



The Wreck of the Grafton

Five men are stranded on an island. Five men survive.

By Bryon Cahill • Based on a true story • Illustrations by Aaron Bihari

CHARACTERS

(main characters in **boldface**)

Narrators 1, 2, 3, 4

François Raynal, *first mate of the Grafton*

George Harris, *an amiable English fellow*

Henry Forgès, *the Portuguese cook*,

Alexander “Alick” Maclaren, *a Norwegian*

Thomas Musgrave, *captain of the Grafton*

SCENE 1

Narrator 1: A ship known as the *Grafton* is leaving the harbor from Sydney, Australia, and heading

out to sea. It is November 12, 1863.

Narrator 2: The purpose of the journey is to sail to the subantarctic islands, specifically Campbell Island, near New Zealand. There, the men expect to mine untapped mineral ore. It is a special and exotic kind of tin they are after—one that especially attracted François Raynal, the *Grafton’s* first mate, to the voyage.

Narrator 3: Raynal has spent the past 11 years mining for gold and suffering many hardships. He contracted several diseases but managed to, in his own words, “beat them off with brandy.” But when a tunnel collapsed on Raynal, nearly killing him, he decided to seek his fortune elsewhere.

François Raynal: It’s called *argentiferous* tin. Doesn’t the word just roll off your tongue?

Narrator 4: Raynal is speaking to George Harris, a 20-year-old Englishman with a good amount of sailing experience despite his young age.

George Harris: Argen ... argentif ... what? No. In fact, it sits on my tongue like a stubborn mule. What does it mean?

Raynal: It is a tin containing the most magnificent silver. Metallic and beautiful! With the amount we bring back, we will be well-off indeed. Not to mention the pretty penny we shall earn from the many seal pelts we will sell.

Harris: I must admit, that par-

ticular part of the job is not very appealing.

Narr 1: Henry Forgès, the Portuguese cook, speaks up. The men try not to stare at his face. A few years back, Forgès lost his nose to **leprosy**, but no one knows the full story.

Henry Forgès: Seals are good eatin’.

Narr 2: An uncomfortable silence falls over the men. The sea becomes choppy, and the wind begins to howl. Alexander Maclaren, otherwise known as “Alick,” does not usually have much to say. But now, he speaks over nature’s volume.

Alexander “Alick” Maclaren: Clubbin’ seals is just like anything

else—I imagine you get used to it.

Harris: I think I’ll go see whether the captain needs help at the **helm**.

Narr 3: Harris heads for the ship’s **bow**. He is not gone a minute before the captain, having been relieved by Harris, joins the men.

Narr 4: The *Grafton* is a smaller-than-average vessel. Weighing in at 56 tons, the ship is furnished with a large room that is reserved for supplies, food, and what the men intend to bring home.

Thomas Musgrave: Unfortunately, gentlemen, it looks like stormy seas ahead. Stay sharp.

Narr 1: Indeed they do meet

stormy seas on most of their trip, **tempests** even. But the bulk of their trouble does not come until they reach their destination weeks later.

Narr 2: Upon arriving at Campbell Island, the men drop anchor and immediately head ashore in search of the precious tin. They cover a lot of ground in a few

* vocab

LEPROSY: an infectious disease affecting the nervous system, skin, and nasal passages, which sometimes leads to dramatic decay of the body

HELM: the wheel of a ship

BOW: the front part of a ship

TEMPESTS: violent windstorms with rain and sometimes hail

short days but find nothing. On top of that, the weather conditions are extremely harsh and there are no seals to be found anywhere.

Raynal: What now, Captain?

Narr 3: The men are feeling **dejected**, and night is coming on. Their trip seems to have been a fool's voyage. The captain is the most **disillusioned** of all.

Musgrave: Gentlemen, it appears the reports have been false. There is no argentiferous tin to be found here, but I commend you for your efforts.

Harris: And what of the seals, Captain?

Narr 4: Musgrave ponders the question.

Musgrave: The Auckland Islands lie just 270 kilometers due north-west from here. It is possible the seals are lounging there.

Narr 1: The men are silent.

Musgrave: I know what you are thinking. The Auckland Islands are known for a number of shipwrecks. The waters are dangerous to navigate to say the least. All I want to do is take a look. We will get close enough to the reef to investigate but remain at a safe distance. If there are no seals to be seen, we will head for home. But if we do spot them ...

