

Real Dreams never Die

By David Lemereis ©

"Hike, hike," 82-year-old Norman D. Vaughan hollered into the dark and windy night. Spurred on by his weary voice the dogs strained against their harnesses and their muscles bulged underneath the thick fur coats as the heavy sled inched forward through the knee-deep snow. Just ahead, obliterated from his view by a blinding curtain of snow dancing wildly in the beam of light shining from the headlamp strapped to his head, lay Eagle Island, a checkpoint three-quarters up the trail of the 1157 mile Iditarod Sleddog Race that runs from Anchorage to Nome across Alaska's most dangerous and unforgiving territory.

After travelling 800 miles and battling freezing winds, blinding blizzards and paralyzing cold temperatures for over two weeks, Vaughan and his mushing partner, 44-year-old rookie-racer Carolyn Muegge finally reached Eagle Island on the evening of March 21, 1987. Numb from exhaustion the two mushers pulled up behind one of the handful of plywood shacks that made up the village when a race official suddenly emerged out of the darkness. "Hi," he said, "I heard on the radio you guys have been scratched from the race." According to a new rule, mushers trailing the race leaders by more than 5 days were withdrawn from the race but neither Vaughan nor Muegge had expected such an abrupt ending of their race.

The verdict struck Muegge hard and she was ready to call it quits. Vaughan, however, wouldn't hear of it. "I'm going to finish what I started," he said. Inspired by his determination Muegge decided to continue the race with him. The following day the two teams mushed on.

Three weeks after the onset of the race and 13 days after Susan Butcher reached the finishing line to win her second Iditarod, Vaughan and Muegge finally made it to the small town of Nome, just above the Arctic circle.

As they mushed into town the crowds lined up along the wet, bare street of Nome. "Welcome to Nome," they shouted and cheered as the oldest contestant to ever run the Iditarod mushed his team underneath the Iditarod finishing arch, being the last but not the least of the 63 mushers that entered the 1987 Iditarod. Vaughan was voted the 'Most Inspirational Musher' of the year by Team & Trail, a publication for the fraternity of dog mushers. The new rule was quickly dropped.

When a reporter later asked Vaughan if he would run the race again, he replied, "Sure. Why not? What's going to stop me?"

Quitting never crosses Norman Vaughan's mind. The 88-year-old tireless adventurer and explorer's life reads like a web of fantastic tales intertwined by endless endurance and determination; the first American to drive sled dogs in the Antarctic as part of the support team to Rear Admiral Byrd's legendary 1928 flight over the South Pole, Olympic competitor, Air Force Colonel in two wars, Arctic-archeologist, successful author, veteran Iditarod sled dog racer. And he's still going strong. "You're never too old to retire," says Vaughan, his beard as white as the snow surrounding his remote log cabin 120 miles north of Anchorage, Alaska

where, together with his 50-year-old wife Carolyn Muegge Vaughan, he spends most of his time mushing dogs. His slightly stooped posture and barely noticeable limp are sure signs of his age. Yet a boyish grin, a sharp mind and mischievous sparkling eyes full of dreams mark the man who still charges through life like a young bull.

Since his first Iditarod sled dog race in 1975 he's entered thirteen times and finished five, the last in 1991. He was 85 years old. A phenomenal feat for anyone his age, but even more so considering that a fused right ankle and a plastic knee - remnants of old race injuries- carry his weight.

Frozen feet and broken ribs never dissuaded Vaughan from re-entering the Iditarod. His critics, however, tried. Several years ago an Anchorage Newspaper Columnist wrote that Vaughan, endangering the lives of the rescue-crews, should hang his sled on the wall and retire. Alaskans bombarded the newspaper with letters supporting their hero. "I've always thought of Norman, taking off from the starting line as an inspiration," wrote one reader.

"You should see all the senior citizens waiting for him in Nome," DeeDee Jonrowe, a musher who finished fourth in the 1989 race, told a reporter in 1990. "I think it's wonderful. I love to see people follow what they do as long as they can."

Others regard his exploits as 'crazy' and characterize it as an 'obsessiveness' verging on a deathwish. His close friends say otherwise. "Death is the farthest thing from his mind, he still has too many things to do in life," says Charlotte Masarik, friend of the Vaughans. "The man is rocket fuel. He simply takes on every challenge with such incredible energy and determination that he lives life to its fullest. I'd go to the bottom of the world with him."

