

Annual Dinner Meeting Nov. 15

Native Heritage Center again chosen as site for elections, auction

Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum will hold its annual dinner meeting Nov. 15 at the Alaska Native Heritage Center. On tap will be a prime rib dinner, served at 7 p.m., a brief business meeting at 8 p.m. followed by the guest speaker.

Business to be before members will be a report from President Suellyn

Wright Novak, election of directors and ratification of a bylaws amendment to change the name of the organization.

Terms of John Peck, Anna Fairclough and Karen Scheussler expire at the meeting. Candidates are being solicited. New directors will be seated at the Dec. 22 board meeting, followed by election of officers.

The board has adopted a proposed amendment to the bylaws that would drop the word "Memorial" from the name of the organization (See separate story on Page 2).

Col. David Shutt, garrison commander at Ft. Richardson, has been invited to be guest speaker.

Charge for the prime rib dinner is \$55, plus membership for the coming year. Fees are listed on the back page.

"We have a number of great items to be sold at the silent auction," Novak said.

Cocktails, socializing and bidding for auction items begin at 6 p.m.

"The annual dinner meeting promises to be a fun and informative evening," Novak said. "I look forward to seeing all our members and friends there."

Alaska Scouts honored at Sept. 28 rite

Reporting by MARY RALL
AVMM Publicity Chief

The three surviving members of "Caastner's Cutthroats" were honored Sept. 28 at the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center. Receiving the Veterans Honorable Service Medal were Ed Walker of Palmer, Earl Acuff of Blacksburg, Va. and William "Billy" Buck of Glenallen.

A posthumous award was made to Drafin "Buck" Delkettie, who died in March, 2007. Present to accept the award were his wife, Jesse, son Gerald and daughter-in-law Karen Delkettie.

The ceremony was held in conjunction with the opening of a year-long display honoring the Scouts for their part in repelling the Japanese invasion of the Aleutian Islands early in World War II.

The exhibit is co-sponsored by Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum. Col. Suellyn Wright Novak, USAF, Ret., AVMM president, had worked with the Anchorage Museum for the past two years in arranging to display memorabilia



Alaska Scouts, left to right, Ed Bailey, Earl Acuff and William "Billy" Buck received Veterans Honorable Service Medals Sept. 28. Drafin "Buck" Delkettie was posthumously honored.

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Photo courtesy Mary Rall, Alaska Post

President's Corner

Col. Suellyn Wright Novak, USAF, Ret.
President, Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum



AVMM Name change proposal on Nov. 15 dinner meeting menu

Members will be asked at the Nov. 15 annual meeting to amend the organization's bylaws to change the name by dropping the word "Memorial." Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum's original bylaws were adopted in February, 2002.

The amendment was approved by the board of directors earlier this year and now is being submitted to the members for ratification.

President Suellyn Wright Novak suggested the change, explaining that the shortened name, Alaska Veterans Museum, would be simpler and eliminate confusion on the part of people who are not familiar with the Museum.

"I have appeared before many different groups during the past year," Novak said. "At every one I find that people attempt to identify us with the Vietnam Memorial Wall, the Veterans Memorial on the Park Strip, or other memorial efforts.

"Our purpose is to provide a museum and that would become more clear if our name were just Alaska Veterans Museum. Our motto remains, 'They Shall Not Be Forgotten' and we will continue to honor not only those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, but also those who have served and are serving."

The decision by the Board was not unanimous. A founding member who brought the idea of a veterans museum to Alaska strongly opposed the idea of eliminating the word "Memorial" from the name. It is anticipated that the proposed amendment will draw some debate at the meeting.

The bylaws amendment proposition will follow election of directors in the brief business meeting at 8 p.m.

Terms of John Peck, Anna Fairclough and Karen Schuessler expire at the annual meeting. Candidates for the Board are being solicited by a nominating committee. Nominations will also be taken from the floor.

Directors will be installed at the Board's regular meeting December 22. At that meeting, directors will elect officers for 2009.

What an exciting Fall it has been! It has taken longer to birth the display *Castner's Cutthroats: Forgotten Warriors* than it does to birth an elephant. Wow, that puts the effort into perspective! Our two-year labor of love came to fruition Sunday 28 Sep with about 130 people attending the panel discussion by the last three remaining Alaska Scouts, a.k.a. Castner's Cutthroats, or as they were officially known, the 1st Combat Intelligence Platoon. We surely surprised the Scouts by awarding them the Alaska Veterans Honorable Service Medal in a moving ceremony. Thanks to Maurice and Ann Bailey, Jerry Beale and Dave Glenn for an out-damn-standing job. The Scouts did well handling the press' questions and had nothing but accolades for the exhibit. The food was good and the companionship even better. Thanks to the oral history team (Forest Brooks, George Darrow and Diane Fearon) for all their hard work. We had

TV channels 2 and 11 there, as well as the *Anchorage Daily News*, the *Alaska Star*, the *Alaska Post* and Alaska Newspapers. We made the 10 p.m. Channel 2 News 28 Sep and the program was mentioned on all the radio stations. Well done, Mary Rall (our new publicity chair) and thank you!

