



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

The Greenland Ice Cap Rescue of B-17 “PN9E”

November 5, 1942 to May 8, 1943

By CAPT Donald M. Taub, USCG, Retired

On November 5, 1942, a U.S. Army Air Force [USAAF] Douglas C-53 Skytrooper with five men aboard returning from Iceland, reported that it had made a forced landing on the Ice Cap on the SE coast of Greenland somewhere south of the radio beacon station located at the village of Angmagsalik, Blue East-2 (BE-2). USAAF at the main airbase at Narsarssuak, Blue West-1 (BW-1), called “O-No-To”, located near the southwest tip of Greenland, promptly began detouring aircraft, B-17s, B-25s, C-47s, that were in transit from USA to Scotland, to search for the C-53. The B-17 “PN9E” was one of them.

U.S. Coast Guard Greenland Patrol’s (SOPA-USCG: RADM Edward “Iceberg” Smith) ships and its assigned U.S. Navy VP-93 PBV-5As had conducted the earlier aircraft search & rescues since the start of the trans-Atlantic flights via the “Snow Ball Route” that had begun on June 26, 1942, with three B-17 crashes on the first day; but were now busily engaged in other activities. Winter was already beginning to set in, and daylight was getting shorter each day.

The establishment of additional sites on both coasts, including ship and air aids-to-navigation, weather stations as far north as Thule (BW-6), supplying the Sledge Patrol stations on the northeast coast, escorting Greenland convoys and conducting PBV anti-submarine patrols in the Greenland Air Gap continued during 1942. Following USCGC *Northland*’s rescue of the eight-plane “Lost Squadron” on the east coast on July 23, 1942, USCGC *Comanche* was sent to establish a USAAF weather-rescue station at that location. It was called “Beach Head Station” at Comanche Bay, located at 65° 04’ North, about 85 miles southwest of BE-2. A small summertime weather observation shack was also added 17 miles due north on the Ice Cap at about 3,000 ft. elevation, called “Ice Cap

Station.” The abandoned eight planes of the “Lost Squadron” were about four miles due east of Ice Cap Station. The main station was a 16 ft. x 24 ft. wooden building and was outfitted with six small motorized sleds and 27 sled dogs. Its crew consisted of two officers (1LT Demorest & 2LT Eddy), seven enlisted men and a Norwegian civilian dogsledder, Johan Johansen. Meanwhile a new small airbase was being established about 90 miles northeast at Ikateq BE-2 called “Optimist”, near the weather and radio beacon station BE-2.

On November 6, the C-53 was in radio communications with Beach Head Station, and was told to fire flares. Its flares were seen twice on schedule that night, bearing due north and visually in line with closed Ice Cap Station, 17 miles due north. The station’s CO, LT Max Demorest and SGT Donald Tetley set-out on two motorsleds with two other men (SGTs Hall and Linton) to man the radio at Ice Cap Station. On November 8, the C-53 was told to fire flares again, and the flares were seen bearing 350 degrees. The C-53 said that they could see the water. Due to the configuration of the coastline, this indicated that the C-53 was about five to 10 miles farther north. The Ice Cap there was essentially flat. On November 10, LT Demorest and SGT Tetley set-out toward the C-53 on their two motorsleds. LT Demorest reported his estimate that the rescue would be completed within three to four days; if the good weather continued.

On November 9, the B-17 PN9E was sent out from BW-1, assigned to the search grid that encompassed the location of where the C-53’s flares were seen, and the brief east-west coastline there. This coastline included three fjords. Comanche Bay fjord was the easterly one, and larger Koge Bay fjord was the westerly one. The B-17 had a six-man ferrying crew, and had picked-up a passenger, PVT Clarence Wedel, at Goose Bay, and two volunteer observers at BW-1 (TSGT Alfred Best and SSGT Lloyd Puryear). The B-17 approached the approximate center of its search grid from seaward where it encountered a local low cloud ceiling. The B-17 reversed course to go around the weather and headed in again, going northward into Koge Bay fjord to the west, and flew into a visual “white-out”, which became an unseen three-sided trap. The pilot began to turn away to the left, and the left wing tip hit the unseen Ice Cap. The plane skidded for about 200 yards on the surface of the Koge Bay fjord’s active glacier. The B-17 broke apart at the after bulkhead of the radio compartment aft of the wings. Volunteer observer, SGT Best was thrown out through the B-17’s plexiglass nose. PFC Paul Spina was thrown out of the radio compartment across the left wing and broke his right arm. The three officers and the radioman were unhurt. Others suffered various cuts and bruises. The broken-off tail section was overhanging a large open crevasse, and another crevasse was in front of the plane. The B-17 was at about 4,000 ft. elevation and 29 miles northwest of Beach Head Station.

Fortunately the weather was good. They took stock of their situation, treated injuries, collected rations and made quarters in the cramped tail section of the plane. They used parachute shrouds to tie the two parts of the plane together, and used their parachutes for warmth. The three officers had been provided with jungle survival kits, each of which included a large bolo knife. These were later useful for cutting snow blocks to construct snow shelters. The radio compartment was badly damaged and doused with gasoline. The radioman made attempts to transmit SOSs using the portable 500 KC emergency radio with its kite antenna.

