

War Correspondents

War correspondents are a special breed of men and women who continue today risking their own personal safety to capture a story, photo, or painting, and communicate the news back to the public. These people are neither soldiers of war or members of the armed forces. However they were given the same uniform and are treated with the same priority and respect as the fighting man and women. It is an exhausting, dirty, and deadly business, facing the sniper's bullet and land mine which is impervious to the war correspondent badge. Near the end of World War Two [30 April 1945], LIFE magazine presented a portfolio on ten artists who had been in the conflict since December 1941.



My favorite American LIFE war correspondent artist was Capt. Tom Lea who wore the standard uniform of the United States Army Air Force. Only a small strip of cloth on his shoulders identified him as a war correspondent. Through the medium of pencil and paint Tom captured the mysteries, death, and spectacle of war art such as the American pilot expression and the four leaf clover he wore for good luck. His art appeared in many issues of LIFE magazine and dramatically showed how deep Americans had been plunged into the Second World War. It was the magic of the airplane and the U. S. Air Transport Command that flew Tom to the strange and new world at war.



LIFE'S ARTISTS RECORD

A WORLD

AT WAR



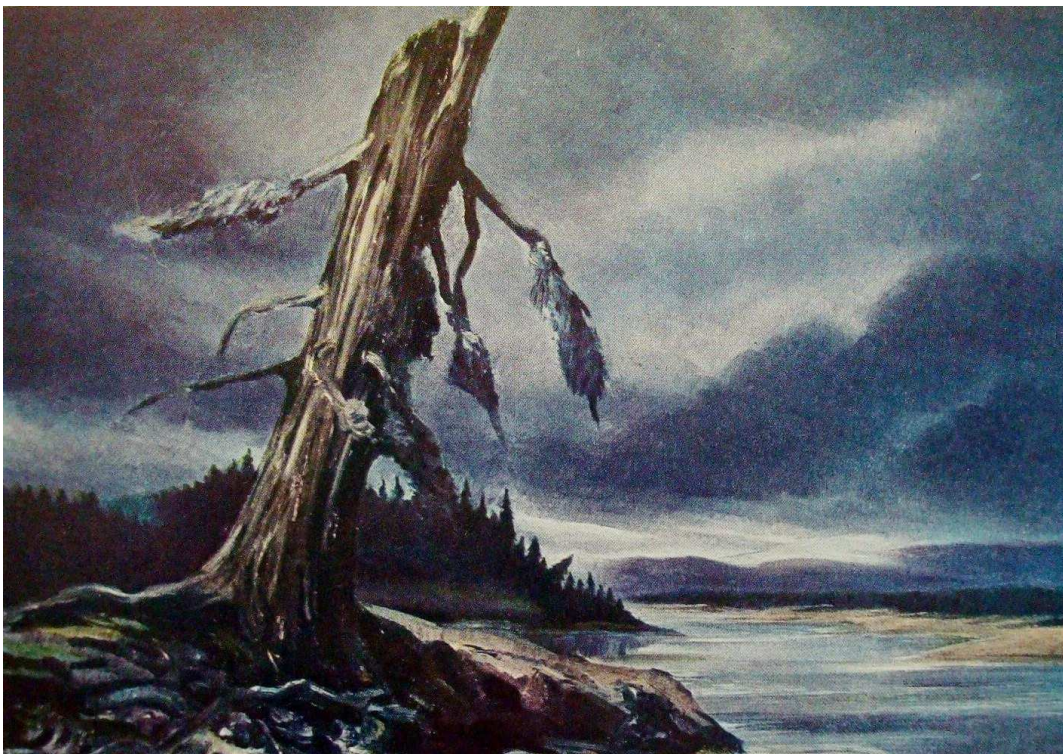
This image is from the 1944 book titled *Flight to Everywhere* by Ivan Dmitri, the story of the United States Air Transport Command in WWII.

The badge of the U.S. Army's Air Transport Command contained the new boundary lines which changed the very shape of the world as these big transport aircraft flew the new circle routes. These routes opened up new remote landing strips and way stations for the aircraft to refuel and then depart on a network of bases from the Arctic to Australia.

By 1945, U. S. Air Transport Command flew regular plane routes that totaled over 160,000 miles. Artist Tom Lea, flew over 38,000 miles with Air Transport Command, including many trips around the world. He painted and brought back hundreds of images of the little-known places in the world, including

Arctic Canada. When he stopped at Goose Bay, Labrador, in 1942, he painted images of the Arctic Northern Lights and the virgin forest that surrounded the remote air base.

He reported a Canadian, Eric Fry, found the base location while flying over the area in an amphibious aircraft in the spring of 1941. This was the only flat, sandy ledge, with room for runways and proximity to coastal waterways for thousands of miles. The base construction was a joint undertaking shared by both American and Canadian funds, containing both American and Canadian base camp areas. By 1943, the base could service and feed the crews of 100 aircraft in just 24 hours. Then weather permitting, they continued the Great Circle route to Greenland, England, and the war in Europe.



This Tom Lea painting records one of the thousand rivers that cross the plateau near the great base of Goose Bay airport. This was recorded as being near the 300 foot Hamilton waterfall where the Indian spirit Manitou, lives.



The next day Tom painted the enormous piece of Danish ice covering 700,000 miles of frozen island Greenland.





Many American airmen in Goose Bay came from the southern states. They were not prepared for the cold Arctic life style and from this was born the legend of the "Kee-kee Bird."

The Kee-kee Bird

This bird looks just like a buzzard;

It's large, it's hideous, it's bold.

In the night, it circles the North Pole.

Crying "Kee, Kee, Kee-rist but it's cold!"



THOUSANDS OF WAR BOUND PLANES WERE SERVICED AT GOOSE BAY'S SOLE "NOSE HANGAR"



Images taken in December 1943, from book "Flight to Everywhere."

Goose Bay, Labrador, Canada became the hub for the hundreds of American war correspondents traveling to the war in Europe and many of these men and women never returned to the United States.

On 20 September 1948, at 5 p.m. American Secretary of Defense James Forrestal dedicated a special memorial wall honoring the 80 plus American war correspondents who died or were killed during their war service. The wall was located in the National Military establishment Press room, [2E 676] of the Pentagon building. On any given day, forty war correspondents photographs will be mounted on the memorial wall, giving the location and date of death or missing in action.

In 1945, Gillis Purcell and Ross Munro formed the Canadian War Correspondents Association, which today records and represents over 100

Canadian reporters who served and died scattered all over the world. Two Canadian War Correspondents from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Art Holmes and Robert Bowman, departed Halifax, Nova Scotia, in a convoy for England in late December 1939. They would spend the duration of the war wearing the standard Canadian Army attire which was identical to the front line soldiers they served beside in action.

Other Canadian newspapermen served as civilian war correspondents, while many served as members of the armed services in the public relations sector. Several didn't come home. To their roll of honor, you can add the name of RCAF Flying Officer David Francis Griffin # C24863.

David Griffin was born in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1907, and began his newspaper career at age seventeen, working as a press boy for the Hamilton Spectator.

He moved on to become a newspaper reporter and was employed with the Windsor Star, Sudbury Star, and became assistant city editor of the Toronto Star newspaper. He was a widely-known and very well respected newspaperman with 18 years' service when he enlisted in the RCAF in late 1941.



The sudden crippling attack by Japan on the United States naval and air forces at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, quickly changed the war defenses in Canada and Alaska. F/O Griffin was assigned to cover this air defence of British Columbia and Alaska, attached to the new formed No. 111 [Thunderbird] Squadron. Some of his RCAF reporting would appear in his old newspaper the "Toronto Star" including the special color center-section titled "Star Weekly."



By May 1942, the tide of war was running very strongly in favour of Japan, and the U.S. War Department had to immediately booster its Alaska Air

defence and ask if Canada could led air assistance to the American Forces in Alaska. On 27 May 42, Maj./Gen. S.B. Buckner, commanding the Alaska Defence Command, sent an urgent message requesting one RCAF Bomber Squadron and one RCAF fighter Squadron to proceed at once to Yakutat at the north end of the Alaska panhandle. On 2 June 42, twelve Bolingbroke bombers of No. 8 [B.R.] Squadron RCAF left Patricia Bay, B.C., for the 1,000 mile flight north to Yakutat, where they all arrived the next day. On 4 June No. 111 [F] Squadron under command of S/L A. D. Nesbitt arrived at Yakutat. The RCAF ground crews arrived by old Stranraer aircraft on 2 June and one of the passengers was F/O David Griffin. Lorne Bruce of Vancouver, B.C. the former superintendent of the Canadian Press at Edmonton, Alberta, was also selected to cover the RCAF in the Aleutians.

S/L Nesbitt joined the RCAF on 15 September 1939, then served with No. 1 Squadron in the Battle of Britain. Nesbitt returned to Ottawa on 18 September 1941, and took command of the new formed No. 111 Squadron on 1 November 1941. After the attack by Japan at Pearl Harbor, No. 111 Squadron was ordered to Sea Island, [Vancouver] B.C. on 14 December 1941. On 18 February 1942, they were moved to Patricia Bay, where they completed training in the new Kittyhawk Mk. I fighter aircraft, becoming operational on 12 March 1942. During this time period, public relations officer F/O David Griffin was attached to No. 111 Squadron and recorded all the squadron activities until August 1943.

On 17 March 42, a special ceremony was held when the West Coast Saanich Indians adopted the fighter squadron and presented S/L Nesbitt with a 20 inch carved and painted "Thunderbird" totem pole. This was reported by F/O Griffin and images appeared in the Star Weekly magazine.



17 March 1942, S/L Nesbitt, D.F.C. and his Thunderbird. Star Weekly image.

On 15 June 42, Nesbitt was promoted to Wing Commander and given command of RCAF Station Annette Island. The little "Thunderbird" totem stood on his desk for all to see.



Ottawa image PMR 75-603.

No. 111 flew their first operation on 1 July 1942, from Elmendorf Field, to intercept an unidentified aircraft. A few of the fighter aircraft painted the Thunderbird totem as nose art, as seen in the recovery image of Kittyhawk Mk. I, serial RAF AL194, [RCAF #1087].

The RCAF No. 111 Squadron formed "F" flight of the 11th Pursuit Squadron commanded by Major John S. Chennault, the son of the famous Major Gen. Claire Chennault of the Flying Tigers fame.

In a few days motion picture producer Col. D. F. Zanuck arrived and shot color flying scenes of the war in Alaska. This film can be downloaded and watched today, including the unrehearsed scenes of the RCAF "Thunderbird" squadron.





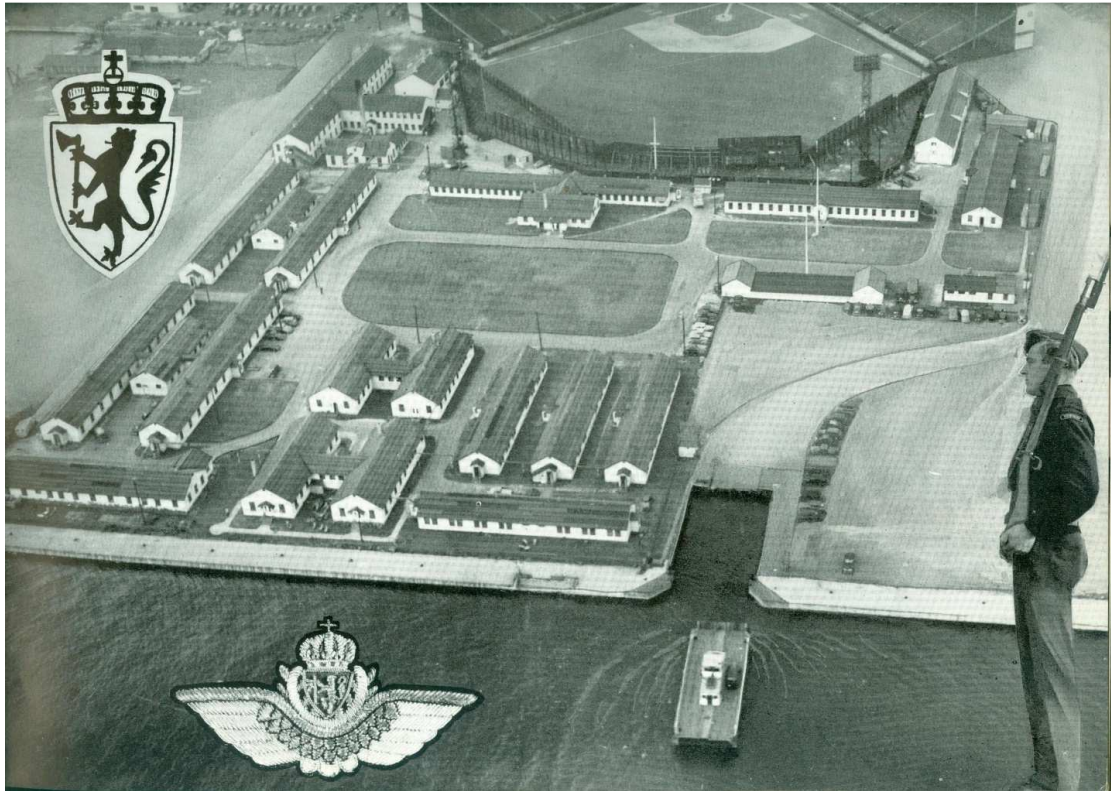
In 1943, the U. S. Navy commissioned war correspondent artist Lt. William F. Draper to capture the war in Alaska. These two of 42 paintings, record the conditions at Umnak Island where the RCAF No. 111 Squadron were based.

Public Relations Officer F/O David Griffin was attached to No. 111 Squadron from March 1942 until August 1943, completing two tours of operations against the Japanese forces. During this time he recorded the interesting account of RCAF operations and of the life involving the Canadians who served in the Aleutians. His unpublished manuscript was titled - "First Steps To Tokyo."

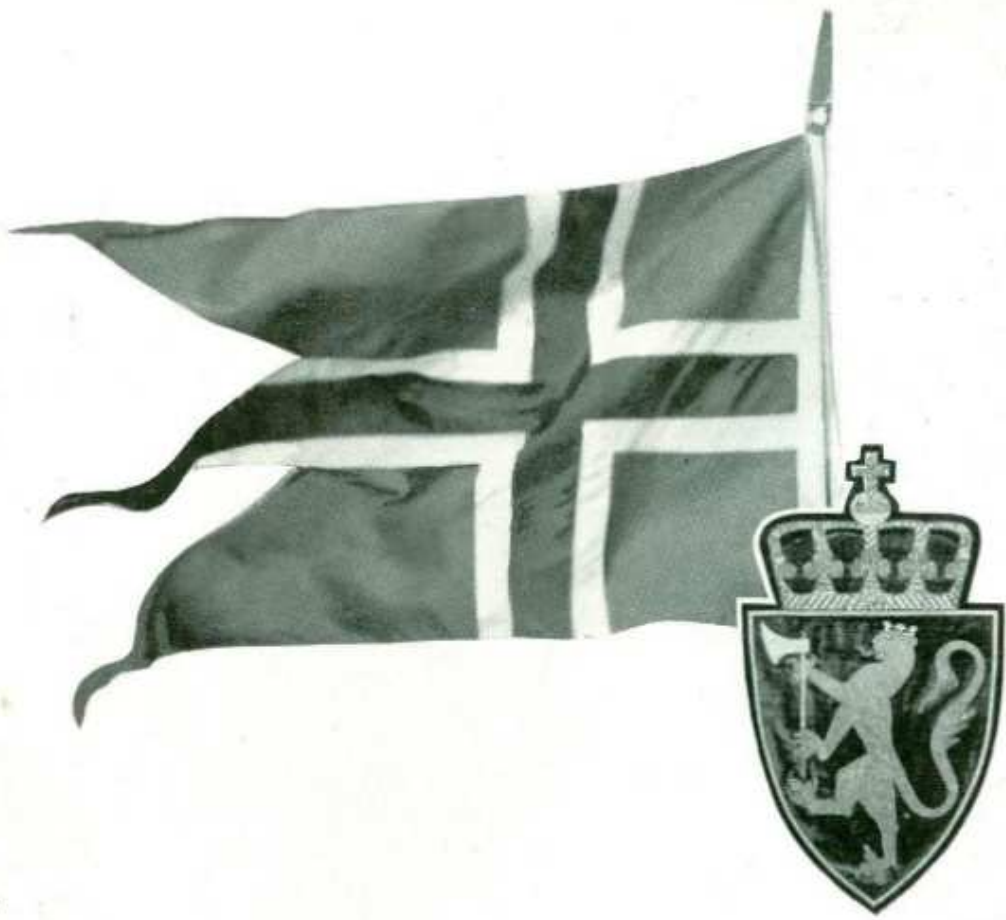
After taking thirty days leave, he was assigned to cover the story of the Norwegian patrol bombers flying from Iceland, protecting the Atlantic convoy ships from German U-boat attacks.