Ignoring practicalities, Vaughan possesses an uncanny ability to concoct what others don't even dare to dream of. There was his 1968 snowmobile trek from Alaska to Boston. On another occasion he gave Pope John Paul II, visiting Alaska, a dog-sled ride and with his disarming wit he crashed President Carter's '77 inaugural parade with a dog team. That year no one represented Alaska in the planned parade and Vaughan thought to himself. "They should have a dog team!" Together with a good friend he loaded a team of huskies on a old, tattered pick-up truck and set out for the long drive to Washington DC.

On arrival he immediately paid a visit to Senator Ted Stevens' office. "Senator, I drove all the way from Alaska to represent our state in the parade with a dog team." The senator asked how he intended to do so without authorization. Always a gentleman Vaughan politely replied: "Sir, I'm sure you can find a way."

He did. Lacking an official number designating Vaughan's position in the parade, the Senator's office came up with a unique 'halfway' solution; number 57 1/2.

"Having mounted wheels on the skids of my sled I waited in a side street with my dog team," Vaughan says. "As soon as Number 57 marched by, I squeezed right in." At President Reagan's inauguration Vaughan officially represented the State of Alaska with his dog team.

Vaughan's zest for life doesn't stop at the 'fun' challenges. When he first moved to Alaska he was a 66-year old jobless man with nothing more than a hundred dollars stuffed in his boots and a pickup truck to sleep in. Undaunted by his precarious

predicament he borrowed a shovel and proceeded to clear snow from restaurants' sidewalks in exchange for a meal. He shoveled with such gusto he soon landed more work than he needed. "When I finally found a paying job I had fifteen meal credits," the Colonel chuckles.

Later when he applied for a janitors job at the University of Alaska his boss doubted whether a 69-year-old man could do the work. Vaughan simply said, "Can I have two mops, please?" Holding on in each hand he marched down the hall mopping both vigorously at the same time. His boss no longer doubted.

Alaskans regard him as the Living Legend and follow his achievements closely. When he drives along the highway passerby's honk at his "Norm to Nome" message on the back of his truck. There's even a baseball-like musher collector's card that reads: "Norman D. Vaughan, The Oldest and the Slowest.", which suits him fine because his idea of winning a race is to finish what he starts. "When you have a goal, you stick to it," Vaughan says.

Norman Dane Vaughan was born in December 1905 in Salem, Massachusetts. His father ran a successful leather tanning business and manufactured children's- and woman's shoes. His mother, a devoted family woman from New England stock, raised him and his brother and sister on a dairy farm in Hamilton, Massachusetts. Captivated by a book on Eskimo travels by dog sled, twelve year old Vaughan and his childhood buddy, Eddie Goodale, fabricated harnesses out of rope to fit their fathers' Collie and German Shepherd. Hitched in front of a sled one of the two boys hollered: "mush!".

"Both dogs turned around and walked over to us wagging their tail," Vaughan recalls, grinning. "They didn't understand, they just wanted to be loved."

The boys persisted and finally learned one boy had to run ahead of the dogs to make them pull the sled.

In school Vaughan thrived on sports. He drove himself hard and by the time he became a senior at Milton College he made varsities of wrestling, basketball, track and football.

Following Milton he went on to study at Harvard University where spent much of his time playing football. Just like his father he never drank or smoked. Yet, at the university some of his close classmates invited Vaughan to join the fraternity Club but refusing to drink his way through the initiation rites he declined their offer. "I'm very sorry, but I'm going to stick to my principles," Vaughan told them.

Because of his total commitment to sports Vaughan's grades began to fall. A concerned dean proposed that he should volunteer for the Mission of the legendary Sir Wilfred Grenfell, a medical missionary who served the Natives living in the remote regions of Newfoundland and Labrador by dog sled. If the dean received a good report of 'Norman's serious and industrious work' he'd allow Vaughan to return to college as a dropped freshman. Vaughan jumped at the offer and under the tutelage of the Mission's chief dog-driver the young Harvard dropout learned quickly to be an expert dog driver himself. For eight months he drove Doctor Grenfell's sled around Labrador and watched the humanitarian Doctor care for the native population in all their educational- and medical needs.

He returned to Harvard and little eventful happened until one warm September evening a newspaper headline caught the 22- year old student's attention. 'In large, bold letters I read five magic words that would change the direction of my life: BYRD TO THE SOUTH POLE', Vaughan writes sixty years later in his book 'With Byrd at the Bottom of the World'.

Commander Byrd, already famous for his flight over the North Pole, wanted to repeat a similar feat over the South Pole. Vaughan knew at once he wanted to join the expedition.

The next day Vaughan went directly to Byrd's house in Boston but a maid barred his way to the Commander. "Nobody gets by me without an appointment!" The door to his dream slammed shut in his face.