Raynal: Then we will proceed with caution.

Musgrave: Well put, Mr. Raynal. All hands on deck!

Narr 2: The men return to the *Grafton* and sail for the Auckland Islands.

SCENE 2

Narr 3: As soon as they arrive at the Auckland Islands, they spot the seals lounging on the beach.

Narr 4: There are too many to be counted. The discovery is both promising and **harrowing** at once. In order to hunt the seals, they need to first drop anchor. And with the ferocious waves crashing into the islands, it would be an understatement to proclaim it is a difficult task.

Harris: Look at them all out there. Hundreds of them.

Musgrave: Yes, and all but out of our reach. The waters here are too deep to drop anchor. We will wait here until the storm subsides and then move closer.

Narr 1: The *Grafton* sits in the bay for days. New Year's passes without celebration. On January 2, 1864, it is the peak of summer in the Southern Hemisphere. It is a time when small squalls change quickly to storms and storms blow treacherous winds in every which direction.

Narr 2: The *Grafton* is suddenly at the mercy of the tides. Raynal stands in the middle of the ship in great awe of the sea.

Raynal: (*to himself*) The unpredictability of Mother Nature was something we should have predicted.

Narr 3: A massive wave slaps hard into the *Grafton's* **hull**. Raynal raises the alarm.

Raynal: Captain! The sea is pulling us into land!

Musgrave: Drop the anchor! Now!

Narr 4: The anchor is dropped into the water, but it is too late. At midnight on January 3, the *Grafton* crashes into the rocks.

Musgrave: Men, gather as many provisions as you can and abandon ship!

Narr 1: Together, they cart many sacks of food into the lifeboat and row to shore in the dead of night.

Narr 2: When dawn breaks, they take stock of what they have. Unbelievably, Forgès saved a box of wooden matches and somehow managed to keep them dry. He uses them now to start a fire.

Narr 3: The men make some tea and drink it with hard bread for breakfast. They eat in silence. Looking around, they see what little they have.

Musgrave: We must keep our heads about us, men. I know you are looking about you now and you see but a small amount of food. I don't want you to worry about that, for God will provide. But first, we must find ourselves a suitable shelter. George, Alick, you will head east. Henry, you and I will head west. François, I want you to stay here and keep the fire burning.

Narr 4: The men head off in separate directions and are gone for several hours. When they return, neither party brings good news. There are no caves to be found anywhere. The island they have landed on is indeed huge, and getting even halfway across it would take weeks.

Harris: What are we to do? No one knows we are here! They



think we went to Campbell Island. If a search party goes out, they will go there. Not here.

Musgrave: (*thoughtfully*) Yes. That is true. I imagine we may be here for some time, men. But let's not lose our heads about it, shall we?

Harris: How can you be so calm? We are going to die here!

Narr 1: The sun is beginning to set on the men's first full day as castaways. Harris is not the only one who seems afraid. In fact, only Musgrave and Raynal appear to be holding it together. The other three men are fidgety and worried, to say the very least. And as the darkness comes, even the captain himself is showing signs of losing his **composure**. He sits down on the

beach and rocks himself steadily back and forth.

Narr 2: Raynal sees that and takes action. He stands up and walks to the edge of the beach where the sand meets the water. He looks out at the wreck of the *Grafton*.

Raynal: Captain, our ship is indeed not seaworthy. Of that we can be certain. Crashing upon the rocks has made it crippled, but not worthless.

Forgès: Aye, there is still a great deal of food on deck if that's what you mean. But even with a good fire such as this one, I could not cook it. The storm and the sea have surely spoiled it all.

Raynal: I'm not talking about the food. We managed to save,

by my estimation, about two months' worth of food ... if we are not greedy with our intake.

Harris: Two months? Do you imagine we will be stranded here that long?

Raynal: We must face the harsh facts. We must plan for the worst. The truth is that this island is

* vocab

DEJECTED: depressed in spirits, disheartened

DISILLUSIONED: extremely disappointed

HARROWING: extremely disturbing or distressing

HULL: the hollow, lowermost portion of a ship that rests in the water

COMPOSURE: calm, self-controlled state of mind



known for harsh weather. We witnessed that firsthand when we crashed. Luckily tonight seems calm enough. We can sleep on the beach. However ...

Musgrave: We will die without shelter.

