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THE NORTHERN AVIATOR'S NEWS

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July 1990, Volume 11, Number 7

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'Friendship Flight' takes wing over Siberia

By Everett A. Long

"Provideniya radio — this is Cessna November One Two Seven Three Eight entering Soviet air space at . . ." It was June 17 USA date, June 18 USSR date. If someone had told me two years ago that I would be making this flight — I would have laughed and said they were crazy. Now I was doing it — talking to a Soviet Air Traffic Controller and requesting permission to land at a Soviet airfield. "Roger, Cessna Seven Three Eight we have you in radar contact continue for approach vectors."

I and my daughter Shannan were making a historic flight following the Lend-Lease route from Fairbanks, Alaska to Yakutsk, USSR. Our Cessna was the first American airplane to land at the enroute airports since 1945. Dubbed the "Friendship Flight" by our Yakutsk sponsors the flight commemorated the nearly 50 year old aerial bridge between Alaska and Siberia.

The "Friendship Flight" was part of an agreement between the Sister Cities of Yakutsk and Fairbanks. Much of the shared history of the two cities is the historic World War Two Lend-Lease flights. Fairbanks was the exchange point where American pilots turned over P-39 and P-63 fighters, B-25 and A-20 bombers, and C-47 transports to Soviet pilots. Yakutsk was a major collecting terminal for the American planes after several refueling stops in Alaska and Siberia. Our flight included most of those refueling stops.

My Cessna is a 1974 172M with long-range fuel tanks. Avionics include a standard VHF radio, two VORs, Localizer with Glide Slope and marker beacon indicator lights, ADF, and a Mode C Transponder. STC modifications include flap gap seals, Mogas fuel capability, and the new "Sportsman STOL" wing cuff with aileron gap seals. The "Sportsman" wing cuff proved to be the most crucial element to our success.

The Long's, Shannan, Ruth and Everett with the family dog in front of the Cessna 172M before departure of the Friendship Flight! *PHOTO BY DICK HOOPES*

Passports and visas were the simple items to obtain. The most difficult document was the permit from the Soviet Ministry of Civil Aviation.

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The T-28 trainer, pictured here in both U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force dress, is among the aircraft sought by Warbird collectors. *EAA PHOTO*

Warbird profits handsome

By Philip Bulman

When Dr. Bill Harrison wants to relax after a grueling week in the operating room, he drives out to the airport, looks over his collection of four military airplanes and four helicopters from the World War II era, and goes for a joy ride. And when the Tulsa, Okla., hand surgeon gets bored with one of his flying investments, he simply sells it for a handsome profit and buys another.

Harrison is among a growing number of investors who are speculating in what some describe as the ultimate collectible. Fewer than

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Bering Straits balloon flight borne of 'improbable' idea

By Bill Arras

Purely original ideas are not the norm in life. Ideas are born from outside influences and experiences. Each idea grows if allowed to and it may mature into action. The thoughts and ideas that each person ultimately acts on are what shapes that person's life. It has become apparent to me that I like to explore and pursue thoughts and ideas that most people would discard as ridiculous, outlandish, improbable and not worth the bother. An example of this is an idea that entered my mind: to fly a hot-air balloon across the Bering Strait. The idea was born in November of 1988.

The first step in growth of this idea was to do basic research. Would it be possible to make such a flight? What would the weather be like? When would be the best time to attempt the flight? A seemingly endless stream of questions would need to be answered. In March of 1989 I made my first visit to Nome, Alaska to develop a feel for the area and to get a better idea of the special problems associated with such an undertaking.

If you look at a world atlas or a globe, you will have a better understanding of what I was learning. The Bering Strait is the channel of water between Asia and North America, the Soviet Far East and Alaska. On first glance, it would appear that a balloon flight across the Bering Strait would be a somewhat simple matter. Less than sixty miles at the closest point, the two continents are separated by a distance that I had already flown many times in a balloon. There are no mountains to cross and no trees or power lines to be concerned with. But the more I learned about the area, the more respect I gained for the critical nature of a balloon flight across the Strait.