Depressed because a chance of a lifetime had slipped through his fingers he walked away when a sudden, bright idea struck him. 'If I can't get past front door I'll just have to enter through another door.'

The other door was W.A. McDonald, a renowned journalist who knew Byrd from the articles he'd written about the explorer. "Sir, please help me. I have to go with Byrd to the South Pole." Skeptical at first but amused by the brash, young man who'd barged into his office minutes earlier, the reporter listened to what Vaughan had to say. Finally, when Vaughan offered to work an entire year for free, preparing for the expedition with no obligation to Commander Byrd, the reporter offered his help. Two days later Byrd gave his consent.

Vaughan dropped out of Harvard, said good-bye to his family and moved to New Hampshire. For a year he slept in a uninsulated gazebo braving the cold winternights and having no income scrounged leftover meals at a lodge while preparing dogs and equipment for the expedition under guidance of Arthur Walden, the chief dog driver chosen by Byrd. He also talked his friend Eddie Goodale and Harvard classmate Freddie Crocket to indulge in the adventure.

Just before the expedition set sail his father drove up to New Hampshire to say good-bye. They talked for a few minutes and then his father unexpectedly embraced Vaughan and placed something in his hand. Vaughan glanced down and saw father's prized gold Hamilton watch. "I want you to have it."

Vaughan knew how much his father treasured the watch and in his book he writes: "It represented a level of affection for me that my father could never put into words. Through many lonely times on the ice, especially during the long nights, I thought of that priceless gift from my father. It always made me feel a little closer to him and my Mother."

In the fall of 1928 the expedition set sail from Boston to Antarctica onboard the Norwegian whaler 'Ross'. During his days at sea Vaughan eagerly volunteered at every possible opportunity. He worked in the Black Gang shoveling coal in the blazing hot boilers of the ship, secured dog cages while waves washed over the deck and stood up to 36 hours straight in the crows nest on the lookout for ice bergs. And finally, on Christmas day, 1928, fifteen months after he first read the words "Byrd to the South Pole" he set foot on the Antarctic ice in a place Byrd later named 'Little America'.

His volunteer efforts onboard the whaler hadn't gone unheeded. On arrival

Commander Byrd walked up to him and said, "Vaughan, hitch up a team. You're going with me."

"Yes, Sir!"

Vaughan was elated. The Harvard drop-out had become the first American ever to drive dogs on the frozen continent.

Though the three men party only planned to go a short distance they prepared for the worst taking along sleeping bags, tents and food. The wind howled over the barren land and the party soon discovered the deceptiveness of sight in the polar region. Under the Arctic summer sun that never dropped below the horizon icy ridges seemed miles away though the sled would suddenly hit it. Mountains of snow turned out to be a small hill less than thirty yards away.

After several hours of searching for an appropriate camp location Byrd got off the sled and said, "We'll set up Little America here!"

The party started to dig into the ice, cutting and piling big square blocks of ice six feet high. Byrd then unfurled an American flag and said, "Shipmates, today, December 27, 1928, I name this Little America. May this flag wave here forever!" Vaughan was choked with emotional silence. He felt proud to be an American and honored to take part in the Byrd expedition.

Three months of hard labor followed. The dogteams hauled 650 tons of equipment over the white desert covered with pressure ridges and dangerous crevasses to Little America, the base camp where 42 men would spend the long, lonely winter. Though Vaughan savored every minute of the brutal life in the Arctic, not every one shared his joy.

With the shortening of the daylight hours 50-year-old Arthur Walden suffered from the severe isolation of the camp life and became severely depressed. He blamed Vaughan for his predicament; lacking leadership capabilities, he had lost his position as chief dog driver to the ardent, young man. The situation grew worse as time went on. One day Braathen, a Norwegian expedition member motioned Vaughan to go outside with him. "Walden is out to get you."

"I know he doesn't like-"

"No. It is now different. He carries a gun. He is planning to shoot you."

Fearing for his life and nowhere to hide from his aggressor, Vaughan pitched a tent a little way from the camp and each night, for the two months following, he sneaked out of camp to the safety of his bivouac.

It hadn't occurred to Vaughan to burden the Commander with his problem but eventually it took care of itself when the polar sun reappeared and the preparation for the upcoming trip of the geological party kept most men, including Walden, too busy to brood.

Not only Walden suffered from the isolation. The official expedition photographer, Ashley McKinley, grew so depressed he slept nearly twenty hours a day. Byrd noticed and invited McKinley to his quarters. "Mac, I need a man for highly secret mission."

"What kind of job is it?" the photographer asked.

