

MacMillan Tells of Visits To Site of New Arctic Base

PROVINCETOWN, Sept. 22—Disclosure by the U.S. Government of the huge air base only 900 miles from the North Pole at Thule, northwest Greenland, brought reminiscent thoughts to Commander Donald B. MacMillan of Provincetown, who, until World War II, probably visited that particular area as much if not more than any other person. Commander MacMillan, who first visited the Thule area, known in Eskimo language as Uminak, or Heart Shape, from its topography, with Admiral Peary in 1908, when Peary's expedition stopped off to get the services of Polar Eskimos for the dash to the North Pole, said he visited the area almost every Summer when he made his trips to the Far North, the last visit having been in 1950.

Building Put Up

When the Peary expedition reached the area, Commander MacMillan said the "only things to be seen were about four seal-skin tents in the Summer, and four holes in the ground, or igloos, in the Winter."

However, when the expedition returned to the Thule area in 1909 after successfully reaching the North Pole, the first thing which met its eyes was a building, the commander said, "put up by the famous Danish explorer Knud Rasmussen, who built the

first and only trading post in the area and, incidentally, changed the name to Thule from the Eskimo name of Uminak. It's known officially now as Thule, or North Star Bay."

In fact, Commander MacMillan said, both names of Thule and North Star Bay are on maps, with the latter name for a British ship, the North Star, which became frozen in during the Winter of 1849-50. The commander said on one of his trips he found the graves of two Englishmen who died that Winter.

Reminiscing of his earliest trips, Commander MacMillan said that Peary's expedition obtained the services of four Eskimos, who actually made the successful dash to the Pole with the Admiral. Included among the four was the Eskimo Ootah, whose photograph accompanies the pictorial story of the air base in the current issue of Life Magazine. Both Commander MacMillan and his wife, Miriam, who also has visited the area many times, recognized the Eskimo, who is a personal friend of both. The commander recognized many of the pictures.

Made Frequent Trips

Commander MacMillan said that during the year 1913-17, he lived at Etah, about 120 miles north of Thule, and frequently made the long dog sled ride in bright moonlight to the trading

He speaks in praise of the intelligence of the Eskimos, declaring that no race of human beings anywhere possess a higher degree of ingenious application with the very limited materials they have to work with, often accomplishing results which would put to shame the efforts of the white brother.

One of the many wonders of that ice enveloped region, and a thing for which science had long sought an explanation is: Where do the migratory birds go." The nesting place for some of them has never been found. No matter how far north the explorer has gone the birds are still flying North.

This fact might bear out the claim that beyond the present land of discovery there lies a great territory where birds may nest and rear their young, far beyond the ice cap and in a milder climate.

When there are no more frozen fields to explore and conquer we trust Capt. MacMillan will return to take up his residence on Cape Cod.

Twenty-Five Years Ago

From the Files of The Register

September 1937

Commander and Mrs. Donald B. MacMillan have returned to Provincetown after the 27th Arctic exploration of the well-known navigator and explorer.

ladies dress to offer any description but she certainly looked fine, as did all the others of the group.

Rev. Nancy Paine Smith was toastmaster and the fine way in which she performed the part showed that the selection of toastmistress had been well chosen.

The following speakers entertained the company with interesting speeches, which were received with generous applause, which was surely merited. Rev. Dr. Hamilton, Mr. Young, Judge Collen Campbell, Mrs. Emanuel Dewager, Mrs. William Sparrow, Mrs. Eugene Watson, Mr. Edwin Paine.

Mrs. Smith, the toastmistress is a sister of Mr. Paine, and when she called upon him to speak she said, "You have just heard the wealthiest man in town, (Mr. Young, of the Saving's Bank. He gets all your money and keeps it." Now I will call upon the "Handsomest man in town, Edwin Paine".

Mr. Paine in responding said; "There was once a very homely man in this town and when he died they said his looks were passed on to me." My friends often say "how much you look like your sister."

Mrs. John Manta sang most delightfully. She said she had a bad cold, but if she can sing like that with a bad cold we would go miles to hear her when that cold has passed off.

Mr. Thomas Nickerson with his orchestra from Hyannis dispensed some fine music, and Mr. Stowe played some nice solos on the violin.