Images from the 1945 book "Little Norway" Publisher unknown.



When Hitler suddenly attacked Norway on 9 April 1940, the Norwegian Government fled to Canada and purchased 20 million dollars of American combat aircraft. The first training of the Royal Norwegian Air Force began 10 November 1940, next to the Toronto "Maple Leaf" baseball stadium which was now named "Little Norway." Fairchild trainers, Curtiss fighters, Douglas attack bombers and new Northrop patrol bombers were now seen on the Toronto Island Airport, which had been obtained for use from the Toronto Harbour Commission. By 1942, the Canada trained Norwegian fighter squadrons were taking the fight to Hitler, and this included Catalina flying boats and new Northrop N3-PB patrol bombers flying from Iceland bases.





NORDIC NORTHROPS

These are veterans of the skies above the seas—Northrop N3-PB's. For many months these Northrops piloted by valiant Vikings of the Norwegian Naval Air Force have been tracking, attacking, sinking enemy raiders—helping maintain the vital life lines of the

democracies—avenging the plight of Norway.

Yet these death-dealing Patrol Bombers, fastest military seaplanes in the world, are but forerunners of a steady, ever-increasing stream of faster, more powerful Northrop air fighters already *in production and in development.*

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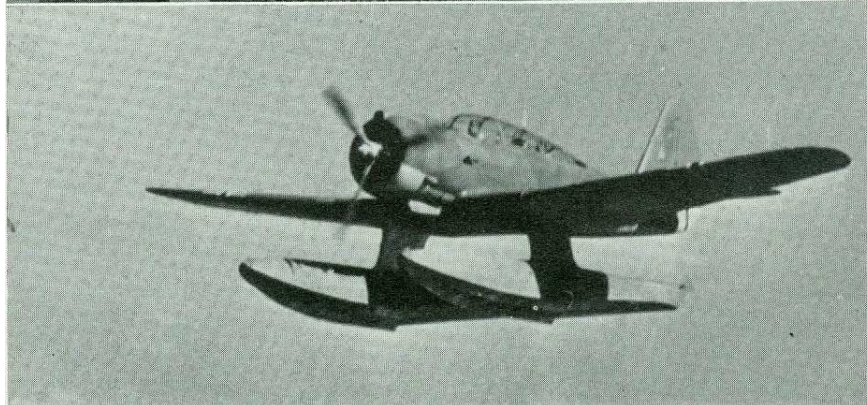


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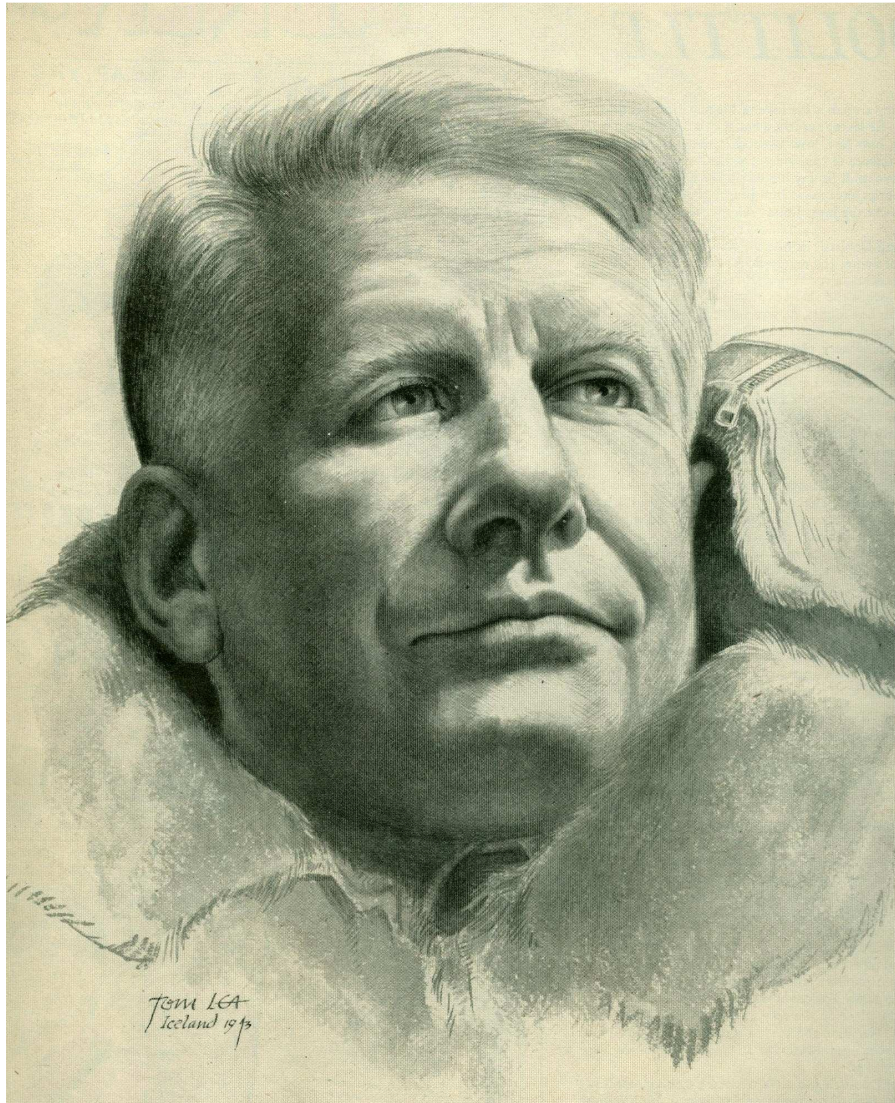
The training in the N3-PB float aircraft at Toronto Island Airport, "Little Norway" July 1941.



... TO GET THEIR WINGS

and leave for combat duty over enemy territory and the Atlantic, in Norwegian fighter and bomber units.

Wings parade at Toronto Island Airport, "Little Norway" 1941.



LIFE magazine 29 May 1944.

Bernt Balchen sketch by war correspondent Tom Lea in Iceland, 1943. He learned to ski at age eight and flew in the Norwegian Naval Air Force. He piloted Admiral Byrd to the South Pole 1927, then became an American citizen in 1931. In 1940, he assisted the Norwegian Government to begin pilot training at "Little Norway" in Toronto. In 1941, he was placed in command of the northern U.S. air base at Goose Bay, Labrador, and the main base in Greenland. All his life he was involved with snow, ice, and aviation.

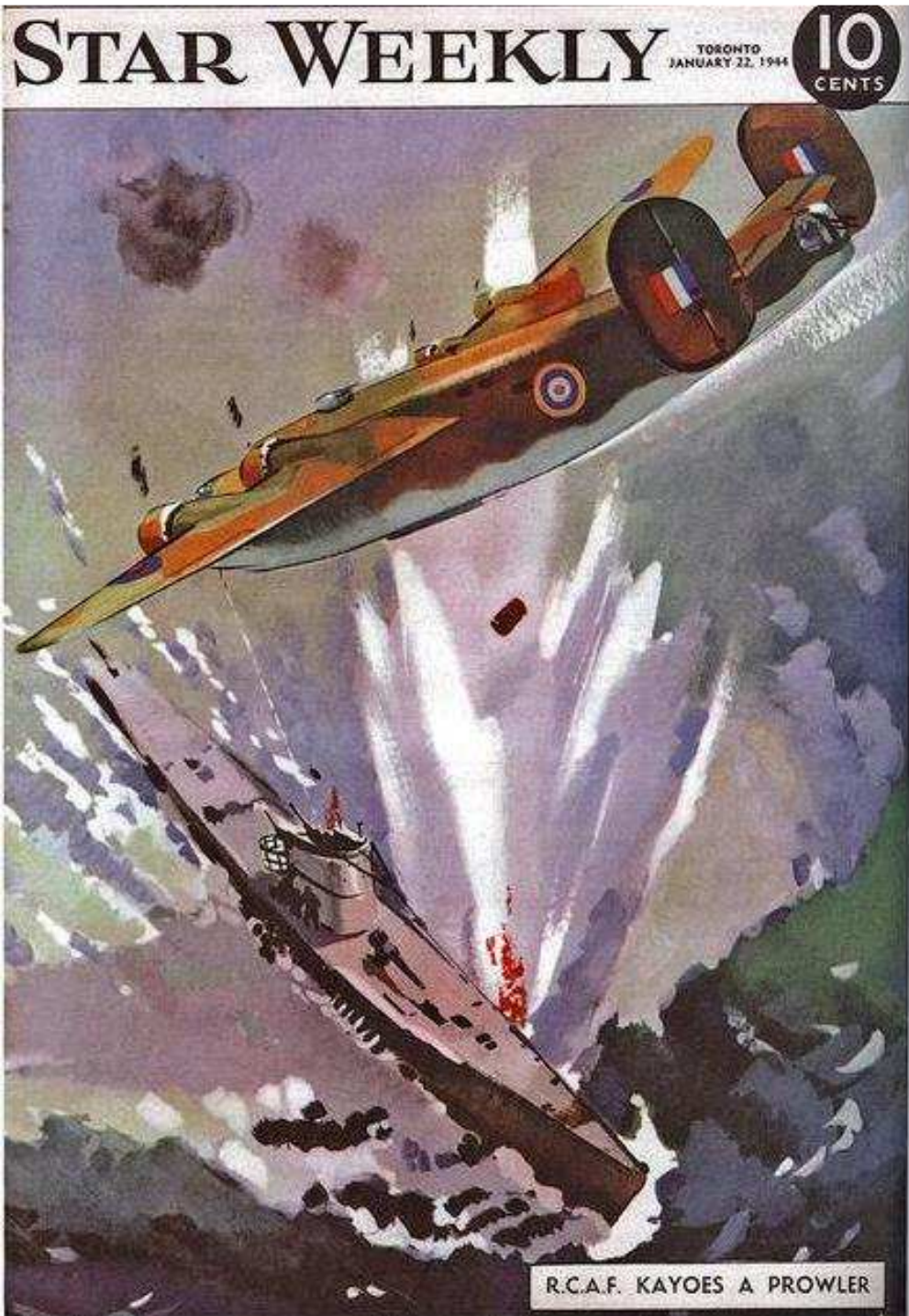


NORWEGIAN PATROL BOMBERS AT ICELAND

They convoy ships on the Atlantic. German submarines don't like them but the Norwegian and Allied freighters do. The R.A.F. have given them much credit.



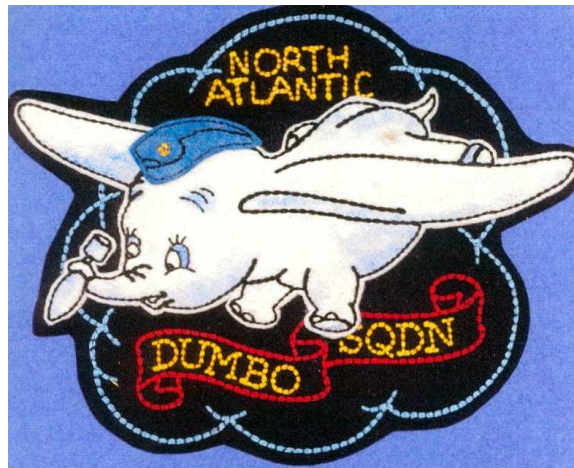
In February 1944, F/O Griffin completed his story on the Royal Norwegian Air Force in Iceland, but his story would never be published.



Reykjavik, Iceland, was the H.Q. for No. 330 [N] Royal Norwegian Air Force and a major base for the RCAF Liberator bombers that were hunting

German U-Boats. No. 10 [Dumbo] Squadron of the RCAF used this as refueling base on flights from Gander, Newfoundland.

On 18 February 1944, F/O Griffin secured a ride in a No. 10 [Dumbo] Squadron Liberator GR. V 856 bomber returning to its base at Gander, Newfoundland, from Iceland. This B-24 had delivered ground personnel from No. 162 [B.R.] Squadron to Reykjavik, Iceland, and was returning home empty with crew of five.



No. 10 [Bomber] Squadron had been formed at Halifax, Nova Scotia, 5 September 1939, and established a record of 22 attacks on German submarines, with three confirmed sinking's. They were also proud to have two unofficial titles "North Atlantic" and "Dumbo" Squadron. Walt Disney artists in Burbank, California, created the unofficial insignia. They had moved to Gander, Newfoundland, on 8 May 1943 and continued anti-submarine duty until disbanded on 15 August 1945.

F/O Griffin would be the only passenger in Liberator [U.S. #42-40526] RCAF serial 586, the very first bomber assigned to the squadron on 15 April 1943.

This bomber had scored the units very first U-Boat kill 15 September 1943, when it sunk U-341. This should have been a safe normal flight but freezing temperatures caused icing problems. Three inches of ice built up under the wings and this cause the aircraft to consume more than normal fuel for the flight. The last contact with the crew was when they acknowledged a signal to divert to Goose Bay, Labrador. The story of this crash first appeared on 5 January 1945, in the British magazine "The Aeroplane" titled - Crash in Labrador. It can be found online, but in short the ice covered bomber ran out of fuel in three engines, and then just thirteen miles from Goose Bay, the fourth over-stressed engine caught fire. The Liberator plunged headlong into the thick bush and struck many large eighteen inch diameter trees, snapping the bomber fuselage in half. F/O Griffin was thrown out and killed instantly. The other five crew members all survived.

