

Duke Snider retired from the Coast Guard in 2012 and established his own consulting firm, specializing in ice management.

Duke Snider, Ice Navigator

Development of the Arctic is going to happen whether we like it or not, but with Duke Snider helping to guide the way we can rest a little easier

WHILE DAVID (DUKE) Snider answers his cell, I scrutinize his living room. A Robert Bateman depiction of a polar bear's furry head and foreparts covers one wall. A shelf carries a superb collection of Inuit art carved in bone and soapstone. A 17th century map reproduction, "Poli Arctici" exhibits Davis Strait, Baffin Bay and Arctic Russia—at least as imagined then. Duke's jam-packed study likely includes every book published about polar expeditions, histories, explorers, ice and the Inuit—including his own tome, *Polar Ship Operations: A Practical Guide* (2012).

Duke is passionate about ice—and navigating safely through ice—a fact that still surprises him when reflecting on his background. He was born 57 years ago in Nova Scotia, near the Bay of

Fundy, but when his father retired from the Royal Canadian Air Force, the family moved to a farming community—Exeter, Ontario. "Small town living taught me the importance of community," said Duke. "And tolerance. That knowledge is important aboard ship. Your shipmates include every possible nationality and religion and your mind must be open."

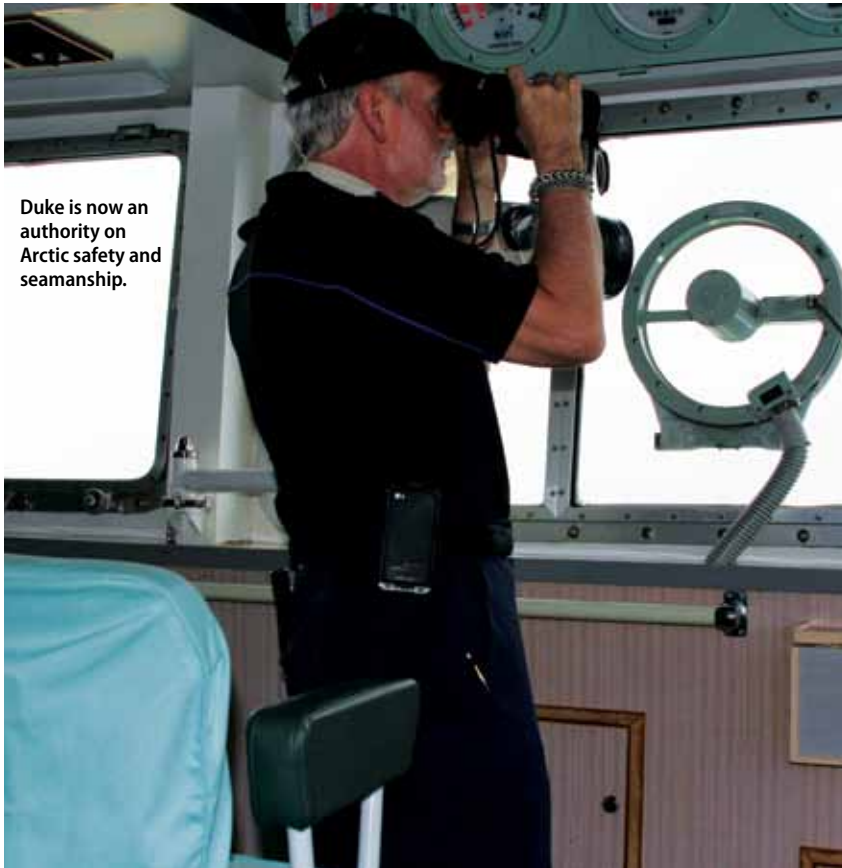
At age 18, Duke was unsure of his career path. On a whim, he skipped school wanting to sign up for the RCAF. He learned his eyesight would keep him from flying but a thoughtful recruiter told him to finish grade 13 and join up then. He subsequently spent two years in the Navy but found that service "didn't fit my ethos." He mucked around selling cars in Vancouver and Victoria—it was only a stopgap. Then serendipitously, a friend mentioned enlisting in the Canadian Coast Guard and serving on a weather ship. "They're always looking for people," the friend said. "And you like being at sea."

Duke put on a jacket and tie, walked into Manpower and was interviewed by chief officer Norm Thomas—who would one day report to him. "Well," Norm said, "you're the best dressed seaman I've seen in a while." The suit worked and 21-year-old Duke became an ordinary seaman on the weathership *Vancouver*,

stationed 1,000 miles from Vancouver Island. Duke's first job was cleaning decks and toilets. "It was 49 days on station and 42 days at home," Duke said. "In those days there was no communication while at sea. Today, ships plying the oceans are connected. Even in the Arctic, I'm in daily contact by phone, text and Skype with my wife, Kelli Kryzanowski."

