

This is a story about a ship, trapped in ice, which survived in such a way that no one would believe the tale without proof that it actually happened.

So ... here is the story, and here is the proof. We can learn all about it from an old newspaper which was published in England, in late 1856.

To begin, let's set the stage.

The ship, called HMS *Resolute*, was on a specific mission. She was one of five vessels sent to look for the missing Franklin Expedition (a crew of men, and their leader, who were searching for a fabled "Northwest Passage" in the Arctic Region). The mummified remains, of some of those Franklin-expedition men, were later found on a lonely Arctic-area island.

The *Resolute* was a sturdy ship, built to manage the treacherous conditions of ice-clogged Arctic seas. Though such vessels could often make way where differently designed ships would never go, they could still get trapped in moving ice packs. Sometimes the ice would crush even a well-designed ship.

On other occasions, the ice held a trapped ship so tightly it would not let it escape within a reasonable time frame. How one defined "reasonable" depended, among other things, on the amount of supplies available to the crew.

The *Resolute* found herself in such a circumstance during 1854. By this time, she (and her crew) had been trapped in ice for nearly a year-and-a-half!

With no end to the trouble in sight, the *Resolute's* captain made a very hard decision. He and his crew had no choice but to leave. On the 28th of April, 1854, Sir Edward Belcher gave his order to abandon ship.

Thereafter ... the ship was on her own. A story in the December 27, 1856 issue of *The Illustrated London News* tells us what happened to her.

The main point of the news article was to report on Queen Victoria's reception of the *Resolute* (after the vessel returned to England). But ... let's not get ahead of ourselves. Here's what the article says:

...it may be as well to recall the circumstances under which the lost ship was found.

The *Resolute* was frozen in among the icebergs in lat. 77 N., and in May, 1854, her officers and crew finally abandoned her, leaving their effects on board. She had remained in the icebergs sixteen months, when a large portion of the ice in which she was imbedded becoming detached from the mass by a thaw, it floated off with her, leaving her at the mercy of the wind and waves, and hurrying her out to remote seas, where in lat. 67 deg. 30 sec., and long. 64 deg., she was found in the month of September, 1855, by the American whaler George Henry, commanded by Captain Buddington.

She had then drifted over the wilderness of waters about 1200 miles from the spot where she was abandoned.

Captain Buddington and a part of his crew approached her over the ice and took up their quarters within her. They found "a deathlike silence and a dread repose" for, except themselves, there was not a living creature on board.

The ship was found not to have sustained any very material damage. The ropes, indeed, were hard and inflexible as chains; the rigging was stiff, and cracked at the touch; the tanks in the hold had burst, the ironwork was rusted, the paint was discoloured with bilge-water, and the mast and topgallantmast were shattered; but the hull had escaped unscathed and the ship was not hurt in any vital part.

There were three or four feet of water in the hold, but she had not sprung a leak. The cordage was coiled in neat little circles on the deck, after the fashion of English seamen, and the sails were frozen to such stiffness as to resemble sheets of tin. Several thousand pounds of gunpowder were found on board, somewhat deteriorated in quality, yet good enough for such purposes as firing salutes.

Some of the scientific instruments were injured by exposure and rust, but others were in excellent condition. For a year and four months no human foot had trod the deck of that deserted ship; yet, amid those savage solitudes, where man there was none, and might never be, the pilot's wheel made a stern proclamation, for around it were inscribed in letters of brass the immortal words, "England expects that every man will do his duty."

Captain Buddington remained on board till the thaw set in, and then, when the ice began to soften, he shaped his course to New London, Connecticut where he arrived in December, 1855.

The *Resolute* was removed without delay to New York, and what followed is so honorable to the American Government, and speaks so highly for their courtesy towards this country, that, though it has been often published, it may well be repeated, for it should be universally known throughout England.

A sum of 40,000 dollars was appropriated, with the concurrence of the Senate and Congress, for the purchase of purchasing the *Resolute* from the whalers, the English Government having waived all claim to her and it was determined that she should be repaired and refitted with the utmost care, with the design of restoring her to the Queen in at least as good a condition as she was at the time when the exigencies of their situation compelled her crew to abandon her.

With such completeness and attention to detail has this work been performed, that not only has everything found on board been preserved, even to the books in the Captain's library, the pictures in his cabin, and some musical instruments belonging to other officers, but new British flags have been manufactured in the Brooklyn navy-yard, to take the place of those which had rotted during the long time she was without a living soul on board.

The article continues, as included in *The Illustrated London News*, Volume 29, [at page 648](#) (digitized and online, thanks to Google Books).

Later, when it was time for the *Resolute* to be decommissioned, Queen Victoria remembered the kindness shown to her and the British people. She ordered that three "Resolute" desks be made, one of which was (and still is) used by American presidents in the Oval Office of the White House.

Click on the image for a much-better view.

ISSUES AND QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

There are many hard-to-believe parts to this story. Pick your favorite and explain why it matters to you.

What would it take for a person whose ship was trapped in ice for 16 months to maintain focus?

How could an unmanned vessel, in sea-ice conditions, travel 1200 miles without becoming shipwrecked?

Before reading this story, did you know American Presidents were using a desk made from the wood of an ice-bound, abandoned ship? What is the symbolism of such a desk?

Credits:

Image online, courtesy [Rhode Island College website](#).

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Miracle-Ship-HMS-Resolute>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Miracle-Ship-HMS-Resolute>

Media Stream

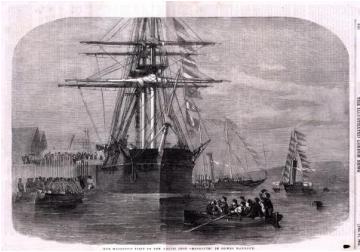


John F. Kennedy, Jr. - Playing in the Resolute Desk

Image online, courtesy the whitehousemuseum.org website.

View this asset at:

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Miracle Ship - HMS Resolute

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