John Hugh Mather and the north Russian campaign, 1919

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ABSTRACT. John Hugh Mather was a member of the crew of *Terra Nova*, the vessel of R. F. Scott's expedition of 1910–1913. After World War I, he participated in the allied campaign against the Bolsheviks in Arctic Russia and achieved considerable distinction in that area of operations.

John Hugh Mather (Fig. 1) took part in Robert Falcon Scott's expedition of 1910–1913 as a member of the crew of *Terra Nova*, but his name is not, at present, widely known. In his subsequent career, however, he achieved commissioned rank and considerable distinction both in his wartime services and also with regard to his administration of the Antarctic Club. He was born in London in 1887 and joined the London Division of the RNVR in 1904. By 1906 he had become a Petty Officer First Class (*Naval and Military Record* 1914). He was one of several members of the RNVR who assisted in the fitting out of *Terra Nova* on the Thames Embankment before the expedition. He was then selected as a member of the crew and, later, he acquired taxidermy skills in order to assist Dr E.A. Wilson in preserving his bird, animal and marine specimens (Scott 1913 II: 297). On 20 January 1913, Mather was detailed to act as assistant to the secretary of the expedition (*Naval and Military Record* 1914). After the expedition, he later assisted E.R.G.R. Evans with his lecture tours and fund raising (Elizabeth Marsden, personal communication, 2005).



Fig. 1. John Hugh Mather. Photograph taken outside Derby House, Liverpool in 1945.

Just before World War I, Mather was commissioned becoming acting Sub-Lieutenant and substantive Sub-Lieutenant on the same day, 3 July 1914 (*Naval and Military Record* 1914). He was placed in charge of the Signal School at Crystal Palace, then the headquarters of the Royal Naval Division. From 1915, the organisation included the first wireless school (Second souvenir 1915: 19–21). Mather was clearly an efficient officer as he had, by 31 May 1915, reached the rank of temporary Lieutenant Commander (*Naval and Military Record* 1915).

Following the successful Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917, the Allies became apprehensive that Murmansk might be captured by the Germans and used as a submarine base (Luckett 1971: 197). British, American, Canadian, Italian and Serbian troops were landed at Murmansk in 1918 and later, at Archangel, in support of the White Russian armies which were engaging the Bolsheviks (Fig. 2). Other forces were landed in such places as the Baltic, the Black Sea and Vladivostok and the political situation became highly confused. As Secretary of State for War, Winston Churchill obtained Cabinet approval in 1919 for further forces to be sent to Arctic Russia in order to ensue an orderly withdrawal of British forces, and to gain time for the Whites by assisting them with a campaign against the Bolsheviks (Luckett 1971: 207).

Early in 1919, Mather volunteered for service in that theatre. He was transferred to the army and granted, on 18 February 1919, the temporary rank of Major in the Royal Engineers (*London Gazette* 1919). It is probable that Mather was selected for this service because of his experience in the Antarctic (*The Times* (London) 15 April 1919: 11). Also serving in north Russia in 1919, and also in the rank of temporary Major, was Sir Ernest Shackleton. Many Antarctic veterans gravitated towards this zone of operations, including *Endurance* expedition members F. Wild, Dr A. Macklin, F. Worsley and L. Hussey and *Terra Nova* personnel Dr E. Atkinson and V. Campbell (Huntford 1985: 662–666).

Two brigades were sent to north Russia in 1919 and it seems certain that Mather was part of this group. He was initially based at Murmansk in April (Mather 1919) but it appears that he was later transferred to the Royal Naval force, despite the fact that he was in the army, near Archangel. This force was based on the Dvina River. It was under the command of a Royal Navy Captain, who had a headquarters ship *Borodino*, a requisitioned paddle steamer. His forces comprised large 'China' class gunboats, small monitors and coastal motorboats (CMBs) of the 55 ft class (Strakhovsky 1944: 189). It appears

