: visual estimates, and tag and recapture programmes.

The visual estimates are based on aerial photography of a grid over the whelping patches combined with eyeball estimates from a seasoned observer. A considerable improvement in this method was made in 1974, when a team of biologists from the University of Guelph discovered that the white pelts of the harp seal pups absorb a great

deal more ultra-violet light than does the surrounding ice and snow. Consequently, through special photographic techniques they are able to show the young seals as black images against the white ice (Lavigne and Øritsland, 1974).

Tag and recapture programmes involve tagging a number of pups before the hunt begins, and offering a reward to sealers for returning the tags from seals they kill. By simply dividing the number of seals tagged by the number of tags recovered, the ratio of those killed to those which survive can be extrapolated.

Despite continuing sophistication in population estimating, there are still wide variations in estimates between scientists using different techniques. It does seem however, that since ships at the Front have been easily taking their total quotas in recent years (providing weather and ice conditions do not interfere with their operations) the quota system appears to be working.

By 1979, the year with which this thesis is primarily concerned, the TAC was boosted to 180,000 harp seals and 15,000 hood seals. People

in the Arctic were reserved 10,000 harp seals and the remaining 170,000 were distributed as follows:

1. Large Vessels (Front)	Canada	57,000
	Norway	20,000
	Total	77,000
2. Large Vessels (Gulf)	Canada	20,000
3. Landsmen Operations (Overall)		73,000
The landsmen quota was distributed with:		
Newfoundland Front		45,500
Newfoundland Gulf		7,000
	Total	52,500
North Shore (Quebec) and Magdalen Islands		19,500
Cape Breton Island		1,000
	Total	20,500
Arctic (Including the Labrador coast from Cape St. Charles north)		10,000

(from G.R. Traverse, "Seal Report, Newfoundland Region" 1979: 11).

PROTEST

It is well known that the seal hunt has become a cause celebre for the environmental movement. In the mid-1950's Drs. H. Lillie and J. Cunningham made a film stressing the inhumane aspects of the killing (Pimlott, 1966). In

1955, Dr. David Sargeant, a Department of Fisheries biologist, also stated he was not satisfied with the killing methods and recommended improvements (Lamson, 1979). In 1960 a well known Newfoundland writer and naturalist, Harold Horwood, published an article in the March-April issue of Canadian Audubon entitled "Tragedy on the Whelping Ice". He vividly described the decline of the seal herds and discussed the humane aspects of the kill. Various provincial Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, other humane organizations, and the Canadian Audubon Society sent observers to the hunt throughout the late 1950's and the 1960's. They raised serious questions about the conduct and size of the hunt (Pimlott, 1966 and 1967).

Most of this early concern was directed at the Gulf hunt off the Magdalen Islands, where in addition to ships, light aircraft were used extensively after 1962 to ferry sealers out to the ice and return the pelts to shore. Much of the literature about the Gulf hunt during this period gives the impression that this was a rather haphazard operation conducted in haste and often by inexperienced men. This contrasts with the

hunt at the Front off southern Labrador, where experienced Newfoundland crews worked from ships under the scrutiny of their captains and other responsible officers.

Groups such as the Canadian Audubon Society pushed for a much more stringently regulated hunt through the 1960's. They were primarily concerned that far too many seals were being taken and that the herds would soon be depleted unless strict quotas were enforced. They did not however, advocate the abolition of sealing.

The Canadian Audubon Society was convinced that nearly all the seals were killed in a humane fashion, especially after regulation hardwood bats were prescribed in the 1967 sealing regulations and fisheries enforcement officers monitored the seal killing. Of greater concern to them was public acceptance of clubbing seals.

> The thought of a club being used is revolting to a large segment of society and for that, if for no other reason, it should be discontinued. If it is not, it is going to be very difficult to manage the sealing in the Gulf of St. Lawrence on a rational basis (Pimlott, 1967).

Inevitably, the gruesomeness of the seal

slaughter attracted activists who continue to fight for the total abolition of sealing on the grounds that it is a barbaric and inhumane activity. In 1964 Radio Canada commissioned Artek Films to shoot footage of the Magdalen Islands hunt. The film showed seals being skinned alive and raised a great deal of public indignation. One of the members of the film crew was later identified as a "sealer" skinning a live pup, and a local fisherman admitted in a sworn statement that he had been paid to skin a live adult seal for the camera (Pimlott, 1967: 57).

After publication of the Artek film the abolition movement continued to grow, primarily through the efforts of Peter Lust, a journalist for the Montreal Star, and Brian Davies, a Welsh born director of the New Brunswick S.P.C.A. Lust wrote an article, "Murder Island", for the Star which was widely reprinted in European newspapers in 1964. He also produced a book, The Last Seal Pup, published in 1967. Davies began his career as a seal protester while an employee of the New Brunswick S.P.C.A., but was fired and subsequently started his own

anti-sealing group.

During the 1970's and into the 1980's, a considerable voice of protest against the seal hunt has been raised by environmental groups who still consider it to be both unnecessarily cruel and ecologically dangerous. The protesters, particularly the Greenpeace Foundation and Davies' group, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, seek to stop the hunt by bringing world attention to it through a massive publicity campaign. Reaction to this protest in Newfoundland has heightened awareness of the hunt as a cultural event. This is supported by the institutional structure of the province. The government, churches and schools have promoted it against outside opposition as an economically necessary and culturally valuable endeavour. The publicity created by the protest and counter protest has given new life to the culturally symbolic side of the hunt, which had waned since the operation was made less risky and more comfortable after World War II. This resurgence of intense interest in the hunt coincided with the onset of an increased awareness of a Newfoundland identity amongst the general population.

The traditional ecumenical Blessing of the Sealing Fleet, the "sealers sendoff" was resurrected in 1978 in response to the protest. In the same year, the Newfoundland government held press conferences across North America and Europe to present the Newfoundland side of the sealing issue. The Mummers Troupe, a St. John's based theatre company toured Canada with their production of "They Club Seals, Don't They?"--a humourous but passionate defence of sealing and the outport heritage. In 1978, former sealer Raymond Elliot joined Brian Davies' campaign against the seal hunt and was regarded as a traitor by a large number of the Newfoundland public. The sealers however, saw him more as an oddity than a threat. In 1979, "Codpeace", an hilarious parody of Greenpeace formed by members of the St. John's elite, delighted audiences across the island with the exploits of "Cuddles", the cute baby codfish pursued by the rapacious "Erich von Harp Seal". There arose at the same time a groundswell of public support for the seal hunt through poetry, song and public expression (Lamson, 1979). Sealing is clearly recognized and promoted as a

cultural activity having important symbolic meaning to the province.

The protest, which began in earnest in the latter part of the 1960's, reawakened interest in the hunt in part because it is seen as a direct interference with the prevailing cultural ideal, which is to promote the rural life style as a valued part of Newfoundland's heritage. The protest is "them" against "us", a direct intrusion of urban values that clash with rural traditions. It sums up various complaints Newfoundlanders have about the intrusion of mainland cultural values.

The protesters try to underplay this cultural aspect of sealing--something they are not prepared to deal with. They prefer to argue that since the seal hunt added only about $5,500,000 to the total economy of the province, in 1978 (Which is only 0.2% of the Gross Provincial Product) it cannot have a claim as a important or vital part of the economy (figures provided by Greenpeace). The sealers are led to believe that the outside world thinks of the hunt in economic terms, and they respond to the protest and to outsiders by arguing that they seal for economic reasons,

because "they need the money".

While it is certainly true that the sealers need the money, the economic argument is a presentation they give to outsiders because they believe the outsiders are only interested in the material viability of the hunt, evidenced by the protest propagandists who pay scant attention to the social and cultural side of the issue. The result is that the culturally and personally meaningful aspects of sealing are rarely discussed except among insiders. To try to explain the inside point of view to an outsider would be confusing and difficult, if not impossible, for the sealers because it has an experiencial, evaluative meaning. It can take place only within an "emic" sphere in which there has been some shared experience.

The following chapters attempt to convey those qualities of the hunt which are important to the sealers. Straight forward economic considerations are important to the sealers, but so are the cultural and social dimensions. Much of what follows is a narrative, using the experiences of the researcher alongside those of the crew. Since it is, in part, the intensive experience of

the hunt which makes sealing so important to its participants, I have attempted to give the reader a direct sense of this experience.

CHAPTER III

RITES OF SPRING

HARBOURSIDE

It was 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, March 4, 1979. We were due to sail at 3:00 p.m. The five storey parking garage across the street began to fill with some of the nearly five thousand people who would come to see the Blessing of the Sealing Fleet. I was standing on the ship's deck leaning on the rail, trying to look inconspicuous while watching some men put the finishing touches on a public address system, which was on a makeshift wooden stage nearby.

A man wielding an expensive looking camera asked if I was a sealer. I hesitated, wondering whether I should say I was a sealer or an anthropology student, then told him I was a sealer. "Do you mind if I take some pictures?"

"No." He took the picture.

I felt self-conscious and anxious to be underway, out of the harbour and away from the confusion. A tall, gaunt, middle aged man stumbled toward me. In contrast to the clean blue parka the camera man was wearing, this man had on a

dirty, ragged jacket, also blue. The bright yellow licence badge on his tattered stocking cap identified him as a sealer. He put his unshaven, whiskey smelling face too close to mine. "You goin' on this one?"

"Yeah, I think so."

"Well, so am I b'y. She's a good ship, this one ain't she?"

"Yeah, I guess so," I stammered, feeling apprehensive about spending a month in close quarters with, and being accepted by, such men. For a moment I wished I had stayed within the antiseptic womb of the university.

Later I would learn to appreciate a gentle side of this man who would save my life in a few days time.

I broke away from my new acquaintance and saw a young man leaning on the ship's rail, looking as confused and concerned as I felt. Billy and I introduced ourselves. He explained he had been given a berth only a few days before. "I've been dreaming about this ever since Christmas," he said. "I haven't been able to sleep at night for thinking about going to the ice." He told

me he had decided to go sealing at Christmas and had informed his mother he was going. She had told him to put the matter out of his mind, but he insisted and said he was going anyway. His father had been out six springs and he wanted to see what it was like. He waved to his mother and sisters on the dockside and they came over to anxiously wish him a safe trip. He fishes on his father's trap boat, one of the inshore fishermen based in St. John's.

The master of ceremonies tested the microphone, then started to announce the beginning of the ceremony. By this time all the dignitaries were assembled on the podium, including the provincial Premier, decked out in a full length sealskin coat; the leaders of opposition parties; the mayor; the head of the federal fisheries department for the area, representing the Minister of Fisheries; the leader of the Newfoundland Fish, Food and Allied Workers Union (the fishermen's union); and ministers and priests representing the major denominations in the province. The Salvation Army Band warmed up beside the makeshift stage.

The service began with a prayer for those

men who "have gone down to the sea in ships, but have not returned." The clergy took turns giving their messages, which spoke of man's relationship with the sea and of the dangers inherent in seafaring. The band struck the hymn, "Eternal Father, Strong to Save" and the crowd sang along, reading from the leaflets that had been passed out. One of the sealing captains spoke on behalf of them all, thanking the crowd, the clergy and the Board of Trade for making the ceremony such a success. As the ceremony was ending, the band started to play "Ode to Newfoundland", the former national and now provincial anthem, while the city churches began ringing their bells in tribute. Immediately the anthem was interrupted.

From where I was standing I could only see excited movement near the podium. Then a man I recognized as a Greenpeace protester hurried toward the edge of the dock and jumped into the harbour between the sterns of the four ships directly behind the podium. He was wearing a diver's wet suit underneath street clothes and flailed about in the water, presumably trying to chain himself to the rudder of one of the ships.

At nearly the same time, amidst the confusion, a woman chained herself to the rail of our ship near the top of the gangway and a young man chained himself to the rigging on our foredeck. The Coast Guard soon appeared in a rubber boat and tried to get the man out of the water. Two other small boats, powered by outboard engines and bearing Greenpeace insignia suddenly started careening around the harbour at high speed.

The chief engineer got a hacksaw from the engine room and started to saw the chains which held the woman to the ship, but quickly gave up when someone produced a sledge hammer. Then he turned his attention to the man on the foredeck and while two sealers held the protester he hammered off the chains, smiling and passing comments with each swing. "What do you say, maybe we ought to leave this guy here for a week, eh?" The young man did not resist and kept a tight expression on his face as the chains were battered away.

Soon the captain came aboard and took the sledge hammer to the girl's chains which he quickly battered off, and gave her his boot in the seat

of the pants as he marched her down the gangway. There are conflicting reports about the crowd's reaction to the incident. Some say they were yelling, "kill them, kill them!" although I did not hear it. It was a frightening, emotionally charged mass scene and I could not be sure of what was going on in all places. The crowd was excited and pushy and each new effort by the protesters made the throng of people surge toward the action, dangerously close to the water.



Eventually the police and crew members got the protesters out of the way and one by one ships left the waterfront. Greenpeace rubber boats continued to buzz around the harbour at top speed, symbolically trying to stop the fleet by racing past the bows of the ships.

We were the last ship to leave. Much of the excitement on shore had died down and friends and families waved good-bye to the men. As we cleared the harbour entrance at about 4:00 p.m. we saw there were people standing on the rocks, cheering and waving. I was on deck, still feeling nervous, but happy to be underway.

UNDERWAY

When a ship leaves harbour it leaves behind more than the land. Land bound social referents are replaced for the time being by an already prescribed structure of relations. The number of social possibilities is limited both by the number of men on the ship and by the authority structure aboard. The confusions of shore life, with many of its commitments, fall away as do the stimuli which produce them. A ship becomes a haven in which the social and spatial boundaries are rigidly defined and usually familiar. It provides a small, life sustaining unit in which relationships are simplified and comforting. Matters in and of the ship are all that are immediately important, and while the men may think of shore, their interaction with it has been suspended. It was both physically and psychologically refreshing to feel the ship lift to the first ocean swell.

The chief engineer told me shortly after leaving port that there was a berth available for me in the forward section with the sealers, so I picked up my gear and stumbled across the rocking deck and down into the sealers' quarters in the

bow of the ship. I found one empty bunk in a four man cabin. The three others were obviously occupied. The room measured about two and a half by three metres. It was dark, stuffy and hot, and smelled of wet wool and stale sweat. A quick look at the one small porthole assured me the ventilation would never be adequate. My bunk was the same as the others: narrow, almost two metres long, with a dirty foam mattress. The wall next to the bunk was cold and damp. It was the bulkhead next to the forward hold and condensation had made yellow stains that looked like urine. I plunked my bag on it as a claim and sat to have a cigarette and ponder my situation.

A young man in his early twenties occupying the bunk above mine poked his head over the side and asked in a matter of fact way, who I was and whether this was my first trip. I told him my name and admitted to being a "green hand". He said it was his third trip and seemed pleased to be able to offer advice as an experienced man. "Just do as you're told and you'll be alright," he said. We then got into a conversation about the protest. He said he thought Greenpeace, (whose name has become a tag for all protesters) would

"win", although he did not elaborate on the reasons he thought they would do so. He said he did not think there would be a seal hunt after the one we were on. I asked why he thought this and his only answer was "they'll win". Then he went on: "We should just go out there and kill all the seals if that's what they're going to do. What difference does it make? Take all the bitches, everything. Fuck 'em."

I wished for the moment I hadn't heard Victor's statements. My rather weak reply to him was that perhaps it would be good to save some of the seals for posterity. He replied with something like, "Well, what good are they if you can't kill them?" I shrugged and said I couldn't answer him.

It took us eight days to find the harp seal breeding patch. During that time the twenty sealers transformed themselves from a group of ordinary workers, half of whom did not know each other, into a cohesive unit, a crew which could work well with a minimum of supervision and was able to integrate beginners into the fold of intracrew rapport. This happened quite spontaneously and naturally.

The men spent much of the first two days

just getting familiar with each other and the ship. We lay around in the bunks or stood silently in the wheelhouse, watching as the captain expertly manoeuvred his ship through the vast white ocean of ice. We encountered "slob", or loosely packed ice shortly after leaving St. John's and starting northward. We would rarely see open water for the next month, and then only in small ice locked lakes or gaps in the ice cover.

INITIATION

Patterns in crew relations soon began to develop. The young men on their first trip teamed up with older experienced men and between them there developed a special kind of relationship. The experienced hand became a sort of patron-initiator to the newcomer, goading, making him the butt of jokes, asking and giving favours for things big and small. Several cases of this sort of relationship developed, each varying in intensity and and importance. The younger and less experienced the neophyte, the more important the relationship became. The most intense and obvious play between initiator and neophyte grew between Billy and Isaac.

Isaac was as physically tough a man as I had ever met. He had an enormous amount of energy which one might almost call hyperactivity. He could stay awake, joking and telling stories long after most of the other men had given in and gone to sleep. Then he would be the first man out of the bunk in the morning and would put in an extraordinary amount of work in the day.

Isaac had been sealing for fifteen years and this was his sixth spring aboard our ship. He quickly installed himself as ship's clown and boasted incessantly about his exploits on other ships. He was particularly proud of working on the "old Kyle", one of the last coal fired steamers to take part in the seal hunt. The Kyle soon took on mythical proportions. Isaac told of carrying coal all night after working on the ice all day, of contests where men would skin thirteen seals in one hour, and of men who could skin three seals in three minutes.

These stories, or "cuffers" (Faris, 1972:144) may stretch the truth somewhat (Isaac often seems to take some artistic licence with his tales); but I never caught him in a bald faced lie, and sometimes the far-fetched stories came

up truthful. But true or not, the stories did have an effect on Billy, who provided Isaac a rapt audience.

Billy was an easy target for Isaac's joking. He looked the part of the green hand; strong but chubby and without much of a beard on his chin. He had lied about his age to get his berth. Sealers must be at least nineteen--Billy's nineteenth birthday would come about halfway through the trip. It was a fact he let everyone know, but at the same time he was desperately afraid the captain would find out. He is an energetic young man, fond of joking but also capable of taking his work seriously. He was bolstered with pride at having been chosen to be a member of the sealing crew and sometimes expressed an enthusiasm that Isaac knew was unwarranted.

Isaac would often sit in his bunk while other men, cabin mates or men just looking to pass some time, lazed about the room. In the cramped quarters there was not much privacy for anyone. Isaac singled out Billy as his foil for the most dramatic stories.

Although neither party mentioned, nor probably even recognized it, Isaac was carefully

preparing Billy for the task of sealing, and in a more general sense he was initiating him into a fraternity of manhood. Isaac's stories and jokes usually revolved around themes of sealing, work, and sex.

They were jovial encounters, with men guffawing at the young man's embarrassment. Billy took it in good fun. The message was given within a joking situation, but it was nonetheless serious in intent, meant to provide Billy with the emotional equipment necessary to carry out his task as a sealer and to integrate him as a full member of the crew. If he passed his tests well, by showing he could take Isaac's verbal abuse and eventually respond in turn, and more importantly, if he was able to work well on the ice, he would be admitted to the fraternity as a full member. In this capacity he would have a more serious set of obligations to uphold, and would consequently be taken more seriously.

Isaac would chide Billy about his sexual inexperience, then invite him to his home town where the local women would quickly relieve him of his innocence. He would tell Billy that although

he was a fisherman, men from St. John's didn't really know how to fish, that life in St. John's was easy, designed for boys and soft skinned men. The "real life" he said was to be found in the outport--reflecting a common antagonism between "baymen" (rural people) and "townies" (St. John's residents) which finds great expression on lavatory walls at the university and other public facilities.

The dialogue which follows is a reconstruction of the conversations between Isaac and Billy that took place during the time the ship was searching for seals.

"Hey Billy, listen up now while I tells you a story. Did you ever see an old dog hood? No, I dare say townies don't see much except the inside of lacy panties. Well, later on when you got a dog hood chasin' after your pecker you'll know what it looks like.

"I seen a dog come alive on deck once, right when we was skinnin' it. One of the biggest I ever seen, it must have weighed over half a ton. That was on the old Kyle. He had two bullet holes right in the head and we all thought he was dead. He layed there a little while, and then just as

we was puttin' our knives to him he reached up and near bit the arm off the guy that was startin' to skin 'im. Lord Jesus! then he started chasin' all the men around the deck! And see, there's not much to do with a dog hood but shoot him. He blows up his hood on top of his head with air and it's just like a big leather ball. You can hit him all you want and you can't hurt him. I tell you, there was some men jumpin' around that deck.

"Think you could manage one like that, Billy?" He gave admonishments not to turn one's back on the breathing holes, "Or the bitch will come right after your balls. That's what they go for you know, just like they knew."

But not all Isaac's stories were meant to impress in the same way. Isaac also tried to steel Billy emotionally for the task of killing white-coats.

"I got me "octipus" (hakapik) all picked out, gonna knock all them little seals right on the head," Billy joked while dancing around pretending he was clubbing seals.

"Yes, and I daresay you'll be puking all over

the place and callin' for your mother," Isaac broke in. "It's not so easy as that. Wait until you've got to skin your first one, and the blood gets in your eyes. And then when you cut open his belly and see all that mother's milk flowin' all over. I daresay you'll probably start cryin'! The milk is right pink you know--it's that rich. And those whitecoats grow about seven pounds a day. Now if you tied a string around a whitecoat's neck at night, just loosely you know, then come back in the morning, he'll be strangling to death."

"Aw, I'll be alright. I'm a man. I can do those things," Billy boasted, with an impish look on his face that told everyone he did not really believe himself.

"A man? Lord Jesus! Did you hear that? Nar a whisker on his chin and fat like a little whitecoat; and he says he's a man! You've got a few things to learn first, my son."

