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From the "Ouachitonian": Ben Blocker, Greg Bryant, Sean McKinney and James Renshaw



*By Anna Roussel*

December 22, 2021

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at [newsbureau@obu.edu](mailto:newsbureau@obu.edu) or (870) 245-5208.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – *Previously published in the 2021 Ouachitonian yearbook*

While most people were stuck in quarantine for the summer, a few students opted to spend their time in the last frontier.

Juniors Greg Bryant, James Renshaw, Ben Blocker and Sean McKinney spent nearly two months on salmon boats in Alaska. Just when they thought they would be having an uneventful time off, their plans changed within a matter of days.

"It was all thrown together pretty quickly," explained Bryant, a junior finance major from Springdale. "A lot of it had to do with the virus. As soon as we got the call saying we had the job on a Saturday, they asked if we could be in Alaska by Monday."

As the rest of the country debated mask mandates and saw case numbers rise, life on the boats remained normal for the crew; as normal as life on the water could be for four guys from Arkansas. After a two-week quarantine period, boats could fly a yellow flag signaling that their crew was COVID-free. The voyagers quickly learned that life on the sea was much different than life on the mainland.

“It was very much a culture shock coming back,” said Blocker, a junior physics major from Little Rock. “Everyone was wearing masks, some places were closed, and there were all these specific rules of what you’re supposed to do. When we were up there, we had no service and didn’t hear about anything that was happening; it was a complete 180 twist.”

The boats the four journeymen were on were not fishing boats. They were tasked with weighing newly-caught salmon, taking their temperatures and supplying fuel and groceries for the fishing boats. Blocker described their job as being the “glorified middlemen.” The hardest part of the job, for all of them, was the unpredictability. While Bryant, Blocker and McKinney stayed on the same boat the entire summer, Renshaw was moved almost every week.

“I never unpacked the whole summer; I usually got a max of 10 minutes’ notice when I was about to leave,” said Renshaw, a junior business major from Little Rock. “There was one time when I was woken up in the middle of the night to someone telling me the boat was there, and I didn’t even know I was supposed to leave.”

Even though the hours were long, and the work was monotonous, the young sailors still found a way to have fun and build good relationships with each other and the crew. Random supplies around the boat were used to do curls and other workouts, and they even had a pull-up competition spanning most of the summer. At one point, Bryant and McKinney attached a swing to a crane that was 25 feet in the air, but it did not last long after their superiors discovered the shenanigans.

“There was a lot of free time, so we got to spend a lot of time together and have some good talks,” said McKinney, a junior nutrition and dietetics major from Little Rock. “We watched a lot of movies and played a lot of card games, but the food was honestly the best part.”

*From left: Ben Blocker, Greg Bryant, James Renshaw and Sean McKinney; photo by Valeria Gomez*