

Alaska State Library  
Historical Collections

**Guide to Collection**

**Longworth, Francis Champion**

**Francis Champion Longworth Motion Picture Collection, 1942-1943**

**AV 006**

2 Boxes  
21 film clips

Processed by: James Simard, July 2009

**ACQUISITION:** The collection is the donation of Aline Longworth Dix of Mays Landing, NJ. Ms Dix is the daughter of Francis Champion Longworth. Accession # 2009-24.

**ACCESS:** The collection is unrestricted.

**COPYRIGHT:** Request for permission to publish material from the collection should be discussed with the Librarian.

**PROCESSING:** The 8mm film was cut into short sections and captioned by the creator on title cards intended to be used with the finished film.

Representative still images have been captured from the moving image film. The materials have been reassembled and converted to digital format.

See PCA 531 for related photographs.

## HISTORICAL NOTE

Francis Champion Longworth was in Alaska with his brother Richard Doughty Longworth in the mid 1920s. When Pearl Harbor was attacked, Francis was living in Moon Creek, Custer County, Montana. At 40, he was "too old for the military" so joined the Army Engineers. Their project was to cut the survey line from Dunbar, 33 miles southwest of Fairbanks, to Teller for the construction of a railroad. Said railroad would permit protection from invasion by the Axis onto North America. Dated April 20, 1943, the War Department issued a Citation for Merit for the extraordinary work done in temperatures as low as -70 degrees F. in the winter of 1942-1943. For more information about the Dunbar-Teller route see: *Duty Station Northwest: U.S. Army in Alaska and Canada, 1867-1987, Volume Two 1918-1945* by Lyman L. Woodman Lt. Colonel, USAF-Retired; Chapter 30, pages 229-234 (UA26.A73W66 Vol.2).

Francis Longworth was an amateur photographer who shot motion picture and still film during the course of this work.

A Citation for Merit was issued to Francis Longworth:

WAR DEPARTMENT  
UNITED STATES ENGINEER-OFFICE  
SEATTLE WASHINGTON April 20, 1943  
*Subject: Citation for Merit*  
*To: Francis C. Longworth*

- 1. I wish to express the appreciation of the Engineer Department to you and the other field employees engaged on the railroad location survey, Dunbar to Teller, Alaska, for the successful completion of a difficult and hazardous task.*
- 2. The work was carried on during the winter months, 1942-43, in the most severe weather in many years. Much of the work was done in temperatures of 40 and 50 degrees below zero in order to push the job through. Temperatures as low as 70 degrees, blizzards, and other extremes of weather were endured.*
- 3. The successful accomplishment of this survey, in spite of the constant dangers of traveling over unknown ground, over treacherous river ice and overflows, with the possibility of entire parties being cut off from camp by sudden blizzards, must be attributed to the alertness, courage and tenacity of all party members, as well as to the leadership furnished by the party chiefs.*
- 4. It is my opinion that the difficulties and hardships experienced in carrying on this work were beyond the ordinary call of duty, and that you and your fellow employees deserve the highest commendation for seeing the job through.*

(s) R. Park  
 R. Park, Colonel,  
 Corps of Engineers,  
 District Engineer

## SCOPE AND CONTENTS NOTE

8mm motion picture film documents the activities of the Army Corps of Engineers survey party whose assignment was to survey a possible railroad location between Dunbar and Teller, Alaska, during the winter of 1942-43.

## INVENTORY

### Box 1

#### ALASKA FILM CLIPS WW II Survey Crew #1

*List of captions typed on 3 x 5 inch file cards for editing into 8mm. Film.*

**Reel 1:** This is Crew #1 of Alaska Western RR location survey, Fairbanks to Nome. Main idea for RR was for U.S. to drop down on Japan.

**Reel 2:** For heating we cut local timber for our 50-gallon drums made into stoves, except Nome District where they burned oil.

**Reel 3:** (4 cards) -a- Crew #1 was composed of 16 men, 2 wanigans (housing), 1 wanigan (cook & diner) and 2 bulldozers[bulldozers].  
 -b- All crews & supplies away from established Alaska RR were flown to their starting point by transport planes on skis.  
 -c- The wanigans & sleds have 18-inch butt trees for shoes. Here is a bulldozer pushing one onto new shoes.  
 -d- Wanigans(living quarters) & bulldozers were at starting location.

**Reel 4:** -a-“Longworth belly skiers”; Airplane arrives at camp with new bearings for bulldozer. We marked landing strip on lake with spruce boughs.  
 -b-Snow bulldozed to get wanigans up hill to new camp site.  
 -c- However, plans were changed and Uncle Sam came up from Australia. Survey completed but RR was never built.

**Reel 5:** -a- The gentlemen of the crew. He was found in an abandoned CCC Camp at Fairbanks. He had 3 mangled toes from a muskrat trap.  
 -b- Dogs at front of sled not so sociable and Casey gets a poke in the nose.

- c- Nearby trapper “calls” with strange dogs. Casey decides to visit.
- d- Visit turns into a mad battle. Casey hurriedly retreats under a wanigan.

## CLIPS

- 6: Dog teams – were our liaison with the outside world. Such as contact with trading posts getting mail to nearest route.
- 7: -a- Before mechanic works on dozer, it is covered with tarpaulin and a fire is built under the motor to take frost out of it.
- b- The smoke from the fire was used as a filter to take a picture of a 90% eclipse of the sun. (March 16, August, Sept. 1942)  
 [Dates from: <http://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/SEdecade/SEdecade1941.html>]
- 8: Wanigans parked above river with others for use by some government agency for summer housing.
- 9: 1. Wanigan containing- shop tools, electric welder, bulldozer parts, 2. Sleds- food, kerosene, oil 40 drums, gasoline, etc.
- 10: Wanigans – sleep 8 men & duffle. This was also living room & dressing room. At night with fire out, temperature drops to 20 below. We used eider down sleeping bags.
- 11: There was not any inside toilet accommodations and outside it reached as low as 50 below. “OH BOY”
- 12: For entertainment – sewing, reading, playing cards in dining wanigan. A La thick coffee. Hikes if we should be near human life.
- 13: Dogs fed cooked corn meal and tallow and our garbage.
- 14: Mail & food were dropped about twice a week by airplane. One time a 30 gallon drum of oil.
- 15: Taking out work reports – gets orders from headquarters, to seek medical help or advice, freight food in.
- 16: Stopped for lunch on Yukon River. We now travel 45 miles down river to Tanana. Ice is only 5 foot thick.
- 17: Looking up river bank at Tanana. Large building next to church is the Northern Commercial Co. The Hudson Bay Co. of Alaska.
- 18: At Tanana Airport with duffle & hat, waiting turn to fly with bush pilot to Fairbanks.
- 19: As the survey line progressed, our campsite was moved ahead. Average every 5 working days.
- 20: 15 crews had their share of ground to survey. December to April. Winter is unusual for surveying but this was an emergency.
- 21: This rig is in the middle of the river making tests of the bottom for footings for a RR bridge.

## Box 2

Camera