



# 4 / LEADING THROUGH CHALLENGES SHACKLETON'S WAY

Leadership Lessons from the Great Antarctic Explorer



A three-masted sailing ship, the Endurance, is shown from a low angle, partially submerged in a field of ice. The ship's masts and rigging are prominent against a dark, starry night sky. The ice is broken and uneven, surrounding the ship. The overall mood is one of isolation and historical significance.

# Shackleton's *Endurance* Expedition

LeadershipLives



A large, dark blue and white three-masted sailing ship, the Endurance, is docked in a harbor. The ship has a complex rigging system with many ropes and pulleys. Several crew members are visible on the deck. In the background, other ships and buildings are visible along the waterfront. The sky is blue with some clouds. A semi-transparent text box is overlaid on the image.

In 1914, Shackleton sailed for Antarctica from Buenos Aires with a crew of 27 aboard *Endurance*.



A satellite map of the Antarctic continent, showing the ice-covered landmass and surrounding ocean. The map is oriented with the continent's tip at the bottom. A dark rectangular box with a white border is centered over the continent, containing white text.

The goal was to make “the last great polar journey”  
– the crossing of the Antarctic continent.





Shackleton and his crew never reached Antarctica. In sight of their intended destination, a summer storm blew up. When the clouds cleared, *Endurance* was trapped in a floating sea of ice.





Shackleton called his team together so everyone would hear the same message at the same time, directly from him.



In describing that critical moment, surgeon Alexander Macklin captured Shackleton's leadership style.

"We could see our base, maddening, tantalizing.

Shackleton at this time showed one of his sparks of real greatness. He did not rage at all or show outwardly the slightest sign of disappointment; he told us simply and calmly that we must winter in the pack, explained its dangers and possibilities; never lost his optimism, and prepared for winter."







Dr. Macklin continued...

“As always with him, what had happened had happened; it was in the past and he looked to the future.”



Let's break that down...



## LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Dr. Macklin: “He did not rage at all or show outwardly the slightest sign of disappointment.”

Shackleton set an example of the attitude he wanted his crew to adopt.



## COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Dr. Macklin: “he told us simply and calmly that we must winter in the pack, explained its dangers and possibilities.”

Shackleton explained the situation to his crew in clear and simple terms. He didn't sugar-coat it.



## MAINTAINED A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Dr. Macklin: “As always with him, what had happened had happened; it was in the past and he looked to the future.”

Shackleton’s mantra was “Look ahead.” He once said, “Optimism is true moral courage.”



## KEEPING UP MORALE

Shackleton's crew knew he was concerned about their well-being and had their best interests at heart.

As Dr. Macklin put it, "He looked to the future." In practical terms, Dr. Macklin meant that Shackleton instructed his crew to rearrange the ship so they would be as comfortable as possible during the frigid cold of the Antarctic winter.



For 10 months, they lived on the ship as it was pushed north by the currents and winds of the Weddell Sea.





They played football.





Held dog-sled races and set up walking tracks.





They gathered in the common area, nicknamed “the Ritz,” to work on science projects and write journals entries.