We have seen some dedicated people come to our meetings and we are pleased to welcome Randy and Terrie Miller, Mary Rall and Rosella Young. We have several other folks offer their services but we have been unable to connect on a meeting night. Mary Rall ensured the press was an active player in the 28 Sep event and spearheaded the questioning and served as mistress of ceremonies for the panel. Rosella has agreed to work with Patte Duchesneau on membership and build a membership drive for us, and Karen "Kandi" Kizis is hard at work on the silent auction items for our annual meeting at the Alaska Native Heritage Center on 15 Nov. Cocktails and socializing and silent auction bidding start at 6 p.m. Dinner will be served at 7 and the short business meeting will be at 8 p.m., followed by our guest speaker. Hopefully, we'll not be in a snowstorm this year!

The Aleutian Tigers display at the Alaska Aviation Heritage Museum has been delayed due to personnel changes at that museum. The director still wants our display and I am working with the exhibit builder to adapt our exhibit. I was able to get back all our artifacts we had on loan and we'll rework our ideas.

After negotiation, Imig Audiovisual is willing to give us an initial 20 percent off the price of making a dual channel audio cassette of each oral history, so we'll get an hour tape for \$16. After they have a few under their belt to see the amount of work involved, they'll reassess and then maybe give us a deeper discount. We have 75 oral history tapes for them to get the audio so we can then take them to our transcriptionist.

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Honoring Veterans with the Pledge:
"They Shall Not Be Forgotten"



Karen Delkette, second from left, the daughter-in-law of the late Drafin “Buck” Delkettie, views one of the displays depicting the activities of the Alaska Scouts. The “Castner’s Cutthroats: Forgotten Warriors exhibit opened Sept. 28 at the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center. Photo courtesy Mary Rall, Alaska Post

Alaska Scouts recall WWII adventures

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of the fabled but little-known World War II Scouts.

The three surviving Scouts responded to questions from a panel of journalists, moderated by Homer author Dr. James Rearden. Rearden wrote a book with the title “Castner’s Cutthroats” based on the exploits of the clandestine group.

“It was a tremendous success,” Novak said. “I was especially proud that these brave men were awarded the service medals by the State of Alaska. They deserve all our thanks for their valuable service to our forces both prior to the recapture of the Aleutians and afterward.”

Introducing the panel, Novak said Bailey had been “incensed” that their appearance had been billed as “the final reunion” of the fabled unit. Novak said she hopes there will be many more, to which Acuff responded amidst laughter, “So do we.”

Suggested by Col. Lawrence Castner, intelligence officer under Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner of the Alaskan Defense Command at Ft. Richardson, the group was organized to form small teams that would watch for expected invading forces. They were taught intelligence-gathering techniques and were to train other soldiers. They also were taught to survey and map, a skill that was put to good use throughout the state after the Japanese withdrew from the Aleutians.

Officially known as the 1st Combat Intelligence Platoon (Provisional), the Scouts were recruited from a diverse group of Natives, prospectors, trappers, guides and others who knew how to subsist on their own in the harsh Alaska climate. Their

backgrounds and personalities definitely set them apart.

Members of the platoon preferred to be known as the Alaska Scouts. Their identity as “Castner’s Cutthroats,” however, quickly caught the fancy of the press and the Alaskan public.

Walker explained the origin of the nickname.

“We didn’t have any insignias, because the more insignias you have, then that’s the first one to get shot, so none of us had anything on.

“One day Col. Castner was down at Adak. I had eight men there on a special mission. He came to see how we were doing and that night he went out to the creek to scour his frypan. All of us carried our own gear, cooked our own food and ate it.

“(Castner) went out and was scouring his pan and a regular soldier came along and said, ‘Hey, Mac, what outfit you in?’”

“He says, ‘Oh, I’m in Castner’s Scouts’”

Walker continued, “And the fellow sasys, ‘Castner’s Scouts? I saw a couple of them guys, looks like Castner’s Cutthroats to me,’ and that gave us the name ‘Castner’s Cutthroats.’”

