

January 29, 1997

First War Story

A World War II story about the 54th Fighter Sqdn. Alaskan Defense Command.

Before I get too engrossed in a story or two, I want to recognize my two pilots. Captain George C. Liven and Lt. Banks.

Lt Banks was a nice guy (kid). I used to put candy and gum and other such things in the cockpit for him when he went out on a long haul. A LONG haul meant either 8 or 9 or sometimes 10 hours of flight, sitting on your BUTT, confined to a CHAIR in a FIGHTER which meant some times you had to PEE in your pants cause there was "NO" relief tube for the pilot to UTILIZE. IT DID HAPPEN. A lot of times we kept belly tanks installed, full and ready for a mission. This particular day he was ordered to go out on patrol, NO BELLY TANKS. So I dropped them and moved the ship back and away from the dropped tanks and fire danger. Well he started engines, taxied out and took off. Some time later the weather closed in and covered the island, and that left BANKS blind to where the runway was. So what happened?? HE WAS LOST AT SEA !!!!! Not enough fuel, poor kid. I learned to fly, or got my 3rd class in 1947 and I often wonder what Lt Banks last few minutes were like.

CAPT. LAVEN will always be "CAPTAIN" to me even tho he retired as a COLONEL. The last time I saw him, he was a Capt.

I have a story about him and his Capt's bars. We (notice I said WE) had a broken rear view mirror on OUR P-38 and Capt. Laven had asked me to replace it. I don't know how it became damaged, shot out, flak, kicked, or whatever, but broke it was. So off to salvage I went. Tools in hand I located one on a ship that had belly landed.

I got busy removing the mirror and some M/Sgt came ROARING out of the salvage hut and pronounced in no uncertain terms to get my hands off that mirror and get the HELL out of there. I left and proceeded to find "MY" Captain LAVEN.

The Capt. Wore a sheep skin flying jacket with his BARS on the UNDER side of the collar. Well here we came --- me with tools in hand and Laven with "AUTHORITY". Started to work again and sure enough the M/Sgt came roaring out of the shack once more and started telling us how he was going to HANG OUR BUTTS.

Now the fun part, Capt. Laven just rolled up his collar and showed those 40 miles of bright shining railroad track. Boy did that M/Sgt cool off --- not a word--- just walked back into the shack like a little lamb. We went home with our mirror and every one was happy, (well almost every one).

Don't ask me what our CO'S name was on ADAK because it's been to long and I wasn't his bosom buddy any how. As the story went, he thought our moral was LOW and wanted to-do something to pick it up. He took a C-47 and flew back to Anchorage, bought enough liquor to give each enlisted man a 1/5th (quart). I don't know where all the money came from, I can only guess that the officers kicked in some ????????. He brought back every kind of hard liquor there was. If you wanted a bottle, you came and picked up what you wanted --- it was free. (at least mine was).

Did we have a party, man o man. I can only tell you about our Quonset hut. Early in the evening, it was only card games. Then some one said something somebody didn't like and it went from there.

We had two coal stoves in the hut for heat and of course they were full of BLACK SOOT. They came down with a crash and rolled NORTH and SOUTH. As for the wrestling that went on, no one really got hurt. Soot, blood, and beds all over the place. When the fun was over we looked around and some one said "get a mop". To no avail, the floor was BLACK_BLACK_BLACK !!!!!!! . Then some one turned on a "LIGHT-BULB" in his head and suggested turning the floor over. (The floor was $\frac{3}{4}$ inch by 4ft by 4ft ply board not nailed down, but fit together like a gig saw puzzle. So over it went, stoves reset, bunks in order, beds made, and guess what, the WHITEST, CLEANEST, looking floor you ever saw.

In comes the C/O for inspection, (maybe he just heard about our floor). He looked around, GRINNED, and said "did you have a good time"?

We had a young man by the name of TERRY. He must have had connections with the hospital because about once a month he came home with a 5 GAL. Can of grain ALCOHOL. We could only buy a 1/5th, IF—IF—IF you had a bottle or container. We tried aluminum water jug, but that just melted, slowly, and we ended up getting sick. So we went to glass containers.

Terry sold a 1/5th for \$100.00 DOLLARS. Every one was glad to get it. There was no other place to spend our money, no P/X, no girls, no anything. One guy would buy a beer bottle full for \$25.00 then nurse it for a week. He drank it straight, boy I'll bet he has no belly left today. It was 180 PROOF.