On November 10, the weather began to change. The snow lasted for three days. The motorsleds enroute to the C-53 were caught on the Ice Cap and had mechanical failures. And a RAF Douglas A-20 Boston with a RCAF [Royal Canadian Air Force] three-man ferrying crew from Gander, Newfoundland, over flew its fuel stop at BW-1 in a snowstorm, and made a forced landing on the Ice Cap on the east coast. Its SOS was received at Gander. Now there were three planes on the Ice Cap on the east coast, and BW-1 was soon closed by the weather. The alternate airbase on the west side of Greenland, Sondre Strom Fjord, BW-8, located just north of the Arctic Circle, was basically shut-down for the winter, and had no planes. COL Bernt Balchen was its CO. SOPA-USCG had removed its three PBY-5As from BW-8 in about September, and now had only four PBYs at BW-1, which were primarily being used for convoy escorting and anti-submarine patrols in the Greenland Air Gap. In-transit search planes continued to be sent out from BW-1 when the weather permitted it. A civilian TWA C-54 arrived at BW-8 and was put to use.

Meanwhile the Canadian A-20 crew set-out on foot toward the coast. They had made snowshoes from materials on the plane and used an inflated liferaft for shelter. A strong foehn wind blowing down off of the Ice Cap caused the temperature to rise 54 degrees-F. On November 13, the 2 motorsleds that had been enroute to the C-53 returned to Ice Cap Station due to motor problems, and continued back to the main station for replacement motorsleds. On November 23, they made their way back to Ice Cap Station together with Johan Johansen's dogsled. Radio communications with the C-53 had already stopped.

Meanwhile USCGC *Northland* passed-by Comanche Bay twice on November 12 and November 15 going to and from the new airbase at Ikateq BE-2. It was transporting the season's last 80-some Army men to BE-2, and taking the last 80-some civilian construction workers out. On November 19, it transferred them to the troopship USAT *Brooklyn Heights* that was waiting far to the south outside of the coastal pack ice. On November 18, a search plane from BW-1 located the A-20, but not its crew. SOPA-USCG sent the *Northland* to try to rescue them. On the morning of November 23, the ship's Grumman Duck pilot, LT John Pritchard (CGA'38) located their trail; but not the men. Later that night the ship fired star shells and rocket flares. One of the A-20 men responded by setting fire to his coat,

and was seen on the Ice Cap. The ship's rescue party went ashore by motorboat and located the A-20's crew: Flight Officers David Goodlet and Al Nash, and SGT Arthur Weaver. They were to remain aboard the *Northland* for the next 43 days.

On November 16, the B-17 PN9E got its transmitter working and made contact with Beach Head Station, and its receiver working the next day. On November 18, 15 planes were sent-out from BW-1 and the TWA C-54 from BW-8. One of these located the A-20. Then the weather turned bad again at BW-1. On November 24, COL Balchen, the CO of BW-8, using the TWA C-54 located the B-17 PN9E. LT Demorest had returned to Ice Cap Station, and gave-up on the C-53, and on November 25 set-out to the B-17 PN9E with the two motorsleds and Johansen's dogsled.

On November 24, SOPA-USCG radioed the *Northland* after its rescue of the A-20's crew: "WELL DONE. SUGGEST Northland go" north again to assist USAAF at Comanche Bay. The 216-ft., 1000 SHP *Northland*, which was built in 1927 for service in Alaskan waters with sails on two masts for emergency propulsion (since removed) was not an icebreaking ship. It was outfitted with a Grumman J2F-4 Duck seaplane in 1941. The ship worked its way through the coastal pack ice and arrived in ice-free Comanche Bay at daybreak on November 28, and promptly launched its plane. COL Balchen had also returned and was making an airdrop to B-17 PN9E when LT Pritchard's Duck arrived, and landed with wheels down away from the glacier's crevasses about one mile from the B-17. LT Pritchard and his radioman, RM1 Benjamin Bottoms walked to the B-17 using a broom stick to probe for hidden crevasses, and administered first aid. The B-17's pilot, 1stLT Armand Monteverde chose two injured men who were able to walk. The navigator, 2ndLT William O'Hara's feet were black with gangrene and PVT Spina's arm was broken and his feet were also frozen, and they would need sleds to get to the Duck. The B-17's uninjured copilot, 2ndLT Harry Spencer accompanied LT Pritchard to the Duck to prepare it for take-off. RM1 Bottoms assisted the two injured men, observer SSGT Lloyd Puryear and PFC Alexander Tucciarone, both of whom had to make rest stops along the way. They cleared away the snow and raised the Duck's wheels, and turned the Duck around to take-off downslope on its incoming tracks. LT Spencer helped by pushing the Duck and it took-off toward the axis of the Koge Bay fjord and seaward back to the *Northland* in Comanche Bay, two fjords away. The Duck returned to the ship as it got dark, guided by the ship's search lights, and was hoisted aboard. The total flight time was 4 hours and 33 minutes. This was a historical event; the first intentional landing and take-off on Greenland's Ice Cap.