For a competent pilot, the major factor in flying balloons is the weather. The random, fast-changing and locally extreme weather conditions common to the Bering Strait became my main concern. It is a virtual

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Gyroplane Reborn After 25 Years page 5

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Three Final Flights Recalled by Jarman page 12

Friendship Flight: Lend-Lease route is retraced

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Our Soviet sponsor was head of the Yakutsk Aeroflot Detachment Yury Oblan. Oblan is also the airport manager in Yakutsk and was our host during our stay in Yakutsk. After many telegrams, phone calls, precise to-the-minute flight planning, and a delay of one week, we got our permit.

The most hazardous leg of our journey was the two hour flight over the Bering Strait from Nome to Provideniya. "Air Alaska" helped with planning safety equipment for the single engine flight over water. Eagle Enterprises in Anchorage provided us with a life raft, and ERA Aviation loaned us cold water flotation flight suits and life vests. We studied ditching procedures and attached a quick reference list to the sun-visor.

Bering Air in Nome helped with a staging area for departing Alaska. Dressed in cold water flotation suits we looked like astronauts boarding the space shuttle. The journey begins. And yes — the engine did seem to run a little rougher over the water.

At Provideniya Soviet Customs agents were polite with minimal inspection, but very strict instructions on how and where to exchange dollars to rubles. It was here I met Valerie Smirnov our navigator assigned from the Yakutsk detachment. Smirnov is a rated Class One navigator for aircraft such as the Tupolev Tu-124, similar to a Boeing 727, and the Ilyushin I1-76, which resembles our C-141. Smirnov took a long look at the Cessna.

"Provideniya, Cessna Seven Three Eight requests permission to start engine," Smirnov called. Shannan and I were not the only ones embarking on a new adventure.

Our first fuel stop and overnight stay was at Anudyr, a joint military and civil aviation field. Smirnov was concerned about a stiff 25 knot quartering crosswind. After an uneventful landing he was beginning to have some faith in our little Cessna.

After an official reception by the Anudyr airport manager we checked in at the combination airport terminal and hotel. Our room was comfortable and clean — with the exception of a few bugs. We were not impressed by the considerable amount of trash piled around the airport. Landfill and trash collection is a technology the Soviets need to learn.

In the morning B-91 avgas was hand-pumped into my tanks. I carried my own funnel to control water and dirt. As it turned out my funnel was used more to adapt their large fuel nozzles to my small size tank fill openings. Dirt and water was never a problem throughout our entire flight. B-91 is the Soviet's standard avgas used for the AN-2 biplane, their only remaining recip powered airplane in the Aeroflot fleet. I'm happy to report that B-91 burns great in my 150 hp Lycoming. Never a problem.

At Markovo we experience our first taste of Soviet/Alaska goodwill. The last American airplane to land here was a Bell P-39 Aircobra in 1945. Many oldtimers turned out to wish us well and welcome the return of Americans to their community.

I get my first glimpse of their air-taxi system. Big Mi-8 helicopters and the antique AN-2 biplanes operated by Aeroflot. When an AN-2 pulled up for fuel — two pilots made rapid exchanges to inspect airplanes. I thought his AN-2 was great — and he was more than willing to swap for my Cessna. We didn't understand a bit of each other's spoken language — but we both knew aviation talk.

Gravel airstrips and community spirit is reminiscent of Alaska's remote villages during the 50s and 60s. Each small airfield has a full service weather and air traffic control detachment. Forecast weather was excellent and on the mark throughout our flight. Local ATC and Met Service (weather) were great folks to work with — even when we were not expected. The flying community brotherhood is very strong in the Soviet Union.

Flight planning is more rigid in the Soviet system. Everything in aviation is based on "Moscow Time," and you may wait several hours for a flight plan to be approved. That's after you have waited one or two hours on a request for the weather forecast. Soviet VFR flight rules are similar to Canadian VFR rules. No VFR on top or night flying — anything after 10 p.m. local is night regardless of summer's long days. VFR flights are planned along the same IFR routes, assigned specific altitudes, and report at each control sector hand-off and route check.

