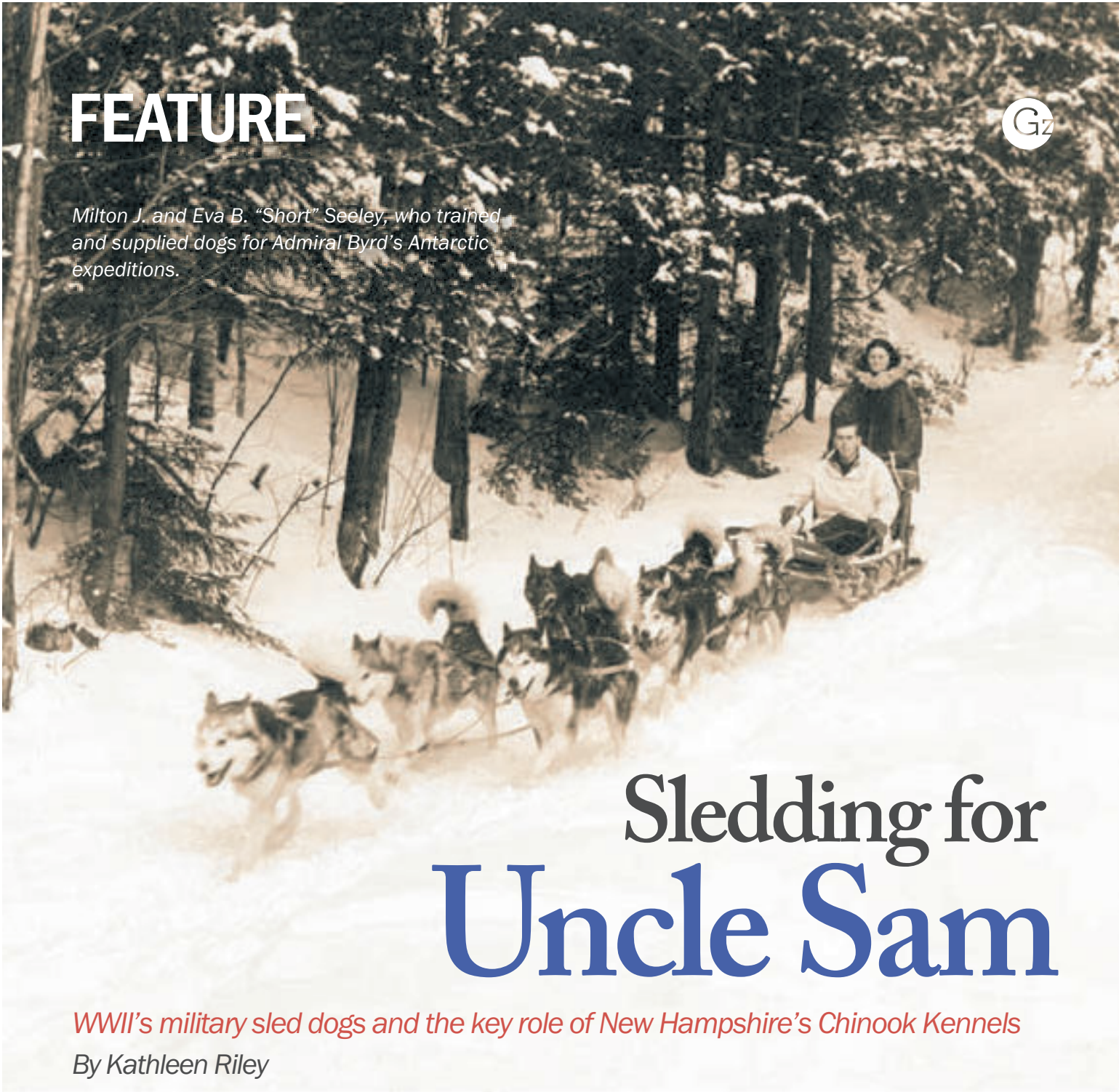


# FEATURE



Milton J. and Eva B. "Short" Seeley, who trained and supplied dogs for Admiral Byrd's Antarctic expeditions.



## Sledding for Uncle Sam

*WWII's military sled dogs and the key role of New Hampshire's Chinook Kennels*

*By Kathleen Riley*

Nestled at the edge of the White Mountains in Wonalancet, New Hampshire, is Chinook Kennels—an ideal spot for raising and training sled dogs. It is considered the

birthplace of U.S. military dog sledding.

Military use of sled dogs became a reality in the early years of World War II. When the Quartermaster Corps selected Chinook

Kennels to provide dogs and troops for military operations, the dog drivers, trainers, kennel masters, and dogs all simultaneously became “government issue” (GI).