Raynal: Yes. And that is why, as soon as daylight pierces the horizon, we must head back to the *Grafton* and salvage any wood and tools we can.

Musgrave: You mean to build a shelter, François. That is smart.

Raynal: I mean to do more than that, sir. At your command, I mean to build us a home.

SCENE 3

Narr 3: The men sleep on the soggy beach, close to the fire.

When the sun rises, they get into the lifeboat and row out to inspect the wreck of the ship.

Narr 4: Over the course of the next few days, they recover many wooden planks for which to build their house. They also retrieve the few tools they had brought along on the ship.

Narr 1: There is a creek that is not too far from the beach. They decide to build there, next to the freshwater, where they can drink and wash freely.

Narr 2: The men fall into a productive rhythm. As they work, Forgès catches Maclaren staring at him. Maclaren quickly looks away, but it is too late.

Forgès: Not too pretty, am I? Don't imagine you'll be introduc-

ing me to your sister if we ever get out of here, will you?

Maclaren: I ... didn't mean to stare.

Forgès: It's all right. I'd stare too if I was you.

Narr 3: The men continue to work in awkward silence. They don't have many tools, but they try to make do with what they have. Then, Forgès surprises them with a story.

Forgès: It was leprosy that took my nose.

Narr 4: The work is put on hold as the men listen.

Forgès: It was on my very first voyage. I was but a lad of 13. I was quite a dashing boy back then, believe it or not. An

American ship came to port in my hometown in Portugal. The captain was looking for a cabin boy. I was eager to get away. The high seas called to me.

Narr 1: They all nod in agreement. These men are cut from the same cloth.

Forgès: It wasn't long before I caught the vile leprosy on some remote island. I was lucky it took *only* my nose. However, my shipmates ... they couldn't stand the sight of me. And I imagine they were quite fearful of catching the disease. I begged my captain to drop me somewhere. And he did. I lived on the Samoan Islands for a year. The natives there had special medicines and cured me.

Raynal: Fascinating.

Forgès: I imagine so. But once I was better, the natives seemed to treat me ... sort of like a pet. That's the best I know how to describe it. I quickly began to realize I was trapped there.

Harris: What happened?

Forgès: Eventually, by sheer **Providence**, I caught sight of a passing ship in the distance. I managed to break away from the village and ran for the water. The natives—they started chasing me. As I swam for my life, I could feel the wind from their arrows as they pierced the water around me.

Raynal: I guess they didn't want to share their pet.

Narr 2: Musgrave smiles at the story but remains silent. He understands the importance of the **camaraderie** his men are now sharing, and he stays out of it.

Maclaren: So you made it to the ship?

Forgès: I'm here telling you the story, am I not?

Narr 3: The other men chuckle cordially at Maclaren's expense.

Forgès: Yes. Luckily, the men saw me and lowered a boat. I climbed in and they raised me up to their deck. I would not have survived if not for their kindness.

Narr 4: The men do not respond, but go about their work. They all feel it. A turning point has occurred. Yes, they have been stranded here. But if they continue to work together, they might just have a chance at surviving the ordeal.

Narr 1: As night falls, the sound of amateur construction echoes for miles.

SCENE 4

Narr 2: Sleeping on the beach is neither restful nor peaceful. The air is cold at night, and mosquitoes feast on the flesh of the stranded. Every morning, the men are sore and exhausted, but they use it as motivation to build their shelter faster.

Narr 3: They manage to retrieve some cloth from the wreck of the *Grafton*. By the end of their first full week, they are sleeping somewhat more comfortably under a makeshift tent by the creek.

Narr 4: In a little more than a month, during which time there has been no sign of rescue, the shelter is considered to be **inhabitable**. The men beam

with pride. They have built themselves a home.

Musgrave: Excellent work, men! Tonight, we will sleep like kings.

Harris: (*laughs*) I never heard of a king who lived in a **shanty**.

Musgrave: This is not a shanty, sir. By no means! Just look at what you have built here. The cabin is 24 feet by 16. In another month I believe we will have built the stone chimney! Why, we shall be able to have a roaring fire in the winter, if we are so unfortunate as to have to remain here till that time.

Forgès: Captain.

Musgrave: What is it, Forgès?

Forgès: We have truly done God's work here.

Narr 1: The other men nod in agreement.

