

Contributed by Charles Landrum

Excerpts from a Remembrance of USS ARNEB AKA-56 in Operation Blue Jay
By Floyd Shannon Moser / Engineman E-5 --USS Arneb AKA-56

In May 1951 we were assigned to an Operation coded Blue Jay. At US NAVAL Amphibious Base Little Creek, Va. we were given cold weather operations training and indoctrination. Just before I was assigned to my ship, USS ARNEB, AKA-56, we were not allowed to telephone anywhere /we were denied passes; we were told we were going to Korea!!

USS ARNEB AKA-56 was converted to cold weather operations at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard 1947-48 for a polar expedition to South Pole & was to be Admiral Richard Byrd's' flagship of the expedition. When the Korean War broke out in 1950, the Antarctic expedition was postponed, and Arneb was assigned to the amphibious fleet at Little Creek, NORVA.

None of the crew knew anything about "Operation blue-jay". After 2 weeks we went to Army Piers at Norfolk to begin loading cargo --2 bulldozers, 40 New Ford dump trucks, a forklift, barrels of diesel fuel, lube oil, and food (our ship carried 1200 tons of frozen food);.

We set sail on June 10, 1951, not knowing our destination. I thought it was strange that we were northbound, if we were bound for Korea, for the Panama Canal is South of Norfolk. On June 13, 1951, At about 45° N. Lat., Capt. JT Hazen opened his orders and announced on the PA system that Arneb was headed for a place called Thule at the head of Baffin Bay in Greenland.; That we were to build a Strategic Air Command (SAC) base for the USAF. Enroute to Newfoundland we spent some 10 days shrouded in fog. After 2 weeks of sailing we rendezvoused with USCG ice breaker East wind off the west coast of Greenland near Cape York. We were stuck in the ice at that time, our last two weeks we spent going thru ice packs as deep as 4 feet.

I had a little RCA portable battery radio with vacuum tubes, which was notorious for using up batteries (before the days of transistor diodes) I would put the little RCA up next to the cargo boom cables which were anchored fast to our starboard gunwale behind our boat shop. The hundreds of feet in the cables gave me enormous antenna strength for my radio, even better than the ship's radio, on AM frequencies, The ship's electrician furnished me with a steady supply of "A" batteries for my radio, which would go down after about 16 hrs of steady use.

On our fifth day out of Norfolk, Moscow Radio came on and a girl we named "Moscow Minnie" told us what we had on our ship & all the ships in our convoy. At about 2100 hrs every night after that, Moscow Minnie would come on and tell us what our position was. The Captain even came down and listened to my little radio on numerous occasions, commenting that it was nice that Moscow verified our position that his navigator had told him within the hour. Needless to say, after about 50° North, Russian "Bear" Recon planes were shadowing us constantly, when we got into Baffin Bay, away from Canadian Airspace! Except for the numerous foggy days we encountered between Newfoundland & Greenland.

Starting into Baffin Bay at about 60° N, we began encountering heavy shelf ice which had no breaks. Here we dropped a sea anchor to wait for help from US Coast Guard Cutter Icebreaker Eastwind. When we got into Melville Bay before Cape York, we were almost at a standstill for the last two weeks. We went thru ice 4 foot thick. 1951 was one of the coldest winters on record in North America. Eastwind sometimes had trouble breaking the ice we made less than a mile a day!

Finally, at about 75° North Latitude, we encountered a terrific storm which blew most of the ice floes out of way, and we steamed into Thule North star bay on July 9, 1951, 29 days after we had left Norfolk. USS Arneb was the second ship in after the Cutter Eastwind; she enlarged the channel behind the narrower Eastwind.

When we began unloading our cargo with the help of our Mike Boat landing craft (LCM), the place was desolate. About August 10, 1951, I was fortunate to shake hands with King Frederick of Denmark., as he came off his yacht during ceremonies with General Hoyte Vandenberg, USAF, at Thule. When we left Thule on August 29, 1951 it looked like a town. The fuel oil storage tanks we built one a day during July 1951. Later, around July 20 we built a pier from a floating causeway. USS Paiute, a seagoing tug, brought it up from Boston. We unloaded more than 120 ships in summer of 1951 at Thule. I remember USS Shadwell LSD-15 & USNS Hershey. USS Arneb was at anchor near Shadwell. Hershey was at anchor a bit farther North. USS Monrovia APA-31, anchored farther out in Thule Bay than Arneb. USS Taconic AGC-17 was the flagship of the Navy operation; it had extensive communications equipment aboard.

USS Taconic - Flag ship.

USCGC Adak

USS Arneb (AKA-56)

USS Ashland

USS Casa Grande

USS Chipola (AO63)

USS Deuel (APA-160)

USCGC Eastwind

USS Earl B. Hall (APD 107)

USS EDISTO (AGB-2)

USS Fort Leonard Wood

G.W.Codrington. Chartered and operated by Moran T&T of New York.

USS General A. W. Greely, AP-141

USS General Elterg

USS General Eltuge

USS General LeRoy Eltinge (AP-154)

USNS General M. L. Hersey T-AP 148

USNS General Stuart Heintzelman T-AP 159
USNS General W.G. Haan T-AP 158
USS Krishna, ARL 38.
USS Lindenwald (LSD-6)
USS LSM 397
USNS LST 287
USNS LST 325
USS LST 509
USSLST 525
USS LST 601
USS LST 980
USSLST 1041
USNS Mahanomen County LST-912
USNS Mayfield Victory
USS Monrovia APA 31
USS Norton Sound AV-11
USS Oak Hill (LSD-7)
USS Piconic
USNS Sappa Creek
USS Shadwell LSD-15
USS Sublette County (LST 1144)
USS Talbot County(LST 1153)
USS Taumer
USS Vermilion (AKA-107)
USS Whitewood (AG129)
USS Wyandot (AKA 92)