

**Interview with Robert Buchanan**

**Aleutian World War II National Historic Area  
Oral History Project**

**October 9, 2008, Barberton, Ohio**

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*This interview is part of the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Project. The interview with Robert Buchanan was conducted via the telephone and recorded on a digital recorder. Copies of the audio file are preserved in mp3, wav, and wma formats and are on file at the offices of the National Park Service in Anchorage, Alaska.*

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:00:00] So, can you tell me where you grew up?

**Robert Buchanan:** In Barberton, Ohio.

**Janis Kozlowski:** The same place that you ...?

**Robert Buchanan:** The same place I live. I've lived here 86 years.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Wow. And so your whole family was there?

**Robert Buchanan:** Uh, you mean my children and so forth?

**Janis Kozlowski:** And your brothers and sisters and so forth?

**Robert Buchanan:** Uh, well I've got ... not really right now. I've got a sister in California and I have a son in Florida. I have one son here in Barberton, I have a daughter here in Barberton, a daughter in Wadsworth Ohio, and a daughter in North Canton, Ohio.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So people are pretty scattered about now.

**Robert Buchanan:** Right, yeah. [chuckling] But that don't ... they're all pretty close together though, the towns are.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Ok. [0:01:00] So did you become interested in aviation when you were a young kid?

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, I might have been interested but getting into aviation in the Navy was kind of a [laughing], just kind of a mistake really. When I was in boot camp they gave us tests we took and these tests they rated you ... I forget what they call that –

by a percentile. Then I was up pretty high on the percentile on it and so I got to pick out just about anything I wanted.

But I was serving an apprenticeship in a machine shop at the Goodrich in Akron and I'd see on here "Aviation Machinists Mate." I thought well, that'd be right down my alley, get some more experience there as a machinist some place. Little did I know that an Aviation Machinist Mate in the Navy was an airplane mechanic. [laughing] So I didn't find that out until after I signed up for AMM school [laughing]. That's how I got into the....

And then, of course, I went to school as a Aviation Machinist, or as, you know, a mechanic and then they asked for volunteers for ... to fly in crews and I signed up for that. And so then I went to radar operator's school. I couldn't ... I wasn't trained to repair radars but I could operate a radar. And then I was sent to aerial gunnery school in Hollywood, Florida, and then back to ... I signed up ... they asked you to sign up what you wanted to fly in and I signed up to fly in TBFs – torpedo bombers. Well, everybody that signed up for ... all they wanted was ordnance men and radio men in that, and me being a mech I was sent then to Jacksonville, Florida and put in a ... trained in PBYS right there and then sent to the West Coast going to a squadron.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So was it a disappointment to get the PBYS since that's not what you wanted?

**Robert Buchanan:** Not really, no. You know, I don't think it made too much difference to me really. But I was ... after I got into it I was well pleased, I mean I enjoyed it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** And you said you didn't at first know that ... when you took the job there in Ohio that you were going to be working on airplanes. Did that turn out to be something that you really enjoyed?

**Robert Buchanan:** That was in boot camp in Great Lakes, Illinois, is where I was in boot camp. That's where I signed up for that. It was there that I did not realize that I was an airplane mechanic. I thought it was a machinist but it made no difference.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:04:11] So did you enlist or were you drafted?

**Robert Buchanan:** I enlisted.

As a matter of fact I had a deferment because at that time apprentices that were machinists and electricians were ... they were deferred. And I decided I didn't want the deferment so I joined the Navy and it almost cost me my job at the Goodrich because they said that I didn't work out, when I got back, that I didn't work out a notice and then leave. Instead, on Monday morning I joined the Navy and signed up to leave on the

following Friday so all I did was go in and get my tool box and go home and that was it. But they had to give me back my job when I got out, it was a law then.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Why did they offer you a deferment?

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, they ... skilled trades were deferred, if you were in a school doing that. In other words, machinists, electricians and probably sheet metal workers, they were wanted in the plants here in the States that were doing work like that because there really was a, probably a shortage of it for the war effort at the time. All of us were deferred. And we could ... but we didn't have to keep the deferment we could, like I did, turn them down and join. So that's how I got in the Navy.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So how old were you at the time?

**Robert Buchanan:** Then I was, let's see ... I just had my 20<sup>th</sup> birthday.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Were you married?

**Robert Buchanan:** No, I didn't even know my wife then.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, ok. So, after ... so you went through training at Great Lakes in Chicago and then what happened to you ... where did you go after that?

**Robert Buchanan:** You mean ... well I went to school in Chicago at 87<sup>th</sup> and Anthony which was a public school, that the Navy ... a brand new public school that the Navy took over and trained Aviation Machinist's Mates in that school.

Then I went to Millington, Tennessee, which is right by Memphis and did some more training there. And Millington is where I went also to the radar operator's school. Like I said, then aerial gunnery in Hollywood, Florida and then Jacksonville for air operations, and then on to the west coast to be put in a squadron.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So, what squadron were you attached to there?

**Robert Buchanan:** VP-61 which was later ... well, after we got overseas it was then designated as VPB-61 which the V stands for heavier than air, the P stands for patrol and the B stands for bombing. The number, of course, is just the number of the squadron.

**Janis Kozlowski:** And then where did they send you?

**Robert Buchanan:** From there I was sent to Attu.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, lucky you! [both laughing]

**Robert Buchanan:** I stayed at Attu – let me see.... I brought down, I figured maybe some of these things you had so I brought down a couple of these books. Let's see here. I'm gonna lay the phone down a minute here.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Ok. [pause]

**Robert Buchanan:** We got to Attu on, let's see, the 8<sup>th</sup> of April of 1944 and stayed there until the 11<sup>th</sup> of September in '44. And I went to Amchitka on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September and stayed there until the 16<sup>th</sup> of December of '44.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Was that your whole, excuse me, your whole tour of duty in the Aleutians was from April to December of '44 in those two places?

**Robert Buchanan:** From April until December that is right. I went to South Pacific then later.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:09:08] Let me back up just a second. Did you ... how did you get to Attu?

**Robert Buchanan:** We flew our own planes up there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh you did. And did you go up through Whidbey Island, or?

**Robert Buchanan:** We came from Whidbey Island, that's where we formed.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, I see. I thought you said California.

**Robert Buchanan:** No, no, not California. As a matter of fact I never was stationed in California.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, ok, my mistake, sorry.

**Robert Buchanan:** Whidbey Island is where I was sent to and we flew to Annette and I think from Annette to Kodiak then Kodiak to Dutch and from Dutch Harbor to Adak, then Adak out to Attu. That was ... we just stayed overnight in those places.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So was that a very eventful trip down there?

**Robert Buchanan:** From Whidbey to Attu?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yes.

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh, it ... about the only, I think that we were on some kind of an alert at Kodiak that time ... something about submarines. And I don't remember too

much about it. I remember we watched for submarines. Matter of fact, then we got to Adak I think we stayed about two days at Adak because they were just starting up the loran stations in the Aleutians and pilots all went to a loran school for some training on an loran there before we went to Attu.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Ok. [0:11:08] Did you fly with the same crew the whole time you were up in Alaska?

