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Dear Paul:

You are the most provocative correspondent I have had in a long while. Here goes again!

There is truly an untold story about Bernt Balchen. The Balchen I knew at Little America was every inch the athlete, a champion amateur boxer and wrestler, trim build about 155 pounds and five feet ten. He was not a drinker then. I recall that he did participate in most of the "official" drinking days to celebrate things like the Fourth of July, return of the sun, North Pole anniversary and the like but I don't remember him at all in connection with the Bay of Whales "Harbor Board Meetings" after hours in the Norwegian House. That is where our serious drinking was done. Ringleaders Joe Rucker (Paramount Pictures), Jim Feury, and George Black figured out a way to siphon off the hundred gallon drum of pure grain alcohol that Dana Coman was supposed to use for medicinal purposes. They would drain off a quart of two before each "meeting" and the party would get going well after taps which was around 2100. This went on almost nightly about the last three months we were there. We had some highly charged-up people on our expedition and this was their way of letting off steam after the main work of the party had already been done and about all we had to do was to wait for the arrival of the "City of New York".

The Commander soon learned about these parties but pretended not to. He did show up at the door one morning about two o'clock and say "May I come in?" He did and it became one of our very best parties. Prohibition reigned supreme in the States at that time and Byrd was quite sensitive to U. S. opinion back home. Poor Paul Siple had to suffer the indignity of being a spectator at most of these sessions without participating. He was nineteen at the time and a good sport about the whole thing. But, to get back to Balchen, he was seldom present at these brawls. Why we all didn't become alcoholics, I will never know. Most of the rest of the crowd would sleep past breakfast but I had to get up by eight o'clock to start my regular daily camp and weather chores. My attendance record was close to 100%.

Balchen's later life I know only by hearsay. There are weird stories about how Bernt fought with the Finns against the Russkies, later saw service with the Air Corps in Greenland and Alaska. At BW-8, where he was in command, I was later told by Joe George (my counterpart with EAL) that Bernt had a simple answer whenever discipline was violated. He would invite the offender to come with him for a walk on skis and would then proceed to drag the poor devil for 20 miles or more up on the Ice Cap. He seldom had repeaters!

The real mystery, however, is Bernt's claim that Byrd was a liar and guilty of international fraud in his story about flying to the North Pole and back from Spitsbergen. His evidence was that "my slip stick tells me so and, besides, Floyd Bennett told me so one night when we were at the Congress Hotel in Chicago" (while we were on the trans-continental tour with the "Josephine Ford"). Montague published those details in "Oceans, Poles and Airmen". Larry Gould refused to write the introduction to "Come North With Me" until Bernt deleted certain statements. The deadliest quote of all, I think, was Bernt's claim that Mrs. Bennett knew about the North Pole "hoax"! If Balchen is telling the truth, there must be somewhere a statement or message from the Bennetts to be opened at some later date confessing that Floyd and REB framed up the whole deal! Balchen could be the liar.

Baseball in the next issue.

Dr. Paul C. Dalrymple
Washington


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