

[Mrs. W. P. Winchell]

S241 - KNO DOP

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

NAME OF WORKER Harely Anderson ADDRESS [??]

DATE May 14, 1938 SUBJECT Flying in Alaska

1. Name and address of informant Mrs. W. P. Winchell, Verdigro, Neber.
2. Date and time of interview Nov. 14, 1938 9:30 A.M.—4:30 P.M.
3. Place of interview 10 miles west of Verdigro
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant No body
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompany you None
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Mrs. Winchell lives with her husband on the farm, the children are not at home. The house is small and not modern but kept very clean. Mrs. Winchell will permit her picture to be taken if it is wanted. [??]

FORM B Personal History of Informant

NAME OF WORKER Harley Anderson ADDRESS [??]

DATE Nov. 14, 1938 SUBJECT Flying in Alaska

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT Mrs. W. P. Winchell

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1. Ancestry Irish
2. Place and date of birth [Osoocla?] Nebr., Oct. 23, 1880
3. Family Husband, six sons and four daughters
4. Place lived in, with dates [She?] has lived in Nebraska all her life. She lived in Knox County all but a few years that she lived in Boyd County.
5. Education, with dates Parcehial school which she attended six years 1890-1896 Married 1901
6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates Mostly farm work and house keeping
7. Special skills and interests Gardening, loves flowers and liked to raise chickens, geese and turkeys.
8. Community and religious activities None
9. Description of informant Features have characteristics of Irish. She is short of stature weighing 160, mentally alert, reliable and inclined to hard work.
10. Other points gained in interview She has lived on the farm they live on, since they were married. She is unusually interested in he children Mrs. Winchell had one son in the World War, he enlisted and spent 3 year in China. She is also interested in her son Oscar Winchell who is [flying?] in Alaska, known as the flying cowboy.

FORM C Text of Interview Unedited)

NAME OF WORKER Harley Anderson ADDRESS [??]

DATE Nov. 14. 1938 SUBJECT Flying in Alaska

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NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT Mrs. W. P. Winchell

Little [Known?] Local Hero

Oscar Winchell known as the flying cowboy a sobriquet he won when he piloted bucking bronchoes in Montana and Wyoming before breaking into the aviation game was born and raised in Knox County. Went to school in Knox County and worked on this fathers farm till the other boys was od enough to take his place. Then he went out into the world to shift for himself going to Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona working on ranches and hunting in the mountains spending the winter in Arizona coming back to Nebraska a year later and working in the hay fields in Western Nebr.

and breaking bronchoes in South Dakota and Wyoming and Montana at last he came back to Nebr. telling his mother he was going to learn to fly so he could hunt coyotes from the sky. Telling her catching coyotes from an auto was to slow and not enough sport so he went to South Dakota and found a flyer and took his first ride through the clouds and decided to learn to fly. He took a few lessons bought an old plane which him and his brother Harvey bought and was on his way in the field of aviation. He flew old crate without any trouble and soon got a job with the Watertown air lines selling his old plane and taking out some shares in the company. His brother also got on the ground as a mechanic, he flew here till the company went broke that left him broke to losing all he had but he soon was flying again him and a partner bought a new plane and flew every day till his partner got sick and was taken to a hospital leaving him alone again. Hard times was coming on and flying was poor causing them to lose the plane. By this time Oscar was doing stunt flying and among the best. After he lost his plane he got a job flying for some one in Bellefourshe South Dakota here her flew about a year then left going to the West coast and to Seattle Washington boarding a boat and going to Alaska where he had a hard time to get a job as a pilot. But finally succeeded and was given a ship to fly mail passengers from [Ceppercenter?] to Fairbanks. He encountered many hardships on [some?] of these flights at one time having a forced landing that broke the prop of the

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ship the snow was eight foot deep and he was a stranger in that country but he was lucky having with him a old native and a pair of snow shoes the man got out and started for a trading post up the river 9 miles and returning with a dogteam and sled taking with him a blacksmith and some tools to take the propeller off. After taking it off they left the plane and went back to the post and stayed over night returning the next day to find that a hard wind had overturned the plane. One wing broken this took 3 more days to fix the wing. In all he was gone a week and no one had heard from him. When he returned every one was glad to see him back. Winchell said Coppercenter was but a small place a postoffice and a trading post [being?] about all that was there. Pilot Winchel knew Slim Williams and saw the famous dogs grow up that Williams drove to the World fair at Chicago. Later Winchell went anchorage where he flew for the McGee airways. He flew to many interesting placed, Point Barrow is one place that he flew to before Wiley Post lost his life there, the told of staying a week in an Eskimo Village while being forced down in a storm and of living with them for a week in their dugouts under ground he told of them having only caught a few ton of fish when they could have caught hundreds of tons saying a man could catch a thousand pounds every day when they was running by using a trap. Hetold of them eating needle fish when they were out of other fish. He said most of them had never tasted bread or flour their chief food being fish and reindeer from which they make their cloths he said they done their own tanning. Pilot Winchell was one of the first to get to Wiley Posts plane when he went down during his second [hop?] around the world.

Winchell sent his mother pictures of the crippled Wennie Mae also of Wiley Post and the crew that repaired the ship.