Those guys from our sister SQDN'S, 37th and 38th , that went to England and worked on their aircraft with Nazi bombs falling around, then at night , went to bed with a nice soft warm body , had it made, yeah they saw it rough??????????.

The only battle I ever saw was between two jap fighters and two P-40's. The battle took place right over the beach where our revetments were, on the Island of UMNAK,. There we were, with our heads all looking skywards trying to see it all. The event took place very low, I would say between 100 feet and 2000 feet altitude.

Each P-40 had his own Jap aircraft to himself. The Jap's had been trying to stay together because they would dive and come toward each other, and then climb back up. Then dive back down again to elude their pursuer.

Well one Jap came barreling by at about 200 feet; P-40 in pursuit, from a 90 degree angle comes #2 at about 500 feet. The P-40 following #1 Jap pulled up sharply right under his buddy. The lower P-40 prop cut the top P-40 absolutely in two. The astonishing part was that they were so low to the ground; we could see the pilot twist around in his chair, because that's where the prop chewed thru the ship, INCHES behind the pilot. He had the strangest look on his face, then the craft nosed over and went into the water. The pilot was killed, not by the crash, but by drowning or the drop into the water. It all happened in seconds. The other P-40 spewed steam from antifreeze and smoke from oil lines that were crushed, and fluttered like a leaf and settled down to the water. He came

out OK. I'll never forget that young man's face as he turned and looked out at the blue sky and hard ground.

Well gang --- It's been nice talking with you again, see ya soon – I hope.

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Second War Story

This writing is in response to Capt. Pete Hardiman's article about the GROUND CREWS.

Yes Capt. It took a lot of people doing many different things to pull it off. (Win the war effort) I think back to the battle of ATTU. We had about three different radios tuned to different frequencies and about 100 guys all crowded around to listen. We could hear the transmission from the flag ship, from the pilots in the air, and army personnel in the forward positions. The voices were fast, furious, barking, pleading, demanding, and the whole battle was laid out for us to hear and imagine what was taking place. VERY GRIPPING!!!!.

I don't want to get ahead of myself, that radio thing was one of the last things that happened of note in the ALEUTIAN Island war. But to us ground people, it put us momentarily in the air with our ships (aircraft) and flight friends.

One of the first things that happened in my life as an airman happened at the air base at Everett, Washington. We had three Sqdn's of P-43's. The Sqdn's were 37th, 38th, and 54th, of the 55th Pursuit Group? They didn't call it "FIGHTER" Group in those days of early 1941. We were changing from P-43's to P-38's and operations moved all the 43's to an off ramp parking spot, (to get them out of the way), I had three ships to look after, preflight, fuel, polish, kick tires, etc, etc.

Across the tarmac and taxi strip to my position walks the fanciest looking officer I had ever seen. Riding PINKS (those pants that flared out at the thigh), brown polished boots up to the knee, Sam brown belt across his shoulder, riding quirt, regulation flight cap (as if this guy would have anything else), an officer to the bone. Let's remember this was 58 years ago, so you know he impressed my mind.

He strides up to me and says "are these airplanes ready to go sergeant"? All I could muster was a weak "yes sir". "Good lets take one ". He climbs in, I belt him in, asked if he needed anything else, and dropped to the ground and in front to give him hand signals, pull chocks, and sent him off into the wild blue yonder. That was the first and last time I saw him. I think what made the story stick in my mind was the fact that he was so WIRY, grey headed, polished, and smiled at a buck sgt. I'll never forget that day.

From the very beginning, our personnel of the 54th pursuit began to click. 1st. sgt Robert F. Shields did a lot for the lower four grades. He looked after us like a mother and father all rolled into one. He lined us up one day about the first of May 1941, lowers four grades here and tops three over there, and gave us a pep talk. (He read the riot act to us) Ending up with "if any of you people get into any trouble, come and see me, (he got a kid out of a rape charge) but if any of you top three get into any trouble I'll BREAK you, because you have those stripes to know how to stay out of trouble".

Some time in late 1941 (don't remember the month) right after they fished Capt. EDDY RICKENBACKER out of the ocean, he made a surprise visit to Paine Field (Everett). To make a long story short, he popped into a P-43 to have a publicity picture taken. Well guess what, my flight leader was on one side of the cockpit and me on the other, my hero, Capt. EDDY in the middle. Because it was an army photographer, I couldn't get a copy !@#%^&*.