Duke spent 33 years in the Canadian Coast Guard, his positions improving steadily and ended his career at the highest level: director of the Pacific Region Fleet. Along the way, he served on the *George E. Darby*, a Hecate Strait SAR cutter. "It was a horrible ship, but I was promoted to acting chief officer. One day, Capt. Fred Wedgewood said, "you're wasting your time, boy. Get a job on the Mackenzie River. It's seat-of-your-pants navigation."

Into The Ice Duke took the advice and joined the river buoy tender CCGS *Nahidik*, a life-changing move. "I came to love the Arctic," says Duke, blue eyes sparkling. "We started at Great Slave Lake and ran 1,500 miles down the Mackenzie, placing buoys and servicing lights to Tuktoyaktuk for the ship trains travelling north—incredibly exciting. Our shallow draft allowed us to beach the ship and visit communities. ▶



Duke is now an authority on Arctic safety and seamanship.

My Arctic passion grew.”

Over the following years, Duke served in the Arctic on several Coast Guard ships and gained more ice experience. He also sailed in Baltic, Greenland and Gulf of St. Lawrence ice. In 1991, he challenged the captain’s exam and four years later, earned his ticket as a master mariner, foreign going. In the mid-’90s, while chief officer on CCGS *Arctic Ivik*—under Capt. Norm Thomas who’d hired him initially—the Canadian government invited Duke to conduct an Arctic shipping study. “During my four-week holiday, I went to Ottawa and wrote the report. That narrative launched the career I have today.”

Months later, he was recruited to study Arctic shipping potential full-time. He took a year’s leave of absence and moved to Ottawa. “The project aimed to develop the first international standards and certification for ice navigation,” he said. “International interest in crossing the Northwest Passage was growing.”

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It was one of Canada's lead projects under the aegis of the International Maritime Organization, a UN agency that sets standards for the safety, security and environmental performance of international shipping. Duke, the lead author, was pleased with the Polar Code, which he hoped would establish required standards. Unfortunately, politics transformed the standards into watered-down guidelines. Companies operating in Antarctica claimed standards weren't needed near the South Pole.

"It was frustrating," Duke continued. "Anyone can claim expertise to navigate through ice, but you must be trained and experienced. There's ice and ice and ice. Annual ice melts in summer, sea ice can accumulate over years, and glacial ice is harder than granite. Presently anyone can skipper a freighter in ice—and anyone can have an environmental disaster and loss of life. Canada, fortunately, developed our recommendations into its 'Arctic Shipping and Pollution Prevention Regulations.'"

Then in 2007, the adventure ship *Explorer* sank off Antarctica. "The guides down there said, 'holy crap, we better

implement these guidelines,'" Duke said. "It was a tremendous wake-up call. But required standards have yet to pass."

The Nautical Institute In 1984, Duke had joined the UK-based international non-profit for maritime professionals involved in the control of sea-going ships. "I've volunteered with this group because it fosters the highest professional standards on the sea," said Duke. "It has branches all over the world. Next year, I'll have the honour to serve as its president. It's something I never dreamed of when signing up for the Coast Guard." For his nearly 40 years of service to the Institute, Duke was awarded the Queen's Jubilee Medal for Voluntary Service and dedication toward global standards for ice navigation.

Duke retired from the Coast Guard in 2012 and established his consulting firm, Martech Polar. He teaches seminars on ice management around the world. Last month, he served as ice navigator on the first Canadian-owned iron-ore ship from Baffinland (71.3233° N, 79.2106° W) to Europe. "It was the

first ship of the season and the goal was to conduct it through the ice safely, no holes and no injuries while teaching the crew aboard about ice management," said Duke. "It has to be accomplished during a narrow window when the ice retreats."

Does Duke worry about resource development in the Arctic's still pristine environment? "Yes, I worry," he responds, "but the key is 'responsible development.' The world cannot exist without resources. We can't just stop exploiting them. But I'm 100 percent for environmentally responsible resource development. Then we have to move the stuff with responsible ship operators. That's why I want the Polar Code to be implemented and why I'm writing Lloyds Maritime Academy's rules on polar ship operation for a diploma course. Although we're decades away from an ice-free Arctic, shipping is increasing. I want to do my part to make it safe.

"I never dreamed that Coast Guard service would lead me to this profession. It's what I love to do, need to do. I want this to be my contribution." ☪



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