PROLOGUE

At the heart of the floating iceberg is the body of a man, flash-frozen in the beauty of his youth.

The iceberg containing him is the size of a four-storey house. Once it formed part of the vast ice sheet almost two miles thick that covers Greenland and which, deepening under centuries of snowfall, creeps with infinite slowness toward the coast, to be squeezed between its mountains into rivers of solid ice slithering to the sea…eventually to reach the land's edge, protrude, protrude further, and calve. With a thunderous crash a giant mass splits from its parent glacier to tumble into the sea below, and floats to drift south on the current toward the shipping lanes of the Atlantic… This one contains a man. Flawlessly preserved, he is a perfect specimen of his type and period: clean-cut young English toff circa 1930. Characterising a species about to become extinct, this particular example has been frozen for present study still wearing the shirt he has had on for a thousand years, which he bought at Harrod's.

That was his destiny, that was how it would be if they didn't find him soon. The notion fastens on the man's mind as he lies waiting for them to come, and the flame of life within him dwindles to an ember for there seems no hope, no chance they can ever find him beneath the spreading white immensity which is his frozen home today, 5 May 1931. He is in a small tent 8,500 feet up on Greenland's ice cap, the most hostile landscape on earth. Alone.

The man has lived here in solitude for five months, most of the time in darkness. In all that period he has seen no one and heard no human voice, for he is without radio and has no link to the outside world. In the barren wilderness stretching for countless miles about him he has glimpsed no growing thing, no beast, bird or insect, no colour and no sign of life. Embedded in that gigantic frozen slab creeping toward the sea, he is not on the ice cap but under it. The tent that forms his home is now completely buried except for a few inches of ventilation pipe poked above the surface in the vast ocean of storm-tossed snow. He has been here since 6 December; two days later the sun failed to rise above the horizon and Arctic winter shut in as unremitting night. Blizzards rage continuously, the anemometer records windspeeds of 130 MPH, the thermometer a temperature of -41°C. The tunnel forming the exit to his burrow has become blocked and frozen solid beneath a heavy drift of snow he cannot shift. For the last six weeks he has been trapped in his dark hole unable to get out.

At the start meals gave punctuation to the day; now his supply of food is almost gone, little paraffin remains. Each morning he heats up a small saucepan of porridge for breakfast – as he does today, hunched in his sleeping bag to tend the Primus. For weeks he has subsisted on only half the daily ration of food. His body has grown thin, the muscles in his legs are wasted from lack of exercise. He can feel strength ebbing from him daily; only his will keeps him sane, his purpose to survive and pass on the all-important weather records he has maintained. Now most of the time he lies in his damp sleeping bag in darkness, lighting a candle only for minutes to keep up his diary or read a few sentences from a book. Sometimes he picks up and fondles the pipe given him by Mollie, the woman in England he had hoped to marry. Occasionally, very occasionally, he smokes it, luxuriating in the old homely fragrance and the memories it recalls. He is on his last tin of tobacco. 'I am completely buried. Paraffin has nearly run out and things are generally pretty dismal', he writes in his diary.

In his frozen den he crouches over the Primus, stirring watery gruel in the saucepan as it warms on the spluttering flame. Cooking this one meal is his only activity of the day; since the exit has become blocked he's been unable to continue his readings of the weather instruments outside. He has nothing else to do but think. Fears gnaw at his mind. The ventilator pipe will become obstructed with ice, the air in his lair grow toxic and poison him. Under the weight of snow the buried tent creaks and sags, it will give way and crush him beneath it. *Why has Gino not come for him? What has gone wrong? Why isn't Gino here yet?* The level of snow outside is now almost to the top of the tent; even if a relief party manages to get through to look for him, how will they find him? What in God's name is he doing imprisoned beneath the ice in this forsaken spot? Why is he here? Of all those insistent questions he knows the answer only to the last. He is here because he's chosen to be so. He came here 'to do something big'.

Now a further horror floods his mind. His home, this flimsy pod of air sunk into the ice cap, is *shrinking*. At first he tells himself it is paranoia, but he's taken measurements. His burrow has grown smaller; the tent has shrunk in size, its walls are bulging inward beneath the weight of snow compressing them. The roof is clustered with icicles, its canvas coated black with grime from the oil lamp. He has not had a bath or clean clothes for five months and his lair is a squalid stinking pit. For the last six weeks he's been unable to dispose of his own body waste.

