

Birdmen Write Letters While Awaiting Martin

World Fliers Tell Thrilling Stories of Arctic Country as Recounted to Them by Natives.

Told by LOWELL THOMAS. (Copyright, 1924.) For two weeks the fliers waited on the barren island of Unalaska, hoping that Martin and Harvey would soon catch up with them. Here, while the "wille-waws" howled, the boys had an opportunity to see something of life in one of the most remote places under the American flag. Between hunting and fishing trips, waiting eagerly for radio messages from the ships that were out searching for the lost aviators, playing tennis in the snow, attending an all night Easter service in the little Russian church at Unalaska, and protecting their planes from the gales, they wrote their first long letters home.

"They said that Terra Del Fuere, Labrador and Greenland are the bleakest and most inhospitable places in the world," wrote Henry Oden, who was flying with Leigh Wade in the Boston. "But I don't see how they could be more foolish than these Aleutian islands. Human beings don't live up here, they merely exist. We are right on the edge of Bering sea, where the ice drifts down into the North Pacific from the north pole. There are no trees, and except for smoking volcanoes, there is no shelter from the winds that sweep down from the Arctic ocean.

"Although we met 'wille-waws' all the way along the coast from Seward, they were nothing compared with the 'wille-waws' here in the Aleutian islands. I suppose they are caused by the cold winds from the Arctic ocean coming in contact with the warmer breezes of the Pacific. At any rate, to protect themselves from them, the inhabitants of these islands either live in holes in the earth called 'barabaras,' or if they have enough money, they build houses and hold them down by means of cables thrown over the roofs and anchored to the ground.

"There are two villages here at Dutch Harbor on this island of Unalaska. One is called Dutch Harbor, where the wireless station and oil tanks are, and the other is the native settlement at Illillyook, where the old Russian Greek orthodox church and Mr. Strauss' trading post are located. All whaling ships on their way to the Arctic ocean make this their headquarters. Steamers going south pass this way. The coast guard cutters that protect the vast seal herds on the Pribilof islands, just a little to the north of us, in Bering sea, also stop here frequently.

"These islands are volcanic in origin and on nearly every island there is a steaming, smoking cone, some of which rise right out of the sea, like Bogoslof, which on several occasions has erupted, vanished beneath the waves, erupted and reappeared again as if by magic.

"This little arm of Bering sea, where our planes are anchored, is one of the finest landlocked harbors in the world. Mr. Strauss tells us that these islands have seen many strange sights, but none quite so strange as when we came diving down out of the air. This, of course, is the first time that airplanes have ever been here. But nothing strange seems to astonish these lackadaisical half-breed Aleuts—not even the eruption of a volcano, the disappearance of an island, or the arrival of white men through the air. Last night I picked up a copy of Service's poems on our host's table, and in it read a few lines that struck me as being rather appropriate and which run like this:

"There are strange things done 'neath the midnight sun by the men who mull for gold. There are Arctic trails that have secret tales that would make your blood run cold."

"And of all the stories we have heard here, the most horrible are those of how the early Russian fur traders made slaves of the Aleuts, tortured and killed the men, and carried the women off into the Arctic on their whaling ships. It is one of the blackest pages in history.

Movie Man on Job. "When we arrived here at Unalaska, we found Captain Blaisell, our advance man, waiting for us, and also a Pathe movie man from Seattle. Although we stayed at the home of the trader, most of the time we took our meals on board the coast guard cutter, Haida, until the day that Martin and Harvey were lost, when along with every other vessel in these waters she went up the coast to help in the search.

On the night of April 24 the boys were all sitting around in the wardroom of the "Haida" when a guard came in with the news that the planes were all afloat.

"We had dragged them up on the beach and thought they were safely out of the way, even at high tide. But a gale had suddenly swept in from the Arctic ocean and the waves had dashed so high up on the beach that they broke all of the planes loose from where we had washed them down. That was a night we will not forget soon. It was as dark as the nethermost pit. It was snowing like the dickens, the wind was howling, and the waves were booming on the beach. Every able-bodied man went out with us to the rescue, including 130 sailors, the 10 officers from the "Haida," and the six of us. We had no lights excepting small pocket flashes and the searchlight from the cutter, which reached out into the gloom and helped us for a moment before it, moved on to some other point. We were all rushing about wildly and wading around in the water trying to get hold of the planes before they were swept out into the bay. Some of us got in right up to our necks, in the icy water, and worked for two hours and a half, from 10:30 until an hour after midnight. The temperature that night was nearly down to zero. A rope fell overboard from one of the planes, and while several of us were debating as to whether or not it was worth while going in after it one of the crew from the "Haida" jumped overboard into the icy water, swam around until he found it, and then brought it up to us. When we got back to the trader's house that night we were so cold that we couldn't unbutton our clothes.