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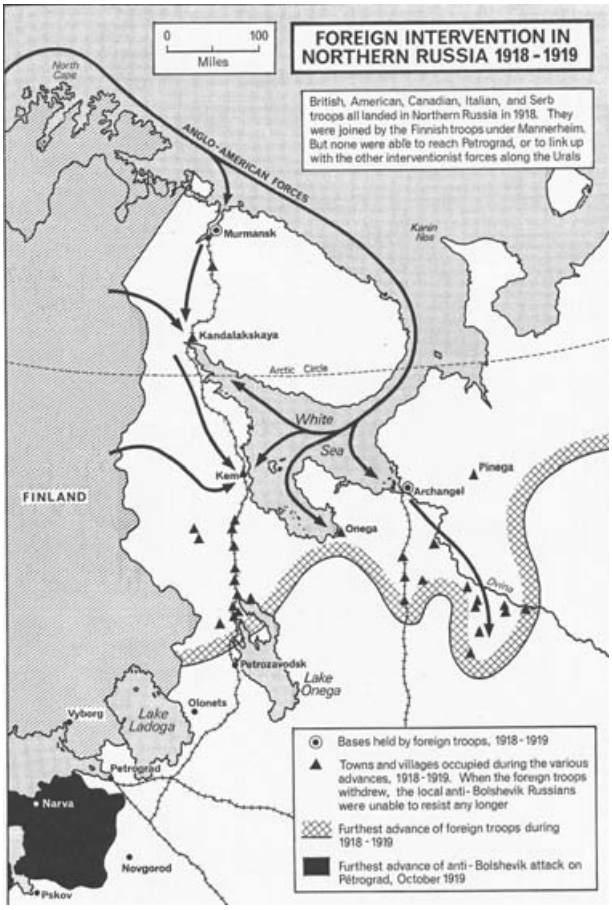


Fig. 2. Map depicting foreign intervention in northern Russia, 1918–1919.

that because of ice at the mouth of the Dvina River, the CMBs were transported by rail towards Lake Onega to the southwest of Archangel. Lake Onega became the scene of a naval action in which Mather was to play an important and dramatic part.

The lake itself was of strategic importance as the navigable River Svir connects it to Lake Ladoga that in turn has direct water communication with St Petersburg. Lake Onega also connects with the waterway that eventually leads to Moscow. Unfortunately, the railway terminated some two miles from the lake. Those involved were then obliged to fell fir trees, to fashion rough rollers and to drag the boats overland to the shores of the lake (Marsden 2006).

Early in June, four armed Bolshevik vessels were observed steaming on Lake Onega northwest towards Medvyejya. Mather, in command of a flotilla of CMBs, engaged the enemy and for this action he was later awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). The citation reads:

> For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty, on the 5 June 1919, before Shunski Bor, Lake Onega, when in command of four motor boats [sic] he engaged four enemy steamers, carrying many heavy guns, in order to relieve the Russians who were being heavily attacked. Notwithstanding the disparity in armament he caused the enemy vessels to retire south, and so enabled the Russians to counter-attack with success. He showed throughout great courage and devotion to duty and set a fine example to all (National Archives 1920). (In this citation, the Russians referred to are the Whites; the enemy are the Bolsheviks.)

Lake Onega was one of the southernmost points to which the allied expedition and the White Russian forces were able to advance (Fig. 2; Gilbert 1993: 94). Mather may also have been involved in another similar action near the same time, on this occasion with the support of a seaplane squadron. This was also successful in achieving a similar result (Maynard 1928: 234–235).

In July 1919, mutinies among the White Russian troops indicated that they could not hold out on their own. General Ironside, the British commander, therefore decided to withdraw all allied forces from Archangel. This evacuation was completed by 27 September and Murmansk, itself, was evacuated by 12 October 1919 (Young 1986 XI: 3498)

Mather was demobilised on 31 January 1920. In addition to his DSO, he received a Mention in Dispatches for his service in Murmansk and was also awarded the Volunteer Reserve Decoration. Mather eventually retired from the RNVR in 1937. Following the outbreak of World War II he was appointed as a duty Commander on the staff of the Admiral in charge Western Approaches. His last naval duty appears to have been in 1954 when he took part in the RNVR Jubilee Parade in London before HM the Queen.