Private pilots should be instrument rated, not required, but damn handy. The flight would be impossible without a Soviet navigator to smooth the way. Learn the Russian language — especially the numbers and alphabet. Every approach to landing is by the numbers as though you were shooting an instrument approach. Once Smirnov got to know my flying this relaxed some, and I was able to make simple base or straight in approaches.

You will not be put into icing conditions, but you will be routed VFR top. Radio and NDB coverage was excellent and totally compatible with our American equipment. Charts were very accurate for airways and terrain. All navigation information is added by the navigator, frequencies, NDB locations, change over points for sector control — everything.

After Markovo we planned to overnight in Seymchan but had to divert south for weather. This took us to a community which was n along our planned route. June 19, 1990 was a day to remember in the small community of Evensk — an American airplane had landed. A bright blue "Americanski Cessna," made an unscheduled stop to avoid poor weather conditions.

Evensk is located east of Magadon on the north shore of the Sea of Okhtsk. Our Cessna was the first American airplane to land at their airport. The 172 was recognized as the same model which West German pilot Roost, had landed in Moscow's Red Square. Fortunately we had permission from the Soviet Ministry of Civil Aviation for "all civil flight routes." The photos on the front page of the Evensk newspaper was clear "THIS PILOT IS NOT ROOST."

Continued on page 9

'Stealth,' B-1B to make Oshkosh

- The U.S. Air Force will be front and center with the F-117A "Stealth" fighter and the B-1B bomber during the 38th annual EAA Fly-In Convention scheduled for July 27 through August 5 at Wittman Regional Airport in Oshkosh, Wis.

The black, v-tailed Stealth, which is designed to avoid detiction by radar, will arrive on Friday, July 27 and remain on display through Sunday, July 29. The B-1B will engage in a fly-by on its arrival on Tuesday, July 31 and remain on static display through Thursday, August 2.

"We are thrilled to have the Stealth fighter visit this year," said Tom Poberezny, EAA convention chairman. "It marks one of the few times the airplane will visit a civilian aviation event. Although this airplane has been a closely guarded secret for nearly a decade, people have shown a tremendous interest in its shape, design and related technology. At EAA Oshkosh, everyone will have an opportunity to see this high-tech airplane."

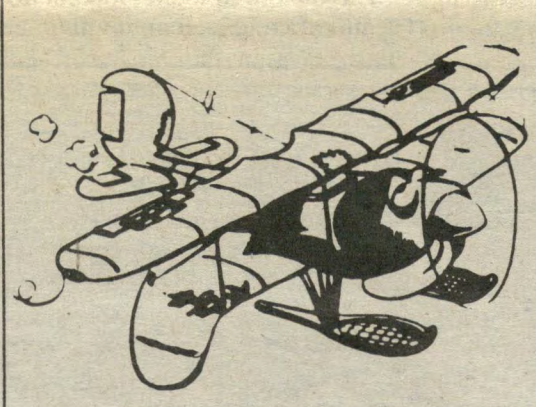
The B-1B made a public appearance at the Oshkosh convention two years ago and participated at last year's event with a series of low-level fly-bys.

"The B-1B will certainly add to the excitement that will be genereated by the appearance of the Air Force's F-117A, 'Stealth' fighter, the return of aircraft and pilots from the Soviet Union as well as the thousands of homebuilt, antique, classic, warbird, ultralight and light planes that will be attending EAA Oshkosh," Poberezny said.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) will return to Oshkosh with a new exhibit and its X-29 research jet. The theme of this year's exhibit is "NASA: Technology for America's Future," and will highlight research and technologies being developed in three areas-- for future flight vehicles; for safer, more efficient flight; and for space science and exploration.

The X-29 features forward-swept wings made of high-tech carbon fibers and is being used to test high-angle-of-attack flight at NASA's Ames Dryden Flight Research Facility at Edwards Air Force Base in California. The airplane will fly into Oshkosh prior to opening day and remain on static display in front of the NASA Pavilion throughout the convention.

"By walking through the NASA Pavilion at EAA Oshkosh, many people have learned that NASA is involved in many more important projects other than space exploration," Poberezny said. "Many people are pleasantly surprised to learn that 'aeronautics' is NASA's middle name. We are happy to be working with NASA again this year and look forward to hosting them in Oshkosh for many years to come."