Byrd explained he needed a tunnel dug behind his quarters but never told McKinley exactly what he intended it for. McKinley perked right up and offered his services. Very cleverly, Byrd had created a purpose for the photographer who

worked so diligently on his 'secret' mission his depression soon lifted.

"Byrd was a great leader," Vaughan says of his mentor "He never asked anyone to do what he wouldn't do himself and I hope some his qualities rubbed off on me."

On August 20, 1929, eight months after the expedition had landed on the ice, the sun returned. The men had been holed up in Little America for the duration of the winter, preparing for the expeditions that lay ahead. And now the first rays of sun finally brought respite from their months of isolation. The men's faces brightened and they walked around the camp with renewed energy. From then on they closely followed the lengthening daylight hours. Though the sun had appeared it didn't bring relief from the cold during the months of August and September. They measured temperatures ranging between 40 (F) below zero to minus 66.

While each day the sun grew closer to full bloom the preparation for the geological party, under leadership of Dr. Larry McKinley Gould and with Vaughan in charge of the dogs was set in motion. On October 29, 1929 a line of dog sleds with six men on skies behind them set out from Little America to reach the South Pole as close possible before Byrd's flight a month later. The geological party would serve as a rescue team in case Byrd's flight to the Pole went awry.

Mike Thorne, the most experienced skier of the party, guided the men on their route south. Skiing up to a half a mile ahead of the party he carefully scrutinized the terrain for the hidden crevasses. Falling in would mean certain death. One time, as they descended a glacier they had climbed the night before, Mike Thorne suddenly stopped dead in his tracks. He gestured wildly signaling the party to stop at once. Danger lay ahead. Following closely behind Vaughan yelled "Haw!" to stop his dogs but the sled started to skid and slid directly toward Thorne. Using all his weight he leaned on his gee pole and managed to turn the sled on his side, stopping sled and dogs less than 2 feet short off Thorne. A gaping crevasse, four feet wide, stared Vaughan in the face.

The hardships the party endured weren't only of a physical nature.

One night along the trail Vaughan's favorite dog, Belle gave birth to several puppies. Like previous expeditions to the South Pole the geological party relied heavily on sacrificing the weaker dogs to feed the others. Vaughan knew Belle couldn't survive but the thought of disposing this affectionate dog tore at his soul. For two days he watched Belle pull as hard as any of the other dogs. Yet at night she collapsed from the cold and utter exhaustion and unwilling to let any of his dogs suffer Vaughan killed her and wept.

In the third week of the geological party's trip a heavy wind picked up just as they traversed a badly crevassed area. The party halted and quickly set up camp. The worsening blizzard struck them so hard they no longer could tell whether the wind came from above or howled low above the ice, whipping the snow into a confusing frenzy. The men found refuge in their tents. A few hours into the storm Vaughan volunteered to venture outside and feed the dogteams. With a rope tied around his waist he crawled out of the tent stretching his hand out to feel his way through the blinding white-out. He tried to stand up but the wind struck the six-foot tall, 200 pound Vaughan down to the ground. At last he found a sled, groped around blindly and found the dogfood. He couldn't see the dogs buried under a thick blanket of

protective snow but stumbled on them by good luck. When he tried to feed them, the dogs refused. Vaughan gave up and retrieved his way back to the tent by the rope tied around his waist. Inside the tent Vaughan collapsed into his sleeping bag from utter exhaustion. 36 hours later the storm finally subsided.

Despite the harshness of the environment the trip progressed according to plan. When Byrd made his 1600 mile flight to the South Pole the party caught their first glimpse of their objective, the Queen Maud Mountains.

On his flight back, Byrd flew over the men at low altitude and dropped a small package by parachute from the plane. Inside they found notes from their friends at camp and the cook had included a prune pie and angel food cake. The men devoured the delicacies with much gusto.

On December 8, 1929 the geological party set out to climb the Queen Maud Mountains. Gould, the leader of the geological expedition was searching for hard to find patches of bare rock. After several hours of climbing Gould suddenly yelled, "There, there!" and he rushed forward, bent down and picked up a rock the size of a hand. It was yellow sandstone. "Finding this stone," he said, "Has made every hardship worthwhile."

The stone proved that the Antarctic mountains were actually part of the earth's crust that had been pushed upwards. That night Gould sent Byrd a radiogram: "No symphony I have ever heard, no work of art before which I have stood in awe gave me quite the thrill that I had today when I reached out after that strenuous climb and picked up a piece of rock to find it sandstone. It was just the rock I had come all the way to Antarctica to find."

