

Janis Kozlowski: That was a pretty interesting day for you, wasn't it? You had quite an experience.

John Pletcher: Well, it was. I had a flight of four B-26s assigned to me and, a fellow pilot by the name of Kenneth Dempster (sp?) who later became a Major General at B (??) flight also of four B-26s. We were both sitting down at the ready room Quonset hut down on the line, waiting an assignment on Thanksgiving Day and it became lunch time. So, most everybody being chow hounds we flipped to see who got to go eat first and Dempster won the flip so he chose to have his flight go eat. So they took off in their jeeps and hadn't much more than left when the group operations officer came in and said we've got a ship located down at Attu and we want you guys, your flight, to scramble and go out there and bomb it. And that was about all the detail that we had on it.

They gave a little more information to the navigator; they said it's in Holtz Bay and the weather ship, which is already out there cruising around – B-24s were used as weather ships. They would send a weather ship out about daylight or before and it would cruise out clear out to Attu and around because it had extra tanks and long range and it could stay out for 12, 13, 14 hours. It had located this ship and radioed back. And they sent us out to bomb it. They said well if you get off by 12 o'clock you'll have four P-38s as an escort, so we dashed down to the airplanes and by the time we got off it was a few minutes after 12 and I figured, well, we won't have any P-38s. Well, after I'd got off and started my first turn to the left, which was toward Attu, lo and behold here were four P-38s pulled up along side. Those guys didn't want to get left behind, they were gonna go. They had wing tanks –droppable wing tanks – for extra fuel, so they burned fuel out of the wing tanks on the way out to Attu and then they had their normal fuel in their wing tanks internally to fly back on and nobody ran out of fuel.

The fighters got, a couple of them, got holes in them, bullet holes, but nothing serious. Nobody lost an engine, nobody got wounded and nothing serious happened to anybody. We dropped the bombs and the fighters shot up the ship while we were on our way in. When we entered the mouth of Holtz Bay it was several miles up to the ship and as soon as the fighters entered the mouth of the Bay they could see where the ship was. So they took off, they dropped their droppable belly tanks and they took off and they were strafing the ship by the time we got there. Since we had low clouds I decided to set a pattern up as near the hillside as I could get under the clouds and bomb the ship on the way out – the thinking being that if anything happened – lost an engine or anything I would be on my way out and not facing a mountain. So that's the way all four of the airplanes bombed.

My wing man stayed with me and the other two airplanes made one circle and then they made their bombing run and we all four formed up out over the bay. We didn't dally around out there because we were short on fuel. It was a question whether we would have enough fuel to get home, so we were saving our fuel and we bunched up and got on our way and the P-38s joined us. We started the long three hour cruise back to Adak and it was a slow trip but none of us ran out of fuel.

We were all low on fuel, but when we got within about 50 miles of Adak the fighters recognized where they were because they had been flying around that area so they took off. They knew

where they were going. And they had already landed and taxied in by the time we got to Adak. I landed our airplanes, the last wing man first, because I figured he would be the lowest on fuel and I landed last. I was down, when I taxied in, I had the warning light on, on the fuel light, and I was down to about 20 minutes of fuel on my airplane and I think the others were down to about that amount themselves so it was a real squeaker getting back. If we had dallied around out there at all, some of us might not of have made it back. We might have had to crash land someplace and I can tell you there are very few places out in the Aleutians that are a very suitable place to crash land. There aren't very many nice beaches, its mostly rocky shoreline. So the idea of either crash landing in the water, which was almost sure suicide, or bailing out which wasn't much better – everybody was interested in seeing that we got home.