One evening, after a particularly vicious attack, Isaac called me into his cabin after Billy had left, "We really think the world of him, you know," he told me earnestly. "There's no sense coming out here to hate anyone. We wouldn't go

so hard on him if we didn't like him." The other two men in their bunks nodded in agreement.

"He's okay," they smiled.

Billy realized the other men thought highly of him and responded to their attention by frequently making himself available for their teasing. The mere fact that the men took time to tease him enhanced his status and made him feel he was well liked. Because he knew he was well liked and knew the other men thought he had promise as a good sealer, he also knew he would be under pressure to put in a good performance on the ice if he was going to maintain and build their respect further. He was aware that while he was passing his tests on board ship thus far, his final exam would be to prove his ability to survive and dispatch a very different set of obligations in a humourless, potentially deadly serious effort.

One evening Billy came into our cabin, which was directly across the hallway from Isaac's. "Hide me, hide me!" he blurted in his usual rambunctious way. It was an excuse to come and talk with us. He explained that he needed a respite from Isaac's taunts, and soon he and Victor

got into a more subdued conversation about killing whitecoats and the expectations others would have of him. Victor repeated the advice he had given me: "Just do as you're told and follow what the others are doing and you'll be alright."

Billy worried about the captain. "Does he watch you all the time?"

"Well, not when you're on the ice, he's too far away for that. But whoever is your master watch, he'll know what you're doing."

"It's not really so hard to kill a baby seal as Igaac says it is, is it?"

"Oh, it's mighty hard until you get used to it. It's not easy. They bawl just like a baby. Oh, I don't like that. I gives the bawlin' ones a smack right away."

Victor was much closer to being Billy's peer than the older men. He was only three years older and had been to the ice two previous springs. He did not have the authority to place Billy into a completely subordinate position as he was too close to that position himself. But he did speak to him in patronizing tones, as a superior to an underling. Victor had successfully passed the test that Billy

was now being put to. He was an initiate. His opinions were taken seriously because others knew they were based on experience. But he was not an elder, so to speak, as were Isaac and a few others.

STAGES OF EXPERIENCE

Roughly speaking the sealers might be placed in three levels of experience: neophyte, initiate and elder.[1] The neophytes are like Billy--making their first trip, usually young, naive and apprehensive about what demands will be made of them. They want to be full fledged members of the crew, but cannot be. They want to impress but are either unsure about how to do it or try to make up for lack of experience with a nervous enthusiasm. They must learn quickly. The potential payoff for the neophyte comes in an increased sense of manliness and maturity if he is able to dispatch his duties well, because he will know he has passed

1. Many authors have written extensively about rites of passage and renewal, most notably Arnold van Gennep (1908--translation: 1960) and Victor Turner (1969). These stages of experience bear resemblance to classic categories but do not attempt to parallel or be shown as equivalents to them.

an important test of manhood. And even if he does not pass the test with honours he will likely gain the praise of family and friends simply for having had the experience. After all, only a few men on the ship will know whether he has measured up to expectations. The neophyte himself may not even be sure if he has measured up. But he will have a fair idea. Five of the twenty sealers could be called neophytes.

The initiates are men who have been sealing before. Most of them have been on the whitecoat hunt, but three were experienced landsmen who were on the ships for the first time. They might be in their early twenties or late thirties. They understand their work and have confidence in their abilities. They have proved themselves able workers on past voyages or they would not have been asked out again and they realize they have certain expectations to uphold. There were eleven initiates on the ship and they formed the core of the working crew.

The elders are men of long experience. Most of them have been sealing ten springs or more. There were four of them aboard: Ches, James, Isaac

and Norman. They ranged in age from about forty to fifty-six years of age. They have a respect for one another but do not develop close bonds amongst themselves as they do with some of the younger men. They take leading roles. They can tease and joke and step outside their authoritative position, but in serious matters their opinions are always given credence, because other men recognize and acknowledge their experience.

Norman shared the cabin I was in. He is a knowledgeable man of about forty, and a bachelor. He comes from a small outport on the north east coast where he still lives with his father and brothers when he is home. He has very little formal education and has spent all of his working life as a seaman or fisherman. He often works on the ship as a deckhand when it does charter work. Although as deckhand he holds one of the lowest positions aboard, he is one of the captain's most valued and trusted employees. I once heard a fellow crew member say of him, "The old man doesn't like to go anywhere without Norman. Not if he can help it." He is a skilled and observant man who, despite his low position, finds himself

valued for his depth of experience and his willingness to pass this on in the forms of advice and favours. He became my patron-initiator.

DECK WORK

It was the third day out from St. John's. In the morning we rigged the whipline cables making sure they could run freely over each side with a minimum of bother. We also made the sidesticks and ladders, timbers that would be hung over the side of the ship so we could scramble aboard from the ice. It was a very cold day, with an icy wind that cut through even heavy clothing. Isaac characteristically did much of the carpentry work without gloves or hat. The work started shortly after breakfast and was all but finished in time for the noon meal.

The most striking characteristic of this work was the way everyone pitched in to do it. Indeed, the mate was kept quite busy telling the men to lay off. Too many many men were getting in the way of others. It was a pattern that kept up for the whole of the trip. Except while actually sealing, when there was more than enough work, tasks were often met with too many eager hands. A simple explanation for this may be that the ship

was designed to be operated with a much smaller complement of men (about twelve) and with the additional twenty sealers there was an over supply of muscles aching for a workout. But there was something extra in the feryour with which the men sought to work. At 10:30 a.m. or so some of the men took their regular coffee break, but most worked right through, ignoring the chance to warm their skins and innards.

A more complex, albeit speculative explanation would be that the attitude the men displayed toward this work showed something fundamental about the hunt and the men's relationship to it. To be a sealer is to work very hard. To work hard is to gain recognition from your fellows as being a valuable person. In this all male company, to be a good worker and a valuable person is to be a man. In this way then, the attitude toward work reflects an affirmation of manliness. The young men want to impress the older men with their ability, and the older men want to confirm to themselves and others that they are still as able to work as strong, young men. The result in this case is that Billy tries desperately to find something--anything--to

do, more often getting in the way than being of any help while Isaac shows off his toughness by taking it all like a summer holiday. To each his actions are essential, for to complain about the cold or to sit in the comfort of the mess is to deny manliness.

After dinner we cleaned up the deck. Some of the men went to their bunks, more wandered up to the wheelhouse. The mate now stood in the "barrel" or "crow's nest" atop the main mast, searching for leads in the ice, weak places, or open water where he thought the ship could push through. He waved to the captain and pointed with his arms the direction he thought we should head. We were now at the front of the convoy of ships that had left St. John's harbour, but there were only four of us. One ship developed engine trouble early and had dropped far behind.

The chief engineer and the mate had tried to rig up a megaphone at the top of the mast, so that the mate could broadcast his directions to the wheelhouse, but met with only moderate success. Then one of the neophytes, who had sat quietly by the radar set thus far on the voyage, suggested

to the captain he might be able to fix up a radio between the mast and wheelhouse. He and the chief put together a small two-way radio system in short order; the neophyte volunteered to take the mobile part up to the mate.

Climbing the mast can be a particularly frightening experience when the ship is underway. Old hands like the mate have been up and down so many masts in a lifetime that it almost seemed they were born in a barrel, but the first time is not easy. The young man scampered up the first leg of the climb quickly, then made the mistake of looking down to the deck. He hesitated, only for a moment, then braced himself for the steeper climb to the top. "There, he's got no fear," the captain announced. A neophyte had passed another test.

The mate was quite comical with his new found communication. Although the system worked efficiently and broadcast directly into the wheelhouse, he thought he had to project his voice as if he were speaking directly to the deck below. "Staaaarbooooard, Poooort--ten degrees," he bellowed, and soon the men were laughing and imitating him.

LIQUOR

At mid-afternoon the captain opened the stores, which were kept in his cabin below the wheelhouse. He sold duty free cigarettes and cases of softdrinks, and handed out knives, sharpening steels and gloves to those who needed them. These items were marked in a ledger and their cost plus the cost of the sealer's food expenses would be deducted from the sealer's share of the voyage at the end of the trip. He also gave each man a tin of beer.

Liquor was a very scarce commodity on the ship. None of the sealers brought any with them and the captain doled out his reserves very sparingly. There were no complaints about this. In fact many of the men did not seem excited about what liquor they did receive. Some comparison was made with other ships which worked on a different system, giving each man two dozen beer at the beginning of the voyage which were supposed to last him until the end. But as a rule, liquor was rarely a topic of conversation and I can only conlude that this did not occupy an important place in the sealers' thoughts, although a good

many of the men, like Isaac, are heavy drinkers when on shore.

The captain rationed out liquor on special occasions which usually marked passages of some sort. It was as if he were trying to symbolically convey his support for something we were about to embark on, or to say "job well done" at the end of something. Thus we received a round of rum and beer the evening before the sealing began, but then did not see another drop until the last day of the hunt when we turned for home and were given another--this time a double round of rum.

By the time of the first round we had had our first taste of life aboard the ship, had gotten used to being at sea and had come to know our fellow workers fairly well. We were in transition, changing from being a roughly assembled group of workers into a sealing crew.

SHEATH MAKING

With the acquisition of knives we started a ritual that must be as old as the seal hunt itself. "Got to make a 'shathe' for that now, b'y," someone said. The quarters soon began to resemble the inside of a Boy Scout's tent, as men whittled bits

of wood into sheaths for their knives. An ordinary leather sheath is no good for a sealing knife because it quickly fills and becomes stiff with frozen blood. A properly made wooden sheath, on the other hand, is less porous and allows the blood to drain away through a small hole cut into the bottom. It should fit the knife handle snugly at the top so it will not fall out when the sealer bends over, and it should be thin and streamlined, both for aesthetic reasons and so it will not get in the sealer's way as it dangles at his hip. Some of the older men had sheaths that might be considered works of art. Norman's was simple and slender, made of birch. It had a loop carved into one side which fitted a specially made belt. It was smoothed with ten years of use, the oil from thousands of seals giving it a rich lustre. The knife was of far better quality than those we had just been given. The hard steel blade had been honed to a razor sharp sliver. The outfit was one of those rare objects that seem to radiate history, experiences, even a sense of power. It had an aesthetic life of its own.

The elders patiently showed the neophytes how

to make a proper sheath. Norman suggested I try make one of the same design as his. He told me to find two pieces of wood, one thin and one thick. I was then to trace out the pattern of my knife on the thick piece, making allowance for the curve of the blade, so the knife would slide easily into place. I would chisel out the blade pattern about five millimetres deep, "so she fits easy, but not too loose," and notch the top on both pieces to fit the handle precisely. "You want her to fit snug, so's you don't lose her when you bend over. Then you should carve out a wooden loop for your belt to go through." He left me to fashion what I could. I searched the ship until I found a scrap of two-by-four and a piece of eighteen millimetre shiplap which I had to saw off. I chiselled out the centre as instructed, but found I was not a skilled enough carver to make the loop for the belt, so I whittled down the two-by-four, trying to make it as thin as possible. Then I went to the engine room to have holes drilled around the edges and made wooden pegs to dowel the two pieces together.

The institution of sheath making is a further

trial for the neophyte and builds up intracrew rapport and solidarity. It gives the older crew members another welcome chance to pass on their experience and to consolidate their position as experienced men, as elders, in a concrete effort centred on a specific object. Before I was able to build the sheath I had to ask Norman to show me how it was done, which gave him a chance to show off his masterwork, and through that the expertise which he wanted to pass on. I had to ask the mate where I might find two pieces of wood that matched my description. I had to ask the men in the engine room if they would help me by drilling the holes. Previous to this I had not had much contact with these men and the simple act of drilling the holes gave an excuse for a not so simple banter and tour of the engine room, during which they tried to impress me that being an engineer was not an easy job, as they thought the sealers may think.

Many of the initiates also made sheaths, either because their old ones were not good enough for them, or because they had bought a new knife and needed a sheath to fit it. These men simply and quietly made their sheaths, only occasionally

attracting attention. This is not to say they did not have their own pride in their handiwork. One man walked across the deck, lovingly holding his efforts and the captain called down to him, "You'll want to stain and varnish that one, my son."

But neophytes received the most attention. Nearly every time someone saw me whittling my oversized two-by-four, they would pass a comment and judgement: "You wouldn't need to worry about drownin', Guy--with that thing around you you'll never sink!" But more telling are the serious comments Billy received regarding his sheath, for this was one test he failed miserably. He was too busy playing the fool, trying to impress others with his exuberance, to take the time to make a proper sheath. Despite serious admonishments from Isaac and others that he would have a lot of trouble on the ice without a good sheath, he said he thought the leather one he had brought with him would suffice. Finally he was talked into making a wooden one, but the result was a wretched concoction of two pieces of wood roughly nailed together and obviously made in haste. "What's that piece of junk you got there, Billy?"

"Aw, it's good enough. My knife goes into it." The sheath was something he could neither take pride in, nor gain praise for. It was a joke, but unlike much of the joking behaviour he had participated in thus far, it was a meaningless joke, and not very funny.

Once I had my sheath pegged together and whittled into an acceptable, if not elegant, form, Victor pointed out that I would need to bind it together with some twine. The wooden pegs alone would not be enough to hold it together. He asked Harry, who was feigning sleep, to give him some cotton twine and then started to show me how to wrap the twine tightly, using a half hitch on every loop. Harry watched intently from his bunk and quickly interrupted the procedure. "Now that's no way to lash a sheath." He hopped down and examined it. "What's he going to put it on his belt with?"

"I'm going to put another wrap higher up, and tie a rope loop into it."

"Well, if he's going to have a rope loop, he'd better have two, or the sheath will swing all over the place." I asked him what he meant.

"Come here, I'll show you," Harry said. "What are you going to tie it around your waist with?"

"A piece of rope, I guess," I replied.

"Have you got one?" asked Harry.

"You'll probably find something in the starboard side locker on deck," Victor said. "Make sure it's long enough to go around you and all your outside clothes. Remember, it's got to go outside your oilskins."

I found a length of rope in the port side locker and brought it down.

Harry cut a twelve centimetre piece of rope, which would need to be shortened in any case, then held it with his thumb against the side of the sheath, forming it into a loop. He then passed the longer rope through the loop and put it around my waist. "Now this is the way Victor wants to do it," he said. "See, it swings because there's only one loop to hold it, you'll always be chasing the thing. Now, if you put another loop in it, alongside, it won't swing because you've got two loops, right?" He showed me his sheath, which had two rope loops and a length of rope strung

through to form a belt. It didn't swing as much.

Victor objected, claiming that once he had frayed the rope and lashed it tightly his design would not swing either. I did not want to get into the argument and be forced to take sides, but it soon became clear there was no way to avoid this. I thought Harry had the better design, but I had grown closer to Victor, whom I felt would be a good friend and informant. Harry slept too much to be of much conversational value. I could only choose Harry's plan at the risk of putting a damper on my relationship with Victor. Then I had a rare stroke of Solomonic wisdom: I cut the end off the leather belt I was wearing, bent it into a loop and explained that this would solve the problem. The leather was wide enough that it would prevent the sheath from swinging; it was only one loop and would be simple and slim. Most importantly, the solution had come from a neutral party in the debate.

Harry rewrapped the twine around the sheath, using a different and slighgly more complicated lashing, but Victor suggested that he slit the leather to make a firmer grip for the line. Then

Victor suggested I have a loop spliced into one end of the rope belt. I asked him to do this for me and he did a masterful job. Harry then suggested I melt the ends of the rope together with a match so they would not unravel, which I did. Everyone's honour was saved, and then it was supper time.

CREW SOLIDARITY

Later that evening, as we sat in our cabin, Victor asked to see my knife. "Lord Jesus! you'd have trouble cutting butter with that thing. You'd better get someone to sharpen it for you. James is the best."

I had been told by Norman and Victor that a sharp knife is essential for stealing, and by sharp they meant an edge as honed and perfect as a new razor, one that would cut clean and straight. Many of the men had James put the initial edge on their new knives because he was so good at it. The blade needs to be thinned down so subsequent touching up with the sharpening steel is quicker and easier. Then the cutting edge needs to be ground until a thin bead of steel rolls off the opposite side of the blade. This bead is trimmed off with a whetstone and the

other side of the blade is done the same way.

James walked by the open door to our cabin and Victor called him in. I asked him if he would be kind enough to sharpen my knife. His answer was given in such a thick and gravelly brogue that I could hardly make out the words, but it was plain nonetheless. "Sure b'y, if you'd asked me sooner, I'd have done it sooner."

There was a simple and honest tone to this statement which seemed to sum up a profound depth in the relationships that the sealers enjoy with with one another. A unity, a brethren, a solidarity was aboard the ship and among the men that had little reference to the outside world.

Obviously there are tensions that arise as a result of men being crowded together for such an extended period of time, but it was surprising how infrequently these tensions were expressed and how little they disrupted the otherwise excellent relations the men had with each other. The emphasis in social relations was toward lessening the existing hierarchy. Open competition amongst the crew was not tolerated. The older sealers helped to make the neophytes better sealers while

never asserting themselves as men who had more influence that the others. Nor did one get the feeling there were any power struggles riding beneath the surface.

Experience was acknowledged only in a positive sense. Victor could say that James was the best man to sharpen my knife, but he would never say, "Don't let Harry get near the knife or he'll ruin it." It is true that the neophytes can come up for ridicule by the older sealers if they fail to perform well, but the ridicule is given in a way that is meant to help correct fault by shaming the man into improving his performance, and does not include one-upmanship. Thus when Billy did a poor job on his sheath and the older men realized he would have difficulty on the ice because of it, they tried to shame him into making a better sheath for his own good. And while they did not hide their disappointment in him for this, they let him know at the same time that he was still well liked by them. They took a brotherly, fraternal attitude which tended to build solidarity among the crew.

This fraternization process might be best

expressed by showing what happens in the rare times that it breaks down. One man, David, had set himself up for ridicule by presenting himself as an experienced man although he was a neophyte to the hunt. He claimed to me that he had been out sealing fourteen years before, although I have since learned that this was his first trip ever. He was from an outport but had worked in Toronto for nearly ten years at various jobs and liked to boast about his experiences in the city. One morning I had been helping shift a barrel of helicopter fuel on the deck. He pushed me out of the way and took the barrel himself, explaining that there was a right way and a wrong way to do these things, intimating that I was not doing a proper job of it. I felt at that moment that David would run into trouble before the trip was out and on this evening Isaac confirmed my suspicions.

James was still in the cabin, talking with Norman, Victor and myself. Isaac wandered in, closed the door and interjected that he thought David was a liar because he had told Isaac something earlier and then had contradicted himself. Perhaps

Isaac had been wanting a confirmation of his suspicions, but he did not get it. James and Norman snubbed Isaac by blatantly ignoring the comment and went on with their conversation, letting Isaac know by their silence that they did not wish to hear more.

The fact that David was caught in a lie was probably not important. Isaac wanted to upbraid David for his showmanship and condescending attitude. Although Isaac himself is a clown and a showman, as an elder he has a certain licence to act as he does. Furthermore, Isaac's joking behaviour, which included story stretching that might border on being outright lies, tended to build up camaraderie and rapport between the men rather than to tear it down. David's showmanship seemed designed to win personal prestige only and this was not tolerated by Isaac or, as I later found out, by many of the other men. Isaac however, was the only one to make a vocal complaint during the trip. By complaining to the others that David had been behaving badly, that is, transgressing the unspoken rule that men should behave fraternally, Isaac was making an attempt

to bring David into line by bringing pressure against this behaviour. But at the same time, James and Norman did not appreciate Isaac slurring another crew member. Isaac had broken the same rule by assuming that he had the right to pass judgement on a fellow sealer.

LOCATING THE HERDS

It was now March 9, five days since we had left St. John's. The convoy of sealing ships had grown by four. One Canadian ship which sailed out of Halifax had joined us two days earlier, and now three Norwegian ships joined and were ahead of us, making a total of nine. It was a sunny day but cold, and the ships made an impressive sight as the convoy made its way through the vast white wilderness. Predominantly northeasterly winds had blown heavy ice against the land, making it difficult to steam directly to where we expected to find the seals, so the ships made a large sweeping arc north, outside this heavy ice and then steamed southwest toward the coast of southern Labrador. By now we were making scattered sightings of adult harp seals and in the evening some of the men even saw a whitecoat. The seals seemed to

dance as they bobbed up and down in the water, watching curiously or swimming by in groups of varying sizes.

The ship seemed more alive. Men's interests were sparked by the seals, the foreign ships, and nearing our destination. At dinner most of the talk was of the "Narweejins". Many of the experienced sealers knew something of the size and power of the Norwegian vessels and we were told it was a combination of smaller size and higher horsepower that made them superior to the Canadian ships for manoeuvring in the ice. The three Norwegian ships with us now were twenty or thirty years old but later we would see a brand new vessel, the Lance, which was built at a cost of approximately ten million dollars. It had a seal pelt processing plant built into it as well as the capability to operate as both a purse seiner and trawler when fishing.

After meals many of the men would go to the wheelhouse for a smoke and try to catch information about our position and the progress we were making. The captain would not tell us very much, but occasionally he would make observations to the crowd

on the bridge, or a sealer could pick up on information if he heard the captain musing to one of the officers, especially the first mate.

A spotter plane, hired jointly by the sealing interests, had flown out from Gander two days prior and claimed to have found the seals, but the information it relayed to the sealing fleet was not trusted because it suggested the herd was spread over a much larger area than is normally the case. Nevertheless, because the position given was the only information available on the whereabouts of the herd, we had been steaming for two days guided by this information, and were making very slow progress through this "goddam hellish ice," as one captain called it. The convoy of sealing ships was heading southwest, toward the southern tip of what the captains expected to be a large and loosely scattered seal herd, which stretched north for over one hundred kilometres. If this information was accurate it meant the hunt would be a difficult one since a scattered herd means a great deal of walking for the men and manoeuvring through ice for the ship. But this first report turned out to be inaccurate.

