

ORAL HISTORY 76-54-24

Don Sheldon

1973

Fairbanks, Alaska

Series: Don Sheldon tapes

Don Sheldon talked about the Wilcox expedition. Both groups started from Wonder Lake and they both walked together through McGonagall Pass as a crew of 12. They walked up the Muldrow Glacier, the Harper's Ice Fall and to the 16,000 foot level. Five of the strongest in the group including Wilcox decided to summit and they were successful.

Sheldon talked about discovering the bodies east of the Archdeacon's Tower and then he circled up to Babcock's expedition at about 19,200 feet. At that time he dropped notes to them. They looked at the map and made out in the direction of the location of the bodies.

Sheldon said Genet told him when he returned from his time on Sanford they sent up a helicopter in the middle of the night instead of the following day.

Sheldon talked about his plane on its back after an accident. The battery acid was pouring from the cells onto the rest of the wreckage. His job was to take the battery out of the battery box. It was becoming dark and overcast. In order to activate the radio it must be hooked up correctly. It had to be hooked up backwards. He was able to make contact and a helicopter came in about two in the morning.

Sheldon said Don Cuddy from the First National Bank had for years been on sheep hunts. He hadn't bagged a large sheep for years. With the expeditions of the Wrangells Sheldon found there were trophy size sheep in the mountains. He had often seen world record rams. Cuddy went on a sheep hunt. As they landed at about 7500 feet on the glaciers. They had tie downs with them. He had chocked the skis up from the ice. When the sheep hunt was discontinued they headed back to the plane. It took two days to go sixteen miles. Sheldon had a fall while hunting and his injuries were extremely painful. Dan Cuddy had in his career many thrills, but they weren't flying thrills. Cuddy and Sheldon arrived back at the plane. Cuddy wanted to fly the plane and since Sheldon was in pain he allowed Cuddy to fly the plane. They arrived at Gulkana and Cuddy had to land on a washboard runway. Because of Cuddy's skill as a pilot he was able to safely return.

Sheldon talked about making a radio call by VHF to Nenana. Then he turned on his HF radio which is not line of site and he called Talkeetna at the office. He gave instructions to contact rescue. This is how they got in contact with the military helicopter who was in the area and northbound at the time. He only had a thirty minute wait over the crash site and evacuated the injured pilot of the aircraft.

Sheldon said no one every salvaged the 185 on the Hayes Glacier on the upper Susitna. He did go up to salvage it himself and he found it covered with huge ice blocks from an avalanche.

He completely demolished an aircraft in 1949. A soft snow ski had torn loose from its fittings. All the check cables and bungees gave way. The ski went down and back creating a tremendous drag. He was not able to figure out at that time how to bring the ski up. Fifteen years later with a larger aircraft the same thing occurred. This time he had aboard three Baptist ministers. The one closest to the door was

the largest. They tied a rope around his waist and encouraged him to stand on the ski while he made a successful landing. On the first try to rope was too short. On the second try he could stand on the heel of the ski and they were able to land successfully. He wasn't sure if they did or did not charge the ministers for the flight.