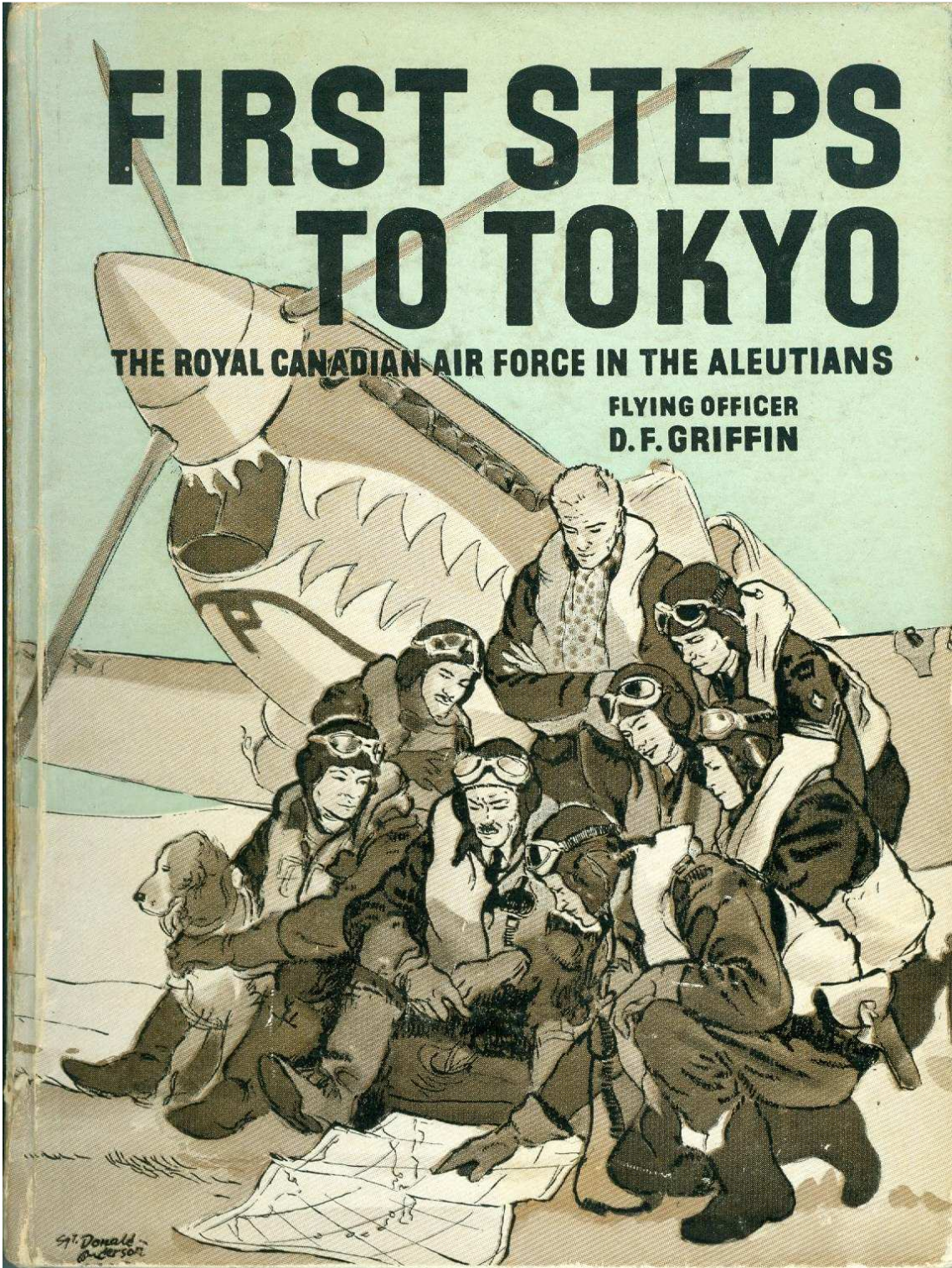
In the fall of 1944, the RCAF published the manuscript of Flying Officer David Griffin, titled "First Steps To Tokyo." The front covers were designed by another RCAF famous Official War Artist, Donald Kenneth Anderson. In the early 1990's, I had the pleasure to meet this artist at a dinner in Nanton, Alberta. It is possible this original art survives today in Anderson's War Museum collection in Ottawa.

It is also possible that F/O David Griffin and RCAF artist Sgt. Donald Anderson knew each other. Anderson had painted covers for the Star Weekly magazine as early as 1940, and Griffin was then employed as assistance city editor for the Toronto Star.

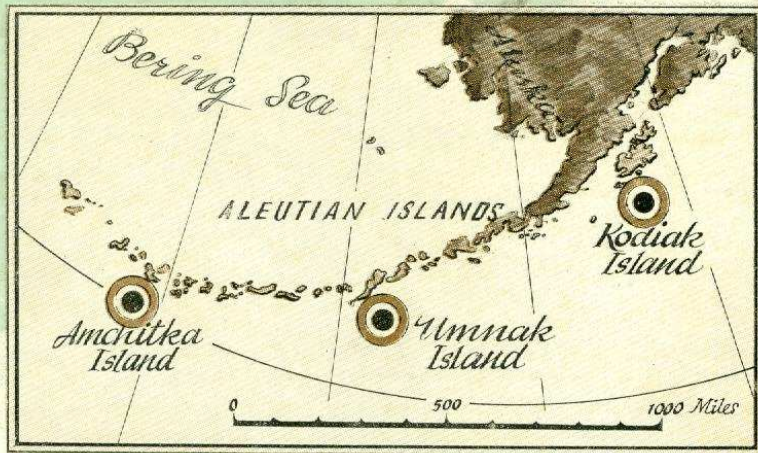
FIRST STEPS TO TOKYO

THE ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE IN THE ALEUTIANS

FLYING OFFICER
D. F. GRIFFIN



Sgt. Donald
Anderson



Chapter One

THIS is the story of the Royal Canadian Air Force adventure in Alaska and the Aleutian Islands in 1942-43. It covers months of danger, loneliness, and often hardship, and it reaches its highest points at the beginning and at the end of the adventure. For the R.C.A.F. rushed north from Canada at a time when it was badly needed to plug gaps in the U.S. North Pacific defence and it was R.C.A.F. fliers who dealt the last blows at the Japanese before the little brown men retreated from Kiska, their last foothold on American continental soil.

Canadian fliers went to the Aleutian Islands in June of 1942, just after the Japanese had tried to capture Dutch Harbour with a task force. Dutch Harbour is the big United States naval base on Unalaska Island, and had the Japs succeeded in taking it they could have based there a battle fleet which might have secured for them the domination of the better part of the Pacific Coast. They could have used their naval power to cover progressive invasions that might have taken them as far as California. And their plan, as

visualized in the famous Tanaka memoranda, would have been to colonize and exploit the American coastal area, using the Rocky Mountains as a barrier against counter attack. In short, had the Japs succeeded at Dutch Harbour, and had they not been held in check later, with the help of the Royal Canadian Air Force, the Pacific Coast of the North American continent might some day have been a Japanese province.

A handful of Canadian pilots first helped hold them in check, and later played a big part in kicking them right out of the Aleutian chain. In so doing, these Canadian youngsters helped write a new page in the history of aviation, for they flew and fought in one of the strangest parts of the world. They braved fog and storm, hardship and appalling isolation. They braved Japanese fire and possibility of capture by the Japs, with all that that could mean. They had to live in a part of the world that might have been the other side of the moon, so little connection was there between it and the world they knew. And all the time they kept smiling and battling. They made the Canada badges on their shoulders stand for something mighty big in the eyes of U.S. soldiers, sailors and fliers with whom they served.

Few people have any real conception of the Aleutian Islands. If they think of them at all, they see them as a vague collection of dots somewhere on the northern

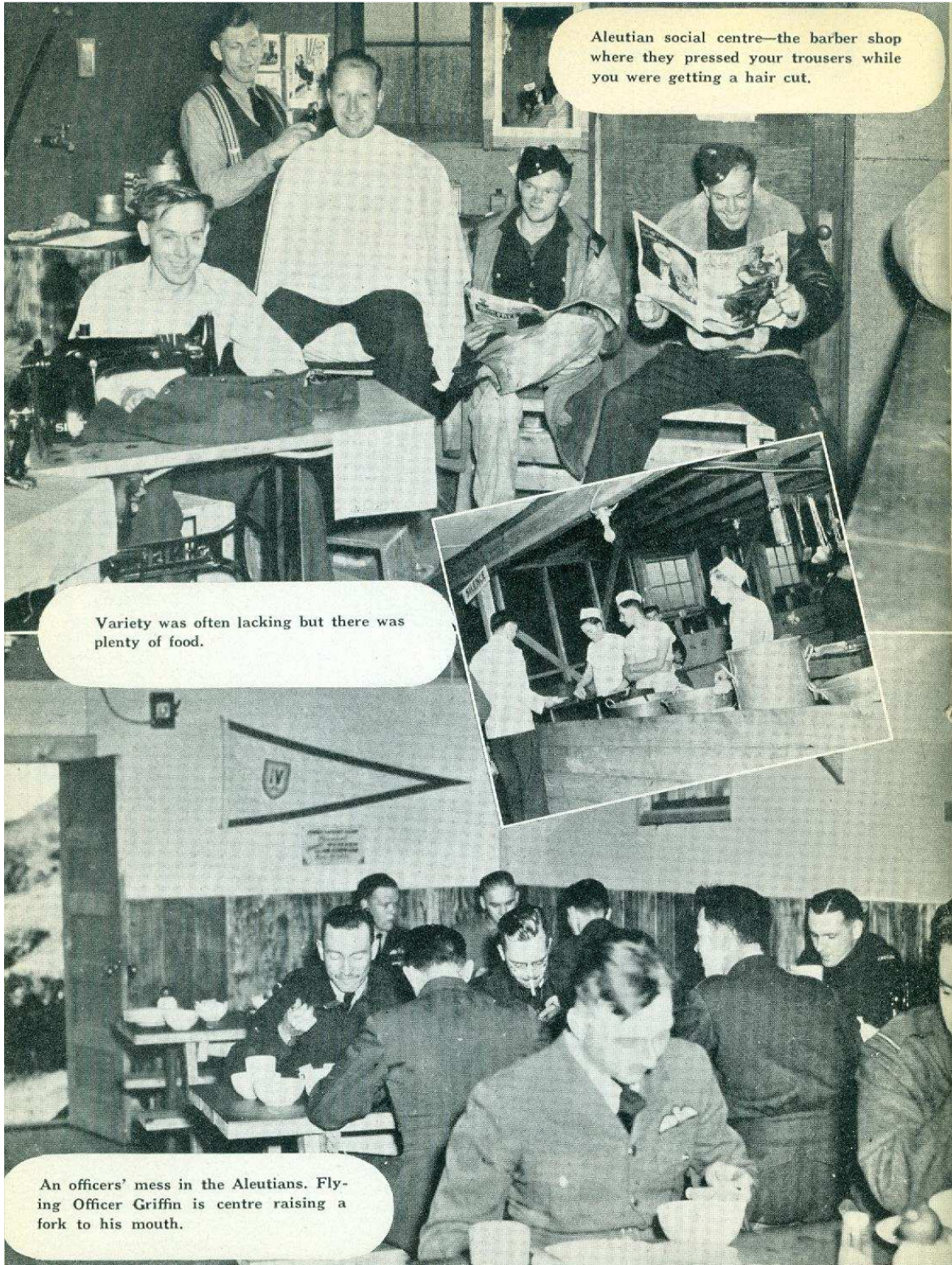
Periodic parades were welcomed by the men.
They knew it kept them from getting slack.



Radio station CORN frequently had more
performers than audience.



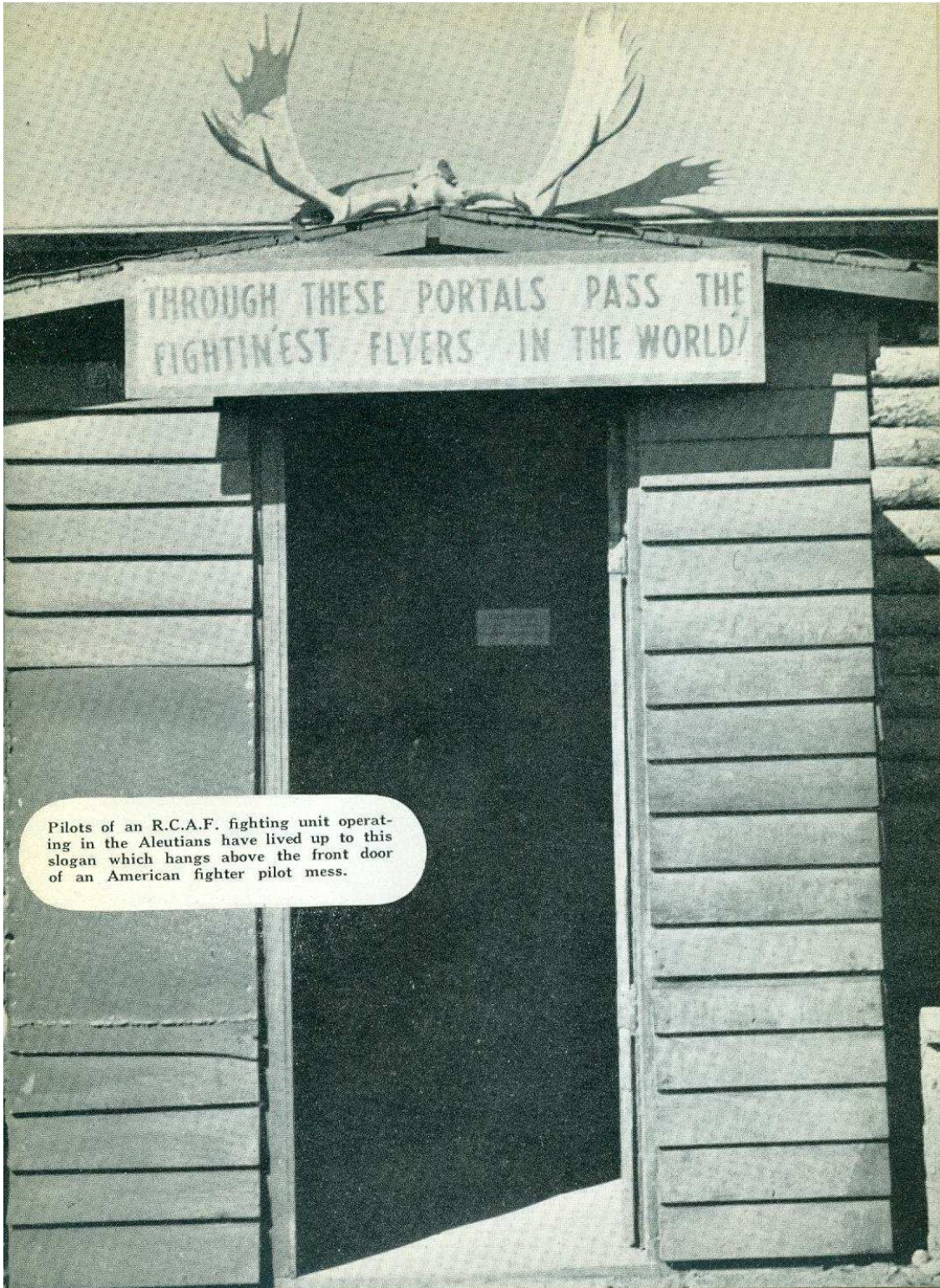
A U.S. Army Air Forces transport unloads
supplies in the Aleutians.



Aleutian social centre—the barber shop where they pressed your trousers while you were getting a hair cut.

Variety was often lacking but there was plenty of food.

An officers' mess in the Aleutians. Flying Officer Griffin is centre raising a fork to his mouth.



Pilots of an R.C.A.F. fighting unit operating in the Aleutians have lived up to this slogan which hangs above the front door of an American fighter pilot mess.



Check-up by the M.O. The health of the men in the Aleutians was remarkably good.

It's the ambition of every pilot in Alaska to tangle with the Jap Zeros whether it's over Kiska or further west.