A second reconnaissance flight, this time

with a well respected and experienced observer aboard, had flown over the patch that morning. It reported the main patch to be further north than the original report suggested and the seals to be packed within a much tighter area, forty-three kilometres long and about nine to sixteen kilometres wide. The captain was satisfied that this information made sense and was probably accurate. The convoy altered course, but it was hard to tell any change had been made since we were not heading in any straight direction. Rather, the ship in the front of the line tried to choose a pathway through the loosest ice and headed in the general direction of the course we needed. All the ships needed to fight their way through the ice, backing up when they came against an immovable mass and trying other directions. The lead ship now was one of the Norwegian's since they had much more power and better ice handling ability.

A good deal has been written about the competition between ships at the historical seal hunt. Certain captains made reputations for being able to reach the seals first and to return home with the largest catch within the shortest

length of time. Less skillful captains would try to follow these reputable "ice masters" in hopes they would lead them to the main patch. Unless ships were owned or skippered by members of the same family, the competition was fierce to reach the seals first and to leave the other ships behind if possible. On the modern hunt a great deal of cooperation is evident between the captains, who help each other through ice. One of the underpowered Canadian ships had been jammed that morning. A more powerful Canadian ship had tried to cut her out by steaming in a circle around the disabled ship but became stuck herself. We came behind the rescue vessel and had to pull her out with a line. When the ship finally came free it was still steaming in reverse and was unable to stop before colliding with us. Luckily the damage was superficial, and eventually the three ships were free. But as we tried to catch up to the convoy we found that the path through the ice had quickly blown in and was now as solid as if there had not been ships through it at all. It is a frustrating exercise taking a ship through the ice and the captain was relieved to finally have a

reliable position for his destination.

PROTEST WORRIES

In the evening of March 9, several men stood in the wheelhouse. The Northern Lights were undulating in a curtain of green against a clear, cold sky. The captain looked at the moon and commented, "I don't guess the man in the moon has to worry about Greenpeace."

He had asked me earlier what I had thought about the protest performance in the harbour and quite obviously was concerned about how he had acted when throwing the woman off his ship. The captain of a ship that had to return to St. John's briefly on the day we left saw the coverage given the event on the national television network and radioed his impressions to our captain:

> I wonder how it can all be so biased. It makes you wonder about all the news...that was a real disgrace, interrupting the holiest song to Newfoundlanders, the "Ode to Newfoundland"...Those so called protesters in their rubber boats. The media made them out to be such brave men, what a laugh. It was a lot of rubbish.

Then he explained there had been coverage of our captain throwing the woman from the ship. "I didn't know there was a camera there," the captain

said sheepishly.

More worrisome than the public reaction to the protest in the harbour however, was the possibility of a confrontation with the protesters on the ice. Despite the increasing obstacles the government places in the way of groups who wish to disrupt the hunt, there is a protest on the ice nearly every year. There had been rumours that the Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior was going to make an attempt to disrupt the hunt. That morning the Fund for Animals' ship Sea Shepherd had been arrested near the Magdalen Islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Eight of her crew members were charged under the seal protection regulations after they had painted several whitecoats with a red dye.

The protesters have become increasingly bold in the past few years. As more regulations are put into place to limit their activities they seem more willing to step outside the law in daring attempts to attract media attention to their cause. The sealers have, until now, been particularly restrained in their confrontations with the outsiders. Their captains order them to try to avoid

any sort of counter protest action and to carry out their work in as unobtrusive a manner as possible. The protesters have been known however, to bait the sealers by verbally abusing them and throwing pelts and equipment into the water. The sealers are armed with potentially lethal weapons and it would take only one man to be pushed too far to cause a major incident. A Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker carrying fisheries officers and R.C.M.P. now accompanies the sealing fleet in case serious problems occur, but it is still difficult to predict what sort of action the protesters might take.

INTO THE PATCH

Shortly after noon on March 11, a Federal Fisheries Department helicopter landed on the ship's helicopter pad and took the captain and fisheries protection officer, who had been stationed on our ship to enforce sealing regulations, for a flight over the seal herd. They returned with news that the herd was well situated and compact enough for a good hunt. "That's really a beautiful experience," the captain observed to the men in the wheelhouse. "There's seals as far as you can

see. There's enough for everybody and I don't expect the ships will get in each other's way." The major problem, he explained, was that the seals were as yet too young and he suggested we might have to wait a day or two before beginning the hunt. Many of the seals were just being born.

It was an overcast, cold day with snow and a light but biting wind. Yet most of the crew were on deck watching for signs of the seals. The captain went up to the barrel and a gust of wind took his hat and laid it in a pool of water behind us.

The convoy had separated as we headed into the patch and kept a distance of about one kilometre between the ships. By about 4:00 p.m. we had stopped. All around us harp seals were lumbering across the ice, which was dirty with yellow excrement and puddles of frozen placentae and blood. The whitecoats cried with a bawl much like that of a human baby, as Victor had said they would. The men stood at the rail, entranced by the spectacle. Isaac, embarrassed, made a few crude jokes about the sexual habits of the seals, and Billy was curiously quiet. It is a rare spectacle to see

thousands upon thousands of mothers ministering to their newly born. Through the whole vast circle of horizon under a hard, cold sky the frozen sea was alive.

One man grabbed a hakapik and jumped over the side, calling out that he was going to get the first seal of the trip. He had considerable experience as a landsman, but he was not used to the rigid discipline of a sealing ship. The fisheries officer saw him and shouted out that he was not to kill any seals until the captains had made a decision about when to begin hunting. "I'll take your licence away if there's any more of that foolishness."

That evening at supper there was a round of rum and beer at each table place. We had reached our destination and another passage was marked, but we were as yet unsure whether we would be hunting seals in the morning. The ships' captains held a conference via the radio and decided to vote on whether the hunt should begin the next morning or be put off for another day to allow the white-coats time to grow. The Norwegians were in favour of waiting the extra time since their quota of

4,000 pelts was considerably lower than the 9,800 seals each Canadian ship was allowed to take, and they would easily be able to take their allotment before the whitecoats began to moult. For the Canadian ships their larger quota meant they might be pressed for time toward the end of the hunt to make up the quota before the seals started moulting to "raggedy-jackets". Although the conditions now seemed to be near perfect, no one could be sure the weather would remain stable. A storm could blow up at any time--March is meteorologically a particularly unstable month--disrupting the hunt for several days; a swell could break up the ice; or an offshore wind could push the ice further out to sea where it would dissipate. The quotas are fairly evenly matched to the processing capabilities of the Canadian ships and there is little room for wasted time. The Canadian ships voted to start sealing right away and they outnumbered the Norwegians, the vote to start the hunt in the morning passed. The radio operator on the Coast Guard ship acted as poll master. The captains agreed that only the larger whitecoats should be taken during the first few days and

the smaller pups would be given time to grow.

MASTER WATCHES

During the evening we were told the crew had been divided into three watches, each under the supervision of a "master watch". This arrangement is a holdover from before World War II when the huge crews of two hundred or more sealers were divided into watches of about fifty men, each watch working both on ship and off as a unit. The captain had obviously tried to place friends together in the same watch, probably in consultation with the masters. I was working with the three men who shared my cabin: Norman, Harry and Victor, with Peter acting as master watch. Two other men were also in the watch, making a total of seven.

Authority on the ship comes from the captain in as direct a way as is practical. Since the crew and ship are small he can have an immediate say in many things, but for the major chores to be done on deck he delegates the first or second mate, or the bo'sun as overseer. The master watches ideally function as foremen or supervisors on the ice. Orders from them carry the proxy of the captain and are rarely questioned. The master watches

work right along with the men on the ice and make decisions as to where and when the group should move and what individual men should be doing. But they are more "first among equals" than true bosses and lead by example, not command. Consequently, the master watches do not give direct orders. They will say, "Come on boys, let's get this done," but never, "You do this." James, Ches and Peter were chosen as master watches.[2]

The following chapter is a close description of the events of our second day. It records the sequence of a day which was in many ways typical, but during which the ethnographer also got a taste of the hunt's hard realities.

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2. Although Isaac and Norman were elders (by my distinction) and men of great sealing experience, the captain may perhaps have felt that they had personalities which did not suit the position master watch.

CHAPTER IV

A DAY ON THE ICE

MORNING

The mate called at 3:50 a.m. "Come on boys, all hands out of the bunks now, breakfast'll soon be ready." Every part of my body ached as I turned over in the narrow bunk, fooling myself that I could ignore the wake-up call. Norman rolled out and quickly lit a cigarette. He was fully dressed except for his outside clothes. He pulled his rubber boots over two pairs of wool socks and stumbled out the door.

By the time I got out on the deck most of the crew were busy stowing the one thousand or so pelts we had gathered the day before. I noticed that it promised to be a reasonably good day. The temperature was below freezing, but the wind that had gusted up past ninety-five kilometres an hour the day before had died down.

It was only the second day of the hunt so this was the first time we had to stow pelts in the morning. The men took two pelts each from the neat stacks on the deck, carried them to the hatch and tossed them into the hold, where other men

caught them and stacked them neatly within the pounds. It was not a bad way to limber up in the morning, but I wished we had been given more than four hours of sleep.

We finished stowing the pelts by 5:00 a.m. and breakfast was ready. There was a lineup for the toilet as usual; there was only one sink for twenty sealers.

Breakfast held no surprises: two hard boiled eggs each, bread and fried bologna, and a pot of strong tea on every table. The cook had left us the makings for lunch: molasses, extra bread, some fruit and soda pop. This meant that the captain did not know for sure if he would be able to pick us up for dinner near noon.

After breakfast we had about fifteen minutes to gather our gear and get ready for the day on the ice. Every man had his sculping knife, with either a straight or curved blade according to choice, honed so sharp he could easily shave with it; his wooden sheath and sharpening steel hung on a rope or leather belt, tied round his waist outside all his clothing; his hauling rope, looped under one arm with its hook turned away so he would

not fall on it; and his hakapik. In addition to this basic gear, each man took a flag tied to a pole which marked the pans of gathered pelts as belonging to our ship. These pans would be picked up later in the day as the ship followed the sealers.

At 5:45 a.m. we gathered on deck and waited as the captain began giving directions. "There looks to be a good few seals off to starboard, just about a quarter mile off. James, you take your crew and clean them up. I'll put you on that big pan of ice just coming up." As the ship sidled up to a sizeable piece of ice, the men clambered onto the "sidesticks", timbers they had prepared and lashed to the side of the ship to form a step from which the men could jump onto the ice.

It is a tricky manoeuvre to jump from a moving ship to a piece of ice, especially when carrying unwieldy flagpoles and hakapiks. Occasionally a man falls into the water this way. This is a particularly dangerous predicament since a moving ship is not easy to handle in a delicate situation and a man is easily crushed against the ice if the captain is not extremely adept at the wheel. In 1980, on a different ship, a man was killed in a

similar way. He slipped between the ship and a pan of ice, and the swell forced him under. It was the first fatal accident at the hunt for many years. While this incident was tragic, it points up the generally excellent safety record the modern industry has, despite the ever present dangers.

Our watch was told to work in a patch of seals only a few hundred metres from the ship, and so we carried our gear to where we thought there would be the most seals within a compact grouping. Peter, the master watch, thought there would be more seals a little further on so he left with four of the men, leaving Norman, Victor and myself at the first pan. We chose a fairly flat place, leeward of a sizeable ridge of rafted ice. Although the ice was rough and hummocky, it was solid and compact and there were not too many leads of open water nearby around which we would have to walk. Three whitecoats were within five metres of the pan and Norman and Victor quickly killed them.

KILLING

Killing a baby seal is physically a very easy task. Three sharp blows to its head with the hammer

end of the hakapik usually smashes the small, fragile skull, causing massive haemorrhaging to the brain. Although nervous reflex action often causes the body to move in a sort of swimming notion that is sometimes mistaken for the seal being alive, it is almost certainly dead or irreversibly unconscious with the first blow. If a sealer is not sure the seal is completely dead, he can touch the eyeball. If the seal blinks it means it is still alive and the sealer strikes it again.

Killing a whitecoat is physically easy and almost certainly causes the seal little or no pain. But it is an emotionally difficult thing to do until one gets used to it. The young seal lies motionless, or it struggles along the ice randomly, seeming to search out its mother, who usually abandons it as the hunters approach. If frightened, the young seal's natural reaction is to puff out its pelt, especially around the head, stiffen its body, and go into a coma-like trance. In this

position it resembles a large fur covered football, using its only defence of white camouflage against the stark ice and snow.

After bravely laughing off the ribbing about having the nerve to kill his first seal, Billy soon found that his experienced friends had indeed been truthful, and he could not bring himself to kill. He managed to kill and pelt only two seals the first day and was reported to the captain by his master watch for not working hard enough. The captain understood the problem and told Billy to help the other men by towing the pelts to the collecting pan until he got used to killing. The next day he was able to nerve himself better and managed to kill more seals than the previous day.

Some of the other neophytes reported later that they too were apprehensive about killing their first few seals. The captain's response to the matter leads me to believe it is a common apprehension. Billy's reaction may have been somewhat atypically extreme, but it is understandable given his inexperience and his youth. Although he is a fisherman, Billy is from the city and has not had experience killing mammals, something which

the boys from the small communities were more likely to have done.

The sheer number of seals that are killed, combined with the fact that the work is so strenuous and dangerous, helps prevent the sealer from becoming absorbed in moral or emotional questions about the slaughter. I had thought it would be emotionally disturbing to kill my first seal and had done considerable worrying about whether I would have the nerve to do it. I have never been a hunter and the memories of the few animals I have had to kill are unpleasant. The first morning on the ice was very windy and rainy. I had trouble enough just manoeuvring in the strange new environment, and after I had been shown how to kill and pelt and told to try one for myself, I found I just wanted to get the procedure over with as soon as I cou[illegible]

The act of killing a seal by striking it on the head seems somehow detached and impersonal. There is no blood and no visible reaction from the seal, save that it stops moving. I did little agonizing over it, but nor did I enjoy it. Later though, I found that I did respond to the killing:

while I believed there was nothing wrong with what we were doing for a time, I found the act of killing distasteful. Once I became more seasoned, I found myself somewhat indifferent to the killing. I did not particularly like it; I simply became accustomed to it.

Pelting the seal can be an unnerving experience to anyone not hardened to it. The dead pup's pelt is cut in a smooth stroke from the chin to the tip of its small tail. The body holds a great amount of blood, necessary to keep a mammal alive in such a cold climate. The fat laden pelt separates easily from the carcass, but one must be careful not to tear the pelt when trimming the face and head. The form left on the ice is lifeless and cold. For a practiced hand the job takes about three minutes.

Pelting brings the man into a more direct and personal contact with the animal. He feels the warm, life giving blood turn cold on his hands and face. It is neither a pleasant experience nor a pretty one. But for the twenty sealers

on our ship, the process must happen nearly ten thousand times over the course of about ten days, the length of time before the pups start to moult. The sealer soon adjusts to his work and emotionalism recedes.

QUALITY OF WORK

Once we had established our panning area and placed our lunches and excess gear safely on the ice, we started working outward from the pan, each man moving separately. I took some time to try to improve my pelting technique. Norman had given me only a very brief lesson the day before and seemed to expect me to learn quickly through practice. In the wind and rain I found it difficult; I soon tired and pelting properly became almost impossible.

Pelting is strenuous and intricate work. One must be careful to keep the blade of the knife turned inward toward the seal's body while separating the pelt from the carcass, or the knife will nick the pelt. Any slight mark, even if the pelt is not cut through, greatly reduces the pelt's value. Most men take a good deal of pride in their ability to pelt quickly and cleanly, but it is very tiring

work and until it comes as second nature through repetition a sealer is well advised to take his time and not worry about speed.

It soon became obvious that a few of the men, like myself, were poor pelters. We should have been taken aside and given further instruction or told to go slowly until we had mastered the technique; some of the men continued making a mess of many of the pelts, thus lowering their value considerably and costing everyone money. There are a number of reasons this practice is tolerated. The sealers are working toward a quota which needs to be filled within a short period of time so it is easy to let quantity replace quality as the most important consideration. Some of the less experienced men were anxious to be seen as keeping up to the speed of the more experienced sealers, but had not had time to develop their skill. Regardless of that however, the neophytes were not given adequate instruction in the first place.

A young rural Newfoundlander is generally expected to learn through observation. An elder shows him a skill once or twice and he is expected to pick it up quickly through imitation (Chiaramonte,

personal communication). Youngsters and neophytes are not taught in the usual sense of formal education. Thus Norman showed me how to skin a seal, but did so only twice before he expected me to have an adequate grasp of the technique. He did precious little explaining. When I badgered him with questions about the third seal, he made it quite plain that I was being annoying and that he wanted to get on with his work. Billy later complained to me that his master watch had not taught him enough about pelting before he was expected to work on his own, and said that this was part of the reason he could not bring himself to kill and pelt on the first day. Since he is from St. John's he may not have been used to this rural style of educating.

After the trip was over, several of the men voiced complaints about other men who, they felt, had done poor jobs of pelting, thus reducing the value of their share. This disapproval remained unvoiced during the trip. Mild incompetence was not commented upon at the ice because to point it out during the trip would have meant demeaning a crew member when it was assumed that everyone

was doing his best. Given that it is not customary to give "extra lessons", tolerance was the only alternative. On the other hand, if a man is clearly seen not to be making an attempt to do his share, the matter is usually dealt with by mild ostracism or possibly by referral to the captain, both of which happened to Billy. When it was thought he was not working hard enough, Billy was given the "cold shoulder" by his experienced friends, the men he most wanted to impress. They became coldly polite and joked with him less, in order to show their disappointment in him. The treatment lasted only part of one day, until he proved himself as capable and, more importantly, as willing to work as any of them. He had an understandable revulsion at his first encounter with the seal kill, which was quickly remedied. Apparently the year before there had been a sealer who did not live up to the expectations of the others and he was thought to have tainted the whole voyage. The chief engineer told me, "...we had a pretty good trip last year, but it could have been better; we had one guy who didn't pull his weight and that sort of spoils things."

The tolerance of mild incompetence and intolerance of laziness reflects the fraternal nature of the experience and feelings of solidarity amongst the crew. While sloppy pelting can result in lost wages for everyone, if a man is seen to be trying to do his share of the work but, through lack of skill and experience, is unable to match the abilities of others he is not faulted. If a man seems to be making the attempt to do his job he is confirming that he sees himself as a regular part of the crew. If, on the other hand, a man neglects his share of the work then he is breaking a trust in his fellow workers and placing an extra burden on them.

MIDDAY

The fair weather held for most of the morning and we had a good pan of about sixty pelts stacked neatly around our flag by about 10:00 a.m. As we moved away from the panning area in our search for seals, we had to tow the pelts a greater distance. They were noticeably heavier than they had been the day before. A harp seal pup grows by about three kilograms a day, fed by the rich, pink milk of the mother. Most of the extra weight is added to the layer of fat and can make an individual pelt

weigh up to twenty-five kilograms by the time moulting begins.

I gave up my efforts at pelting and helped the others by towing their pelts to the pan, thus freeing them to work more quickly. I sensed that Norman was somewhat dissappointed in me for not continuing with the pelting but he did not say anything. It was much easier to tow the pelts and I felt that I was doing work which was just as helpful. The backs of my legs were beginning to get sore from bending over so much and I was starting to walk with more of a waddle than a stride. Most men complain that their legs take a beating the first few days.

By 11:30 a.m. the ship had worked its way to within hailing distance of us. We had moved on to another patch of seals and the ship was picking up the first pan of pelts which we had collected that morning. "Come on Norman, you and the boys come aboard for a drop of hot soup," the captain told us through his powerful megaphone. Norman seemed to ignore the call at first, indicating that we should all continue working. The captain called again, "Norman, you and your boys just put

down your gear and come aboard the ship." Finally we responded and walked the couple hundred metres over to the ship.

Perhaps Norman's initial reluctance to comply with the captain's request was the result of an incident which had occurred the previous day. We had left the pans of our own volition in order to come aboard for dinner and the captain had reprimanded us severely. It had been raining and blowing at gale force. We had killed and panned all the seals in our area, we were wet and wanted something hot. So, although we were nearly one kilometre from the ship, we started winding our way back toward it. Other men joined us as we met them and soon the whole crew formed a straggling line of sealers stumbling across the rain slicked ice as best we could. The hike took nearly an hour.

As we climbed aboard the captain shouted some angry words down from the wheelhouse. Then, just as we sat down to our soup, he stormed into the mess. "Look," he said, "I don't like to hear myself talk, so I'm only going to say this once, now, listen to me."

James, Ches and Peter are the master

> watches. They are the boss and whatever they say, you do. You stay out if they say so and you come in when they say so. I thought I made that clear this morning when I told you how we would organize this hunt. Now, I told them this morning not to come in unless they were handy to the ship. I was just coming to pick some of you up, when the first thing I see is a whole string of men beating themselves out, headed for the ship. I told the cook to put food out for a lunch this morning. You should have got down behind some raftered ice and ate a snack if you were hungry. There's no sense beating yourselves out by running back to the ship that way. If you want, I can blow the horn every hour and you can come aboard for tea, but we won't get any seals that way. Now eat up and get back out.