**Robert Buchanan:** Yes. The only time that I would've ... I was in the same crew all the while I was there. Anytime that I flew, it was just a ... could have been, I think I filled in a couple of times for somebody that was sick or something like that on another crew and flew with them. I flew in a volunteer – I was supposed to fly in a volunteer crew once, that didn't materialize. But mostly all of our time there I flew in the same crew.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Do you know ... do you remember who the guys were in your crew?

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh, yeah.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Can you tell me ... go ahead.

**Robert Buchanan:** You want the names of them?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yes, please.

**Robert Buchanan:** Ok, the pilot was J. W. Trout, Lieutenant J.W. Trout, he was from Kansas. The other two pilots was Ensign Erv Selberg, he was from Seattle, Washington. And the other one was Ensign George Keiter, he was from Lima. Now, George Keiter and I are the only two out of that crew that are still living and he lives in Xenia, Ohio. The rest of the crew was: John Yearwood, he was from Little Rock, Arkansas; of course, then myself from Barberton, Ohio; and a John Arnst who was radioman from Cheboygan, Wisconsin; and a Thomas Minyard who was a radioman from Bessimer, Alabama; and the ordnance man was James Ryckman and he was from Fresno, California.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So people were from all over on that crew.

**Robert Buchanan:** Yeah, they were, just two of us from Ohio. That was the only two that was from the same state.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did you guys get along well?

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh, yeah. We got along real good, there was no problem there, no.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Were you all about the same age?

**Robert Buchanan:** The enlisted men, yeah, were roughly about the same age. The pilots ... the main pilot, - the PPC, who they called the pilot "Plane Captain" – he was probably a few years older than the rest of us. The other two pilots were maybe a little bit older but not much older than us. The one that's still living, I think he's about 6 or 7 months older than me.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Ok. So was ... Trout then was your pilot. Was he a guy that you had respect for?

**Robert Buchanan:** John Trout?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah.

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh yeah. I liked him real well. Now the other ... Selberg, he died in Anchorage. Now I don't know what he did there but after the war he was living in Anchorage and died in Anchorage. Of course, John Keiter [meant George] is still living in Ohio as I told you and the rest of them are all dead, the rest of the enlisted men. I'm the only enlisted man in the crew living.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did you keep in touch with these guys over the years?

**Robert Buchanan:** No, not really so much anybody in this crew other than I did talk to a couple of them, you know, afterwards on the phone. But the next crew that I went into.... When we come back from up north I went into another crew, the one ... the radioman in that crew and myself – he was from Indianapolis, Indiana, and we stayed in touch with each other up until about 2 ½ years ago when he passed away. Matter of fact we'd go fishing together, our families would, up in Canada. We attended all our kid's weddings. But I stayed close to him, the rest not really other than just talking to them. Now George Keiter, yes, I talk to him every so often on the phone. Matter of fact I talked to him here just not too long ago – just a few weeks ago.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:15:56] Now, tell me who were your commanding officers when you were in Alaska.

**Robert Buchanan:** You mean of the squadron?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yes.

**Robert Buchanan:** Joseph Eastman was the Commanding Officer. The Executive Officer was William Perry and the Operations Officer was Frank Woody who was killed while we were up there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** What happened to him?

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, I don't think they really know. His plane went down and matter of fact he got killed ... the plane that they were in ... they were over, close to some place close to ... wait a minute I might be getting this mixed up with the one ... one of the crews I remember was over by Kamchatka Peninsula just north of the Kurile Islands. And one of them, they think, cracked up coming back there right close to Attu.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So he was lost and never found?

**Robert Buchanan:** That's right.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Ok. Was that a common thing there? Did you lose a lot of crews?

**Robert Buchanan:** No, we only lost the two crews. We were very fortunate.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Two crews in VP-61?

**Robert Buchanan:** Yes.

**Janis Kozlowski:** And what happened to those two crews?

**Robert Buchanan:** They both were on flights over towards the Kurile Islands. From Attu we would go ... you know where the Kurile's are at, north of Japan?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yes.

**Robert Buchanan:** At that time, Japan still owned the island of Paramushiro, which is now owned by Russia. But our flights were all over to the island of Paramushiro and then we'd also patrol up towards the Kamchatka Peninsula of Russia. See we'd ... from Petropavlovsk, Russia we were only about, I don't know, some 525 miles from there ... from Attu to there and from the northern part of the Kurile's we were about, I don't know, maybe 650 miles.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So is that what your mission's were all about, was flying over to the Kurile Islands?

**Robert Buchanan:** Basically that was right, yes.

**Janis Kozlowski:** How many missions do you think you flew over there?

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh, off hand I don't remember just how many. The plane that's in ... the only one I know is because I've checked on that with Matt Voight [from Palm Springs Air Museum]. That plane that's in Palm Springs, California we flew that one over there 33 times ... our crew did.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So if you flew that one 33 times you probably had about maybe 40 missions or so?

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh, probably that was only about half, we flew a lot over toward there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, ok.

**Robert Buchanan:** That was just an every ... when it was your turn to fly it was an every day occurrence, that's where we went.

**Janis Kozlowski:** I know some people only got a short ... they stayed in the Aleutians longer than you did but they only got, you know, 8 or 10 missions. So you flew a lot of missions during the time that you were there then it sounds like.

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, yes, but that was our purpose. Most of that was, you know, patrol, down into the Kurile's and up and down the Kamchatka Peninsula, the Russian Coast, and down into the Kurile's.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So what was the purpose of the patrols? What were you looking for?

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, anything. See, that's where they, that's when they invaded Dutch ... when they invaded Attu and Kiska and bombed Dutch Harbor, that's where they came from right there in the northern part of the Kurile's.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So you were looking for any kind of activity that would....

**Robert Buchanan:** Coming toward the Aleutians.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Ok. Did you ever see anything?

**Robert Buchanan:** We'd see things, yes – picket boats.

[0:20:40] I remember one time we almost ran into a Japanese plane in the fog.

**Janis Kozlowski:** What happened there?

**Robert Buchanan:** Pardon?

**Janis Kozlowski:** What happened there?

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, we were going over toward there and all of a sudden here's a plane that was right ... almost perpendicular to us and went right across the front of us. It was a Japanese plane. Neither one of us could see because it was solid fog. Normally,



what we seen up there, most of the time going there, we'd just be on radar because the fog was so thick.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Was that pretty scary? Or did you actually get to see what happened?

**Robert Buchanan:** In what way do you mean what happened?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Um, could you see from where you were sitting how close you got to that Japanese airplane or was it something that the pilot told you about later – your near miss?

**Robert Buchanan:** I don't remember who in the crew seen it or how we seen it and whether I seen it or not. That is one thing I do not remember. I know that that plane did cross right across the front of us but I don't remember who all seen it. It could have very easily been the two pilots in the cockpit that would have seen it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Well, that brings up the question I have is, tell me where in the airplane you were stationed?

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, in that plane we had what we called the tower. We had a lot of instruments up there. We adjusted our fuel consumption out of there, we did things when we started the planes up we had to do things there. The floats were up and down from there, there was just certain things in that cockpit or in that tower, that whoever was riding it – either myself or the other mech. That's ... you didn't normally stay up there, I mean, you'd switch off with other crew members. In fact, I would be on radar, I could be on radar too.

Whenever I got a chance, especially when we was coming back, the pilots would get out of his ... they knew I loved to fly it when we was up in the air so they'd ... I got to fly quite a bit. Never was allowed to land or take off but just as far as flying, get something to follow and that'd be it. I could do things like that.