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Continued from page 1

battleground for weather systems, the point where Bering Sea storms meet Arctic Ocean fronts, where Asian and North American highs and lows fight for control of the region. Yet, my research led me to believe that suitable weather conditions to make such a flight do occur from time to time. March and April was determined to offer the best combination of conditions: adequate daylight hours, acceptable temperatures and a minimum of open, non-ice covered water. After April, the receding ice pack would mean fewer suitable landing areas for the balloon and more open water. The higher temperatures later in the spring would also mean increased fuel consumption and increased incidence of fog.

Early on it became apparent that it would be foolish to attempt the flight unless a helicopter was on standby, monitoring the flight and ready to make a rescue in the event of an emergency. I am not a daredevil. Although it may seem contradictory, I go about my non-conventional life in a very conservative manner. I like life too much to risk it unnecessarily.

In July of 1989 I traveled to Lithuania to fly in the first balloon competition held in the USSR. At both ends of that trip I visited Moscow with the head of the Soviet organization that was supporting the Bering Strait expedition. Everything appeared to be developing nicely.

Now, along with planning and preparations, much effort was put into soliciting financial sponsorship. Hours of phone calls were made and stacks of proposals were sent to prospective sponsors. Although much interest was generated, no pile of money arrived in the mail. Full sponsorship of the expedition would have cost $55,000. Without a sponsor I figured that out-of-pocket expenses could be trimmed to about $20,000 (Consider just a few of the expenses: propane in Nome costs over $4.00 per gallon and over 500 gallons would be needed; shipping of equipment round trip from Oregon to Nome is $3,000.00; round trip shipping Nome to Little Diomede is $1,800.00; Nome to Provideniya is $5,000.00. All flights from Nome would be charters, using a twin Beechcraft cargo plane capable of carrying up to 2,800 lbs. of cargo, including propane).

My bank account told me that I could not afford to fund the expedition personally. Yet, late last fall, when it became apparent that my solicitations for sponsorship had struck out completely, I realized how strong my interest in completing this project had become. I decided to do it anyway. It would be worth going broke for. And most importantly, I had the full support and encouragement of my wife Patricia. Unfortunately she would not be able to take part in the adventure because of other commitments.

The decision to proceed with the project was made even though there was no financial support and my Soviet sponsor was providing no help in the USSR. There was no authorization from the Soviets to fly in the USSR or across the Bering Strait. To top this off, I would be making the trip alone. All my friends lacked the time, interest and or money to commit to the expedition. So I was on my own but feeling very good about it. I have always trusted my feelings enough to follow them. There was no reason to change now.

A start date of March 8th was set. The next step was to assemble all the equipment. What do you pack for a four month Arctic balloon expedition? Socks, underwear, toothbrush, Mustang survival suit, transponder and encoder, 12 volt gel cell battery, 1,400 watt generator, so on and so forth. A mountain of equipment. 1,700 pounds of gear, plus 1,100 more pounds of propane and CO_2 tanks to be added in Nome.

As the equipment was being assembled I received an invitation to fly as a guest in the Japanese National Hot Air Balloon Championships in Kamishihoro, Hokkaido in early March. I really like Japan, and being a glutton for logistical nightmares and a total fun hog, I had to go. So my wife and I packed everything for Alaska and shipped it off. Then she put me on a plane to Japan in the end of February. After two great weeks of ballooning on Japan's northernmost island, it was time to change gears and go farther north to Alaska.

Nome, Alaska. There are posters and T-shirts that state "There's No Place Like Nome." It's true. But there are other T-shirts that claim "When I die I'm going to Heaven because I've

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AOPA seeks 'distinguished pilot'

The AOPA Air Safety Foundation is accepting nominations for its prestigious Distinguished Pilot Award.

"The award is presented to pilots who react to a difficult flight situation with poise, calm and precision," according to Foundation President Donald D. Engen. "The award symbolizes the high level of competence, coolness, and caring for others that anyone who pilots an aircraft should possess."