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*Arthur Walden and his famous dog, Chinook, in 1922*

The U.S. Army had used sled dogs in Alaska since the early 1900s, though only through contracts with local drivers for specific needs and a limited time. As far back as June 15, 1926, a War Department technical regulation (#1380–20) noted that military funds, when requested from the Quartermaster General through proper channels, could be used to

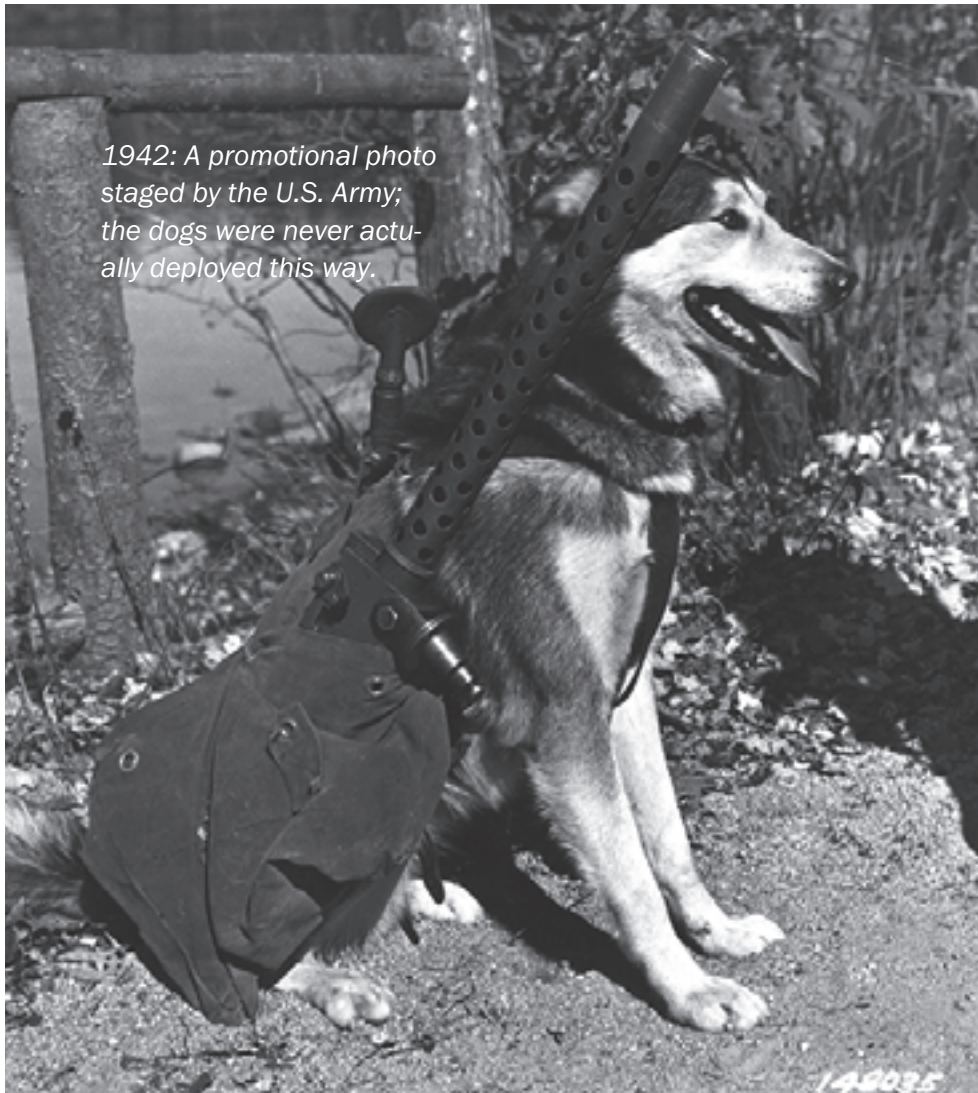
purchase sled dogs.

Arthur Walden, the founder of Chinook Kennels, had been to Alaska in 1896 during the Klondike Gold Rush and had used dog teams to move freight. Walden had become a master of this method of travel. When he returned to New Hampshire, he acquired several dogs for his team. One was a large, yel-

low mixed-breed male, Kim, whom he bred to a descendant of one of Admiral Robert E. Peary's Greenland Huskies, Ningo. The resulting sled dogs were known for their tremendous power, endurance, and friendly dispositions. Walden named one of the pups Chinook after the lead dog (a half-breed MacKenzie River husky) he'd had to

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*1942: A promotional photo staged by the U.S. Army; the dogs were never actually deployed this way.*

leave behind in Alaska.

Chinook was an exceptional lead dog, and Walden enjoyed showing him off to visitors by standing on his front porch and giving Chinook and the team he was leading commands as they worked out in the field.

Walden continued breed-

ing these dogs for many years, naming the breed itself Chinook. Walden and his Chinooks became the impetus for New England dog-sled racing. In 1924, he founded the New England Sled Dog Club, which still exists today. Walden won many races during this

era and drove a dog team to the summit of Mount Washington, the highest point in New Hampshire, a feat unknown in those days.

