

# MEMBER ADVENTURES

## ROBERT CAMPBELL REEVE - Glacier Pilot



Theodore J. Holsten  
EMERITUS MEMBER  
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*I gave it the gun, and off I went....ahead of me I could see the big crevasses—wide enough to hold a boxcar. If I hit them, I was a goner. Then I happened to glance left and spotted an ice fall, sheering off to the*

*side—maybe [a] 250-foot drop. It was my last chance. I made a sharp left turn and dove the plane right over that ice fall. It mushed straight for the bottom, and I thought maybe I was a goner after all. But the plane had achieved just enough forward speed to become airborne. I leveled out about ten feet from the bottom. That was the greatest feeling of my life, bar none!*

With these words, Bob Reeve described his takeoff from Walsh Glacier, where in 1937 he set a record for high-altitude landings with a ski-equipped plane. He had just taken mountaineers Bradford Washburn and Robert Bates to that location from which they would make a first ascent of Mount Lucania, a previously unclimbed Canadian peak. Washburn, in a later interview, said that Reeve “is without doubt the finest ski pilot and rough country flyer I have ever seen.”

Bob Reeve was born in Wisconsin in 1902, and was an adventurer from an early age. Falsifying his age, he enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1917 at age 15, and he reached the rank of sergeant. After the war, his return to school was brief. He joined a pair of barnstorming pilots exchanging work at the airport for flying lessons. In 1926 he received his mechanic's and commercial pilot's licenses. A short time later, flying the mail in South America, he got much experience in mountain flying over the Andes.

Stories of the Gold Rush and adventure opportunities drew him to Alaska in 1932. He quickly became a bush pilot flying supplies to miners and trappers in remote locations. It was a time when bush pilots flew without navigational aids, and Bob had many

**Reeve had brought the Fairchild 51 to a stop 6,000 feet above sea level, on Brevier Glacier, site of the Big Four.**

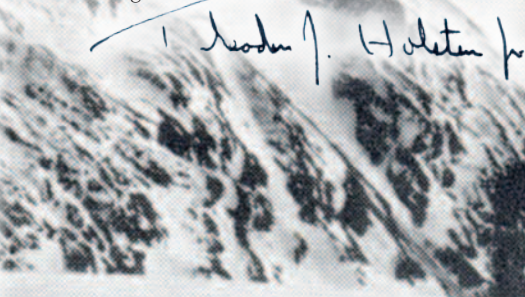
harrowing experiences. He made more than 20 forced landings, often improvising repairs at wilderness locations, sometimes at temperatures as low as 50 degrees below zero!

World War II saw Bob flying supplies and mail for the U.S. military during the Aleutians campaign against the Japanese. The long string of Aleutian Islands suffer some of the most hazardous flying weather conditions in the world. After the war, Bob organized Reeve Aleutian Airways, offering commercial air service to that remote area until it ceased operations in 2000.

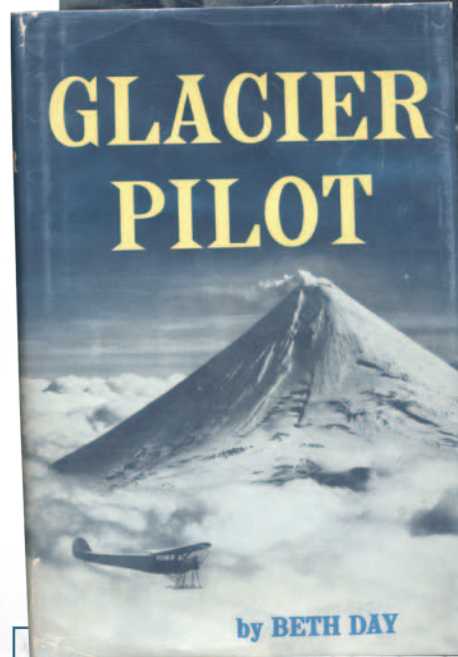
By 1948, the physical toll on Reeve forced him to retire from commercial flying. His activities running his airline kept him very busy. However, over the years he had become interested in the bears around Cold Bay in the Alaska Peninsula. On a long-planned hunt with General Nathan Twining and others, he shot what stood for several years as the World's Record Alaska brown bear.

In 1951 Bob suffered two near-fatal heart attacks. Taking doctor's orders to slow down, he took more time for hunting and family activities. He had become a Boone and Crockett Club Member in 1949, and he went on to become an officer and executive committee member of the Club. He was later elected an honorary Life Member.

Beth Day wrote the book, *Glacier Pilot*, the biography of Robert Reeve and his exciting life. She spent several months with him, visiting locations and gathering the details of his many adventures. Reeve died in 1980 at age 78. ■



**Robert C. Reeve was the first recipient of the Sagamore Hill Award for his Alaska brown bear. It was taken in 1948 near Cold Bay, Alaska, and scores 29-13/16 points.**



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