

## FIRST FLIGHT OF THE INTERNATIONAL ICE PATROL

by  
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Having volunteered for assignment to Squadron VP-6 in Greenland was selected as the Patrol Plane Commander for the Biloxi Air Station PBY5A crew.

Preliminary to transfer, training was provided for instruments at the CAA Flight Standardization, Houston, TX. The brother of the famous flyer Wiley Post was our link trainer instructor. Other highly qualified Coast Guard Aviators were fellow trainees. Was given the opportunity to take the qualification test for a CAA instrument license. Became only the second Coast Guard Aviator to pass the test.

Took possession of our PBY5A at the Coast Guard Air Station New York. The first leg of our flight to Boston almost wound up in disaster. We had been loaded with full tanks of fuel for a one hour flight. Alvin Voss my copilot was flying the plane. In making the landing, the overloaded plane almost stalled out and hit the runway so hard the wings almost collapsed.

Our next flight was to Argentia, Newfoundland, the rest base for VP6. Newfoundland was plagued by fog. It just depended on which way the wind blew as to where the fog was located. There was always at least one airport free from it. Goose Bay airport in Labrador was our next stop. It was the jumping off point for Blue West 1, our main base in Greenland.

The flight to BW-1 was complicated in making the approach. It was necessary to fly to a radio beacon located at Cape Farewell on the southernmost tip of Greenland. From there a fjord was followed for 50 miles to BW-1. The landing strip running south to north was inclined with 8000 feet in length. You landed going up hill north and took off downhill south. The only navigation aid was a radio beacon. There were very few radio navigation aids in Greenland. You navigated by piloting visually counting fjords to determine your location. A weather problem was Foehn winds that blew in excess of 100 mph due to supercooled air spilling off the Greenland Ice Cap into an approaching low pressure area from the south. At least there was a warning method of their approach. Looking north up at the Ice Cap, there were twin mountain peaks projecting through the Cap. When you saw streaks of snow blowing from them, you knew the Foehn winds were on their way. This made it necessary to secure our parked aircraft on the ground with rope tie downs. The winds caused the planes to become airborne while tied down. We finally solved this by placing spoiler boards on the wings to repel the lift.

Flights from BW-1 were always interesting. Ivigtut was one destination. There was a U.S. Coast Guard land base there along with a kryolite mine. Kryolite is used in the production of aluminum. Ivigtut is on a fjord, the entrance to which is plagued by fog. To land on the water there the procedure was to locate twin mountain peaks that stuck up through the fog. They caused breaks in the clouds to leeward. You then dove the plane through the breaks to the fjord below landing on the water.

The landing area also was interesting since you had to avoid hitting small icebergs (growlers) in the water.

A frequent destination was Blue East 2 on the east coast of Greenland. This was used to patrol against German weather stations that they tried to establish. It was a short up and down unpaved gravel runway carved into the mountain side. From there, we patrolled north of the Arctic Circle. Its only navigational aid was a radio beacon.

Took a flight delivering diplomatic mail to our embassy in Godthab, the capitol of Greenland on its west coast. There were no navigation aids. Found it through the brightly painted houses. On the other side of a hill near the water were the huts of eskimos. It was like going from the present to prehistoric times. Observed an eskimo returning in his kayak with a captured seal. They butchered it on site making use of all of its parts.

An interesting flight was to Iceland. When we landed there we were directed to a spot with a band playing. A carpet was unrolled to the plane. They had mistaken us for a plane carrying Air Marshal Tedder of the

Royal Air Force. The people were unfriendly to the U.S. forces stationed there. We were restricted to base.

A disaster befell me at BW-1 when I had brake failure. A simple flange fitting had bent thereby making the braking system inoperative. As a result, the plane went off the end of the runway. We would have crashed into our BOQ below with fire and deadly results. Fortunately, due to the rough terrain, the left landing gear collapsed destroying a wing of the plane. Gasoline poured from the ruptured wing. The plane was a complete strike. Still have pictures of this.

My final duty was at Argentina. While there pioneered mail flight pickups utilizing a system of hooking onto a line strung between two goal like posts. It was utilized for picking up outgoing mail from the remote USCG Loran Station at Battle Harbor, Labrador. In December flew passengers to Goose Bay Labrador. Before landing the tower warned us that the ground temperature was 40 degrees below zero and that 4 DC4 aircraft of the Air Transport Command were grounded due to frozen engines which could not be restarted. Therefore, decided to discharge our passengers leaving the engines running. On takeoff at 200 foot altitude the cry came from the engine mechanic station that oil was pouring out of the starboard engine. The oil cooler had frozen on the ground while the oil bypass system was operating. On takeoff the oil returned to the now frozen cooler blowing it out completely. Fortunately, we were able to land on an alternate runway before the engine lost all of its oil. It then took a week on the ground to repair the cooler in a hanger with a zero degree temperature.

With the advent of the LORAN system of navigation, it became possible to pin point our exact position over the ocean. As a result, VP-6 took over the USCG duty of the International Iceberg Patrol. Previously it had been performed by assigned Coast Guard cutters. For myself it provided the highlight of my over 60 year career in aviation. On 6 February 1946, as Patrol Plane Commander, I flew the "First Flight" of the International Ice Patrol. Subsequently, a trophy was presented to me commemorating this flight. It has been donated to the Naval Aviation Museum at Pensacola, FL.