Because of his reputation in New England, and despite his age, in 1928 Walden became lead dog driver and trainer for Admiral Richard E. Byrd's Antarctic expedition. He acquired, bred, and trained dogs for a year, assisted by Norman D. Vaughan, Freddy Crockett, and Eddie Goodale. These men later became military dog drivers, renowned for using dog teams to find and rescue pilots downed during World War II.

When the Byrd Antarctic Expedition arrived in Antarctica, the team members immediately put the dogs to work. All the dog teams broke numerous records for the weight per load and the number of loads carried. Walden's lead dog, Chinook, pulled freight on the expedition, even though he was over 12 years old by that time.

## FEATURE



1943: David Armstrong  
with the "Cream Team"

### ENTER THE SEELEYS

Before leaving for Antarctica, Walden partnered with Milton J. and Eva B. "Short" Seeley, whom he met in 1924 when they purchased a Chinook pup. In 1928, they moved to Wonalancet. Seeley, a chemist, developed a diet to sustain dogs during the rigors of the upcoming

Antarctic expedition. Those formulas were the basis for modern commercial dog foods.

Walden returned from Antarctica in 1930 in outstanding debt, despite his wife's resources and the Seattle bank savings he gathered during his Yukon Gold Rush years. The 1929 stock-market

crash and bank failures had destroyed both their fortunes. Upon his return, Walden found his wife, Kate Sleeper, needing help running Wonalancet Farm. While Walden was on the Byrd Antarctic Expedition, Kate's incapacity due to memory issues had resulted in the Seeleys obtaining a power of attorney, moving

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*Recruits enroute to the Camp Rimini War Dog Reception and Training Center near Helena, Montana*

her into a small cottage on the property, and leasing the farm to Walter Jones. Exactly how this came about is not known. Walden came home to find the farm occupied by Jones under the terms of a lease so strict that he could not access any of his belongings that were stored there.

As a result of the partnership with Chinook Kennels, the Seeleys trained and supplied all the dogs for subsequent Byrd Antarctic

expeditions. Becoming close friends with the Admiral, they ultimately built an entrenched reputation as sled-dog experts.

### THE GATHERING

In 1942, the Quartermaster Corps selected Chinook Kennels to gather dogs and drivers for military operations. There were many reasons for this choice. Paramount was Seeley's friendship with Byrd. In addition, New

England had become the nucleus of recreational dog sledding at a national level. Many people who had worked with Seeley during the Byrd expeditions kept in touch with him years later, thus Seeley could refer to the Army Personnel Section to men who had experience with sled dogs. Several had already been drafted, including David W. Armstrong Jr., Robert W. Brown, and Garfield W. Dicey. All three were

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*Another Army publicity photo:  
“Machine guns were never again  
mounted on dogsleds.”*

transferred from their current military assignments to Eastern Remount Headquarters at Fort Royal, Virginia, then sent to Chinook Kennels in October 1942.

The military men were housed with residents and ate their meals at a boarding house, since no military housing was available. Richard S. Moulton was also drafted into the U.S.

Army when he returned from the 1939 Byrd expedition. He was initially assigned to Baffin Land but was later sent to Chinook Kennels, where he spent several years preparing dogs for Antarctic expeditions before his trip to the South Pole.

With all his experience, Moulton oversaw men and dogs at the kennel. Several months later, he was

assigned the same job at the newly established Camp Rimini, Montana.

### INNOVATIONS

Dog training became more innovative as the number of dogs in the kennel grew. Lacking snow, the men stripped an Austin automobile chassis to train teams. Dogs were assembled into teams as soon as they arrived. One matched

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team of eight light-yellow huskies became known as the Cream Team: Jack, Jill Jr, Saucey, Darkar, Nome, Malala, and Jill Sr. David Armstrong trained the Cream Team, then shipped to Camp Rimini, Montana, and later to Camp Hale, Colorado. These eight-dog teams were based on an army conception that teams should consist of seven dogs and one spare—a standard later revised to eight dogs and one spare. Since there was never a “spare” in reality, it was a team of nine dogs.

Decisions that Seeley and other kennel employers made during this period affected the entire U.S. Army sled dog program. Standardization of dog teams was one of the changes; equipment was another. Most equipment was chosen and acquired based on successful use during the U.S. Antarctic Expeditions. The low-back draft harnesses that became standard mili-

tary issues were refined from the original Chinook Kennels design. These harnesses, known as the Siwash harness, were tested extensively by Russians on Dixon Island, Siberia, and by Byrd’s explorers in Antarctica. The harness is constructed of one-inch-wide military-cotton webbing and padded with half-inch-thick wool felt that is sewn and riveted at all the stress points. The Siwash neck-yoke design places most of the strain of pulling on the dog’s chest and shoulders. A wooden spreader-bar prevented side traces from chafing the dog’s flanks. All the harnesses were handmade and individually sized.

