



Wide World Photos

OBITUARY

Sir Hubert Wilkins (1888-1958)

Sir Hubert Wilkins died on November 30, 1958, in New York. He had been a Fellow of the Arctic Institute of North America since its foundation, and in 1947 was appointed Assistant to the Chairman of the Board of Governors. The following notice was written by his friend Col. Bernt Balchen in Chappaqua, New York.

The passing of Sir Hubert Wilkins on November 30 means the loss of one of the most colourful figures of polar aviation and exploration.

Sir Hubert was born in South Australia on October 31, 1888. He received his education as a mining engineer in Adelaide, and in his younger years worked as electrical engineer, meteorologist, and movie photographer. It was this last vocation that started him on his career of adventure and exploration.

In 1912-13 he followed the Turkish Army as a movie photographer in the Balkan War. He was second in command of the Canadian Arctic Expedition 1913-18. He then joined the Royal Australian Flying Corps, learned to fly in 1917, and saw war service as a photographer and in the intelligence services. He was mentioned twice in dispatches and was awarded the Military Cross with Bar.

After the war he served as navigator on one of the England-Australia flights in 1919, was second in command of the British Imperial Antarctic Expedition 1919-20, naturalist with the Shackleton Antarctic Expedition 1921-22, leader of the Australian Islands Expedition 1922-25 and leader of the Detroit Arctic Expeditions 1925-28. During these expeditions some very important pioneering flights were made in the Arctic, the most outstanding of which was the flight from Point Barrow, Alaska, to Green Harbour, Spitzbergen, April 15 to 21, 1928, which Wilkins and his pilot, Carl Ben Eielson, undertook in a single-engined Lockheed Vega. On this flight they crossed large areas of the Arctic Ocean in which other explorers had claimed to have seen land, but where Wilkins and Eielson found none. For this flight he was knighted on June 14, 1928.

Sir Hubert then became leader of the Wilkins-Hearst Antarctic Expedition 1928-30 during which he discovered more than 500 miles of new coastline in the Graham Land sector. In 1931 he was leader of the Ellsworth Nautilus Submarine Expedition to the Arctic, and from 1932 to 1939 manager of the Ellsworth Antarctic Expeditions. The highlight of these was the trans-Antarctic flight from the Weddell Sea to Little America by Lincoln Ellsworth and Herbert Hollick-Kenyon in November 1935.

Sir Hubert headed the search expedition for the lost Soviet flyer Levanevsky in 1937-38 and during the search covered about 170,000 sq. miles of the Arctic Ocean never previously seen. From 1942 he served as consultant to the U.S. Armed Forces on arctic problems.

During his many flights and travels in the Polar regions Sir Hubert acquired a great store of knowledge of these environments, that provided invaluable help for later expeditions. He was the recipient of numerous honours from all over the world and was recognized by the American Geographical Society and the Royal Geographical Society. He was the author of many books, and active as scientist and lecturer.

Sir Hubert was a man of the type that you always looked forward to meeting again. His memory will be cherished by those of us who had the privilege of being with him on polar expeditions and we shall always remember him as the finest companion one could wish for. He had courage and daring but was always even-tempered, kind and modest.

BERNT BALCHEN

Sorbonne, and of the research that I shall be doing on Greenlandic at the University of Copenhagen next year.

The object of my present studies at the Sorbonne is to examine the various linguistic theories and to try to apply them to the solution of the many practical spelling problems. On pursuing my studies of Greenlandic in Denmark next year, I hope to assess to what extent the new Canadian Eskimo orthography can approximate the Greenlandic one. Some Greenlanders are considering slight spelling reforms that would bring their writing system much closer to the one considered for Canadian Eskimo. Any step in this direction will be welcomed by all those seeking closer ties between the two groups.

Thus far my personal experience has led to the conclusion that, whatever the cost, the design of a standard orthography should not be introduced prematurely for reasons of expediency, because, as Gleason says, the design of an orthography is a difficult and intricate matter.

RAYMOND C. GAGNÉ

Correction

In Sir Hubert Wilkins's obituary (*Arctic* 11:259) it had been erroneously stated that Sir Hubert died in New York. Actually he died in Framingham, Mass., where he had lived since 1953, while working for the Quartermaster Research and Engineering Command, U.S. Army, at Natick, Mass. He had served with the Quartermaster Corps and Department of the Army as consultant and arctic expert since the beginning of World War II.

The second sentence of paragraph four of the obituary should read: "He was second in command of the northern party of the Canadian Arctic Expedition 1913-18 under Stefansson".

The following, taken from the *London Times* of March 28, 1959, may be of interest. During a second cruise under the arctic ice pack the U.S. nuclear submarine *Skate* surfaced on March 17 at the North Pole. There the vessel's company under Commander James Calvert held a service in memory of Sir Hubert. In compliance with one of his last wishes his ashes were then scattered in the driving snow.