After this great discovery the party turned eastwards to venture into unknown land Byrd had skirted on his earlier flight and claimed for the United States. On December 21, 1929 the party reached the farthest point east of Little America where no man had ever set foot on before. They celebrated the momentous occasion in silence by building a six foot tall stone cairn and placing the American flag attached to a skipole on top.

Once again, emotions swept over young Vaughan. The last 16 months had taken him from college to this triumphant moment in Antarctica. Vaughan clutched his layered clothing and he felt the watch his father had given him on his departure. It gave him a strong feel of his father's presence and he wished he could actually be here to share this proud moment.

On their returning trip to Little America the party searched for the cairn the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen had built on his history making trip to the South Pole in 1912. After a long search near a mountain Amundsen had designated the men found the cairn. With trembling hands Gould pulled the rocks aside and pulled out waterproof package containing a sealed can and several boxes of matches. He pried off the lid with a knife and the men curiously gathered around him as he pulled out two small sheets of paper. One paper listed the names of Amundsen's expedition members and the other dated 6-7 January 1912, stated in Norwegian he had reached the South Pole on December 18, 1911 and if something might happen to him on his return to basecamp he wanted this to be message to the King and citizens of Norway.

Gould who knew a little Norwegian copied the note, added a brief description of his own geological party and placed the notes inside the can, keeping the original. Years later Gould presented the King of Norway with Amundsen's note. It is now displayed in an Oslo museum.

The geological party set out on the journey back to basecamp and after covering more than 1500 miles by dog sled in 87 days, the party returned to Little America. One month later, just before leaving the ice Vaughan looked back. Thrilled he'd been part of history-making but sad the adventure which turned the college boy into a man had come to an end he thought, "I'll never have another chance like this again, not ever in my whole life."

Life after the Antarctic was hard on the young explorer. Despite a successful job selling advertisements and a lovely wife and son, he was unhappy. The adventurer longed for the outdoors, the excitement of dogs straining against their harnesses and the harsh life of the Arctic.

For a brief moment he relived the thrill of adventure when he represented the US with a dog team in the 1932 Olympics in Lake Placid, New York but in general life seemed dull. Then Byrd, planning another South Pole expedition, invited him to be on the party to spend the long Antarctic winter in isolation. Overjoyed, Vaughan gladly accepted. For nine months he organized and raised funds for the expedition when Byrd suddenly announced he planned to winter alone, reaping all the glory for himself. It hurt him deeply but instead of excoriating his idol like some of the other expedition members, Vaughan graciously resigned and returned to the life of a salesman.

The United States early involvement in WW II brought Vaughan back on the path of adventure. On July 16th, 1942, 36-year-old Air Force Lt. Major Vaughan stationed at Goose Bay, Labrador Canada oversaw the refueling of a B-17 bomber when Colonel Benjamin F. Giles summoned him to his office.

The Colonel introduced Vaughan to Major Crocker Snow, the Commanding Officer of the North Atlantic Ferrying Command. "Major," Snow said staring out of the window overlooking the airfield. "Yesterday a squadron of two B-17's and six P-38's bellied on the ice along the East Coast of Greenland."

The day before the squadron had taken off from BW 8, an US airfield at Sondre Stromfjord, Greenland, enroute to Iceland. Several hours into the flight blizzard conditions and conflicting radio reports forced the planes, low on fuel, to land along the Greenland's coastline, an area regularly patrolled by German submarines.

"We've got to get those 25 airmen out but there's no ski-equipped plane available," Snow continued. "Any suggestions?"

"Sir," Vaughan replied. "We can get them out by dog team."

"How? You don't have a team here."

"Sure, but I have one in Boston. There's also a Navy man stationed on the east coast of Greenland named Freddie Crockett. He and I drove sleds through crevassed terrain on the geological trip of Rear Admiral Byrd's 1929 expedition to the South Pole. The two of us can rescue the airmen."

It took Major Vaughan several days to fly to Boston, retrieve his dogteam, sled and camping equipment and fly via Goose Bay to the BW1 near the little town of

Narsarsuaq, Greenland.

Crockett, stationed near the town of Angmagssalik on the eastern coast of Greenland some 90 miles north-east of the downed squadron, decided not to wait for Vaughan. Instead he borrowed a sled and a dogteam from the local Eskimo's who ferried him, together with two Air Force skiers, in a fishing skiff to a drop off point, some ten miles from the airplanes.

On the seventh day the airmen heard the rescue party was on its way. The crew proceeded to destroy all secret data aboard the aircraft's in preparation of their departure. Before the day was over the 25 jubilant airmen saw the rescue party coming over a snowy rise. They greeted their rescuers with shouts and hollers. The Lost Squadron had been found!