Before we got rid of the P-43's, our C.O., first Lt. Harley S. Talks, took one up for a fun ride. He got up to about 26,000 feet, turned the nose down full throttle, started to pull out at 15,000 feet and succeeded into level flight at around 5,000. I don't know what the airspeed was, but I'll bet it was close to MOCK ONE.

When he landed we all gathered around to look seeing. The tunnel that goes from the supercharger on the belly, forward to the carburetor blew up, blowing the little windows out behind pilots head. The baggage door, in the same area of the supercharger, popped open, came up and tore about a foot of skin off where the hinges used to be. Baggage door hit vertical fin and rudder and cut off top two feet of vertical stabilizer and rudder. Wings were rippled where skin was depressed from the pressure of pull out. Wheel well doors bent so they wouldn't close any more. Lt. Talks said "good flight".

Republic Aircraft purchased the plane back from the Govt. to study the stress on the aircraft. The P-43 was the fore runner of the mighty JUG P-47. JANES ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AVIATION Supplies us with the information about the two different aircraft. P-43 had an R-1830 engine. With TURBO in tail and TUNNEL going forward between the pilots legs to CARB. 2 Machine guns in each wing of 30 CALIBUR. P-47 had an R-2800 engine with Turbo in same position and tunnel to crab. 4 50 caliber rifles in each wing. With AMMO boxes and belts reaching out to the WING TIP. Jane's says the P-47 was the largest Fighter aircraft of WW11 (it was big)

When we got to Alaska, Lt. Talks said "if I run out of ammo and have a Jap in sight, I'll run him over with my props". It was reported that the last they saw of Talks, he was flying WEST in pursuit of a Jap fighter. Lt Talks never came home. (PS I just received CONFIRMATION that Harley Talks died in the states Jan. 29, 1961) so much for HEARSAY.

These stories are of airplanes and pilots and ground crews-----our very own airplanes-----that we talked to, that we patted (like a girl friend), that we felt proud of-----protected, and BABIED.

The first one and one-half years in Alaska we had no hangers and no engine stands. (To crawl up on to be right close to the engine or see what you were working on). We did change engines-----in a tent. Many times we changed plugs, radiator, oil cooler, or generator in a snow storm. We had gloves, but you couldn't feel the nut with gloves on, so we took them off and felt for the nut or bolt for five minutes and went to warm up for ten.

A funny story came out of that one time. We had a crew chief on one of the 38s by the name of BUCK BURNETT. Buck always wore a sheep skin lined parka coat; it hung

down to his ankles. The main reason it hung so low was because he carried a full, LARGE tool box of tools in the two pockets of the parka. What ever he needed he would dip down into the pocket and pull out the wrench or socket he needed. Buck was a good ole boy, part Indian.

When we were based in Portland Or. Buck wrote a song, (he played a guitar). I can only remember the first verse.

Quote-----

We'll meet our babies in Portland, on the corner of fifth and stark.
We'll take em down to the river, as soon as it gets dark.

It got better from that point on !!!!!!! I missed most of the time spent in Portland; I was in Chanute Field Illinois, going to airplane and engine school

Well back to the story on Buck Burnett. General Buckner, Alaskan Defense Commander, always walked around with no aides, a long GI over coat, with no INSIGNIA or RANK. (He said that way he could mingle with his troops and find out how they really felt). We had been having some trouble with foot soldiers who were wandering in to look seeing. We had put an emergency cable from the cockpit to the bomb rack, just in case the bomb rack DID NOT RELEASE the bomb or belly tank. The cable was right out in plain sight about head high. A couple of times strangers would come along and say what's this , give it a yank and down would come 350 gals of 100 octane gasoline , with a thump. You can imagine what the crew chief said"!@#%^&*()

Back to Gen. Buckner. Buck was changing plugs and had gone to supply for plugs and antisize. When he got back, here is this long tall soldier in a GI overcoat standing at the foot of Bucks ladder. Buck strolls up to the soldier and kicks him on the heel and says" move it soldier, carry your ass "The tall guy smiles and moves on. Before long the engineering officer comes running out to Buck and asks what went on. Buck told him and the engineering officer said "you know who that was? Buck made some unprintable statement and says "who cares "So he was told --- it did'nt move Buck much.