[0:23:57] Matter of fact, I would ... in the morning before we'd take off, I mean, it was our job – the mech's job – to get in the plane and start the plane up and run the engines, check the engines out, check the plane visually all over and well, I used to call it bleeding the automatic pilot. When the pilot's would come out, why, they'd get in and you'd tell them everything was all right, that would be it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So was that position similar to what they would call a flight engineer now?

**Robert Buchanan:** That is right. It's the same thing.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Ok. Do you remember your first flight?

**Robert Buchanan:** The first one, no. [laughing] I wouldn't, I don't remember the first flight. No, not really.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So, it must not have been real memorable to you, that particular flight. But were there others that you remember because of some event that happened or...?

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh, just oddball things maybe. I know ... well, like ... I remember I was on radar once and we ... it was real foggy and I picked up three picket boats and we just circled around and come in like we was making runs and I could even tell on the radar how they would separate when they would ... of course, they had us on radar too evidently. They knew we were coming in toward them. It was so foggy I remember we couldn't even make a run on them.

Then another time we were down around Paramushiro and come back ... was coming back what we called sectors – I think there was about six sectors. You'd fly ... you'd be assigned to one sector. I remember we come back, we decided to drop off and take a little ride over the top of Kamchatka Peninsula. All we could see was woods down there. Of course, being from Attu there was nothing grew there – absolutely nothing but tundra. There wasn't a tree on the island. So we decided to take a ride up to there and then all of a sudden I saw ack-ack coming up. So they started ... but I don't think they ... it was just a warning. Of course, we were supposed to be ... at that time we were to stay three miles from the shoreline of Russia and we were clearing land.

Then, they quit firing at us and we started out and then the fighters – Russian fighters – come up and followed us back out to sea. And I don't think they even shot at us. I think that all they did was just followed us.

**Janis Kozlowski:** They wanted you ... to make sure that you knew you were in the wrong air space.

**Robert Buchanan:** That's right. They had the right ... they were not at war with Japan – Russian wasn't. Russia didn't declare war on Japan until right at the very end of the war in the Pacific. We ... being as they had a Peace Treaty with Japan we were not supposed to be in Russia. If a plane got shot up and had to go to Russia because they wouldn't be able to make it back to Attu, because that was strictly nothing but solid water all the way back, they could go in and they could crash land in Russia. But they would then taken as internees and kept same as a prisoner of war camp.

Now our squadron didn't have anybody ever taken as an internee over there but the PV squadron that was with us went up there, they had a couple of crews that ended up over in Russia as internees and were put in a, you know, same as a prisoner of war camp.

**Janis Kozlowski:** What squadron were you with that had PVs?

**Robert Buchanan:** Uh, that I don't have ... I don't remember if it was 135 or 139, I forget.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Do you remember any of the guys?

**Robert Buchanan:** No, they weren't ... the PV squadrons were all kept in Quonsets more or less to themselves and the PBV were up in another section. No, I ... some of them, you know, we'd get together but I don't remember any names of ... the only one I can think of right now is one that came to our ... I probably could look it up in my whatcha call it, in my roster of ... from our reunions. But it was Bob Larson, who is ... he's probably dead now, because he was quite a bit older than me. He was a pilot in a PV.

**Janis Kozlowski:** I was just kind of curious about whether you guys mixed it up very much when you were on the ground or not. It sounds like you kind of stayed separate.

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, there wasn't nothing much you could do, you know. There wasn't nothing much to do there. There was a ... they had a Quonset where they had a ... they showed movies. Of course, it was the same Quonset they held church in too [laughing]. No, I didn't associate with any of the PV people up there to amount to anything at all.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So it sounds like there wasn't very much to do when you weren't flying?

**Robert Buchanan:** There was *nothing* to do – shoot dice, play cards, nap, and that was about it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:30:29] It sounded like you flew quite a bit even in bad weather.

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh we, the PBVs flew when nothing else would fly. We would ... we flew more than the rest of the squadrons or any of the rest of the type of planes.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Why was that? How come the PVs didn't go up and the others?

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, they weren't just probably the safest plane to be flying in stuff like that, where the PBV could. A PBV would take an awful beating. I know, I remember not up there -- it was always bad flying up there, but we flew through a cyclone off the coast of Australia later on and that PBV took an awful beating going into the eye of that cyclone. And they could stand an awful beating like that.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Who decided whether the weather was ok for you to go out?

**Robert Buchanan:** That, you know, is something that I don't ... it wasn't the squadron. I think it was, like, the Commodore Gehres that was the head of everything on that island

was probably ... it was his group that was probably the ones that decided on who was going out and what they were doing.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So you just got the word that even though it could be fog to the ground, your crew was taking off and you were headed for the Kurile Islands?

**Robert Buchanan:** That is right. [chuckling] We usually left the ... I'm trying to think ... I don't know if we got up or left ... 3:30 rings a bell in the morning. I think the Master at Arms would come around and wake the crews up that were to fly that morning. I think they used to wake us up about 3:30 and you'd get dressed and head for the plane.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Was it kind of frightening sometimes, some of the weather that you had to fly in? Did you feel nervous about it?

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh, I think we got used to that. It probably frightened some but I don't know maybe I wasn't too bright, I don't remember it really bothering me that much.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Maybe it was just youth, huh?

**Robert Buchanan:** Pardon?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Maybe it was just your youth? Young people don't tend to get so ....

**Robert Buchanan:** That probably was it too.

[0:33:26] Now, I know when we came back a psychiatrist interviewed us -- when we came back.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Back to Whidbey you mean?

**Robert Buchanan:** Back to the States. We went back into Seattle. And I only know of -- that I can remember -- of one, maybe two -- I don't remember who that second one was -- but I know of one that was ... we thought he was old, he was 28, 29 years old [both laughing]. To us he was, you know, when you was 20 years old that was an old man! But I remember he was grounded. I don't know how they detected who to ground, but no, I wasn't.

**Janis Kozlowski:** For psychological reasons?

**Robert Buchanan:** I think that had to be it. They just asked you questions, that's all I remember them just asking me questions and that was it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Do you remember what kind of things they were asking you about?

**Robert Buchanan:** No, you know, I don't remember to be honest with you I don't remember one question.

**Janis Kozlowski:** And was it just that one time when you went back to Whidbey ... was that after Alaska or was that after ... when you were getting out?

**Robert Buchanan:** I didn't quite understand that.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Was that just ... after Alaska you went back to Whidbey and that's when they were questioning you?

**Robert Buchanan:** Yeah, we went back ... you know, I'm trying to think, I can't even remember. I don't think we went to Whidbey we went back to Seattle Naval Air Station. Of course, it was not very far from Whidbey Island.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, I see.

**Robert Buchanan:** There was Naval Air Station which hasn't been there now for a long time but it was at Seattle [Sand Point Naval Air Station on a peninsula in Lake Washington]. Of course, Whidbey Island Naval Air Station, the seaplane base part of it did not ... let's see it would have opened up, I think, in 1943. I think it was the year before, no, it must have been '42 because I got there in '43. And the land plane base [Ault field] opened up, I think, in ... oh, I might be mixed up a little bit. I remember the seaplane base opened up in '42 and the land plane base opened up in '43, I forget. But that was not until then out of Whidbey. That was both ... they both belonged to what you'd call Whidbey Island Naval Air Station.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, I see.