A few days later after debriefing the jubilant pilots, it was discovered one of the B-17 pilots neglected to destroy the Norden bombsight. So far the Germans had failed to get their hands on one of these bombing devices - whispered the nation's biggest secret- which allowed Allied bombers to accurately hit their targets from great heights. The device was so secret that a canvas cover shrouded the bombsight at all times when the planes were grounded. And now an undamaged Norden Bombsight left behind on a bomber lay in full view of German submarines!

High Command sent Vaughan and Air Force skier Max Demarest out to bring the bombsight back to safe hands. The two men retraced the trail marked by Crockett but a buffeting rainstorm forced them to make camp for three days. As soon as the weather let up the skier returned to warn the Coast Guard Cutter of their delay while Vaughan mushed on alone. Utterly exhausted from the long trip over hazardous terrain Vaughan reached the plane. With his last bit of strength he unbolted the bombsight before he laid down in his sleeping bag on the floor of the plane. As a precaution against enemy intrusion he pointed his gun at the door opening. Just as he dozed off a terrible thought jolted him awake "What if Max sticks his head through the door and I shoot him by accident!" Adrenaline coursed through his body and he jumped up. Without delay he loaded the device on the sled and took off. One last time, on his way to meet Demarest and rendezvous with the Coast Guard vessel, Vaughan glanced back at the planes in the distance. "I hope I'll never see them again!"

In the latter days of WW II Vaughan, by then a Lieutenant Colonel coordinating all search and rescue operations in the North Atlantic, heard it took four POW's to manhandle one stretcher with a wounded on the European battle front. "It's winter over there. We can get those casualties out much faster and more efficient by dog team," he volunteered to his senior Officer. A message was forwarded to Washington but red tape caused Vaughan's suggestion to reach General Patton only a month later. "Send the dogs!" was the immediate reply. Vaughan, 17 drivers and 209 dogs flew to the Battle of the Bulge but it was already too late. Vaughan's efficient use of dogs pulling 'ambulance sleds' to bring the casualties to safety was short lived. Spring had already set upon the Battlefield. Melting snow turned the ground into a thick muck and the sledrunners got stuck.

After the war Vaughan continued his career with the Air Force. Though he enjoyed the military life, his love for dogmushing, the cold and all it implied prevailed and

after 14 years he resigned from the Air Force as a Colonel. He went into business selling snow machines in New Hampshire and in the seventies Vaughan moved to Alaska and mushed dogs during the day while he worked night shift as a janitor until at age 74 he was forced into mandatory retirement.

In 1981, 38 years after Vaughan last saw the downed airplanes on the Greenland ice-cap, he received an unexpected phone call at his home in Anchorage, Alaska from Colonel Crocker Snow, his Commanding officer during W.W.II.

"Norman," he said. "I read in the newspaper two airplane enthusiasts are searching for those W.W.II planes on Greenland. You might want to call them."

Vaughan followed up on the call and Richard Taylor, an Atlanta based architect and Pat Ebbs, president of Ebbs Air Service invited 74-year-old Vaughan to join their expedition. Only a few P-38's still fly today and Taylor and Ebbs thought it was simply a matter of finding the planes, sweeping the snow of the wings, fly them out of there and restore them to their original state.

In October 1981 the three men party landed at Sondre Stromfjord, Greenland. The Taylor and Ebbs never considered nature's reluctance to reveal her hidden treasures. All along, blizzard conditions prevented the three man expedition from reaching the last known site of the Lost Squadron. On their last attempt they flew into a gale. "I can land and drop you off," the pilot told the three men. "But I'll never find you again."

Disillusioned after spending gobs of money and much of their spare time, Taylor and Ebbs packed up their gear to return to their jobs in Atlanta, Georgia. They'd given up. Vaughan, however, didn't seem affected by their failure and walked around whistling cheerfully. Taylor tried to ignore him but the whistling finally got on his nerves. "Don't you realize we've failed!" Vaughan snapped to attention. "No, we flew into the teeth of that gale and we went as far as a man can go. We haven't failed until we quit!"

"Norman is my hero," says Taylor, "If it wasn't for his never-ending energy, humor and resilience I would've bagged the whole idea of retrieving those planes that first summer. His resilience became even more apparent after we returned from Greenland. It changed my life."

Several days before their departure to Greenland on their first search for the airplanes doctors fused Vaughan's right ankle and two of his friends drove him straight from the hospital to the airport where Ebbs and Taylor waited. When he arrived he hid his crutches in the car, never mentioning a word about the ankle operation. Not until after the expedition returned to the States two weeks later, did the two other two men find out. "But you didn't limp?" Taylor asked.