LT Demorest and SGT Tetley's motorsled party arrived near the B-17 later that night, guided by flares from the B-17. Johansen's dogsled had been forced to go back. They parked their motorsleds about one mile away outside of the area of the glacier's crevasses, and carefully skied to the B-17 in the dark, and then returned to their sleds and made camp until morning. COL Balchen had returned to

BW-8. Two B-17s had arrived at BW-8 to assist, and he released the TWA C-54; confident that the rescue of B-17 PN9E's remaining seven men was in good hands.

At *Northland*, the weather forecast predicted a change in the weather. LT Pritchard had the Duck further lightened and hoped to make two trips to the B-17 the next day, November 29. LT Pritchard returned to the B-17 and airdropped two improvised stretcher sleds, and proceeded to land again where he had on November 28. Soon after he left the ship, the weather began to change somewhat rapidly and started to snow there. At about the same time that Pritchard was landing wheels-up on the Duck's pontoon, LT Demorest and SGT Tetley were arriving on their motorsleds. Near the B-17, LT Demorest made a wide turn to turn his motorsled around, and disappeared into a snow covered crevasse. It was fatal. SGT Tetley stopped in time. Fog was seen coming in from the sea. The B-17's uninjured radioman, CPL Loren Howarth was sent to meet Pritchard to inform him of LT Demorest's fall, and also advise him to take-off. Pritchard waited for Howarth to arrive, and took-off with him. By then the ship advised Pritchard that it had become unsafe to land at the ship. Pritchard's last radio communication came nine minutes after he took-off; requesting "M.O.'s"--the direction back to the ship. It was 115 degrees-true, and over land, rather than the route offshore. The magnetic compass variation there was 40 degrees-West. At the ship, there was hope that Pritchard turned back to land again on the Ice Cap. (Months later, LT Spencer said that Pritchard had taken-off as he had on November 28, downslope toward the axis of the fjord and seaward, and not up over the coastal mountains and the Ice Cap to return to Comanche Bay.)

SOPA-USCG informed the ship several times that search planes would be sent from BW-1 as soon as the weather enabled it. None came. The *Northland's* CO, LCDR Francis Pollard, replies said that local flying conditions were excellent at Comanche Bay, it was still free of sea ice and it was warm. He suggested sending a PBY. He also suggested sending USCGC *North Star* with its Grumman Duck from BW-1. It was soon on its way.

Things were getting desperate at the B-17. Their living quarters in the tail section was progressively sliding into the large open crevasse. They built a snow shelter under the right wing, and cut the ropes that held the tail section to let it fall into the crevasse. They made plans to use SGT Tetley's motorsled to get LT O'Hara to Beach Head Station. On December 2, the ship transferred its hospital corpsman, HMC Gerald Hearn, to the station in anticipation of their arrival. On December 7, four men set-out from the B-17 (LT Spencer on snowshoes, SGT Tetley driving the sled, PVT Wedel on foot) with LT O'Hara on a towed sled. The B-17's radio was no longer operable, and Tetley left his walkie-talkie radio at the B-17. They came to an incline about one mile from the B-17, and stopped so that they could all get on the motorsled. They were on top of an unseen snowbridged crevasse. Spencer was taking off his snowshoes and Wedel suddenly disappeared into the crevasse. It was fatal. They

continued onward. About six miles from the B-17, the motor died, and they made camp and were stranded, unable to communicate. Spencer and O'Hara got into a two-man pup-tent and Tetley dug a hole in the snow for himself. With added snowfall, they progressively increased the size of their snow shelter. They were eventually sustained by airdrops and remained there until they were rescued on February 5, 1943.

On December 4, ENS Richard Fuller (CGA'43) volunteered to lead a four-man Coast Guard rescue party ashore [Fuller, AM1 Donald A. Drisko, BM2 Harold W. Green, and COX Stanley P. Preble] from the ship to search for its missing Duck. This was now ENS Fuller's third rescue on the Ice Cap since his one year early graduation from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in June 1942, and newly married while on one week's leave. The expectation was that they would be ashore for no more than two weeks. On December 6, Captain Kenneth Turner's B-17 was sent from BW-8 to BE-2. The runway was still being widened at BE-2. On December 7, Turner's B-17 located the Coast Guard Duck, and reported it to the *Northland*: "Grumman located. No sign of life. Badly wrecked. 65-11 North, 40-37 West. 2,700 feet. One half mile from the (fjord's) water." Turner soon added that the plane was on the fjord's seaward slope, about three miles from the ocean, and plane's wings had broken off, but the fuselage was intact.

Turner's B-17 was new to the east coast, and the navigator identified the wrong fjord located between Comanche Bay fjord and Koge Bay fjord. On the morning of December 8, ENS Fuller's party set-out on foot across Comanche Bay fjord to the next fjord, and climbed into the coastal mountains until December 11; four men with two sleeping bags. Daylight had reduced to three hours and 25 minutes. [Map location "D".] Later on December 8, Turner's B-17 corrected their error on the Duck's location to BW-1 and BW-8 to the east side of the Koge Bay fjord at 65°-09' North, 41°-01' West. Also, they located the B-17 PN9E and a dogsled party six miles northwest of the B-17; but were not able to find the motorsled on the Ice Cap. Here too they were mistaken by informing BW-1 and BW-8 that they had located a dogsled party on the Ice Cap, apparently from Beach Head Station. That was good news, but it was false news. It was actually the stranded motorsled.