The previous winner was a general aviation pilot who led a VFR aircraft lost on top of clouds and low on fuel to a safe landing in 1989. In 1988, the Aloha Airlines crew who safely landed their crippled B-737 after it suffered explosive decompression received the award.

The 1990 award will be presented by Engen at the opening luncheon of the AOPA convention in Palm Springs, Calif., and the winner will attend the convention as Engen's guest.

Inquiries concerning the award may be made by telephone, and letters of nomination must be received by September 1, 1990. Newspaper articles or videotapes of news coverage, ATC tapes, or personal accounts of the circumstance for which the nomination is being made should accompany nominating letters. Contract Greg A. Llafet, Director of Communications, AOPA Air Safety Foundation, 421 Aviation Way, Frederick, MD 21701, (301) 695-2198.

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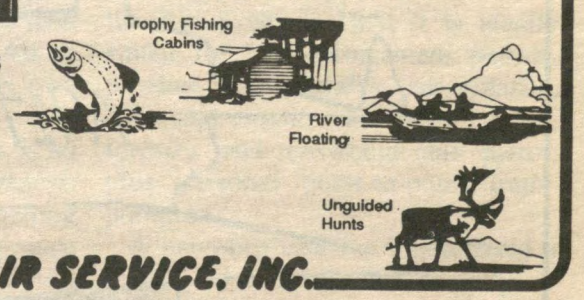

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Congress supports pilot issues

Several key proposals affecting pilots nationwide have received congressional support, according to John L. Baker, President of the 300,000-member Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, primary sponsor of the proposals.

"We are pleased that two very important pilot issues have received early approval from two key House subcommittees: preservation of existing flight service stations and support for a space/earth-based navigation system," Baker said. "Both of these proposals are a positive step for pilots and we commend Congress for understanding their significance."

In response to a proposal conceived and advocated by AOPA, the House Subcommittee on Aviation approved a provision directing the Department of Transportation to develop and implement a system of manned auxiliary flight service stations. These stations will be located in areas of unique weather or operational conditions which are critical to flight safety and will supplement the services of the FAA's automated flight service stations. The provision is part of a bill reauthorizing the programs under the Airport and Airway Trust Fund and is expected to be approved by the full House Public Works and Transportation Committee in the near future.

"Few issues have generated as much concern from pilots as the Federal Aviation Administration's plan to consolidate and close flight service stations," Baker said. "From a safety standpoint, closing flight service stations in areas with unique weather or operating conditions would be disastrous. We are pleased that Congress has acknowledged the devastating impact the FAA's plan would have and especially applaud Representatives Jim Oberstar (D-MN) and William Clinger (R-PA) for including the measure in the original bill, and Reps. Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Jim Lightfoot (R-IA) for their efforts to generate support for the provision."

In other congressional action, the House Science, Space and Technology Committee authorized the addition of $4 million to the FAA's research, engineering, and development budget to be used to define and execute an aggressive plan for transitioning to a space/earth-based ATC system. AOPA has led the call for such a transition. The plan must also include a look at potential cost savings from early transition, and a report to Congress is due no later than

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Friendship: Siberian flight

Continued from page 2

The fuel stop became an overnight stop as residents descended on the airport. It was dinner and toasts to a renewed Alaskan/Siberian friendship at the Romanov's apartment flat. Romanov is the captain of an Mi-8 helicopter. Other guests included Evensk's Chief of Air Traffic Control, and the Fire Chief.

The gravel strip at Evensk is a little less than 2,000 feet and ends at the beach. With three people, full tanks and max baggage we were at gross weight. With the modified wing we had no problem and used less than half the airstrip. During gusty landings I could carry plenty of speed for changing winds and still settle down to a smooth landing.

Reporters and a reception committee were waiting for us at Seymchan. During the Lend-Lease flights a local pilot was killed when an American A-20 Boston crashed. Near the airport terminal is a monument to the pilot and others who lost their lives flying the route. Seymchan's museum has a large display of artifacts dedicated to the American aircraft and the Lend-Lease flights.

