

Call number: 02-00-77

An unidentified ACS representative, Major Browers [Melvin?] talks at Pedro Monument

Summary created by Varpu M Lotvonen

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Notes: Original on 5-inch reel, master copy on CD. Harrie Hughes Collection.

The speaker is talking about ACS [Alaska Communications System] which expanded in 1940-1944 to form [unclear] with 1000 men. They were located at Amchitka, [unclear], Atka, and Kiska. In addition, Department of Alaska Communication was formed, providing communication for the construction of the Alcan Highway. In post-war years, ACS provided improving communication to the civilians and the military in Alaska. In 1947 Alaska was provided the first commercial service over a landline. They established ship-to-shore communication that was important due to large number of ships around Alaska's shorelines. More than 1,200 ships have registered the service.

On 11th of December, 1956 in collaboration with American Telephone and Telegraph Company, ACS built a submarine constructed cable from Washington to Skagway, Alaska. It cost \$22.5 million dollars and \$2.5 was paid by ACS. It could handle 36 [unclear] simultaneous channels of telephone communication. Each telephone channel could handle 18 channels of telegraph. The most recent improvement in long-distance telephone service is the [unclear] of operator call dialing.

The speaker gives an account of ACS's current services: They operate in 48 widely [unclear], the larger populated areas, and they provide long-distance telegraph and telephone service to all governmental agencies and general public. In addition, they have 300 bush stations which are located in isolated areas. Many of the stations are owned by individual miners and trappers, some of them are operated by the State of Alaska and some by Bureau of Indian Affairs. The ones owned by BIA are located in remote Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean locations. The stations operate with radio [unclear] but they handle telegrams and telegraphs. ACS also provides telegraphed money service, [unclear possibly wire?] service for newspapers, radio broadcasting and programs, and many other services.

At 6:16 the speaker says he'd like to tell that Wickersham in 1903 prevailed over Judge Bunnell in [unclear, establish a telegram line? Probably telegraph. Telegrams are typically sent by telegraph from] Fort St. Michael to Fairbanks. That line was activated in town of Chena, south of Fairbanks. Through Judge Wickersham's efforts, [something unclear about Bunnell] they inaugurated a telegram line in Fairbanks. Communication between Fairbanks and Nome, Fairbanks and Valdez, and all the points between was established. Then Valdez-Seattle line was opened in 1904 and Fairbanks was connected to the outside world. The Signal Corps rapidly expanded its services and communications facilities. In 1906 they constructed a 100-foot tower on the ACS grounds and in 1907 they constructed the antennas [unclear]. [Unclear] Cushman Street building [unclear]. In the beginning of World War II, the ACS built a land line from Fairbanks to Edmonton, Alberta in Canada. Alaska Railroad line was built from Fairbanks to Anchorage. That was the time when Fairbanks first got telephones to outside world. In 1947, the ACS begun a program of modernization of all the stations within the system, bringing the system in line with the continental USA. New communications building was constructed in Fairbanks and it cost more than \$2 million dollars.

Today Fairbanks' communications are as modern as in any other part of the world. The improvements have made a large impact on telephone traffic: In 1954 ACS had 539 calls a day from Fairbanks and in 1960 it was 2217 calls a day on average. In 1963 it was expected to rise to 2950 calls a day. In 1970 the amount of Fairbanks originated calls is expected to be 5400. There's been increase in quality and ACS is now installing 9 new [unclear], growing many more long-distance [unclear] to Anchorage, Juneau, Seattle and Ketchikan. In Fairbanks alone, their annual payroll is \$700,000 dollars. In future, ACS is planning on [unclear] and bringing new television programs from the Lower 48. The speaker is talking about direct dialing the numbers versus having an operator dial. Pacific Telephone Company in Seattle recently completed a long-term [unclear] program that cost \$14 million dollars. [Unclear.] [Unclear] television programs to Alaska is not likely in the near future. [Unclear.] Many advances have been made concerning long distance telegrams, telephone and television. Some are in developmental stages, but the speaker sees them being in commerce in the next 10 years. Use of space satellites for long-distance communication may be the answer [unclear].

