

John Pletcher: ... with the runway and, lo and behold, you'd be all set up for a landing. So we got in and landed OK, no problem. Poor old Goldie he was really having a bad time, but....

Janis Kozlowski: Those crews had to have a lot of confidence in you as a pilot, 'cause you....

John Pletcher: Yeah, I'm amazed at the GIs that were gunners and so forth, that rode with us. They had confidence in those two guys up front, maybe too much, I don't know [*laughing*], maybe more confidence than was warranted.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, you got 'em through.

John Pletcher: We got 'em through. I never had anybody refuse to fly with me [*laughing*].

Janis Kozlowski: Were there pilots that people refused to fly with?

John Pletcher: Oh, there were some pilots people didn't want to fly with, you bet. They'd had bad rides with them. I don't say there were many really any bad ones, but there were some that didn't use very good judgment part of the time.

We had one land a B-18 in the surf just east of Nome one night, I think it was in probably, I would guess about June, but it was midsummer and it was overcast. He had been up to Kotzebue and around and come back to Nome and it was socked in so that he couldn't get lined up with the runway or for some reason he couldn't, but he could see the line of foam where the waves were breaking on the beach. The beach east of Nome is a sandy, sloping beach and there'll be a line of foam where the waves are meeting the beach and he could see that line through the overcast. And he ended up – I wasn't in on this, I wasn't in the radio shack at the time, but there were other people that were, and talking to him and he knew he was over Nome. He landed on that surf line on the beach, in the B-18 and made a successful landing – bent the props, of course, and banged up the bottom of the airplane, but nobody got hurt.

But I feel that somebody in the radio shack should have had presence of mind enough to talk to him – find out how much fuel he had left. If he had enough fuel to cruise back and forth over the radio range at Nome for two or three hours it would have been light enough that he could have seen the beach better and probably could have landed without landing on wheels without landing in the surf.

He landed right on the edge of the water and the next morning to get the airplane up the wheel, the left wheel – since he was facing east – the left wheel was a little up hill up the beach a little from the right. They were able to lower the right landing gear and lock it but not the left, so they had to dig out a hole under the left landing gear to get the landing gear down and locked. The engineers who were working on building a runway at Nome brought over a D-8 and they got a crew of men and they dug under that wheel and got some planks to run the wheel on and some rope and they used this tractor tied onto the landing gear and pulled that airplane back up on the ground and further up on the beach.

Later the engineering officer came over and they put two new propellers on the airplane and ran the engines up and everything checked out ok. And they flew the airplane off the beach and flew it back to Anchorage. So it was possible to do it and if this young pilot had either thought of it, or somebody on the ground had presence of mind enough to coach him, he may have had fuel enough to loiter around up there until it got daylight where he could see better, visibility was better, and the outcome could have been better or he might have even made the runway. Because there was that 3800 foot runway at Nome but he chose to put it on the beach because he couldn't see the runway.