

**Memoirs of  
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WX Observer, Shemya, Alaska WWII**

**Sept. 15, 1944.**

It seems to me that the most difficult task in writing a diary is the starting of it. For years you have promised yourself that "someday I'll keep a diary", you say it in the same vein as you would "well, I think I'll write a book" or "next Monday I'm going to give up smoking". Of course the world is full of people who write books that other people wish they hadn't and you can think of at least sixty seven reasons, next Monday, why it would be unhealthy and inane to quit smoking. And so you continue to procrastinate and let other people write books and eschew the pleasures of the world and set their life down in print. But somehow you never quite give up the idea - "someday I'll keep a diary".

Of course you will agree with me that this diary business is sort of a psychological prop; something that, when there is nothing left to do in the world, you can always fall back on. You feel certain that such a day will never mature and you are therefore quite safe in making this promise to yourself. But stay - I'm afraid I do not make myself clear. I do not mean that the thought of writing a diary is distasteful; rather I intend to convey the idea that a diary is the ultimate in wishful thinking, the last thing to hope for, the remote pot of gold that serves as a goal for the living spirit.

So now you are a chortling, "Aha! This callous mortal has reached the end of his rope - he is keeping a diary ". And, of course, you're wrong. For suddenly, in the span of a day, things have changed and a new and more remote pot of gold lures us. A few short hours behind us there are bright lights and movies, crowded streets and smoky bars, twice-a-day-mail and banana splits - and sex. A head of us lies the cold North about which I will tell you more later. And ahead of us lie long months during which a new thought will enter our minds-"Someday I'll keep a woman". So go button up your head - this diary is just something to fill up the hours between now and then.

Today is Sept. 15<sup>th</sup>, 1944 and, I suppose, just as good a place to start as any. I could go back to last night when we left Seattle or to a week ago when we left Kearns. In fact I could go back to the day in October of 1942 when I was personally invited to join the "Armed Forces" (I use quotes because I have seen an arm only on rare occasions - one of them the wooden one used in walking off "Tours" as a cadet). To go back that far would be something of a chore besides being a bit incriminating. For in telling the story I would have to include my five weeks at Salt Lake City which some would think a great waste of money (except for the huge store of whiskey in my foot locker) and others would think a waste of time(except for that "one last night"). Well, thinking it all over very carefully, it does seem that this trip started on \_ \_ \_ \_ \_

### **Sept. 8, 1944.**

It is 0800 and our shipment is gathered for its final meeting. Up to this point all we've heard is rumors. The meeting is short - we are to be ready to board a bus to the RR station at 1500. That's all; no destination, no time en route. So we rush through the last-minute preparations and board our train on schedule. Officers first, then the enlisted men led by the band. The train is loaded, the doors are locked and the band gives out with "Dinah" and "Who". A few of the gals who drive trucks and staff cars around the port are on hand to wave goodbye. Somebody shouts "We're off" as the train gives a lurch and the band bursts forth with "Off we go....into the wild blue yonder". I wonder if ever the Air Corps song held such meaning! I have heard it and sung it hundreds of times but now - well, the whole world beats to it's tempo and the chills that run up the spine are the kind produced by a great symphony. Yes, it is a great symphony and we are a part of it. "Off we go" - some with a prayer, some with a song, some with a catch in the throat. But we had waited a long time for this - and there were no regrets.

Little facts add up to the truth like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. The brakeman says we go to Ogden to tie up with the UP; the officers shell over a buck fifty for six meals enroute. Six meals and the UP can only mean Seattle.

### **Sept. 10, 1944**

Portland in the early morning hours. How nice to see stately pine trees again and breath cool, damp air. The run from Portland to Seattle is long on beauty and I, for one, would like to turn back and do it all over. But we must unload into trucks and check-in at Ft. Lawton. Our barracks are maintained by Italian prisoners who do not comprehend English. But they comprehend America as we find out through one of our pilots of Italian parentage.

Our Italian boy is happy, contented. He loves to talk. We ask him if his people were surprised to hear that New York had been bombed. His reply was a sarcastic laugh followed by, "We knew we had lost the war on the day we got into it. - - - America has everything. - - - I would like to live here if they would let me".

### **Sept. 14, 1944.**

By this time our processing has been completed - luggage shipped, Arctic equipment issued and two more pints of Canadian Club whiskey purchased on our one night in Seattle. Assembly is in the late afternoon and we are whisked off to the waterfront where we board the good (?) ship North Coast.

The North Coast could hardly be described as a luxury liner. Despite the fact that she has just been overhauled she looks like an A-1 priority for the scrap heap. For twenty

years she has hugged the coast between Seattle and Anchorage kept together only by the faith of the skipper and the prayers of her passengers. The sailing list is predominantly civilians bound for Prince Rupert or Anchorage with a few army officers returning from leave and a handful of troops making their first trip northwards. I have a cold so I hit my bunk at 2200 and miss the sailing several hours later.

### **Sept. 15, 1944**

And now we are back to the starting date of this diary. There is every chance that this new toy of mine will run down and end up with a line a week. But, as I said before, it is something to do between now and then. Anyway it doesn't cost much for you to read it.

For a dollar a day we get three meals and a side show. All four are good. The show is produced by our Filipino mess boy who A) does not speak English, B) does not understand sign language, C) is probably deaf and dumb. Six of us ordered ( and somehow got) eggs for breakfast. Mike (Lt. Millard B. Smith) asked for eggs over lightly - one was up easy, the other over hard. Bill (Lt. Bill Whalin) likes his over hard and emphasized by pressing five spread fingers towards the floor. He got an omelet on toast.

Prices at the ships PX are as mysterious as our ultimate destination. Figure them out if you can. One(1) carton of Chesterfields (wrapped in cellophane), two(2) half-pound Nestles' Bars, three(3) Oh' Henry bars and a nail clipper come to seventy cents!! If I had a wife, I feel it would be safe to make an allotment to her.