Our planned flight would have taken us to Ust Nera where the Soviets felt we would have better facilities. But weather again changed our plans and much to my delight we landed at Oymykon Airfield. Oymykon was one of the Lend-Lease fields. Ust Nera was not.

Aeroflot pilots, the mayor, and the city council from the nearby village of Tomtor came out to see the first American plane in 45 years land. We were hosted to a tour of town which included a small museum with part of P-39 cockpit display. We were also shown their monument to the cold. Tomtor recorded the lowest temperature in the Northern Hemisphere, minus 71.2 degrees Centigrade. That is minus 96.2 degrees Fahrenheit.

It was noon before our flight plan was approved and at 80 degrees Fahrenheit, a 2,625 foot field elevation, and a 2,400 foot runway — we had some density altitude to consider. No Problem — jumped right off in that soft gravel and we were on our way — thank you Sportsman STOL Cuff."

One June 21 we landed in Yakutsk, a city of 225,000 located on the three mile wide Lena River. Soviet Television recorded the landing and reception. We were treated like royalty.

My wife Ruth arrived the next day on Aeroflot. During the following days I attended several formal receptions; the Veterans organization, the World Peace Council, the Aeroflot Detachment, and the Mayor flew back from Moscow for a special reception. The mayor of Yakutsk also sits on the Supreme Soviet council, so it was a special trip for him.

During a two and half day excursion up the Lena River we stopped at a community for a Solstice Sun festival. The Aeroflot lads pulled a fast one on me. We drove out to watch a local Aero Sports club skydive from an old olive drab AN-2 with a "BIG" red star. The AN-2 landed and I was informed that I would take up the next load of skydivers. What a kick that was — the pilot took off and landed — and I logged an hour of duel. I flew the lumbering biplane to a 9,000 foot level — and out the door went my passengers. I hope it had nothing to do with an American flying their airplane.

We had a fantastic flight in our Cessna, flew over 5,100 miles in 53.5 hours, and were greeted by some of the finest people I had ever met. Between 1942 and 1945 nearly 8,000 American built warplanes were given to the Soviets for their battle against Nazi Germany. The people have not forgotten their American friends. We made many agreements which will benefit the Alaskaland Pioneer Air Museum in Fairbanks. A major part of Alaska's aviation heritage was the Lend-Lease flights. Alaskan and Soviet history will be exchanged and books written to tell the story of those brave aviators during a desperate time.

I shot 20 rolls of slides and some video. From this collection I'll put together a compete photo story of our Alaska/Siberia flight. What to expect, what not to expect — and tips like "bring your own toilet paper." The world is changing fast — they are our neighbors — and the people of Yakutsk want us to come back with our friends.

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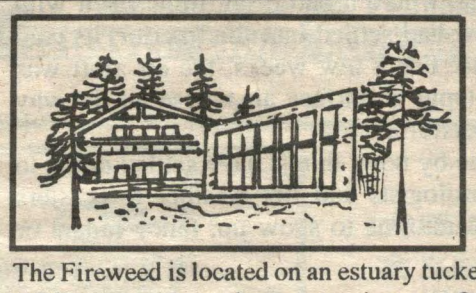

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Balloon: bridging the Bering Straits aloft

Continued from page 3

already been to Nome." Maybe that's true too. Nome is quite a place.

Nome was a huge gold mining center at the turn of the century, with a maximum population of over 40,000. Now, fewer than 5,000 people live there. It's current claim to fame is as the finish line of the Iditarod Dog Sled Race. It is also the gateway to the Soviet Far East. Many of the citizens of Nome have been to Provideniya, in the USSR, and many Soviets visit Nome. As the locals say, their exchanges are melting the "Ice Curtain."

Nome is where the first balloon flights of the expedition were made. A total of ten hours of flight time was logged in temperatures ranging as low as -10F. These were the first non-tethered, free flights in Nome and the balloon created lots of excitement. It was also very exciting for me, flying over the barren but beautiful, all white landscape. No trees grow in Nome's Arctic climate. The tundra and hills around town are snow covered and Norton Sound is iced over. Basically it is one big landing area with retrieval by snowmobile and cargo sled. In between flights there was plenty of time to watch the arrival of dog sled teams, enjoy the Northern Lights and to explore.