At one time numbering 67 members, the Scouts were trained to live off the land while spying on the enemy forces on Attu, Kiska and neighboring islands. They landed surreptitiously to scout out the occupied outposts, then were

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Alaska Scouts recall WWII adventures

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taken out to help prepare the troops who were sent to retake the islands.

EARL ACUFF

A lieutenant when assigned to the Scouts as one of the original members, Acuff retired as a brigadier general after 33 years of service. He holds 54 medals and commendations, including three Combat Infantry Badges for his service in WWII, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

Acuff was sent with two sergeants to Fort Robinson, Nebr., to pick up sled dogs to be used when mapping the area. Returning to Alaska with 110 dogs, they were divided into teams of nine dogs apiece and leaders were selected. The Scouts built the sleds themselves.

“In the meantime, we took the men up to the abandoned gold mine. Independence Mine was not working then. We used their facilities and taught people how to run a control line with the transit,” Acuff said.

Castner, Acuff said, “was one of the smartest officers that I’ve ever seen. He saw the need for having a combat intelligence unit that was experienced and people who could live and operate in any place in Alaska and still get by, and that’s the reason he picked most of these gentlemen that we had in the Scouts from Alaska.

“Most of the Scouts were all very talented outdoorsmen. They could live and operate anywhere. They were excellent trappers, some of them were fishermen.

“I think we learned more from them than they learned from us, because they had all the experience in Alaska and the only reason, I think, they ever picked me to go in the Scouts is because they were always sending me out because I was from northern Idaho and I’d lived a lot in the woods.”

Acuff credited his time with the Scouts for making a difference in his life. After the war he became a teacher and coach, but was contacted and asked to return to duty and train people to live and operate in cold weather. He reenlisted with the support of his wife, serving as a battalion commander in Korean and a brigade commander in Vietnam.

EDGAR WALKER

“We had one of the finest officers I’ve ever served with,” Walker said of Acuff. “He was an expert at getting things done without looking it up in the book. We didn’t even have a book. Our credo was, ‘If it has to be done, do it.’”

Walker told of Acuff’s ability to provide food. He recalled Acuff diving from a boat into the waters off Adak, catching crab with his bare hands and throwing them up into the boat.

“We learned Morse code, and we learned surveying...They didn’t have to teach us how to feed ourself, we all knew that,” Walker said.

“It was just so good a feeling to have these people under you who each one was expert at something.

“We wound up with 36 Alaska Scouts at the time that the Japanese landed in the Aleutians,” he said.

Learning of the invasion, 22 Scouts went to the harbor in



AVMM President Suellyn Wright Novak, right, talks with Gerald Delkettie, who accepted the veterans service medal for his late father, “Buck” Delkettie. Photo courtesy Mary Rall, Alaska Post

Anchorage and boarded a boat that had been commandeered by the Army. At Kodiak, they were transferred to a submarine that took them to their assigned areas to reconnoiter and report on the enemy troop emplacements.

Walker said he always carried a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle).

“It was the best firing gun we had at the time, and the fact that I had that blasted gun designated me the first one to land and make the beach safe,” he lamented.

From the time he first learned of the Scouts, Walker said he wanted to join. He applied twice and was rejected by Castner. One night, however, he was called over by his sergeant major and told to apply again. The colonel, the sergeant major advised, was away to receive a medal and the lieutenant colonel left in charge “will sign anything I put in front of him.”

“I told that sergeant major, “You get me in the Scouts, Buster, and you have free hamburgers and beer the rest of your life for free.”

WILLIAM “BILLY” BUCK

Technician 5th Class Buck was serving as a post scout at Fort Randle in Cold Bay prior to joining up with Castner. He transferred to Fort Richardson to work on a fish camp, serve

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Alaska Scouts appealed to volunteers

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on boats and handling sled dogs for the Army.

Buck spoke little during the event, but told the crowd, "It's a great honor to be here and attend this."

After Pearl Harbor, Buck said, "Several of us volunteered and they rushed us through training and they made us post scouts and standbys for rescue work.

"There were several rescue trips I was on and was very successful at saving lives." One of those rescues involved saving six crew members from a downed B-128 bomber.

Buck said that when he heard of the Alaska Scouts being formed, he wrote a letter to General Buckner, commander of Alaska defense forces, requesting a transfer to the unit.

Although he was reprimanded for going outside the chain of command by writing directly to the general, his heroism in rescuing the airmen made up for the protocol violation. He was given orders to join the Scouts.

DRAFIN "BUCK" DELKETTIE

Buck recalled that Delkettie was "a very good tracker" who was able to identify tracks of enemy soldiers as well as those of various animals.

Walker also remembered their comrade.