### **Sept. 16, 1944.**

Blue sky trimmed with powder-puff cloud, emerald islands set in sapphire waters - these are the boundaries of our world. It is morning and the North Coast threads its way through the thousands of pine covered islands that sleep on the inland passage to Alaska. We move softly and smoothly along quiet waterways, careful not to awake the slumbering beauty that surrounds us. "This is the forest primeval" - a rich velvet robe covering the gentle hills with its majesty, holding communion with the blue sky, dipping to caress the waters, peaceful and quiet - sleeping. Only the grey hulk of the North Coast mars this royal pageant of green and blue - but we are soon gone, our passage marked only by a white sea of foam.

It is 0900 and we are leaving this fairy land of trees and islands. The ship is rolling gently and ahead of us lies the open sea. - - - - - This is just a trial run to test the stomachs of the passengers. For two hours the ship pitches and tosses and rolls, then is back in waters sheltered by the Queen Charlotte Islands.

The tiny village of Namu is off to starboard at 1415 and the fishing town of Bela Bela appears around a bend in the channel at 1610. A new note is added to the panorama

of islands and waters; the hills grow in size and soon become mountain peaks poking inquisitive heads through the clouds. The afternoon wanes and the closely-packed pines begin to dress for evening, stretching out graceful arms to receive the patches of misty vapors that roll down from the heights.

- - - - We are beginning to see some wildlife - ducks, then salmon jumping in the channel and finally whales (big ones) not a hundred yards from the ship.

### **Sept. 17, 1944.**

We tie up at the pier in Prince Rupert, B.C. at 0700. Lt. John Keaty and myself get shore leave in time to make nine o'clock mass at a little gray church on the top of a hill overlooking the town. Capt. Leland Lannage joins us and we stroll over to the Officers Club at the army post after mass. The club is officially closed but we manage to get in - and we convince the G.I. at the bar that he should serve us beer on Sunday (it's against orders).

Prince Rupert is a town of 20,000 and is the end of the line for Canadian Pacific Railways. It is not pretty if you consider only the unpainted houses and the narrow, rough streets; it is exquisite if you lift your eyes to the pine-covered hills or look out over the blue, island-studded harbor. Sunday tells nothing of it's life and people for the Sabbath Day is still holy in Canada - stores are for everyday use, Sunday means church and home.

Returning to the ship at 1300 we run into the Civilian Women Employees Club, a bevy of lovelies invites us in to dance and talk. They are sorry to see us leave (the Air Corps always gets along) and we are sorry to miss a dance this evening. But the ship sails at five - maybe we'll get back some day.

### **Sept. 20, 1944**

It would have been futile to attempt an entry in this diary yesterday or Monday. We left Prince Rupert at 1700 Sunday (Sept 17). Cirrus clouds to the West indicated that a storm would meet us on our voyage across the Gulf of Alaska. Monday morning brought grey skies and mounting swells and by noon the North Coast acted like the last car on a roller coaster. The wind and the swells steadily increased, reaching their maximum intensity late Monday night. Tuesday morning I announced to Mike Smith (who had already missed three meals) that a life-boat drill would be held at 1100. His weary lips mumbled, "Why don't they just let the damn boat sink". Rough seas prevailed until early this morning (Wednesday) when we entered Prince William Sound.

Now, at 0900 Wednesday, the Sound is narrowing and we are surrounded by rugged grandeur. To starboard lies a lofty range of snow-covered mountains - mind you, I said snow-covered, not snow-capped for these peaks are solid white from head to foot. To port are more mountains, somewhat smaller, dotted with snow fields and glaciers. Several

hundred yards off are numerous islands, the bases thickly forested, the tops wind-swept grass and rock. It is a brilliant morning with hardly a cloud in the sky.

Night on the Gulf brought complete blackout - we were a lone ship escorted only by a half-dozen albatross. These birds are small of body but have a tremendous wing span - fully four feet. They delight in skimming through the troughs and soaring up the wave crests with the tips of their wings a scant inch from the water.

- - - - We docked at Whittier around noon and entrained for Anchorage an hour later. The roadbed (Alaska R.R.) starts at a small landlocked harbor on the East coast of the peninsula, quickly dives through a mountain range tunneled last year and emerges on the shores of a large tidal basin. On the left the tidal basin, on the right lofty mountains dotted with glaciers that feed countless streams cascading down precipitous slopes. Signs of civilization spring up as we near Anchorage - cattle, hogs and potato farms. To the North Mt. M<sup>e</sup> Kinley rears its 20,300 feet of snow-clad majesty. We drop a few passengers at Anchorage and continue on several miles to Fort Richardson. We are taken by truck to our quarters in the Company B area.

If you have never heard a bunch of pilots sing the blues, then you have never heard griping in its purest form. Even the Medics, who can moan at the slightest inconvenience and make the blood run cold with their tales of horror of P.T., even the Medics sit back and sigh when a pilot is at odds with the world. "Patience and tact", therefore, becomes the watchword for all those who must deal with the bird men; humor them, summon staff cars with reckless abandon, kill the fatted calf, deck the halls with holly. These amenities must seem a bit silly to the brand-new, shiny-winged aviator but soon they are accepted (unbelievable) as the normal way of life.

Picture, then, the arrival of shipment AB116 at Ft. Richardson - eight pilots and eight weather men, their eyes still bright with the glow of civilization, ready to save the world for democracy and brighten the life of Alaska.. There is no band at the station, no staff cars waiting, no majors to clasp hands and gurgle "Well, we've anxiously awaited your arrival". Of course some mistake has been made! Ah, but no! This post is run by the "walking army"; sure they've heard of the Air Corps. So what!! There'll be a truck along soon. Sure, a truck - you don't expect a Packard, do you?

The truck will comfortably hold ten men and their luggage. Oh, there's sixteen of you. That's T.S., isn't it? And off goes this rumbling monster; but not to the center of the post. Oh, o! There's a spot on the hillside, two weeks from anywhere, with nice Quonset Huts and poor transportation. And the song begins "Oh, my aching back! They can't do this to us - we're Air Corps". The world is a blue funk and war is indeed misery.

**Sept. 21, 1944.**

While strolling thru the PX today I ran into Ray Fox, a former lab instructor at

Chicago and now with the WX Bureau at Elmendorf Field.