**Robert Buchanan:** The land plane base is there now, but there is no seaplanes there at all. At the seaplane base now all they have there is a, oh, they have a big laundry there and they have a school for kids that are, you know, their parents are stationed there at the island, on Whidbey Island, they have a school. That used to be our chow hall. The only reason I know that is we held our reunions there and we got all that information when we'd go out there to our reunion.

**Janis Kozlowski:** I see. So you ... when you went back there to the Seattle Air Station after Alaska and they were asking you questions were they trying to figure out whether you psychologically they could send you back into a combat area?

**Robert Buchanan:** Probably was, yeah.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Ok.

**Robert Buchanan:** See our squadrons, we came ... we formed, not the same crews, but 61 reformed then in February of – either January or February of 1945. Because we got back to the states in December, was sent home on a rehabilitation leave, then back there and put into a squadron that was 61 again. And we were going back overseas in a squadron but for some reason they didn't even move us out of there. We stayed right there and I don't know why that was we stayed there so long.

[0:37:56] Then the war came to an end and the crew that I was in, we were sent to the South Pacific and put in a squadron there on the island of Samar in the Philippines. And then our, myself and my pilot, and the first radioman in our crew, three of us in that crew, and then another pilot from another crew and two more, - three more enlisted men, were put into a crew and we were sent to Sangley Point which is Caviti in the Philippines. We flew for Admiral Allan McCann. [meant McCann]

**Janis Kozlowski:** So what kind of...?

**Robert Buchanan:** Or Allan McCann [Allan Rockwell McCann commanded a submarine squadron during World War II], not McCain [laughing], the guy running for President ... for Allan McCann.

**Janis Kozlowski:** McCann, ok.

**Robert Buchanan:** We were his crew.

**Janis Kozlowski:** And what were you doing in the South Pacific there? Why did they send you down there?

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, first we still was patrolling but then we got ... then we ended up, they lent our crew to the Army and a General Butler was more or less in charge of that, and we flew him and some people from Washington DC. Matter of fact, they were higher ranked than this General was. Because, even though they were civilians we were told how many flags to fly on the side of the plane and one that I remember was by the last name of Howard [Robert Buchanan had him listed as just "Mr. Howard" in his log book and said he was a civilian.]. He rated three stars. We flew them all over the South Pacific and they sold the stuff that was left over on these bases, like in New Guinea, places like that, mostly to the Dutch. We'd take....

The reason they wanted the PBY because we could land on the water and take out a life raft, you know, if there was no landing strip there, and take them in on a life raft, you know, on the beach. And they'd go in and look over all this stuff that was left over there, they sold what was.... I remember places I seen where tools for - airplane tools and stuff like that - just loaded with them – different bases. And I don't know what else they was selling. It wasn't the land, it was a property on there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So how long were you involved in that?

**Robert Buchanan:** Pardon?

**Janis Kozlowski:** How long were you involved in that?

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, I had enough points to get out of the Navy, I don't know just when it was, must have been, like in October, something like that, of 1945. But I was more or less was, decided I was maybe going to stay in the Navy and so I turned this down and I stayed with this crew doing this.... My pilot was regular Navy and so myself and the radioman, we stayed in the crew, both of us did. We both were thinking about staying in the Navy which neither one of us did then, but that's how we stayed in. We did that then until, I don't know, something like March of 1946. I probably can tell [pause, looking at paperwork]. Yeah, matter of fact I see right on here, March 11 of 1946, that's when I ended up down there, came back home.

**Janis Kozlowski:** And you didn't re-enlist and stay in?

**Robert Buchanan:** Pardon?

**Janis Kozlowski:** You didn't stay in after that?

**Robert Buchanan:** No, I ... you know, I was Petty Officer First Class which was pretty good and my pilot who, like I say, was regular Navy, wanted me to stay in. He said that he could arrange it for me to ... he'd get me a ... normally you'd have to take a test to advance in rate in the Navy. He said they would give me Chief Petty Officer if I wanted to stay in, I could come back to the States with the Admiral and be his Plane Captain back, but I wouldn't have the same pilot anymore. And, then he wanted me to, I decided not to do that, he wanted me to – he said he'd get me into flight school. Then I didn't, I decided to go home.

So then I came home. I no more than got home, I was only home a few weeks, I met who is now my wife. [laughing] So, if I'd have stayed in everything would have been a lot different than it is today.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah. What did you end up doing after the war, was it anything that you were trained for in the Navy?

**Robert Buchanan:** No, nothing. Not as far as flying. I went back to Goodrich, finished up my apprenticeship and then they had quite an extensive apprentice program. It took you four years of training at running machines and all them four years you went.... Now, myself, I had to go to school at Akron University, which I would go three evenings a week for maybe about three hours a night. And I did that for four years. Then I went to a school right after at Akron University in different schools with Goodrich. I was put on

salary and was a foreman in a machine shop. Then I ended up the last, about 12 years I was there, I ran the machine shop and we made prototype machinery for tire building equipment which, that was my last job at Goodrich before I retired.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So you pretty much made a career of Goodrich?

**Robert Buchanan:** Yes, right, that's about it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:44:55] Can I jump back for a minute back to the Aleutians. I wanted to talk to you about the PBYS that you flew in. What was that ... the area where you ... the mech was stationed was ... can you tell me about that? What your station was like on the airplane?

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, you know, if you went into a PBY now today it wouldn't even be up there. It's what they call the tower. One mech would ride that tower – there was two mechs in the crew – one of us would ride up in the tower. And then we also had a gun ... we were gunners and we'd been to aerial gunnery school. So you had, like I say, I was radar operator, so we had multiple jobs to do.

The nest in the tower of this plane in Palm Springs, California [Palm Springs Air Museum] is where they found my name scratched into the plane there ... written into the plane.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Do you remember the day you did that?

**Robert Buchanan:** No, not at all. But, soon as they showed me a copy of it ... my printing was just exactly the same. Matter of fact, I printed my name out like that and it looked just like it was in there. I didn't have ... matter of fact they found that under two coats of paint. I don't know how they got them coats of paint ... they haven't even look for stuff like that when they take that ... my name had two coats of paint over top of it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** It's amazing it was preserved and didn't come off.

**Robert Buchanan:** That ... just by being there, they've been able to track me down and find a lot of stuff about [the airplane and crew]. Matt Voight tells me that's the only airplane at Palm Springs that they have any history on of what it did during the Second World War.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah, and he's doing an incredible job of putting the history together on it.

**Robert Buchanan:** Yeah, he's got ... a lot of names that were given to him by myself and Ken, oh boy....



**Janis Kozlowski:** Claypool?

**Robert Buchanan:** ... Claypool, and I think it was one of the pilots. Oh dog gone, I can't think of it... That's my problem today is I know that name as well as I know my own but do you think I can think of it now? ... different people he's contacted and they've ... also, then, I had got ... he got in touch with me, a man from Georgia, whose brother was killed - that was in our squadron - one of the ones that got killed. And Matt talked to him a lot. Matter of fact that guy wrote a book about his brother.

But them books are not exactly right because, for instance, in this book, this man from Georgia wrote, he's got me in there that I was an enlisted man stationed at Dutch Harbor and I never was stationed at Dutch Harbor. I was stationed at ... I went to Dutch Harbor that one time, we stopped there, but that was just over night. That was the only time I was ever on Dutch Harbor. So some of the things in the book are not exactly right.