"I don't limp when people can see me," was the cheerful reply. Astonished, Taylor thought of his own crippled leg. Ever since he hurt his leg in a motorcycle accident ten years before, he limped. He hardly noticed it anymore. Hobbling around on his bad leg was simply part of his gait but now he told himself. "If he doesn't, I won't either!" Taylor never limped since in the company of others.

Vaughan's words and attitude towards life had a profound effect on the two other men and it became the thrust behind the Greenland Society Expeditions long search for the airplanes.

Summer after summer the three men and as many as 30 volunteers returned to the ice cap, searching fruitlessly for the lost airplanes until in 1988, with the aid of

subsurface radar, they finally spotted the Lost Squadron buried under the ice. Nearly four decades of snowstorms, creeping glaciers and freezups had buried the gems under 256 feet of ice and snow. It seemed a nearly impossible barrier to overcome but the elated men combined their knowledge and expertise and before long attacked the problem with all sorts of modified contraptions. They chiseled, chainsawed, converted a car-engine cleaner into a steam probe, scraped a 16 foot hole with a modified grain-silo auger and eventually, in 1990, succeeded to melt a 42 inch shaft down to one of the airplanes with the aid of the Super Gopher, a device resembling an inverted trash can holding copper tubing fed with hot water from boilers above. Two summers later, in 1992, the Greenland Expedition Society brought a P-38 in nearly perfect condition piece by piece to the surface. In 1994, 52 years after Vaughan walked among the Lost Squadron lying abandoned in its frigid grave, the P-38 will take to the sky again.

Though it appears Vaughan effortlessly rides with the tides, at times he finds himself awash in the turmoil of life. Three broken marriages, including a son and a daughter, proved his adventurous spirit unsuitable to the rigors and demands of domestic life. Or so it seemed until several years ago, at a party in Atlanta, Georgia he met Carolyn Muegge, a business woman specializing in adventure trips for executives and a divorced mother of one. "Why don't you come up to Alaska and help me train dogs for the coming Iditarod?" Vaughan asked. She did. "In the few weeks I was up there," she says, "I fell in love with Alaska, the Iditarod and Norman." A year later she dropped everything in Atlanta, Georgia and married all three. She has since entered the Iditarod several times herself.

His wife, Carolyn helped Vaughan realize a dream he has nurtured for over sixty years and what may amount to his greatest achievement yet. At the end of 1993 the explorer planned to return to the Antarctic, with his wife and three other expeditioners. He wanted to retrace 500 miles of the 1928 Byrd expedition by dog team and on his 88th birthday climb Mount Vaughan, a 10,320 foot peak named after him by the Admiral, before a treaty signed by the various nations governing the Antarctic bans the use of sleddogs on the continent by April, 1994.

Though the couple spent nearly two years fundraising and preparing for the expedition they were \$150,000 short of their fundraising goal when the expedition members, 20 dogs, 12,000 pounds of supplies and 5 tons of dogfood, prepared to leave Alaska On October 25, 1993 on an airplane flight for Punta Arenas, the steppingstone to the Antarctic continent at the southern tip of Chile, South America. Despite the financial setback, the expeditioners left for Antarctica in high spirits. A National Geographic filmcrew went along to film the entire expedition. On arrival in Punta Arenas they revised the original route Vaughan would mush with the dogteams to Mount Vaughan, cutting costs.

From the onset of the expedition more than 200,000 children and adults followed the expedition's 'live' broadcasts through a telecommunications network linked to computers all over the United States. "We hoped to spark students' interest to study the two polar regions and their environmental impact," Vaughan explains. The response of the children asking questions routed directly through the computer

network set up by Hamline University's Center for Global Environmental Education Program to Vaughan in South America and later on the Antarctic ice, was overwhelming. The questions ranged from curiosity about the environment, "What kind of insects or rodents are found in Antarctica? to concern about the Antarctic environment, "What do you do with all your garbage?". But mostly children sought inspiration from Vaughan's relentless pursuit of his dreams. "What words of encouragement would you offer me?", a boy missing all of his right foot but yearning to become a mountain climber asked.

"Hugh Herr is a climber with no feet or lower legs. He paints his wooden legs like brightly striped socks with climbing shoes! You are only limited by your thoughts," Vaughan replied. Another child asked, "What inner drive pushes you?"