A trip to Anchorage in the evening reveals it to be a town of gravel streets and frame houses. Victory gardens run to small but bountiful potato patches. One old fellow, busy digging in a yard perhaps 20 x 40, insisted that he has been harvesting about 3/4 ton each year from his plot - with never a rotation of crops.

Anchorage's main street (also gravel) is flanked on both sides for four blocks with liquor stores and bars. Occasionally one sees a grocery store or meat market (T-bone @ 90c, boiled ham @ 95c, loin lamb chops @ 60c) or drug stores but the great majority of shops display only row upon row of bottles. The conversion to this war-time business must have been some-what hurried; the proprietor of one small concern didn't even bother to paint out the vestiges of his former trade - his sign now reads, "Union Steam Baths" and underneath it, "Liquor Store".

A familiar sight: most of the stores (including grocery and drug) purvey that great nickel drink - Squirt.

#### **Sept. 23, 1944.**

Dropped into the Officers' Club for a short beer and a game of pool and thereby renewed two old acquaintances - Ralph Tucker (a Capt.), M.I.T. '39 and Capt. Bill Stern, M.I.T. '40, both in the Coast Artillery. Also discovered that John C. Eberhard, cousin of Russ Miller, has just transferred from Elmendorf to Fairbanks.

#### **Sept. 25, 1944**

The RCO greeted us with a cheerful smile and the words, "Gentlemen, my requisition asked for superior men for this job. You are it!" Dr. Rossby, who had just returned from a trip along the chain, was introduced and gave an informal talk on forecasting problems in the 11<sup>th</sup> Weather Region. We were in complete agreement with his closing statement, "If you can forecast for this area, you will have no trouble in any other part of the world".

In brief, our mission here (so said the RCO) was to replace men who are not up to par - and we are expected to greatly benefit the 11<sup>th</sup> Weather Sqn through our knowledge of new forecasting techniques.

#### **Sept. 27, 1944.**

Orders finally came thru assigning us to the 11<sup>th</sup> Weather Squadron. We moved down from the hill into the Air Corps barracks. To celebrate the occasion I took a date to the Lido Gardens. Filets and two drinks apiece came to \$14<sup>50</sup> which seems to me a hellava price for steak.

### **Sept. 29, 1944**

Reported at 1700 AWT for my first days work since July 22<sup>nd</sup>. It took only a few minutes to discover that there's much to do - reviewing upper air and dynamic metro and learning the call letters, locations and topography of Alaskan stations.

Base wea at Elmendorf uses eight teletype machines to clear weather reports to and from the states. Since all reports come to us in code, the cryptographic department is a busy one.

The Aleutian Route is handled by the Army and carries No. 1 priority. The Army also takes care of the Fairbanks and Nome airways with the wea bureau forecasting the Seattle route.

Was surprised to learn that United Airlines operates planes into Anchorage as a part of ATC.

### **Oct. 1, 1944**

From the RCO (Col. Smith) right down to the squadron mascot, this is a swell bunch of men to work with. In this business particularly one expects to find an antagonistic attitude towards newcomers; but at Elmendorf new ideas and suggestions are welcomed. Life cannot fail to be pleasant when men work unselfishly towards a common goal.

War still goes on in the Chain. Whoever forecasts for Paramushiro raids goes along to see that his prognostication verifies. One of our forecasters has been lost to ack-ack, one to fighter fire and the last report from yet another was, "See a front ahead. Am going into it to investigate".

Oct 2, - - Weather data: Max temp, 64; minimum, 24

### **Oct 3, 1944**

Chalk up a victory for Theory! I drew up the hodograph for Anchorage last night; the analysis sent me rushing for a look at the surface map. The nearest front, as analyzed, was still eighteen hours away but a layer of cold air advection on the hodograph could only be due to a fast moving cold front which should hit in six hours (or 0200 this morning). I don't know exactly when the rain started but the soft patter of big drops wake me up at five past three.

The frontal passage has wrought magic in our world. To the east of us, some ten miles, lies a range of mountains that, in one breath-taking sweep, rise from sea-level to twelve thousand feet. Today the skirt of that range is garbed in traditional autumn hues; the green of the pines is flecked with the gold of dying birch and beech leaves. As the eye moves higher, patches of snow appear on the gold like sugar sprinkled on corn flakes. A sharp line at six thousand feet marks the bottom of a soft, unbroken coat of white which

climbs swiftly until it merges with the fluffy clouds hiding the peaks.

The full moon last night brought a 36 foot difference in the tides of Cook's Inlet.

#### **Oct. 4, 1944**

Started a series of lectures on 11<sup>th</sup> Weather administration, supply, communications, codes, etc to run for ten days at 9 - 1130AM.

- - - Max 47, min 32 - - -

#### **Oct 6. 1944**

John DeClaispel took me for an hours' plane ride (in an AT6-D) over the local area. The beauty of this country makes one gasp. Southward towards Kenai lies a peninsula of lakes and woods - it is here that the great herds of moose roam - bordered by Turnagain Arm to the north and Cooks Inlet to the west. Northward rise the majestic peaks of the M<sup>c</sup>Kinley range. East and west lie great peaks and glaciers. Even from a cloud deck extending from the Gulf northwards to Takeetna, the mountains could be plainly seen set against powder blue skies beyond the cloud cover.

At the start of our flight the tide was low; as it began to rise we could see the waters rushing into the Knik Arm, boiling and churning like a river in flood, hurrying to meet a schedule which calls for them to rise 28 feet in six hours.

#### **Oct. 8, 1944**

To say that I am passive towards cats would, indeed, be a masterpiece of understanding. I hate, loathe and despise cats! My feelings include both sexes and all sizes. Oh, kittens are nice alright but, unless a large truck or a well-placed kick intervenes, they invariably grow up to be cats. And, as I said before, I hate cats.

Alexander is, somehow, different. Alexander is about the size of an old carburetor and almost as pretty - though far more dirty. His coat, if sent to the cleaners, would be a motley pattern of brown and white. Not having a mother to mind him, he never bothers to wash behind (or anywhere near) his ears; consequently they are a dark grey as are his shoes which are in need of a shine. But his yellow-gold eyes are bright and shiny which indicates that his heart is clean - or maybe its just a sign of youth.