On December 9, Turner repeated their correction of the Duck's location, and this time specifically addressed it by names: "Turner to Balchen". Meanwhile, the ship was avoiding pack ice and icebergs that were drifting into the Comanche Bay area and threatening to trap the ship there. SOPA-USCG ordered the ship to depart. On December 9, the *Northland* broke out through a five mile wide belt of pack ice to open water, where it lost radio communications ashore. The *North Star* also arrived offshore, but was not capable of operating in pack ice. On December 11, SOPA-USCG ordered both ships to return to BW-1. Later that night, ENS Fuller's search party returned to Beach Head Station, and remained unaware of the corrected location of the Coast Guard Duck.

The continuing snowfall caused new problems for sled operations from Beach Head Station. Strong winds blew large amounts of loose snow down from the surface of the higher Ice Cap, which increased in depth at the lower elevations, and made it very difficult and eventually impossible for both the motorsleds and dogsleds. Another attempt by motorsled failed to get far from the station. The next series of attempts were by dogsleds. On December 1, LT Eddy and Johansen set-out with two dogsleds, and had to return because LT Eddy could not control his dog team. On December 2, SGT Howes and Johansen set-out with two dogsleds, and had to return. On December 5, they set-out again and got to Ice Cap Station, and then started toward the B-17 and encountered bad surface conditions and lost four dogs, and returned on December 15. On December 22, they set-out again toward Ice Cap Station with two motorsleds and two dogsleds. Both motorsleds broke down. The dogsleds returned after four days unable to find Ice Cap Station. The search for the C-53, whose flares were seen from the hill, called Atterbury Dome, adjacent to Beach Head Station on November 6 and from Ice Cap Station on November 8, had already been abandoned after the first 30 days. The C-53 and its five men were never found.

On December 14, USAAF contracted the use of a Canadian civilian twin-engined Barkley-Grow ski-plane. On December 22, it flew from BW-1 enroute to BE-2; but ran out of gas and landed on the sea ice in a fjord near BE-2, and sank. Its two-man crew were rescued by Eskimo hunters six days later, and taken to their village, and later to BE-2.

On December 27, a meeting was held at BW-1 on how to proceed. COL Balchen recommended belly-landing a PBV-5A seaplane on the Ice Cap. LT Pritchard had landed and taken-off twice. RADM Edward "Iceberg" Smith, SOPA-USCG, was reluctant. He now had only four PBVs in Greenland, and the Battle of the Atlantic was at a peak, and his current PBV pilots were fairly new to Greenland having recently rotated PBVs with those at Argentia, Newfoundland. USAAF put pressure on SOPA-USCG via Washington. Admiral Smith's condition was that COL Balchen, as the most experienced Arctic flier now present, be assigned to supervise the landing. The reply from Navy-Washington on January 4, 1943, was: "Use of Navy PBV under the direct supervision of COL Balchen is authorized in accordance with best judgment of SOPA Greenland." Admiral Smith gave his OK to the Army's Greenland Bases Commander, COL Robert Wimsatt, for the use of two PBV-5As with reduced volunteer crews, and COL Wimsatt placed COL Balchen in charge. LT Bernard Dunlop volunteered to do the landing(s) in (PBV 93-P-20) with a four-man crew; himself as pilot, LTJG Nathan Waters as copilot, and two enlisted men, Larsen and Sabo, with COL Balchen along as advisor. ENS Frank Henderson, an ex-enlisted pilot, would be the pilot of the cover plane (93-P-17). On January 9, 1943, the two PBV's flew from BW-1 to BW-8, and were delayed there. On January 25, they flew to BE-2 with an experienced USAAF dogsled rescue party; Captain Harold Strong ex-of

Alaska, and SGTs Joseph Healy and Hendrick Dolleman, both experienced in Antarctica, nine dogs, a doctor and a weatherman.

On January 14, ENS Richard Fuller took over the dogsled operation with Johan Johansen, and set-out from the main station to the B-17, and got stranded at Ice Cap Station by a blizzard until January 25. Sergeants Hall and Linton had been stranded there since November 7. Fuller and Johansen evacuated them back to the main station. On January 31, Fuller and Johansen set-out again to Ice Cap Station with 15 dogs; Fuller on snowshoes. They were delayed there again for three days. During this time, they made trail flags to mark their trail westward on the Ice Cap.