"He came from a little tiny village somewhere between Barrow and Unalakleet," he said. Delkettie was especially skilled in catching and smoking fish for the men and sled dogs.

Walker said the group once needed someone to drive a Jeep and he assigned Delkettie to the job. When Delkettie advised that he did not know how to drive, Walker showed him the fundamentals and told him to drive through the woods and stay off the roads.

"He was gone about an hour when he came walking back out," Walker said, "telling us that the Jeep couldn't be driven." The motor and wheels worked fine, Delkettie advised them, but the Jeep wouldn't go.

"I went out and he had high-centered it on a rotten log," the former sergeant told the crowd. "All four wheels went, but it didn't go anywhere."

JIM REARDEN

Dr. Jim Rearden of Homer is the author of "Castner's Cutthroats," the chronicle of the exploits of the Alaska Scouts. He moderated the panel discussion at the museum exhibit's opening program.

"Most people today don't remember World War II. It's just old guys like me...It seems like ancient history to most," he told the crowd of about 130 people who attended the Sept. 28 event.

"When I arrived in '47 I heard all these stories about these wonderful outdoorsmen," he said, adding that it raised his interest in learning more about the group. "I started meeting them over the years and met about 12 of them."

AVMM receives \$2,000 grant in 'Slippery Salmon' proceeds

Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum was "thrilled" recently to receive a \$2,000 check from the Chugiak-Eagle River Chamber of Commerce. The Museum had been designated as recipient of this year's grant from proceeds of the Chamber's annual "Slippery Salmon" event held as part of the Bear Paw Festival in July.

The popular contest features a relay team carrying a salmon in one hand and a tray of liquid-filled glasses in the other. The team able to complete the obstacle course the fastest and with the least spillage is declared the winner. Teams are sponsored, with a portion of the entry fees going to a deserving non-profit designated annually by Chamber officials.

"We were thrilled to receive the check and the substantial amount was a very pleasant surprise," said AVMM President Suellyn Wright Novak. "We knew that we were to be the beneficiary of this year's grant, but had no idea what the amount would be."

A presentation of the check was made at the Chamber's monthly forum held in Eagle River.

The Museum is a 503(c) corporation that operates on donations, membership fees and proceeds from various fund-raising activities such as the silent auction to be conducted at the upcoming Annual Dinner Meeting that will be held Nov. 15 at Alaska Native Heritage Center. The dinner will cost \$55 plus membership for the coming year.

Oral history list grows by three

Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum recently collected oral histories from Fred Kehl, who was in on the liberation of Dauchau, and Bill Plate, the only Wake Island survivor in Alaska. We are also collecting an oral history from Bill Just, who flew B-24s from Italy in WWII.

The Museum has 75 oral history tapes and is in the process of having the stories transcribed.

The oral history team could use some help. Call Suellyn at 696-4904 to volunteer for this team—or any other. We are searching for chairpersons for our financial, fundraising and strategic planning committees.

Alaska Veterans Memorial Museum is a non-profit 503(c) corporation formed to create a museum to honor Alaskan veterans, educate the public on persons, operations and the sacrifices made in defense of freedom and support our active duty military, Coast Guard, Reserve and veterans.

Into the Unknown—

2LT H.T. Allen led 1885 exploration trek

Hardship, hunger, disease
overcome by soldiers during
pioneer journey to explore Alaska

By **GEORGE DARROW**

Special Orders No. 16
Headquarters, Department of the Columbia
Vancouver Barracks, Wash. Ter., January 27, 1885

By authority of the Lieutenant General of the Army, conveyed in telegram from Division Headquarters of the 26th instant, Second Lieut. Henry T. Allen, Second Cavalry, acting aide-de-camp is authorized to make reconnaissance in Alaska, proceeding up the Copper River and down the Tanana River Valley.

Lieutenant Allen will be accompanied and assisted by Sergeant Cody Robertson, Troop E, Second Cavalry, and Private Frederick W. Fickett, Signal Corps, ordered to report to him for this purpose.

By command of Major-General Pope
H. CLAY WOOD
Assistamt Adjutant General

Thus was set in motion one of the great journeys of exploration in the Territory of Alaska.

Our story (one of hardship, hunger, disease and ultimate triumph) begins in December, 1884, in Portland, Ore., when Lt. Allen asked Pvt. Fickett (who had previously suggested just such an expedition) to accompany him on an expedition up the Copper River the following summer. Fickett agreed to the proposal pending the approval of his commanding general, William B. Hazen, who was in Washington, D.C. Lt. Allen telegraphed General Nelson A. Miles, who was also in Washington, asking him to see General Hazen about Pvt. Fickett.