14:34 [Unclear] recognizes the importance of providing all the services to Alaskans that are provided to people in other states. [Unclear.] ACS's future plans

include improving any and all government lines in Alaska. It's difficult to say what the future of ACS will be. The speaker thanks the audience. [Applause.]

[Unclear talking.]

17:10 Harrie Hughes' voice states that this is a tape-recording is made at the Golden Days Pedro Ceremony on July 22nd, 1961. Then he re-states it a moment later, mentioning also the Igloo no. 4 president, Forbes Baker. [Maybe the side of the tape changed and the second introduction was originally at the beginning of the tape].

[Unclear talking due to high volume of background noise.]

At 25:06 a woman's voice says that their [Pioneer Women's Auxiliary no. 8] Queen Regent is [unclear] and the other ladies serve coffee and doughnuts. Mrs. Zimmerman. [Unclear man's voice says something.]

At 28:10 a man's voice addresses the Pioneers of Alaska, guests, ladies and gentlemen. He's excited about celebrating the people who aided in the growth and expansion of the Fairbanks area. He also mentions the individuals and organizations that helped with it. [Unclear.] As Mr. Baker [Forbes Baker] pointed out, it's worthy to note that the post office, the Federal Judiciary, and the Alaska Communications System all contributed to the exploitation and expansion of Alaska. He wants to especially recognize Major [unclear] of United States Army, retired Signal Corps for his many years of faithful service.

The speaker says he'll conclude with a story, which is a reflection of Alaska's [unclear] communications systems over a span of almost 60 years. The discovery of gold in Klondike in 1896 to 1898 brought the communication systems into Alaska. The communication systems came on heels of the prospectors and others. A requirement was soon placed to the military to establish forts and camps and to return the territory to [unclear.] Subsequently the congress authorized [unclear], establishing the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System, WAMCAT. Work on it was started by General Greely, a dynamic and forceful individual. He came into the territory [unclear]. Fort St. Michaels was given [unclear] and the line was completed in 1901. The line stayed in communication until [unclear]. It was damaged in Norton Sound by ice packs. However, it was put in in total 605 miles in length [unclear] telegraph communication between Fort St. Michael and Fort Gibbon which was an improvement from mail that took 29 days. Then General Greely turned to science of wireless telegraphy [probably wireless

radio] was invented. Captain Wildwood [?] made necessary modifications to adapt radio to arctic conditions. It's believed that wireless telegraphy was used for commercial traffic, [unclear]. In 1901 Lieutenant William Mitchell was sent [unclear]. He later became General Billy Mitchell and he established connections to Valdez and Prince William Sound areas and from there to the Canadian circuit and to the rest of the world. The great length of wire ran in almost uninhabited wilderness and it was maintained by [unclear] based every 40 miles along the line, living in cabins, traveling the line and keeping it safe. During the year 1903, some 105 men maintained the line. By the summer of 1903 the United States connected all the military posts of Alaska to Washington through Canadian government line. [Unclear] system, cities of Nome, Rampart, Eagle, Valdez, Skagway and Juneau. [Unclear] point to point in Alaska. Still, there was no means of communicating with the United States except through the Canadian Circuit. This was not to the liking of the US Army and hence they decided to establish a submarine cable directly from Sitka to Juneau.

At 37:18 the speaker tells about establishing submarine cables: In 1903 Army Cable ship the Burnside was in Philippines and in summer of 1903 the first submarine cable was laid between Sitka and Juneau. It is 295 miles. The same ship returned the following year and laid cables from Sitka to Seattle, which was about 1070 miles. They also put in cable from Sitka to Valdez, which was another 600 odd miles. [Unclear] 1904. [Unclear.] The network consisted of 2128 miles of cable, 1400 miles of land-line and [unclear]. [Unclear] land lines from Washington to Texas. From 1904 to the beginning of World War 2 the system is a story of service [unclear]. [Unclear.] ACS provided valuable service in Nome fire in 1934, and also in providing communications for various American mushers [unclear] later in the period. About incidents like having a moose tangled in the line and so on.

40:46 In the summer of 1940, around the time of World War 2, adequate establishment of [unclear] in the territory of Alaska had been long postponed. [Unclear] ACS expanded [unclear]. [Unclear, only partially intelligible.]

[End of the recording.]