I first met Alexander in the corridor outside my room. He was lonely and he was cold. The chills that ran through him were plainly visible. They followed the bone structure of his body, the main flow being down his spine with secondary vibrations along each rib. You see, Alexander hadn't eaten in quite some time so even his thick coat of dirt was insufficient to cover his ribs.

"It won't hurt," "I thought", to let the little beastie sit in my room until I'm ready for bed". So there he sat, slowly thawing out, until I finally set him back in the corridor, closed the door and hit the sack. And then - - - s-c-r-a-t-c-h, scratch, Alexander wants in!



Next morning Mike Smith suggested it would be a good idea to adopt the kitten. It was too late. Alexander had already decided to adopt us. Now he sleeps in my room at night and never misses a chow call. He eats raw hamburger (at eight in the morning and six at night) off of an old newspaper and drinks from the cover of a soap dish. And, if Alexander can stand this diet, he will probably grow up to be a cat. I must be mad!

- - - Meteorological Notes

1. Contender for "fastest moving system".

Amchitka, 071230Z, pressure 993 mb

Amchitka, 081230Z, pressure 1023 mb !!!

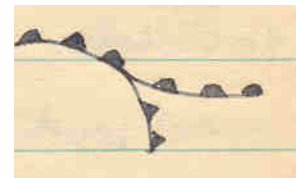
2. 10-7-44: A wave appears near Shemya



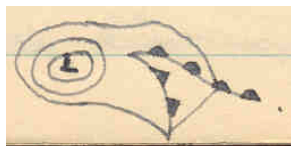
and forms a cold-type accln



which orients itself



and then moves under the west side of a low aloft so that the 10,000 ft winds over the accln are 945. Consequently the temperature contrast at the sfc is wiped out giving



In this position the low follows the wave south of the chain, both moving at 40 mph with the accln being devoured as quickly as it is formed.

### **October 15, 1944.**

Time passed quickly this week. Daily lectures continued on Alaskan forecasting and climatology and on operation of weather stations in this region. In the base weather station we kept hard at the job of becoming familiar with locators and analyzing all sorts of charts. At this early date I don't dare attempt a forecast; it seems to be more wise just to follow the systems as they move in on the chain and observe the relations between the roofs(*sic*), hodographs, upper air charts and surface maps.

During the middle of the week Alexander disappeared and I am not at all sorry. After all, I hate cats and Alexander is no exception. He is too selfish, too independent to be considered a friend. His true self was revealed due to an error. Being concerned about his hamburger diet, I purchased some choice kidney which he relished. After two meals of kidney I attempted to feed him the remaining hamburger, purely in the interests of food conversation. Alexander, the heel, refused to cooperate and stalked out in high dudgeon. The hamburger ended up in the furnace, as did the rest of the kidneys, and I have not seen Alexander since. Which is good riddance.

The week closed with a formal dance at the club. This was the first formal I attended at Ft. Richardson and now I feel entitled to wear my campaign ribbon. The wolves howl loud and long on Saturday night.

### **Oct. 17, 1944**

Four of our group has been assigned to the 54<sup>th</sup> TCS and four to the Instrument School (I to the latter) for weather maps. No flights today so I drew my .45 automatic and went out on the range to see how well it worked. It must be a good weapon for I qualified as sharpshooter with a score of 82% (85% makes expert).

### **Oct. 18, 1944.**

Flew for four hours (C-47) over the local area in the morning and went out on the sub-machine gun range in the afternoon. There is undoubtedly a spot for me in the infantry for my score on the Thompson was 92 (expert).

### **Oct. 19, 1944.**

Lts. John Keaty, W.W.(Red) LeFeure, M.R.(Mike) Smith & myself moved out of the filthy air corps barracks into an apartment. Waiting for us were two bedrooms, living room, kitchen, bath and a million years collection of filth. As to the latter, we closed our eyes and threw out everything we laid hands on. Medicine bottles, foodstuffs, long

woolies, writing materials - things flew fast and furious until five trash buckets were filled.

#### **Oct 20, 1944.**

Left for Adak in a C-47 at 0830. We landed at Umnak for dinner at 1430 in the midst of a driving snow squall. At Adak we were met by the usual weather, to wit, rain showers. After a late supper at Adak we headed back for Elmendorf. Magneto trouble hit the starboard engine somewhere east of Atka but we finally managed to get to Naknek at 0430 on the morning of Oct 21 for a check up. An hours time found the cause and we landed at UHQ at 0640.

Out of 23 hours, seventeen were spent in the air mostly on instruments with four hours actual time in clouds.

#### **Oct. 22, 1944.**

Left for Edmonton at 0300 after attending Major Carlson's party for the personnel of 11<sup>th</sup> Weather Squadron. We stopped for breakfast at Whitehorse and arrived at Edmonton around 1330 (1630 MWT).

It being my birthday-eve, I called Phoenix for a short chat with mom and dad. What a wonderful birthday present to feel a touch of home even is for only a few short minutes!!

After my phone call Smitty and I dined on filet mignon, took a stroll around town and bedded down at the MacDonald Hotel for a fourteen hour nap.

#### **Oct. 23, 1944.**

I awoke with a start at eleven this morning. Something was different and I lay back for ten minutes or so trying to figure out what it was. Oh, yes! Today I am thirty! I tested each joint carefully and, finding then in good order, decided I was not too old to get out of bed and see what Edmonton looked like.

Today marked the opening of the Canadian Victory Bond drive with a parade and speeches in the public square. We missed the talks but were on hand to witness a drill by a CWAC bagpipe and drum unit. It was very formal and very colorful, starting with a cadence of sixty and gradually increasing to one thirty. With each step the drums would crash, the sticks would be lifted on high, swirl rapidly, hesitate and crash again. These girls had the precision and poise of the Rockettes.

After the drill had ended we sauntered through the department stores - Hudson Bay Co., Eatons and Woodwards. For a birthday present I purchased a pair of sheepskin slippers. Size 11½ they were and probably the largest the Hudson Bay Co. had sold in many a moon.