* * *

On Easter Sunday, 5 April, there is only a cupful of paraffin remaining and two candles. He's finished the chocolate. His tobacco is almost gone; on 13 April he smokes his last pipeful. 'There is now precious little to live for,' he notes in his diary. On 20 April he lights his last candle. On the 26th only two biscuits remain. He is smoking tea leaves. Only half a cup of paraffin is left; there will be no way to melt snow for drinking water when it is ended. On 1 May he finishes the final biscuit. A little pemmican and some oatmeal remain but later that same day the stump of the last candle burns out. For the following four days he lies in cold continual dark. Now on 5 May, as he kneels over the saucepan heating porridge for his breakfast, the jets of the Primus falter, splutter… and expire. The last of the paraffin has gone.

* * *

No fuel, no light, no hot food, nothing to smoke. No drinking water, only ice to suck and the weather station buried. Beneath him a layer of ice 8,500 feet deep, above and around him almost a million square miles of snow-covered desolation where nothing lives. Entombed beneath the ice cap, it is his 149th day of solitude. He is more alone than anyone on earth…

CHAPTER ONE

THE SCENE IS best imagined as a sepia photograph, a picture postcard of the period, faded and chafed at the edges. Depicting a view of London at the end of the 1920s, it shows a wide road wonderfully free of traffic. What there is amounts to no more than three box-shaped cars or cabs, all of them black – the largest driven by a chaffeur in peaked cap – and a goods dray pulled by a pair of carthorses clopping toward the West End with its load of wooden barrels. On the far side of the road, which is separated by ornamental railings from the trees and cropped grass of Kensington Gardens, a small girl in Alice-in-Wonderland dress and leggings, accompanied by her nanny, is guiding a hoop along the pavement by an iron wand hooked to its rim. On *this* side of the street stands a large Victorian mansion of dark red brick. At the bottom of this imposing edifice, and only just visible in the photograph, the figure of a uniformed housemaid can be spotted emerging from its basement area with a dustpan and shovel to gather up the small pile of manure which one of the passing horses has just deposited in the road. Despite the sunlit day, the appearance of the red-brick mansion is rather forbidding; it looks what it is, the home of a venerable institution existing since 1830: the Royal Geographical Society.

On this spring morning one of the upper windows in the building's gloomy façade is wide open. From it is coming loud jazz music. The sound of Louis Armstrong's *West End Blues* reaches across the road into the leafy park where a nursemaid pushing a baby in a high perambulator picks up her step on hearing it while for a moment her attention strays from her duty in a quick glance toward the source of that syncopated beat.

Inside the room where the music is playing a blond young man, faultlessly dressed in a grey flannel suit, stands by the wind-up gramophone, talking and laughing with two others. Beyond them, a further group lounging around a trestle table have abandoned all pretence of work and are chatting together exuberantly. The room, with its upright wooden chairs, shelves of leather-bound books and maps and metal filing cabinet in the corner, looks like an office. But the young men in their sports' jackets and ties do not have the appearance of office workers; their manner and the way they are behaving suggests that, despite the early hour, this is a party. In fact, the atmosphere in this room over the last few weeks has always been high-spirited and noisy, but today the mood of the group is way beyond that and almost manic. And it has every reason to be so. Today the last brick has fallen into place and the dream finally become reality. They have just learned that the expedition to the Arctic put together by Gino Watkins is definitely *on,* a goer.

The idea had come to Gino the year before when he had been in Labrador with another Cambridge undergraduate, J. M. Scott, travelling by canoe and dog sledge while they mapped the head waters of Hamilton River in an unexplored area of the country.

Both men were the same age (twenty-two), but their personalities were very different, as was their appearance. Gino slight and fair, with a taste for jazz, dancing and sports cars, did not fit most people's idea of an explorer; a fellow undergraduate remarked that he looked like a 'pansy'. In contrast to his rather effete figure, Scott was broad-shouldered, muscular and dark-haired; he had won a rugby Blue at Cambridge and shown himself good in the scrum. Rather less good off the field, for he was emotionally reserved, serious minded and a little uncomfortable with people he didn't know. Yet what had brought the two men together and what they had in common was enough to override all disparity between them, for they shared a consuming passion. Perhaps even more compelling than passion, for Scott would describe it later as an 'addiction'. They were both hooked on the rush of extreme adventure and the unknown.

