

## Obituary for Harmon R. "Bud" Helmericks



Harmon "Bud" Helmericks, Arctic explorer, bush pilot, and author, died in Wickenburg, Arizona on January 27, 2010.

Bud was born and spent his childhood on a farm in Illinois. He studied engineering at the University of Arizona before migrating to Alaska in 1940 with his first wife, Constance, to take up a life of adventure and exploration. When not out living and exploring in Alaska's wilderness, Bud worked for the Alaska Railroad, at the docks in Seward, and served in the Army Corp of Engineers in the mid 1940's. Two daughters, Jeanie and Annie, were born to Bud and Connie during Bud's early years in Alaska.

Bud was inspired by Vilhjalmur Stefansson's early Arctic exploration and writings, and soon his early years of exploring and survival in Alaska's wild places produced books written (or co-authored) by Bud. One of Bud's later and most famous books is *The Last of the Bush Pilots*, the story of Alaska's flying frontiersmen and their daring and courageous exploits to bring improved transportation and services to a vast and wild land.

As one of Alaska's most famous bush pilots himself, Bud holds the Award of Merit, Territory of Alaska, for "Special Service in the Arctic Regions." He couldn't tell you exactly how many Alaskan flight hours he had, because he tired of adding up his flight hours after logging over 27,000 hours. He crossed thousands of miles of mostly uninhibited wilderness in small Cessnas on wheels, skis or pontoons. Besides personal family flying, Bud hauled fish to Barrow, carried freight and mail, moved hunters and fisherman throughout the Arctic, and guided for numerous industrial pursuits. Bud was the *Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award* honoree for the Fairbanks Flight Standards District Office in 2004.

In 1953, Bud married Martha Morlang and together with son Jim, they established a homestead on the Colville River Delta, located on the North Slope of Alaska. Sons Mark and Jeff soon joined the family and the children were raised and home-schooled on the edge of the Arctic Ocean. Bud established a flourishing commercial fishing operation, became a renowned big-game guide (Alaskan Master Guide #4), and continued his adventures as one of the first Alaskan bush pilots. Becoming known for his Arctic knowledge and experience, Bud became a consultant for Eastman Kodak, Eddie Bauer, and other companies working in cold weather regions. He was an industrial guide for northern Alaska's early oil exploration, starting with guiding Northern Transportation Company's barges loaded with Sinclair drilling equipment and supplies from the Mackenzie River across the Arctic Ocean into the Colville River. He was also a consultant for British Petroleum during their early push into the Prudhoe Bay region. Western Geophysical used Bud to orchestrate their first seismic "cat-train" operations across the Arctic prairie. Hundreds of flights of equipment and supplies were flown into an ice runway on the

river in front of the homestead, the cat-train assembled, and Bud taught the crew how to safely operate and travel in severe cold and unfamiliar territory.

Bud was an avid builder, and constructed his main home and complex on the Colville River, but also built homes in the Brooks Range and Fairbanks. His "Arctic Tern Fish-Freight Company", established in the early 1950's and named after his Cessna 170 the *Arctic Tern*, went on to include guiding, air taxi work, and environmental services.

Throughout Bud's life in Alaska he documented each day in a journal. He was always writing and produced many magazine articles on Alaskan life and experiences, about animals, cold weather survival, and other outdoor topics. He was a spokesman for conservation and prudent game management, and studied these subjects throughout the world, having traveled extensively. In 1999, Bud received the Alaska Professional Hunters Association Andy Simon - Hal Waugh Award, Alaska's big game guide's highest honor.

For many years, Bud lectured about the Arctic on the old lecture circuit throughout the Lower 48 states for several months each winter. He has been a member of the prestigious Explorers Club since 1947. He produced movies for the lectures, plus contributed to some major films, including one produced in 1970 titled *Edge of the Arctic Ice*, a feature length movie about the Helmericks family and life in the Arctic.

He is survived by his wife Martha Helmericks, brother Jim Helmericks and his wife Jemmi; children: Jim and Teena Helmericks, Jeanie Aspen-Irons and Tom Irons, Annie Helmericks-Louder and John Louder, Mark and Lori Helmericks, and Jeff and Susan Helmericks; and 11 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren.

Condolences may be sent to Martha Helmericks, P.O. Box 275, Salome, AZ 85348.