Forgès: However, I do worry about our food supply. As much as we have been **rationing**, it still dwindles. We have enough meat to last three more weeks perhaps. And then ...

Raynal: And then what, sir?

Narr 2: Raynal, once again, steps in to assist his captain.

Raynal: We must go on a hunting party.

* vocab

PROVIDENCE: divine guidance or care

CAMARADERIE: good fellowship, brotherhood, trust between friends

INHABITABLE: suitable for living in

SHANTY: a crudely built hut, cabin, or house

RATIONING: restricting provisions of food

Maclaren: Yes. We came here for the seals' pelts, but considering our situation, I would think we should now hunt them for their meat.

Musgrave: Well spoken, Alick. We will try, once again, to hunt in the morning. I daresay this time we shall succeed.

Narr 3: Before crashing on the island, none of the men had been on a seal hunt. However, they were advised on how to go about it before they left Australia. They were told to sneak up on the seals and club them hard on the nose—and quick! Because once the men are spotted, the seals will dash off into the water and swim away. And that is exactly what happened the first few times they had tried.

Musgrave: Tonight, we will enjoy the best night's rest since we came here. We will be fully refreshed and ready for a successful hunt in the morning.

Narr 4: Musgrave looks proudly at the house they have built and suggests they call it Epigwaitt.

Maclaren: Epigwaitt?

Musgrave: It is an American Indian word that means “a dwelling by the water.”

Narr 1: As they enter Epigwaitt, they all suddenly realize what should have been obvious to them as they were building—the house is made up of two rooms that are not alike in stature.

Forgès: Am I right to assume that you, Captain, and you, François, will be taking the larger, more comfortable side of the cabin,

while we three sailors are to bunk in the smaller room?

Narr 2: It is a fair question.

On board the *Grafton*, that was exactly the arrangement. On any ship, there are separate quarters for the captain and the first mate, and their space is much more pleasant. Musgrave thinks it over.

Musgrave: (to himself) Why didn't I think of this when we were building? On board the *Grafton*, these men had no choice but to obey my rank. But here ... here we are all equal, are we not? However, if I give up the better room, they will surely no longer respect me. I fear the beginnings of a **mutiny**, no matter which course of action I take!

Raynal: Captain, might I suggest a vote?

Narr 3: Musgrave immediately sees the brilliance of his first mate's suggestion and follows through.

Musgrave: Yes, François. That is a superb idea. But we will not merely vote for who gets which room. For that is not enough. We are civilized men, and we must form a **democracy**. We shall vote a leader. We need one man among us who will act as chief, who will maintain discipline, settle quarrels, and give out daily tasks. Would anyone care to nominate a man?

Narr 4: They think it over as Musgrave waits patiently.

Narr 1: As much as Raynal would like to nominate Musgrave, he does not. He figures (and rightly so) that it would be bad form for the first mate to

speak for the captain in this particular situation. The men must choose.

Maclaren: The way I see it ... is that you, sir, are our captain and chief. You should remain our leader.

Narr 2: Musgrave nods politely at Maclaren.

Maclaren: I nominate Thomas Musgrave for our leader.

Raynal: I second.

Harris and Forgès: Hear! Hear!

Musgrave: Very well then. I accept. Gentlemen, enjoy your stay at Epigwaitt. I bid you good night.

Narr 3: With their newfound democracy formed, Raynal and Musgrave head off to the larger section while the other three men make themselves comfortable in theirs.

SCENE 5

Narr 4: In the morning, the shipwrecked crew wakes. They are so pleased to open their eyes to see a roof over their heads that they lounge there for a few minutes longer, relishing the best night's sleep they have had since their arrival.

Musgrave: Rise and shine, men! We can't sleep all day. Come on now!

* vocab

MUTINY: revolt or rebellion against authority, especially by sailors against their officers

DEMOCRACY: a government of the people and ruled by the majority

Narr 1: They all—though a few reluctantly—rise to meet the day. Within an hour, they are making their way through the woods. As they approach a pack of their prey, Harris speaks softly.

Harris: It is a shame they must die for us to live.

Maclaren: Oh, not this again.

Raynal: (to Harris) Would you rather it were the other way around?

Harris: No. But that doesn't change the fact that the thought of killing one is gruesome and makes me despise the way of the world.

Forgès: *The way of the world?*

Where exactly do you think you are, Harris?