The men spend their off hours in fighting for trout and salmon in the island creeks. Fish are plentiful.

map. They probably think of icebergs, polar bears and seals, with maybe a few quaint Eskimos thrown in for local colour. They have somehow gotten the idea that the Aleutian islands are in the Arctic ocean, because they are connected with Alaska.

Actually the Aleutians are not in the Arctic at all, and the farther you go along the chain, the more south you tend. Take your map and look at Alaska. Sticking out from what could be called the northwest corner of Alaska is the Alaska peninsula. It goes west, away out into the North Pacific Ocean, pointing like a finger towards Asia. Off the end of the Alaska peninsula the Aleutian Islands start. And they keep on going, like stepping stones, until they reach nearly to Japan. In fact the island of Attu, which is the farthest out on the chain, is within 750 miles of Paramushiro, at the north tip of the Kuriles islands which are part of Japan proper. The Aleutian chain therefore points southwest, and the farther you advance along it from the American mainland, the farther south you get.

Attu and Kiska, where the Japanese put holding forces when they failed to snatch Dutch Harbour, are actually almost on the 52nd parallel of latitude. Amchitka and Adak and Umnak, used as bases for the recapture of the two outposts, are just bordering the line between 52 and 53 degrees north latitude. That is hardly the Arctic circle. Canadian cities like Edmon-

ton, Alta.; Prince Albert, Sask.; Calgary, Alta., and Dauphin, Man.; are all about 55 degrees north. The border between Canada and the United States is the famous 49th parallel! No, the Aleutians are hardly in the north.

But terrain and weather are terrible, particularly for flying. The islands themselves are volcanic, thrown up by some terrific disturbance of nature not so very long ago, if you figure time by nature's eternal clock. Some of them are just heaps of volcanic ash, covered with a thin layer of rotted vegetation, which, when it dies rots in turn to support other vegetation in increasing quantities, until nature's process may make those islands worth something in maybe a few hundred more years.

Right now they are just miserable, desolate bits of landscape, cast up in dreary seas, and worth little or nothing, except for the purposes of war strategy. They have no trees, grow no food, and in peace time they supported few people. Hunters and fishermen visited them, and Aleut Indians lived there, eking out some kind of an existence. The one outpost of civilization, the big permanent U.S. navy base at Dutch Harbour, half way down the chain, was hardly known to the average man until the war threw it into sharp focus. Today it is one of the most important bases in the world.

To help protect this string of islands, the Canadians went there in June, 1942. The U.S. knew that the Japs would try to take Aleutian bases, and General Simon Bolivar Buckner, who was in command of Alaska's defence, took positive steps. Even before the Jap sneak attack on Pearl Harbour he had anticipated a Japanese attack on Alaska. Quietly he brought equipment into the north and had it freighted out along the chain. He picked Umnak as the place from which to fight off a Japanese stab at Dutch Harbour, and on Umnak he set up a secret air base. When the Jap bombers came over Dutch Harbour on June 2 they didn't reckon on opposition. Imagine their surprise when land based fighter planes intercepted their bombers as they headed back to their carriers. The bombers took an awful beating. The Japs fell back on Kiska and Attu, nearly 1000 miles away from Dutch Harbour, and there they dug in with 18,000 troops.

There they remained a constant menace, and the United States was not yet fully prepared for war.

Canada was prepared. The stepped-up production of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan had yielded a large reserve pool of aircrew. And the Royal Canadian Air Force "home war" establishment was reasonably well equipped. Washington appealed to Ottawa and Ottawa passed the job to the R.C.A.F.'s Western Air Command which already had pushed

ahead our own Pacific Coast air defences. Air Vice Marshal Leigh Stevenson, the Air Officer Commanding on the West Coast, acted quickly. In a matter of hours a Bomber Reconnaissance squadron was winging its way to a base on Kodiak, with Squadron Leader Charles Willis in command. And those old Bolingbrokes were welcome. The United States didn't have much there, and the enemy was close.

It was only a matter of hours after the Canadian squadron arrived that this signal came through from "operations":

"Canadians will load with 550 pound bombs and take off to seek enemy submarine sighted at Lat..... Long....." (Signed) "Buckner."

Meanwhile Air Vice Marshal Stevenson cast about for more help for Alaska. He assigned a Fighter Squadron, which started from a west coast station in B.C., around the beginning of June under Squadron Leader Deane Nesbitt, D.F.C.

Now a fighter plane was never intended for long trips. It hasn't much range—about 750 miles. It carries one man, therefore in matters of tricky navigation the pilot must fly with one part of his mind and work out his position with the other. It was quite a chore for Squadron Leader Nesbitt to guide that flotilla of fighters to Kodiak. But he did it without loss of a man

or of very much time. It was a record of some kind, even for the R.C.A.F.

The U.S. asked for help on June 2, and on June 3 the Canadian Bomber crews were climbing out of their planes at Yakutat, 2,000 miles from the Canadian west coast base from which they took off. The fighters got there a little later because they had to make it in shorter hops.

The Canadians flying patrols from Kodiak for a time found no signs of Japs, which indicated that the west coast was in no immediate peril. But there was still a threat to Anchorage, a thriving and important Alaska town at the jumping off place to the Aleutian route. If the Japs intended coming down the island chain to the mainland, Anchorage would be the immediate objective. The fighter squadron moved to Anchorage as a defensive force.

The boys had seen Kodiak, the home of the world's biggest bears. Now they were in one of the world's most famous frontier towns. The characters on the streets—prospectors, fishermen, hunters—might have come out of a Robert Service poem. The little frame buildings might have been a movie set. It was strange and new. So were the Canucks. The open-handed Alaskans had never seen their like before, and they let them know that they were welcome. Nothing was too good for any fliers who might be needed to drive off

an attack on Alaska, but when they happened to be wearing Canada badges, well, the town was theirs.

Time went by and the Japs still didn't hit. Very well, go out after them. The squadron got their orders to proceed down the chain. They left Anchorage and the last vestige of civilization behind.

They saw the last tree they were to see for months. They began to see dreary lands below, and great stretches of open, grey water that lay between the islands. And they encountered the fog.

Five of them never lived to tell about their particular encounter with the fog. They were flying echelon and four planes smashed into one of those Aleutian peaks that seem to rise up for no reason at all, where a flier least expects one to be. The planes probably plunged into that mountain one behind the other, like machine gun bullets. The pilot of the fifth must have seen his danger, for he swerved out to sea. Whether he came down in the Bering, or in the North Pacific no one will ever know. Nothing was seen of him again. Up on Boot Hill on dreary Umnak the four bodies lie today, along with the men who died later in treacherous flying weather. There are 11 Canadians there now, in one of the world's loneliest graveyards.

For seven months the fighter squadron stood guard with the Americans, and then another R.C.A.F. fighter squadron, under command of Squadron Leader

Bradley R. Walker, of London, Ont., was ordered into the field.

Up to this time the Canadians had virtually merged with the U.S. Army Air Corps. The pilots were by now flying American planes, getting them serviced by U.S. ground crews, and the planes carried American markings.

When the new fighter squadron went in, they took their own ground crews. The ground crews went straight out from Canada by boat and were pitched cold into the worst the Aleutians had to offer.

From a west coast port where, even in the middle of winter, the climate wasn't too bad, where there was occasional sunshine, trees, street lights, people they knew—the thousand and one familiar things of everyday life, they embarked on a troopship for an interminable, tossing voyage through strange, angry seas. Finally they came to a harbour in a bleak island they had never heard of before. It was Chernoffsky, which didn't mean a thing, except it wasn't the place anyone would pick to go to voluntarily.

Then into a square barge, which pulled away from the dock, and into the fog. It seemed hours, that run through the fog, while the cold seas chopped away and those with weak stomachs became acutely unhappy.

Picture yourself there.

Finally you swing in against another dock, and this

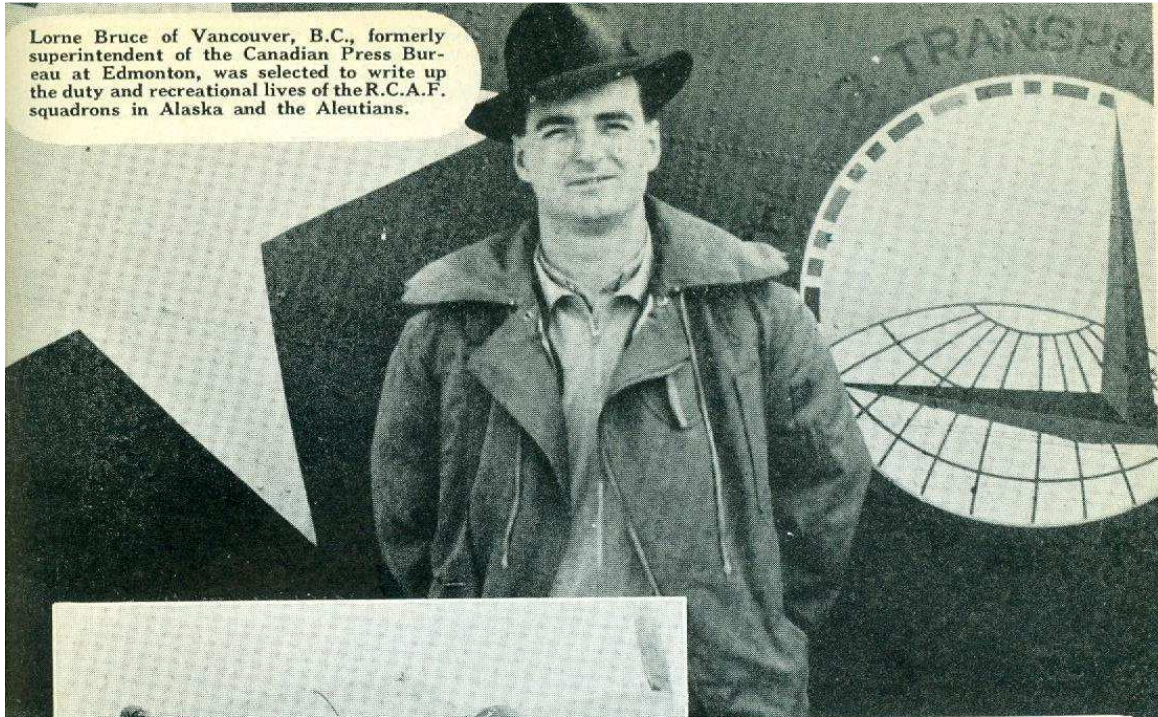
is Umnak. This is what we came for. If we happen to be from Toronto, we have travelled 8,500 miles from home (Africa would be nearer). If we happen to come from the Maritimes, add another 1,500 miles. Even if we happen to be from Vancouver, we're more than 5,000 miles from the folks we know. It's an awful long way and this inhospitable land doesn't look like anything many Canadians ever saw before.

So take trucks from the dock to the place where the U.S. guide officer says we are to be quartered. Boy, this is what you are going to live in! It's called a Quonset hut.

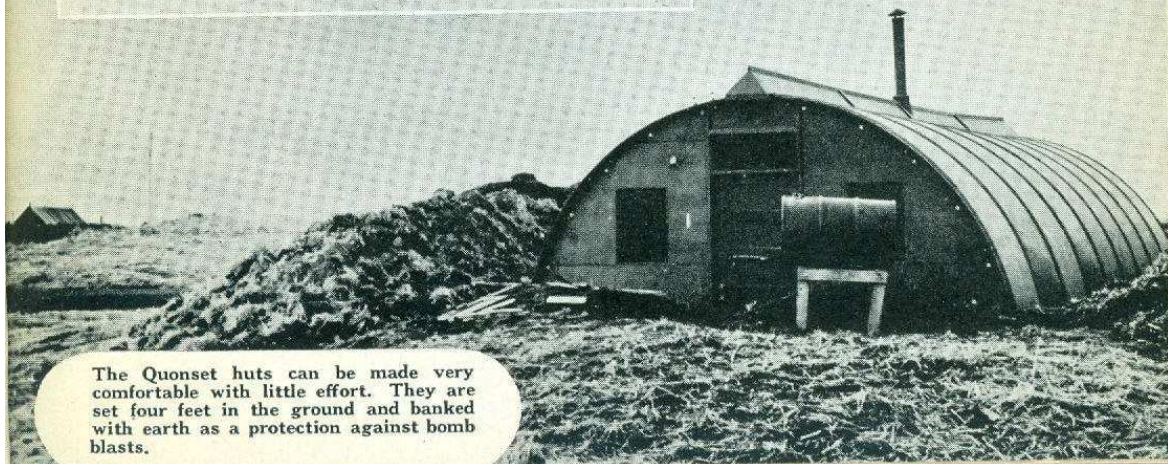
It's about 18 feet long, 16 feet wide, 12 feet high at the roofline. If you took a big sewer pipe and split it lengthwise, you'd have a pretty fair replica of a Quonset hut. It's made of sections of sheet steel, bolted together, and lined with fibreboard. It's floored in veneered wood, which comes in sections. It can be moved easily, which is why it's here. It and thousands like it were brought up by the boatload and laid in by U.S. Army Engineering troops, who first of all dug down into the volcanic ash and sort of "planted" these structures so that very little of them showed—a precaution against Jap bombs. This is your new home, boy; go on in.

The hut is furnished with U.S. army cots, which are canvas, stretched on a frame. When you get them

Lorne Bruce of Vancouver, B.C., formerly superintendent of the Canadian Press Bureau at Edmonton, was selected to write up the duty and recreational lives of the R.C.A.F. squadrons in Alaska and the Aleutians.



Members of the R.C.A.F. "Thunderbird" fighter squadron pose for a picture "somewhere in Alaska", with the "Thunderbird" totem pole presented to them by the West Coast Saanich Indian Tribe which adopted them as "fighter brothers".



The Quonset huts can be made very comfortable with little effort. They are set four feet in the ground and banked with earth as a protection against bomb blasts.



THIS THUNDERING totem, held by Sgt. Clifford Hicks of London, Ont., is the official good luck piece of an R.C.A.F. unit co-operating with U.S. air forces to protect Alaska.

**This story and photo appeared in the Star Weekly magazine published by the
Toronto Star.**



Flight Lieut. J. F. "Doc" Arthur of Redvers, Sask., took a large supply of pills, potions and bandages when he went to the Aleutians battle area as medical officer with an R.C.A.F. fighter unit.

AC1 Alphonso Tanguay of Verdun, Que., keeps the morale of fighter pilots high through the hot meals, cleanliness and repartee he serves up as maitre d'hotel of their mess.



Although office space was at a premium, the efficiency of the administration, equipment and engineering staffs was not affected.

they are all folded up. You unfold the frame and stretch the canvas. It's quite a chore. When you get one rigged, the canvas is so tight that you can pound on it like a tom-tom. It sags after some use, and becomes quite comfortable.

Food? The U.S. army supplies its regular issue. Transport is tough in the Aleutian islands, and every bit of grub has to be brought in by boat. At the time you and the Canadian ground crews move into the Aleutians every available Allied ship is going the other way. Africa has to be bolstered, and the U.S. is moving tremendous forces to Europe. That means that the Aleutians have to get along on what can be spared. In view of the fact that thousands of U.S. troops are doing garrison duty, here, and that supplies and equipment have to have priority, there are no nick-nacks in the way of "chow". What the boys eat comes in cans, or in dehydrated form. It says a lot for the skill of the cooks that they can keep the men happy on what could be a deadly monotonous diet. If you don't think food can be a morale builder, eat canned beans for a week. Sit down some time to five kinds of beans at the same meal. You get five kinds of beans at one meal because the supply boats have not been getting through. It's quite a distance from Seattle or Vancouver to the Aleutian outposts. Under the best of circumstances it

takes a boat a long time to get there, particularly when it's running a zig-zag course to fool Japanese subs.