We took off at 1500 and flew over the great plains of Alberta. Wheat fields

stretched for miles in all directions, the soil black and rich. The farms slowly thinned out into a land of lakes and rivers and forests. Below us the Alaska Highway twisted its way Northward across frozen rivers and through remote camps. The sun descended and a waning moon showed a land of silver and black caught in the clutches of a new winter. I stretched my sleeping bag on the floor of the plane and took a last look out the window before crawling in; the land did not seem so cold - it was warm and it was friendly for it looked like a Christmas card come to life.

#### **Oct 24, 1944.**

Because of bad weather ahead we landed at Whitehorse about one in the morning and spent the night a few miles south of the shores of Lake Laberge. It was of this spot, I believe, that Service wrote "Strange things are done in the midnight sun - - - - here on the shores of Lake Laberge I cremated Sam Magee".

Our journey was resumed at seven and we landed at Anchorage at eleven fifteen. I felt my age a little during the morning hours. We flew at 12,000 feet (temp -19<sup>0</sup>C) in the midst of a dense ice fog. At one point a 16000 ft mountain lay hidden just ten miles off our course.

A cold front had passed Anchorage twelve hours previous and we were met by a cold north wind as we stepped off the plane. The puddles are solid ice and we begin to appreciate our parkas.

**Total rtrip = 20 hrs**

#### **Oct. 28, 1944**

Received orders today assigning me to 54<sup>th</sup> TCS for Special Duty - flying the chain.

Spent the evening at Col. Smiths' apartment and there met the first wave - an aerologist - to arrive in Alaska..

#### **Oct 31, 1944**

Took off from Anchorage at 6:30 AM and climbed to 10,000 feet in time to watch the new sun set its torch to the clouds and turn them into pillows of red flame. Lunch at Umnak, supper and a soft bed at Adak - total flying time 8 + 5.

#### **Nov. 1, 1944**

5 + 48 flying time took us from Adak to Shemya to Amchitka and back to Adak. The pilot on this trip is Lt. Kelley, co-pilot Lt Quinn and a passenger who boarded at CH is Lt. Col. Sullivan - name of the ship should certainly be the "Irish Clipper".

#### **Nov. 2, 1944**

8 + 5 flying time, Adak - Cold Bay - Anchorage.

Today I pay tribute to the Weathermen's Aid - the snow-capped volcanoes that rise above the clouds, serving as landmarks to the navigator and as gigantic weathervanes to the meteorologist. Mt. Cleveland, though not the loftiest, is monarch of all; he blew his top in June of '44, wiped out a fishing village, and now blows out a constant, thick stream of smoke as if to announce that he will not be content with just one town. Pavlov is weary and old and has a bad stomach; every seven minutes he growls and spits an inky smoke from his 8900 foot cone. Shishaldin is a graceful, 10,000 ft lady; her smoke is white and wispy - I think she means no harm and, beautiful and neat thing that she is, only shakes out powder puffs in her boudoir. At night she washes her face and glows a bit to show her youth.

There are others, too; Carlisle and Vsevidof and Makuskin and Tanoga and more. Lone sentinels standing watch on the air lanes.

#### **Nov. 4, 1944**

8 + 14 flying time. Anchorage - Cold Bay - Adak. Pilot Lt. Stalzenmuller; co-pilot Lt. Baldner. Room 6 in the Adak Degink is getting to feel like home

#### **Nov. 5, 1944.**

7 + 52 flying time. Adak - Cold Bay - Anchorage. Home at 6:30 PM..

#### **Nov. 6, 1944**

Off the ground at 6:30 AM en route to Cold Bay but turned back after reaching Kenai because one of the fuel pumps went out. So "back to the sack" for a few hours sleep. We arrived at Cold Bay to find a 35 mile wind lifting the snow and blowing the hard crystals so that they resembled a sand blast. Hopes of an early take-off quickly dwindled as a front was strengthening out on the chain. So we willingly settled down in a comfortable hut to sweat out the weather. Flying time 5 + 3

#### **Nov. 7, 1944.**

The front of the West has developed as expected and I spent a leisurely day sleeping and reading. Cold Bay is not a bad place to be weathered in. Climatically it is well named. The air is clear and dry and cold - though not nearly as chilly as the inland stations. East of the port is Pavlov volcano, with Frosty Peak South and Shishaldin to the West.

Pilot on this trip is Lt. J.J. Josselson and co-pilot is Lt. E.V. Johnson.

#### **Nov. 8, 1944.**

4 + 54 hours, Cold Bay to Adak.

**Nov. 9, 1944**

8 + 18 hours. Adak to Amchitka.(CH). Amchitka to Shemya (PF). Then PF to CH, CH to PF, PF back to CH.

The first leg of our trip today was one that I don't care to make again. We cleared for the 6000 ft level where the clouds were dense. West of Adak Tanoga Volcano rises to 6975 feet - clearing it is a simple navigation problem. Unfortunately we had not been given notice of a 30<sup>0</sup> shift in the Amchitka beam. After an hours flight we were lost - finally broke out of the soup to find ourselves over Oglinga. By checking back on our course it was decided that we had better inspect the wing-tips for signs of gravel for we had probably come that close to the 7000 foot Tanoga. God watches over fools and flyers.

The weather between Amchitka and Shemya was the best of the season. We cleared contact and made a close inspection of Kiska en route. From a height of fifty to a hundred feet we had an excellent view of the Japanese installations, the derelict Jap freighters in the harbor and the bomb holes left by the Americans. As a parting gesture we cleared the tower by a few feet and extended the same courtesy to the landing strip.

On the return trip, PF to CH, I became the second Mehren to pilot a plane over Kiska. For 30 minutes I took over the controls of our C-47. Approaching the West end of Amchitka, Josselson pointed to a hole in the clouds and ordered, "Take her down". "Hold you hats, boys", sez Barney and dives 5000 ft to hit it right in the middle.

On our second shuttle to Shemya we circled low over Buldir Island and parachuted supplies to the weather men who are the sole inhabitants of that lonely spot. On paper the procedure is simple - circle low, kick the freight out the door at the proper time. That is exactly what happens but all the while the plane is traveling at 140 mph and is being tossed like a cork by the terrific up and down drafts in the canyon - which explains why the crew chief (who did the dirty work) wore a parachute on his back and a rope around his waist.