Meanwhile, Turner's B-17 had been making precision low level freefall air drops to B-17 PN9E, Spencer's motorsled camp, Ice Cap Station and Beach Head Station when the weather permitted it. This generally required enough daylight to cast the shadow of his B-17 on the white surfaces in order to judge his altitude above the irregular terrain at each location. He had no back-up plane until the 2 PBY's arrived at BE-2. On Feb.3, he dropped Walkie-Talkie radios to the B-17 PN9E and the motorsled camp. On Feb.4, visibility was excellent with a stiff breeze, minus 12 degrees F. ENS Fuller and Johansen were about 10 miles west of Ice Cap Station when Turner made another airdrop to them; a radio, a large tent, a stove, fuel, food, dogfood, sleeping bag and a large bundle of trail markers. Fuller expected to reach the motorsled camp, 6 miles NE of the B-17 PN9E, on the next day.

Meanwhile on Jan.27, one of SOPA-USCG's PBY's (93-P-22) accidentally flew onto the Ice Cap in a "white out" near Ivigtut, BW-7, about 50 miles from BW-1, with superficial damage. The irregular surface conditions however prevented its take-off, and the crew was rescued by parties from 2 USCG ships. Another PBY was lost at sea near Argentina, and its crew was also rescued. On Feb.3 at about 1:00 AM, the Greenland troopship USAT DORCHESTER was sunk enroute to BW-1 with 904 men aboard south of BW-1 in a convoy escorted by SOPA-USCG's ships. (239 men were rescued). Later on Feb.3, COL Balchen made the first use of the two PBY's at BE-2 to make a survey flight. SOPA-USCG now had only one PBY at BW-1. Four days later, 7 ships were sunk in a convoy enroute to Iceland. SOPA-USCG was in need of his PBY's. On Feb.5, the Navy sent a group of PV-3 Ventura bombers from Argentina to SOPA-USCG at BW-1.

On Feb.5, ENS Fuller watched Turner's B-17 and the 2 PBY's arrive from BE-2. LT Dunlop's PBY-5A belly-landed at the motorsled camp 23 miles west of Ice Cap Station with COL Balchen along as advisor. It picked-up the 3 men there; Lt. Spencer, Lt. O'Hara and Sgt Tetley. Both of O'Hara's feet had fallen off earlier. The PBY became frozen to the hard surface. Men got out onto the PBY's wingtip pontoons and rocked the plane to break it loose while the engines were revved-up. The PBY taxied in

a circle while the men ran to get into the side blister, and took-off to BE-2 "Optimist". Three men remained at the B-17.

Fuller and Johansen continued toward the B-17 PN9E. Later that night a strong storm began. They made camp. The wind blew the tent down. One of their 15 dogs ran away. Fuller had been on skis, and took-off his ski-shoes to put on mukluks, and discovered that the forward part of his right foot was frozen. Turner had told him that there was no sign of life at the B-17. They also needed Turner's B-17 to guide them to the B-17 PN9E. The planes were now grounded at BE-2. Fuller decided to give up and go back. Fortunately they had marked their trail from Ice Cap Station. They traveled from flag to flag and got to Ice Cap Station. The storm increased with hurricane force for the next 4 days. The small flat roofed shack became buried by the snow. They managed to get 6 of their dogs inside. The blizzards continued off and on until March 2nd, and 7 more dogs were lost. They had only about 2 gallons of kerosene for cooking and heat from the one-burner stove, and a lantern. The radio gave out. Heat from the stove caused the ice on ceiling to leak onto the floor. The dogs' litter added to the foul smell. They used a snow tunnel as their toilet. They spent most of the time in their bunks in the dark. The dogfood had already run out. Four of the 7 remaining dogs were sick. Fuller's right toes were now black. Another hurricane force wind blew away most of the deep surface snow, and the wind died down, and they were again able to travel. The final 17 miles route was down slope from about 3,000 ft. elevation with 3 working dogs, and they arrived at Beach Head Station on the night of March 2. They had traveled slightly more than 80 miles roundtrip during the peak of winter.

Conditions had been similar at the B-17 PN9E and the motorsled camp. They had been sustained by Turner's airdrops through the winter. At the B-17 PN9E, everyone had degrees of frost bite and bouts of constipation. Food often ran out between airdrops. Radio communications were lost. They initially had to use aviation leaded gasoline for cooking and lantern light. Candles were air dropped and ran out. The men were black from the soot. Sgt. Best had bouts of depression, and Pvt. Spina's arm broke again. Lt Monteverde managed to maintain their health and sanity. At the motorsled camp, the increasing snowfall enabled them to increase the size of their snow shelter. Lt O'Hara's feet eventually fell off.

Conditions at Beach Head Station were tight. Their 16 ft. x 24 ft. station house became buried under the snow with access by ladder through its attic loft window. The flat roofed generator and storage shed's roof collapsed. The fuel drums were buried in the snow. The addition of the 5 USCG men added to the crowding and food consumption. Drinking water was a problem for everyone at each location. Turner's B-17 made a total of 34 airdrops, which included a total of 26 cases of dogfood.

Earlier, two twin-engined AT-7/C-45 Beechcrafts were sent with skis. On Jan.5, the first one was lost somewhere while enroute from BW-1 to BE-2. Now 3 rescue planes had been lost. The second Beechcraft arrived at BE-2 on Jan.20, where its skis were installed. Upon a trial take-off, the skis turned upward and were chopped-off by its propellers. The plane survived it. On March 3, a PBY (93-P-19) was sent from Argentia to BW-1, and it fatally crashed in the mountains near BW-1. Admiral Smith's aide, LT John Starr (CGA'41) was killed in it returning from leave.

