

Janis Kozlowski: Now, tell me who were your commanding officers when you were in Alaska.

Robert Buchanan: You mean of the squadron?

Janis Kozlowski: Yes.

Robert Buchanan: Joseph Eastman was the Commanding Officer. The Executive Officer was William Perry and the Operations Officer was Frank Woody who was killed while we were up there.

Janis Kozlowski: What happened to him?

Robert Buchanan: Well, I don't think they really know. His plane went down and matter of fact he got killed ... the plane that they were in ... they were over, close to some place close to ... wait a minute I might be getting this mixed up with the one ... one of the crews I remember was over by Kamchatka Peninsula just north of the Kurile Islands. And one of them, they think, cracked up coming back there right close to Attu.

Janis Kozlowski: So he was lost and never found?

Robert Buchanan: That's right.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok. Was that a common thing there? Did you lose a lot of crews?

Robert Buchanan: No, we only lost the two crews. We were very fortunate.

Janis Kozlowski: Two crews in VP-61?

Robert Buchanan: Yes.

Janis Kozlowski: And what happened to those two crews?

Robert Buchanan: They both were on flights over towards the Kurile Islands. From Attu we would go ... you know where the Kurile's are at, north of Japan?

Janis Kozlowski: Yes.

Robert Buchanan: At that time, Japan still owned the island of Paramushiro, which is now owned by Russia. But our flights were all over to the island of Paramushiro and then we'd also patrol up towards the Kamchatka Peninsula of Russia. See we'd ... from Petropavlovsk, Russia we were only about, I don't know, some 525 miles from there ... from Attu to there and from the northern part of the Kurile's we were about, I don't know, maybe 650 miles.

Janis Kozlowski: So is that what your mission's were all about, was flying over to the Kurile Islands?

Robert Buchanan: Basically that was right, yes.

Janis Kozlowski: How many missions do you think you flew over there?

Robert Buchanan: Oh, off hand I don't remember just how many. The plane that's in ... the only one I know is because I've checked on that with Matt Voight [from Palm Springs Air Museum]. That plane that's in Palm Springs, California we flew that one over there 33 times ... our crew did.

Janis Kozlowski: So if you flew that one 33 times you probably had about maybe 40 missions or so?

Robert Buchanan: Oh, probably that was only about half, we flew a lot over toward there.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, ok.

Robert Buchanan: That was just an every ... when it was your turn to fly it was an every day occurrence, that's where we went.

Janis Kozlowski: I know some people only got a short ... they stayed in the Aleutians longer than you did but they only got, you know, 8 or 10 missions. So you flew a lot of missions during the time that you were there then it sounds like.

Robert Buchanan: Well, yes, but that was our purpose. Most of that was, you know, patrol, down into the Kurile's and up and down the Kamchatka Peninsula, the Russian Coast, and down into the Kurile's.

Janis Kozlowski: So what was the purpose of the patrols? What were you looking for?

Robert Buchanan: Well, anything. See, that's where they, that's when they invaded Dutch ... when they invaded Attu and Kiska and bombed Dutch Harbor, that's where they came from right there in the northern part of the Kurile's.

Janis Kozlowski: So you were looking for any kind of activity that would....

Robert Buchanan: Coming toward the Aleutians.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok. Did you ever see anything?

Robert Buchanan: We'd see things, yes – picket boats.