Risk in various forms is available today, but seventy-five years ago that particular compound existed. Then there still were unknown places in the world, places no one had yet gone to; there was blank on the map. It was no desire for fame that drew them to those untrodden regions but something visceral and instinctive to their nature. They had tasted it already, both had known the high of venturing into that vast white empty landscape of cruel beauty and truth. To face the adversities they encountered there required comradeship, resolution and courage. Their existence was harsh but simple and their purpose clear. They were fully alive there; it was a place of elemental purity in a messy and uncertain world.

Gino and Scott wanted more. They craved the exhilaration of challenge and adventure – but neither of them had a penny to his name. How could they raise the cash for another and bigger expedition to the Arctic? One night in their shared tent in Labrador Gino came up with the answer: the Arctic Air Route Expedition. The future of travel lay in the air, they should tap into the spirit of the age and open up a flight-path between Europe and America.

Two years before, in 1927, Charles Lindbergh had made the first solo flight from New York to Paris in 33½ hours, winning a $25,000 prize. But to achieve that 3,000 mile ocean crossing he had been unable to carry anything except fuel. Transatlantic passenger travel continued exclusively by ocean liner, as before. But, as Gino reasoned to Scott in that sealed tent dense with pipe smoke, if one traced the great circle route from the British Isles to North America there existed stepping-stones where a plane could land to refuel. And each hop between these stones was less than 500 miles, so a commercial passenger route was possible. Theoretically.

‘It is certain’, Gino wrote in his diary, ‘that nearly all the great air-routes of the future will lie across the Arctic. The safest and quickest air route from England to the American continent is by Iceland, Greenland and Labrador… But before anything can be done, these places must be scientifically explored…’ Gino’s idea was prescient at the time; viewed from today it looks obvious. 1929 was a seminal year in the infancy of the airline business when four of the players who would dominate the trade first entered the market. Tom Braniff opened a single route Tulsa – Oklahoma City – Wichita Falls, Texas, with two rickety aircraft piloted by himself and his younger brother. The National Airlines Taxi Service (later shortened to National Airlines) acquired a 142-mile mail route St Petersburg – Daytona Beach. United Airlines was formed, using Ford Tri-Motor planes to cut flying time New York – San Francisco to twenty-eight hours. And Howard Hughes, movie producer and aviator, started TWA with a government mail contract.

Thirty-six years later Hughes would sell his shares for $500 million, but at the time many thought his stake worthless. Airlines were struggling to survive, none were making money. And all for the same reason. The public was scared to death of flying, and with good cause. Airplanes were primitive, draughty crates, their instruments basic and navigation elementary. Planes caught fire or iced-up; flying was a chancy business. For those early airlines naked fear among the customer-base was a major marketing problem. The movie *Hell’s Angels* (produced by Howard Hughes) had just been released and was showing to big audiences in the US and Britain. Sensational and spectacular, it featured sick-making footage of open-cockpit stunt flying and several lives had been lost in the making. Air travel was seen as glamorous, exciting… and dangerous.

Airships were thought much safer. And not just safer but infinitely more roomy, comfortable and luxurious, of far greater appeal to wealthy men and women accustomed to the pampered opulence of transatlantic liners. You didn’t have to wrap up in greatcoat and scarf to travel on an airship, where uniformed stewards served you a five-course dinner and vintage wines. Airships were the airlines' well-established rivals, and they dominated the market. Fixed-wing airplanes looked particularly fallible when in January 1929 Imperial's airliner *City of Ottowa* developed engine trouble on a flight from London to Paris and came down in the English Channel, drowning seven. In contrast the *Graf Zeppelin* airship in August flew serenely from the US to Europe in 55½ hours, then continued its voyage in an attempt to fly around the world. Twenty-one days later it landed at Lakehurst, New Jersey after a successful journey of 21,000 miles. In November Airship R101 completed her final test flight with eighty-two people on board, the largest number ever carried by a British dirigible.

Then came disaster. On the R101's maiden voyage to India, with a full complement of passengers, the craft caught fire and crashed in France, killing fifty-four. A few years later the giant *Hindenberg* (804 feet in length, the largest and finest airship ever built) burst into flame while landing at Lakehurst, New Jersey, incinerating thirty-six passengers and crew. In that fireball of blazing hydrogen the *Hindenberg*, and with it the whole airship industry, burned to ash in minutes – leaving the future to the airlines.