We made our own entertainment. There was no town to go to and no girls. (We said there was a girl behind every tree, NO TREES)

The first female I saw in about 18 months, was Olivia Dehaviland. I was at the dentist and she walked up the hall and I went by her, OH DID SHE SMELL GOOD. I turned and watched as she disappeared thru a door. Boy, did she smell good.

So much for memories. We had a good time together-----just like kids----19, 20, 21,-- -- thrown together from all sides of the US of A-----different sizes, personalities, color, religions,-----but we came to be " ONE ". We made lasting friendships. Until I die, I will be unable to for get my brothers who served with me for a short time from one end of the ALEUTIAN chain to the other. (I made every stop and every island up there).

There are a lot more stories from our two and one-half years spent together overseas.

Until next time

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Third War Story

I never imagined myself to be a writer of stories. I don't know where to begin or stop. So this time I'll try to start where I went into the ARMY AIR CORPS, That's what it was called then. I must admit tho, at the time there was a lot of CAMMARRADIE.

Boot camp and shots came at San Rafeal CA. Arrived at Hamilton Field CA. 4/14/41. There weren't too many men in the outfit at that time; it was forming up a contingent from several groups well established. So came in to existence the 37th—38th—and 54th Squadron's of the 55th PURSUIT GROUP, Army Air Corp.

WE had TWO, yes TWO ships to look after and train on. One was a P-36 and the other was a P-35. One you had to stand on the right landing gear tire and crank the INERTIA starter, to wind up fast enough for when the pilot pulled the energizer cable, the inertia would turn the engine over fast enough to fire it up. If not you wore your BUTT off cranking that monster or until the pilot said forget it.

The other one started with a shot gun shell insert, (only black powder, and no lead.)Every once in a while the smoke and fumes from the gun powder would end up in the cockpit and if there was a spark from a switch or something--- FLAMES--- boy did that pilot come tumbling out . That's where I met up with BISBEE. What a guy, S/SGT at the time if I remember right. He told me one time "I" was going to wash the ship with a TOOTH BRUSH, if I did'nt stay out of the way. There were only 35 men in the Sqdn. at that time. 1st. Sgt Robert F. Shields and Forrest Elvig were always arguing about trivial things. They would throw their wallet on the floor and say "cover that"

Elvig had a PIERCE ARROW automobile; every one said it had a ONE INCH line from the tank to the carburetor. It took that much fuel to keep those TWELVE cylinders pumping.

There was an incident at the front gate one day. Some Shave tail decided he did'nt have to stop at the gate coming in. Well the gate guard said halt to no avail, he raised his rifle, FIRED, (oh yeah I forgot , the vehicle was a convertible.) The bullet killed the rear view mirror. When the O.D. came around he asked the guard what happened, guard told him. Guess what????The O.D. flipped him a quarter for the bullet and said "NEXT TIME DON'T MISS". That was the old army.

Well from that point we moved from Hamilton to Portland air base, Portland OR. The base was built on a slew area filled in, when the trucks rolled in it was still soft enough for the tires to roll a wave of dirt ahead of the wheel. Couldn't stop the trucks would have sunk in the fresh dirt and mud?

From there I went to airframe and engine school at Chanute Field Ill. One thing I want to put into print right here. There was a contingent of men there from the 99th pursuit sqdn. I don't know if it was the whole sqdn or not, but they were there. TUSQEEGE AIRMEN, (I hope I spelled that right) A sqdn of P-40s, HDQ's, line men, mess hall and

all. The reason I remember was because there was quite a time TRAINING those WHITE boys to salute those pilots and officers when they met them on the street. I got to say this. That BLACK outfit was SHARP-SHARP-SHARP.

I was pulling KP when the Jap's attacked Pearl Harbor. Within TWO hours that base went from a sleepy little SCHOOL base to a wide awake full fledged, on fire, letsgettum, training school.

Shortly there after the 99th shipped out, lock, stock, and barrel.

Well gang see ya another day.

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Fourth War Story.

When I got out of engine and airframe school at Chanute field III. The sqdn had already moved from Portland airbase to Paine Field, Everett, Washington.

