

Army & Navy

Delicious Meal Awaits

Monday, May. 03, 1943

Routine submarine patrol completed, the broad-winged Catalina lumbered baseward across Greenland's icecap, through a formless, numbing nothingness of snow and ice and haze and white fingers of sun feeling through clouds. Suddenly there was the awful crunch of hull against frozen snow and ice. The pilots grabbed for the throttles. The plane rose for an instant, settled, slid 300 feet up the slope of centuries-old ice, turned to rest on her left wing tip, stopped dead. An alert radio operator flashed an S O S.

For two weeks the crew of seven lived inside the PBY (with sleeping space for four), stranded on an uncharted peak 400 miles below the Arctic Circle. Lieut. Glister, navigator, told the story day by day:

"First day, Jan. 27. . . . All attempts to move plane having failed, all men return to the plane and we make plans for the stay on the icecap. . . . Heaters not working. . . . Communications with the base are hot & heavy, with the put-put [gasoline engine to charge radio batteries] getting a good workout. . . .

"Second day. . . . Make a head [privy] in the tunnel hatch and place seat from waist hatch stool between rungs of ladder—not bad, although a bit on the chilly side. . . . Visibility picks up to three miles, still see nothing but snow and ice. . . .

"Third day. . . . Two B-25s. Talk about feeling good—nothing ever looked better. They dropped at least 25 bundles of food, clothing, drinks, radio, rations. . . . We're really lucky. . . .

"Fifth day. . . . The area about 20 yards in front of the plane is heavily crevassed—a few of us have fallen through up to our shoulders. . . .

"Sixth day. . . . We tried to start an oil smudge fire for the rescue party which was out trying to find a possible way to get over the glacier and up on the icecap to us. . . . The oil is like tar. . . . Rescue party has little success. . . .

"Seventh day. . . . Ski [Chief Petty Officer J. J. Rutkowski] gets very sick, heaves until he is weak, has chills, stomachaches and we cannot keep him warm. . . . He has us pretty worried. . . . The put-put goes out and the battery is very low. . . . Cannot key the transmitter, no plate voltage. . . .

"Eighth day. . . . The put-put is busy charging our batteries. . . . How all of us used to dislike the rattling of the put-put, now it is music. . . .

"Ninth day. . . . Beans and hamburger for supper. The hamburger had to be cut with two axes. . . . Word comes in tonight that five dog teams are to arrive at the foot of the glacier tomorrow. . . .

"Tenth day. . . .

Swing low sweet dog teams Coming for to carry us home.

"Eleventh day. . . . [wind is] 40 to 45 knots. The plane is rocking as though we were at sea. . . . The rescue party must be having a rough time. . . .

"Thirteenth day. . . . The rescue party is coming in tomorrow. . . . Hear that Lieut. Dunlop has successfully landed on the icecap near Angmagssalik and taken the three remaining kids from the B-17 that went down the 8th of November—one of the kids had amputated both of his feet with a pocket knife to avoid gangrene—golly but we have been most fortunate so far. . . .

"Fourteenth day. . . . [I] climb up on the wing and see two men coming over the rise in single file. Then there appears a third, fourth and finally a fifth man. . . .

The 15-mile trip up to the plane took these men about six hours and 20 minutes. . . . They said that the toughest part of the trip tomorrow would be at the end crossing over some six glaciers and then finally climbing a mountain—only 400 feet of it and then sliding on the seat of our pants down the other side into their camp. . . ."

"Sixteenth day. . . . At last we are off the cap with all its ice and away from the rocks of her mountains. A very warm and delicious meal awaits us. . . ."

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