Next on the agenda was a three week stay in the village of Diomede, on Little Diomede Island. Nome is at the edge of the earth. Diomede is beyond the edge of the earth. Picture a tiny island almost on the Arctic Circle, in the middle of the Bering Strait. It is just a scant two and a half miles from Big Diomede Island. The US-USSR border, the International Dateline and the division between Eastern and Western Hemispheres runs between the two islands. In the winter, the span between the two Diomedes is ice covered. Around the islands and beyond the solid ice there is pack ice, ice chunks moving with the fast currents of the Bering Strait.

The village of Diomede is inhabited by 180 Eskimos living in tiny houses clustered together on the steep-sided island. There is no flat area on the island, so in the summer the only access is by helicopter or by boat. But in the winter the ice between Little and Big Diomedes is thick enough for planes to land on. But the weather can be so extreme that sometimes more than a month passes with no planes, boats or helicopters able to get in or out.

The natural setting and the lifestyle of the Diomede people is unique. In winter, the Eskimos catch fish and Alaskan king crab through holes in the ice. They hunt seals and polar bears. In the springtime they go out in big walrus skin boats to hunt the walrus, seals and whales. On the island they collect bird eggs, and eat the birds, they collect greens and in the fall, they harvest berries and wild potatoes. Even today, with the arrival of many modern conveniences, they maintain many of their historical ways, living a life of subsistence and relying mainly on what nature offers them in order to survive.

On March 31st, the weather allowed me to make the first balloon flight between the US and USSR, out on the ice between the two islands. Then on April 10th conditions were perfect for a much longer balloon flight, with patchy fog, wind from every direction at various altitudes, and crystal clear blue sky above the fog. A flight of 2.5 hours was made, back and forth between Little and Big Diomedes.

Still, there was no approval from the Soviets to fly in their airspace. I knew the frequency they used and had called for them in English many times with no response. Before launching on April 10th, I called them on my radio and said the only words I knew in Russian "I don't speak Russian" and then continued in English, asking if they spoke English and saying that I would fly the balloon now. No response. But immediately after take-off, a Russian voice came on the radio. I responded in English. We did this a few times before the radio became quiet again. As I approached Big Diomede, the Russian voice started again, noticeably excited. My concern was that they were telling me to get out of their airspace or else . . .

". . . the Russian voice started again, noticeably excited."

At this point the balloon was at 2,200' above the ice with an incredible view of both Diomedes and both continents rising out of a sea of fog. Wow! With binoculars my two Eskimo passengers and I scanned the island of Big Diomede and found that many pairs of binoculars were trained on us by the Soviet Border Guards, all lined up at their observation spots. From time to time we received more transmissions on the radio in Russian, but no signal flares were fired, nor were their helicopters sent out to escort us out of the air. Hopefully they enjoyed the sight.

Later that week it was reported that my flight had caused a mini-dilemma, similar to the uproar caused by the German pilot who flew a plane to Moscow and landed in Red Square. That flight was much more serious than mine and at a time that the Soviet military attitude was non-tolerance of such nonsense. Times have changed enough that my flight only caused the Ministry of Defense in Moscow to get a little upset.

Now it was time to move on to Provideniya, in the Soviet Far East, 230 miles directly west of Nome. This area is closed to tourists still. I had gotten a business visa, through a Soviet friend, good from April 1st through June 30th. The same twin Beechcraft cargo plane that transported the equipment to Diomede was chartered to take me to the USSR. The balloon was taken as my personal baggage because I had still not received the required authorization to bring the balloon into the country. My feeling was that if I got it there, I would be able to fly it. When the plane landed, the customs officers did a lot of head scratching, looking at the ground and each other, made a few telephone calls and said O.K., bring it in but don't fly it unless I received official authorization. Alright!