I must tell you a story about the WINDMILL nightclub just outside of Everett. It was a dinning and dancing and bar place. We of the 54th spent so much time and money there that we began to call it the 54th NIGHT room. We were sort of proud of our position at the Windmill. One night another outfit moved in which to our consternation was very up setting. Tempers flared, threats were laid down, and accusations were mumbled. So out doors we all went. I happened be standing shoulder to shoulder with friend FREDDY HALL. Out of the blue comes the M.P's on a weapons carrier, of course it had a mounted 30-caliber machine gun and a GI with hand on trigger. Next to pull-up was a jeep with about 6 mp's to come charging out. The first mistake was when the OD. Barked an order "fix BAYONETS". Which the 6 mp's started to do. Notice I said STARTED. They were young like us, probably a little frightened (like us). To make a long story short, one young man was right in front of FREDDY and I, fumbling with his bayonet, it wouldn't go on. So FREDDY and I both grabbed it at the same time, snapped it on his rifle and said "NOW WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH IT" By that time the OD. Saw that he had a situation, so he called his men back to the jeep. I have often thought of that situation and what could have happened, both with bayonets and machine gun. WHEW. That cooled every one off and back into the WINDMILL we went for another beer.

Fred Hall was a good friend, and tent mate all through the Alaskan campaigns, As I write this story Fred has been deceased for a month or so (I don't have the exact date) but I must say Fred had a way of making every one feel good. Freddie had a nickname that stayed with him as long as we (54th) knew him. We hardly ever called him FREDDY it was always THREE BALL. I won't go into much detail as to why we called him that, but that was his handle all the way from Anchorage to Attu. Tentmates were Three ball Hall, Shorty Hufford, Heddy Lamar, Dillahunty, Simpson, and myself (McGalliard).

While we are here into tentmates I got another story. Simpson always had one ear open for the 55 caliber cannon that was supposed to warn us if we were under attack or the JAPS were in the area or just to warn us of maybe an impending ATTACK alert. Well one night the cannon went off ONCE. Simpson raised his head, (he always kept his sheep lined pants and jacket handy by his cot) the SECOND shot sounded, Simpson rolled out of his sleeping bag and started putting on his clothes. The rest of us were not as swift as Simpson when it came to hitting the door and heading for the FOXHOLE. By the time the THIRD shot sounded, (which meant we were going to be BOMBED) was dressed and heading for the door, but all this time every one else had been hitting the floor also and as it came out we were not that far behind Simpson. In fact as he hit the tent flap and got almost out, he tripped on the bottom rope. (the tent flap door was fastened with ROPE TIES) First Dilihunty, then Heddy, Three Ball, Shorty, and me last (I got to see it all) each one going out put their foot smack dab in the middle of his back and pushed him back into the MUD in front of the door. He was furious as we all got a big chuckle and were already in the foxhole. Boy did he fuss at us. I guess you might say that is the "riggers of war?"

About here I want to tell you about our BATHING FACILITIES, in the Aleutian Islands. In 1942 to 1944. We lived in a 4 sided tent. With a tiny coal stove putting out heat into the tent. (You could almost feel the heat if you touched the stove) The said stove had a small hole in the top to put in coal or whatever, when we took our baths we would go outside and scoop up some snow in our helmet and set the helmet in the hole in the stove, and wait until water was warm enough to wash our ARM PIT'S and CROTCH and then shave in the same water. A wonderful way to live. This we did for about 2 years, regardless of TEMPERATURE OUTSIDE. Which usually ran from 32 DEG.? To minus 60 DEG.

While at Paine Field (just outside of Seattle) we still had the P-43's, some one decided to have a MOCK air battle. As it came out it took place right over the air base. L-O-W, I mean LOW, right on the deck. Let's call them BLUE and RED teams. They flew around for awhile having fun, then two opposing members decided to play CHICKEN (or some such game) Here they come from opposite sides of the landscape, red here and blue there. Instead of one turning left and the other right, they both pulled straight upright over the center of the tarmac where we were standing. Their belly's came closer and closer and closer, I don't think either man knew where his opponent was, but each ship was like a shadow of the other one belly to belly about three feet apart. Full throttle, props churning the air and then they fell off on opposite wings to pull out level. Those two young men if alive today don't know how lucky they were.