This was the set-up into which the Canadians of 21-fighter squadron stepped in February of 1943. It was cold. It was miserable, and it was appallingly lonely. True, there were plenty of U.S. soldiers, sailors, marines and fliers around, and they had developed the island's defences to a high degree, so that it wasn't exactly a wilderness. But it was still an isolated community, in a strange, new land, almost entirely cut off from the rest of the world.

Chapter Two

THEY felt the isolation and the strangeness of their surroundings as soon as they set foot on shore, and this feeling never left them. Men of the U.S. forces who had served in the theatre for as long as two years prior to this, said that you never got used to it—that you always felt as if you were in another world.

Start with the ground under your feet. Most of the year in the Aleutians, it's a brown ragged carpet of dead grass, where you can see it through the snow. There isn't very much snow, because when it falls it doesn't stay long, down here in the flats where you're camped. Dig under that grass and you don't find earth. You find rotted vegetation. Dig under that thin layer of rot and you come to volcanic ash—coarse, grainy, black stuff something like sand. Dig down as far as you like and you are still digging in volcanic ash on this particular island.

This whole island you're on is cut by ranges of peaks and ridges, with the valley flatlands lying in between them. The peaks rise to about 2,000 feet, and the snow is on their tops for 10 months of the year. On one or

two of them, it never goes away. Every so often one of these peaks lets off a belch of smoke. They're volcanic, and some of those volcanoes are very much alive. They don't give any trouble—at least they haven't so far, but there they are, adding to the strangeness of the scene. Living next door to a volcano gives you something in common with the primitives who crawled around on the face of the world when it was a new place.

The U.S. engineering troops have done a wonderful job. They've laced the islands with roads—raw cuts across the tundra. They've put strong gun positions in every place where a gun position should be. They've torn airfields into the face of the grim landscape and they've thrown up Quonset huts and buildings by the thousands. They have, in fact, set up fair sized cities in this remote land. But they're strange cities. They have no women and all the men wear uniforms and carry guns. They have electric lights, and more motor traffic pours through them at all hours of the day and night than would pass through any city of comparable size back here on the continent. Jeeps, command cars, reconnaissance cars, huge trucks—come and go 24 hours a day. Maybe some day an invading army will pass through there on its way to Japan. Remember, it's only 750 miles from Attu, the farthest island, to Paramushiro, the big Jap navy base. That's something

for the Japs to think about too, and it probably has them as worried as we would be if the Japs held a similar bridgehead to this continent.

That is why the Canadians who served in the Aleutians are proud of what they did.

For them there were none of the heroics of European battles. Their job was to help stand guard while the U.S. ground forces built up the Aleutian bases. Their job was to fly patrols to make sure there were no interruptions in the steady program of building the bridge towards Japan. And their job, after a while, was to help soften up the Japs who held the outer footings of that bridge—soften them up to the point where they were unable to stand against the land forces who went to dig them out. They did this in conjunction with the U.S. navy and bomber command, and the part they played in the Jap retreat from Kiska was not insignificant.

This is not a picture of their battle record—that will come later. This is an attempt to show the kind of a place in which they lived, and the things they went through, day by day, in order to do their jobs.

A picture of their surroundings has been sketched. Now for a description of the weather. It has been called the worst flying weather in the world, and that is the exact truth.

A trick of nature makes the bad flying weather in

the Aleutians. The warm Japanese current skirts the island chain on the Pacific side. On the other side is the black, cold Bering sea. Thus, two bodies of water, one very cold, and the other more or less temperate, come together around the islands. That, in turn, means fog. Fog of the worst kind. Fog that rises from the ground up, building itself into thick layers almost as high as you can go. Where those layers of ground fog stop, the clouds commence.

Look at it from the viewpoint of the pilot. He comes out one day ready to hop into his aircraft for a patrol. There is a 1,000 foot ceiling. If he stays below those clouds that are topping the 1,000-foot level, he can fly. But, over the ridge that borders his field, heavy mist is coming in off the ocean. It sweeps in low, clinging to the ground and is held away from his field by that high ridge. After a while it piles up on the other side of the ridge and commences to spill down his side. It looks for all the world like a huge mass of condensed milk, and it just seems to pour downhill into the flatlands.

The pilot knows that if he takes off he may not be able to get back to his own field, yet his mission may require him to take off. He has an idea that within half an hour the whole island will be covered by that fog, and that it may have built itself up to cloud level. It takes nerve to go off the ground in weather like that.

There are days when it is perfectly clear as high as you can see, and yet within half an hour it will be "socked right down to the deck". There will be fogs over one area of those islands, and it will be clear 10 miles away. There is always the chance that a pilot will be soaring through that stuff, coming in to look for his field, and will end up against the side of a peak he never had a chance to see. At 250 miles an hour it's not hard to misjudge those matters. There's many a tattered wing flapping on the side of a crag in the Aleutians, grim memorial to a flier who got fooled by the weather. Those wrecked planes just stay there, because when they hit at that speed, there is no salvage.

Squadron Leader Walker has seen a lot of weather. Before he went to the Aleutians he was in England with a Spitfire outfit. He saw action on one of the worst days they ever had over the channel. That was the time that the *Scharnhorst* and the *Gneisenau* made their break out of the harbour at Brest, and ran for the safety of the Norwegian fjords. The German sea command got plenty of weather forecasts before they picked that particular day because they wanted to make sure of a fog that would hide their ships from the R.A.F. They got the right kind of a day, one of the worst the channel could offer, but the R.A.F. came out anyway. Brad Walker was through that fight, and can speak with some authority on bad flying weather. He

admits that some of the Aleutian weather tops the worst samples anyone could find in Europe.

Any other place in the world a flier is afraid of the fog he can see. In the Aleutians, it's the fog that he can't see, but that he knows may be there waiting for him when he comes back, that gives him the jumps.

Flying Officer Arthur C. "Major" Fanning, of Winnipeg, put it succinctly. He had flown many missions over Kiska, going in as low as 1,000 feet to bomb and strafe the Japs. A ground crew lad asked him one day: "What do you think about when the flak starts coming up at you?"

"Why, I think to myself, 'There's some flak,'" Fanning told him.

"No, but don't you get scared?" the ground crew man demanded. "It wouldn't be so hot to be knocked down and grabbed by the Japs."

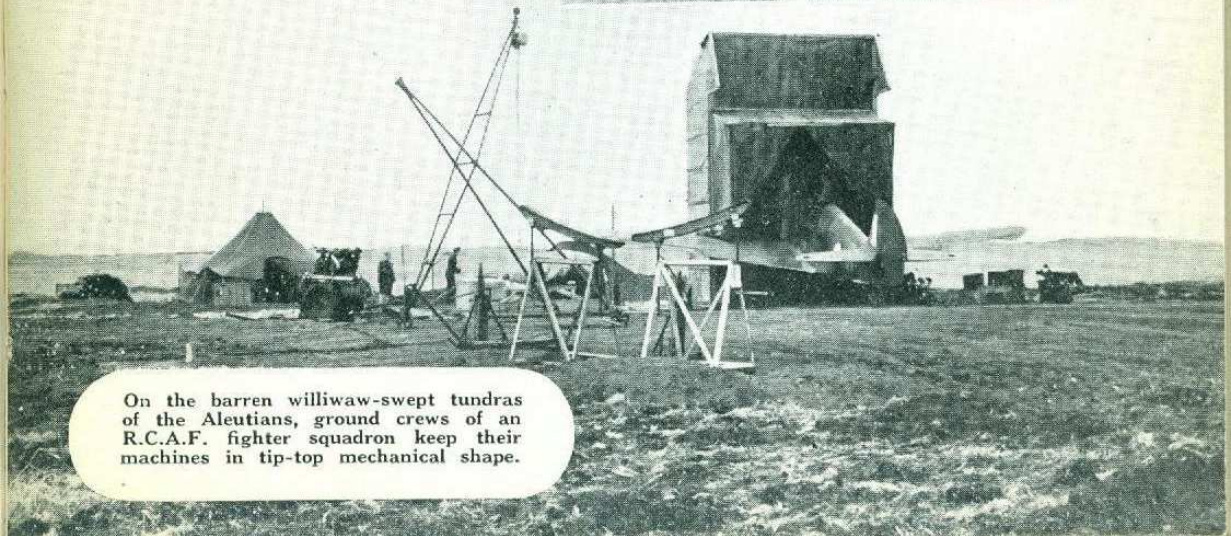
"Sure I get scared," Fanning replied, "but not of flak. I'm scared every time I get over Kiska because I don't know whether I'm going to find a place to land when I get back."

Veteran pilots who had been through the worst Europe had to offer all admitted they had the same feeling. You're gone for half an hour, they pointed out, and you come back to where your field should be, and it just isn't there. Your flying controller, sitting at his plotting board and phones, can bring you in right

Five minutes after they were through their period of "readiness" with an R.C.A.F. fighter unit in the Aleutians, three pilots borrowed a jeep and some American army skis and headed for the snowline.



Some of the Americans in the Aleutians were mystified by the appearance of U.S. citizens as members of the R.C.A.F.



On the barren williwaw-swept tundras of the Aleutians, ground crews of an R.C.A.F. fighter squadron keep their machines in tip-top mechanical shape.

Officers and men alike missed their meals or stood in line for an hour at a time waiting for enough water to heat to "shower" four men at a time.



Officers who undertook to do their own laundry in the Aleutians found that the antlers and skulls of defunct bull caribou made handy drying racks and sock stretchers.

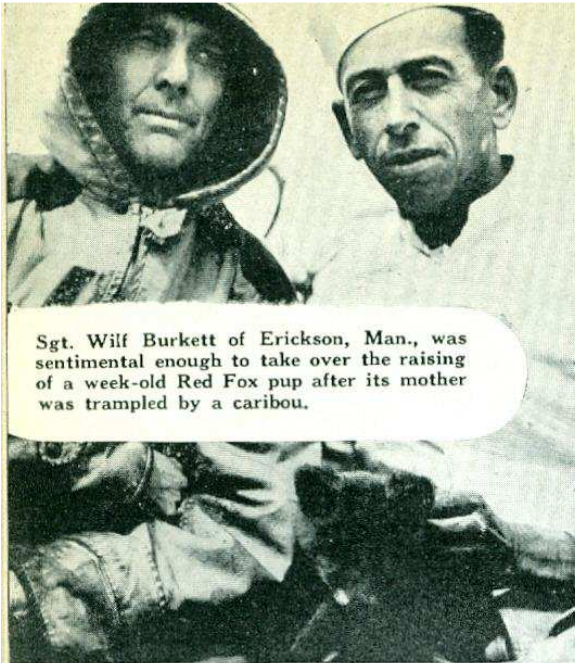


Maintenance work on the aircraft must be done out in the open.

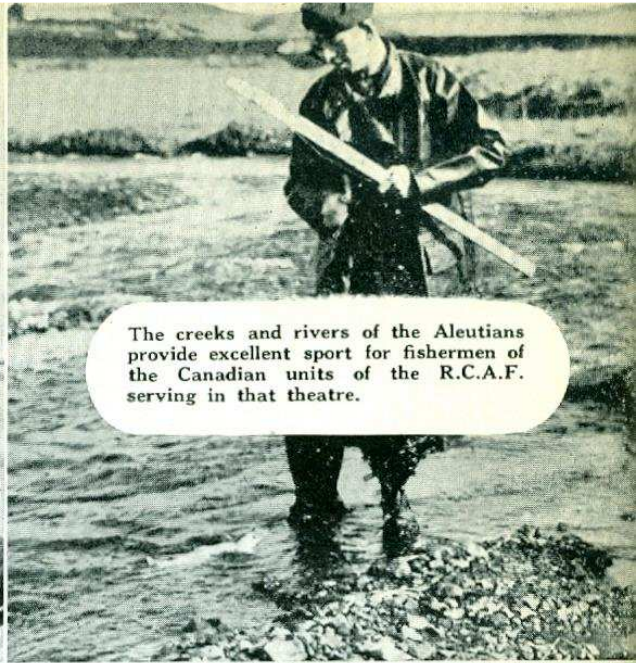
Flying Officer Louis Cochand of Montreal, Canadian skiing ace, found there was ample snow near one advanced base for skiing purposes.



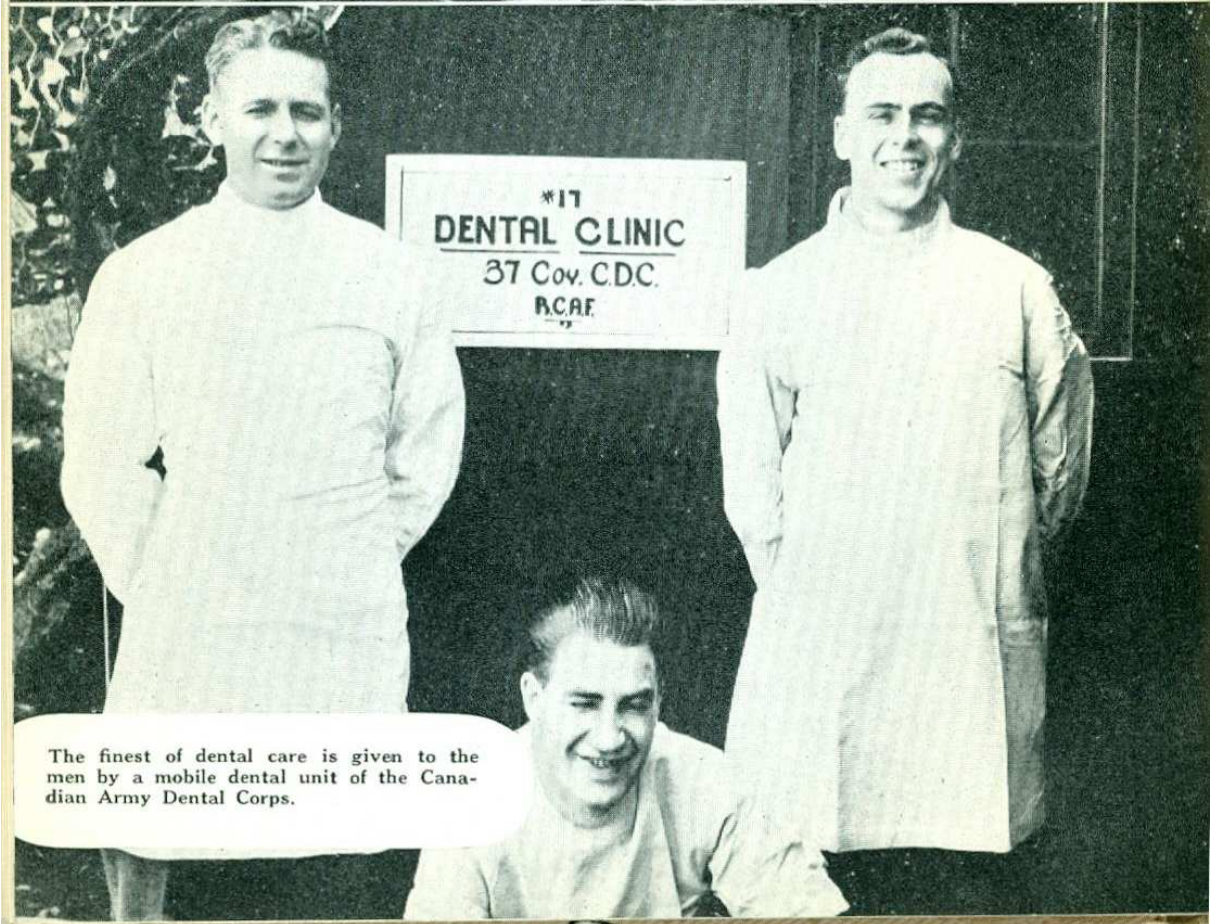
Two armourers out for a walk found a long-legged caribou calf stumbling over the Aleutian tundra near the R.C.A.F. base where they are stationed.



