

Henry T. Harrison
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January 4, 1981

Dear Paul:

"Assault on Eternity" came yesterday at two and, today at two, I have completed a reading of it. The first 50 pages of history were read in detail, the detailed story of OPERATION HIGHJUMP only selectively. Here are my early reactions:

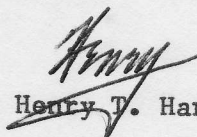
1. The Washington POST review was as biased a piece of writing as I have seen in a long time. The book was actually one of the finest tributes to Richard Byrd that I have ever seen. Rose called Byrd "probably the greatest polar explorer of all time."
2. It was also the greatest tribute I ever saw handed to Paul Siple. I predict that Ruth will be impossible to live with after reading "Assault on Eternity."
3. I never thought I would live to see the day when someone of substance took a specific position on the Balchen-Byrd North Pole controversy. On page 23 we read, "In later years Bernt Balchen broke openly with his old companion and charged - erroneously from all evidence - that Byrd had not even gotten to the North Pole back in 1926 but had turned around in some sort of panic before reaching the magical 'top of the world'."

If Pete Demas could come back and visit with us today just for a few minutes, he would say, "What I did was worth it!"

I pat myself on the back that I was privileged to know those two great persons so well. Paul and I signed on board the "City of New York" on the same day in August 1928 at the Hoboken Pier. Then Paul and I were both on the Port Watch together under Mate McGuinness and Boatswain Black as we headed for the Barrier. I played in the same auction bridge foursome with Byrd, McKinley and Rucker for over five winter months and we averaged five rubbers an evening.

1981 Sounds Like a Great Year

Dr. Paul C. Dalrymple
Washington
c.c. Laurence M. Gould


Henry T. Harrison

THE GREAT HOAX PERPETRATED BY PETE DEMAS, JUNE 20, 1929

The Setting

It was midwinter at Little America I with forty-two men living in three houses on floating sea ice which was the north edge of the Ross Ice Shelf. Commander Byrd lived in the Edgar Barrett House along with Larry Gould, Bernt Balchen, Dr. Coman and twelve others. There were some in the winter party who were apprehensive about the stability of our ice base, fearing that it might crack up under pressure of winter cold and leave us on an iceberg to drift northward into the open sea and almost certain death. New York TIMES correspondent Russell "Step-and-a-half" Owen was one of the chief "nervous nellies". Russ was also an easy mark for the several talented pranksters in the camp. My diary entry for June 29, 1929 tells how they worked one of the meanest and deadliest of all hoaxes:

LITTLE AMERICA I June 20, 1929


"-A really sensational hoax was worked on the gang at 5:30 a.m. by Pete Demas - especially for the benefit of Russ Owen but others fell for it as quickly as Russ did, so realistic did the whole thing seem. As night watchman, Pete rushed into the Edgar Barrett House at 5:30, let out several ungodly screams and then yelled,

"ALL HANDS TURN OUT. A CRACK IN THE BARRIER HAS OPENED UP AND THE CAMP IS THREATENED!"

Cyclone Haines, Taffy Davies, Charlie Lofgren, Russ Owen, Alton Parker, Jack O'Brien, Malcolm Hanson, Tom Mulroy and Ashley McKinley all jumped into their clothes and some of them even ran all over the camp in the dark trying to find the crevasse. Russ and Hanson were like two scared rabbits and Hanson almost wrecked his radio lab in his rush. When I woke up, everyone was rushing for the door and there was an air of intense excitement and tension.

I knew that something like this had been planned before but so realistic did it all seem that I was almost ready to turn out too when I suddenly heard a suppressed gurgle from Larry Gould's bunk. Then I was able to lie back and enjoy the fun.

The affair was discussed and rehashed all day with the "suckers" being kidded unmercifully. All agreed, however, that it was a risky joke to pull off. Willard Vander Veer seems to have been the instigator."


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