This was the first time I had seen the captain angry, but the men quickly saw his reasoning. The hour spent walking back to the ship had not only been time wasted, it was also very tiring work and a useless expenditure of energy.

Soup and bread was all that awaited us in the mess. I had expected more although the soup was certainly thick, nutritious and welcome. By the end of the trip the men were calling the ship "The Soupboat" because soup was the only meal served at dinner while we were on the ice. We ate in silence. Only the four of us were in the mess.

HAULING ABOARD

On deck, some of the officers and engineers who were off engine duty were busy with the whipline. As the ship came close to a pan of seals two men would scramble over the side pulling the winch cable and an armful of rope straps with toggle ends. The straps are pushed through the hole left in the pelt where the flipper has been partially severed. Fifteen pelts go on each strap which is attached to the hook on the end of the whipline, then the bundle is winched aboard. The work looked easy compared to killing and pelting on the ice, but we were in ideal conditions. Often the ship cannot manoeuvre in heavier ice and the men on whipline may have to carry the cable half a kilometre or more, hardly an easy task.

STRATEGY

After we had eaten our soup we immediately donned our oilskin outer wear and prepared to get back to the ice. Norman was called to the wheelhouse by the captain where he was told that we were to walk nearly a kilometre ahead of where we had been working and establish a pan in front of a Norwegian ship that was moving in our

direction. Our strategy was to cut off the other ship to prevent it from coming into the area which we were working.

Although the ships cooperate with one another while on the way to the ice, competition develops when in a patch of seals. Each operates individually, as most are owned individually.

As we walked past our old pan we picked up the flags and hakapiks we had left there and proceeded to within about a kilometre of the Norwegian ship in order to establish our new panning area. We could see the Norwegians working in the distance but out of commonly accepted courtesy they would not come past us and work inside the area that our ship had staked out for itself.

FALLING IN

The fine weather of the morning was beginning to deteriorate. The temperature was dropping off and the wind had picked up. The sky was now overcast.

Victor and I were working together. I was hauling two pelts back to the pan and had to jump across a one metre lead of water that ran between us and the panning area. I took a step which would

ordinarily have been easy but my legs, stiff and encumbered by oilskin pants, did not reach far enough and I slipped on the ice edge. I was able to hold on to the edge of the ice with my arms and the slush on top of the water kept my legs up. I did not feel the cold, although it must have been there. My arms were on solid ice but I could not get a strong enough grip to pull myself out. I shouted and Victor rushed over and pulled me out with his hakapik. My pants were wet and my boots were full of water. Nothing very serious.

Falling through a lead or breathing hole is a common experience, but no less frightening for its frequency. The man often cannot pull himself out because the side of the firm ice forms a near vertical face thirty centimetres or more above his head. He is burdened with heavy clothes so he cannot move freely, and nothing he can grasp will give him enough grip to pull on. He is almost totally helpless and will soon be dragged down by the weight of his wet clothes unless helped, or the crack in the ice can close in, crushing him or forcing him under. Survival time in such icy waters

is measured in minutes.

Sealers who remember killing with the old sealing gaff point out that the one hundred sixty-five to one hundred eighty centimetre pole, topped with a hook and spike, was far more useful than modern bats and hakapiks for a man who has fallen in. The sealer might be able to use the staff to bridge the lead or hole he had fallen through, or he might be able to hook a piece of solid ice and pull himself out. As a veteran sealing captain told me, "The worst thing they did to the seal hunt was ban the gaff. It had a lot of uses. But the bat, now that's a useless thing." The hakapik is a recent adaptation introduced by the Norwegians. It is smaller than the gaff, at about one hundred thirty-five centimetres. The curved hook is of some use in handling pelts and it can be used by a sealer to pull himself out of the water.

Victor told me I should go back to the ship and change. I was quick to agree with him. He walked with me to where some other men were working, closer to the ship, and I asked them to keep an eye on me to make sure I made it the rest of the way safely.

As I approached the ship the second mate was hauling pelts aboard. There was a whitecoat nearby which he pointed out so I killed it and brought it on deck. I started to pelt it but the captain leaned out of the wheelhouse window and stopped me. "Got wet, did you?" he chuckled. "Well, so do most people. Just leave that for someone else and get down and change." I was somewhat surprised that the captain was so cordial. He had been rather cool toward me for most of the trip, as though he were not sure of my motives. Later, when the trip was finished, he told me he had not wanted me to come and had relented only because I was so persistent in asking for a berth. He also said he would like to help a person with his studies. He had undoubtably had reservations because I am not a native Newfoundlander. Perhaps he thought I had misrepresented myself in order to gain a berth and and disrupt the hunt, or that I may write of it in a poor light. I found later that he had checked with a mutual acquaintance at the university and asked whether I should be considered a genuine researcher. He had probably also asked Norman how I was making out. Norman must have said that I preferred not to kill and this

might have increased his fears. When I showed no hesitation in killing the seal near the ship some of these fears may have been allayed.

I went down to my cabin and changed into a dry set of clothes and pair of leather boots. I knew these boots were not as warm as the felt lined ones I had just taken off, but by this time it was about 2:30 p.m. and I had only another four hours of work left to do on the ice. It was now cooling off, but it had been a warm morning and I thought I would be comfortable. I also thought I would be working near the ship since there was not much time left in the work day on the ice.

Rubber boots are best for working on the ice. When worn with wool socks, the rubber keeps the water out while the wool soaks up the sweat from the feet. Leather, on the other hand, will soak up salt water and blood quickly, which freezes and leaves the boots useless as insulators.

After I changed I went to the wheelhouse where the captain told me I should help the men working near the ship for the time being. "There's thirty or forty seals right near the ship, you can help clean them up." The engineers and mates were busy

killing seals nearby and I went over to help them. They were doing a poor job. Their pelting was sloppy and they did not appear to have any organization compared with the regular sealers who quickly organize themselves into work teams and become efficient in their work.

The engineers complain that they have the hardest job on the ship. Not only are they expected to work the engine, keep it running smoothly and answer the telegraph calls for full, half and reverse speeds, but when they have finished their shift in the engine room they are expected to work on the whipline or kill seals near the ship.

The sealers often think the engineers have an easy job because they are seen sitting in the warm engine room merely pulling levers and adjusting valves. Although there is no real animosity between the sealers and the engineers--even though the engineers are paid the regular sealers' share of profits plus normal salary--the engineers are somewhat jealous of the sealers because they can get away from the ship during the day and away from the captain's watchful eye. I did not like working with the engineers, not only because they were

sloppy and disorganized, but also because they worked faster and with less care than my other partners. Whereas the sealers work steadily at a reasonable pace, taking time for a cigarette break when tired and then continuing, the engineers almost frantically try to work as hard and fast as they can. It is similar to the difference between the efforts of a sprinter and those of a marathon runner. These men were not pacing themselves.

This poor performance appeared to be as much the captain's fault as anyone else's, and later helped produce no small amount of animosity between him and the engineers. The engineers were generally men who had social or working links with the captain. They either depended upon his firm for employment during the rest of the year or they came from his home town and knew him well. Two of them complained later that they felt they had been treated unfairly. Their complaints generally centred around the fact they had to work both in the engine room and on the ice, often getting very little sleep. More importantly though, they were in direct contact with the captain at all times. When on the ice they were always near the ship,

within sight of the captain and therefore could not, or would not, take the breaks the rest of us enjoyed. This situation produced a considerable amount of ill feeling, and consequently two of the engineers quit the ship as soon as it reached port.

Although the engineers were working hard, I doubt their claims that they had more to do than the other sealers. Everyone on the ship works close to the limits of their endurance and sleep is a very scarce commodity. The engineers though, receive little of the positive side of the communal effort. They are stuck between the roles of being ship's officers and labourers. They do not identify with the sealers and are not included in the camaraderie the sealers develop among themselves. They are not really sealers and do not participate in the hunt as sealers. Rather, they see themselves as ordinary workers who are at the hunt primarily for the extra money involved. Depending on the man, and the other economic opportunities that may be open to him, this may not be enough incentive to work as hard as he must. There is much more to the hunt than merely earning money, and if a man cannot share in this extra, almost spiritual aspect he might not

consider the effort worthwhile.

AFTERNOON

It was getting much colder now and a wind was starting to blow. It was a light breeze, but in the cold it cut like a knife. My leather boots were obviously inadequate, but my torso was warm and I thought I would be all right as long as I did not get chilled. By now it was close to 4:00 p.m. and there were only two and a half hours to work on the ice.

We had finished picking up the seals near the ship and I was working on the whipline, strapping the panned pelts together in bunches of fifteen. The captain shouted to me that there were enough men working around the ship and that I should go and work with the regular sealers in James' watch, which was nearby. "Leave you hakapik behind if you don't want to do any pelting. You can do just as much good hauling them," he said. I swore under my breath. I knew he was being fair, asking only what should be expected, but I was beginning to get painfully cold. My legs were really starting to tighten and cramp, and my fingers refused to respond to the brain's command. The thought of

spending more time on the ice made me shudder, yet I did not want to be a disappointment so I threw the hakapik onto the ship and started off to where I could see some men working in the distance.

I struggled along for a few hundred metres and came upon David, who was working alone. He had killed several seals and towed them "round" (meaning unpelted) to a spot where he sat and pelted them. When I saw him he was up to his ears in blood, flesh and fat. A quick look at his handiwork showed me his pelting technique was poor. The flipper holes were large, the belly cut was ragged and wavering, indicating that he probably did not have his knife sharpened properly and the tails of the pelts were cut short where he had been too lazy to correctly trim around "scutters" or hind flippers. He seemed quite content with his work and even bragged to me about the number of seals he had pelted singlehandedly, proudly sweeping his arm at the stack of pelts he had collected. He should not have been working alone, but I did not want to stay with him.

I continued walking. My leather gloves were frozen and useless, but I could keep my hands relatively warm by clenching them into fists drawn up in my sleeves. The other men in James' watch were only a further hundred metres away and I soon reached them. They were still busy, the seven men except David working as a team.

The men who were pelting only killed and skinned, while other men were hauling pelts to the pan. They were working slowly but steadily. At the pan one man was busy pelting seals that had been hauled "round" to him from nearby. Other men took shelter behind a large rafter of ice for a short rest and a smoke. I fell into the routine, taking tows of one or two pelts to the pan. By this time however, my legs were so stiff that I could not bend over far enough to put the hook of my rope through the eye-holes in the pelt, and had to fall onto my side, connect the rope to the pelts and then stand. Others, especially the younger men, seemed to be having somewhat the same problem.

To Isaac the work seemed easy. He had a certain reputation to uphold. Later in the trip, after he had fallen through the ice and wet himself

to the neck, he stripped completely while on the ice, wrung out his clothes with Billy's help and put them on again. He claimed that this was his first dunking in several years and did not want to change on the ship. His cure for cold hands was to wash them in snow until it melted. After that, he claimed, his hands would not get cold and he could work without gloves.

While some of Isaac's toughness may be a matter of impression making, there is no doubt in my mind that most of it is genuine. The harsh environment of the ice is no place for show-offs and this fact is well recognized by all the men, especially the elders. Yet the infectious, mischievous sparkle in his eyes betrays a personality that is at once both warm and calculating. He uses people for his own benefit, but at the same time does not mind being used by others if they can trick him into something. Behind the leather tough exterior is a gentle and considerate man, albeit exploitative, who, through his real and professed position as expert sealer, goads and manipulates and shames men into better performances.

TRANSITION

When Billy got himself into trouble for not working hard enough the first day, he was asked by the captain if there was anything he might do to help Billy do his work better. Billy replied, "Put me with Isaac, I'd like to work with him." So the next day Billy and Isaac worked as partners. Isaac took enough time to teach Billy how to pelt properly and was able to understand some of the reluctance the younger man showed about killing. He was patient but demanding, and the two of them became a very productive team.

I have encountered this same sort of alliance between experienced hand and neophyte in other situations, particularly while working in forestry camps in British Columbia. The neophyte recognizes the obvious fact that the older man is far more experienced, and directs his whole energy toward trying to impress the expert with his performance. The older man, grateful that he is able to pass on some of his expertise, reciprocates with a patient understanding of the problems the neophyte encounters, he encourages and chastises in private but praises the neophyte in front of the other men.

An emotional bond develops between the two men which transcends the bounds of the immediate task. The younger man feels he is being initiated into a truly "man's world" through his patron. He finds that within this relationship he can perform much better and is constantly rewarded for extra performance with voiced or tacit approval. The work takes on an exaggerated importance because he feels there is a personal stake involved which goes far beyond the immediate task.

Within the expert/neophyte relationship there is no competition. The anxiety borne of trying to compete with others who are roughly peers is subsumed in the knowledge that the neophyte is working with a man whose expertise he cannot hope to match, and so he concerns himself with learning all he can. The most dramatic change seems to occur when the neophyte has been under emotional strain because, for whatever reasons, he has not been able to keep up with the other men. Such was Billy's case, but he soon found himself doing more than his share. When existing emotional strains are lifted, the man can realize his full potential.

Billy told me that when he was working with

Isaac he was able to do things he had never thought possible. He said he carried up to five pelts, at a time back to the pan, when most men consider two or three of the nearly fourteen kilogram "sculps" to be an ample load. Once he found he could do this extra work and was rewarded for it, he continued trying to match this performance, which quickly gained him a strong reputation among all his fellow workers. For his part, Isaac was able to show off his new prodigy as an example of his ability to teach and inspire other men.

FREEZING

I soon found I could not do even the easiest work. I sat near the pan with some other men, smoking cigarettes, trying to shield ourselves from the frozen wind behind a piece of raftered ice. My feet were past the painful stage of freezing--they were numb. I thought though, that there was still some circulation to them. My legs were cold and I cursed myself for not putting on the oilskins, even if they had been wet. My hands were useless because I could not put my fingers into the digits of the frozen gloves, and to work without gloves would be equally impossible. The

men I sat with did not say very much. One muttered that we should go on board the ship since it was close now and we were not accomplishing much anyway. But he was not a master watch and we remembered the captain's admonition the previous day: do not go back to the ship unless told to do so. Soon they got up and tried to do some more work, to keep warm more than anything else. I saw that the third watch was not far away and that they seemed to be huddled together and not working. I thought I might as well have company if I could not work so I announced I was going to join them.

Most of the other watch were standing close together, their backs to the wind, slapping their arms across their chests to keep the circulation going. Ches, the master watch, kept busy killing seals and hauling them round to the pan. With each tow he brought over he would urge his men to keep working, "that's the best to stay warm." But few of the men paid him heed. Everyone was too cold and tired to work. The seals were split open and the men thrust their hands into the steaming blood, desperately seeking warmth. When the blood started to cool, someone cut away more of

the fat and men stood on the pelt, sapping the last ounce of warmth from the dead pup. It was a macabre sight, but the only practical thing to do in such a situation. By now the ship had moved to about a kilometre away, but the men thought it would soon return to pick them up. It was about 5:30 p.m.; an hour left to wait.

Soon James' watch came over to join us. Fourteen men huddled against the wind, mucous and condensation frozen to their moustaches. One young man had only three shirts for protection, he rubbed snow on his face where frostbite had started to turn the skin white. My feet felt like wood but I was not sure whether they were frozen or just numb.

An hour can be an interminable long time. We felt certain the captain would turn the ship around and come and get us; surely he must realize we were not working. Ches kept busy hauling seals to us, and he still tried to convince the men they should be working to stay warm, but he had no takers.

Someone said that it must have been like this in the old days, a reference made to the many times

men froze to death on the ice, but particularly to the Newfoundland disaster of 1914 when seventy-eight men froze to death in a grotesque panoply.

Near 6:00 p.m. some of the men started talking about walking to the ship which was now almost half a kilometre away. I tried to argue against them because I knew I would not be able to keep up and did not relish the risk of falling behind. It soon became obvious that the ship was stuck in the ice and we had little choice but to strike off. The master watches agreed with the consensus and we walked off in single file. I soon found myself falling back. Jim, the man in the dirty blue jacket I had met in St. John's stayed with me, which probably saved my life. The two of us were trying to make our way as quickly as possible; dusk was setting in and it was hard to see the holes and pathways in the rough ice. When I saw a flat, smooth section of what appeared in the twilight to be ice, I gleefully took a long stride--straight onto open water. Like my first dunking that day, the water did not feel cold. The freezing sludge on the surface kept me bouyant but I had to make a conscious effort to quell the panic I felt.

I manoeuvred near the edge of the ice and clawed at it but could not get a grip. Jim saw me and quickly threw his hauling rope.

Back aboard ship, Jim helped me out of my boots. I could see the whiteness of frostbite covering all five toes, extending back to my heel. The toes were completely without feeling, like frozen meat. I felt I could drive a nail through them drawing neither blood nor pain. "Hot water's the thing for those," Jim suggested, but then Norman and Isaac came into the cabin and said I should put snow on them, "to draw the frost out slowly." I did not know anything about frostbite, but tended to trust Isaac's and Norman's advice even though I did not relish the idea of putting cold snow on them. I asked one of the other men to run up and ask the captain what ~~should be done~~. The word returned that I should soak them in lukewarm water, and that if anything were needed for pain the captain had some Demerol.

NIGHT

Although I was in my cabin this particular night, painfully feeling the circulation creeping back into my toes, the rest of the crew was busy

on deck, cleaning and stowing pelts until well after midnight as we had done the night before.

Supper is ready for the men as soon as they come off the ice. No one changes their clothes, but they try to clean most of the blood and grime from their hands. Supper that night was fresh seal flippers--thought by some to be relishingly good, but not all that appetizing to me after having spent a day up to the elbows in them--boiled cabbage, potatoes and pudding. The cook passes the plates through a small gate in the bulkhead adjoining the sealers' mess. A few jokes are passed but little conversation takes place during the evening meal after a day on the ice. Everyone is too tired for talk.

As soon as tea and cigarettes are finished after supper, the men don their oilskins once again and start working on deck. The ship had been picking up the panned pelts and now there were a hundred or so laying in a heap on the port side. The flippers hang by a piece of skin from the pelts and need to be cut off, then the pelts must be washed and stacked on deck to cool overnight. The men quickly fall into the positions they prefer.

Some are happiest cutting off flippers; some carry the flippers in buckets to the wooden bins where they are stored to freeze before eventually being thrown into the hold. Two water hoses are manned and some men haul the pelts to the hoses.

During the evening work session the whiplines are also busy. The ship must search for those pans of pelts that it has not had time to pick up during the day. Government regulations stipulate that all pelts must be taken off the ice within twenty-four hours to prevent wastage. The captain must rely on the master watches' memories of where these pans were left, his own memory, and compass bearings. As night falls the temperature can drop considerably, and the ship has a more difficult time manoeuvring. We used dynamite occasionally to break passages through the ice. A man jumps over the side in the dark and drills a hole with an ice auger, then pushes the explosive into the ice and scrambles back aboard, leaving a lit fuse. Another charge might be laid, or the ship pushes back and forth until it has enough manoeuvring room to turn and try another direction.

The evening work, if it lasts more than a

few hours (which it often does), becomes the hardest part of the day. The work is easier and the ship provides warmth when needed, but the men are craving sleep, their legs ache and their fingers are numb, and since they need to use their muscles less they begin to get stiff from the day's earlier exertions. But there is a pride taken in the ability to work well under adverse conditions. Billy told me after the 1980 hunt that he had chafed himself so badly that he was bleeding through his pants. He used some first aid cream, then dressed and went on deck with the other men, even though his master watch had told him to stay in his bunk. "It got better," he said. "And I'm glad now that I did it. It feels good to remember things like that." There are ample excuses to lay off work in the evening. The captain cannot see who is on deck all the time and there are enough men milling about that one less would probably not be noticed except by some of the other men. The day's injuries, like Billy's, might provide an adequate excuse to lie in the bunk and catch some sorely needed rest, but no one takes advantage of it. On the first night, one man had fallen and

cracked a rib on his way back to the ship. He continued working on deck during the night until he started to stiffen in the cold and the pain from the rib became too much to bear. He received some first aid from the chief engineer and, although he did not go back to work on deck, he stayed up with the men and helped sharpen knives. The work did not end until 1:00 a.m.

This night, the ethnographer had ample excuse for lying in his bunk. After the dousing in warm water the circulation began to painfully return to my feet. I spent a sleepness night and by morning blisters the size of plums had appeared on my big toes. It was obvious that I would need medical attention.

The captain called the Canadian Coast Guard ship Hudson which was stationed nearby and requested an emergency evacuation. The helicopter landed near the ship before 9:00 a.m. and I was flown to the hospital in St. Anthony.

As I was flying into St. Anthony, protesters and counter protesters were flying out to the ice for their annual confrontation. The Greenpeace Foundation sent a small contingent of protesters

to the front in 1979, after their major protest in the harbour. They were issued observer permits and escorted to the site of the whitecoat hunt by Fisheries officials. The group leader was able to break away from the entourage, and managed to mark a seal pup with a stick of green dye. His observer permit was revoked and he was promptly returned to St. Anthony. The previous year, Greenpeace president Patrick Moore had been charged and fined for disturbing the hunt by covering a whitecoat with his body. In 1979, the government had decided to try a policy of playing down the protest and charges were not layed against the Greenpeace leader.

Codpeace, the St. John's based parody of Greenpeace, put on a more imaginative show. As the Greenpeace protester was being led away, a Codpeace member, dressed in tuxedo, tails, and top hat and carrying an umbrella, stepped out of a helicopter and announced to the press that he was "Dr. Cod au Gratin IV, Ringmaster for the Media Circus". With the marked seal at his feet, he proclaimed: "This is what it's all about, a circus!" (E. Kirby, The Evening Telegram, March 15, 1979:3).