Sgt. Wilf Burkett of Erickson, Man., was sentimental enough to take over the raising of a week-old Red Fox pup after its mother was trampled by a caribou.



The creeks and rivers of the Aleutians provide excellent sport for fishermen of the Canadian units of the R.C.A.F. serving in that theatre.



The finest of dental care is given to the men by a mobile dental unit of the Canadian Army Dental Corps.

over it, but blind landings aren't the safest things in the world at the 120 mile an hour landing speed of fighter planes. And for a long time they were chary about directional radio beams in those parts. Put out a beam, and a Jap might come in on it.



Inside front cover map of RCAF bases in Alaska.

Chapter Three

WHEN the Canadian units were rushed for front line duty in the Aleutians, there also fell upon the R.C.A.F. the responsibility of maintaining secondary defences and the story of the Aleutians is not complete without a description of the dreary, wearying months other R.C.A.F. squadrons put in on Annette Island, Alaska.

There, too, they were co-operating with the United States forces and there, too, they had the same conditions of climate and desolation to contend with. But they were merely a second line force. They had little hope of action and that slim hope was never realized. Nevertheless with patience and with gallantry they rendered an invaluable protective service.

Frankly jealous of their comrades farther north who had much more opportunity for action, their position outside the sphere of combat seemed to stimulate them to the greatest effort to find a job to do. If they did not find a scrap it was not for want of trying.

Annette Island is far up the West Coast near the entrance to Clarence Strait and not far from Ketchi-

kan. Along the beaches and for a little distance inland the work of preparing runways and roads stirred up a fine rock dust that was almost stifling. Farther inland they encountered great areas of muskeg as much as 10 feet deep and dotted with treacherous pools.

The heavy rains in winter, the mud and dust in summer, the winds that blew the cups off the station anamometers, lack of heat, lack of water, lack of proper accommodation at first—with all these they had to contend and at the same time build a station and fly patrols. They flew those patrols regularly. That was their real job and it was done thoroughly. In addition, of course, there were constant exercises and new crews arriving had to be trained for the specific types of operations of this strange new terrain.

The R.C.A.F. squadrons went to Annette in the early summer of 1942. One fighter squadron stationed on the East Coast is believed to have carried out one of the longest flying movements ever made by a fighter unit—3,000 miles. It took them 15 days. They started with 20 aircraft and arrived with 17. When this same squadron completed its vigil on Annette recently it was considered to be in such a high state of efficiency that it was moved overseas as a unit. Not since early in the war had Canada sent a fully organized flying unit overseas. The R.C.A.F. squadrons with the early exceptions all have been formed in the United Kingdom.

It is enough to say of them that the morning after their arrival on Annette they were ready for action.

Another fighter squadron posted to Annette was converted to a bomber reconnaissance squadron. Their only taste of real action was to bomb something that might have been a Jap submarine. They never knew. But they are very proud of the fact that they never became careless, never relaxed their vigilance. On one occasion an American vessel failed to identify itself promptly. A burst of machine gun fire which kicked up spray around the ship quickly brought action.

First commanding officer of the station was Wing Commander A. D. Nesbitt, D.F.C., of Montreal, a veteran of the Battle of Britain. His first squadron commanders were Squadron Leader E. M. Reyno of Halifax and Squadron Leader A. M. Yuile of Montreal. It was they who had the task of creating an air station out of the wilderness. Squadron Leader Yuile gets the credit for discovering one of the best emergency landing fields in the area. He found a stretch of level beach and there the R.C.A.F. constructed the first steel strip runway in Canada. And the job was done in 14 days.

But that was just one of the jobs. In the early building stages it was not unusual to see pilots and other members of aircrew with their sleeves rolled up doubling as carpenters.

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There was plenty of misery on Annette but there was some compensation too. There was good swimming. Fishing was excellent in Tamgas Lake and the lads reported that sockeye salmon could be caught by hand in some streams.

Then six months after their arrival on Annette came their first Christmas. This is the way the station diary reports it! "A real white Christmas. There was five to six inches of snow and a brilliant moon all night. Crews in readiness but no flying. Dinner was a great success with the Officers and N.C.O.'s waiting on table, and washing up in true air force style. A scrub pine was used for a Christmas tree and sprigs of cedar were woven in wreaths. Turkey with all the palatable trimmings, of course, and a smoker later in the dispersal hut. A little U.S. beer was available, quite a break."

That sort of thing compensated for such entries as this early one: "No light, no water, no oil."

And to break the monotony of their flying patrols there were only such incidents as this: Flying Officer A. Jarred saw what looked like a periscope in the sea. He sprayed it thoroughly with machine gun bullets. Then he discovered it was only a partly submerged log. But he had the satisfaction at least of scoring direct hits.

It seems little for fighting men to be doing but those were anxious days. None knew when the Jap might

attempt to slip through. And if he had the Annette squadrons were certainly ready.

Chapter Four

CANADIANS back in civilization from the Aleutians, are often asked: "How did you live? What did you do for amusement?" Answer to the first one is: "As best we could." Answer to the second one: "Not much."

The boys in the Aleutians were even farther from centres of civilization than the men who fought in the African deserts. This may seem an odd statement in view of the fact that the Aleutians are actually part of the continent of America. But if you want to prove how far away the islands really are, use a draftsman's compass. Put the pin in the map at Ottawa. Extend the other leg of the compass out to Amchitka, near the end of the Aleutian chain. That's where the Canadians took off from when they flew missions against the Japs on Kiska. Now, sweep the compass around in a big circle.

That circle will take in most of the far islands of the South Pacific, most of South America, the whole northwest hump of Africa, where the desert fighting seemed so far away, and in Europe, your sweep will reach

almost to Russia. If you travelled in a straight line from Toronto in any other direction the same distance, you could reach the Marquesa Islands in the South Seas, well past Montevideo in South America, Cairo in Egypt, the Bug River in Poland—this just gives you an idea of the distance those Canadian boys in the Aleutians were from their homes. And did they know it! Particularly when their mail ran as much as two months behind. As the crow flies, boys who lived in Central Canada were 5,000 miles from home. But you don't travel the way the crow flies, particularly where routes are not so well defined, and where continental outlines intervene. It was nearer 10,000 that the boy from Central Canada would have to travel to get there, and some of the lads who served in the Aleutians came from the Maritimes. That put them one awful long way from the folks they knew, and this fact tinged their every thought.

Letters from home could run as much as six weeks late—there was one time when they had no mail for two months. Newspapers seldom got through, and it was easier to tune in radio Tokio than Seattle or Vancouver to get the news. Not that any one ever believed radio Tokio, particularly after the day that a little announcer who had trouble with the letter "R" joyously described how, at that very minute, the island where the Canadians were based was under a furious Japanese air and

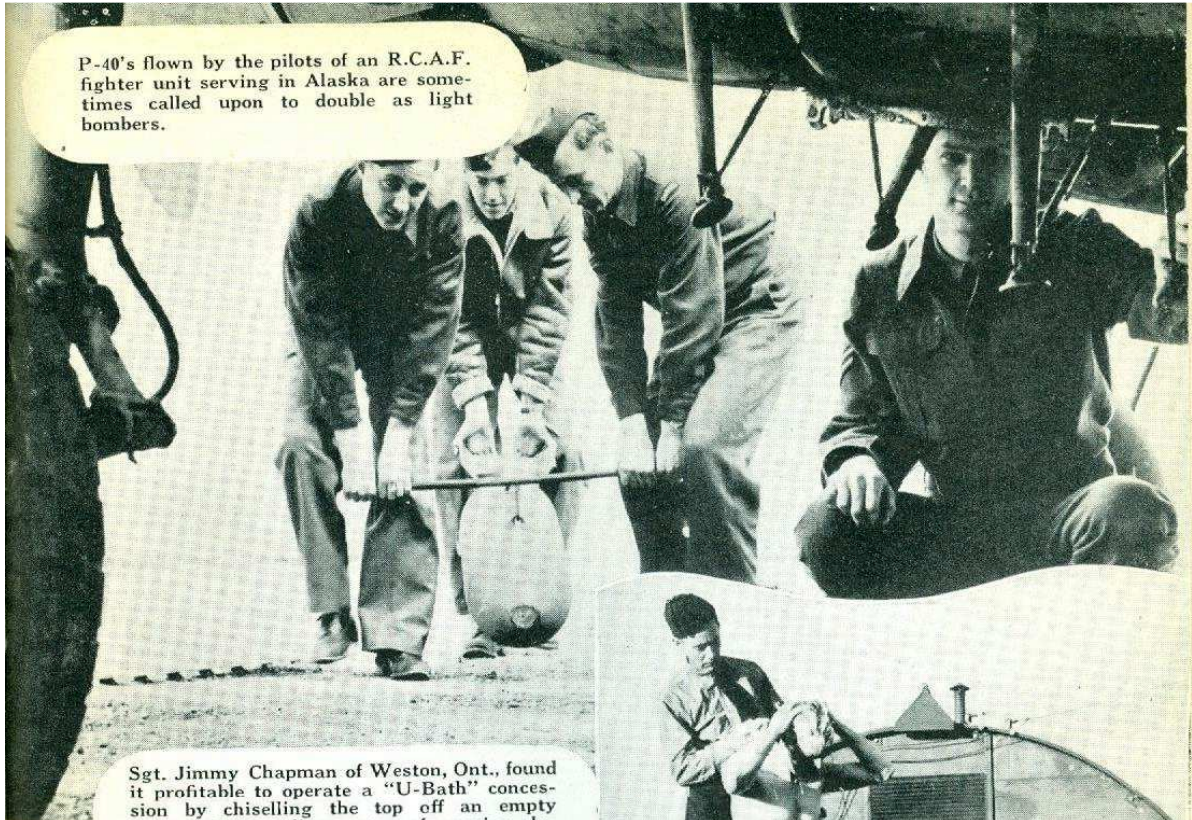
sea bombardment. That one certainly amused the lads. It was so foggy at the time that even the gulls were walking.

The first thing that hit the Canadians as strange was the internal economy of the islands. Many of the U.S. troops had been there for as long as 18 months when the Canadians arrived. They drew high pay, and they had nothing on which to spend it. Private soldiers were walking around with hundreds of dollars in their pockets. Some of the luckier ones counted their cash in the thousands—in fact there was one U.S. trooper who had a shoe box full of \$20 bills.

As soon as the Canadians began circulating they were besieged with offers. They had just come from the mainland, therefore they must have things like fountain pens, wrist watches and other desirable knick-knacks. It was startling at first to get an offer of \$50 for a wrist watch that had cost about \$10 in Canada, but after a while they got used to it, and were sorry they had accepted such offers, because, while a \$40 profit is nice to have, you can't tell time with it. And there was no way of getting another wrist watch in a hurry.

After they'd been there for about a month, they understood why these outlandish prices were paid for things that could be regarded as novelties. They'd have been willing to pay the same prices themselves,

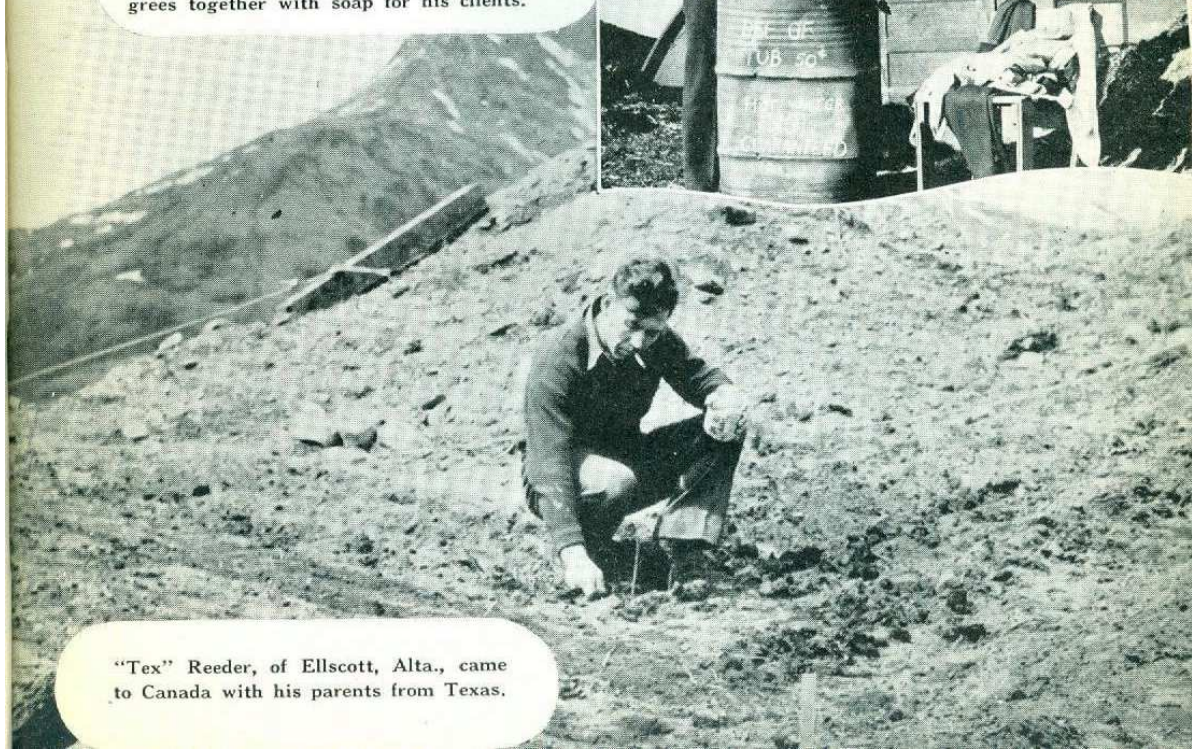
P-40's flown by the pilots of an R.C.A.F. fighter unit serving in Alaska are sometimes called upon to double as light bombers.



Sgt. Jimmy Chapman of Weston, Ont., found it profitable to operate a "U-Bath" concession by chiselling the top off an empty drum and providing water of varying degrees together with soap for his clients.



"Tex" Reeder, of Ellscoot, Alta., came to Canada with his parents from Texas.



When the Alaska williwaw blows hard enough to let the sun come out briefly, all hands of an R.C.A.F. fighter unit turn to putting their blankets out for an airing.



Four Canadian fighter pilots serving in the Aleutians were awarded the American Air Medal for operations over Jap-held Kiska.



R.C.A.F. Kittyhawks lined up on a runway carved out of the Aleutian wilderness.

because they could look forward to having their pay pile up, with nothing on which to spend it. None of them, however, reached the point attained by one U.S. truck driver. He was known as the "buyingest" man in the Aleutians. He was lucky at poker, always had lots of money, and was in the market for anything at any time. He wore four wrist watches, and once offered an airman \$15 for his cap badge. The airman was sorely tempted until he thought about what the C.O. would say if he showed up on parade without his badge. There was no way for him to replace it, so he had to decline, with regret.

