OBITUARY

HELMER JULIUS HANSSEN, the Norwegian sailor and polar explorer, was born at Andøya in north Norway and died in Tromsø on 2 August 1956 at the age of 86. He worked as a fisherman, sealer and whaler from the time he was 12. In 1897 he was mate on the *Laura* which took J. H. Pearson's ornithological expedition to Novaya Zemlya. In 1898 he was master of the sealer *Ellida*. Hanssen then became Amundsen's second mate on the *Gjøa* during her voyage through the Northwest Passage in 1903–06. He joined Amundsen again on the latter's antarctic expedition of 1910–12 and was one of the party who reached the South Pole, on 15 December 1911. Hanssen served Amundsen yet again as master of the *Maud* during her voyage through the Northeast Passage in 1918–20. When the vessel was frozen in at Ostrov Ayon, Hanssen and the mate, O. Wisting, travelled by sledge round the coast to Anadyr in order to telegraph to Norway; the journey took from December 1919 to June 1920. In 1924 Hanssen took part in Binney's Oxford University Arctic Expedition as dog expert, and in 1928 accompanied Villinger, who was making a film in the Arctic for "Ufa", to Spitsbergen and Anmagssalik in east Greenland.

Amundsen considered him the finest dog driver he knew, and also remarked on his wonderful eyesight. In 1936 Hanssen published his autobiographical *Voyages of a modern Viking* (London, Routledge).

HUGO HOLTEN MØLLER was born on 19 April 1900 and died on 21 March 1956. In 1925 he was a member of the first group of wireless operators to be stationed in Greenland. During the war Møller served in the organization established in New York to maintain supplies to Greenland. In 1946, at Grønlands Styrelse in Copenhagen, he became responsible for the Greenland radio organization and later took over the direction of the entire electrification programme in Greenland.

VLADIMIR AFANAS'YEVICH OBRUCHEV died in the U.S.S.R. on 19 June 1956, aged 92. He was the doyen of Russian geologists. Among his published works, numbering over a thousand, are found many on the geology of Siberia. From the point of view of Arctic studies, his monumental annotated bibliography *Istoriya geologicheskogo issledovaniya Sibiri* [*History of the geological exploration of Siberia*] which came out in 13 parts between 1931 and 1946, is an essential aid. His own field work was largely in southern Siberia and central Asia.

Obruchev was also a pioneer in the study of permafrost. Elected Academician in 1929, he was the Director of the Academy's Institute of Permafrost Studies [*Institut Merzlotovedeniya*] from its establishment (under another name) in 1930 until a few days before his death. In 1939 the Institute was named after him.

MORTEN PEDERSEN PORSILD, the Danish scientist, was born at Glibstrup in Denmark in 1872 and died on 30 April 1956. In 1898 he accompanied K. J. V. Steenstrup's expedition to Disko in west Greenland. In 1900 he took his degree in botany, and in 1902 led his own botanical expedition to Disko. He saw the difficulties of research in Greenland by means of summer expeditions only, and planned a permanent station which would do work all the year round. While supporting himself as an assistant in botanical gardens or as a teacher he agitated vigorously for this idea, and in 1906, with the financial support of A. Holch and the State, Den danske arktiske Station was established near Godhavn on Disko (*Polar Record*, Vol. 7, No. 50,

1955, p. 422–23). It is the oldest scientific station in the Arctic, and was for many years the only one. Porsild himself was director of the station for forty years, from its foundation until 1946. Porsild did not confine himself to botany but also studied Eskimo archaeology and ethnology. Many of the works in the large number of issues of *Meddelelser om Grønland* which are grouped under the subtitle of *Arbejder fra den danske arktiske Station paa Disko* ("Works from the Danish arctic station on Disko") are his. Porsild spoke Greenlandic and was elected to Godhavn's kommuneståd (Commune Council). From 1927 to 1938, as Godhavn's representative, he was the only Dane in Nordgrønland's landsråd (Provincial Council).