Upon receiving Gen. Hazen's approval, Allen, Fickett and Robertson left Portland on Jan. 28, 1885, on the steamer *Idaho* and arrived in Sitka during the morning of Feb. 7 after a rough and stormy passage. Originally they were instructed to take the schooner *Leo* from Sitka to the mouth of the Copper River, but found that it had departed for San Francisco three days earlier. Allen then offered the captain of the *Idaho* \$1,500 to carry them. However, this being the season for storms, the captain begged off, saying the ship was not in good enough condition.

Allen then approached U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. Nichols, captain of the *U.S.S. Pinta*, which happened to be in Sitka at the time. Nichols, however, refused to move his ship without orders from the Navy. A message telling of the state of affairs of the expedition was dispatched aboard the *Idaho* to headquarters at Vancouver Barracks, across the Columbia River from Portland. While awaiting a response, the party unsuccessfully attempted to charter passage on a variety of vessels.

On March 11, the *Idaho* once again arrived in Sitka with authority for Lt. Cmdr. Nichols to use the *Pinta* to transport Allen and his party to Nuchek on the west coast of Hinchinbrook Island, this being the nearest trading post to the Copper River Delta. The three explorers departed Sitka on March 16.

In a March 19 letter to his fiancée, Nellie Lord, Fickett wrote, "We had rough, stormy weather during the whole trip. I never was on a ship that rolled and pitched worse than this one did."

Upon arrival at Nuchek and unloading their supplies, Allen bought two rowboats of one ton capacity each. He also hired a local prospector named Peder Johnson and three Natives, one of whom acted as their pilot. Leaving Nuchek in the two rowboats, they battled heavy surf and took on water while rounding the southwest point of Hinchinbrook Island. They made camp in two deserted barabaras on the north side of the island. That evening a storm of sleet and rain came up and they didn't see the sun until they were north of the Copper River glaciers 14 days later.

March 21 found them camped south of present-day Cordova at Point Whitshed. From this camp, Allen and Peder Johnson hiked through mud, ice, snow and water to the village of Eyak. Returning to camp in a canoe with four Eyaks, they came across another canoe full of Natives that had furs to trade. Four of the Natives, including one Allen said was called "Skilly," agreed to help Allen and his party in the ascent of the Copper River.

The explorers left Point Whitshed on March 23, only to be turned back by headwinds. Trying again on March 24, they finally made the mouth of the Copper River. Attempting to row up the river, they had to stop at times due to floating ice and use a process known as cordelling. In cordelling, a long towline was attached to the prow of a boat. Everybody, except for one man to steer, got out of the boat, got a good hold on the towline, and manually towed the boat upstream. During the day the explorers were, at times, in water up to their necks. That evening they were forced to stop by an ice blockage in the river. Due to the continuing storm, as they unloaded their supplies on the muddy river bank they tried to protect them with three tent poles and the tent-fly, this being all they had.

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Explorers face harsh weather, hunger

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After landing on the river bank, and clad in their sodden clothes, the explorers divided into three groups in order to search for a place near Alaganik called Sakhalis where they finally went into camp.

After spending the night of March 24 at Sakhalis, Allen discharged the Natives from Nuchek due to their physical exhaustion, and hired more from Sakhalis to help him and his party transport their supplies to Alaganik. The supplies were transported to a large slough coming in from the west, and were further damaged by being left again in the mud and rain. Here Allen abandoned the boats and, taking Peder Johnson with him as an interpreter, took a canoe to Alaganik where he hired more locals to help with supplies. March 27 found everybody, and their supplies, at Alaganik. At this point they had been in constant rain, sleet, and strong southerly winds since leaving Nuchek on March 20.

The ascent of the Copper River began on March 29. That morning Allen, Robertson, and Peder Johnson, along with several Natives, left with canoes and sleds. Fickett was left behind with orders to rejoin Allen in May or June at Taral, which is on the Copper River just below Chitina. After traveling for six miles in five canoes, each carrying two men and about 200 pounds of provisions and baggage, they were forced to portage over ice and snow by using sleds and the canoes. At this point Allen sent Johnson back to Alaganik with instructions to Fickett to bring forward all possible provisions. Fickett, after struggling through soft snow all night, reached Allen on the morning of March 30.

Being concerned about the many hardships, melting snow, difficulty of the terrain and the weather, Allen then decided to abandon most of their supplies and equipment, including their tent, cooking gear, and most of their clothes and food. In his official report he said that the supplies they took with them consisted of "...about 150 pounds of flour, 100 pounds of beans, 40 pounds of rice, two sides of bacon, 15 pounds of tea, some Liebig's extract of beef, deviled ham, and chocolate." He also said the weather was "...incessant precipitation of rain or sleet driven by strong wind..." They were unable to dry their clothes, and camp was made on snow without the benefit of any tent.