On March 17, Turner's B-17 and the two PBY's were able to return. LT Dunlop's PBY landed again with Balchen along at the motorsled camp, and off-loaded the three-man dogsled rescue party: Strong, Healy and Dolleman with their nine dogs, and the planes returned to BE-2. The rescue party went the final six miles to the B-17 PN9E and returned in three days with the last three survivors; LT Monteverde, TSGT Best and PFC Spina, to await the PBY's return. On April 5, the planes returned, and LT Dunlop and LTJG Waters's PBY-5A (93-P-20) made its third landing there, and the took the six men, nine dogs and sled aboard. This time they did not have a surface wind to assist their take-off. The right engine developed an oil leak and started a fire. Temporary repairs were made. COL Balchen ordered the rescue party off of the plane. On April 6, there was a wind again, and the PBY took-off down slope toward the water, feathered the damaged engine, and flew offshore on one engine to BE-2, and landed safely with the nose wheel still up.

On April 6, COL Balchen and the dogsled party set-out toward Ice Cap Station following whatever of Fuller's trail markers remained. It was now springtime with 15 hours of daylight; but there was bad weather again and they had their own difficulties. They failed to find Ice Cap Station. They arrived at Beach Head Station on April 16. Fuller now finally learned of the 'actual location of the missing Coast Guard Duck from COL Balchen. Perhaps due to a misunderstanding; this location was also wrong. [Map location "E."] On April 18, ENS Henderson's PBY (93-P-17) made a water landing at the station, and flew COL Balchen and the rescue party with their dogs to BE-2. On May 8, Henderson was able to land again at the station, and picked-up the five USCG men to BE-2. The 2 PBY's returned to BW-1 on May 13, 1943 with the five Coast Guard men.

The official USAAF accident report did not mention the five Coast Guard men but did say that an unidentified rescue party had reached within ½ mile of the Coast Guard Duck at the report's [December 9,1942] location on the eastern side of Koge Bay fjord, when in fact they had searched at the December 7 reported wrong middle fjord 11 miles farther east. The USAAF report on the missing C-53, which was never found, did not tell of the mishaps of the motorsleds and dogsleds. It is possible that the C-53 was seen, partly covered by snow and mistaken for one of the scattered eight "Lost Squadron" planes fairly nearby.

The saga of the B-17 PN9E had spanned from November 5, 1942, to May 8, 1943; three planes down on the Ice Cap, three rescue planes lost, two deaths in crevasses and three in the Coast Guard Duck, and five Coast Guard men there for five months who were not mentioned in USAAF's official report, nor in the USAAF's 1944 selectively written book on it, *War Below Zero*. Separated groups of ordinary men had been sustained through the winter by airdrops; most of them by Turner's B-17. By the end of November 1942, at least 900 aircraft successfully made the transit from USA to Britain via the northern Snow Ball route. Later in 1943, SOPA-USCG got its own Coast Guard-manned PB5Y-5A Squadron, VP-6 CG.