Life dropped into a pattern that varied little from day to day. You'd haul yourself out of your cot in the morning, and go through the labour of washing and shaving. Hot water came from a five gallon gasoline can if you had thoughtfully placed one on the oil stove the night before. If you hadn't, you'd run around the tundra with a mess kit to the other huts, trying to scrounge some. At first the water had to be lugged from a central tank, but the Canucks soon installed "running water" in their Quonsets by putting up a big gasoline drum outside the hut, and connecting to it a length of pipe. Airmen took turns at filling the drums. Sinks were made from galvanized tin and soon the luxury in which the Canadians were living was noteworthy. They scrounged old packing cases and con-

trived arm chairs, tables and desks.. The Quonset huts lost that bare look. They never did get to the stage of chintz curtains and rugs on the floor, because there is a point past which you can't go with a Quonset hut. But they did become much more liveable, and soon the handier airmen were in business. They were making packing case furniture for the U.S. lads. The American troops were not less ingenious. But the Canadians had their own set up, their own carpenter shop, and being fewer, could use the tools more freely. They got good money for that furniture. Some of those prices would have caused the mouth of an antique dealer to water.

The Canucks by this time were getting wise to the idea that small change was anything less than a \$20 bill.

To get back on the track of daily station life: after the morning ablutions, there'd be breakfast, eaten in the mess hall, which became the centre of community life. The mess hall was not a Quonset hut—one of the few buildings on that particular strip of tundra that wasn't. Corporal John Kelly, of Toronto, Vancouver and many other points, ran the mess hall and did a bang-up job. He could work wonders with powdered eggs and dehydrated food—could even make C ration taste like something to eat.

After breakfast, the details would split up for the day's work. Flying Officer Bob Kennedy, all the way

from Cape Breton, would take his crews out to check the planes. There were no hangars, or rather, there were nose hangars—canvas boxes about 20 feet high, 10 feet deep, 15 feet wide. They'd run the nose of the aircraft into it, drop the flaps, and enjoy comparative shelter from the weather as cold fingers fumbled with nuts and bolts. The nose hangar's frame of tube steel was rigged with little footholds, and it also held cross planks that could be used as a platform.

Try fooling around with an aeroplane engine in a nose hangar sometime, when it's freezing outside, and maybe with a williwaw whipping up. A williwaw is a wind that's peculiar to the Aleutians. It blows in all directions at the same time, and seldom at less than 50 miles an hour velocity. It has been known to pick up a packing case and waft it aloft like a kite.

It has blown an aeroplane half a mile. One really good Aleutian twister tossed five American dive bombers the length of a runway, piling them into two big transport planes. This particular williwaw was so bad the crews couldn't rush outdoors to do something about it.

So, weather or no weather, you do your morning's work. The G.D.'s (general duties) clean the huts, haul the water and attend to the hundred and one chores. Over in the parachute section the boys check and recheck their packs.

In the orderly room Flying Officer P. E. Wilkins, of Duncan, B.C., ran his office staff. It was quite an orderly room. Improvisation was the keynote. Desks were whacked up out of packing cases, so were chairs and filing systems. The whole issue was housed in a Quonset hut, of course, and over the door was a fine big set of caribou horns. There were caribou horns all over the place. When you wanted to do some decorating, you found a set of caribou horns. Then you either whitewashed or polished them. Polishing a set of caribou horns is quite a job, because they're big. So are the caribou themselves. The boys saw lots of them.

They came down out of the hills in herds as big as 2,000 head. Sometimes they were a nuisance. They had seen few men and had no fear. No one ever thought of shooting a caribou; the U.S. authorities wanted them as a reserve food supply in case the Japs should ever put the islands under blockade. Anyway, no one ever should have to shoot a caribou. You could walk into a herd and club one over the head.

One day the caribou kept all the aircraft grounded at the Canadian field. They swarmed over the runways in hundreds, and airmen were out spanking them off with shovels. Had the Japs sent a few visitors that day, little could have been done about it.

To return to F/O. Wilkinson and his orderly room, it was probably one of the most unusual in the

R.C.A.F. Command was away back in Vancouver, and if official routine was to be kept, Vancouver had to be advised of all moves. F/O. Wilkinson would compile his weekly reports and start them out hopefully, with every assurance that the mail might take six weeks to get to its destination. He'd want advice on a problem, would ask for it in the regular and official way, and long after the problem had been solved and forgotten, the asked-for advice would arrive from Canada. In the Aleutians, you stood on your own feet.

The orderly room was a busy place. The main U.S. camp was some miles away, and all rations had to be drawn from there. The mail run went over the roads twice a day, and signals had to be picked up from the main camp. Messengers came and went, clad in their long brown parkas and knee high rubber boots.

Dress in the Aleutians took the weather well into account. A couple of airmen or officers hiking down the road would be unrecognizable as members of the R.C.A.F. The "spit and polish" which characterize the force in Canada disappeared in the island outposts. There they dressed to keep warm, and to keep the chill damp out.

However, there were times when they did dress up—parade days. Squadron Leader Walker ordered regular "Pukka" parades, when every man on the station turned out in full blues. Formal inspection was followed by

a drill period. They were excellent for morale. They marked a certain period in a dull routine. Men stationed in an outpost tend to lose their keenness unless something is done to keep them on their toes. The parades were to the R.C.A.F. in the Aleutians what dressing for dinner was for that traditional Englishman in the jungle.

And because the R.C.A.F. is a bearcat for drill, those drill periods always attracted an audience. It was not unusual for U.S. troops to come miles to see the Canadians drill. They'd throng around the flying field, rifles and tommy guns slung over their shoulders, to watch the airmen go through their paces. U.S. Army drill is considerably simpler than that laid down in Canadian manuals, and this difference seemed to intrigue the American soldiers.

About those rifles and tommy guns—you always went armed up there. It was an order. When you drove in at night to see a movie at the fort, you packed your weapons with you. You'd sit in the long Quonset that was the movie theatre, surrounded by an audience of men, each of them armed to the teeth. If that audience had ever got mad at the screen villain, it could have blown the end out of the theatre.

You went about the camp armed, and you only parked your weapon when you sat down to eat. Some pilots looked like wild west gun-toters. They made

themselves fancy leather holsters and cartridge belts. They weren't regulation, but they were picturesque. So were the knives they carried. Pilots are instructed to carry sheath knives to cut themselves loose from their parachutes if they bail out. Some Aleutian knives were a foot long.

Pilot Officer Johnny Irwin, of Toronto, had one of the fanciest in the island. The blade was a piece of truck spring steel, filed down. The handle was fashioned from layers of plastic from a discarded cowling. Johnny was fierce, with his revolver stuck in an embossed holster on his right hip, and his big knife thrust into an embossed sheath on his left. High leather boots added the right note. Those boots were necessary in that kind of country.

There is something laid down in R.C.A.F. dress regulations about shirts. They have to be blue, of a certain shade and texture. In the Aleutians, where the laundry problem was acute, you got along as best you could. Flight Lieutenant Ron Cox of Winnipeg had a brilliant plaid number, which, being flannel, kept him warm. His idea was comfort, not a liking for the design. He usually wore a white scarf as a concession to dress regulations.

This shirt influenced the colours of most of the shirts in the squadron at one time. Flying Officers Eyre and Fanning lost a toss-up one day, and were "joed" to do

the laundry for their brother officers. Into a big gasoline drum, filled with water and placed on the stove, they dumped all the shirts, sox, etc. Among the shirts was the plaid flannel. The dye was not fast, and it was about four months before the pink tinge faded from the rest of that laundry. The plaid shirt itself emerged as a pale memory of its original glory. Eyre and Fanning did no more laundry.

Chapter Five

“**H**OW did you get along with the Americans?” is a question often asked of the men who come down from the Aleutians. The answer is, there was no particular effort. The Canadians didn’t try to get along with the Americans, and vice-versa. As far as all hands were concerned, there was no difference between a Canadian and an American. People somehow expect that definite efforts to “get along” might be made—concessions by each to each. This was not the case. If you got sore at an American you spoke your mind and heard his spoken back to you. You acted towards him as if he were one of your own lads in the service, and he acted towards you as if you were in his own unit. If you wanted to argue, it was strictly a personal matter and no international relations about it.

In areas where the Canadians hadn’t been seen before, soldiers would stop them on the road to ask about their uniform. When they were told “Canuck”, they’d express amazement, particularly if they came from the deep south, where Canadians are not as well known. They’d inform the Canadian that he talked

“exactly like a northerner”, and they’d be puzzled by the fact that he didn’t have an English accent.

R.C.A.F. rank badges always fooled them too. They were used to their own gold and silver bars, and the inconspicuous strip of blue braid on the shoulder of an R.C.A.F. officer’s battle dress wasn’t so easily discernable.

A couple of buck privates from Alabama stopped us one day and asked us what we were.

“Royal Canadian Air Force,” we told them.

“We been seeing you around,” one of them remarked. “What’s the reason some of you wear flat hats and the other guys have wedges?”

“Flat hats are officers,” we explained.

“Oh, you fellows officers, eh?” They digested this fact for a couple of seconds.

“What are you?” they asked.

“Pilot officers,” we said. “That’s a lieutenant in your force.” We had to start from there to explain the ranks in the R.C.A.F. They went away shaking their heads.

The R.C.A.F. rank badge led to one amusing situation involving Wing Commander R. W. Morrow. He was based at Anchorage, on the Alaska mainland, when this one happened. He was coming out of the post movie one night when an American sergeant pitched him a salute. He returned it. Couple of minutes later, the U.S. sergeant was tugging at his sleeve.

"Hey," said the sergeant, "sorry, serg., I thought at first you were an officer."

Wing Commander Morrow just let it ride, and joined the sergeant in his laugh.

What fooled the sergeant was the rank badge—three blue stripes on the cuff of the jacket. As far as he was concerned, they were a sergeant's stripes, and from one sergeant to another he was apologizing for having mistaken him for commissioned rank. Sergeants, in any army in the world, are proud to be sergeants, and they'll tell you, if you ask them, that they are really the backbone of the army. A lot of people who should know, are inclined to agree with them.

So the way our international relations worked out in the Aleutians was on strictly frictionless lines. We were all serving the same cause, we all spoke the same language, used the same idiom, and thought about things the same way. The homes we came from were very much like the homes the Americans came from. There was no adjustment. None was needed. A Canadian from the West doesn't have to make any particular adjustment when he comes east. He's among his own people. That's the way it was.

Chapter Six

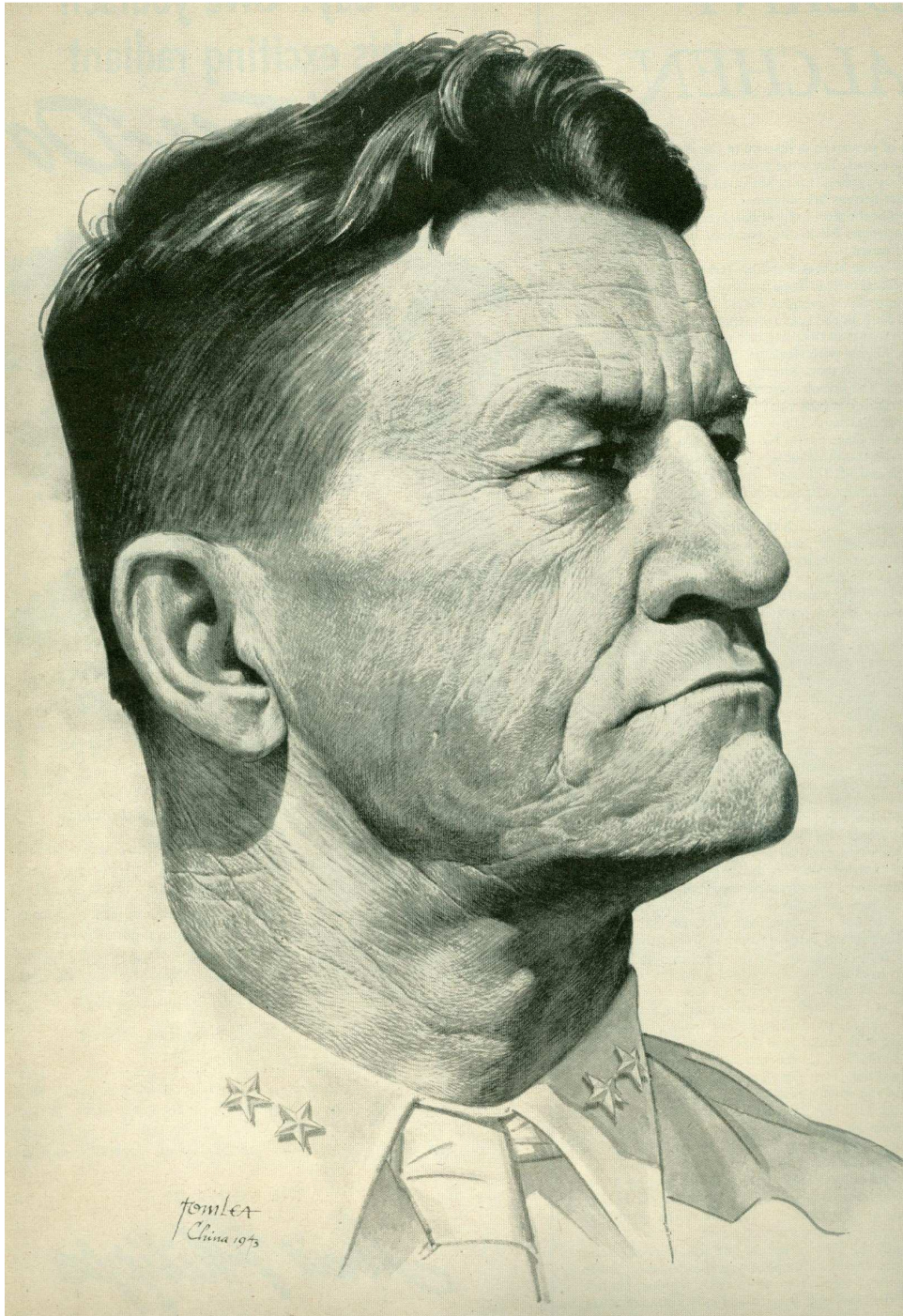
THERE weren't many Jap planes. The Nips never did manage to base them on Kiska or Attu in appreciable numbers. When they failed to take Dutch Harbour and fell back to the outer islands, they didn't land heavy equipment, and the terrain in both places was so rugged that air port construction by manual labour was nearly out of the question. They had one sketchy strip on Kiska, and their Zero float planes, which occasionally appeared, were cold meat for the land based fighters that the Canadians and the R.C.A.F. were able to send over. By the time the Canadians really got wheeling in the Aleutians, this phase was pretty nearly over, although Squadron Leader Ken Boomer bagged himself a Zero. In doing so he achieved a singular honour. He is the only Canadian who has shot down a German plane, an Italian plane and a Jap plane. He got the other Axis numbers when he served in Europe.

He got his Zero while he was out on a Kiska strafing mission with Lt.-Col. Jack Chennault, of the U.S. Army Air Force. Chennault got its mate in the same

fight, and the Canadian and his U.S. opposite number flew happily back to their base, where toasts to their success were drunk in coffee. Coffee was the strongest drink in those parts. Shipping space was too valuable to move anything as bulky as the ingredients for a more traditional toast. Lt.-Col. Chennault, by the way, is the son of the famous General Claire Chennault, who commands the U.S. air forces in China.