The storm abated in the evening of April 3, and for the first time since leaving Nuchek they finally saw the sun the next day. Allen commented on pulling the sleds: "In hauling the sleds one man usually preceded and pulled by means of a long string or rope, fastened to the end of each runner, and then passed over his breast, while the second man followed pushing with a long stick. The rear man could steady the sled, or right it when upset." The physical exhaustion from pulling the sleds was such that some of them did not reach that night's camp until midnight, and the men pulling them laid on the ground several times within yards of the camp. This exhaustion played upon the party and by April 5 most of them, with the exception of Fickett and the Natives, were also suffering from inflamed eyes and swollen eyelids. This Allen treated with warm water, ointment, and an application of tea. Their only food

for the next two days consisted of a half-meal of beans.

While camping at the foot of Spirit Mountain (northeast of the junction of the Copper and Tiekel rivers) on April 7, they realized it was hard to make progress and hunt for food at the same time. This caused them to husband their food, and to begin eating the entrails of animals. On this occasion they ate a porcupine. The coast Natives that were with them smeared

their faces with charcoal and ashes from the campfire, possibly as a precaution against glare from snow and ice. The next day most of the party was again suffering from severe eye pain, more so during snow storms than when the sun was shining. Finding shelter in a barabara on the evening of April 9, they made a meal out of a half-spoiled dried fish.

Reaching Taral on April 10 they fired a salute with their guns and were joined by prospector John Bremner who wanted to reach the copper region on the Chitina River. At Taral the party dried their clothing and provisions,

took observations for latitude and longitude, and searched for dried salmon. Their provisions now consisted of 230 pounds of food that had to support a party of five explorers and several porters until they reached the Yukon.

While he was at Taral Allen heard of a Native leader (or tyone) of Chitina named Nicolai and decided to pay him a visit. The party left to explore the Chitina River on April 11 after caching their personal effects and 180 pounds of their provisions. The party was joined by a Native named Skilly.

Skilly (Allen found out later that this was another Native term for leader) had left Taral in advance of the main party. On April 13, which happened to be Lt. Allen's birthday, Skilly presented the party with parts of a moose that had been killed by wolves during the winter. By this time everyone had swollen feet, and they were all so hungry that they celebrated Allen's birthday by eating the rotten moose meat.

On April 17 the party started from the mouth of the Chitina River and went into camp near a group of Natives after a march of five miles. By this time they were growing so weak on a daily basis due to the lack of food that Fickett (as quoted by Allen) wrote in his journal: "Rotten moose meat would be a delicacy now. So weak from hunger that we had to stop at noon to hunt. All so weak that we were dizzy, and would stagger like drunken men. Fortunately, an old woman brought into camp a small piece of meat and a moose nose, which, with the rabbits we killed, considerably strengthened us."

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AVMM Volunteer George Darrow is a military historian. He is very active with the Museum's Oral History program.

Explorers face harsh weather, hunger

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Here Allen learned that tyone Nicolai lived at the headwaters of the Chitstone River, and he persuaded the skilly of the camp to go with them to Nicolai's home. Leaving camp enroute to Nicolai's home on April 18, they stopped for a noon meal of a large quantity of moose meat and two or three grouse. This did not appease their hunger, and the skilly fainted.

The explorers believed that a diet of meat alone should be enough to provide the necessaary strength, but it apparently wasn't enough and, after leaving camp early on the morning of April 19, they were exhausted after a march of seven miles. However, they made it to Nicolai's house after marching another five miles and he gave them a welcoming feast of stew. They stayed with Nicolai for a week and, while they were there, they built a type of canoe called a baidarra, made observations, repaired clothes, and made moccasins. The explorers, along with Nicolai and some of his vassals, left for Taral in the baidarra on April 28. This canoe was their only means of transportation until it ws abandoned on May 31 near the headwaters of the Copper River. The morning of May 3 found everyone in camp about 15 miles up the Chitina from its junction with the Copper River. Here they all experienced severe pain in the loins and were bothered with frequent urination that night. Returning to Taral on May 4, they took the next day off by writing letters, taking observations, taking photographs, and recuperating.

The week of May 6 through May 12 found them still cordelling up the Copper River. Up to that time Allen had been depending on Native maps to guide them over the "Alaskan Mountains" and down the Tanana to the Yukon via the Tazlina River to a place called Tasnai. He came to realize that those maps were wrong, and that Tasnai (which is non-existent) was on Cook Inlet.

