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Command and Leadership Series

Antarctic Leaders Scott, Amundsen, & Shackleton

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Robert Falcon Scott (1868-1912) - Roald Engebret Gravning Amundsen (1872-1928) – Henry Ernest Shackleton (1874-1922)

Introduction

Scott, Shackleton, and the Norwegian, Amundsen were all leaders with different qualities, each one had his own style of leading men on dangerous and challenging expeditions which makes them good subjects for studies of leadership. These men all had early successes at exploring the Antarctic. Scott and Shackleton reached within 410 miles of the South Pole on the *Discovery* Expedition of 1901-4 while Amundsen was one of the first men to winter south of the Antarctic circle on board the *Belgica* in 1898.

Differences between Scott and Shackleton on *Discovery* meant that Shackleton set up his own *Nimrod* expedition (1907-9) reaching within 160 miles of the Pole. Despite the disappointment, carrying on to the Pole would have meant certain death for the team. Spurred on by this event, Scott prepared for the Pole again, amid much media attention. Meanwhile, Amundsen was developing his own *Fram* expedition, setting up camp at the Bay of Whales. He left for the pole on the 20th October 1911 with a team of experienced skiers and 50 dogs to pull sledges of supplies. Scott's party set off on the 1st November that same year, however, the ponies initially planned to pull their sledges died in the extreme cold and the men pulled the sledges themselves, Scott believing that this method was more noble and less cruel to weakened animals.

Amundsen's team reached the South Pole at 3pm on the 15th December 1911. Almost a month later, Scott's party arrived, suffering from scurvy, starvation and hypothermia. The temperature was -30 degrees lower than the month previously and Scott's team failed to return, dying within 11 miles of their first supply depot.

Shackleton continued to lead expeditions despite missing the chance for the South Pole. He commanded the *Endurance* in 1914-16, during which, when the ship was crushed by ice in 1915, he led his men to safety against all odds across 800 miles of the Southern Ocean to South Georgia to get aid. His last journey was circumnavigating the Antarctic Continent and he died on South Georgia Island from the mental and physical stress of the expedition.

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