Musgrave: He's right, George. No sense in getting philosophical about it. And don't forget that we originally came to this island because of them. We would have slain them for their pelts had we not been shipwrecked. It was *they* that brought us here. And it is *they* that will keep us alive. Be thankful for them.

Narr 2: Harris is convinced. It doesn't take much. His rumbling stomach demands he do the job.

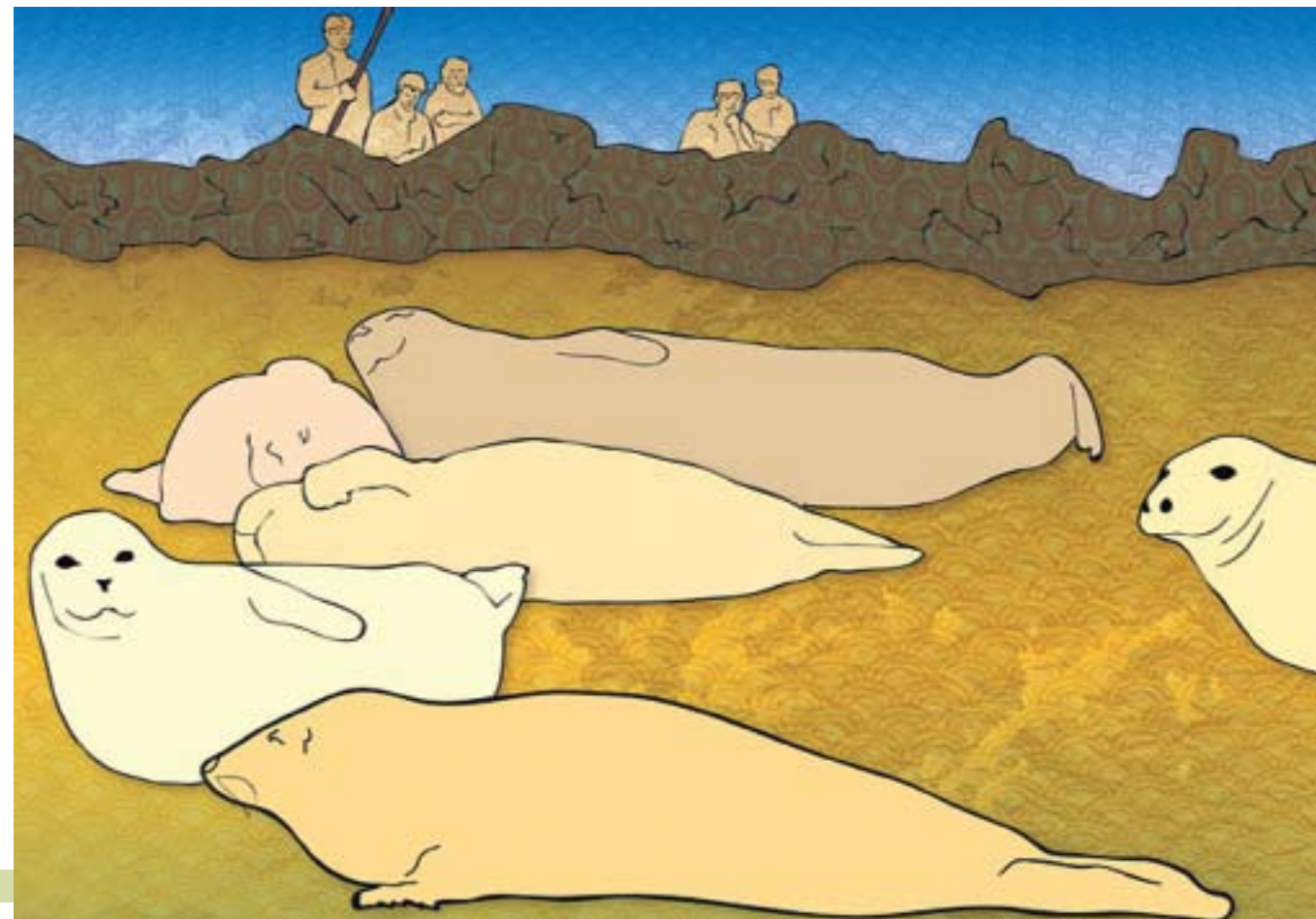
Harris: Right. Let's go.

Narr 3: Slowly the men creep toward their dinner.