Our orders were cut and down to the dock we went (hurry up and wait) Got on board a banana boat. Only a handful of staterooms. Me??? I slept on the deck (steel). No comfort there, the steel deck was put down with round-headed rivets EVERY 12 INCHES. North south east and west. You try sleeping on a rivet head while the ship rolls side to side never got seasick, so I proceeded to the gally and got a fist full of fatty meat to show to the guys who were seasick. Well it kept their stomachs empty. They should have THANKED me !!!!!!!!!!!

We pulled into Dutch Harbor on the 2nd of June 1942. They loaded us on to another ship and we left out approximately 3 hours before the Japs ATTACKED Dutch Harbor next morning. Another WHEW. Several hours later we pulled into Anchorage Alaska and Elmendorf Field. As I recollect the P-38's were already there, ready for us to kick tires, spit and polish, run them up and say "READY SIR"

Let's leave it there for now.

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Fifth War Story

Maybe this is the last story I can come up with, or maybe my old memory is fading?

After all it's been 55 years since I left the Aleutian Islands. (Sept 44) I stayed at Elmendorf AFB about three weeks, then boarded a C-47 and flew to Coldbay. Stayed there 3 or 4 months. This was the time and place one of our better known men died in a C-47 crash. When we got to Anchorage our pay roll got fouled up (wrong station). Payroll made up for Umnak and we moved too soon to get paid. At Cold bay we couldn't get paid cause payroll was made up for Umnak (screwed up all around).

Next payroll went down with Sgt. Unger (the afore mentioned man). By the time the Govt. Paymaster had a clew as to where we were, we moved to Adak. Pay roll had to be made up again. Of course through this NO MONEY entire situation, you must remember there was absolutely NO PLACE to buy any thing. No PX, no PUBS, no GIRLS, no nothing, except Tony Rottmans mess hall. Well to end this story our payroll finally caught up with us. I got 7 (seven) months pay all at once. It lasted 3 (three) days. I guess you might say I was a poor poker player. OK say it. The only good thing to come out of my time in the Aleutians was that I had \$70 held out of my payroll and sent home. That was the only money I saved or sent home in the 28 months I was up there.

Boy the crap games they had wide open no restrictions. Even the nurses were making money. I heard some of them were sending home \$500 bucks a week. They could have made more, but they were laying down on the job????????.

One of our guys traveled around from outfit to outfit gambling. Supposedly he carried around \$20,000 in a money belt. He was found one morning in a jeep, upside down, down an embankment, DEAD. NO MONEY BELT????????.

We had an aircraft inspector who went home early. Got on the boat but when they got to Seattle, he was MISSING. Authorities could not prove what happened, so case closed ???????.

I tell you this last one with tongue in cheek. I know nothing else except what my mom had sent in newspaper clippings from state side newspaper in my hometown.

As the story went ---this C.O. was a mean and demanding so and so. No one liked him or respected him. By and by it was a volenteer action to put as much as you wanted to in the POT, for the guy who got the C.O.

One day a PFC or CPL. Was digging a hole in a bank with a bulldozer for a QONSET HUT to be erected. Guess what, the C.O. came up in his jeep and parked behind the dozer. The kid backed up, and too late -----the C.O. was dead. Crushed in his jeep. Accidental death was the finding. The kid collected 6(six) figures. That's the story as was in the clippings that mom sent me. We checked at the time, oh yes there was an accident. But no one knew any thing about the particulars?????? Strange things happen in a war. The thing that bugged me was, how did the newspaper in the 48 get the info????

Well we moved from Adak to Amchitka to Shemya to Attu.

About two weeks before we (who were being relieved) got on the boat to go home, we were put into a casual area. Nothing to do but eat sleep and check the mail. One day going to chow two guys began to argue. Why, I don't know. One was Jason Grey if I can recollect properly. They got to scuffling and rolling in the dirt and rolled to a MUDPUDDLE. By this time Jason was on top and had his friend by the ears and was holding him face DOWN in the mud puddle. Along come our FLIGHT SURGEN and another officer. They looked at the situation and said, "be care full Jason" and WALKED ON. Jason was so stunned by the officer's comment that he just got up and walked to the chow hall in silence. We were ALL READY TO GO HOME.

I never got home sick any time I was in the service except once. That was when I was in the CASUAL area getting ready to go home. I got a letter from my mom one day and for some unknown reason, I couldn't stop CRYING. I guess I knew it was over and I was going home at last.

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Sixth War Story

Can I tell you a story about the INVASION of “ADAK”.