Squadron Leader Boomer added to Canada's laurels a few days later when he caught a Jap sub surfaced in the Kiska harbour. He led his squadron down at it, flying into an inflade of Jap fire from the heads that dominate the harbour. "We poured so much 50 calibre stuff onto the decks of that thing that it glowed red hot," he recalled. "Killed three different gun crews." He isn't sure whether the sub went down because they "didn't stick around." "The boys just waited their turn and came down at it," he said. "Then they got out of there fast. We didn't wait to see what happened to the sub." He got the U.S. Air Force medal to add to his British D.F.C., and Air Force medals also went to F/O. Jim Gohl and F/O. Hal Gooding.

So far as actual warfare was concerned, it came in fits and starts, depending on weather. When the men moved out along the chain, it based on Umnak, and from there the pilots detailed for the striking force would move 400 miles to Adak, which was the first



**War correspondent artist Tom Lea drawing of Gen. Claire Chennault, China
1943.[LIFE magazine 29 May 1944]**

advanced base. From August of 1942 to well into the winter the men would take off from Adak, with belly tanks, for the 250-mile hop to Kiska, and there they'd strafe and bomb. They gave the Americans a big hand with this chore until they were called back to Kodiak as a defensive force, and replaced by the fighter squadron, under "Brad" Walker.

By the time the squadron got there, the Americans were developing Amchitka, within 75 miles of Kiska, as an advanced base. They did this right under the noses of the Japs, stealing in under cover of fog and laying down steel runways before the surprised enemy even knew they were there.

It was from Amchitka that the squadron worked, as part of the U.S. fighter command. Strategic decisions were made by the U.S. chiefs and tactics were left to the Canadian commanders.

Half the squadron would remain at Umnak, and the other half would move up to Amchitka for a month's tour of combat duty. This meant discomfort and sometimes hardship. While Amchitka was in the process of development, building material had a priority over food and comforts. Living there at first meant sleeping bags and tents, and canned rations. It was the same on Adak when the squadron first started to use it as a striking base, but things got better in a few months.

With the exception of Squadron Leader Boomer's

encounter with the Zero, it was strictly plane-versus-ground forces. But this was a highly perilous job and it's just the fortunes of war that no Canadian plane was shot down.

It was a weird sort of warfare. The Japs sat on Attu and Kiska, with an estimated 15,000 to 18,000 men, who always burrowed into the ground when the planes came over. The Canadians seldom saw their enemy in the flesh, and only by tremendous doses of flak did he reveal his presence.

Up to the time the R.C.A.F. got there the American high level bombers had been working on the islands. They'd take off any day their own fields were clear and head for Kiska, which was usually shrouded in clouds. Taking a line on the big volcano peak that is a feature of the island, they'd make a timed run on a compass course, and, through close figuring of speed and distance, they'd be able to drop bombs in approximately the camp area. They figured that if you started the watch when you passed over the volcano and kept going in the right direction you'd be over the Jap camp in about two minutes, depending on the wind and other factors. When the watch had ticked off the two minutes, they'd let their bombs go. It was not the most accurate bombing, but it kept the Japs busy, and did achieve a lot of results.

On clear days, of course, the bombers went in low.

One crew made a name for themselves by coming in over the bluffs that edge the island and roaring down a valley to take the camp by surprise. The next time they tried this stunt, they narrowly missed a cable the Japs had strung between the hills.

This had been going on for some time when the Canadians got into the islands. They wanted to get into active combat against the Japs rather than merely "fly flagpole" back at Umnak, where there was no action at all. "Flagpole" means routine patrol in the Aleutians.

So they were ordered to send half their squadron to Amchitka at a time, leaving the other half to guard Umnak.

The first unit got to Amchitka in the Spring of 1943, just about the time the U.S. task force came all the way from the States to win the grim and bloody battle of Attu. With Attu, the outermost island, taken, Kiska was cut off, so a methodical campaign began to soften it to the point where the ground forces could move in.

Amchitka was no Umnak, even though Umnak was no bargain. Umnak had good roads and the camps had been established for so long that they were comparatively comfortable. At Amchitka the huts were smaller, the ground under foot was a bog when you got off the roads, and the landscape was grimmer, if that could be possible.

But at Amchitka, the Canadians ran into some of the finest fliers in the U.S. forces. They shared rations with men who have become famous, and in this company their combat record began to take shape.

They developed a bombing technique that really began to get results. The R.C.A.F. boys were flying Kittyhawk fighters, rugged little planes that could stand a lot of stress. The U.S. ground crews rigged them with racks, under the fuselage, and into these racks they'd load a single 550-pound high explosive bomb.

They'd wait for a good day and then scramble into their planes and head for Kiska. There might be fog there but that didn't stop them.

Their plan was to come in at around 13,000 feet and dive from there. The Kittyhawk was never built to be a dive bomber, but they made it work.

The Jap radio locaters would pick them up as they came and the heavy calibre flak would be coming at them through the fog, always bursting at their level. But they'd throw their planes around in the air, weaving and dodging. When they reached a spot where there was a big concentration of fire, they'd figure they had a target below, and the leader would peel off and dive.

Tearing down through dense clouds at 300 miles an hour plus, when you can't see your target, takes a

special kind of nerve, particularly when you're diving into heavier fire all the time. Around 5,000 feet, the lighter calibre flak would be arriving in storms, tracers spitting past all over the place. At 3,000 the machine guns, light and heavy, were opening up. Still they'd go in, aiming the plane at something that was just taking shape through the haze. Maybe it was revetment, sheltering trucks, maybe a gun position. Anyway, they'd go in there until they could lay the egg on it. At 2,000 feet, perhaps even as low as 1,000, depending on visibility, they'd dump that bomb and pull up the nose. Sometimes they went so low that the concussion of the 550-pounder lifted and tossed the plane.

Then they'd get out of the way, for there'd be someone else coming in right behind, looking for a likely spot to plant one. And there'd be another coming in behind him. So get clear and give them the track. The flak would be storming at them but they didn't worry. It hadn't got them so far.

Down below, big Jap guns would bellow as those Kittyhawks, flashing the R.C.A.F. roundels, screamed at them to plant destruction. The Kittys, "peashooters" as the pilots fondly called them, had now done one part of their job, so they'd whizz out to sea and leave the flak behind them. There they'd climb back to 13,000, to rendezvous and get into formation again.

The leader might signal, and they'd turn and go

back, the flak picking them up again, bracketing them right at their level. The Japs have pretty good radio location. They'd peel off again and go in, this time right down on the deck. Press the gun button, boy this is what you're here for. The Kitty's are down to 200 feet now and every gun on the island is going. Kiska is raving like a maniac under the lash.

Sweep that road. Those trucks look good. The Japs'll have trouble bringing in new ones. Six 50-calibre guns three in each wing, spit armour-piercing and incendiary bullets and three trucks by the side of the road start to flame. There must be some scared little Jappies down there somewhere, huddled in a ditch, catching a flash of the R.C.A.F. roundel any time they get up enough nerve to give a peek at the sky.

The Canadians flew nearly 60 missions against Kiska, none against Attu. By the time the R.C.A.F. got to Amchitka, Attu was being mopped up. And the weather was so bad there that even the U.S. medium range stuff couldn't give the ground troops much help. It was strictly an infantry show, as ferocious as they come.

Sixty missions do not seem many for the length of time the Canadians spent in the Aleutians, but when the weather is taken into account, it's a big number.

There are combat reports on record to show what they actually did:

“Ships Able, Buffalo Charlie and Dog left burning in Gertrude Cove.”

“Hit runway seven times in 16 tries. Japs hadn't fully repaired it after last bombing.”

“Left mess hall burning, and blew up warehouse.”

“Observed direct hits on submarine pens.”

“F/O. Cochand (Flying Officer Louis Cochand of St.-Marguerite, Que.) scored direct hit on heavy anti-aircraft battery on North Head. Blew it up.”

“Strafed Jap main camp from low level.”

These, and a lot more like them, tell in the brief language of military intelligence, what the Canadians were doing to the Japs on Kiska. They did quite a lot of the same. Any day they could fly (and on a lot of days when no one outside of the Aleutians would have dared to take a plane into the air) they were in there pasting the little brown men who dreamed of pleasant homes and docile slaves on the Pacific coast of America.

They poked that island with their bomb patterns wherever they saw signs of activity. And they risked themselves in fog and flak to get in close with their machine guns. They did so well that the R.C.A.F. uniform came to mean something among the flying men in the Aleutians, where you have to be tops as a pilot just to stay alive.

There was the day that Major General N. E. Ladd jumped into his command car and drove to the

R.C.A.F. field at Umnak. He was carrying seven U.S. Air Force medals. There was a "pukka" parade, in the best R.C.A.F. tradition, with a United States army band playing "The Star Spangled Banner" and "God Save the King". He pinned the medals on the following officers of the R.C.A.F.: Squadron Leader Bradley R. Walker, London, Ont.; Flight Lieutenant Ron Cox, Winnipeg; Flight Lieutenant A. W. Roseland, Calgary; Flying Officer William MacLean, Campbellton, N.B.; Flying Officer Dave McDuff, Trafalgar, Ont.; Flying Officer Louis Cochand, St. Marguerite, and Pilot Officer Hairston Hobbie, of Roanoke, Virginia. The citation mentioned "attacks pressed home in the face of enemy opposition, with a courage, skill and determination that reflects the highest credit on the force in which they serve."

Behind all official messages, which are necessarily brief, and sometimes stilted, there are stories. The deeds covered in the citations sometimes take hours, and often only minutes, to accomplish. The deeds themselves are performed by a few men from a whole unit. But it is the work of the whole unit that makes their deeds possible. In this case ground crews, general duties men and administrative staffs had to endure life in this remote part of the world, so that the handful of pilots could be put into position to slug the enemy. The pilots, particularly the ones who were decorated,

were always ready to admit freely the debt they owed to the other men in their squadron.

So those medals summed up the grateful recognition by an ally of the fact that Canadians went where they were needed, did their job, and did it well.

When the time came for the ground forces to move in on Kiska, the R.C.A.F. had its little fighters on the line, ready and eager to go in and give them co-operation and cover. The pilots looked forward to that. They'd hit the Japs a real wallop. They were especially pleased when Canadian regiments arrived to take part in the show. Mind, this all took place before the Canadian army landed in Italy, so this might be the first chance in this war for a co-ordinated movement between the Dominion's ground forces and the R.C.A.F.

Everyone waited for the big day. But the old enemy, the weather, stepped in again. On July 26 the Canucks had been over Kiska on three separate missions. They had blasted the Jap runway to bits, and had drawn heavy fire. The R.C.A.F. carried out the last attack on the Japs before they fled.

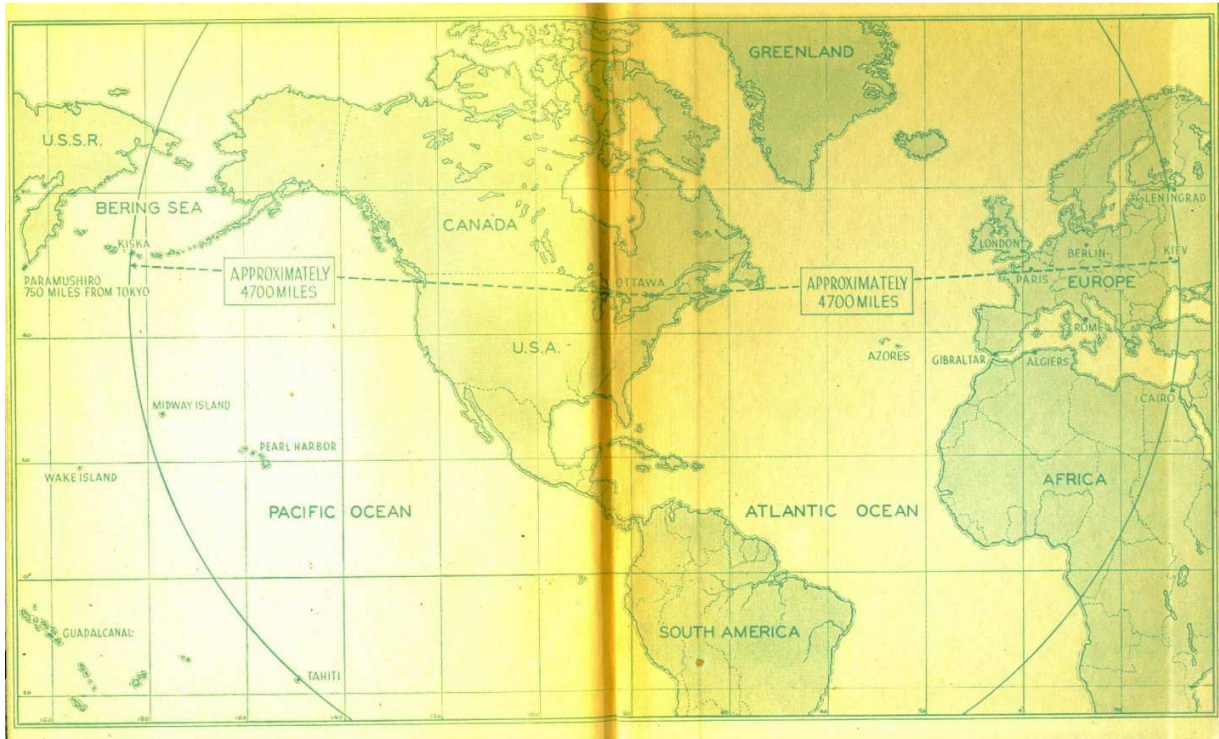
Next day the fog came down, and stayed down for ten days. No planes could fly in that stuff, and by the time it lifted, the Japs had sneaked out of Kiska. The ground forces charged ashore on Sept. 2 and found them gone.

Canadian and U.S. pilots sat around the rude mess

hall on Amchitka, the night that it was confirmed that Kiska was empty of Japs. The language was something to hear.

But there was one ray of light. The U.S. pilots seemed to be pretty well agreed on one thing: that if the Jap fighter runway had not been bombed out of commission, on that last day, the Japs might have remained on the island, counting on planes from Paramushiro to come over and give them a hand. Had they remained, and had they been able to get air cover of any sort, Kiska could have piled up a tremendous casualty list.

As it was, the Jap was forced to flee from his American foothold, and another stepping stone to Japan was cleared.



**F/O David Francis GRIFFIN C24863 is buried in the Goose Bay Cemetery,
Goose Bay, Labrador, Canada.**

The war correspondent from Canada and the United States represent a free press, for the free people, and they are not afraid to die for both. In the United States the newspapermen and women killed as a direct result of their chosen war correspondent assignment are remembered in memorial walls, arches, and special televised dedication by the Overseas Press Club.

In Canada, we forget about our Newspaper Heroes, but they are there, being killed in a far off dirty land just to bring us a story to read with our morning coffee.

On 30 December 2009, a young 34 year old Calgary Herald reporter was on a six-week assignment as a war correspondent in the War in Afghanistan. She wore the same uniform as the four Canadian soldiers that carried out a route patrol in an armoured military vehicle. They struck a roadside bomb and all five were killed together in the blast.

This World War Two story is dedicated to Canadian War Correspondent Michelle Justine Lang, 31 January 1975 - 30 December 2009. The first Canadian journalist to die in the war in Afghanistan, but never forgotten.



Calgary Herald image.