[0:49:13] Matter of fact, Ken Claypool, he gave me the name of somebody that wrote a book, I don't know who that was. I didn't recognize the name at all. In that, it had in there that the three men that became prisoners of war in Japan were never heard from or nobody knew where they was at until after the war was over and that's not true either.

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh. I got to know the one quite well from a reunion. His name was Carl Creamer. I think I ... didn't I give you their names and addresses?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yes, you did, un-hnn.

**Robert Buchanan:** Did you ever contact them at all?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Not yet, I haven't. No.

**Robert Buchanan:** Ok. I didn't ... because I don't know if they're even living yet. But there was a Carl Creamer and Wiley Hunt, but that's the only two that I knew. And Wiley Hunt I met him and was with him for just a matter of a few hours, in fact my wife and I and he and his wife went out to eat I remember and we talked. Carl Creamer I got to know him quite well. Matter of fact I've got a picture of myself and him and Jeff...

**Janis Kozlowski:** Jeff Dickrell?

**Robert Buchanan:** Dickrell, yeah. Because Jeff Dickrell used to come to our reunions.

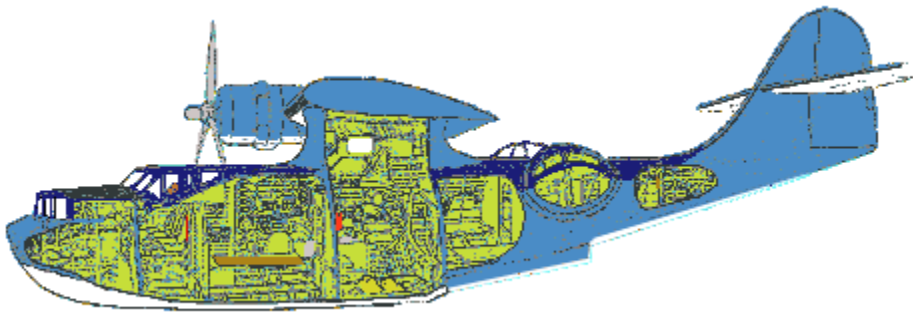
**Janis Kozlowski:** Let me, can I jump back for a minute again to when ... in the PBY you were ... so you were up in this tower. Was that a ... what could you see up there? What was in view there and what were you doing?

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, there was instruments and so forth in that tower. If you look at a PBV – a picture of a PBV – between the main body and the wing there, you'll see a section goes up from the body where the wing comes across and is fastened on the top of that. On each side of that is a little window, you can see that on a picture of a PBV if you look at it. And that's where the tower was. The tower was up into that. There was a seat up there, you sat up into that. Like I say, there's a, I have pictures of that tower from a book that I got one time of all the parts of a plane.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So were you monitoring engine performance?

**Robert Buchanan:** Yes, you could up there. Engine heat, rpm's, everything in that, yeah, we could monitor that up there in the tower.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did you have control over the engines or did you just monitor them?



*Cutaway image of a PBV. From: A project to restore a 1942 Consolidated Aircraft Corporation PBV-5B Patrol Bomber Seaplane for Display in the National Museum of Naval Aviation. <http://home.earthlink.net/~cutawaypbv/>*

**Robert Buchanan:** The only control that we had up there was when we started them and also of ... to regulate the fuel consumption while we were flying, how many gallons per hour we would set the engines to use.

**Janis Kozlowski:** And did you have good contact with the pilots up front then?

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh, yeah, we had, we could talk to them over their intercom and plus we had a bunch of little buttons and we had a little ... above them was a little light you could flick on a light. And that light would tell you certain things. Like when we would run the floats up, the pilot, would ... if we were operating off of water, he'd take off and [when] he wanted the floats up he'd flip that button on and it would come on up in the tower and you'd run the floats up. Then you'd just jog the button up and down and that told him that you were done, the floats were up and you were sure they were locked. And the same way if you come off of ... if you were taking off from the land, you could tell

him whether the wheels had locked up into place when they come up. Just different things like that were on this board going across up in the tower. I don't remember all of them.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:54:05] Now you told me one story that I was hoping that you'd repeat today, the night that they wanted unmarried men to go on a nuisance raid to Paramushiro.

**Robert Buchanan:** Yeah. I remember that.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Can you tell me what happened?

**Robert Buchanan:** We didn't go though.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Can you tell me what happened that night?

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, I ... the beginning of it ... I remember they come around and they asked for volunteers. See and I don't remember whether it was just one crew, two crews, or just how many crews there was, I ... that I don't remember. And it was something to do ... we were to go over to be a nuisance raid on Paramushiro because the Army bombers had been over Paramushiro that day and did a lot of damage and all they wanted us to do was to go over it at night and just be a nuisance to them getting stuff back together.

One thing I do remember is – I'm Catholic – and the Catholic Chaplain there, I don't remember if I was the only Catholic or not [laughing], but I remember he ... which used to be in Catholicism, they'd give you the last rites if they thought you didn't have a chance to live. Now they don't do it, they call it "the anointing of the stick." But then he gave me the last rites. Well, I wasn't too enthused about that.

Anyway, I remember going down, we'd get in the plane and there was a bunch of guys from the Army Air Corp, they were down there and they were kidding us that we were gonna fly – and it was snowing and raining and both. They was kidding us about, well, just kind of agitating us about flying those things over to ... on a night like that. Well, we got, our crew, we got out, we cut the engines - and I topped the engines off with gas which we always did, we filled them right up to the top after. Then we start in with ... we no more got our engines started when a jeep come around and told us that they had stopped that flight, that it wasn't gonna be done. They sent us back to ... take the plane back to the revetment and we went back to our Quonset huts. So it wasn't even listed as a flight because you didn't list your flight unless you got in the air.

**Janis Kozlowski:** You must have been relieved though?

**Robert Buchanan:** Yeah, I could [laughing] say ... to be honest with you, yeah.

**Janis Kozlowski:** After getting your last rites, heading out on a mission, that's gotta make ... put the fear in you. [both laughing]

**Robert Buchanan:** It didn't come about. I never knew just ... never did know just what the whole story was to that. There was a lot of rumors went around. Rumors was that the Chaplain had contacted an Admiral Kinkaid [in charge of North Pacific Force] who wasn't stationed up there, but I don't know just where he was at, but contacted him and he's the one that stopped the flight.

[0:57:32] Commodore Gehres was pretty gung-ho. He was ... I don't know if you ever heard about him or not. He got himself into an awful lot of trouble right at the end of the war. He was ... after we was ... he was taken out of, off the island of Attu and was a skipper of the carrier, the Ben Franklin. And that Ben Franklin got shot up awful bad and he was as, I've been told, he was supposed to abandon that ship and get out of there but he brought the ship back towards the States and got it back. But he endangered an awful lot of lives, I understand, doing that. Anyway, he got back, anyhow.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Was he the one that you think was responsible for sending out the PBV missions in all kinds of weather?

**Robert Buchanan:** His group was, yes, that's right. He was in charge of that. There's been a lot of stories. I don't know if ... there's a book out about him. Let's see what kind of, I'm trying to think which book it was in, about him. He had a cow, had a barn with a cow in it so he had fresh milk because everybody else got powdered milk up there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, that's right I remember that story.