In civilian life, before and after World War II, Mather was employed by J & E Hall Ltd a company dealing in the refrigeration of perishable cargoes, especially in freezing fish catches before return to port. In 1948, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society on the recommendation of Frank Debenham and James Wordie (Royal Geographical Society 1948).

He maintained his Antarctic interests as co-founder of the Antarctic Club in 1929. As Secretary and Treasurer of the Club, Mather continued until 1954 when he was elected President but opted to remain as such for only one year as his health began to decline. He died on 10 April 1957 after a long illness. One of his obituaries read in part: ‘He knew personally, and kept in touch with, almost every member of British Antarctic expeditions of the last 50 years, and it was due to his untiring labour that many Antarctic explorers have been able to renew annually friendships made many years ago’ (Stephenson 1957).

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An incident of polar bear infanticide and cannibalism on Phippsøya, Svalbard

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ABSTRACT. A case of polar bear infanticide and cannibalism is reported from Phippsøya, Svalbard. In this instance, a cub of some 7 months was killed by an adult male bear, which was in poor condition, in the close proximity of the mother, which was also in poor condition. It seems probable that the attack was made for nutritional gain.

Periodic reports of infanticide, intraspecific predation, and cannibalism have been noted in polar bears (*Ursus maritimus*) (Taylor and others 1985; Lunn and Stenhouse 1985; Derocher and Wiig 1999; Dyck and Daley 2002; Amstrup and others 2006), brown bears (*U. arctos*) (Troyer and Hensel 1962; Swenson and others 1997), and black bears (*U. americanus*) (Davis and Harestad 1996). In polar bears, the predator is often an adult male, although in many cases the predator's sex and age are uncertain. Polar bears are sexually dimorphic with adult males being roughly twice the mass of females (Derocher and others 2005). The predated animals are often smaller dependent offspring although adult females and juveniles are also vulnerable (Taylor and others 1985; Derocher and Wiig 1999; Amstrup and others 2006). Intraspecific killing and cannibalism should be viewed as separate events because killing does not always include consumption. Furthermore, infanticide is viewed as a specific form of killing. Proposed reasons for infanticide include: use of young for nutritional gain, to reduce competition for resources, sexual selection, parental manipulation of progeny, and social pathology (Hrdy and Hausfater 1984). More recently, infanticide in brown bears was linked to disruption of social structure in harvested populations (Swenson and others 1997) although this appears to vary between populations (McLellan 2005).

This note reports an incident of polar bear cannibalism that took place at Eidsbukta, on the northern side of Phippsøya (Lat. 80° 42.5'N, Long. 20° 51'E), Svalbard, Norway at 1025UT on 30 July 2006. At the time, the lead author was acting as Expedition Leader on board the vessel *Professor Molchanov*, with some 50 passengers on board. There was much interest in Eidsbukta, a deep bay on the northern coast of Phippsøya, Svalbard, during the early part of summer 2006 because a whale carcass had washed up there and had attracted a number of bears. The species of the whale in question has not been definitely determined but it may have been a sperm whale, *Physeter macrocephalus*, or a minke, *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*. On the morning in question, at approximately 1000UT, 5 zodiacs from the ship, one of which was driven by the lead author, arrived offshore of a beach where the remains of the carcass, which simply appeared to be bones, were in view. More substantial carcass fragments, including pieces of fat, were evident in the water approximately 5 m from shore at a depth of approximately 2 m. At least 15 polar bears were in the area and were either attempting to feed, both on the beach or by diving, or resting. Most of the bears appeared to be young males but there were also two mothers with cubs-of-the-year (one with one cub and one with two cubs). This activity was taking place in a peaceful manner, although there could, of course,

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