

## ARCTIC

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## FREDERICK A. MILAN (1924–1995)



Frederick A. Milan

Frederick A. Milan died on 28 January 1995 after a series of strokes and related illness of several years. Many friends, colleagues, and students have pleasant memories of the good humor, good will and intelligent perceptions so characteristic of this long-time Alaska resident. His activities around the polar regions of the world are well known and fondly remembered. Fred was Professor Emeritus of Human Ecology and Anthropology at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. He was elected a Fellow of the Arctic Institute of North America in 1980.

Fred's ability to experience so much enthusiastic living in one lifetime tells much about his personal philosophy. His fascination with exploring the world around him started at an early age. Shortly after he graduated from high school in Waltham, Massachusetts, he worked during the summer of 1942 in the forest fire lookout tower, no longer in existence, on Mount Garfield in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Continuing in his new interests, he found employment in the winter of 1942–43 as a weather observer for the United States Weather Bureau at the Mount Washington Observatory. He also worked from time to time for the Appalachian Mountain Club hut system based at Pinkham Notch, at the foot of Mount Washington. These were the beginnings of a lifelong enthusiasm for weather-watching, mountain life and skiing.

In 1944 Fred joined the American Field Service and went overseas as an ambulance driver on the British Army Burmese front. He had previously been rejected by his draft board

as physically unfit for military service because of a disability resulting from an earlier encounter with polio. That condition was not limiting for Fred, as it might have been for a less enterprising person. He served with distinction in Burma and returned home in 1945.

That autumn he went to work on his uncle's logging operation in Maine, and while there Fred participated in one of the last river log drives. In 1946–47 Fred returned to the Mount Washington Observatory, leaving later to assist in establishing the weather station at Resolute, Northwest Territories, Canada. This episode marked the origin of an enduring interest in the Arctic and its peoples. Having saved up a few dollars, he bought a secondhand Jeep in 1948 and headed north to enroll at the University of Alaska, where he spent the next four years. His work as an assistant on the Harvard Peabody Museum Anthropological Expedition to the Aleutian Islands in 1949 heightened his interest in the Arctic. It also impressed upon him the utility of studying Russian for understanding the history of the region. Fred worked in the summers of 1950 and 1952 as an archeological assistant at Deering and Kodiak, Alaska. He was a weather observer on the Juneau Icefield Research Project in the summer of 1951. His major scholastic interests were in anthropology and linguistics, and he graduated in 1952.

In 1953 Fred began several years of association with the former United States Air Force Arctic Aeromedical Laboratory near Fairbanks. His duties consisted in developing arctic survival techniques and studying the effects of cold exposure. About that time he took up flying instruction. In later years he acquired an instrument rating and a glider pilot's license.

1954 was a busy year for Fred. He participated in the rescue of an injured climber on the Muldrow Glacier, Mount McKinley. For that effort, he was awarded the United States Army Patriotic Civilian Service Medal. That summer he and other Arctic Aeromedical Laboratory personnel participated in the Mount Wrangell Research Project, a high-latitude cosmic ray study. His role was as a collaborator in a study of high altitude acclimatization of the team members. Transportation to the research site near 14,000 feet was by Piper Supercub aircraft, and it was among the highest routine landings of that time. In 1956–57, Fred would overwinter at the International Geophysical Year Little America Base in Antarctica. There he studied the physiological effects of cold exposure.

Fred undertook graduate study at several institutions: the Universities of Oregon, Wisconsin and Copenhagen, and the London School of Economics. His linguistic skills became well developed, and he was especially interested in the Inuit language and culture. He spent one winter in northern Sweden traveling and living with a nomadic Sami family. Back in Alaska in 1956, he began his close association with the Inupiat Eskimo village of Wainwright, Alaska. His ability to speak the language enabled him to gain the villagers' confidence and elicit genealogical information, and endeared him to the people. These activities led eventually to successful completion of his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees at the University of

Wisconsin. It was there that he met his wife, Leda, a fellow student of anthropology. They raised three children: Arthur, an engineer; Paul, an attorney; and Ruth, an airline pilot.

Fred's professional life took him to many parts of the world to study native populations and their adaptations to harsh environments. In 1957 and 1959, he joined international teams doing physiological studies of temperature regulation in Australian Aborigines and Chilean Alakaluf Indians. Other ventures took him to Greenland, northern Canada and the Soviet Union. In these and related activities, he successfully bridged the disciplinary boundaries of anthropology and environmental physiology. They were landmark investigations, and they set the style and example for similar studies in other parts of the world. Fred published extensively on the topics of his interests, and he imparted his views of field research and investigative philosophy to his students.

In the 1960s Fred played an important role in establishing a worldwide study of northern peoples as part of the Human Adaptability section of the International Biological Program. His energetic initiative for this study led to his being appointed chairman of the four-nation (Canada, Denmark, France and the United States) Eskimo Study Program. Fred was the editor of the volume generated by results of the program, *The Human Biology of Circumpolar Populations*, published in 1980 by Cambridge University Press.

He was a longtime advocate for multidisciplinary study of the needs for health care delivery and for the regular international exchange of information about circumpolar health problems and research efforts. In 1967 Fred, Dr. C. Earl Albrecht and colleagues in Alaska and other parts of the United States, Canada, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Greenland and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics organized, with the support of the Arctic Institute of North America, the first International Symposium on Circumpolar Health. The symposium was held at Fairbanks in July 1967, and these meetings have continued at three-year intervals at various circumpolar locations. Fred was the president of the Sixth International Congress on Circumpolar Health held at Anchorage in 1984. In recognition of his contributions to the circumpolar health movement, he was awarded the Jack Hildes Medal, provided by the Donner Foundation of Canada, at the Eighth International Congress on Circumpolar Health

at Whitehorse in 1990. He was also a charter member (1980), president and board member of the American Society for Circumpolar Health.

Fred's contributions to circumpolar health interests were recognized by the creation in 1991 of the Albrecht-Milan Foundation of the American Society for Circumpolar Health commemorating the enterprise and devotion of these two prominent leaders of the organization. Memorial donations can be sent to: The Albrecht-Milan Foundation, American Society for Circumpolar Health, Post Office Box 92419, Anchorage, Alaska 99509-2419. The announcement of the Foundation included the following remarks:

The information that Dr. Milan shared in his stories over the years will be remembered long after the papers he has written are yellow with age. Most every story he told brought humor and humanity into the science. He was a believer in technology transfer long before it became a catch phrase. He always worked to assure that what was learned in the academic and research centers far from the polar regions came back to the people in a form that they could understand and use. He took the serious rigor of technical science and made it into a real world lesson from which we all can take advantage and with which we can have fun. (Hild, 1993)

During the 1970s and 1980s Fred was a faculty member at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. He was a much-respected teacher, and he was noted for conveying his enthusiasm for scholarly work and his respect for the people of anthropological study to students and colleagues. The Fred Milan we knew was a genuine free spirit—he looked at the world through eyes wide with perceptive curiosity and interpreted it with kindness and good humor. We have been made richer and wiser by sharing in some of his generous and stimulating life.

#### REFERENCE

- HILD, C.M. 1993. The Albrecht-Milan Foundation of the American Society for Circumpolar Health. *Arctic Medical Research* 52: 98–99.

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