It started at Cold Bay, 50 (fifty) of us so called airmen were transported to Umnak where we got on a Canadian CORVETTE ship. It was night and dark and I heard these men talking in what I thought was an ENGLISH ACCENT. So my big mouth and me says, “what ho a bloody limey ship”. Well these men talking came alive and said in a harsh voice “who said that, who called us bloody limeys”. It did’nt take me long to understand that I had made a big blunder. I never opened my mouth and hid in the group.

Well we sailed out of Umnak in the dark of night, and the voyage went down hill from there. The sea got rough and rougher, and then all hell broke loose. First the Bow went down into the water and sea spray blew over the entire ship. Then a roll to port with the nose coming up clear of the water so that when the bow settled down it crashed with loud bong and the ship would quiver from stem to stern. Then a roll to starboard with the bow going down again and this time the stern came up so high that the screws came out of the water, when this happened the ship vibrated violently and started a new roll with the nose descending again into the sea. The Capt. Told us the next morn that through the night the ship rolled to a maximum of 70 (seventy) degrees to one side and then tried to match in on the other. Now you guys who can read a compass or any other instrument made up of DEGREES can understand what a 70-degree roll looked like. I’d say we were in danger of floundering.

While all this was going on, Forrest Elvig had gotten wet on deck and had retreated to a hatch over the engine room, where he had removed his outer clothes and hung them on the hand rail around the cat walk. As the rolls got greater and greater and the hatch came closer to the surface, Elvig was getting warmer and warmer in his cozy corner. THEN, the big roll, water comes tumbling into the hatch, freezing Arctic water and splashes all over Elvig, you could hear him scream allover the ship, when that cold water hit that nice warm skin. Some trip.

In the flotilla of ships they had two or three tugboats pulling barges. The one in question had about 200 or 300, 55gal drums of 100-octane gasoline all tied down nice and neat. On the barge were two 50-cal machine guns. One on each end of the barge. Two men attended each gun, I would guess in case of attack one man would fire and the other would load and lead the belts of ammo into the gun. So what happened, the rough sea got to the barge and turned it over and the four guys with it. The cable pulling the barge was cut loose and the flotilla went on its merry way. I guess in the middle of the night, and the sea as rough as it was, HOW were you going to see the men in the dark anyway. Like all soldiers, they were EXPENDABLE. That was ONE rough night.

When we got to Adak and into the harbor or inlet, from out of nowhere came personnel landing craft. The guys on the Corvette threw an invasion ladder over the side and us 50 airmen climbed down with rifle and duffel bag, and some had tool boxes. We climbed down very slowly. So to the shore we went, beached and lowered the noses of the landing craft. 50 guys stepped out and someone said unload the gear. So we made two lines facing each other, and rolled our gear hand over hand and had the craft unloaded in couple of minutes. Some one up the beach away was shooting pictures of us unloading, and he says ‘are you people COMMANDOS”. Of course we smarted of and said “ yeah, airforce commandos”. At this point and date 8/14/99 I must tell whoever is reading this, that about six months

ago I was watching the HISTORY channel, and what should appear but us guys unloading on the beach just like I said. How about that I'm on film, I'm Immortal. (Happy face).

We settled every thing down on the beach and started to look around for some thing to do. A group of infantry people had gone into the interior of the island to take care of the Japs who were on the island). so some of us wandered off and found a stream about four or five feet wide ten to twelve inches deep. LOADED with humpback salmon. To make a long story short, we were looking for some different food, cause "C" rations had been our fare for weeks, and hash to me is sickening. So three of us went fishing with JACKKNIVES. Yes I said jackknives we stood astraddle the creek with our jackknife in hand we stabbed 52 (fifty-two) salmon in one hour. Back to camp, built a fire with rocks around for reflection of heat. Cleaned fish and used only the select part from the gills to the butthole. We only had two square shovels to cook them on. Dillahunty stole a slab of bacon from the navy and that was our frying oil and seasoning. That was a meal fit for a king.

Nine days later the Engineers had the steel matting laid down and in came a PBY to test the runway and then our beloved P-38s. Camp was made and fox holes dug, mess hall erected and slit trench activated. Up on the side of the mountain away from the shoreline. There I stayed for another nine months. From that point it was Amchitca, Shemya, and Attu.

We had fun, yes we did. Vivid memories will go to my grave with me of the adventure and friends who shared it with me.

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