**Nov. 10, 1944.**

5 + 59 hours, Amchitka - Adak - Umnak - Port Heiden. Magneto trouble delayed our departure so that we didn't get to Heiden until long after dark. We had cleared for Cold Bay but the weather would not permit a landing. Heiden wasn't much better and was further complicated by a new tower operator who forgot to turn the runway lights on. At present I prefer to skip the details of this flight. I can remember how glad I was that we had a chaplain for a passenger; how nice the cold, wet, muddy ground looked when we were finally on it; how the pilot's hands and the co-pilot's hands and my hands shook

as we accepted the two ounces of straight rye whiskey prescribed by the medical department, issued by Uncle Sam, fed to us in the station hospital and charged up to “emotional fatigue”. What a hell of a way to make a living!!

#### **Nov. 11, 1944.**

3 + 2 hours Heiden to Anchorage. And what a ride! Instruments all the way - and snow and sleet and a heavy load of ice that cut our ground speed from 200 to 140. Mountains all around us, especially above, but their nearness could only be felt, never seen. The chaplain was still with us, though, and we made a safe landing through a snow storm that blanketed Elmendorf. It was high noon when our wheels touched the ground but we still needed the runway lights to see the strip.

[Nov.13, Min temp. -6<sup>0</sup>F.]

#### **Nov. 14, 1944.**

Lt John Keaty and I started work today in the new Upper Air Section of the weather central with Vince Oliver as chief consultant. Our job for the next several weeks will be to familiarize ourselves with the data received and the methods of interpretation. We become pioneers since very little of this work has been done in the 11<sup>th</sup> Weather Region.

#### **Nov. 19, 1944.**

Today, while hurrying over to Weather Central for a meeting, I was stopped in my tracks by a raucous chirping behind me. As I turned to investigate the clamor I beheld a huge magpie, with props feathered and flaps down, executing a fast dive for my cap. There seemed to be business in the black, beady eyes that quickly loomed larger and larger on the horizon. I ducked just in time and this huge ball of feathers plopped into the snow at my feet. Then began a curious game. The bird would burrow into the snow, then toss it into the air, chirping madly all the while. And he was smart for when I approached to pick him up he would circle quickly and end up a few feet behind me; as I turned to find him he would dash behind my back again. At length he gave up and flew onto my shoulder, scolding constantly for something to eat. I later learned that his habitat is the grounds around the PX where, rather than grubble honestly for food, he finds it simpler to beg meals from the customers.

#### **December 1944**

Now, due to laziness, a time-consuming job and a goodly share of the social life of Ft. Richardson, we skip blithely through the last few weeks of November and the early days of December. During this period we had our coldest temperatures to date. One night the mercury fell to twenty-three below with a maximum of eight below the following

day. Cold such as this only comes with still air and, although our furnace could only heat the apartment to 63<sup>0</sup>F, the bite of the weather outside was not hard to endure. This period also produced a thirty-six hour snowfall that left sixteen inches on the ground. During the same days, the ice-fogs came to add their beauty to the winter scene. On calm, clear nights when the thermometer coasts rapidly below the zero marker the moisture in the air condenses into a fine and dense mist of tiny ice particles. As frost gathers on a refrigerator unit, these delicate crystals of ice build a soft white coat over everything they touch. Oft times morning will see an inch-thick blanket of hoarfrost on buildings, telephone wires, trees - everything that is exposed to the cold caress of the ice fogs.

#### **December 9, 1944.**

For Lt. John Keaty and myself this was the last night in Anchorage for many a moon. On two days notice we had cleared the post (a lengthy procedure involving the procurement of signatures from almost everybody you've never seen before), had packed our worldly goods, had announced to one and all that we were finally going overseas and consequently were ready for a gala farewell celebration. The party was forthcoming, tendered by Colonel Smith and graced by the presence of the weather officers and their current ladies. Sleep came late this night.

#### **December 10, 1944.**

After sweating out transportation all day we were finally hustled into ATC's "Luxury Liner" (the one with reclining seats) and took off near five P.M. for the land of forgotten men. As if in answer to an unspoken request, the pilot made one slow circle over the Fort. Below us the lights of civilization twinkled gaily on a new snow; ahead lay the dark, winter night. Below us were pine trees and countless shrubs, hotels and the night clubs of Fourth Street; ahead lay a world of rock and sand and windswept islands. The words of a favorite poem ran thru my mind,

"I see the lights of the village  
Gleam thru the rain and the mist  
And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me  
Which my soul cannot resist".

We, who are ever on the move, always feel that note of sadness as the wheels begin to turn again. In a flash the mind separates the good memories from the bad; we forgive our enemies, rejoice in our friends, re-live the happy moments we knew. Then the mind tucks these pleasant experiences away - little candles to relight on lonely nights. From the past we have reaped a harvest of happy memories; now we go to sow a new crop.

Brief stops were made at Port Heiden, Adak and Amchitka and we arrived at



Shemya near five in the morning after a 1750 mile journey. Our next twelve hours were spent sleeping in a Pacific hut which, as in Adak, bore the name, "Hotel De Gink". In the late afternoon we signed the register and, as of Dec. 11, 1944, were officially enrolled in the Air Base (400<sup>th</sup>) Colony.

### **Dec. 19, 1944.**

During the first week on this island we worked in the secret room at Base Weather, divided our few leisure hours between the Air Base Officers Club and our hut on the hill. The hill was nothing more than an oversized sand-dune; the hut was set hurriedly on the south side, presumably to afford some protection from the strong winds that buffet Shemya. There was always some question as to whether the hill sheltered us or we it but unfortunately we moved before any conclusive evidence could be obtained. This I do know; when the winds mounted to sixty miles an hour, no matter what the direction, the hut trembled as though in an earthquake and the constant blast of sand against the arched roof sounded like torrential rains. Sand was everywhere - in our shoes, heaped on our beds, hidden under the maps on which we strove to draw neat isobars.

The hut itself was deluxe. Large wooden lockers to hang clothes, wide sink with running water (when the pipes weren't frozen) supplied from two fifty gallon oil drums outside, the conventional oil heater in the center, storm hall at one end, twenty gallon tank with spigot set on top of the stove for hot water.

