

## **PBY Operations at Dutch Harbor, 1942-43**

**By Bill Maris**

It is raining heavily right now and that brings back many memories also of how to keep warm and dry under the circumstances. Mostly if we weren't flying we would look for a passage way or compartment we could hide in as well as staying out of the Ships Crew as they performed their duties of running the Home we happened to be living on at the time. Or maybe if we were lucky and happened to be in Dutch Harbor, the barracks there were nice, so you could take a nap, play cards, read or just plain wonder around and see what the rest of the gang was doing.

We always tried to go over to the old Hotel for breakfast where a couple of Army men had opened up the kitchen and served Spam, eggs, coffee and biscuits for \$2.00 a plate. that was choice eating. Then there was a store some where in town that we could buy canned food along with canned Heat that we would use in a corner of the barracks to heat and eat between times when we got hungry.

Quite a few of the Station Band member lived in our wing of the barracks so every afternoon or evening they would gather and play request for us as they practiced their regular music. Most of these men were former pro's from named bands so they were good.

A few of us would go for walks around the station just checking on our planes to see if the ground crews needed any help, as well as get some exercise by hiking over to the Army camp were two of my high school friends were stationed in the Army and swap sea stories.

At Dutch Harbor they had movies every afternoon and a bowling ally that we used regularly, taking turns setting pins and keep from getting hit as they flew around when some strong bowler would send them flying.

One afternoon we were at the movie and un-be-known to us our two F4F fighters were airborne, they made a few low passes over the station and some one hollered air raid, the doors got torn off the hinges as we all evacuated the theater only to find it was a false alarm as we recognized our F4F's putting on a airshow for us.

Everyone was still "trigger happy"! They were able to launch and recover the F4's from a portable "cat and arresting gear unit" that was built adjacent to the end of the new runway that was started. Never seen it in operation. That is where the current runway is now. The CB's carved out the side of the mountain to make revetments to hide the PBY's in and that helped make the start of the runway. Lots of rock was carved out of the mountain as the length was extended to allow us to land our PBY-5a when they arrived, taking off and landing on the bay was the safest for quite a while. Landing on the runway was a act of God considering that you had to almost fly right into the mountain then kick hard right rudder and drop in with your left wing almost touching the revetments walls, at

least we could go down the seaplane ramp in to the bay if we overshot and run out of runway, fortunately I never seen anyone have to do that.

Watched three of our PBY-5's taking off one morning, one taxied way over to the right side of the bay, one taxied out almost to the spit and one was just leaving the ramp. The plane on the right took off and went out the channel, the one out by the spit turned around and started his take off towards the ramp while at the same time the plane that had just left the ramp applied takeoff power towards the spit, well all hell broke loose, the plane at the spit continued his take off run and was just getting airborne when the plane that had started from the ramp seen he was on a collision course, did a hard port turn still on the water, caused him to water loop, burying his port wing almost up to the engine, the port blister flew out due to the excess twisting of the fuselage, luckily he didn't take any water on and made it back to the ramp were he was recovered and turned over to the maintenance crews for inspection and repairs. So another plane was loaded and the crew manned it and off they went on their assigned mission. Don't know what went on at the next "All Pilots Meeting", but you know there was hell to pay for such stupidity of airmanship. So you see we always had some kind of excitement to enjoy!

One early morning while at Dutch, Floyd Hill AMM1/c Plane Captain was preflighting his assigned plane, walked out on the starboard wing and as usual gave it a couple of bounces to check the wing tip float lock when he heard a crunching noise behind him, further check reveled that the main wing spar was broken, when, how long ago, no one knew of any problems before. Probably broken due to excessive turbulence while on a flight. We were more diligent believe me when pulling our preflights.