On May 13 Allen and his party left camp with Nicolai, two of his vassals, and a Native named Chefoza. Allen was bothered by the Native's sense of rank. Because Nicolai was tyone nobody would sell Allen any "...food of any kind without consulting him, and he advised prices that would make a commissary in civilization shudder."

Camping at the mouth of the Tazlina River on May 15 the explorers bid goodbye to Nicolai because they were passing out of the territory that was under his control. They then spent the day trying to replenish their supplies by hunting, but all they caught were a few rabbits. From this point on the Allen party had to depend primarily on their own resources, and they experienced the greatest hardship and hunger of the expedition until they reached the headwaters of the Copper River. Fickett wrote to Nellie Lord that, even though they had to eat "...food that we would not eat were we in civilization..." and even though they had to work hard, the health of the party was good, the weather was good and the scenery was beautiful. In contrast to this are the feelings of Lt. Allen who said, when they left the mouth of the Tazlina on May 16, that the party had been constantly wet since leaving Taral and that they were hungry, tired, and in a depressed state of

mind. He also reported that they had a potentially fatal accident when their baidarra struck a boulder in the river. The rock caved in the sides of the boat and threw their pack dogs out. They were, however, able to make it safely to shore.

May 18 found the explorers suffering from loss of sleep due to poor blood circulation and frequent urination at night. Between May 20 and May 22 they found a cache of thirty salmon that were so bad their dogs hesitated to eat them. The explorers were all so hungry that they ate them anyway. On May 26 they passed the mouth of the Sanford River, and Allen noted that they were almost continually in the water. May 29 found them still cordelling up the Copper River, having passed the mouth of the Chistochena River the previous day. According to Fickett (as quoted by Allen), "May 29-Party nearly played out for want of food. Can just crawl. Had to stop middle of p.m. to make a flap-jack for each and a little beef tea." Meeting a camp of four Natives the next day, they abandoned the baidarra in order to make a portage. One Native gave them a dinner of boiled meat from which he scraped the maggots by hand before he cut it up. Fickett (as reported by Allen) said, "It tasted good, maggots and all."

The morning of June 5 found the explorers at Lake Suslota in the Mentasta Mountains where they were able to catch all the fish they needed in a nearby stream where the saalmon had begun to run. Leaving camp later that day they began the ascent over the mountains to the Tanana River via Suslota Pass. By June 8 they were at a point where they could see the Tanana River and the mountains between the Tanana and the Yukon River. On camping that evening they were barely able to stand and were harassed by gnats and mosquitoes. They left camp the next afternoon and two of the Native helpers, who had been sent out rabbit hunting, caught up with them that evening with one rabbit to feed nine half-starved men.

On June 10 they reached the village of a Native named Nandell where a medicine man implored them not to go to the camp of a man named Kheeltat because he feared they would all be killed. The explorers stayed at Nandell's village until June 11 when they left for Tetlin, reaching the village that afternoon. At Tetlin they began the construction of another baidarra. The party was in an exhausted condition, and Allen noted that one of John Bremner's ankles (which he had sprained earlier on the Chitistone) was swollen to an unusual size. This was later determined to be due to scurvy. Allen also noted that Robertson was covered all over with black spots which later became another form of scurvy. While they were in Sitka Allen had bought a bottle of ascetic acid as a treatment for scurvy, but that turned out to be useless. The explorers (which, by this time, included six paddlers, three pack dogs and one steersman) left Tetlin on June 14 in their new baidarra and headed for hte Tanana River, reaching that river in a little over two hours.

While canoeing down the Tanana the following afternoon

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Physical conditions serious by late June

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they spotted the signal smoke from Kheeltat's camp. After making camp that evening they heard three guns firing, after which appeared three Natives who turned out to be runners from Kheeltat's camp. Not willing to pass through this country without knowing the disposition of the Natives, Allen (despite the warning from the medicine man at Nandell's) decided to visit Kheeltat and he and Fickett left for Kheeltat's at 11 p.m. Arriving there at 1:30 a.m. on June 16 to a rather unfriendly reception (Kheeltat frowned at them and remained silent), Allen explained the purpose of his visit. The Natives weren't interested in this, but were interested in his reputation as a medicine man that had preceded him, as there had been many deaths among them. Allen gave them some pills which seemed to satisfy them.

The explorers were once again running out of food and, by June 21, were living on the fat and tallow they had reserved for frying fish. On June 22 they ran into a group of Natives who, except for four people from whom he was able to get 45 small fish that were served in tallow or grease, ran into the brush. June 23 found them passing the Toklat River. Later that day they encountered a party of Natives from whom they were able to get some fresh food. Allen reported that their physical condition was serious at the time.

