

'A Mushy History'

BY SHERRY SHAHAN

FEB. 27, 2011

Norman Vaughan was born on Dec. 19, 1905. He spent his whole life chasing adventures.

As a boy living in Massachusetts, Norman's four-legged companion was Rex, a mixed German shepherd. His friend, Eddie Goodale, also had a special dog, Fido.

Both Norman and Eddie liked to read true-life adventures. They learned that Eskimos used sealskin to make harnesses for their sled. The boys thought, "Why not?"

Norman found a long rope in his barn. He hitched their two dogs to a sled. "Ready?" he asked Eddie.

"Ready!"

Norman called out the only command he knew. "Mush!"

Instead of pulling, the dogs ran back to him. The next time, Eddie went in front and called the dogs. They followed, tails wagging.

In their minds, the boys were Eskimos mushing over the frozen Alaskan tundra.

"What if we had more dogs?" Norman asked.

The boys spent their allowances on a St. Bernard from the pound. Now they had a three dog team: Rex, Fido and their new pal, Storm.

That was the only beginning!

Ten years later, a headline in the Boston Transcript newspaper read, "Byrd to the South Pole."

Norman Vaughan was 22 years-old. He longed to be part of this adventure. But how? He thought and thought and finally came up with a plan.

He would spend a year training sled dogs for the trip — without pay — and at the end of that time, the Admiral Byrd could decide if he wanted to take

Norman with him. Byrd agreed.

To get ready, Norman called on his friends, Eddie Goodale and Freddie Crockett. Together they made special sled sheets. Different types of cargo was loaded, as if it was a real expedition: dog food, long timbers, kegs of nails, and sacks of coal.

They set up a training schedule. Each day they rotated dogs, mushing down the snowy trail. To get ready for the subzero temperatures of Antarctica, they slept outside in a gazebo with little protection from the nighttime cold.

Norman knew that Admiral Richard E. Byrd planned to take 97 dogs on the long journey. He worked hard to come up with a meat-cereal formula. In the end, 40 tons of dog food traveled with them on the ship.

Vaughan and his two friends trained the dogs for 11 months before Admiral Byrd showed up. He was pleased with what he saw. Norman, Eddie and Freddie were invited to join the Byrd Antarctic Expedition, 1928-30.

Norman never had a doubt!

On Christmas 1928, the ship docked in the Bay of Whales. One of Byrd's first duties was to set up a base camp. "Vaughan," he said. "Hitch up a team."

Norman took Byrd inland where he chose a site for their camp, called Little America. The trek made Norman Vaughan the first American to travel by dog sled on the frozen seventh continent.

During the early months of 1929, Norman, Eddie and Freddie and their fellow mushers traveled 1,500 miles by sled. They provided ground support for Byrd's historic flight. If the admiral had trouble in the air and was forced down, the mushers would be his search-and-rescue team.

When winter came, Antarctica was plunged into eerie darkness. Nighttime temperatures dipped to 40 degrees below zero or lower. Norman was never happier!

Then, on Nov. 29, 1929, Admiral Byrd completed the world's first flight over the South Pole. After reaching his goal, he buzzed the dog mushers on the ground.

Thankfully, no one had to rescue the admiral. But they did continue traveling across the continent to survey the territory. By the time they

finished, Byrd's maps showed five mountains. He named them after members of his team, including Mount Vaughan and peaks named for Goodale and Crockett.

When the adventure ended and the expedition embarked for home, Norman stood on the ship's deck. "I was happy there," he said. "I didn't want to leave."

Sherry Shahan is the author of children's adventures "Frozen Stiff" and "Death Mountain." Visit: sherryshahan.com