

Billy Neakok, Danny Truesdell in Disney Film



FAA EMPLOYEES GET PROMINENT ROLES IN FILM

ROLES IN DISNEY FILM—Daniel R. (Danny) Truesdell, left, and William E. (Billy) Neakok, both air traffic control specialist Trainees for the FAA at Barrow, Alaska, are shown with one of

the cub polar bears brought from Holland for use in the movie "Snowbear." Both Danny and Billy assisted the Walt Disney Studios of Hollywood in the filming of this movie.

By W.P. DANIELS
(Air Traffic Control Specialist at Fairbanks)

To the Arctic Eskimo, polar bear is "NANOOK." To movie makers it is "SNOWBEAR." But two northernmost ATCS Trainees such words recall the toil of off-duty hours through months of Arctic winter, spring and summer spent before the Disney movie cameras on ice flows, tundra, and on a movie set at Point Barrow, Alaska.

Despite the action and drama of North Slope oil, scientific and industrial expeditions and research projects at Point Barrow, the Walt Disney Studios of Hollywood have managed in the past year to capture on film a fascinating nature story of The Great Land, with a sharp focus on the Arctic regions.

The blending of a menagerie of polar bears from European zoos, the casting of local native talent at Barrow and the tender handling of the theme combine to make "SNOWBEAR" a story that foreshadows the end of an era, a story that struggles to keep alive an Eskimo culture that once was, but which has been over-

whelmed by another age of man.

A bizarre but understandable notewas struck in the filming of "SNOWBEAR" with the importing of captivity-bred polar bears into an area of natural habitat. While not really "tame" these sophisticated, city-bred type bears never before had seen ocean or ice, or felt the sting of Arctic wintry blast.

Thus they were more subject to control by their German speaking handlers, more adapted to humans than are the fearless carnivores that prowl the Arctic ice around Barrow.

In search for disappearing native skills, and customs to bolster the film's authenticity, movie director Gunther Von Fritsch tagged as "naturals" two FAA ATCS Trainees of the Barrow FSS, William E. Neakok and Daniel R. Truesdell.

"Billy" Neakok is a native of Barrow, Alaska. Besides studying and working to become an FSS ATCS, Billy is active in civic and native affairs. A skilled Arctic hunter, trapper, and whaler, he is knowledgeable in Eskimo culture, past and present.

He was used by the studio as a technical advisor, interpreter, and coordinator. Many of the props used in the film, and the skills displayed were engineered and directed by Billy.

Born in Barrow, with later education in the "Lower 48," Billy served a tour in the army then worked for several years in San Francisco as a helicopter mechanic. But the lure of the Arctic was too great.

He returned to Barrow with his wife Alice, a Navajo Indian from Arizona who shares his enthusiasm for the Arctic and often joins him in his hunting expeditions.

"Danny" Truesdell, the other Barrow ATCS Trainee won a major role in the film as a great white hunter, fur trader and bush pilot, the only non-native role in the story.

Though Danny is not a native, he is a resident of Barrow, married to "Luky" Killbear, a local Eskimo girl, and is no stranger to the Arctic. After high school in Colorado and a hitch in the navy, he heeded the urge to go north, to Alaska, to sample the "spell of the Yukon."

This he did in every possible way, by working on the Dewline, hunting, trapping, trading, and even mushing dog teams. Another urge, to fly and to work in aviation brought him, along with Billy to Barrow FSS on opening day in March, 1968. Danny is currently on detail to the FAA Academy at Oklahoma City to round out his ATCS training.

On the day of his departure for OKC, he walked off the movie set after his last "take," deliriously shaved off a 10 month old itchy beard, sheared his shaggy locks, and boarded the plane.

Said Danny, "This is too much! No more "takes," Oklahoma City, and a clean face! The beard and hair was the worst of the experience. It was really getting to me!"

The Disney crew was lavish in their praise of the outstanding performances of the two FAA-ers. Said Production Director William Redlin, "These two boys were beautiful. A real asset to us, as they are to this place. (both are active in civil affairs). They helped us over some very rough spots. FAA can be proud of them." Hank Schloss, Director of Photography said of Danny, "This guy is cool. He comes on

like he never knew a camera was on him."

Now that the novel experience of moviemaking on a familiar subject has ended, Billy and Danny are eagerly pushing to-

ward their immediate goals of ATCS training and journeyman status in the FSS they have grown with, the one which now has a big role in the reshaping of Arctic aviation.

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