I was in the hospital bed about two hours when a reporter from the Chicago Tribune requested an interview. She asked me what I thought of the sealers. "They are some of the finest, warmest, most real people I've ever met. They're gentle and tough--things that don't seem to go together," she quoted me as saying. She then asked me what it was like to kill seals. "It's brutal, everybody knows that. It's very hard to kill such a cute little thing, and I don't think anybody feels any different, but you just get hardened, you just get used to it" (Mary Elson, Chicago Tribune, March 18, 1979, Section 3).

My feet healed well enough to walk on them in eight days, but I spent a further three frustrating days in St. Anthony before I was able to hitch a ride back to the ship on a helicopter that was delivering an engine part to one of the Norwegian ships.

CHAPTER V

THE HOODS

It was just past noon on March 26 when I arrived back aboard. The whitecoat hunt had finished five days before and the ship had moved thirteen kilometres southeast from where it had finished taking the quota of 9,800 harp seal pups and had begun hunting hood seals. The ships were now approximately fifty-six kilometres east of Cape Bauld. It was a warm, sunny day and from the helicopter I could see that the ships were widely scattered. The nearest ship to ours was about four kilometres distant. One of the Canadian ships had already started back to port.

There seemed to have been a great transformation aboard ship while I was away. With the cold had gone the desperate, desolate atmosphere which had marked the whitecoat hunt. It was replaced with warm excitement and enthusiasm. There was still work to do, but hunting hood seals is a much easier task for the men than killing whitecoats. The sealers were well rested, tanned and jovial.

My return to the ship marked a change in the sealer's attitudes toward having a researcher studying them. Those men who had been sealing before were used to having journalists come and go. Newspaper and magazine writers tend to stay aboard a short time, get their impressions, their quotes and pictures and leave, and are rarely heard from again. The nature of ethnographic field work however, requires a deeper understanding and it was necessary for me to complete the voyage as best I could or my story would be hopelessly incomplete. I was happy to return. The ship was a familiar, comforting place and the grease, blood and stench were a relief after the sterility of the hospital. The sealers seemed more trusting of me after I came back to the ship. They were more open and confiding and although my marginal position with them remained, the gap between us had closed considerably. It seems to me that any crew situation demands a certain amount of loyalty to be displayed by members, and I had just displayed mine.

The protest/counter protest did not happen to take place near our ship and very little

was said of them when I returned.

HOOD SEALS

Hood seals are family creatures. Unlike the harp seals which whelp and mate en masse within a relatively confined area, the hoods remain in family units comprised of the adult male or dog, bitch and pup, and are found scattered over a larger area. While in a good patch families might be found within a few hundred metres of each other; they might just as well be a half kilometre or more away from one another.

The hood pups, called bluebacks, moult their foetal coat in the womb and are born a few weeks later than the whitecoats. The pups are able to swim within a few days of birth. The dog, and especially the bitch, will defend the family unit with great ferocity and rarely try to escape into the water at the approach of a ship or sealers, unless wounded. The dog has a large skin bladder which puffs up over his head and nose when he is disturbed, making it impossible to knock him out with a hakapik or club. In any case, it would be far too dangerous for the men to routinely tackle dog hood seals armed only with

a hakapik since they are such strong and tenacious fighters. Therefore, they are shot from the ship.

The ice on which the hood seals whelp is thicker than that which the harps use (Pinhorn, 1976: 51), but since the ice had been drifting south and the weather was getting warmer, the ice was more broken and allowed the ship greater manoeuvrability. At times the ship was able to travel nearly a kilometre within large, ice enclosed lakes. The mate spotted the seals from the barrel, or the captain would see them from the wheelhouse. The ship moved in as close as it could and one of the two "gunners" would shoot the dog with a high powered rifle. Two sealers were then let over the side, pulling the whip-line with them. While one distracted the bitch, the other man would kill the blueback with his hakapik. One bitch out of every twenty is also allowed to be taken.

In comparison with the harp seal hunt, which has been likened by some to an open air abbatoir, the hood seal search seems much more like a hunt. More time is spent looking for the seals. The men work in sporadic bursts. The hood

seals fight back at the sealer and a man who pits himself against an adult hood, in an attempt to steal his or her pup, takes a fair amount of risk upon himself. An adult hood's jaw could easily crush a leg and it would be no trouble for one to drag a man into the water so quickly that his partner would not be able to help. While there are ever present dangers during the harp seal kill, the hoods provide a more immediate sense of them. During the 1980 hunt the ocean swell was so high that the men could not get over the side and so ladders were hung on each side of the bow. The men had to climb six or seven metres on a wooden ladder, out of the captain's sight, with the bow pitching and rolling, and the ice under it knocking the ladders askew as the men clambered down onto the broken and heaving ice.

Sometimes the hood pups are skinned on the ice, and the pelts are attached to the whipline and hauled aboard while the sealers go off to kill others. But often the seals, especially the adults, are brought aboard round and pelted on the deck. Usually two or three men would

work at skinning seals; a big dog could keep a pair of men busy for about fifteen or twenty minutes.

James did a lot of this pelting, on deck. He was acknowledged as one of the better men at it and there was no need of the older men going onto the ice. Isaac and others cleaned the blueback carcasses, which would be sold for meat in Newfoundland along with the flippers. The genitals of the adult males were taken to be sold to Japanese buyers as aphrodisiacs. Isaac put himself in charge of this task as well. The livers of some of the hoods were kept by the men for their own consumption.

The hood seal pelts receive more careful treatment than do those of the whitecoats. In 1979, a first class blueback pelt was worth $56.00 to the ship while the first class adult pelts fetched up to $100.00 each, depending upon their condition. A first class whitecoat pelt was worth about $26.00. The hood pelts are treated with an anti-stain solution after being thoroughly washed. While many of the men are kept busy most of the time during the hood seal

hunt, there are still more hands than work to occupy them.

Certain men preferred doing particular things and these jobs would become their special domain. There was no formal arrangement and men who usually worked on deck would at times go onto the ice.

Two men occupy a special place during the hood hunt: the gunners. These are men who shoot the adult seals from the bow of the ship and are usually selected before the hunt specifically for this job on the basis of their reputations as marksmen. There is some pride taken in this work. They do not have to go onto the ice or work with the seals on deck. The captain ordered a makeshift fence to be placed round their working area in the bow to lessen the chance of other men jostling them and perhaps causing an accident with the rifles.

SAFETY

A fine line was trod between safety and production. The captain was well aware of the dangers inherent in the hood seal hunt and made every effort to minimize them. If he saw that

a seal was in a place which would put the men in unnecessary danger should they attempt to retrieve it, he would pass it by. On the other hand, he was intolerant of men who did not kill a seal because they were either being inept or unnecessarily frightened. From his vantage point in the wheelhouse he could see the overall scene and became frustrated when a sealer did something tactically wrong, such as distracting the bitch from head-on rather than from behind to draw her away from the pup. He would sometimes shout directions with his megaphone. But the final decision on safety rested with the men on the ice, who were better able to judge the small hinderances such as a piece of unstable ice nearby onto which they could not safely step. Although the captain would appear furious at a bungled attempt, he would rarely vent his anger on the men. More often he showed great patience and understanding.

CATS

Twenty-four percent of the proceeds of the voyage are shared equally among the entire crew. The ship takes the remaining seventy-six percent.

Thus each man, regardless of the amount of work he does in relation to his fellows, receives the same wages at the end of the trip. It follows that the entire product of the voyage is the common property of the men who are on the ship. There is however, one by-product not included in this scheme.

A "cat" is a stillborn seal. It resembles a harp or hood seal in every way except that it is smaller and of course, dead on the ice. They can be stuffed and mounted and are valued by the sealers as souvenirs or trophies of the hunt. Some of the sealers put a monetary value on the cats, saying they could easily sell them, unmounted, for $50.00 or more, but there is no commercial market for them and hence they are not a part of the normal product of the voyage.

A cat is generally considered the property of the man who finds it on the ice, carries it back to the ship, and stores it in a safe place. Yet however safely a man may think he has hidden his cat, the ship is small and another man might find it and move it ot his own hiding spot. But this is not considered stealing in the normally accepted sense. A cat is "taken" as opposed to

being stolen and the sanctions one would expect to be taken against a thief do not apply. When I asked a sealer why taking a cat was not as serious an offence as stealing money or cigarettes, his reply was, "Well, everyone wants a cat, sure. If you can keep him, then you can have him."

Billy was very keen on getting a cat and, after finding one, kept it in the bottom of his locker in his cabin for fear that if he put it in some cooler but more public place it would be taken. The other men chided him about keeping it where it would eventually rot and foul the air in the quarters, but no one stole it. And it never did smell too badly.

The cat is an ambiguous part of the hunt. On one hand, it is a product of the voyage and might therefore be considered common property, but because it has no commercial value it is not divided with the catch shares. Therefore, although a man may claim a cat, the ambiguity between common and private spheres of possession does not allow for an absolute claim to ownership: "...everyone wants a cat." The treatment given the cats seems to have parallels

with the "scoff", another Newfoundland custom.

The scoff is an example of sanctioned deviance in which community members in an outport take, or "buck", food from other members of the community and have a party at the others' expense, and to which they are not invited (Faris, 1968: 118ff; 1972: 162). The food is usually fresh meat which a person may have ageing in a shed, and produce from someone else's garden. The person who discovers he has had his larder plundered is also allowed to "second plunder" in return for that which has been taken from him. James Faris writes that "second plundering is the sweetest." If the action takes place within limits, it is considered to be done in good spirit and not treated as stealing. Thus it has the character of a practical joke.

Faris also briefly mentions goods originally plundered from shipwrecks and writes that the second plundering principle holds for this as well. Something from a shipwreck is in the same ambiguous position as the cats. Both are initially salvaged and one person may claim ownership because he has found the item and taken it ashore or to the ship.

But it does not entirely belong to him. It has another attachment, either to the previous owner or to the rest of the ship's crew. After all, the man who finds a cat--or a valued item from a wreck--does so by chance. Any other crew member might just as easily have come across it, and, in a sense, it can be viewed as belonging to the whole crew. This reasoning seems to hold while the ship is at sea, but once ashore the person who has possession of the cat--or item--owns it as he would any other piece of private property.

A sealer who has taken another's cat may not reveal his action save to a close friend. But the ship and crew are so small that it is often discovered who has taken who's cat. Since the cats are normally stored in a cool and usually public place--such as hidden under a dory on deck, or wrapped in plastic in the food coolers--there are plenty of opportunities for mischievous larceny and, if the thief is caught, ample course for excuses to be made and accepted. Although the man who has been duped will be annoyed, he will not consider the theft to be a serious crime, as he would if money or some other, more personal

property were stolen. He is more likely to try to recapture his cat or attempt revenge with a practical joke. I never saw it happen but suspect that if the matter was escalated to a man complaining to the captain or mate, or if another, more serious revenge was attempted, it would be considered a significant breach of crew camaraderie and the complainer would be considered to be untrustworthy by his fellows.

Sealing is a dangerous occupation where it is imperative that crew members know how trustworthy their fellow workers are. Trust is also a very difficult quality to establish. Sometimes it seems to hinge on personal likes and dislikes, but it is often said, "I don't like so and so, but I'd trust him if I had to." Perhaps the most important ingredient of trusting is predictability. A person who is forthright and courageous is often thought of as trustworthy since he can be relied upon to give direct opinion and not to be intimidated by fear which might cloud his ability to act on his opinion. One is also considered trustworthy if he understands the prevailing attitude of the group he is with and acts predict-

ably within the bounds of expected behaviour.

A man who would take serious revenge upon another crew member who had tested his patience by committing a less serious "crime" such as taking his cat, would be considered untrustworthy because he had over reacted to the incident and had placed his self interest above the common or shared interest of the crew.

Crew solidarity is embedded in the economic structure of the hunt, since each man must rely on his fellows to work hard and efficiently toward the common good. In the course of the regular working day there is no room for deviation from this principle. A cat however, provides an opportunity for an exception to the rules. Since the cat represents an ambiguity between common and private ownership and has no serious consequences for the voyage as a whole, it can become an object of playful activity.

A cat can be claimed as personal property, but the claim contradicts the basic principle of the crew's organization--sharing the products of the hunt toward the common good. When a man takes another's cat he may be seen to be testing

the right to privatize a part of the captured common property resource. This action could suggest a challenge to crew solidarity and trust, but is more likely to be tolerated in a light hearted manner and cause little significant threat to the crew's interrelationships. Outright theft on the other hand is obviously a more serious crime, but may or may not be handled in the same manner as the cats.

When I returned to the ship from the hospital I was informed that there was a thief onboard. One of the men said some of the men had been missing cigarettes, money and sealing tags. He said he wished he could find out who had been stealing.

> It's the worst thing to have aboard a ship, a thief. You can't trust anybody until you find him. If you knew who it was you could just break his fingers or something and that would be the end of it. But if you don't know, then it poisons the whole trip.

Yet, with the exception of this man who tended to be more vocal than the others about such issues, there was no mention of a stealing problem. There was no witch hunt and the men carried on

as before, not making any particular effort to hide their valuables. I was left wondering whether my informant simply wanted to say something dramatic to me.

It is unlikely the sealers would want to confront a crew member if it could be avoided, because of the conflict avoidance mechanisms mentioned in the introduction. It would have been a serious breach of trust and solidarity if a hunt for the thief had taken place. However, if someone was caught in a situation that was obviously violating somebody's personal rights, action would have to be taken.

Outside of the one incident, I heard no more tales of theft. The mate had a cat taken though, in a rather telling episode.

The mate was spotting families of hoods from the barrel and saw a cat on the ice. A man on the ice had seen the cat independently and was making his way toward it at the same time. Meanwhile a gunner, shooting from the bow, had also seen it. All three men claimed the cat. When the men on the ice came aboard, the mate ordered that the cat be placed beside

his cabin door. The man who had seen it from the ice made a disgruntled reply to his fellows and told the mate he had seen the cat as well, but gave deference to the mate who at this time was using his authority as a superior officer. The gunner also spoke up and said the cat was his, but that he was willing to let the man who was on the ice claim it. He did not think the mate should have it. Keeping his voice low enough so that the mate could not hear him, he said that in order to avoid another such incident, "I'll bloody well shoot the next one full of holes if that's the way they're going to be." So the mate had his authority deferred to, and the cat was placed by his door. Predictably, it did not stay there very long.

Peter later told me that he had seen two of the engineers on the helicopter deck the next night. We were stopped beside one of the Norwegian ships, waiting as Department of Fisheries scientists transferred some of their samples. Peter saw that the engineers were tying a bundle to a rope to transfer to the other ship:

I didn't care what they were doing. I

> knew it was the mate's cat, so I wanted to make sure it was tied so it wouldn't come off. So I tied it proper for them so they wouldn't lose it. Then I stood and waited while they hauled it aboard. But he (one of the engineers) left, see. Well, along comes this Norwegian fellow with his jacket bulging with cigarettes. He threw us each a couple of cartons and we took off. Well, I never told any of this, but he (the man who left) asked him (the other engineer) if he got anything for the cat. Well, I just about split. See, I had his cigarettes!

The mate was suitably duped. His questionable use of authority in the incident had earned him widespread criticism on the ship, and the engineers thought it would be a particularly appropriate practical joke to relieve him of his cat. It is unlikely that the sealers would have taken this action since the mate is in a position much superior to theirs; but the engineers, being fellow officers, could get away with it without too much fear of the consequences if they were caught. The fact that they did not expect much in the way of reward for their generosity is an indication that they saw the incident in terms of a joke. By giving the cat to another ship they also insured that future disagreements over this particular cat would

not occur. For his trouble, one of the engineers fell victim to another, second plundering--the loss of the cigarettes intended for him, which Peter kept. The mate squabbled a little that his cat had been stolen, but soon let the matter drop and the incident received no further comment.

On the second to last day of the hunt I watched as Norman skinned a cat. It was his fifth cat that afternoon and he complained that his hands were cold and painful and that he was having a great deal of difficulty performing this intricate task. Because the cat will be stuffed and mounted, the skin needs to be taken off in one round piece. There is more than one way of doing this. The skin can be turned inside out through the mouth, or through a small slit made in the belly, cutting away the carcass as it emerges. Then it needs to be cleaned and tanned by taxidermist on shore, turned right side out again and then stuffed. While a sealer may pay up to $100.00 to have a cat tanned and stuffed by a taxidermist who would charge extra for the services Norman was providing, Norman

charged nothing for his work. I asked him why he continued if his hands were so painful. "Well, there's not much you can do about the cold, you can't do this with gloves on, and the boys want them done so they can have them stuffed when we get in."

CHAPTER VI

RETURNING

The ship took one thousand hood seals before the captain decided to return to port. He had set that limit himself, thinking it was a respectable catch. He wanted to have time to sell the flippers and get into the processing plant for unloading while the facilities were free of other vessels.

We started for port the morning of March 29, twenty-five days after the trip had begun, and the ship stopped occasionally on the way to kill hood seals as we came across them. The trip to port took only one day and by 7:00 p.m. that evening we were tied to the wharf in Catalina, the first community in which we would try to sell our flippers (see map). The men had spent the afternoon cleaning their quarters and the wheelhouse, which were then inspected by the first mate who gave his approval. It was another warm and sunny day and the men were understandably in good spirits, anxious to be home.

NEXT YEAR?

Conversation seemed to turn naturally to who would be coming out the next spring. Apparently this happens every year (Sanger, personal communication).

Most of the neophytes said something like, "No, b'y, I came out to see it and now I've seen it so I don't think I need to go through all that again." And the initiates said things like, "Well, I wanted to have a few years at it and I've had a few now to know what it's like, so I don't imagine I'll do it again." The general feeling was that it had been a good experience, but one that was not necessarily worth repeating. The elders, on the other hand, realized they would likely be out the next year despite what they may feel at the end of the voyage, "Yes, I daresay I'll have a couple more springs in yet before I gives it up."

Although the men were now in a good mood, the trip nearly over, the atmoshpere seemed to be generally negative toward sealing. They had had enough of both the ship and seals; their money had been made and the adventure was over. They wanted to see family and friends again and were close enough to the experience of sealing that they remembered the hardships which are inseparable from it. They were concerned with how much money they had made, and how quickly they could get the business of unloading finished and resume their normal lives. Most

of all, one would think, they would want to be out of the dirty, smelly, confined quarters they had occupied for nearly a month.

But an hour after the ship had docked, there were still several men aboard. About half the sealers had relatives or friends waiting for them at the wharf and these left quickly to go home, but the others seemed in no hurry to leave the ship. Part of the reason for this was that some of them had no money and were in a strange town. I had a small amount of cash and loaned out what I had, enough for a few beers anyway. But still the men seemed reluctant to leave. It was as if there was a security to be found aboard that would be ruined by stepping ashore. There seemed to be an unwillingness to separate from the vessel which had provided a safe haven until now, but was at the same time, despised for the deprivations it caused.

Soon though, the men decided to make a tentative move onto the shore. About seven of us went to a nightclub where we met Isaac and a couple of the other sealers, who were already drinking.

As returning sealers the men seemed to be able to take a licence they would not have ordinarily

taken. The money soon ran out and the bar manager gave out several rounds of drinks. As well, rounds were bought by other patrons for the men, and Isaac and Jim went around the tables dancing and singing and passed round a hat for contributions which yielded more drinks. At the end of the evening Jim was able to talk the bar manager out of a bottle of rum and prevailed upon him to give us all a ride back to the ship. I would not doubt that the bar lost money on the evening.

The townspeople seemed anxious to try to share in the company of the returning sealers. They were excited about the trip and often asked for details of incidents they had heard about on the radio while we had been sealing. They wanted to know what the weather had been like, whether we had taken our full quota, whether we had been troubled by the protesters, and the like. The sealers are important people when they return from the hunt. They are symbols of the cultural meaning that the hunt has for Newfoundland. It seemed somewhat akin to the affection given returning soldiers after they have won a war.

FLIPPERS

The next morning was raw and rainy. Most of the men were hung over, as might be expected, and by 8:00 a.m. a crowd of people had lined up on the wharf waiting for flippers. The starting price was $18.00 per dozen and if a retail outlet was buying more than ten dozen, the price dropped to $16.00 per dozen. Two of the sealers collected the money and kept a tally of what had been sold, while the rest of the men who were present hauled the flippers from the hold and sorted them into bags. The people on the wharf displayed the same curiousity and excitement as had the people in the tavern the night before. Some had come a good distance to buy the flippers, and although there was some haggling over prices, most seemed content. One got the feeling that many of the people had come not only to buy flippers but to share in the excitement of the event.

During the night the ship steamed to Carbonear to sell the rest of the flippers the next morning. Several men showed up looking for a better price. They complained that they wanted to retail them and that they could not make enough

profit at our discount of $2.00 per dozen for bulk sales. Because they wanted a large quantity they thought that they should be able to purchase the flippers for $9.00 per dozen. The sealers and the captain were angry at this proposition, not only because they thought it was bad business deal, but also because they felt their work was something important and they were insulted by this crass deal making. "We worked our asses off for the likes of that. He's got some nerve coming round here looking to steal flippers at that price... Lord Jesus! You go out there and freeze your tail for these people and they want to rob you when you come back!"

PROCESSING

The ship sailed to the processing plant at Dildo the next morning. The Carino seal processing plant at Dildo is a subsidiary of the Rieber Corporation of Bergen, Norway. It handles all seal pelts processed in Newfoundland. Individual landsmen sell their pelts to agents in their home communities who truck them to Dildo, while the ships simply unload their pelts at the plant wharf.