Today we moved. Our personal property went into a Quonset hut, barren of all furnishings except two small tables (one with but three legs so that it is doomed to stand in a cold corner until needed for firewood), four shelves hung along each wall and the same old International oil heater in the center.

The office was consolidated with the 28<sup>th</sup> Bomber Group forecasting unit and moved into brand new quarters at the Advanced Command Post of the I Air Force.

Now we serve a multitude of masters. We are assigned to the 11<sup>th</sup> Wea Sqn, on detached duty. We are attached to the 400<sup>th</sup> Air Base Sqn for administration, to the XI Strategic Air Force for quarters and supply, to the 28<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group for rations. Our chief duty is to forecast the weather for tactical missions.

### **Dec 24 & 25, 1944.**

Christmas Eve at Shemya. Outside the winds of an approaching storm howl and wet snow slags against the hut. The heater runs at "high" to beat back the damp cold. And the mind wanders - it hurries back through two thousand miles of air to Anchorage, skims across the waters of the Gulf of Alaska and the Inland Passage, races over the forests and the mountains and the desert - and it dwells on thoughts of other Christmas Seasons spent at home.

The machines of war have been rolled out of Hanger #1 and in their place is a sea of faces. Several thousand men have come to pay homage to the Prince of Peace at a solemn high midnight Mass. Against the center wall a simple altar has been built, flanked by Christmas trees flown in from the Mainland and brilliantly illuminated by photo-flood lamps. Above the altar an artist has painted a scene of the Wise Men following the Star to Bethlehem. Their purpose - in coming is inscribed over the sketch, "Gloria in excelsis Deo". As I read these opening praises of the Gloria I have but one favor to ask. "Please, Lord, bestow upon us this night the blessings of the second phrase - Et in terram pax- -".

Led by a sailor flag-bearer and two soldiers as a color guard, the procession began at midnight. Civilian workers, soldiers, sailors - their voices made up the choir that led the priests and acolytes to the altar. Tonight these soldiers of the King of Kings marched to the saintly music of Silent Night. With the first words of this familiar carol came visions of home and family. "Silent night - - - Holy night". I knew it was silent and peaceful in Phoenix tonight and I longed to be there. And then suddenly I closed my eyes and this cold hangar on a lonely island became a great and warm cathedral and my family and friends stood next to me singing the beautiful words - "Sleep in heavenly peace". I didn't have to look to see them; I knew they were there. Thus the peace of the Babe of Bethlehem came to me as it will to all men who open their hearts to receive it.

It is estimated that 4500 men attended this Midnight Mass with over a thousand communicants.

Christmas dinner at the 28<sup>th</sup> Bomber mess hall was in the grand style and the Upper Air Section was forced to take the day off to digest the huge quantities of food devoured.

### **Jan 2, 1945**

General Johnson paid us a visit to our quarters today, inquiring, in a tone that expected a cheerful answer, "How are things going". To which I answered, "Lousy, Sir". Then followed a discussion as to how our hut could be fixed up. Now the question is can the General get things accomplished quicker than his Adjutant can. I hope so for the promises of the Adjutant are still in the "Well - soon" stage.

### **Jan 3, 1945**

The General wins! Men swarmed like ants over our roof today, pouring hot pitch into every wound. By nightfall the hut was warm and comfortable. Mebee (*sic*) soon we will have lockers to hang our clothes in.

### **Jan 31, 1945**

Time, in its swift passage, has gobbled up the month of January. At the end of the

month Keaty and I are still the only forecasters available to handle the upper air work. For a period of two or three weeks one of us spends 8 - 12 hours on the day shift and the other a corresponding period on night work. When the weather is worse than usual we change shifts and take a day off in doing so.

About the middle of the month the builders began sawing and pounding in our hut. Today we have five individual rooms with a sixth room containing the oil heater, washstand and lockers for toilet articles. The "bedrooms" are partitioned off with paneled plywood; they have closets and tables (the latter folding against the wall). During the next few days built-in bunks with a chest-of-drawers underneath will be added. Then comes wiring and painting. By the time this is done I suppose we shall get orders to move again.

All the benefits of Special Services are available on Shemya. Each month stacks of magazines and books arrive. Some of the periodicals, like Time and the New Yorker, are "pony size"; some, like Satevepost, are a compilation of the month's best stories, articles and cartoons. Even the funny papers come in so that we receive four installments of Terry and the Pirates in a single issue. No advertisements, everything free.

The books are selected by a central board of authors and critics; they are old and new, done in pocket size editions.

Free movies (on 16mm) film are presented three times weekly at the CP theatre, as well as at various unit theatres.

Cigarettes donated by firms, organizations and individuals are distributed about the Island. The thought is a good one but with smokes costing 50c a carton and no other way to spend money they are not missed (the free ones) if they don't arrive.

An occasional beer ration is looked forward to and usually runs around eighteen cans per man. Coca-cola is available about as often (once a month or longer) but the ration is only six bottles. Ice cream, made with powdered milk, is manufactured by the PX.

Officers are allowed a liquor ration. Four bottles per month are paid for in advance (at \$3<sup>50</sup> per fifth) and usually arrive six to eight weeks later.

Laundry, such as it is, goes out each Wednesday, and comes back on Friday. The job is done by the Quartermaster and can hardly be called "finished". But the clothes are clean, even though they don't look so, and who cares if they aren't ironed.

A new dry-cleaning plant has opened within the last week. Enlisted men send three pieces for free; Officers pay about a quarter per article.

Outgoing mail travels the skyways. Incoming mail when first-class also rides by air with second-class going by boat (to Attu and then Shemya). When the weather is good, letters from Phoenix get here in four to six days.

Since Shemya and Attu are classified as combat zones, the Church dispenses us

from any fasting before Communion.

January's weather was exceptionally good. Day or night the temperature rarely went above 35<sup>0</sup>F or below 28<sup>0</sup>. Few storms hit the area so that we had many periods of scattered to broken Stratocumulus. Most of the "bad" weather was of the showery type with squalls and high winds.

### **Feb 2, 1945.**

Made my first trip on flying status today. 6 + 0 hours on a Weather Mission that took us West to 169,48E and South to 47,22N. 2 + 10 hours were spent above 10,000 feet, mostly on oxygen, with some 40 minutes cruising at 20,000 feet.