To raise money to go to the Arctic they should tap into that future, Gino proposed to Scott. And during the rest of their time in Labrador the two continued to discuss the feasibility of an expedition to pioneer an air route London – North America across Greenland's ice cap. When they got back to London that autumn Gino started to draft a proposal to put before the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), whose seal of approval they would require before they could attempt to raise funds, equipment and supplies.

On their return to England they were lent that room overlooking the park in the RGS, which would later become the air route expedition's office. Here the two of them worked out the astrological observations they had taken in Labrador and transcribed their rough survey notes for the draughtsmen who would use them to redraw the territory's map and boundary. Scott describes the scene:

> There, during nearly two months, he and I sat in short sleeves at a trestle-table drawn up to the open window. One morning Gino brought a Japanese fan, which he had looted from a dance the night before. He leaned back, fanning himself and gazing out of the window whenever he stopped to recall some incident of a journey of which the survey notes reminded him; and he always kept the fan beside him 'so that,' he said, 'I can give the right impression if anyone very tough and hearty comes to see me.'

Gino had always enjoyed teasing the rugger buggers and the ultra-respectable. It amused him to play the affected poser and he liked to shock, but his manner concealed a ruthless fully-focused will. 'If a man wants anything badly enough he can get it, absolutely anything,' he told Scott.(1)

An expedition surveying an air route over the ice cap would need to include a light aircraft among its equipment, ideally with a second plane as back-up. Gino had learnt to fly in the Cambridge Air Squadron while at university, but during his first lesson in map-making and aerial photography the plane had crashed. Gino, who was standing up in the open cockpit at the time clutching the survey camera, was thrown clear as the aircraft struck the ground and flipped over onto its back, but the instructor/pilot was left suspended upside down in his harness. Gino scrambled back to the plane still holding the camera, delighted by what had happened. He hoped his instructor didn't mind him saying so, but it was an experience he was very glad to have had. Releasing the embarrassed pilot, he insisted he pose for a photograph standing on top of the wreckage, as upon a kill.

On his return from Labrador Gino joined the Auxiliary Airforce in order to gain a pilot's certificate. The small wage he received was useful in paying for drinks at London nightclubs, for he was living on a small and rather irregular allowance from his father, Colonel Watkins. His mother had impetuously killed herself just before Gino's Labrador expedition and his sister Pam (twenty) and brother Tony (seventeen) continued to live in the family house in Onslow Crescent, Kensington, looked after by a resident cook and Nanny Dennis, who had brought up all three children and would remain with the family until her death over forty years later. There was no money coming in. Harrod's and tradesmen's bills were sent to Colonel Watkins, who forwarded them to his elderly mother in Florence to settle.

Onslow Crescent was Gino's home when in England. It was here where, almost every morning in the autumn of 1929, he was woken early to dress in the clothes Nanny had brushed and laid out for him, grab a quick breakfast and set off in his old Lagonda to Stag Lane airfield. At the flying club there was usually a group of people drinking coffee and playing darts and table tennis while waiting for their turn to fly. Gino did not join in. He used to arrive, dressed as for the City with bowler hat, tightly rolled umbrella and attaché case, and sit down to work in a quiet corner of the room. When the weather was fit and an airplane available he pulled on a helmet and flying suit, spent an hour or two in the air and then went back to his expedition papers. His instructors laughed at first; later to be disarmed but all remained puzzled by this immaculate and self-contained young man. What his fellow students thought of him is not known but may be imagined.

The evenings were gay – gay in the period sense rather than now's – and Gino's social life deliberately included Pam and Scott, who knew almost no one in London. And London was *fun* then – fun in a way that would not be seen again until the Sixties. In both periods it was music that set the mood. There were parties every night: cocktail, costume, baby, swimming pool or bottle parties. Someone always knew of one taking place somewhere. Gino was mad about jazz, night-clubs, dancing. 'It was not that he was extravagant,' says Scott (JMS Bio Gino. P195) 'He was quite the reverse, for he had a very shrewd sense of values which enabled him to live and travel more cheaply than most people and to enjoy the achievement of doing so. Tangible possessions like books and pictures meant very little to Gino and he wasted nothing on them… But memories meant a great deal: memories he could take with him and enjoy on any journey, however lightly he was travelling. He was a rich collector of experiences.'(2)

* * *

Becoming an explorer had occurred at a timely moment for Gino, as he was due to leave Cambridge in less than a year, probably with a poor degree. He would have to get a job and he had not the faintest idea what. It was a bad time to find one and his contemporaries' plans to enter the City, the services, or go into business struck him as infinitely unappealing. He had no particular desire for wealth or any identifiable ambition to motivate him. He wanted excitement and adventure; a 9–5 routine looked to him a secure grave. The idea of a job and of working his way up in a business held no attraction. 'It was not because he was afraid of hard or menial work,' says Scott, 'But because he could not appreciate the virtue of promotion by seniority rather than initiative. Experience was the most valuable possession, but its collection was an active, varied business entirely different from slow plodding. He often said one must have done everything by the age of twenty-five.'

