

Lincoln Ellsworth

Antarctic explorer (1880 – 1961)



Ellsworth was born in Chicago, the son of a wealthy businessman. His mother died when he was eight and his father, JAMES ELLSWORTH, was often away on business trips to New York and Europe. Ellsworth was not close to his father, but he had enormous admiration for him. He later remarked, “One of the things that made me persist in the Antarctic in the face of sickening discouragements was my determination to name a portion of the earth’s surface after my father.” It was his father who sponsored him for the Century in 1915.

Ellsworth’s initial exposure to polar adventures began on May 21, 1925, when he, Roald Amundsen and four other men set out in two Dornier flying boats on a mission to be the first to fly to the North Pole. The planes were forced down onto the ice and the explorers spent 30 days trapped on the surface. After chopping out a runway, one plane with all six men on board made its way back to Spitzbergen, their starting point. The plane landed with just 23 gallons of fuel left.

In 1926, Ellsworth and Amundsen announced their plans to pilot a dirigible across the North Pole to Alaska. Fourteen other men joined them as they began the historic crossing in early May. The journey across the polar sea from Europe to a point north of Nome took 72 hours and covered 3,393 miles. After four more expeditions to Antarctica in the 1930s, Ellsworth announced plans in early 1939 for yet another expedition, but it was cancelled because of World War II. His expeditions were the last privately financed ones.

According to William Daniel’s memoir, Ellsworth spent most mornings at the Club where he “regularly occupied the large chair in the southeast corner of the Reception Room on the first floor. He conversed with another member or read his mail or morning newspapers.”