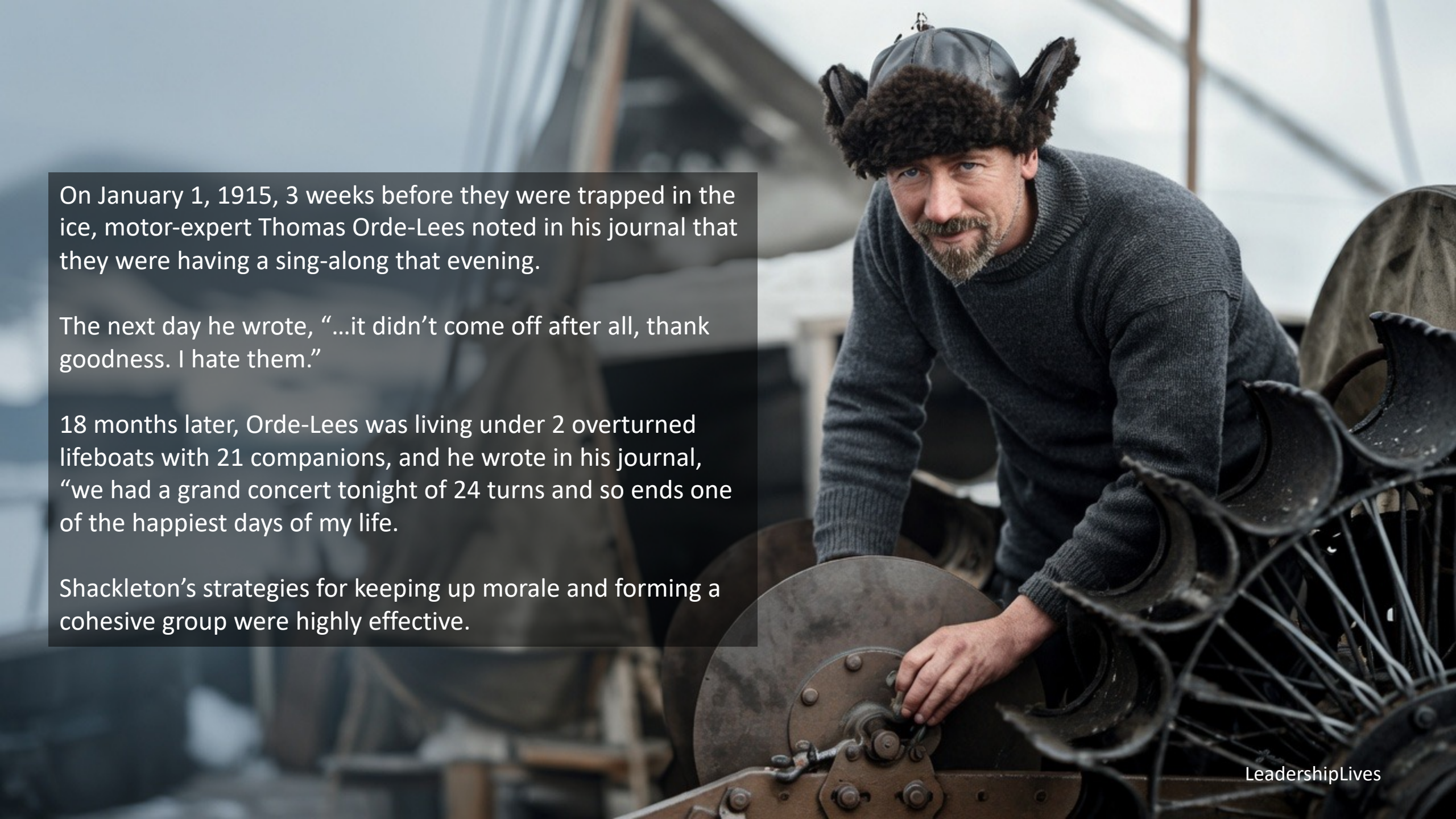
Perce Blackborow, on the left, is carrying a block of ice to use for fresh water.





Amidst great hilarity, they gave each other crew-cuts.



A man with a beard and a dark fur hat with earflaps is leaning over a large, complex mechanical device. He is wearing a dark grey sweater. The device has several large, curved, metallic components that look like blades or paddles. The background is a blurred industrial or workshop setting with various metal structures.

On January 1, 1915, 3 weeks before they were trapped in the ice, motor-expert Thomas Orde-Lees noted in his journal that they were having a sing-along that evening.

The next day he wrote, “...it didn’t come off after all, thank goodness. I hate them.”

18 months later, Orde-Lees was living under 2 overturned lifeboats with 21 companions, and he wrote in his journal, “we had a grand concert tonight of 24 turns and so ends one of the happiest days of my life.

Shackleton’s strategies for keeping up morale and forming a cohesive group were highly effective.





Shackleton treated everyone fairly and equally.

Some jobs, like night watch and washing the floors, were organized alphabetically and done by rotation. You knew when your turn would come up and who your partner, or partners, would be.

There was no favoritism.

