

Alaska Adventure; The Story of the Alaska Orthopedic Appliance Company



A. O. and Julia Rogers enjoy a brief rest
at their Bird Creek Cabin.

The Alaska Orthopedic Appliance Company begins its fifth year of service to Alaska with a 20-fold increase in the number of patients treated. The company was started in a converted garage in Anchorage in July, 1953 as a part-time enterprise, while the owner, Mr. A. O. Rogers was employed by the Health Department. In August, 1954, the property was purchased at the present location, a store front built on the existing building, and stocked with children's orthopedic shoes.

The polio epidemic of 1954 brought about a heavy load of brace work and it was necessary for Mr. Rogers to resign from the Health Department to work full time as an orthotist and prosthetist. In a short time growing business made it necessary to enlarge the shop, for aside from the government brace shop at Sitka, this is the only facility of this type in the territory.

Mr. Rogers began his training in 1938 as an apprentice in Clyde Auger's Arizona Brace Shop at Phoenix, Ariz. He later worked at the A. L. Schenk Orthopedic Laboratories in Los Angeles, the Grunow Clinic Brace Shop at Phoenix and R. E. Huck Company in San Francisco. For a short time during the war he was in charge of the government brace shop at Finney General Hospital at Thomasville, Ga. Mr. Rogers is a Certified Orthotist and Prosthetist and attended the Suction Socket School for Prosthetists at UCLA Medical Center.

The Rogers family consists of his wife, Julia, three sons, Burl 14, Ronnie, 12 and Chris, 20 months, and each does his share in making the business successful. Mrs. Rogers works full time in the office, does most of the

Alaska Facts—The World of the Rogers

Alaska is twice as large as Texas, covering 586,000 square miles. Present population of the territory is 222,100.

The coast line of Alaska is longer than that of the continental United States. Anchorage, Alaska's largest city, has more airplanes per capita than any other city under the American Flag.

The smallest distance separating North America from Asia occurs between Little and Big Diomed Islands; on Little Diomed the picture of Abraham Lincoln adorns the schoolhouse, while on Big Diomed, three miles away, the schoolhouse contains the portrait of Karl Marx.

There are more than 3,000 miles of improved highways, three-fourths of which are all-weather roads.

The temperature extremes at Fort Yukon have been recorded as high as 100 degrees F. and as low as —78 degrees F. The high temperature *exceeds* that of the maximum of Palm Beach, Fla. On the average, it is colder in Milwaukee and Duluth than in Anchorage.

Flying conditions in Alaska are generally better in winter than in any other season.

Approximately one-fourth of the residents of Alaska are Aborigines—Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts, of whom the Eskimos are the most numerous.

Alaska has no snakes, also no poisonous plants or weeds. The Alaska moose is the largest of its kind on earth, the bulls attaining a weight of more than 1,400 pounds. The Alaskan Brown Bear is the largest carnivorous animal in the world today.

fitting of children's shoes, and serves as a female attendant for the women patients. At present Mr. Rogers is assisted in the shop by Eugene Fleishhauser, apprentice orthotist, Charles Beth, apprentice prosthetist and Burl who, when not in school, does the shoe corrections and is an apprentice orthotist and prosthetist.

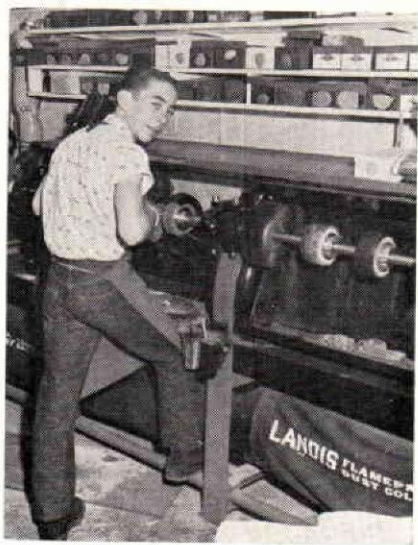
The shop is a fully equipped, modern facility with the latest methods of fitting and construction being used. All A.K. Limbs are made with the UCLA Quadrilateral Sockets and aligned with the Berkeley Adjustable Leg and Duplicating Jig. Plastic resins are now used exclusively instead of rawhide in covering limbs because of the moisture and extreme cold. Suction Socket Valves are found to work satisfactorily to temperatures of 35 degrees below zero, at which temperature condensation tends to form and freezes the valve open.

Mr. Rogers is a licensed pilot and owns a private plane, an Aeronca Sedan which is equipped with floats for summer, wheels for spring and fall and skis for winter flying. This is almost a necessity in order to cover Alaska's 586,000 square miles which sprawl over an area almost as great as from New York to San Francisco, east to west, and from Seattle to Mexico, north and south.

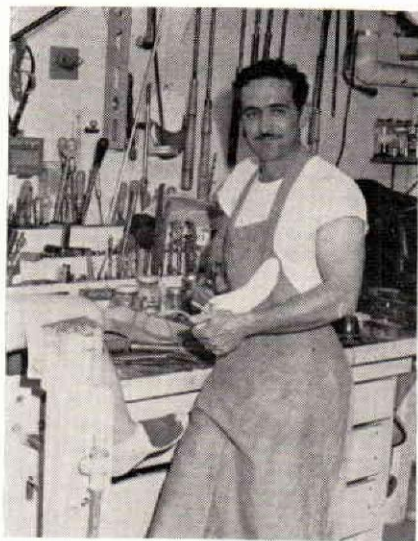
In addition to flying to Fairbanks for regular clinic hours he also occasionally flies patients to and from remote areas and goes to surrounding towns to attend various orthopedic clinics. Transportation presents problems in this huge territory with only one railroad going from Seward to Fairbanks a total of 540 miles, and although the larger towns and cities are connected by highways, air travel is the answer when traversing great distances. Many of the outlying villages are accessible only by dog team and air, and while



The Modern Facility at Anchorage



Burl Rogers, age 14, apprentice orthotist-prosthetist, doing shoe finishing.



Charles Beth, apprentice prosthetist, at the leg bench.



Eugene Fleishauer, apprentice orthotist at the leather bench.



A. O. Rogers, a licensed pilot, flies his own plane, to serve patients.



Burl and Ronnie Rogers report "Good Fishing." →



"A. O." and his exhibit at the Territorial Medical Association Convention at Juneau, February, 1956.

the Rogers do not have a dog team, their Dachshund is in the process of presenting them with a miniature edition.

Brace work is done by prescription only and the Alaska Orthopedic Appliance Company has had an exhibit of appliances and services available at all the meetings of the Alaska Territorial Medical Association since 1954. In addition to doing work for military personnel through the Medical Supply Offices on the military bases, the services are extended to various other agencies including the Alaska Department of Health, Alaska Native Service, Alaska Crippled Children's Association, Polio Foundation, Veterans Administration, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of Public Welfare.

With the population of the territory over 205,000, 34.00 of which are Eskimos, Aleuts and Indians, Mr. Rogers has patients from such distant places as Point Barrow, Nome and Dutch Harbor as well as many of the more remote villages and towns.

The business has grown from a beginning of 10 to 15 patients a month to more than 200 with the work being general in nature and covering shoe work, braces, limbs, supports, trusses, etc. Mr. Rogers feels this increase is partly due to keeping abreast of the new developments in the field, and plans to continue to attend all annual meetings of the OALMA—despite the time and expense involved which is well justified.