"April 25—Smith has just received word from Major Martin that his plane has been repaired and that he has at last left Portage bay on his way here via Chignik. With a little good luck now, for a change, he and Harvey ought to be with us within a day or so, and then we will be off to Japan."

"Read the next installment of the thrilling story of the round-the-world flight in The Omaha Bee tomorrow."

Belvidere Meeting. The Belvidere Improvement club will meet at 8 p. m. Friday at Belvidere school, Thirty-sixth and Kansas avenue.

"We have a lot of work to do here, too, because this is going to be our last big base until we get to Japan. All of the islands over which we are going to fly from here on are also utterly barren, and we must leave nothing undone, because if anything goes wrong our chances will be rather slim. Although we think we have flown under some fairly difficult circumstances so far, the general opinion of everyone whom we encounter here in the north is that the flight from here on across the Pacific and over the Kurile islands will be the worst stage of our whole trip."

Busy Writing Letters. April 21: "A radio has just come through from Major Martin saying that the sea is so rough up at Portage bay that so far it hasn't been possible for him to get the motor ashore which Smith had sent up to him on the Algonquin. So the major and Harvey are having nothing but tough luck."

"The 'Brookdale' is leaving for Seattle in a few days, so we are all spending our spare time in writing letters. The planes are right alongside of a big pile of coal, and one of these damnable wille-waws came zipping down the mountain this morning and blew soft coal over all of them."

"Although we attempted to wash the coal dust off the wings with hot water, it would freeze as fast as we could get it on, and we couldn't even rinse the soap off, so we had to give it up. We will all be mighty glad to get out of this land of the wille-waws, or woolies, as some call them. But when we do, I suppose it will simply be a case of flying on into the typhoon belt, then through the monsoons of India, and the simoons of Persia and Arabia."

"So far this world flight has just been one windstorm after another. Yesterday the wille-waws put on a special show for us. It had been perfectly calm for hours, when all of a sudden the wildest and wooliest one we have seen came rushing down the mountains at from 50 to 75 miles an hour. After it had blown for a few minutes then another one came along from an entirely different direction."

"The second one struck the water, picked up a big sheet of it, and carried it right across the bay. A boat lying on shore happened to be in the way and went rolling end over end. There were a lot of empty iron barrels on the deck, and it scattered them in every direction. Arnold and I happened to be walking down the street when we heard a clanking and here came a big iron drum. We jumped out of the way and it rolled on until it crashed into a fence. The first woolie hit a big pile of lumber on dock that had recently been unloaded and which they hadn't as yet had an opportunity to tie down. When the drum hit it the boards went flying off one by one just you would deal out a deck of cards."

Les Arnold tells in his diary how

that they broke all of the planes loose from where we had washed them down. That was a night we will not forget soon. It was as dark as the nethermost pit. It was snowing like the dickens, the wind was howling, and the waves were booming on the beach. Every able-bodied man went out with us to the rescue, including 130 sailors, the 10 officers from the "Haida," and the six of us. We had no lights excepting small pocket flashes and the searchlight from the cutter, which reached out into the gloom and helped us for a moment before it, moved on to some other point. We were all rushing about wildly and wading around in the water trying to get hold of the planes before they were swept out into the bay. Some of us got in right up to our necks, in the icy water, and worked for two hours and a half, from 10:30 until an hour after midnight. The temperature that night was nearly down to zero. A rope fell overboard from one of the planes, and while several of us were debating as to whether or not it was worth while going in after it one of the crew from the "Haida" jumped overboard into the icy water, swam around until he found it, and then brought it up to us. When we got back to the trader's house that night we were so cold that we couldn't unbutton our clothes.

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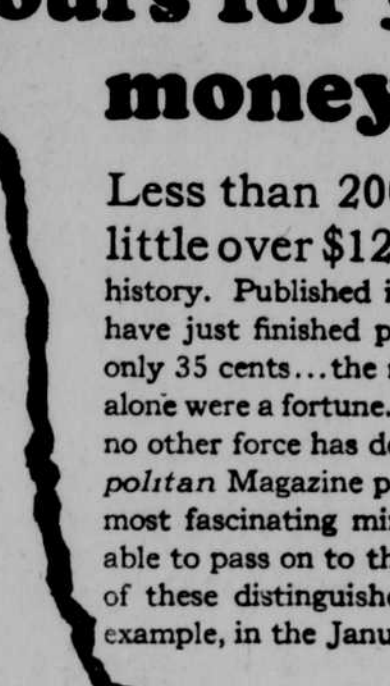
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