

Events Leading Up to October 31, 1957

Reconnaissance hops were made to the pole and a landing was made at the Beardmore-Liv Glacier area to learn whether it would be possible to erect a support base there.

Another B4D flew trail-party men and materials to Little America to begin marking a safe trail into Marie Byrd Land.

On October 25 eight men under Michael Baronick, ADC, were landed at the foot of Liv Glacier on the Ross Ice Shelf where they set up an auxiliary base to aid planes bound to and from the South Pole. Their camp was austere in the true sense. They had fuel for planes, dropped by Globemaster; they had radio equipment; they had tents and sleeping bags and food.

And they had guts.

AFTER 44 YEARS

At 1255 local time October 31, B4D Bureau Number 12418 took off from McMurdo's bay-ice airstrip. Its crew included Lt. Col. Conrad "Gus" Shinn, pilot; Captain William "Trigger" Hawkes, co-pilot; Lieutenant John Swadener, navigator; John Strider, AD2, plane captain; and William Cumbie, Jr., AT2, radio-man. Its passenger-observers were Rear Admiral Dirk and Captain Douglas Godliner, C.O. of Air Development Squadron Six. Aptly named *Que Sera Sera* (Whatever will be, will be), the B4D was destined for history.

Destination: The South Pole. *Mission:* The first aircraft landing there in history.

Soon a Navy B5D flown by Commander Henry Jorda took off to fly air cover for the landing as did a Globemaster flown by Major W. Daniels, pilot, and Major Cicero J. Ellen, plane commander.

The B5D experienced engine trouble en route and returned to McMurdo, accounting for the scarcity of pictures of the historic landing since this was the official photo plane. The Globemaster overtook and passed the slower B4D and arrived over the pole at 7:05 p.m.

Obtaining a good navigational fix, the Globemaster circled the pole until the B4D arrived at 7:35 p.m. Then Lt. Col. Shinn searched the 9,200-foot plateau at low levels, looking for the best surface for landing until 8:34 p.m., when he landed.

The seven crewmen and observers in the ancient B4D (accepted in Navy service during World War II) knew great relief when they felt their skis grating against hard snow. There had been previous speculation that the snow was soft and powdery and that it might swallow the plane. No man had set foot there

since Captain Robert Falcon Scott of England in 1912.

Admiral Dufek stepped from the *Que Sera Sera* into minus 58-degree temperature. Less than three minutes on the snow, he saw Captain Godliner's face grow white with frostbite as they planted the U.S. flag. Radioman Cumbie, helping Captain Hawkes erect radar reflectors for future landings, found he couldn't release the shovel handle and had to kick it free from his hand with his boot.

While others worked with flags and markers plane captain Strider repaired an oil leak.

The initial American occupation of the South Pole lasted 49 minutes.

Lt. Col. Shinn revved up his engines for takeoff and the faithful old plane whose type has been in military service 23 years did not budge. Its skis were stuck to the snow.

He fired four JATO (jet-assisted-take-off) bottles and still the plane remained fast.

He fired another bank of four JATO bottles and the skis broke free.

He fired four more and picked up headway. Finally he fired the remaining three bottles and was airborne at 9:23.

His airspeed was 60 knots.

Every danger signal on the panel flashed on. The windshield was frosted inside and out which required an instrument take-off. Strider threw his circuit breaker so he wouldn't have to look at the various danger signals.

Overhead Major Ellen, too, was concerned. The JATO blasts, plus the Globemaster's own vapor trails, obscured the smaller B4D. He tried to call Lt. Col. Shinn by radio but got no answer. He tried again. Still no answer. (Shinn was so busy clearing his windshield and keeping the plane airborne he didn't have time to answer.)

Finally the airborne B4D came in sight and the Globemaster followed it to Beardmore auxiliary station where it would be refueled for flight back to McMurdo.

You'd think there would have been a major celebration at McMurdo when *Que Sera Sera* returned from its historic mission. There was none. Every man at McMurdo, it seemed, had had complete confidence that the operation would go off as planned and so one shared surprise at its success.

In view of the extreme cold encountered at the pole magnified by the air's thinness at the two-mile altitude, the Task Force Commander decided to postpone further landings of men and equipment until temperatures rose to at least minus 30 degrees.