The sled used extensively at Chinook Kennels was the basis for most sleds developed and built later by the military during World War II. It was a five-stanchion combination sled and toboggan, initially created near the kennels by Arthur King and called the

Wonalancet sled, after the town. Since it had been used successfully in the Antarctic, it was originally considered ideal for military use with dogs. However, as the sled was more widely used in the deep snows of the Rocky Mountains, it proved inadequate.

Most training of the dog teams happened in a large, open meadow about six miles from the kennels along a creek bottom called the Whiteface Intervale. Armstrong would crack the 25-foot whip along the team’s left side while commanding the dogs to *Gee* over to the right. They moved to the right to escape the whip-crack. Cracking the whip on the right side came with a *Haw* over, which made them move to the left. With practice, the dogs followed verbal commands alone.

### DOG-AND-PONY SHOW

In January 1943, soldiers from Fort Peppercell, Maine, visited Chinook

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### 9,500 Years of Service

A study published in *Science* magazine indicates that present-day sled dog breeds and their cold-climate adaptations stem from a common ancient Arctic ancestor that diverged from other dog lineages more than 9,500 years ago in Northeast Asia.

These ancient dogs co-adapted with their human counterparts to the cold, northern regions, where they were used much in the same way as they have been by Arctic peoples over the thousands of years since—as important hunting companions and for pulling sleds great distances across the harsh, frozen and often unforgiving landscape.

The tradition of dog sledding is worldwide and has been practiced by Arctic peoples and the same group of dogs for millennia. However, the Arctic is rapidly changing environmentally and culturally, threatening traditional dogsledding cultures with extinction. What’s more, increased interbreeding between sled dogs and other non-Arctic dogs is putting the Arctic breeds at risk of



Alaska, c. 1915

disappearing in their ancestral homeland.

Despite being one of the most unique and culturally important groups of dogs, very little is known about the sled dog’s genetic origin and evolutionary past.

“Given the great diversity of dogs in the world, sled dogs represent such a small part, with only a few breeds and individuals, however they have been paramount for the Arctic side of human history and are truly genetically unique,” says the study’s lead author, Mikkel-Holger Sinding, a researcher at the University of Copenhagen.

Kennels for a publicity performance. Troops bound .30-caliber machine guns to the dogsleds. With a gunner and an assistant

gunner wearing white parkas for camouflage, teams were paraded around the grounds so newspapers and newsreel photographers

could take promotional pictures. As part of the propaganda, the gun crews unhooked their dog teams from the sleds, donned gas

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masks, and theatrically propelled the sleds through the smoke produced by smoke grenades. They also fired live ammunition across the intervalle into a hill for photographers' benefit. The operation was strictly for propaganda, public relations, and photographs for publication and various periodicals.

The notoriety was good public exposure for Chinook Kennels, the Army, and the Dogs for Defense program.

Dogs for Defense was a World War II U.S. military program in which the military asked pet owners to donate their pet dogs to the war effort. The dogs were trained and used for guard and patrol duties. To encourage donations, the dogs were deprogrammed and returned after the war.

Machine guns were never again mounted on dogsleds. This technique might have been used if the opposing force's planned invasion of Norway had happened,

since dog teams had been envisioned working with the First Special Service Force and commando operations. But all subsequent versions of dog transportation manuals included machine guns and ammunition as combat load freight carried by dog teams.

### THE CHINOOK LEGACY

Shortly after the publicity event in January 1943, the entire Chinook Kennels delegation was shipped to Camp Rimini. Forty dogs in their shipping crates, harnesses, sleds, and dog food were loaded aboard a single railroad car with Richard "Dick" Moulton, David Armstrong, and Bob Brown along to supervise. Dogs were allowed to run loose in the car for exercise during the trip.

Finally, the dogs and gear were offloaded at the Helena, Montana, train depot and put into trucks that arrived at Camp Rimini on February 3, 1943.

Seeley's official business

with the army ended soon after the dogs and men arrived at Camp Rimini. Seeley did one personal inspection tour of the sled dog facility at the camp to ensure adequate equipment was available for training dogs and operating the kennels. Milton Seeley died in 1944, shortly after he returned home to New Hampshire.

Chinook Kennel's association with the military was a brief episode. Still, the expertise and influence generated by its founder, Arthur T. Walden, and former employees guided the entire military sled dog program throughout the war. Supplying sled dogs for all of Byrd's expeditions established Chinook Kennels as the most authoritative and knowledgeable in the United States.—**K.R.**

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*Kathleen Riley is vice president and GAZETTE breed columnist for the Chinook Club of America.*

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