The fat is scraped off the pelts and is

separated and refined to be used as high quality oil in products such as soaps, margarine, perfumes, and machine oil. The pelts are cleaned, graded and set in brine to keep until they are sent to Norway for tanning. The whitecoat pelts are then dyed since the natural whiteness tends to yellow with time. Those of poor quality are dyed dark colours to hide imperfections, while top quality pelts can be made to look like mink or some other more highly priced fur. West Germany is the largest market for finished pelts, although they are also sent to several other European countries to be made into various products, primarily decorative clothing.

UNLOADING

The unloading took three days and one more day was spent cleaning the hold. At first the camaraderie among the crew broke down into bickering and complaining. On the first morning there were only six men working. Several had been home and were slow in returning to the ship. A few others complained about various illnesses and injuries. Victor claimed he had a sore leg, Harry had come down with the 'flu, and another man complained of

severe haemorrhoids.

The six men who showed up ready for work the first morning were almost all either elders or [illegible]ytes. One man operated the winch which brought the pelts out of the hold and put them into the waiting truck on the dock. Billy quickly ensconced himself as the man who unloaded the pelts in the truck, while Isaac, Norman, Ches and I worked in the hold loading the pelts onto straps which were hauled to the deck with the winch cable. It was dreary, stinking work. The fat on the pelts had either begun to turn to rancid oil, or they were still frozen and needed to be pried loose from each other. The men in the hold complained that they should not be the only ones working and began naming men who were not there, tearing down the excuses they had given. Norman was particularly incensed with our cabin mate, Victor. "His leg wasn't so sore when he walked up to the club last night."

Later that afternoon several of the other men returned from their visits with families and helped with the work. The captain told us that the men who did not show for work would be docked money from

their share of the catch. This began a new round of bickering. The year before the captain had deducted $25.00 for every day not worked, but some of the men did not think this was enough. Others felt that the captain would just take this money in any case and that it might as well go to the men. By the afternoon of the second day however, nearly all the men had returned to the ship. Although the men had complained about them in their absence, they were happily welcomed aboard. Thereafter the work went quickly and smoothly. The old shift system soon developed and no one had to work such long hours without taking time out for a rest.

The captain complained that the pelts were not of the same quality as he had been used to in the past several years. He stormed aboard one evening with a blueback pelt he had taken from the grader's table. It had large holes where the flippers had been cut off sloppily and there were several small nicks in it which would not show while the the fat was still on it, but which were very visible when the fat was removed. "This should have been a perfect pelt," he told the second mate.

> We should have got $56.00 for it. But look at the size of those flipper holes. And that's not so bad as the nicks in the back, right through the best part of the pelt. They'll have to cut it up for scraps, you can't make a coat out of that. It should have been an A-1 pelt, now it's a C-2, worth about $22.00. So that slip of the knife cost $34.00. Lord Jesus! I knew who was doing that bad work but I didn't want to say anything. I never thought it would be this bad. We lost a lot of money from bad pelting this trip. I got compliments the past two years for having the best quality pelts but we sure won't get that this year.

PAYDAY

The unloading took three days. April 4 was the last day of work. The hold was cleaned with caustic soda in the morning and the ethnographer was given the odious task of cleaning the toilets. After dinner the men had cleaned up and changed their clothes. Most of the beards had been shaved by this time and the men teased each other about how different they looked when clean.

The captain was in good spirits when he came aboard with a suitcase full of money from the sale of flippers, carcasses and male hood genitals. The men followed him into the mess where he explained how the shares had been divided. He mentioned that

those men who had missed days unloading had been docked pay, and that the proceeds from the few remaining flippers would be added to the cheques which would be sent out after the pelt money had been paid by the processing company and divided up. The flipper shares, including carcasses and "cocks" came to $684.00. The pelt money, seventy-six percent of which would be taken as the ship's share and twenty-four percent of which would be divided among the men, came to about $1,800.00 for each man.

SECOND TRIP

Another topic of conversation at this time was the possibility of going on the "second trip". The ship had been chartered by the government to carry out some stock assessment work which would involve taking "beater" harp seals (first year pups which have completed a first moult to a soft spotted grey coat). The sealing crew would be comprised of about seven men from the present crew who were asked by the captain to continue as crew for the second trip. The work would take approximately two weeks. They would be paid a salary equal to that of a regular deck hand, plus a share of the

pelt money, since the Fisheries Department was interested only in obtaining carcasses. But the money would not equal that which had been made at the main hunt. It was considered something of an honour to be asked to go out again because the crew was smaller and the captain would first ask those whom he liked best. Not all of those asked were quick to accept.

Several of the men had economic reasons for not wanting to go on the second trip whether they were asked or not. Two thought they would still be able to take seals near their homes as landsmen, others had fishing gear to ready, their homes to paint or other jobs lined up. Some had family considerations, "The missus isn't going to take kindly to me going off again." Still, Norman would go--he is a bachelor and had planned to work on the ship after the hunt in any case. Isaac and Ches went and the two landsmen eventually changed their minds. Billy was asked when the ship was finally headed back to St. John's. He had proved himself well and seemed to have become one of the captain's favourites, although he was still nervous in the captain's company. He may have simply been

overlooked initially, because the captain asked him in a way that made it sound as if he had been waiting for an affirmative answer to a question already posed. "Are you coming out the next trip, Billy, or not?" Billy said he would think about it, but eventually decided not to go on the grounds that he was sick of sealing for the time being.

CHANGE OF HEART

I asked Billy the morning before he received his flipper money why he had come to the seal hunt. Had it just been for the money or were there other,, more personal considerations involved? I remembered that when I first met him at the dockside as we were about to leave on the trip, He said that he wanted to seal because his father had been out six springs and he wanted to see what it was like. He had claimed not to have been able to sleep since Christmas for thinking about the hunt. Surely there had been more than the money on his mind. "No," he said, "it's for the money. You wouldn't go and work that hard just for the fun of it, would you?"

In June, Bill (I did not like to call him Billy any longer, he had changed) was still not sure he wanted to go out again. "Oh, I go down to

the ship every now and then when it's in port, but I don't know if I'll go out again. It was a good thing to see the hunt and I've done that. You know, I still don't like killing those little things. They're so cute, it's a sin."

Six months later, shortly after Christmas, his tune had changed considerably. "I went down the other day to ask the captain if I could have a berth. He said I could come. I can hardly wait until the boys get into town. It will be so good to see Isaac again, and you remember Jim. Jesus, remember him and Isaac dancing around the club with a hat getting money!"

Although I did not participate in the 1980 hunt, I met with several of the sealers immediately after they returned. Bill was firmly ensconced as one of the initiates. He was confident and relaxed, no longer a boy showing off but a man who knew he had comported himself well. He told me later that he no longer felt intimidated by the captain or Isaac. In fact, he criticised Isaac for a number of things, something he would not have done the year before. I asked Isaac how Bill had managed on the ice that year. "He's a good

steady hand now, he is. Did a real good share." But despite the fact that he had just finished a very good trip, Bill was again not sure he would want to return to the hunt next year.

Following the pattern however, by November of that year there was no way to keep Bill away from the next hunt. "Look," he said, "when I told my father I was going out that first spring he told me I'd just have one spring and then wouldn't want to go at it again. Well, he was out six springs and I've been out two. I just want to see the look on his face when I come home from my seventh spring."

The attitude of family and friends helps reinforce Bill's love of the hunt. He told me that the night before he was ready to go on the 1980 hunt he came home from a farewell evening with his friends to find that his father had packed all his gear for him, including a new sheath that an uncle had made. "That sure made me feel good." After the 1981 hunt, his mother invited all the sealers from the ship to her home for turkey dinner. Bill did not think this a good idea for a number of reasons and turned down the offer on behalf of

the crew. It is obvious that although she worries about her son at the ice, she is at the same time very proud that he goes sealing, and he recognizes her pride.

It is not just living up to the pride of parents that keeps Bill interested in the seal hunt. He has a deep attachment to the men and to the work. "I loves it, I really do. It means a lot to me. And I love those guys, it's the best thing in the world. It's not the same as fishing. I suppose I'll be out fifteen springs if I can." Bill's attitude seems typical. Harry, my former cabin mate, told me a month before the 1981 hunt began:

> I don't know if I'll be going out again. I've been working on the Arctic Explorer (another sealing ship that also does scientific work on charter) and they've given me a berth. But it would be my month off. I've hardly seen my wife and baby in six months. I've been at sea and I've got to start building a house this spring. My father's going out this spring on one of the other ships, but I don't know if I will... Oh hell, you know I won't be able to stay away from it. As soon as I see the boys coming back you know I'll be there!

There exists a notion that the sea has an ability to "get into a man's blood", to atttact him again and again to pit himself against the temperamental, uncaring, ceaseless roll of the wave. Many will say, quite correctly, that it is some form of economic necessity that keeps men returning to the sea. I assert there is another fundamental lure, whether it be a yearning for the sensuous roll of the ship at sea, the camaraderie of crewship, a need to take a risk in an unpredictable environment, or something more mystical which draws them. These are more romantic and amorphous qualities but they account for much of a man's personal motivations for wanting to return to the sea.

Shortly after 8:00 a.m. on the morning of July 3, 1981 the Arctic Explorer, a sealing ship owned by the Carino Company and under charter to a seismic exploration company, developed a list while sailing in relatively calm waters near St. Anthony. She sank quickly with the loss of thirteen men, including Harry, whose real name is Clarence Ash of Brooklyn, Bonavista Bay.

CHAPTER VII

MOTIVATIONS

There are two main sets of motivations for a man to seek a berth to the ice. One is economic. It is fairly straight forward and is most central to the hunt. But the men's relationship to the hunt is not entirely economic or utilitarian. The other set of motivations is more complex and is embedded in the social and cultural fabric of Newfoundland. This relationship has developed because the seal hunt holds such an important place in Newfoundland's past. But sealing is in no way a sport and if it were pursued primarily for adventure it would be a very different and much less meaningful event.

The first section of this chapter deals with the more utilitarian aspects of the hunt, showing how the money earned fits into the household economies of the sealers. The second section will deal

with the more amorphous question of socio-cultural relationships to the hunt. As suggested in the introduction, economic activity is not always motivated solely by a dollars and cents rationality. This is particularly true of the seal hunt where a long tradition and associated hardships have elevated its profile and made it something more than a mundane, practical economic activity.

ECONOMIC RATIONALE

The sealing industry developed on the northeast coast of Newfoundland since this area is closest to the migrating herds of harp seals. Most sealers today are inshore fishermen or other seasonally employed or self-employed residents of the small towns and villages situated along this coast. The two large coastal towns of Lewisporte and Bonavista each have populations of about four thousand, but many of the smaller outports have less than five hundred people.

The economies of these communities rely primarily on the short summer fishing season, which lasts from mid May through to late October.

The inshore and nearshore fisheries can be particularly unstable and unpredictable, but a few men find work in other industries, on either a seasonal or more permanent basis. However, those able to make earnings roughly equivalent to a steadily employed, industrial wage earner in mainland Canada are rare indeed.

Better economic opportunities might be available elsewhere, but many prefer to stay at home if they can possibly manage it. Staying is encouraged by pride in their rural heritage and the freedoms its lifestyle affords. Government sponsored programmes such as Unemployment Insurance benefits and Canada Works projects, combined with subsistence level gardening, hunting and woods work help create a pluralist economic base. Even so, the standard of living is often well below the Canadian average, and maximum use must be made of available resources.

My cabin mate Victor, for example, lives in a small community in Notre Dame Bay with a population of about one hundred people. His father's small, two storey house is home to an extended family of four sons, their mother,

grandparents, and often Victor's girlfriend. They have no running water. The kitchen is kept sweltering by a huge wood stove which burns continuously and dries the multitude of socks and underwear that hang over it. Tea is always ready, and Victor's mother invests a goodly amount of pride in keeping an ample supply of food on hand. In fact, it can be embarrassing to a visitor who has to push away steaming plates of potatoes, turnip and fish, protesting a bulging belly.

Victor's father is unable to fish or do any strenuous work because of a heart condition. He does keep busy with handiwork around the house and mends some of his sons' fishing gear. Victor's mother keeps six or seven sheep which they occasionally butcher. They are more valued for their wool, which is sent to Prince Edward Island for spinning and dyeing and sent back to her as yarn. She makes a considerable saving over store bought wool this way, and claims the wool is of much better quality. She knits it into socks, sweaters and caps. A garden plot, located about one hundred metres from the house,

provides vegetables, mostly turnips and potatoes, which are stored in a root cellar for consumption through the winter. Victor and his brothers, and sometimes their father, collect wood during the fall and winter and leave it to cure, for use the following winter.

Cash comes into the house in one of two ways: fishing or government supplied subsidies. Victor's father receives a small disability pension, his grandmother receives the Old Age Pension, and the older boys receive Unemployment Insurance benefits through the winter after the fishery has finished. Victor's mother collects Family Allowance payments for the two sons who are still young enough to be eligible.

Victor and his younger brother work as crewmen on their father's brother's trapskiff, along with a cousin and a shareman. During the season they haul the fish traps twice daily; early in the morning and again late in the afternoon. Victor claims that when the fishing is particularly good, as it was the summer before I visited him, he could make up to $600.00 per week during the peak of the season. But this does not all

come from the trapskiff operation. As he says, "When I go fishing, I like to do it full time, no sense wasting fish." In his hours away from the trapskiff, he sets trawls (lengths of line floated at both ends and anchored, from which many smaller baited lines trail to the bottom). He also jigs for cod, and sets lobster pots and salmon nets in season. He contributes some of his earnings to the family household, but much of it is put away in a fund for his own house which he expects to build within a few years, after he is married.

In the summer of 1979, Victor had plans to marry his girlfriend the next spring and head west to Calgary where he had worked once before. He hoped he could save enough money there in a couple of years working at construction jobs so that he would be able to return home, build a house and continue fishing. He did not plan to go sealing again the following year because he thought that by that time he would be in Alberta. "Besides," he said, "I've done it three years now, I think it's time I took a rest from it."

Since a sealer must be free from other obligations during the sealing season, virtually all sealers are seasonally employed people. As an inshore fisherman, Victor's economic adaptation is quite representative of most of the large vessel sealers as well as the nearly four thousand landsman sealers in rural eastern Canada. The viability of Victor's adaptation does not rely entirely on his being able to go sealing in the spring, but he must make good use of whatever opportunities come his way and in this he has few choices. The seal hunt is one of a number of economic possibilities which must be taken advantage of, whether one goes on the large vessel hunt, as we are concerned with here, or takes part in the landsman hunt.

For three years the hunt provided Victor with a sizeable supplementary income at a time of year when he would otherwise have been doing little in the way of economic activity. But the seal hunt is something of a gamble for him. He is well aware the ship is not always able to take its full quota of seals and his investment of time and hard work may not have a corresponding

payoff, especially since he will lose Unemployment Insurance benefits during the time he is out.

March and most of April are often referred to as the "dead months" in rural Newfoundland, when primary economic activities virtually cease and there is a resultant slowdown in other sectors of the rural economy. The hunting seasons have finished, work cutting wood is slowing down, and the fishing and gardening seasons have not yet begun. Men pursue sealing during this time. The winter has used up most of the summer savings, Unemployment Insurance payments may be stretched, and it will be some months before much money can be realized from the fishery. The hunt provides men with an immediate and substantial cash flow which can be used for major expenditures such as outfitting for the summer fishery.

Some of the sealers reinvest their seal hunt earnings directly back into the rural economy. Jacob for example, was in his early thirties in 1979 and lived at home with his widowed mother in a small community on Fogo Island. He had decided to buy a trapskiff and fishing

gear with a partner and needed to earn a considerable amount of money in a relatively short time. He returned to the hunt after an absence of several years so that he could be fishing by the coming summer. When I visited him in the late spring of 1979 he was busy putting an engine in the second hand boat he and his partner had bought.

Because the hunt provides a sizeable amount of money in a lump sum, it becomes very useful for major investments. Wage labour (which is usually not available) would only trickle money into the household, where savings are soon eaten up by small expenditures. Many of the sealers used their earnings to buy substantial items. Victor bought a used car, James bought a new television. Wilf, who is from Jacob's home community, needed money to buy materials for the house he was building. He wanted to finish the job that summer so he and his fiancée could move in after their wedding in August. He also returned to sealing after having been absent for a few years.

Other people can be more or less in need

of the money they can make sealing, depending upon their present financial status. If there have been unexpected expenditures, or if they have not been able to obtain the job they had been planning on, or if they have had a poor year in the fishery, the need may be great. Many sealers rely on the hunt for up to one third of their annual income. This is especially true of landsmen, many of whom own their own longliners (decked boats of between eleven and twenty metres). They rely on the spring seal kill in order to raise capital costs for the coming summer fishery, and to meet payments for loans against their gear. For some, a missed year at the seal hunt could mean they would not be able to make loan payments and they could lose their boats. So while the seal fishery in itself does not provide the largest part of their income, it is often very significant.

In 1982, the European Parliament recommended that member countries ban the import of Canadian seal products. Bill worried that this decision might spell the end of the sealing industry:

> All I get is what I can take from the sea -- from fishing and sealing. I made $7,000.00 last year fishing and another couple thousand at sealing. That's way below the poverty line. It's (the hunt) important to me.

ENTREPRENEURIAL INTERESTS

The hunt is essentially (some would say quintessentially) an economic activity. As suggested in Chapter II the historical seal hunt resembled a textbook case of capitalist exploitation and over exploitation of a renewable natural resource. Large capital expenditures were invested in a high risk, high return venture which, due to low labour costs and high market value for the product, ensured enormous profit for those companies with the resources to take the gamble. Many sealing entrepreneurs lost their investments, but those who were successful were able to reinvest their sealing profits into more stable concerns and build lasting financial empires.

In contrast, sealing vessels today are owned by small, independent ship owners, many of whom are themselves captains. Most of these men began sealing in the same way as the men in this

study--as members of a sealing crew. They started as small boat owners specializing in coastal trade, ferries and other operations, and gradually increased their holdings until they were able to buy boats capable of successfully competing in the large vessel hunt. With the profits made from good years at the ice, and from their other interests, they were able to buy more boats.

The ships bought for sealing are multi-purpose, capable of acting in several different capacities. Outside of the sealing industry the ship owners compete among themselves for charter work for their vessels during the rest of the year. They are relatively small ships of approximately forty to sixty metres in length, and are most often used as support vessels for oceanographic or oil related research, fisheries patrol, oil rig stand-by or ferry services. The owners hire crews from a pool of local seamen, most of whom are known to the owners by person or reputation. These seamen, many of whom work as sealers, depend on the ship owners' business for relatively dependable,

if often sporadic, work throughout the year.

The seal hunt can be a lucrative business for these ship owners. Much like the sealing schooner owners of the eighteenth century who used their ships in the Labrador cod fishery during the summer and fall, sealing is the cornerstone of their business. Charters are often scarce and rarely can be counted on as reliable sources of income. The seal hunt provides capital with which they can maintain and build their small fleets. But it is a dicey game for these entrepreneurs. Unlike their predecessors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries they are comparatively small businessmen with a narrow speciality.

The seal hunt remains a very risky venture. Costs of buying vessels, arranging for licences, insurance, fueling and outfitting are high. While profits to be made during a good year at the ice are considerable, a poor year could create significant financial hardship. Aside from sealing their solvency rests on the ability to find work for their boats in a very limited and competitive market.

Although as a distinctly Newfoundland industry the large vessel seal hunt lagged and almost died during the late 1960's, Newfoundland's participation in the hunt was revived through investment by the present vessel owners. As a result, the hunt, especially at the Front off southern Labrador, has once again become a particularly Newfoundland activity. With the exception of the Norwegians, who are limited by more restrictive quota allowances, nearly all vessels now at the Front are owned by Newfoundlanders.

The fact that most sealing ships are now locally owned and operated has consequences for the way the hunt is perceived within Newfoundland. In the 1950's and 1960's there had been some question about the claim Newfoundland had to "its" hunt when the industry seemed to be dominated by Nova Scotian and Norwegian interests, even though most of the sealing crews on the Nova Scotian vessels were Newfoundlanders. Now, in media reports and in the public consciousness there does not appear to be any such ambiguity. The seal hunt is clearly a Newfoundland industry,

at least in the minds of Newfoundlanders. Although there are seal harvests on the Quebec North Shore and around the Magdalen Islands, the central focus of the industry is Newfoundland. In 1983 there is talk of eliminating the Norwegian connection entirely and developing secondary processing and marketing capabilities within the province. These ideas have come about in reaction to the possibility that traditional European markets may be ruined through the efforts of the anti-seal hunt protest lobby.

For all concerned the seal hunt represents the ability to earn a substantial amount of money, which is always important in a marginal economy. This is especially so because the seal hunt occurs at a critical time of year. It can also be crucial that sealing money comes in a lump sum which favours investment in large and important items.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ATTACHMENTS

The seal hunt has a vivid and ancient history, appreciated if not well known by most Newfoundlanders. This history reflects many of the struggles and hardships associated with Newfoundland's legacy. The present day hunt

represents a continuity of this heritage.

On our second evening at sea I had taken my camera into the mess intending to clean the lenses and get some of the sealers used to my having it. Jacob glared at me from across the table. I did not know him at the time and it was plain he did not trust me. "Don't you go taking pictures of no whitecoats," he told me. "There's more of them than we'll ever need." Jacob then went on with his vehement defence:

> I've got a right. My father was a sealer, and his father. If they (the protesters) stop the seal hunt, and if we can make $2,000.00 on this trip, then it's $2,000.00 that I wouldn't have and that I've got a right to.

He then rose and left the mess.