SCENE 6

Narr 4: Month after month after month passes by. The men have become very skilled at hunting, skinning, and preparing their meals. With their minimal resources, they have completed the full construction of Epigwaitt and enjoy a warm fire in their stone fireplace during the winter.

Narr 1: They fall into a routine. Up at 6 o'clock, scavenge the woods for the day's firewood, hunt, walk, eat, bathe, sleep. That becomes their life, and their hopes of rescue seem all but dashed when Christmas comes and goes.





Musgrave: It has been almost a full year that we have been stranded here, François.

Narr 2: The captain and the first mate are off on their own, gathering firewood.

Musgrave: I'm not well. It is no secret that my face is covered in these boils. But did you know I feel my mind slipping with each passing day? And what of the men, François? Their hair has turned white. Their faces are worn and wrinkled. We don't kill enough seals to stay healthy. We are the walking dead.

Narr 3: Weakly, they carry what little wood they can back to Epigwaitt. Raynal knows what Musgrave has said is true. After a mere year on the island, they have all aged terribly and are

constantly battling illnesses. Something has to be done.

Narr 4: On the eve of the new year, Raynal speaks to the men.

Raynal: No one is coming for us. In two days we will have been here a full year, and not one ship have we seen. There will be no rescue.

Narr 1: The men are too tired or too weak or too beaten to speak.

Raynal: If men abandon us, let us save ourselves!

Musgrave: What do you propose we do, François? Brave the unforgiving sea? Paddle to New Zealand? In the dinghy? We would be crushed before we made it past the cliffs.

Narr 2: The men all share the captain's sense of **futility**. His

leadership, though always questionable, had never been quite this pitiful.

Raynal: I intend to build a ship that can ride the storms. We built ourselves a shelter, did we not? This we can also do.

Forgès: Nothing we can build could take us to New Zealand. You might as well stop dreaming.

Raynal: True, the success of our efforts is exceedingly doubtful. But hear me now when I tell you I would rather go to sea on a log than drag out our miserable existence here any longer than necessary.

*** vocab**

FUTILITY: lack of effectiveness or success

Narr 2: Harris and Maclaren are at their side now.

Harris: Captain, with your permission, we'll go and retrieve what we can from the *Grafton*.

Musgrave: (*finding his authorita-*

tive voice again) Go with God.

Narr 3: As they paddle out, Forgès too gets up to help. Though there is a hole in his face where his nose once was, he imagines he can smell home. ■

What It Takes to Survive

The wreck of the *Grafton* is a true story. What you have just read is a fictionalized account of the events that happened to a small crew of men on a deserted island. Though the play spans one year rather quickly, the men who lived it agonized through the days, more often than not relying on one another for strength and support through their desperate ordeal.

In the end, they did build themselves a seaworthy vessel out of what was left of the *Grafton*. They turned the dinghy (lifeboat) into a much larger ship. But the work was not done overnight. Just as it took a considerable amount of time to build Epigwaitt, the men worked on their ship from early January all the way into July. On July 18, 1865, Captain Thomas Musgrave, François Raynal, and Alexander Maclaren set sail on a very harrowing journey to New Zealand.

After five rough days and nights at sea in a leaky vessel, the crew landed at Port Adventure and commissioned another ship to head back and save the remaining two castaways.

Amazingly, at the same time the men of the *Grafton* were shipwrecked on the island, there was another ship that crashed there as well. On May 11, 1864, the *Invercauld*, an 1,100-ton ship carrying 25 men, crashed into the cliffs on the opposite side of the island. Though the crews of both the *Grafton* and the *Invercauld* were on the island at the same time, they never met. The distance between them was too great. Neither party knew the other existed.

Six men died in the wreck of the *Invercauld*. Of the 19 left, only three survived to be rescued in 1865. During that time, many of the men went mad. There was no real hierarchy of command. When they crashed, many of the men lost all hope, and it is likely (though undocumented) that some resorted to cannibalism.

Whether a person lives or dies in dire situations can often boil down to how well he or she can remain calm. The men of the *Grafton* worked together to obtain food, make shelter, and ultimately save themselves. Yes, they had their moments of desperation that very well could have led to madness—but when things seemed their bleakest, they managed to pull through. The men of the *Invercauld*, on the other hand, were not so mindful of their minds.

Is there a lesson here? Perhaps it is simply to never give up hope.