The turkey supper with all the fixings was well cooked, well served and thoroughly enjoyed by the 200 diners that partook of it.

We want to say here that Captain MacMillan was a Provincetown boy, leaving here when 14 years of age, and since then has been making history in the ice fields of the north. We are proud to have such a representative.

In replying to the call Capt. MacMillan gave a very interesting and instructive address describing some of the many wonders of that ice bound region, always with the lure to those seeking to know more of its ever unfolding mysteries with the excitement and dangers which surround every mile in the advance of the explorer.

With our limited experience in low degrees it does not seem possible that human life can exist in a temperature of 60 below zero, and yet that is what is often encountered in that bit of ice covered earth.

Probably no man living has had a more thorough experience in these regions of ice and snow than Captain MacMillan, and but for some slight accident he would have stood at the pole with Peary.

Only a man with an iron constitution and skill in handling difficult conditions could have stood the gruelling hardships which beset his return journey with the polar expedition, over the treacherous ice field, where many men in the years before had perished in the attempt to find the key that would unlock the top of the world

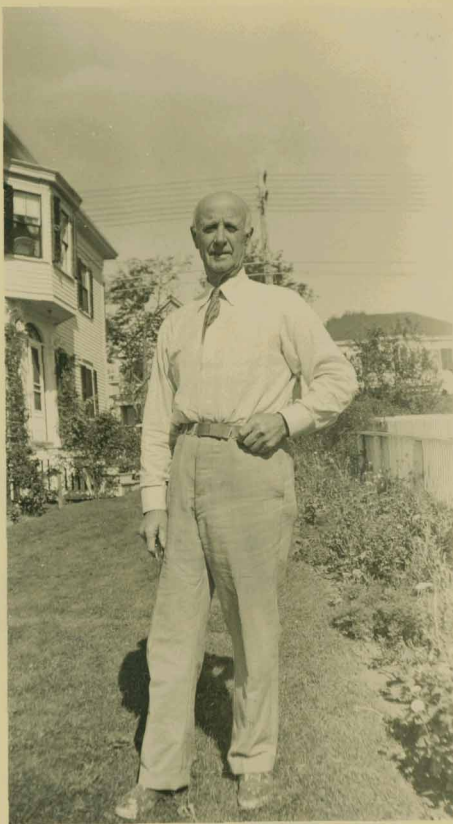
say that it was something worth seeing but faintly express the situation. The towering icebergs, the great fields of tide driven cakes crashing against each other, the dangerous positions into which the ships of the exploring party were frequently driven, and the skillful manner in which they were drawn out of the trouble, the great ice fields stretching away miles and miles, the air planes rising into the air and sailing away, ice covered cliffs and moving glaciers, and the thousands upon thousands of great birds almost clouding the sky as they sweep over the frozen sea or dive into some patch of half frozen water in search of food, and the beautiful cloud effects as the Arctic sun shines over the white glistening surface. And the explanation of the pictures by the explorer was a delight to the ear and eye from beginning to end of the scene.

On the evening of the 18th Capt. MacMillan was the guest of honor of the Research Club and kindred organizations. A large number of young ladies, under the leadership of Miss Maria Rich had been spending several days and possibly some nights at the M. E. church in the centre of the town

in making preparations for the forthcoming reception to be tendered to a native who had gone from the sandy shores of Cape Cod to battle with the frozen ice fields of the far North, and whose efforts had been successful in his several voyages.

The tables for the feast were beautifully decorated, and the many flags that adorned the walls gave the room an air of cheerful sociability. Candles burned brightly on every table.

In the outer Hall Capt. MacMillan stood with the receiving committee for introductions as the people filed by, these were the receiving committee: Rev. W. D. Hamilton, Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Young, Rev. Nancy Paine Smith, Mrs. Emanuel Dewager, Miss Maria Rich, Mrs. Smith led the way, followed by the Guest of Honor and Miss Rich and other members of the Committee to the stage, and they were greeted with prolonged applause as they marched down the aisle. Miss Rich, President of the Research Club, after prayer had been offered by the Pastor of the church, arose, and in a few well chosen words addressed a greeting. The writer is hardly well enough grounded in



Commander Donald MacMillan
Taken by Althea Sept. 1952



The "Seeko" built by Jot Small for Commander MacMillan to take up North. About 1926