General Electric has solved the hazard of low temperatures. Since the ships are too large to be heated adequately, electrical out-lets are strung from nose to tail. Just plug your "zoot suit" in and adjust the rheostat.

Dressing for these outings is a major operation. First comes long woolies, over them your O.D. shirt and trousers. Add next electrically wired trousers and jacket. Over this goes your A-9 flying trousers(alpaca-lined) and B-9 jacket with hood. As a finishing touch you put on heated gloves and (for those who have small feet) heated shoe inserts topped by flying boots. Feet such as mine present complications, being size 12 and not fitting the so-called "large" insert and boot. So I wear wool socks, cover them with wool "snuggies" put on a pair of sheepskin slippers and slip the whale into a pair of galoshes. So far it has worked well.

Pilot, Soland.

### **Feb 10, 1945**

8 + 15 hrs. Weather mission to 49N 159E in anticipation of coverage mission. Pilot was Col. Loney.

### **March 15, 1945**

Went out to investigate a suspected cold front south of Shemya and found same. One sustained updraft lifted us 3500 feet in a minute and a half. Terminal socked in upon return so landed at Amchitka, returning to base next day. Total roundtrip 4 + 30. Pilot, Reynolds; co-pilot, Hauck.

### **March 27, 1945**

1 + 0 hours Casco and return with Lt. Evans in B25D. Going into Casco we found the shoreline obscured by a heavy snow squall. The strip suddenly appeared 500 ft below us and we made a sharp 90<sup>0</sup> turn, then side-slipped onto the runway in the midst of a heavy squall with strong cross gusts. Hardly a healthy way to live.

**April 3, 1945.**

Col Smith paid us a visit today and slyly announced that my promotion was on the way. Also that Lt. M.R. Smith would soon arrive in Shemya to help us with our Upper Air work.

**April 10, 1945.**

My first day off in forty consecutive days.

**April 15, 1945.**

WX mission to 48N, 162E            7 + 35            Pilot, Long.

**May 23, 1945**

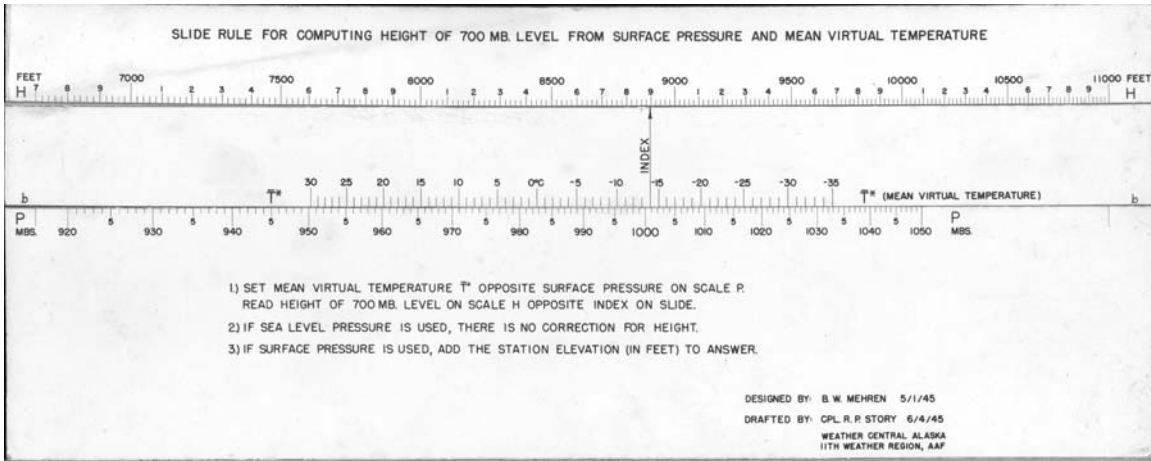
WX - Ferret off at 0600W; land 1610W. Landfall at Kamchatka and drove SW along Kamchatka and Paramushir for one hour, turning South of Suribachi (*sic*) and working NE for fifteen minutes and then turned towards base.

**June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945**

Weather formation to 48<sup>0</sup>50'N, 154<sup>0</sup>10'E. Weniger and Lt. Bill Murphy. 10 + 55. All terrain above 500' visible from Lopatka to Matsuwa..

### **END OF DIARY**

(Editors Note: The diary ended abruptly, in our opinion, probably because Barney became totally involved in the numerous bombing runs that he fly in over the Northern Kuriles, and also the time he took to observe winds aloft, the Jet Stream, which he took part in documenting with a fellow weatherman on Shemya. He was also busily designing a weatherman's slide rule (picture attached) during these days that may have taken away his attention from entries into this diary. As evidenced from the attached postcard, he stayed in the area well after the end of the war).



First Lieutenant Bernard W. Mehren  
 Receiving the Air Medal 5 September 1945  
 Barney is third from right, just before airman receiving his award.

HEADQUARTERS ELEVENTH AIR FORCE  
LEAD CREW  
CERTIFICATE OF COMMENDATION  
Members of the B-24 Liberator Crew which led the  
404 TH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON  
In a Successful Bombing Attack on  
KATAOKA JETTY, SHIMUSHU, 7 AUGUST 1945

2ND LT	Paul McKinley	Pilot	SGT	Harry R. Elegree	Asst Engineer
2ND LT	Bruce G. James	Co-Pilot	SGT	Donald L. Doty	Radio Operator
FLT/O	Duane D. Davis	Navigator	PFC	Joseph F. Mrozowicz	Radar Observer
FLT/O	Gerhard W. Hohn	Bombardier	CPL	James W. Taylor	Photographer
1ST LT	Bernard W. Mehren	Weather Observer	SGT	Joseph M. Bader	Gunner
SGT	Lyndal E. Summarsell	Engineer	SGT	David N. Bennett	Gunner

Edited/transcribed during the 2010 Memorial Day weekend in honor of our father  
Bernard Walsh Mehren, b October 23, 1914 d May 29, 2009,  
by son and daughter-in-law John and Marcy Mehren, Ramona, California USA