The highly inaccurate portrayal of the killing of whitecoats by sealers has given the protest movement a powerful, emotional weapon and reduced the issue to a confrontation of extreme positions. The sealers are often depicted as savage infant murders, doomed by their poverty and lack of sophistication to

being the economic pawns of the fur industry. It is true that historically the sealers have been exploited by the sealing industry. But they see themselves as men who must battle with a harsh and unforgiving environment for a sometimes frugal, but honestly received living.

Scott, in his thesis (1975: 141) isolates two major criteria for manhood in Newfoundland society which, he claims, have relevance to motivations for sealing: hardiness, and the ability to provide for one's family. The two criteria used to go hand in hand, for to be a good provider in an economy based on wresting a living from a harsh environment one needed to be physically hardy. Until comparatively recently, in rural Newfoundland an education would have been hardly comparable in importance to the ability to spend long hours doing the back breaking labour of fishing or woods work that put the food on the table and the fire in the hearth. This is now changing. A man can provide for his family just as well, perhaps even more effectively, by using his brain rather than his

brawn. Although a weak provincial economy limits opportunities to enter secondary industry, the bureaucracy, the educational system and the like, these features of a modern economy are much more widely distributed than they were fifty or a hundred years ago. Hence, although there is still an emphasis on physical hardiness, it is no longer such an absolute key to the most important feature of manhood: the ability to provide. Nonetheless, the sealers tend to come from small communities and are generally members of the occupational strata which must rely primarily on their physical stamina as opposed to their intellectual capabilities as the determining factor in their ability to earn a living.

The seal hunt provides one avenue through which this traditional sort of manly ethic is still given expression. It is physically demanding, exclusively male and has a mystique surrounding it that demands attention both from those who have been initiated to it and from those who have not.

Most of the men work near their homes, as inshore fishermen or wage labourers. So home,

with its attendant constraints, obligations and comforts is normal living. The seal hunt is not normal in these terms. During the hunt the men live in a world in which they have minimal comforts. While they may be used to working hard, more is demanded of them. A sealer's life is rough and austere during the trip.

But there is a certain joy often found in deprivation. By stripping away the social fetters of ordinary existence the sealers can free themselves to be "swilers"[1] for the duration of the hunt. The hunt might be seen as a celebration of manliness. Loosed from the ties of family obligations and from the influence of women, they develop relationships which are solidly male. The sealer can "get away from it all" to the harsh, yet simple environment of the hunt. To test his strength with his fellows. To learn, as Billy did, to become a man, in men's terms. When he returns from the hunt he will reap further benefits of family pride, and

1. The sealers rarely call themselves by the old fashioned term "swiler". I use it here because it suggests the transformation into something special, which occurs outside of the routine of their daily lives.

unspoken but obvious approval from community members.

CREW SOLIDARITY AND FRATERNITY

Between sealers a fraternity and a solidarity develops. They see themselves as members of a crew which has more similarities than differences between individuals. This is due in large part to the deprivation the hunt demands. It puts each man on a roughly similar footing in regard to living conditions and in relation to the authority structure of the ship. The ship is set apart, spatially and temporally, from the outside world. It is a kind of limbo in which outside relations are suspended. Social relationships are internal, built within the confines of the ship, without much reference to outside forces or status.[2]

Fraternity and trust are the qualities most valued in fellow crewmembers. A sealer must do his

2. These are characteristics of a total institutional environment (Goffman, 1961). While the idea of a total institution has been applied to analyses of the social structure of ships' crews (Aubert, 1965:236-258), such an analytical framework has limited value when applied to a trip of only one month's duration, especially since the crew only forms for this particular activity.

best to fill the quota in the shortest possible time, often disregarding his own comfort in favour of the group good. He must share in the pervading fraternal spirit among the sealers. That is, none must seem to hold himself above any other crew member. As part of the fraternity, a sealer must also prove himself trustworthy in any number of life threatening situations.

Sealing is much more than a "job". It has an intensity met in many extreme occupations, such as high steel work, underground mining and deep water fishing. In such occupations the penalty for misplacing trust can come swiftly and severely. For each of these high risk occupations there are important mechanisms through which trust is continually tested and maintained.[3] Those who

3. Jack Haas (1977) has written of the trust producing mechanisms among high steel workers. For a comprehensive account of the sociology of British coal mining, see Coal is Our Life by Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter (1956). In the same school of British sociology of occupations, Jeremy Tunstall's The Fishermen (1962) is the classic work on distant water deep sea fishing from the east coast ports of Hull and Grimsby. More recently, Joseba Zulaika's Terra Nova (1981) deals sensitively with the issue of trust among Spanish trawlermen fishing in the waters off Newfoundland. See Chapter V of this thesis for discussion of a trust testing mechanism among sealers.

pass this muster become members of an exclusive club of men who have proven themselves in their particular occupation.

This mutual dependence, if it works well, naturally builds up a sense of solidarity among the crew. There is however, an extra dimension to this intracrew solidarity which is specific to the hunt and has a meaning which transcends the situational solidarity one would expect to find in most endeavours in which men must rely on their fellows.

ADVENTURE

The hunt has its own properties which are distinct from the normal flow of life. Georg Simmel has given a definition of "adventure" which seems appropriate. The adventure, he states, is a segment of experience bounded by time and space and separated from normal existence.

> More precisely, the most general form of adventure is its dropping out of the continuity of life. "Wholeness of life," after all, refers to the fact that a consistent process runs through the individual components of life, however crassly and irreconcilably distinct they may be. What we call the adventure stands in contrast to that interlocking of life-links, to that feeling that those countercurrents,

> turnings, and knots still, after all, spin forth a continuous thread. An adventure is certainly a part of our existence, directly contiguous with other parts which precede and follow it; at the same time, however, in its deeper meaning, it occurs outside the usual continuity of this life (Simmel, 1959: 243).

There is more than a separation from land and family ties during the hunt. There is also a separation from all other forms of activity in which the sealer might participate. A few of the sealers were merchant sailors for at least part of the year, either as part of the regular crew of the ship we were on, or on other Newfoundland based vessels.[4] For them another month's journey, even in spite of the extra work (for extra pay) might be considered to be a part of their routine lives. But even for these men the hunt holds its special place. Harry, it will be remembered, wavered about committing himself to another seal hunt the next year because it would mean missing his regular time off from the ship. Then, realizing it was foolish to

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4. These men worked as regular sealers and should not be confused with the engineers and ship's officers on our vessel who had a different position in relation to the hunt.

claim he could resist the lure of the hunt, he said he would not miss it for the world. Another man, an initiate who worked full time on our ship, was fond of clapping me on the back and asking, "Well, Guy, how does it feel to be on the greatest hunt in the world?"[5] He thought the hunt had a special place, at least in terms of scale.

The landsmen, who hunt closer to shore using longliners, small boats or by simply walking out from shore to shoot adult seals or catch them in nets, account for nearly two thirds of the east coast seal kill (The Rounder Vol. II, No. 6), but their efforts cannot really be viewed as adventure in comparison to the large vessel hunt. Although adventures might happen while they are hunting seals, it will not be because they are hunting. For them, sealing is much more routine. It is an integral part of their annual cycle of taking a harvest

5. His reference to the "greatest hunt in the world" comes from the revised title of G.A. England's book. I know of no other hunt which matches the Newfoundland seal hunt in terms of the number of animals killed within such a short period of time, and which has continued for so long.

from the sea. There is not the separation from normal life flow which comes with the big ship hunt. They do not leave their homes for an extended period of time and they do not form a special group which comes together for the sole purpose of killing seals. They are more likely to go out with the men from their own community, probably the same men they fish with during the summer. And although they usually kill a greater total number of seals than do the ship based hunters, the landsman kill is spread over approximately four thousand licenced sealers, and over a much longer season. In contrast, less than three hundred large vessel sealers work for a period of about one month. The intensity of the experience is not comparable.

This intensification of experience which separates the seal hunt from ordinary endeavours stems from characteristics integral to it. Thirty men, or, as in the old days, nearly three hundred men, crowd onto a small ship taking them into a beautiful, harsh, strange and dangerous environment. It is an intense experience. The ice and sea is unpredictable, hostile and

very hazardous. There is a contradiction between life and death. The seals, as with the many other animals man has hunted and depended upon for survival, must die in order that the men may provide for their families. The ice itself has taken a staggering toll of human life and every sealer knows the gruesome consequence that has been levelled upon sealers in the past.

TRADITION

From these natural tensions has sprung a deep sense of tradition associated with the hunt. The tragic irony of life and death at the hunt has found expression in an abundance of song and poetry, of painful death and joyous return (Lamson, 1979; Ryan and Small, 1978). It has what the Irish would call "a terrible beauty". These remembrances, reflecting nearly two centuries of sealing, makes the sealer aware that he is not out merely to kill seals for a profit. While the history of the industry represents an enterprise in which great fortunes were made by a few over the frozen bodies of many, the sealers are not alienated from their labour.

They volunteer and compete for berths either from economic necessity, or for a desire to see what it's like. "My father was a sealer, and his father, and his father before him. I have a right (and in another sense, a duty) to be here." The cultural history of sealing is long and deep; for many Newfoundlanders it is a part of an integrity that has helped to keep them a distinct people who still feel separate from mainland Canada despite the encroachment of mainstream Canadian values.

In the face of external pressure against the hunt, these traditions find form in an expressive cultural rhetoric which unites Newfoundland against outside interference, especially around this issue (Lamson, 1979). The symbols which this cultural corpus supplies are most often used by politicians, media, clergy, the artistic community and the like--all manipulators of societal symbols. The sealers are held up as particularly fine examples of the tradition oriented outports, which are central to the theme of the symbolic message these champions of Newfoundlanders are trying to convey. The sealers

do not see themselves as being used, but they do recognize that this manipulation gives them a prominence they would not otherwise have.

Although the cultural/traditional hyperbole is a catalyst that boosts the perceived importance of the hunt, once the ship has left the harbour this attached importance is forgotten. The things in and of the ship are all that is meaningful. And from the vantage of the ship, all the land based protest, counter protest and nationalistic ritual seems absurd.

The men come together from different places and many do not know each other except in the context of sealing. They share cultural understandings which belong to rural Newfoundland and sealing. For young men such as Billy the seal hunt is a chance to learn and appreciate some of his culture in a concentrated experience. It heightens a sense of belonging to a particular island and a particular people. It represents the continuation of a tradition of a certain

style of economic adaptation and offers initiation to a group of men who have proved their ability to take the punishment the hunt demands. It gives the neophyte a chance to learn a number of technical and emotional abilities: the skill to make a sheath and to pelt quickly and cleanly; the strengthening of his resolve to be able to detach himself from the gruesomeness of the slaughter; the social skill to develop meaningful relationships with work mates. To the more experienced sealer the hunt offers the possibility of passing on his knowledge and skill, and keeping the tradition alive.

Newfoundland is very much oriented toward the sea. It is an island which was first settled because of the rich resources of its waters. The sea, and a heritage of a seafaring life defines many Newfoundlander's identity, much as the prairie and a heritage of farming would define the identity of many who have historical roots in Saskatchewan. "Oh, we're mad for the sea," one of the sealers liked to tell me. Now, in the late twentieth century, seafaring is not a necessary life style for most people, and

most present day opportunities do not offer the same quality of experience they once did. Modern trawlers, container ships and oil drilling rigs have more in common with an industrial plant than with the wooden Labrador schooners that men like Ches spent much of their lives working on. The seal hunt is one voyage which can partially fulfil a personal desire to gain or maintain links with one's heritage. It is also a voyage for which the participant will receive unspoken credit from other members of his community for having made. The social pressures in rural Newfoundland tend to be equalizing and egalitarian. A man would never boast about his skill or toughness. On the other hand, every member of his community will be aware of his personal biography, and a trip to the ice speaks for itself.

Once a man has been to the ice for one trip, he may personally feel he should go more than once. This will strengthen his identity as a sealer, and the more often he goes the stronger this identity will become.

The seal hunt is an integral part of the

history, tradition and culture of Newfoundland, especially the north east coast and the Avalon Peninsula, and has a depth which is not lost on the men who persue it. By participating in it a man is affirming a committment to the unique life style which has produced him: a life style based upon the living resources of the sea.

One of the simplest and most articulate examples of a sealer expressing how much the hunt means to him beyond the dollars earned was given me by a man who had worked on the M.V. Prince Andrew the year I was out. His ship became jammed by ice in one of the small harbours of northern Newfoundland. The crew worked the entire month, trying to loosen the ship, without earning a penny, but this did not seem to bother the sealer at all. In fact, he claimed he would certainly be out again next year and that in any case money was not his prime incentive. "It's in my blood, me son... you go out to the ice and if you like it, it just gets to you. It gets under your skin."

This simple statement sums up the whole

series of subjective motivations for sealing. It is a reference to the adventure, the fraternity and the solidarity the sealer shares, and the deeply rooted tradition felt by him. It is meaningful because it is a part of that which defines him. The hunt itself is an element of his heritage and by participating in it he is expressing his cultural foundations.

At this point I wish to refer to a people far removed from the sealers, the Basseri nomads of South Persia (Iran) studied by Barth (1961). The Basseri pastoralists migrated annually from the coastal hills of the Persian Gulf five hundred kilometres north across the steppe lands to the slopes of the Mountains of Kuh-i-bul. In the 1930's, the central government in Tehran forced the Basseri to settle. But in the turmoil following Reza Shah's abdication in 1941, Barth writes, the sanctions behind the Basseri's forced sedentarization were removed. The tribesmen responded by resuming their migrations despite the fact that

> ...most of them had very few animals, and some appear to have resumed migrations entirely without stock--the

> supreme value to them lay in the freedom to migrate, not in the circumstances that make it economically advantageous (Barth, 1961: 149).

The Basseri, like the sealers, had developed a relationship with an economic event: their migration. The cultural and social fabric of their lives was enmeshed with the practical aspects of their economy. Barth argues that much of their ritual life was played out in acts of seemingly utilitarian concern. Because their lives were so entwined with the way they earned their living, and because this involved such a strong subjective experience, the explicit technical acts of following their economy were filled with implicit cultural meaning. I quote Barth at length to give some of the texture of this life:

> The camp itself, with its semicircle of fires, alone in an empty landscape, and constantly repitched in new localities in changing circumstances, serves as a clear expression of the social unity of the group which inhabits it, and of the mechanisms whereby that group is maintained. The caravan which travels the long way over steppes and through valleys and across passes cannot but become a procession: those at the head lead the way, they must decide which path to take, while

> those behind can have no active part in that decision; the aggregation in a camel and donkey train and the dispersal over a restricted plain for camping repeat daily the social facts of group allegiance and divisions; the sullen hostility of unfamiliar spectators wherever the caravan road goes through a village marks the caravan off as a group totally different from the sedentary communities. Finally, the scatter sometimes of a thousand tents over a single valley floor rich in pastures, the parallel movement over a plain of scores of caravans, visible as low lingering clouds of dust on the horizon--such occasions serve to dramatize the community of membership in tribe and confederacy....It is an economic necessity for the Basseri to move with their flocks in each season to where pastures can be found. But the migration has a value to them exceeding even this....The feeling of general excitement, the richness of "meaning" in the technical acts of coming under way and approaching this goal that is only a stage of a longer journey, was a strong subjective experience....When we topped the last pass, and saw before us the mountains for which we had been heading, all the women of the caravan broke out in song, for the first and only time on the whole trip....The migration cycle is used as a primary schema for the conceptualization of time and space...the participants respond, not to the utilitarian aspects of the activities--to good pastures and potential butter-fat--but to the movement and its dramatic form--to the meanings implicit in the sequence of activities (Barth, 1961: 148-153).

Barth devised a simple scheme to attempt to measure the sense of excitement the Basseri found

in their daily treks. He noted the times at which the camp awoke and the times at which they broke camp to move on. He found a cyclical pattern in the period of time it took the camp to pick up and move in the morning. As the nomads got closer to an area they favoured for a major encampment, their growing expectations and tensions were reflected in a shorter time spent getting ready to move. When the major camp broke, the tension started building for three to six days until they reached another.

With the sealers this same sort of pattern occurs, the difference being that this cycle is yearly rather than daily or weekly. At the end of the trip no one expressed much desire to return to the hunt. Even Isaac told me after the 1982 hunt, "I'm tired of the racket. Twenty springs is enough." But in the summer they forget the worst of the hunt, and over the winter they start remembering the best, and by February Bill "...can't wait for the boys to get to town."

Ches has been sealing since he was an adolescent. As a young man he would walk over the ice from his island home in Bonavista Bay

thirty kilometres to the railway station at Gambo, pay a reduced seaman's fare on the train and ride into St. John's where he would take his berth with hundreds of other men who had made similar journeys. He did not seal in 1981, thinking he was too old. But I saw him in late February of 1982, just after his sixtieth birthday. He had a fit of angst over being too late to get a berth.

> Oh, I don't want to go ice huntin' anymore. You can live without going ice huntin'. Look at Leo and Cecil. They's still alive and never went ice huntin' in their lives. And get all dirty and the old seal fat all over everything...Nah, I'd never get a berth anyway. I talked to Peter and he said the old man's got more men than he needs already.

He was saying he would not want to go, but it was completely obvious he was aching to have another spring at the ice. I next saw him aboard the ship in St. John's harbour. He left for the ice the next day.

The ships sail annually, like the Basseri caravan, into a strange and wonderful world, exciting and exhilarating. For Ches it is not so important that he make some money, or prove he

is as strong at sixty as Bill is at twenty. He needs to be a part of it because he has always been a part of it. It is in his blood.

EPILOGUE

As of this writing (February 1983) it appears the long saga of the seal hunt may be coming to a close. The protest has caught the ears of the European Parliament and there is a growing likelihood it will recommend a total ban of Canadian seal products to European Economic Community (EEC) member countries. Since the EEC accounts for approximately seventy-five percent of the market for Canadian harp and hood seal products it is unlikely the industry could survive such a blow, although some effort is being made to attract new markets, possibly in Japan and in mainland Canada. The Carino Company has reduced the prices offered for seal pelts to less than fifty percent of what they were in 1982, and have stated they will accept only adult seal pelts. They recognize that the whitecoat hunt gives the protest its most powerful fuel and have announced that if any whitecoat or blue back hunt takes place this year, they will refuse to accept seal skins of any sort. This is an attempt to reduce criticisms in an effort to salvage at least

part of the industry. Several fur trading houses in Europe have said they will voluntarily stop buying whitecoat pelts.

In response to this threat, the sealers, many of whom are landsmen and would normally be out hunting at this time of the year, have formed the Canadian Sealers Association and are making a desperate effort to alleviate some of the effects of a total ban. They would like government aid to prop up this year's hunt in hopes they will be able to find more stable markets by next year.

The protest which has upset the sealing industry has been growing rapidly. The European Commission claims to have received three million letters of protest against the seal hunt. The movement is spearheaded by three or four preservationist groups, but less extreme conservation organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund steer clear of the issue, pointing out that harp and hood seals are not on any endangered species lists. One group is presently sailing a ship from Seattle, Washington with the intention of ramming any

sealing vessels that venture out of St. John's harbour this year.

The tactics of the protesters are well known. They emphasise the anthrophomorphic characteristics of the seals, for which the whitecoats are particularly suited, and attract media attention by staging events which make impressive news items. Some groups, such as the Greenpeace Foundation, argue that they are using the sealing issue to raise public consciousness of man's inhumanity to the environment (Hunter, 1979:249). Others, like the groups threatening to ram sealing vessels, are less subtle. Brian Davies and his International Fund for Animal Welfare have probably been the most anti-sealing lobbyists. They send by mail, hand deliver, or publish in newspapers pictures of the hunt which show adult harp seals purportedly grieving over their dead pups or pictures of sealers doing their work. The message is simple and clear in these pictures. The sealers are depicted as brutal men who butcher

baby animals for profit. For the uninitiated urban dweller who is not used to seeing animals killed the pictures draw a powerful emotive response. As one of the sealing captains observed on a national television show, "It's white ice and red blood and that makes pretty good contrast." Alongside the pictures is a postcard fill out preaddressed to an appropriate politician and a request for a donation.

The protest groups follow up their emotive appeal with two arguments: killing seals is inhumane, and the seals are in danger of extinction. I have dealt with the humane issue in Chapter IV. I am convinced the seals I killed felt no pain, and I know the other men are concerned that they dispatch the seals quickly and competently. As for the potential danger of extinction, in the fall of 1982 the European Parliament and the Government of Canada requested scientific advice from the International Council of the Exploration of the Sea "...on aspects of the

population dynamics and state of the harp and hooded seal stocks of the Northwest Atlantic..." (Anon., 1982). A working group comprising scientists from seven countries concluded in October 1982 that under the present quota system the harp seal herd had grown from between 1.2 million and 1.6 million animals in the late 1960's to between 1.5 million and 2.0 million in the period 1977-1978 (Anon., 1982: 7). The group unanimously concluded existing data did not allow "...reliable population assessment of... hood seals." Dr. Donald Bowen, a Canadian Fisheries biologist working for the federal government, and a member of the working group has told me the group believes the harp seal stocks are in a healthy condition. Hood seals present a more difficult problem for biologists since the group which whelps off of Newfoundland may be a part of larger herds in the Davis Straits area. There are considerable logistical problems encountered when trying to assess this population; they are a long way from land, and out of helicopter range. Since harp seals congregate in a relatively compact area it is

much easier to conduct accurate population research on them.