The next day was Easter Sunday. The Soviets celebrate this holiday also. The weather was gorgeous so my new Soviet friends and I took the balloon out on the ice on the bay at Provideniya, set it up and tethered it to the delight of the 5,000 locals. Most of them came out to see their first balloon ever. It was my Easter present to Provideniya. As luck would have it, no officials were both-

Continued from page 15

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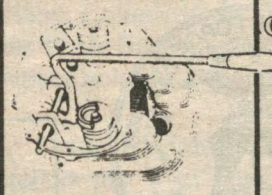
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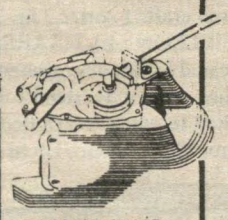
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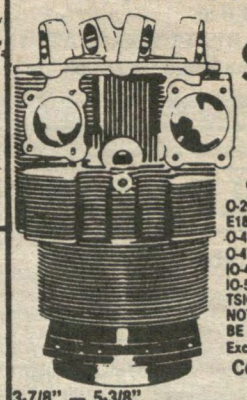
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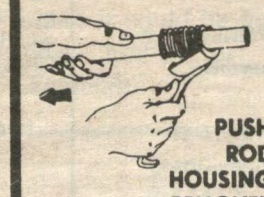
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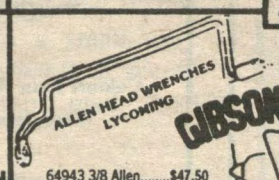

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Continued from page 14

ered by the tethered flight. During the next week I met with local and regional officials, heads of various organizations and reporters. Permission was given to make balloon flights on a daily basis, provided I had radio contact with the tower before launching. The magic of the balloon was working!

The next opportunity to fly came on April 22nd, a picture perfect ballooning day. My first passengers were to be Sergei Pakedov, the chief Dispatcher at Provideniya Airport tower, and Alan Shapiro, a new friend from California. Alan is a skydiver. We had met through a mutual acquaintance and he had joined me in Japan, jumping out of the balloon several times. Interested in foreign adventure, Alan became my traveling partner for a few weeks, hoping for more jumps from the balloon. This was his lucky day. We took off to the delight of the crowd, went up to 2,100' above the ice-covered bay and Alan made his first Soviet jump from the first free flight of a balloon in Provideniya.

Sergei enjoyed the experience, getting it all on video tape. A change of passengers was made after landing, then another flight. A group of sixty spectators followed the balloon to its final resting spot and they were all treated to tethered flights. Provideniya will surely remember, for many years, its introduction to ballooning.

At the time of this writing, April 24th, there is still no set itinerary, only an abundance of ideas. The balloon has captured the attention of the people here and many opportunities are developing. The next two months will be spent exploring the Soviet Far East, with and without the balloon.

My reasons for bringing the balloon here are varied. The original attraction was the thought of a spectacular flight across the Bering Strait and the personal satisfaction it would bring. It would be the first flight by a hot-air balloon between Asia and North America. That flight may still be possible, either this year or next year. But that goal became secondary to my interest in a peace and diplomacy mission.

Ballooning is something that I can share with many people. The balloon breaks through language, cultural and political barriers. It is the ultimate diplomat, representing friendship, freedom and fantasy. The balloon is a "smile in the sky." My desire was to share with the people of Northwest Alaska and the Soviet Far East the special delight that only a balloon can give. To that extent the expedition has been very successful, providing enjoyment to may people, making it all worthwhile.

The current trend is toward worldwide peace and understanding. My hope is that this balloon expedition will strengthen and insure the continuation of that trend. For most people peace is just a dream, but so is a balloon.

Congress: pilot issues

Continued from page 9

September 30, 1991. Reps. Robert Torricelli (D-NJ) and Tom Lesis (R-FL), the Chairman and ranking Republican of the Transportation, Aviation and Materials Subcommittee, and Rep. Dan Glickman (D-KS) all played key roles in securing the additional funding.

According to Baker, AOPA is optimistic that the House Appropriations Transportation Subcommittee will appropriate the funds for conducting the study on transitioning to the space/earth-based navigation system.

"We are delighted that Congress is validating what AOPA and others in the industry concluded quite some time ago," AOPA's Baker said. "Satellite-based technology, rather than the current ground-based antiquated air traffic system, is the future of air navigation, and it is obtainable in the near term."

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