For ten months in Labrador, Scott and Gino had shared adventures, dangers and hunger. At night they slept in the same small tent. Since returning to England they had shared an office and a mutual project, and gone to the same parties. Yet Scott says,

> Often when I was a member of these parties I discovered some unexpected trait of Gino's character; and so I was surprised when people told me that I must have got to know him wonderfully well in Labrador. To a limited extent I had… I knew that I could trust him in an emergency. The more we did together the more firmly we were connected… *but we did not even grow sufficiently demonstrative to call each other by our Christian names.* [italics added]

All the time since coming back from Labrador Gino had been working on, and talking to, suitable people; selling his vision of an air route expedition. By now these plans were sufficiently advanced to be presented as a formal proposal to the Royal Geographical Society:

> I am anxious to study the practicability of an Air Route from England to the Pacific coast of America, via Iceland, Greenland, Baffin Land, Hudson Bay and Edmonton… The part of this route which is least known at present is the East Coast and central ice plateau of Greenland which is almost entirely unmapped, and very little is known of the meteorological conditions on the ice cap…

The expedition would remain in Greenland for one year. It would be equipped with two airplanes, a couple of motor-boats and a large number of dog teams for hauling sledges. Its aim was: 1. To establish a weather station on the ice cap in the centre of the country where met observations could be recorded throughout the year. 2. To use airplanes and motor-boats and sledges to carry out a detailed survey of Greenland's east coast, and to establish the height of the coastal mountains. 3. To test flying and landing conditions in the Arctic, and at the end of the year make a flight with the two planes along the proposed air-route.

* * *

Gino's estimate of the cost of the expedition was £12,000, based on:

Charter of ship	£1,500
Two suitable aeroplanes, spare parts, petrol, etc.	£3,500
Wages to pilots and mechanics	£2,000
Provisions: dog teams, equipment, hut for the base camp, etc.	£5,000

The sum of £12,000 seems ludicrously small, but it was the equivalent of half a million pounds today. Gino enjoyed a good relationship with the Royal Geographical Society. After his first expedition to Edge Is-land he had been elected a Fellow of the Society, though as the President explained at the award ceremony 'There was one slight difficulty in that (at twenty) he was under age.' He had also been awarded a grant, all of which he had spent on funding his expedition with Scott to Labrador. The RGS examined Gino's proposal for an air-route expedition and endorsed his plans. They gave him an office to use while setting it up but no funds; they did not finance expeditions. The project had their gold seal of approval, but it was up to him to raise the money. The New York stock market had just crashed, triggering a worldwide depression. This was the worst moment imaginable to try to raise money for anything, let alone a trip to some place called Greenland.

Gino and Scott sat at the trestle table in their room in the RGS writing letters to accompany the proposal, which they mailed to manufacturers of the wide range of equipment and supplies they needed. To make clothing, boots, tents, skis, surveying equipment, or produce margarine or canned meat, is a useful and worthy job, but it is just possibly a little dull. One imagines that the expedition proposal must have rung a strange chime in some of the chief executives and managing directors who read it on a grey morning in a musty city office at a time when business was terrible. Most they wrote to invited them to visit. Once in there, the pair's track record and obvious professionalism, combined with Gino's singular brand of charm, usually did the rest. Equipment and supplies were assured, but cash was harder.

One morning a letter delivered to the room in the RGS contained a proposition from a movie company wishing to shoot a feature film in the Arctic. They proposed a deal: Gino's expedition party would include their director, film crew and cast. In return for the explorers' help in shooting the action sequences the movie company would subscribe to the finances of the expedition. Gino was initially entranced by the idea. He relished absurdity, it added a comic grace-note to life. Besides, it would shock the establishment and that was always fun. Scott says he held the most fabulous ideas about Hollywood, 'That the women were exotic in their beauty and erotic in their way of life, and the men green of complexion, prodigal and sinister.'