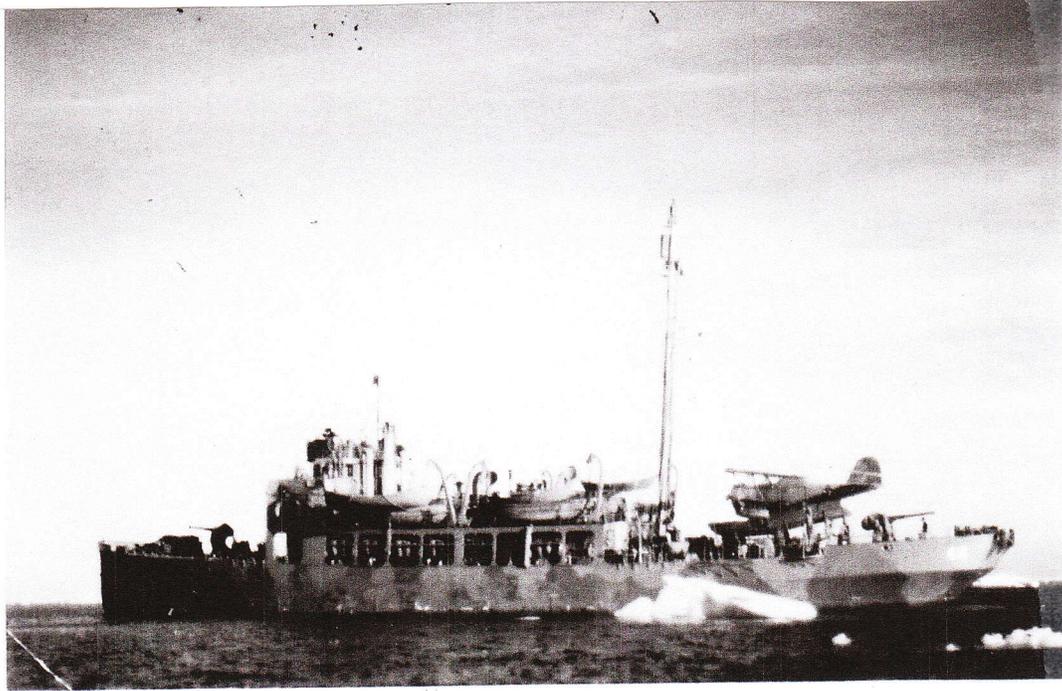




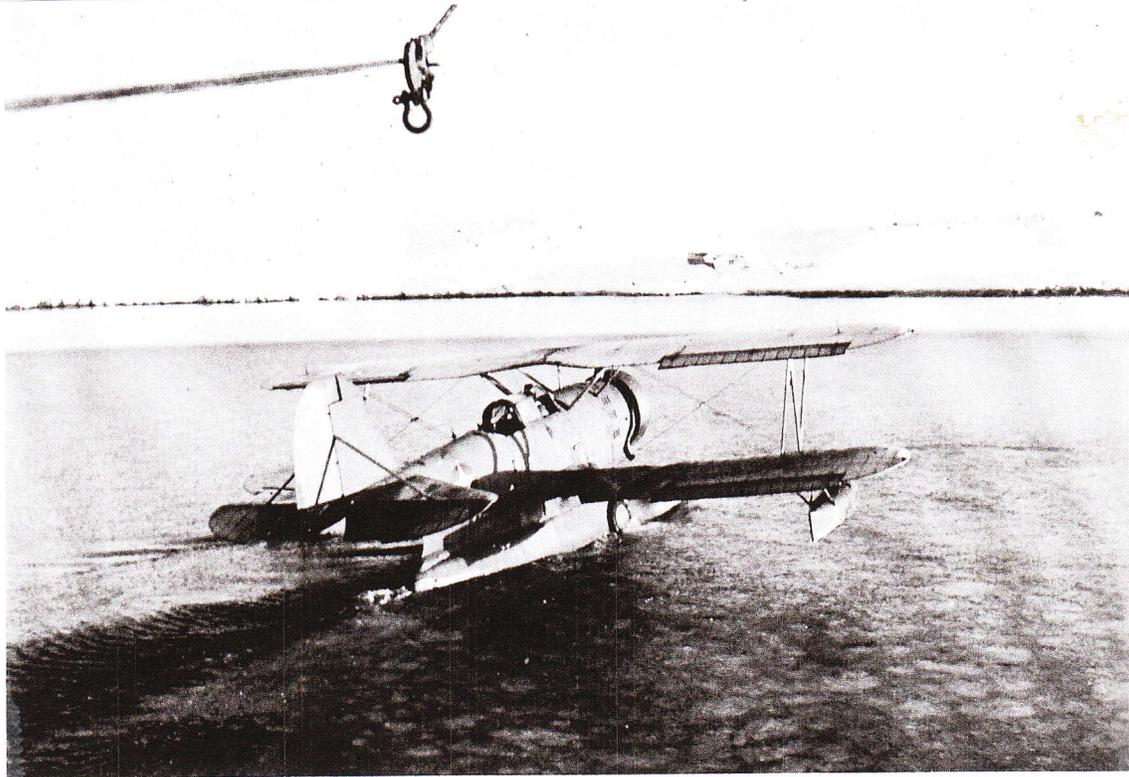
B-17 "PN9E" FERRYING CREW before flight to GREENLAND on NOVEMBER 5, 1942.
 OFFICERS: 2nd Lt. WILLIAM F. O'HARA, NAVIGATOR; 1st Lt. ARMAND L. MONTEVERDE, PILOT; 2nd Lt. HARRY E. SPENCER, COPILOT.
 KNEELING: PFC ALEXANDER F. TUCCIARONE, ENGINEER; Cpl. LOREN E. HOWARTH, RADIO MAN; Pvt. PAUL J. SPINA, ENGINEER.



USCGC NORTHLAND'S RESCUE of 8-PLANES "LOST SQUADRON" on July 23, 1942, BEFORE USAAF WEATHER-RESCUE STATION, BEACH HEAD STATION, BUILT AT COMANCHE BAY in August 1942.



