

Ice explorers to search for Shackleton's stricken ship

By Jake Hurfurt

TRAPPED and crushed by the merciless ice of Antarctica, the wreck of HMS Endurance has sat at the bottom of the freezing ocean for more than a century.

But the last resting place of explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton's doomed ship may soon be discovered.

Researchers on a New Year expedition to the Weddell Sea, one of the coldest and harshest places on Earth, hope they will be at last able to find the Endurance using robot submarines.

They are planning to study one of the region's huge ice shelves, but also plan to search the area where the Endurance broke up in November 1915. The ship could be as much as 10,000ft under water.

'If we are that close to one of the most iconic vessels in polar exploration, we have got to go and look for it,' Julian Dowdeswell, director of the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge and chief scientist on the Weddell expedition.

'The worst portion of the worst sea in the world,' was how Shack-

From disaster... to heroic rescue

- December 1914: Shackleton leaves South Georgia, hoping to make the first land crossing of Antarctica with his Imperial Trans-Antarctic Mission.
- February 1915: Endurance is trapped. Crew camp on ice.

- April 1916: The crew make 340 mile journey in tiny lifeboats to Elephant Island.
- Then Shackleton and five others sail 750 miles back to South Georgia. In August, he returns with a rescue ship.

leton described the Weddell Sea. Though the Norwegian-built Endurance was said to be the strongest ship afloat, in October 1915 Shackleton was forced to give the order to abandon it. Ice that had trapped the ship since the previous January began crushing its timbers. Endurance sank on November 21, with Shackleton

telling his the crew: 'She's gone boys'. In his diary he wrote: 'At 5pm she went down by the head... I cannot write about it.'

Without their ship, the 28 crew found themselves marooned for six months, camping on ice floes and eating penguins and seals.

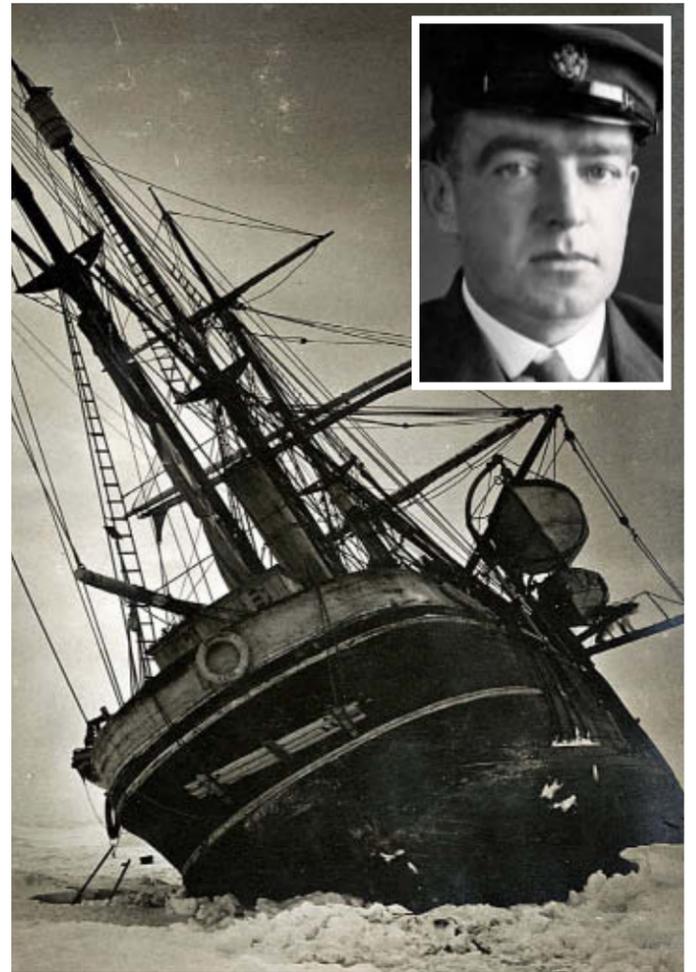
Shackleton and five others took one of Endurance's lifeboats in

April 2016 and, incredibly, sailed the 750 miles to South Georgia for help, returning that August to take those left behind to safety.

On New Year's Day a team of scientists will board the SA Agulhas II, a 13,500-tonne icebreaker, to prepare for their journey to the Weddell Sea. They are hoping to reach the Larsen C ice shelf to

study how it breaks up into icebergs and the effect of this on glaciers feeding it and on sea levels.

As they return from the 45-day expedition, the team will decide if they are able to hunt for the Endurance. John Shears, leader of the expedition, told the Guardian: 'If it was easy to do someone would have done it a long time ago.'



Death throes: The abandoned Endurance heels over as polar ice crushes its timbers in 1915. Inset: Shackleton

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