The explorers paddled down the Tanana on June 25 to the trading post at Nuklukyet on the Yukon River. Arriving there the next afternoon, they met a couple of miners, one of whom was named Joseph La Due, who let them have 50 pounds of flour which lasted the explorers for four days. On July 11 Allen along with Joseph La Due and the local tyone's son, set out down the Yukon to meet the first steamboat while the rest of the party remained behind at Nuklukyet. Allen and La Due set out in the face of a strong wind and after frequently shipping water in their canoe, met the steamer after a run of 30 miles. Returning on the steamer to Nuklukyet on July 26, Allen was surprised to find Peder Johnson and John Bremner in critical condition from the scurvy. Both Fickett and Peder Johnson also looked very ill. Allen attributed this to the continual fish diet they had which had become nauseating to them. The explorers divided at Nuklukyet on July 28 with John Bremner and Peder Johnson deciding to stay on the Yukon and do some prospecting. Robertson, due I believe to his scurvy, was sent downriver to St. Michael's via the steamboat *Yukon*. This left only Fickett out of the original party to explore up the Koyukuk River with Allen.

Allen and Fickett left Nuklukyet in the afternoon of July 28. The route Allen chose to get to the Koyukuk was by descending the Yukon about six miles, then portaging north by east across the Yukon Mountains to the Kanuti River, then down the Kanuti to the Koyukuk. Accompanying them were three Koyukun and four Yukon Natives he had hired at Nuklukyet and five pack dogs. Upon reaching the Koyukuk River on August 3 Allen discharged the three Koyukuns and, taking the four Yukons with them, he and Fickett turned up the Koyukuk. Using canoes the two explorers and the Na-

tives went upstream against a current of approximately four miles an hour by hugging the bank in order to avoid the main current, then poling the canoes forward by placing light sticks against the river bottom and pushing against the sticks. On Aug. 6 they reached the South Fork of the Koyukuk where they encountered the last Native settlement on the Koyukuk. Here Allen determined that the dogs were of no further use and would eat a lot of food, so he killed two of them, gave one to the Natives and kept two to return to the States.

Allen and Fickett reached the mouth of the present day John River (which Allen named the Fickett River) on Aug. 9. Ascending this river to a latitude of 67 degrees, 16 minutes, placed them above the Arctic Circle some distance above present-day Bettles and was the farthest point north in their journey. That evening they were headed downstream and, as Allen stated, "...bound for home."

Aug. 18 found Allen and Fickett camped at the junction of the Koyukuk and Kateel rivers. Here Allen noted that he and Fickett, in journeying up the Koyukuk, had been where no white man had ever been before. The evening of Aug. 21 found the explorers back on the Yukon River at Nulato, where Allen paid and discharged the four Yukon Natives he had hired at Nuklukyet. He and Fickett had missed the steamboat by several hours, so they had to go down the Yukon by canoe and by foot. The morning of Aug. 23 found them camped at the junction of the Yukon and a river that Allen called the Autokakat. It had been raining, so they made a fire and dried their clothes. After drying their clothes they went up this river about 3 miles, then began portaging to the Unalakleet River. They reached the Unalakleet River at a village named Uluykuk on Aug. 26. Here they bought two birch canoes and made a catamaran by fastening them together in parallel. They reached the village of Unalakleet in the afternoon of Aug. 27 after having to make frequent stops to repair their leaky catamaran.

At Unalakleet Allen sent a runner to St. Michael's with a note to the commander of the Revenue Cutter *Corwin*. He also sent a runner to some of the local villages to obtain a baidarra and crew to take him and Fickett to St. Michael's. On Aug. 28 he received a baidarra from these villages that was in bad repair. Later that day a baidarra from St. Michael's that was in better repair was sighted, and that was the one that he used. Allen and Fickett left Unalakleet on Aug. 29, and headed into an unfavorable sea. The wind and heavy surf on a bar about a mile out to sea panicked the Natives who almost returned to shore. The party paddled and sailed until early evening when they discovered that it was faster to cordelle the baidarra along the beach. They reached St. Michael's in the evening of Aug. 30.

Allen, Fickett, and Robertson met with the cutter *Corwin* on Sept. 4 and left for San Francisco via Unalaska on Sept. 5. They arrived in San Francisco on Oct. 11.

Perhaps Fred W. Fickett summed it all up the best when he

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'Prayers answered'

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wrote to his beloved Nellie Lord from the Palace Hotel in San Francisco on Oct. 13: "Nellie, I believe the prayers of those who were interested in us must have been answered, for something higher than mortal intellect and bravery must have guided and guarded us during that trip."

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