

Janis Kozlowski: How did you feel when you heard you were going to Alaska? Is that where you wanted to go? Or did you have a destination in mind?

John Pletcher: Well, we didn't particularly want to go to Alaska. We didn't know too much about it, but we knew that it was like going to the frontier [*laughing*] and it was pioneering alright. When we got up here, because things that we did, the procedures that we used were, were some that we developed after we got here and some were procedures that had normally been used. And maintaining airplanes was sort of a seat of the pants deal for the maintenance crews using whatever was available and some of it makeshift. It was a really an exploring period for the Air Force. They were learning a lot, we even had local bush pilots come over and talk to flight crews and tell them about things to do and not to do that they had learned by flying out in the bush.

Janis Kozlowski: Do you remember any of them that you spoke with?

John Pletcher: Not by name, no. But I know that Bob Reeve was one of them and Reeve Aleutian Airways people helped the squadron a lot, I'm sure, with ideas because they had been running a, sort of an airline under contract out in the Aleutians for the government. They were given a government contract to haul parts and people around the country. But, one of the things I remember them telling us, even though we got up here in March – we arrived at Elmendorf Field, if I'm not mistaken it was the last day of March of 1941. We got to Elmendorf Field and they had one runway, only one runway that was serviceable. And they had the skeleton of the center hangar at the airport, was up but the hangar was not complete when we arrived here. So most of our maintenance at first was outdoors under a tarp or whatever else you could put up to protect you from the weather. One of the things I remember them telling us, that in winter flying and around the flight line they said, "watch out for other people on the line and if their cheek bones and cheeks begin to look pale or their ears, top of their ears, begin to look pale make them get in where its warmer or do something because their beginning to get frostbite". And they warned us about frostbite and they warned us about not trying to, if your fingers got frozen, which they could, in the winter up here easily enough, don't try to bend them when they are frozen. The frozen flesh, you'll damage it, and get your hands some place where it's warm and cover your ears with something. And this old tale about rubbing your hands with snow if they're frozen, they said, "don't believe that – that's not the thing to do" [*laughing*].

Janis Kozlowski: Don't lick the flagpole!

John Pletcher: Don't like the flagpole! [*laughing*] or stick your tongue on anything metal that's cold [*laughing*].