**Robert Buchanan:** [laughing] That was Leslie Gehres was his name.

**Janis Kozlowski:** He must be the one they wrote the poem about, "The Man Behind the Iron Plated Desk."

**Robert Buchanan:** That one I didn't hear.

**Janis Kozlowski:** I'll have to send you that.

**Robert Buchanan:** Ok. [laughing] No that's ... I didn't know much about him. We just did what we was told to do, I guess.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [0:59:20] How long were those flights over to Paramushiro from Attu or Amchitka?

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, see, the sectors up north towards Russia were a few hours shorter. The ones ... if you made a flight down toward Paramushiro on that, that was probably a 12 to 13 hour flight.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Round trip?

**Robert Buchanan:** Round trip, yes.

**Janis Kozlowski:** And was that about at the limits of your fuel?

**Robert Buchanan:** That was it, yeah. That was just about it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** That's a pretty long day to be flying.

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh, yeah.

Matter of fact, we probably did a lot of dippy things. We used to carry a Coleman burner in the plane. They had a little heating stove on them planes but it wasn't worth nothing. And we would put regular gasoline in that Coleman burner and make our coffee and stuff inside the plane with that Coleman burner. Some of the guys in the crews weren't too happy about that. That's the way we did it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** They probably like the coffee though?

**Robert Buchanan:** They drank the coffee, yeah! [laughing] That's right!

**Janis Kozlowski:** Well it must have been ... was it pretty cold in the airplane?

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh yeah, them planes were cold, they had a heater in them but they were ... they didn't work too well. We wore real heavy gear when it was cold. Of course, most of the time up there we had to wear fairly heavy gear all the time. When it got down real cold we wore the extra heavy flight jackets and the flight pants and big flight boots and that was it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So did the Navy equip you pretty well for that?

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh, yeah, we were equipped alright.

Matter of fact, when we came back we could of brought all that stuff home with us and took it home here. I didn't bring nothing! There was gun installations there the Army had them on different ... they manned anti-aircraft guns that were stationed in different places, they would come down, them guys would come down to our Quonsets. I remember, now my stuff I give to them Army guys because I think we were equipped better than they were. When we got back, I remember they said that, there was a guy he

said, "Well, you guys probably lost everything at sea." And everybody said, "That's right!" And they said that anything you had you could bring home and I could of sent all that stuff home but I didn't. I just got myself home and that was about it.

**Janis Kozlowski:** At the time it probably didn't seem very important to you.

**Robert Buchanan:** Yeah, I guess it maybe would.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [1:02:25] Now you said you were stationed on Attu first and then Amchitka second. What was the difference between what you did on those two islands?

**Robert Buchanan:** No difference. Now, they split the squadron up. There was ... the exact amount of crews, that's what I don't remember, how many was sent to each place. But there was a detachment stayed at Attu, and then a detachment went to Amchitka, and one went to Adak, and one went to Kodiak. Now, we went to Amchitka, that was about the same ... we had about the same thing there as we did when we was at Attu. Of course, Amchitka's only, what it's about, I don't know maybe, couple hundred miles southeast of Attu, I think, approximately.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Which one had better accommodations?

**Robert Buchanan:** They were about the same. There wasn't much difference.

**Janis Kozlowski:** What kind of ... where were you staying in Quonset huts?

**Robert Buchanan:** Yeah. When we got up there they had all Quonset huts put up for the, just about everybody.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Was it more fun at Amchitka?

**Robert Buchanan:** More fun?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah, more recreation, more things to do?

**Robert Buchanan:** No! That was the same. There was nothing at either place. Matter of fact, Amchitka, atom bomb tests were done at Amchitka later when they first came out with the atom bombs ... or for tests. I'm talking about after the war was over. They did testing on Amchitka with atom bombs.

[1:04:19] Then coming back we flew to Adak and in our crew, I don't know how we got to come back on a Naval Air Transport. We didn't have to fly our own plane back, we just come back on Naval Air Transport. They flew us to Anchorage and from Anchorage to Seattle.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So you left your airplane in the Aleutians?

**Robert Buchanan:** No. There were more flight crews than there were planes. There was ... not every crew had a plane. So that's the reason that ... you know, I've heard guys say that you was assigned to a plane but you know, really I don't think that that's so. I don't think we were ever particularly assigned to any specific plane. You might have flown in one more than the other one, like, our crew did in that one that's down there at Palm Springs, but I don't... It could have been an assignment to certain planes, but according to my logbook we flew an awful lot of different planes.

**Janis Kozlowski:** How many different airplanes did you have in your squadron?

**Robert Buchanan:** Gee, I think it was 18 crews. I think we went up there with 15 planes. I don't think, I don't think we had a full 18 crews when we came back. And I don't think that we had the 15 planes either. I think there was ... I don't know what the deal was there. I think there was some planes taken back for.... I know there was one crew sent back. I don't know just what all the particulars were on that one ... I don't know what the deal was on that.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Was that PBY a good flying airplane?

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh, yeah. Yeah, you'll never get anybody who flew in PBYs to say it wasn't a good plane. [laughing]

**Janis Kozlowski:** So you felt confident in it?

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh, yeah, I did, you know. I never, you know, felt like I was at risk or anything to be honest with you. Of course, I wasn't too bright either. [laughing]

Weather up there was the worst thing. Weather was terrible flying. They had what they call williwaws. You take off in those dog gone things and they were twisters, they'd catch you and just kind of twist the plane around.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So did you have some frightening flights that way or did that not bother you?

**Robert Buchanan:** Offhand I don't remember that really bothering me that much either.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Did you ever get sick?

**Robert Buchanan:** I think you get used to stuff like that. You know it's there and you more or less expect it so I don't think it really.... It's probably a good thing that you do get that way. You probably would go kind of nutty.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah.

**Robert Buchanan:** The thing up there is there was nothing to do. That was 10 months of absolutely just, you know, absolutely nothing to do.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So you were thankful for the missions so that you had something to occupy your time?

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, [laughing] yeah. I don't remember just actually being *thankful* for them but I didn't, when we did have them I didn't feel like I didn't want to go. So it's probably ... I don't know whether you ... I think you probably did get to a place where you were just happy to have something to do.

But, have you ever been far out in the islands there?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Only to Dutch Harbor, never farther.

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, on Attu there was not a bush. Same way with Amchitka: no bushes, no trees, absolutely nothing. There was ... there was fox on Attu, there *was*. As I understand it, they were brought over there by the Russians one time. There was, they called them Aleuts that lived there when Japan took that island and I think that ... I've read that those were brought in there. The only thing I know of that was ever there was those fox. And I'll be honest with you, the only thing I've ever seen was pictures of them on that island. I don't remember ever seeing one. And ground squirrels – they say that was there.

I used to see a lot of the sea lions, used to be a lot of sea lions there. But, other than that, that's all there was there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [1:09:53] Did you ever go fishing?

**Robert Buchanan:** Oh yeah! I did go fishing. [We'd] Catch Halibut out in the bay. The one Chaplain had ... you'd go down and you could check out a rod and reel out from him and go out and get a life raft and take it out and go out and fish and catch these halibut. You know what a halibut looks like? Looks like it's got an eye on the top and an eye on the bottom?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Um-hmm, black on ... dark on one side, light on the other.