"I am driven to overcome challenges and seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The only death you die is the death you die, every day you don't live," Vaughan replied. Shortly after, on Thursday, November 26 Vaughan's words were put to test when the first of eight DC6 cargo planes ferrying fuel, dogs, gear and several expedition members crashed 9 miles short of Camp deGanahl base camp on the Antarctica ice, badly injuring Jerry Vanek, the expedition's veterinarian.

Vaughan was in such a shock to hear Vanek had been injured that it wasn't until December second before he posted his first letter since the crash on the computer network, "Twenty frightened huskies were released from their broken cages. Veterinarian Jerry Vanek lay in a heap still strapped in his chair which had broken from its footings. The remaining travelers subconsciously thanked God that they were still alive. Our four engine DC6 had crashed short of the runway. On board were all our expedition supplies: tents, human-food, dog-food, sled and one of the National Geographic snowmobiles.

Jerry was sledged to their tents. His clothes were ripped off. His major injuries treated, and a sedative given. Splints were then applied.

Our expedition had suddenly stopped. The first work was to get the survivors back to Punta Arenas. 27.5 hours after the accident, the rescue plane took off for Chile. Jerry was hospitalized and put intensive care. One or two members of our team has been at Jerry's bedside constantly on both 2 hour and 4 hour shifts.

My feelings are coming back, but very slowly. It was a shock that our expedition members had been so badly injured. This was an awful experience. But a setback like this only strengthens the determination to continue."

Besides receiving a hard blow that dampened their spirits, the crash and the rescue had cost the expedition more than \$ 200.000. Continuing seemed nearly impossible. After careful deliberation Vaughan decided to skip the 500 mile sleddog ride to Mount Vaughan. Instead, his wife, two other team members, a National Geographic filmcrew and himself would fly to the base of Mount Vaughan and fulfill at least part of the explorer's dream by climbing the mountain. But money shortage, weather delays and logistical problems continued to besiege the expedition. They couldn't afford the \$300.000 or more most companies charged to ferry the team members by aircraft to the frozen continent. The month December went by without any real hope of reaching the mountain. Vaughan, however, wouldn't give up on his dream and wrote, "Yes, these are anxious days. It seems

that we are on bungee jumps every day. I never can tell if I'm on the gravity down fall or the skyward rebound. Our constant change of plans reminds me of Theodore Roosevelt's speech in 1899 when he said, 'Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious moments even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.'

And then, during the waning days of 1993, hope was restored when the expedition contracted a private carrier to fly them for a reasonable price to Antarctica. On January 4th, 1994 Vaughan and his team flew to Patriot Hills, Antarctica. The following two weeks foul weather grounded the expedition waiting in Patriot Hills to fly the base of Mount Vaughan. Then on January 17th the team sent the following message, "Things are looking up! The weather is starting to improve and Vaughan is scheduled to leave at 6:00 p.m. Chilean time. Vaughan has only 9 days to climb Mount Vaughan as he and his wife are scheduled to leave the continent on January 25th. The airline company is anxious to break camp for the season since the weather has been getting worse."

But nature intervened. Two days later a message posted on the computer network read, "Vaughan has postponed the Mount Vaughan Antarctic Expedition until December, 1994. The expedition continues to be weather-bound in Patriot Hills, Antarctica and has no time left to safely attempt to summit Mount Vaughan."

But the explorer hasn't given up on his dream, yet. "When I return next December and I reach the summit of Mount Vaughan on my 89th birthday I want to deliver a message to all senior citizens. 65 is not the moment for mandatory retirement. Throw away your armchairs, remain busy, get a hobby and live longer younger."

Perhaps his remarkable accomplishments bring him fame but more important, his youthful exuberance, his perseverance and his genuine interest to share his life with others makes him into the inspirational figure he is today. A born story teller, he's lectured all over the country captivating audiences from all ages with his tales of determination. Intrigued by his exploits with Admiral Byrd in the twenties, a group of students of the Faith Middle School in Fort Benning, Georgia produced a ten minute video account of his daring adventure in the Antarctic. For nearly a year the students devoted most of their spare time on the project. One student even overcame dyslexia in order to read background material on the expedition. Similarly, his book 'With Byrd at the Bottom of the World', a detailed and vivid account of his experiences with the 1928 expedition to the South Pole inspired Dr. Jerry Vanek, the expedition's veterinarian to write several years back. "I want you to know your book touched me deeply. Much of your personal life paralleled mine... I read the last chapters and I didn't feel alone. I knew someone else knew. Thank you."

Best of all former Governor of Alaska Jay S. Hammond describes the largess of the Living Legend when, at age 69, he wrote, "When I finally grow up, I hope I'm just like him."