For the sealers, the most immediate concern in the face of a much diminished hunt is economic. They may be forced to adapt their individual economies to a post seal hunt era. The hunt is always a gamble, but it often contributes a very substantial portion of individual earnings. For people who are living in a marginal economy based on pluralistic uses of economic resources these earnings are especially important. Bill, for example, earns roughly $7,000.00 per year from fishing if he does well. For the past four years he has earned between $2,000.00 and $3,000.00 from sealing, bringing his total earnings to somewhat less than $10,000.00 (gross) in good years. This compares with industrial composite average annual wages for Newfoundland of $14,995.00 (gross) in 1980 (Chartbook of Selected Statistics for Newfoundland and Labrador, 1981: Table 4). Without the seal hunt he will be making about half the salary of the average industrial wage earner in Newfoundland. He should be eligible for

Unemployment Insurance benefits but his total earnings will still be meagre.

For Isaac, losing an income he has been able to more or less rely upon for the past twenty years may be even more serious. Since he gets only sporadic work throughout the year, in fish plants, road construction and the like, his seal hunt earnings may account for nearly half of his total income. He will probably not accrue enough weeks worked to qualify for Unemployment Insurance benefits, and will have to rely on welfare or social assistance. It will hurt his pride considerably.

The protesters argue that the seal hunt adds very little to the total Newfoundland economy. They are right, in that sealing itself added only about 0.02 percent to the total economy of Newfoundland in 1978. But this money is distributed in subtle ways which greatly magnify its importance. Timing is crucial. Since sealing occurs at a time of year when other economic opportunities are closed it helps provide stability to many household economies.

Sealing comes in the spring so the money can be used for outfitting for the summer fishery. Without the seal hunt many inshore and nearshore fishermen would have difficulty making payments on boats, and the finance companies may foreclose their mortgages. Fishermen may have difficulty replacing damaged gear in time for the summer. This will create significant financial hardship beyond the simple lost revenues from sealing itself.

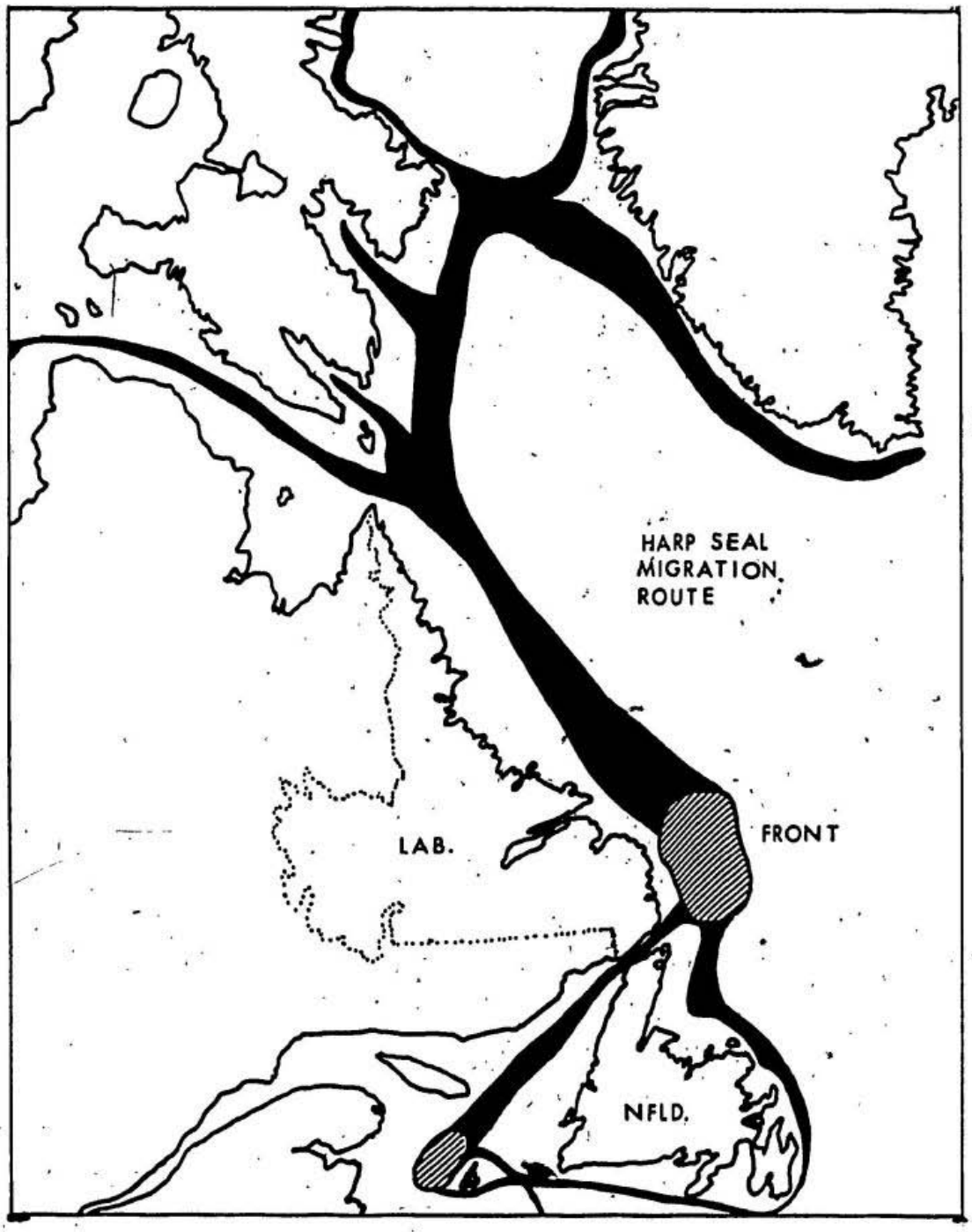
The provincial government is massively over extended and probably won't be able to help alleviate this burden. The federal government is not sensitive enough to help individual cases.

My thesis has argued that the meanings of sealing transcend economic importance. Perhaps this is where loss of the seal hunt would be felt most subtly, but also very powerfully.

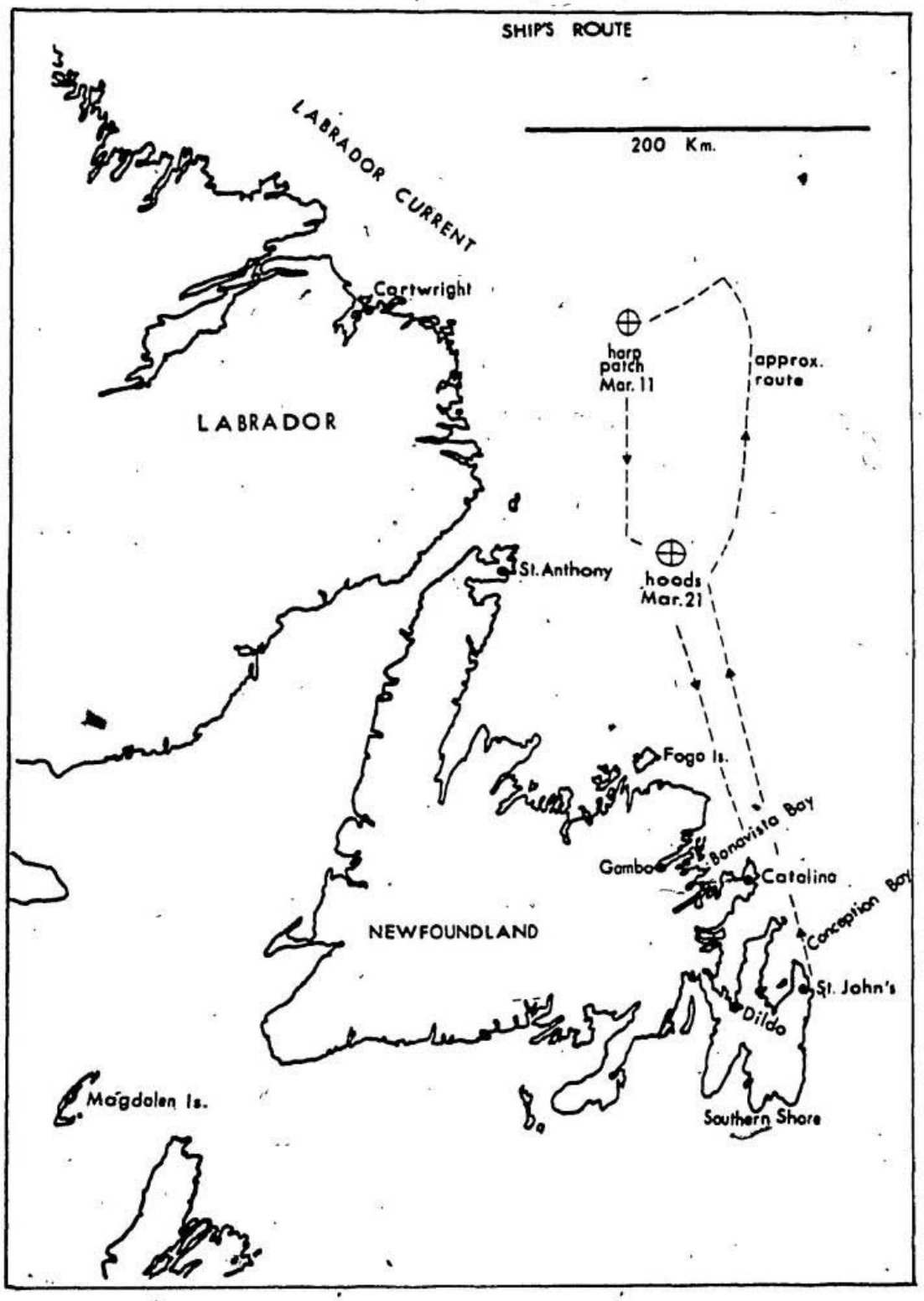
In the process of fighting to save their seal hunt, Newfoundlanders have resurrected the hunt as a metaphor for strength and stoicism in their heritage. If it is lost, defeat will come at

considerable cost to national pride. The more bitter since lost to a phantom enemy; the hastily reached opinion of three million Europeans, many of whom would not be able to place Newfoundland on the map, let alone understand the subtle relations between man and animal on the ice of the North Atlantic.

MAPS



MAP 1


SHIP'S ROUTE
200 Km.
LABRADOR CURRENT
Cartwright
LABRADOR
harp patch Mar. 11
approx. route
St. Anthony
hoods Mar. 21
Fogo Is.
Bonavista Bay
Gambo
Catalina
Conception Bay
NEWFOUNDLAND
St. John's
Dildo
Magdalen Is.
Southern Shore

MAP 2

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Greenpeace dinghy harassing sealing ships in St. John's harbour. (Photo: Raoul Andersen)



Part of the convoy of sealing ships photographed from the helicopter pad. The ice forms a breakwater making calm water.



A view from the barrel.



The ships are at the edge of the whelping patch.
From here they will travel separately.





Looking for hoods. The gunners are in the bow. The men on the rail are waiting for orders to go onto the ice.



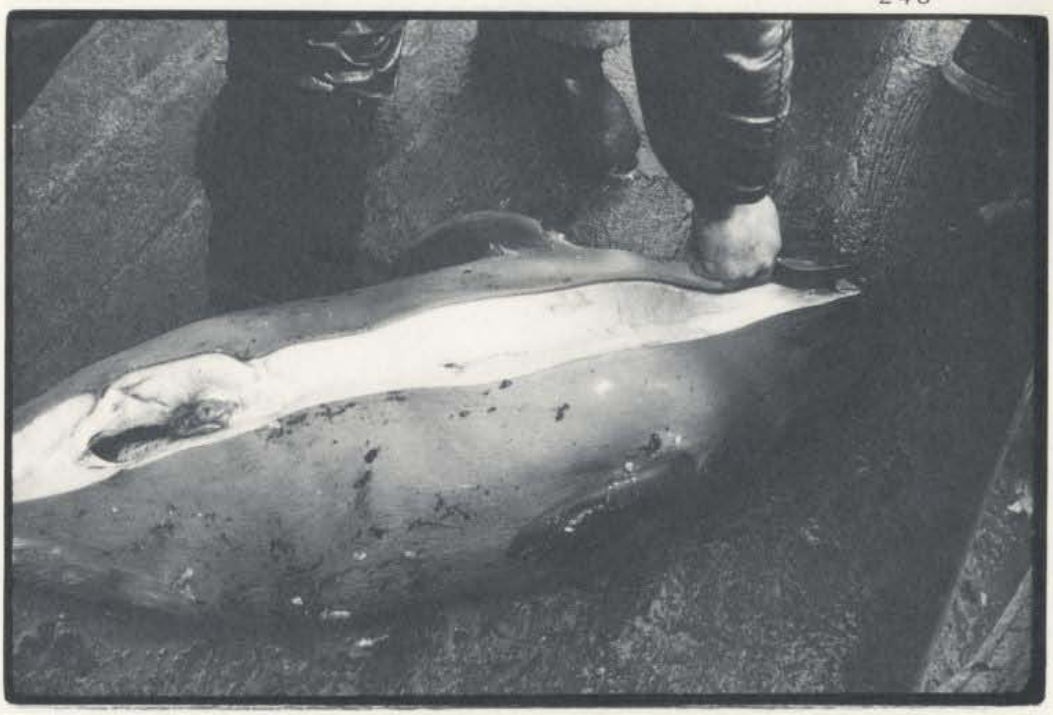
The ship is moving slowly. He must judge his step carefully.



Killing a blueback.



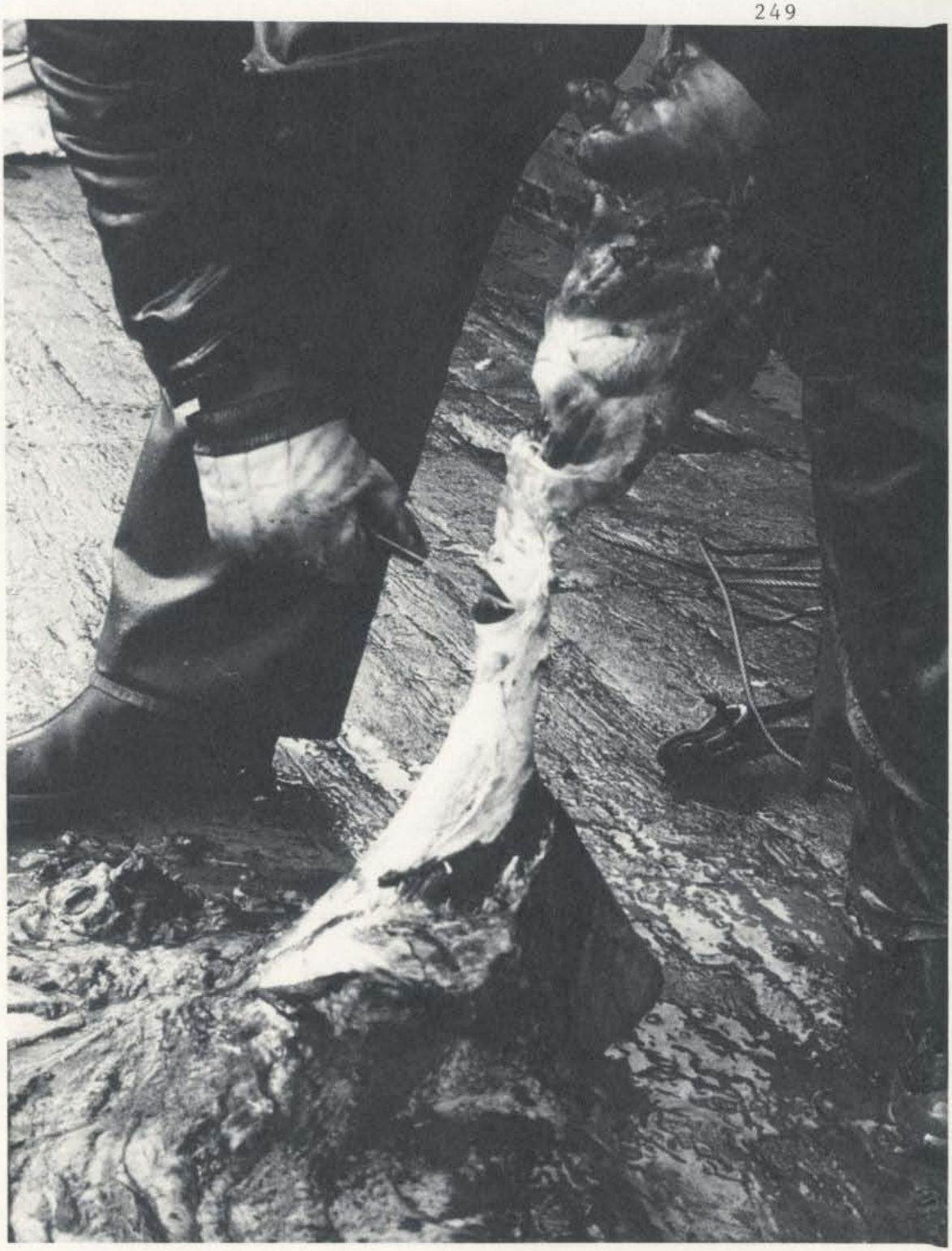
Attaching the whipline to a blueback.



The pelt is cut in one smooth stroke.



The pelter lifts the rib cage to trim underneath.



The flipper is pulled inside out and neatly severed.



Trimming the scutters, or hind flippers, is one of the most delicate parts of pelting.



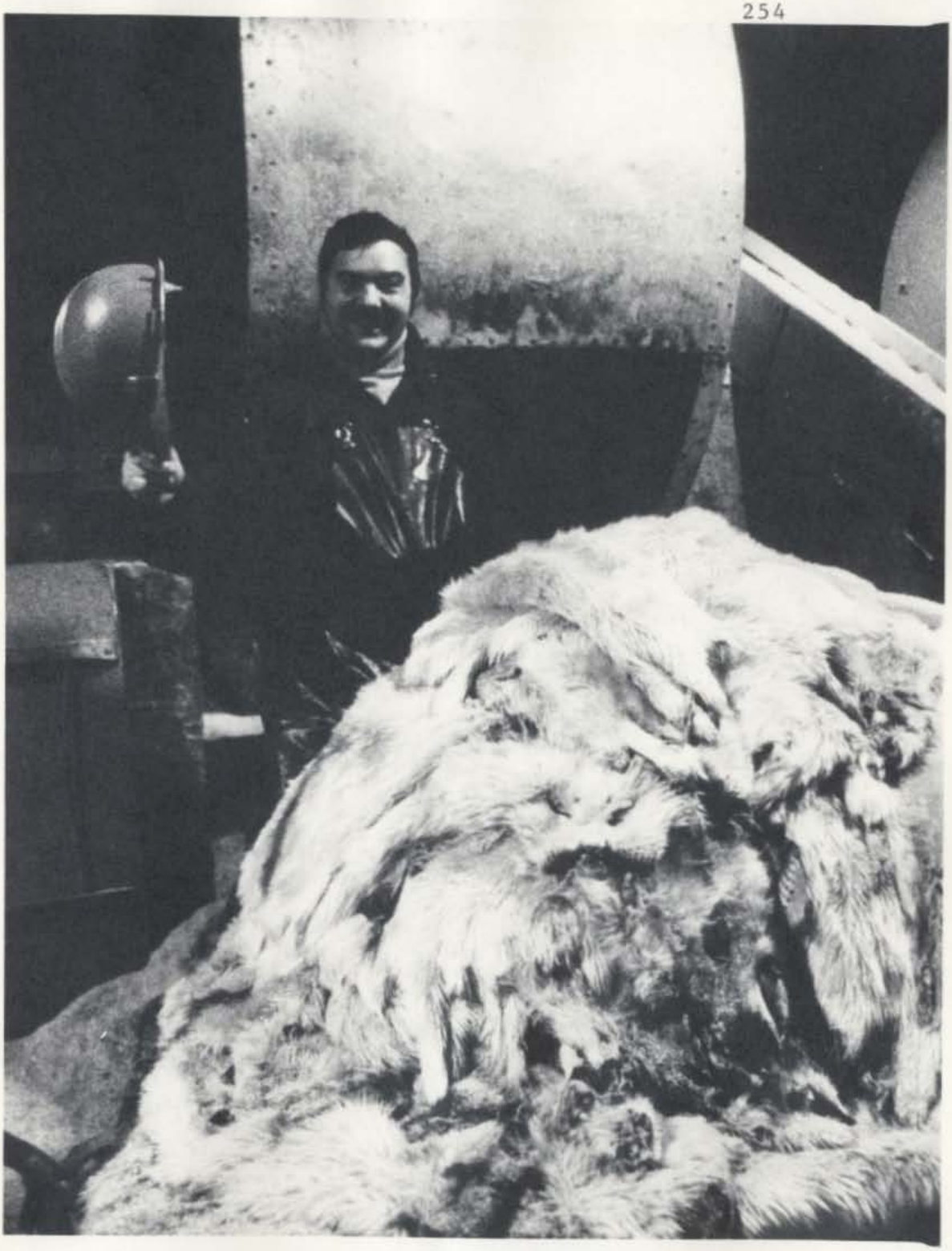
Snow is shovelled on top of the flippers to keep them cold. Although some of them remain in the hold for a month, they keep very well.



Adult hood pelts being winched from the hold. Before unloading began the pelts were piled approximately to the top of the man's head. This pound is about two thirds empty.



Whitecoat pelts. From here they go through a machine, located just inside the building, which presses the fat into oil. The fat free pelts are then washed, rolled in sawdust, and tumble dried.



A portion of the sea's bounty, fresh from the dryer.



The grader, a Norwegian, checks for hair fastness, cleanliness, and knife nicks in the back of the pelt.



The pelts are salted in brine while awaiting shipment to Norway where they will be tanned. Approximately seventy-five percent of the market for Canadian seal products is in western Europe.