**Robert Buchanan:** Yeah, right. We could catch them out there and there was another fish, I don't even know what it was. It was pretty good sized. They used to ... meat was kind of bluish like.



But then, I remember when the salmon was going up to spawn in those hills there was a little crick right there close to our Quonset huts. It wasn't very deep because we'd walk through it to go to the revetment and we'd wear boots that go up right below our knees, just a rubber boot is what we used to wear. That crick was just full of salmon going up to spawn. I couldn't believe it. I never thought I'd ever see that many fish. They were so thick they were just one on top of another. Matter of fact you could kick them out of the water and we would take and.... If they caught you taking, kicking this fish, they'd raise heck with you.

I know we'd take these oil burners in the Quonset for heat and we'd take the top grill part off and put them in a pan and fry them in some of that old butter that they never melted up there. Put them in there and fried them in that pan. I tell you they were awful good coming out of that water up there. That water was cold.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh yeah, I bet they were good. But are you saying they didn't really want you to catch the fish?

**Robert Buchanan:** I don't remember them ever saying anything if you just went down and you caught a couple and brought them up there and fried them. But no, you wouldn't just go around kicking fish out of the water. I never seen anybody checking them. I heard that they used to send some of the Marine Guards up along through there to catch guys kicking more out than what they were supposed to. There's no sense in kicking them out, I mean, what the heck. But, no they were thick in there.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Would your mess hall cook cook them up for you or you had to do it yourself?

**Robert Buchanan:** We do them right there at the Quonset. Just bring them up there and clean them and fry them. I don't really remember how good we was at it. I remember doing it. I really didn't do it more than, I don't remember more than a couple of times doing that. It was more trouble than it was worth probably.

**Robert Buchanan:** [1:13:10] He remembered there was a story in one of his FlyPast magazines that had about the PBVs. And he dug it out and I give him the number down there and he finds out it's the one down there at Palm Springs. Matter of fact it was a picture of it on the cover and then a story on the inside.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Was that before you knew that it was down in Palm Springs?

**Robert Buchanan:** No that was afterwards. In that it's got all the planes that are in – PBVs that are in museums world wide and lists them. I have looked at PBVs at air shows, different places, ever since I got out and would take the number to find out what the military number was on it, not to just ... This plane is down there now, we found out now

that it was 62. I was pretty sure that that rang a bell probably because we flew in it so much that I remembered that number 62. But I wasn't sure.

Matt talked to a fellow that I gave him, a pilot that I gave him the number, and he had also had the number of the plane on the side in his log book. So that gave us ... that's what told us that that planes number on the side was 62.

But then I went through this list and this book FlyPast of all the PBYS and I find there's six of them PBYS world-wide that I flew in. I couldn't believe that. That seems like ... it almost had to.... There's one in Norway, I flew in that one eight times, that was a PBY-5A. Then there's one in the State of Washington owned by Comanche Air Inc. and that one I only flew in once. Then there's one in Tucson, Arizona at the Pima Air and Space Museum, I flew in that one once. Of course, the one in Palm Springs I flew in 34 times. Then there's one in Brazil, that's a 6A, a PBY but it's a 6A. I flew in that one four times. And there's one in, I don't know what that is M U S period. Oh, the RAF museum Cosford, Shropshire, United Kingdom, that's a 6A and I flew in that one just one time. But those could have been, I don't know I'll have to check that, the 6As could have been either at Whidbey when we got back to the States or it could have been in the South Pacific that I flew in one of them. [See table at end of interview]

**Janis Kozlowski:** Well, that must be some kind of a record. Most guys I think just would be happy to have one of their airplanes they flew in in a museum and you have six.

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, that is amazing. The one that I flew in the Admirals plane, I had 26 flights in that one. But I, that serial number was not listed anyplace in any museum. So that one I don't know where that ones at. But I've got all the planes listed, gosh there's an awful lot of them. But the one at Palm Springs, like I say, that one I flew in the most and then the one that the Admiral had, that one next. Then I flew in one I see 23 different times. I don't where that one is, it's not listed as being anyplace. Then I see one 12, lots of 8s and 9s and so forth like that.

**Janis Kozlowski:** [1:17:35] You put the bureau number in your log book, is that how you logged them?

**Robert Buchanan:** I put the bureau number in my log book, that's right.

**Janis Kozlowski:** And it was painted on the...?

**Robert Buchanan:** That's how ... because they got no idea what the number on the outside of those planes would have been. Matt asked me about that, you know, and I told him the number 62 did ring a bell but I was not sure about that. That was something I.... Then when he got a hold of this one pilot, his last name was Skidmore, he had not only the serial numbers listed, he had the number on the outside of the plane – the regular number on the plane. And he had flown in this 48426 and he had listed 48426 that the

number on the side was 62. So that's how Matt got ... come up with the ... we know what the outside number was.

**Janis Kozlowski:** So, when you went on a mission they would say, take number 62 or whatever?

**Robert Buchanan:** That's right. The serial number, I would get the serial number ... I think when we filled out the yellow sheet I think I had to put the serial number on the yellow sheet. That's where we checked the plane before we took off and then when we came back we'd get the yellow sheet back and mark on there if there was any problems with the plane and then the ground crews would – we didn't have to take care of our own planes. All we had to do was do the flying.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Who took care of them?

**Robert Buchanan:** They had a regular ground crew to take care of them. The ground crews didn't fly.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, I see.

**Robert Buchanan:** They would give the ground crews what they called flight skins. They'd pay them flight pay as long as they got four work hours a month in the air. Well, all of us guys, what we'd do is, our flight ... they'd take care of our planes and you'd get to know certain guys and you'd ... when you'd come back you'd sneak their name in on the yellow sheet and turn it in and they'd get their four hours in on this one flight and they'd get paid flight skins. So we kind of cheated the government out of some money.

**Janis Kozlowski:** We won't report you now!

**Robert Buchanan:** [laughing] Ok. I'm glad of that.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Now, did the guys on the ground want to fly or did, were they happy...?

**Robert Buchanan:** No, not necessarily, they'd rather not. They'd like to get paid the flight pay but they didn't want to fly.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yeah, they looked at that fog and said, "I'd rather stay down here on the ground."

**Robert Buchanan:** Yeah, of course, them guys, you know, they'd work on those planes all day and do all the tests and checks on them. We'd have 30, 60 and 120 hour checks.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Where did they work on them, just out in the open?

**Robert Buchanan:** They had a big hangar down there. They'd pull them into that hangar I think, when they'd do ... I don't know how much work they did outside to be honest with you, I never went down and checked. I don't remember ever going down. The only place I'd see those guys is when we'd go ... they had ... you know what a revetment is where they kept the planes?

**Janis Kozlowski:** Yup. Dug back in the hillside.

**Robert Buchanan:** Well, it wasn't ... it wasn't necessarily back in the hillside. What they would do is they'd pile ... the bulldozers would push dirt up and make a big high bank and just enough opening in it that the planes would go through. They used to keep, I think, around three planes in a revetment.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Ok. So they were pretty big.

**Robert Buchanan:** I know what you're talking about. I seen pictures of that. I never seen a revetment built back into the side of a hill like that. Our revetments on Attu were all man-made.