Otto Yul'yevich Shmidt died in the U.S.S.R. on 7 September 1956. He was born in 1891, and was a university teacher of mathematics before the Revolution. After it, he held a number of senior civil service posts in various commissariats, and was then in turn Head of the State Publishing House [Gosizdat], Deputy Head of the Central Statistical Administration [Tsentral'noye Statisticheskoye Upravleniye], and a member of the State Planning Commission [Gosplan]. During this period he continued to be a professor of mathematics and published a number of important mathematical works. He was also a keen climber with an interest in glaciology. In 1929 he made his first arctic expedition, to Zemlya Frantsa-Iosifa. In 1930 he became Director of the Arctic Institute, and in 1932 was elected an Academician. In the same year he became the Head of the newly formed government department created to develop the Arctic, the Chief Administration of the Northern Sea Route [Glavsevmorput']. He occupied this position for over six years, a period of rapid expansion and great activity in the Soviet Arctic. Shmidt himself led many expeditions, notably those in the *Sibiryakov* in 1932, the ill-fated *Chelyuskin* in 1933–34, and the establishment of Papanin's drifting station (later called SP-1) at the North Pole in 1937. In 1935 he visited Cambridge and established the first personal contact between Soviet explorers and the Scott Polar Research Institute. After his dismissal from the Northern Sea Route Administration in 1939—at this time of the great purges he was lucky only to be dismissed—he continued his scientific work, which included editorship of scientific journals and of the *Bol'shaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya* [*Great Soviet Encyclopedia*], and turned his attention to problems of geophysics and astronomy. He was highly versatile, and a man of conspicuous ability. The strong position which the U.S.S.R. now holds in all fields of polar research and exploitation is in no small measure due to his work and influence.

Engineer Vice-Admiral Sir Reginald Skelton, R.N. (retired), was born in Lincolnshire in 1872, and died at Adlingbourne on 5 September 1956. Captain Michael Barne, R.N. (retired), who is the only surviving commissioned officer of the British National (*Discovery*) Expedition, 1901–04, writes of him as follows:

> "I first made his acquaintance in 1900 in H.M.S. *Majestic*, flagship of the Channel Fleet, in which vessel he was serving in the rank of senior engineer, Captain Scott being first lieutenant and myself a sublieutenant. Captain Scott's hopes of commanding an Antarctic expedition were at that time in little more than an embryonic state, but he confided them to Skelton and myself, with an offer of our accompanying him should it ever come to pass. I am sure that Skelton jumped at the offer as eagerly as I did.
>
> "Skelton, as chief engineer of the *Discovery*, attended her almost from the laying of her keel. The ship was equipped with an auxiliary engine, steam capstan, winches and many other mechanical appurtenances as her frame grew, and it was due to his skill and foresight that Captain Scott was able to write in

his book *The voyage of the Discovery* 'from first to last of our voyage we never had serious difficulty with our machinery or with anything concerning it'.

"As our voyage, following the usual sailing ship route, carried us into the higher southern latitudes we fell in with many seabirds not all of which were well known except to expert ornithologists, and there was considerable competition amongst us in catching the rarer specimens following the ship. The means of catching them varied, and one of the most successful of us was our chief engineer, who to his messmates was known as 'Skelly'. After our arrival in winter quarters, near the south-west corner of Ross Island, our first sledge journey was despatched on 4 March 1902 to place a conspicuous mark in the neighbourhood of Cape Crozier, which would guide any relief ship to the position of the *Discovery* during the next southern summer. Among this party were Skelton and myself, the leader being our first lieutenant, Charles Royds.

"Among Skelton's many accomplishments was photography and he was recognized as photographer-in-chief to the expedition. He was indeed a man of many parts as witness the almost constant work of repairs, large and small, in progress in his chilly place of work down in the engine room during our two successive winters in the ice. His domain lacked the warm amenities of ward-room or mess deck. Not only could he contrive the forging of heavy tools, but repairs to scientific instruments requiring skilled precision of work came equally easily to him. Skelton took an important part in several sledge journeys. He it was who discovered a breeding place of Emperor Penguins near Cape Crozier. Most of his sledge journeys were exploratory, across McMurdo Sound, and up the Ferrar Glacier, which, in a letter to me dated 23 March 1956, he describes as the most suitable route through the coastal mountains. I would I had space to remark further on this officer, describing further his vivid personality, his humorous disposition and exceptional reasoning power, lasting up till his end. A few years after our return in 1904 I enjoyed his company once more, when experimenting with motor sledges in Norway and the Alps. Captain Scott had asked both of us to come on his second expedition, but neither of us was able to accept his invitation."

During part of the 1914–18 war he was in charge of the dockyard and installations at Archangel. He retired from the Navy in 1932 and was for some years a director of John I. Thornycroft and Co., the shipbuilders and engineers.

Commander W. F. Skelton, R.N., has presented a valuable collection of his father's antarctic papers and photographs to the Scott Polar Research Institute.