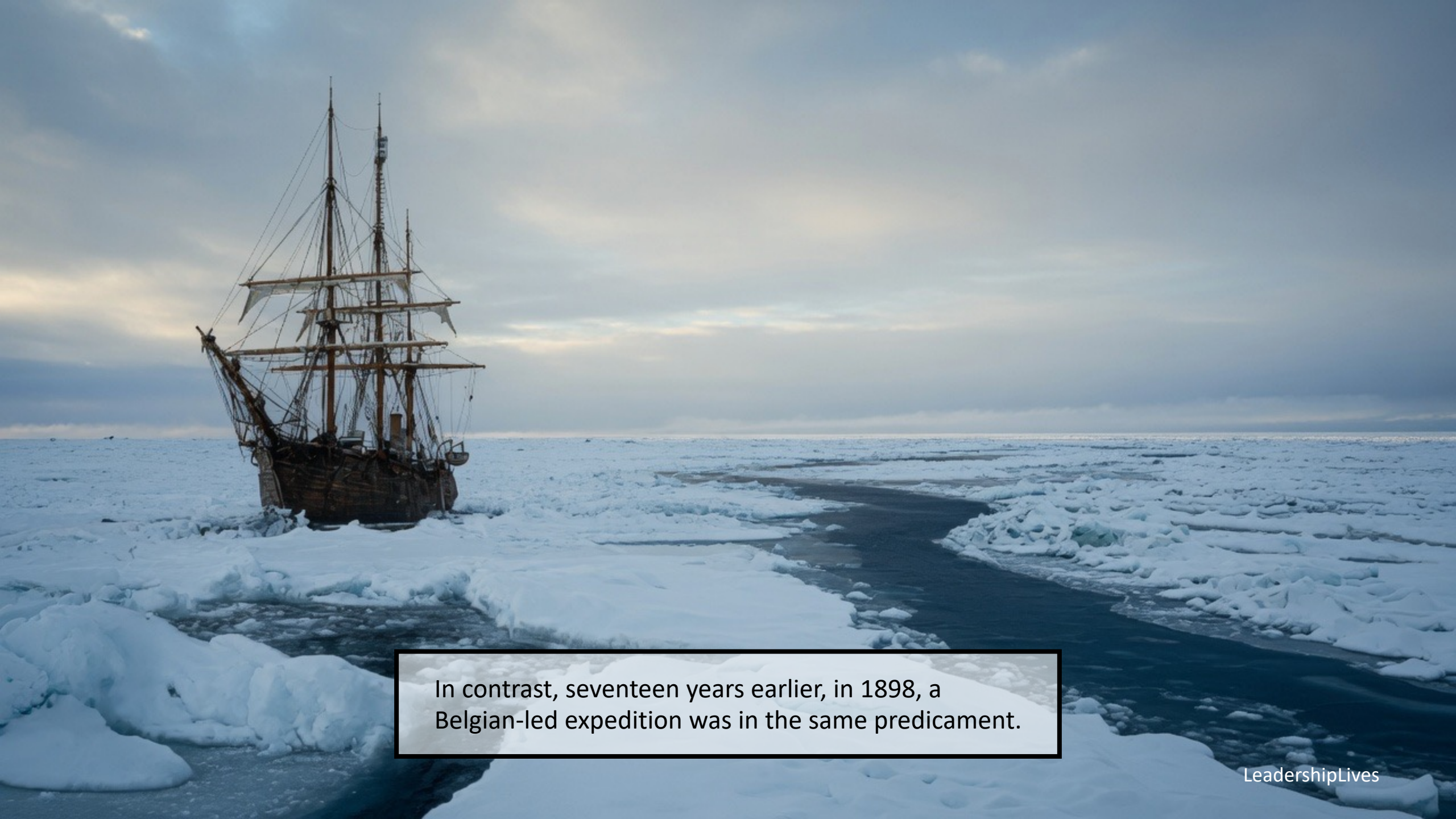
Frank Hurley and Leonard Hussey playing chess on night watch.





They celebrated Midwinter's Day by decorating "the Ritz" with flags. They had a special dinner and continued the festivities with songs, skits and poems.





In contrast, seventeen years earlier, in 1898, a Belgian-led expedition was in the same predicament.



Frederick Cook, an American onboard, wrote in his journal in the depths of the polar winter,

“The darkness grows daily a little deeper and the night soaks hourly a little more color from our blood.

Most of us in the cabin have grown decidedly gray within two months, though few are over 30.

Our faces are drawn and there is an absence of jest and cheer and hope.”







The *Endurance* crew celebrated birthdays with “mail.” To roars of laughter, the recipient would read his cards aloud over breakfast.

In this photograph, taken September 1, 1915, the group is celebrating Dr. Macklin’s birthday. He is in the middle of the second row in the light-colored knit helmet. The photo was meant to be a present for his mother.





Sixty years after the *Endurance* expedition, First Officer Lionel Greenstreet, was asked how they managed to survive. He answered in one word, "Shackleton."





As the polar winter turned to spring in 1915, the ice that surrounded the ship loosened up but in late October, disaster struck.





In the next section, we'll look at how Shackleton led his team – successfully – through a grueling ordeal.