**Janis Kozlowski:** I see.

**Robert Buchanan:** At Amchitka they were man-made. Amchitka is pretty flat to start with.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Um-hmm, yeah. I think only maybe on Kodiak and Dutch Harbor they had them built in the hillside.

**Robert Buchanan:** What's that?

**Janis Kozlowski:** I think maybe Kodiak and Dutch Harbor were the only places they had them actually....

**Robert Buchanan:** That might have been. And I never was stationed on Kodiak or Dutch and, like I say, we landed there going up and that was the only time I was ever at Kodiak or Dutch Harbor. How they, what they called revetments there I didn't really know. But, you brought that up, I've seen a picture someplace in a book that showed what they called a revetment and it was built back into a hillside. I never seen one that way.

[1:22:24] In the squadron there was 144 people in that squadron and there's a lot of them that, you know, really I wasn't close friends [with] or hardly knew them out of that 144. [I] probably knew them at one time, you know, but didn't associate with them that much and they've, over the last 60 – 70 years kind of ... I've lost any idea of them.

I've got pictures here, you know, I have pictures of different people that were in squadron 61 and I remember names. I can't remember anymore, a lot of them I can't put the name with the picture that I can recollect, you know, seeing at one time. I can't put them together. An awful lot of them I can, one's that I knew real well. I've got one picture up there, you know, I know in that picture there's several of them that were killed, were in the one crew that got killed. But only one of them that I remember and he's the only one that I can remember, that I can put the name and the picture together, the rest of them I can't.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Was that Woody?

**Robert Buchanan:** No, Woody was ... this guy was Woody's ordnance man. His name was Joe Heldorfer. And he was the ordnance man in Woody's crew, that's right. And the rest, some of the rest in that picture, I'll bet were part of Woody's crew but you know, I cannot ... there's two other guys on there that I know their, I remember them and they weren't in Woody's crew: one whose name I do are Chester Brokos who was from Cleveland, and the other one was Bob Custer who really lived in Akron here after the war for quite a while. He was originally was from West Virginia. I remember them too I can place the names in the pictures there no problem at all, but the rest of them.... Joe Heldorfer I can remember. The only reason I remember him is because he was a big tall lanky guy and he always used to remind me of ... he looked like Li'l Abner. He was real quiet and just a big raw boned guy but the rest of them I can't.... I remember their faces but I cannot put a name with them.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Well there's ... it sounds like there was a lot of guys in your squadron so it'd be hard to remember them all.

**Robert Buchanan:** Like I say, we had 144 guys in the squadron and that's not counting our Yeoman, because we had 145 guys in the squadron. The Yeoman never flew. Matter of fact he just died not long ago, he was from California.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Who was he?

**Robert Buchanan:** His last name was Jewett. Now, you know, his first name has escaped me.

[1:26:02] I had listed in Cleveland. I didn't .... I was supposed to go to Akron to enlist but you'd enlist in Akron and then you would go ... you would stay home for another several months and then they would call you and send you to Cleveland and that's when they would give you your physical and everything. So, I got a guy to take me to Cleveland and I enlisted in Cleveland; went in in the morning and enlisted, took my physical and everything, and that's all I had to do was get my parent's signature. Back then if you weren't 21 you had to have your parents signature. That's been changed now to 18. But back then you had to have a signature if you weren't 21 years of age.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Oh, I didn't realize that.

**Robert Buchanan:** So, that was my biggest problem, getting my mother to sign.

**Janis Kozlowski:** She didn't want you to go.

**Robert Buchanan:** My dad signed it. He finally talked my mother into signing for me.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Wasn't it likely you would have been drafted if you hadn't enlisted?

**Robert Buchanan:** You know, I was in the Navy and I got my notice to be drafted after I was already joined in the Navy. And my mom and dad got my thing to be drafted. That was way late because that's when they started to draft anybody that had a deferment. I think I told you I had a deferment to start with. So I'm guessing, if I remember right ... matter of fact, I think I was on Attu when I got that notice, when my Mom and Dad got a notice for me to be ... I don't know if it was the end of 1944 or even if it was after I was back in the States, I don't remember. They got a notice that I was to report for duty, to be drafted.

All of them guys that were deferred, like I was telling you about before, those guys were all drafted at the very end of the war. There was no ... I don't know what the deal was there. They took the deferments away. I don't know how that was, because they had gotten a lot of women in working, which was very uncommon earlier in the war, but at the end it was women working then. Probably had all the people they needed to work. Those guys were all drafted then, later on at the very end of the war.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Let me ask you one other question, did you ever get any commendations or awards?

**Robert Buchanan:** No, I never got nothing.

**Janis Kozlowski:** Sounds like you guys should have for all those missions over to Paramushiro, those were dangerous and ....

**Robert Buchanan:** They didn't give much out then. Matter of fact, as I understand each squadron had a limit of citations they could give out and I know that it never made no sense to me. I know when I was just reading it the other day, Bill Perry who was the Executive Officer, his crew made a flight that was supposed to be some kind of a special flight from over Paramushiro and he received the distinguished flying cross and some guy that was, did something special, he wasn't in their crew, but he flew along, he got some kind of a citation. But nobody else in the crew got anything, which didn't really make too much sense to me. If you're going along for the ride I think you should give a thank you or something like that [chuckling]. But that's the way [it was]. They didn't give a ....

Matter of fact most of the guys probably were about as bad as me too. You didn't want to put ... we bought taylor made's. I forget what ... we thought it was an awful price to pay for our taylor makes. It was a much nicer uniform than ... had a bigger bell on the bottom of the pants and stuff like that and you didn't want to put holes in it with anything that you pinned on there. [both laughing]

**Janis Kozlowski:** Wanted to keep them pristine.

**Robert Buchanan:** No, all I got was American Theatre of War, Asiatic Pacific Theatre of War, Good Conduct medal and the Victory medal. That was the four medals that I got. That's all I got.

Robert Buchanan's flights in PBYS that are currently housed in museums across the world. This information was provided from his log books in February 2009:

Palm Springs Air Museum, California: 33 flights from Attu and Amchitka. 1 flight from Whidbey Island, Washington, totaling 34 flights.

Caribbean Airport Facility, Inc. San Juan, Puerto Rico: flown January 8, 1944 at Whidbey Island, Washington, Serial #48412.

Norwegian Historical Aircraft Museum (Flyhistorisk Museum), Stavanger, Norway: aircraft was flown on the following dates: April 14, 1945; April 15, 1945; May 3, 1945; May 17, 1945; July 4, 1945; July 24, 1945; August 19, 1945; August 25, 1945 at Whidbey Island, Washington. PBY 5A, Serial #08109.

Pima Air and Space Museum, Tucson, Arizona: PBY-5A flown May 4, 1944 from Whidbey Island, serial #48396.

Comanche Air Inc, Ephrata, Washington: PBY-5A flown March 8, 1945 and March 11, 1945 from Whidbey Island, Serial #34027.

RAF Museum at Cosford, United Kingdom: flew the PBY-6A on December 15, 1945 at Sanar, Philippines. Serial #63993.

Belem Air Force Base (Forca Aerea Brasileira), Belem, Brazil: flew the PBY-6A on September 5, 1945, September 6, 1945, September 7, 1945 from Whidbey Island, serial #46643.

Hatzerim Israeli Air Force Museum, Hatzerim, Israel: flew PBY-6A on November 14, 1945 from Sanar, Philippines, serial #64017