When the city of [Hope?] was destroyed by fire on September 18, 1934 aid was rushed by plane to the sticken city Pilot Winchell, known as the flying cowboy was the man called on for the job the first plane to be dispatched for the purpose of assisting the stricken [city?] [None?], he left anchorage in the morning flying in a Stinson cabin pontoon plane taking with him radio operator Bob [Scearce?] who was dispatched by U. S. Signal Corps and Chiefs of Washington-Alaska Tellegraph and radio service he also took another

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passenger with him Winchell headed direct for [Nome?] over the shortest route he was the first man to fly this short cut route going via McGrath and across the Yukon to [Nome?]. [A nerve?] racking tale was told by Winchell about how fire had to be put out on many cases containing gasoline until the blaze shifted and got too hot on the side of the building. Winchell praised the coolheaders of there who [?] all night trying to confine the fire. [????????????] He sent his mother many pictures of the fire at [Nome?]. Pilot Winchell had made many mercy flights across rough mountains and in bad weather once getting lost on a 400 mile mercy flight to [Kittyhawk?] a tiny Eskimo Village across the mountain west of anchorage while bringing a boy for the brain operation. Another time he flew through a storm from Bethel when he reciped word of a crash at Goodnews Bay. Where Pilot Bob Carlson was bound on an errand to mercy when he went to his death in a raging storm at Goodnews Bay mining company where his ship went in a tailspin from a height of 500 feet when caught by cross winds during a third attempt to land in a storm to aid a sick man, Carlson had a passenger Joy C. Johnson manager of a mining company. Johnson died one hour and a half after pilot Winchell arrived he arrived at 7 P.M. The crash occurred at noon, he brought with him a government doctor that he picked up at Akiak a flight of a few minutes up the river of Bethel, the doctor gave the injured man aid who was not seriously injured. The next day the bodies were placed on a trailer and pulled with a tractor across the nine miles of tundra to pilot Winchells ship. Where he had landed after maneuvering over the field where Pilot [Ourlaan?] was killed. Pilot Winchell had landed on a strip of beach after deciding conditions were too hazardous to try to land at the mine. He took the bodies to flat where bad weather make it advisable to change his course of flight to Fairbanks the next day he flew to anchorage with the bodies on another flight fifty pounds of dynamite left anchorage by airplane one morning under special permit issued by the bureau of air commerce Pilot Winchell make the flight with orders while the high explosives was being transported. He was to avoid flying over any community and to maintain high altitude. the dynamite was placed in the seat beside him so that he could throw it out of the plane under unfavorable landing conditions, he took the dynamite to [Teketna?] for spring mining operations he also took a light plant and other freight into the interior. On

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December 2, 1934 he became marooned in the wilderness for nine nights, having picked up passengers at interior points he flew through rainy pass on his way to anchorage when he was at the head of Happy river his plane began to encounter heavy clouds, a warm spell was prevailing over most of Alaska but in this place it was cold enough to cause sleet, over Happy river snow began to gather on the wind shield making it practically [unvisible?] snow and sleet on the wings made it unsafe so Winchell circled over the river and found a [bar?] where he landed at noon. They had no trouble in landing on the bar there being no snow. The weather was so thick that they did not dare to take off, they had with them but little food and one sleeping robe and a 30-30 rifle, the passengers got out and looked for a place to stay they were David Strandburg, anchorage resident, Wanio Puntello well known placer operator of flat and cripple creek and Mrs. Hasel McClung hardy young woman of Juneay a half mile over the hill after crossing atreacherous stream 20 feet wide on logs placed across it. They came to an old roadhouse that had [?] been used for years, in this they found some old blankets but the house was unfit to stay in over night.

[They?] stayed in an old cache that was used by trappers years before. It was bad shape but they spread a reindeer skin on the floor and placed their bed roll on the reindeer skin to keep out the dampness. In the old roadhouse they found an oil tank stove on this they cooked and dried their clothes. Their food was streched out and nothing was wasted, each day the went tot he plane to [wait?] for searching planes. The morning they awoke to find 30 inches of snow on the ground, their plane being on wheel made it impossible to take off, the party attempted to tramp down the snow to make a runway but they were unable to get up enought enough speed and were using up gas to no advantage and no gas could be wasted if the plane was to fly into the next supply base. On the fifty day Pilot Johnny Moore flying form anchorage located the overdue plane.

He flew low and was attempting to land, the party waved to Moore not to attempt to land in the deep snow without a ski-mounted plane. On the sixth day a storm prevented searching planes from going out. Each day they crossed the stream having difficulty in crossing but

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they wished to be near the plane most of the time. They cut distress letters out of spruce trees making them 200 feet long when layed on the snow. These are the words they spelled "Hungry-need food and skis." The skis were for the plane, by taking the wheels of the skis could be put on. The large words could be seen several thousand feet above the ground by searching planes. The party spent the days and nights as best they could, sleeping in the cache and cooking in the old roadhouse. The food was soon gone and game had to be shot but the snow was to deep to wade without snow shoes but something had to be done so Oscar and Puntilla took the big rifle and went out and shot some grouse Oscar said every time they shot a bird all they had left was the legs. these went into a sort of mulligan that they make form some old beans and rice that they had [?] found before the beans and rice were found in some old tin cans also some vinegar and soda. These limited rations with the five grouse Winchell and Puntilla shot was might welcome they had no luxuries such as milk, salt or sugar. On the eighth day their rations were all gone and they were getting very hungry and were losing strength. The relief plane came to them on the tenth day flown by two Pilots Roy Dickson and Chet [Molean?] it was ski-mounted plane, they brought food with them that has been prepared for the castaways. Pilot Winchell and his party was given the ski-mounted plane, and after eating and being refreshed they flew the ski-plane back to anchorage getting there at dusk arriving 10 or 15 pounds lighter the men wearing long shaggy beards. All the men praised Mrs. McClung for her trying ordeal while lost in the wilderness. They also praised Pilot Winchell for the way he brought his ship to safety and for the attempts he made in trying to get the plane off the ground until it was seen all efforts were futile. They were fortunate to extra footwear with them such as wool socks and boots. After a good nights rest Pilot Winchell flew a ski-mounted plane back the next day taking skis with him for the marooned plane.