USCGC NORTHLAND with its GRUMMAN J2F-4 Duck, SUMMER 1942



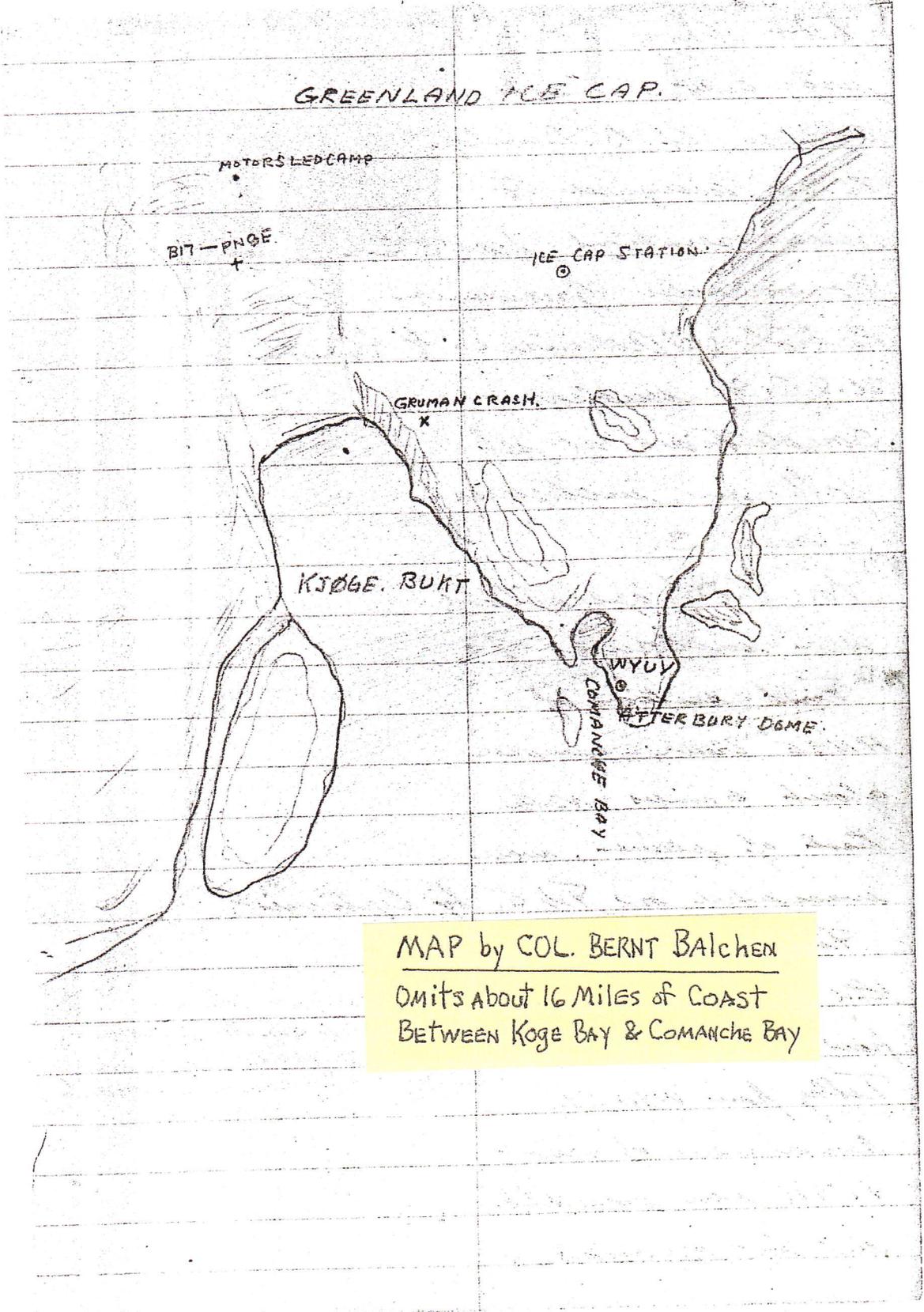
USCGC NORTHLAND'S GRUMMAN J2F-4 Duck taking-off at Comanche Bay upon arrival November 28, 1942, enroute to crashed B-17 PNQE, 29 miles away. Pilot: LT John A. Pritchard Jr., USCG with Radioman RMI Benjamin A. Bottoms, rescued the first 2 of B-17's PNQE's 9 men. This was the first successful landing & take-off on Greenland's Ice Cap. Beech Head Station is seen on shore ahead of the Grumman Duck.



USCGC NORTHLAND'S RESCUE PARTY ASHORE (HAVING RESCUED CANADIAN A-20 BOSTON/HAVOC 3 MAN RCAF CREW ON ICE CAP ON NOVEMBER 23, 1942; BEFORE HEADING TO B-17 PNQE RESCUE, NOV. 28. LT. JOHN PRITCHARD AT RIGHT WITH ROPE & POLE. HMC GERALD HEARN AT LEFT-REAR WITH SNOW SHOES. ENS. RICHARD L. FULLER WITH CIGARETTE IN MOUTH.



SCPA-USCG's NAVY PB5A (93-P-20)'S 2ND LANDING AT PNQE "MOTORSLID CAMP"; HAVING LANDED USAAF DOGSLED RESCUE PARTY WITH 9 DOGS. PB5A PILOT: LT BERNARD W. DUNLOP, USN; COPILOT, LTJG NATHAN WATERS, USNR. COL BERNAT BALEHEN, ADVISOR. DOGSLED PARTY ENROUTE TO B-17 PNQE, 6 MILES AWAY. RESCUE PARTY: CAPT. HAROLD STRONG AND SGTs. JOSEPH HEALEY AND HENDRIK DOLLEMAN (BOTH HAD SERVED WITH CDR BYRD EXPEDITION IN ANTARCTICA).



MAP by COL. BERNT BALCHEN
 Omits about 16 miles of coast
 between Kjøge Bay & Comanche Bay

