

History of Aviation in Antarctica DVDs

As a member of the Old Antarctic Explorers Association New England Chapter our group helped sponsor a documentary on the history of aviation in Antarctica. Mr. Tom Henderson did this video and it contains two DVD's each one is nearly one hour in length. The first DVD contains events that occurred from the early days of the exploration of the continent by explorers such as Adm. Byrd. The second DVD covers the more recent events from 1954 onward and covers the Navy's and the Air Force's participation in Operation Deep Freeze. I have a copy of this video and have watched it a few times. It is very factual and is extremely interesting to watch.

After watching this video I emailed the following to Tom.

I received your DVD's in the mail yesterday and had the pleasure of watching the entire video last night. What an outstanding job you have done putting this together. I enjoyed the entire presentation. I know that this must have taken a lot of your time so I wanted to let you know what a great job you did.

I was particularly interested in the short sequence of the aircraft having to divert from McMurdo to Hallett because of bad weather. I was an Aerographers Mate 2nd class at Hallett and part of my job was to measure the ice thickness at various intervals along the runway to insure that the ice would support the aircraft weight. We received a panic radio message from McMurdo asking if the ice runway was ready and for an ice thickness report. This was needed because a divert to Hallett was underway. A Seabee named Brownie and I jumped in a construction vehicle and headed to the runway. After a few measurements of 18" to 24" ice thickness we notified McMurdo that all was well with the runway and the weather was "A OK".

At this time it was early October and the last visitors, mail, or fresh provisions we had were from an icebreaker back in late February. This visit would be the first outsiders we would see since that time. There were only 16 of us that were permanently assigned to Hallett. When all the planes that were diverted landed and all the people had assembled our total people count had risen by 52 now totaling 68.

Since we had no fuel storage on Hallett, except for our heating oil, regular gasoline and diesel fuel, all the avgas had to be flown in along with rubber fuel bladders and pumps in order to fuel the aircraft for the flight back to McMurdo.

That made for more people and by that time everything was in such a state of confusion counting people was not a priority.

Also of note as I understand it, the C124 that crashed near Hallett was arranged for by the visitors so that the people stationed at Hallett could receive mail and some fresh provisions. After the above incident it was noted that we had been isolated for so long that it would be appropriate that we receive some compensation for our great hospitality. The next opportunity they had they would do a drop from a C124. That was why the C124 was in our area.

Copies of this DVD set are available for \$35.00. If you would like to purchase a set please mail a check to:

Graceful Willow Productions
35 Cherry Street #501
Burlington, VT 05401
Or visit: <http://www.gwillow.com/>

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