The explorers/movie producers' collaboration progressed through several meetings. A screenplay was written with a strong love interest, and a shooting schedule drawn up which included such sequences as: *Blizzard Scenes. Trouble with dogs* and *Loss of two of the party (members of the Expedition lost down a crevasse).* Two reasons caused Gino finally to reject the idea. The surveying and mapping of the mountain ranges on Greenland's east coast, which represented an unknown hazard to any air route, had to be completed before the storms and darkness of Arctic winter. Time could not be lost in film making, whatever fun it promised, and there was another consideration. To take an expedition to Greenland would require permission from the Danish government, who were opposed to any influence which risked to modernise their Eskimos. The spectacle of Hollywood disporting like Hollywood on the ice cap could well provide a culture shock from which they might never recover.

So Gino looked elsewhere for funding. His own family had no money, as his father had wasted it all on foolish schemes and restless living, but many of his relations were rich. Some subscribed, but he needed major funds to make the project a reality. The treasurer to the would-be Arctic Air Route Expedition was August Courtauld. Three years older than Gino, he too had been at Cambridge, though they had not met there. After graduating, Courtauld had gone to work for a City stockbroker, a job he detested. Very soon after Gino started to formulate his plans for the Air Route Expedition he had asked to become a member of the party. Courtauld already had Arctic experience. He also knew how to fly and held a pilot's licence. He was a useful addition to the group and Gino was glad to accept him. The two had background in common: both were by nature anti-establishment and anti-authority, and each had fitted in badly at public school, where they had been notably unsuccessful. But the circumstances of the two could scarcely have been more contrasting. Gino penniless; Courtauld rich and potentially very very rich, for he was heir to the family textile fortune.

August's father, Samuel Courtauld, was a millionaire and a natural mark for expedition funds. But he was a practical businessman lacking in romantic imagination, and he did not enjoy a particularly good relationship with his son. Nevertheless a plan was concocted, and Gino was duly invited to the family's country estate to shoot. Driving down in the ancient and chronically infirm Lagonda, he arrived in the middle of the shooting party and August offered to lend him a gun, but Gino held up a right hand swathed in bandages, asking to be excused because he had sprained his thumb. He passed his day as a spectator, had his conversation with Samuel Courtauld in the evening and drove home to be greeted by the anxious enquiries of his family who did not know that he had hurt himself. 'Oh my hand's alright,' said Gino, peeling off the bandage, 'But I couldn't afford to tip the gamekeeper.' (3)

However, Samuel Courtauld proved unsusceptible to Gino's charm. He was implacably not won over and refused to subscribe a penny to the expedition. Suspecting his mother had been at work, August was disgusted.

> He wants me safe and stuck rather than run the risk that his family might ever get out of the rut of complacent money-making to bring a small spot of credit to this womanly old country of ours. I am so sick with my family I can't even sit with it. Let it fug in its own noxious library. If only I could rake up some of its slimy past and do some subtle blackmail on them… (4)

Perhaps he did. 'I tackled the cousins and aunts… They stumped up nobly.' The most enthusiastic was his father's cousin Stephen Courtauld, who became chairman of the expedition committee. Whether this idea was August's or Gino's is not known, but it proved a well-calculated piece of castin for it led to the sunlit happiness possessing that party of young men grouped around Gino's wind-up gramophone in the Royal Geographical Society, whose description forms the opening to this chapter. It is the news they have just received which has caused the thrill visible on the flushed faces of these chaps in tweed jackets and wide Oxford bags gathered in the room. The air is wreathed with pipe fumes, most are smoking hard and all are talking at the same time above the reedy sound of jazz coming from the Victrola. Looking at them, it is their youth that strikes you most. Some are still at university, the rest have just come down, but in this unguarded moment they look like boys. All have short hair, greased and combed flat; there's a sheen where the light catches it. Their tight jackets are creased and don't fit them very well. There's an artless air to them, an unselfconsciousness similar to that of children at play. Their faces are clear, fresh and healthy, there's an expression in their eyes you don't see nowadays. It's hard to define it (in a moment, though not now, glance at their photographs and try), but there's an openness in their gaze, innocence perhaps, or hope. Hope certainly is running high in them today, hope no longer deferred but real and present. Their lives have been transformed. Their future is infinite in possibility and dazzling in a sparkle of fire and ice. This morning Stephen Courtald's all-enabling cheque has come in with the mail. They have the green light. They are going to the Arctic.