

Interview with Joe Baldeschi

Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Project

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This interview is part of the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Project. The interview with Mr. Baldeschi 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. All photos courtesy of Joe Baldeschi. The transcript has been lightly edited.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok. So this is ... it's June 16th, 2008. And, who am I speaking with?

Joe Baldeschi: Joseph Baldeschi, B A L D E S C H I.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok, great. Thank you very much. And I'm Janis Kozlowski with the National Park Service. [0:00:29] Joe is it ok if I record our conversation today?

Joe Baldeschi: I hereby grant Janis Kozlowski the privilege of using this conversation which is being recorded, in part or in whole, and it's signed today.

Janis Kozlowski: Thank you very much. [laughing]

Joe Baldeschi: 2008.

Janis Kozlowski: Thank you very much Joe.

Joe Baldeschi: Ok.

Janis Kozlowski: Um, did you have a place that you wanted to start or do you want me to?

Joe Baldeschi: Look, you've got these questions in here, these are simple answers.

Janis Kozlowski: Yes.

Joe Baldeschi: The [word unclear] on is coming later. [laughing]

Janis Kozlowski: Ok.

Joe Baldeschi: The questions. Have you got your sheet of the questions?

Janis Kozlowski: I sure do.

Joe Baldeschi: Ok. We'll start with number 1.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok.

Joe Baldeschi: And the answer is: **[0:01:21]** The Navy, volunteer.

Janis Kozlowski: You volunteered with the Navy and which squadron or....

Joe Baldeschi: The branch was Naval Aviation.

Janis Kozlowski: Un-hnn. And there was no further ... which unit were you with then?

Joe Baldeschi: Well, at that time I started with boot camp.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok.

Joe Baldeschi: All right. **[0:01:45]** But I ended up in Naval Aviation as an Aviation Airborne Gunner and Radio and Radar Specialist.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok. And so where did you have your training?

Joe Baldeschi: The training started out with boot camp, obviously, and then I was sent to Aviation Radio and Radar School in Memphis, Tennessee and then sent to air gunnery training in Lake City, Florida and Hollywood, Florida. And from there I was sent home on liberty for a few days and then I was assigned to report to Whidbey Naval Air Station in Washington State at Whidbey Island where I was assigned to VPB-139, a patrol bombing squadron. And [I was]

assigned to a flight crew. We flew PV-2 Harpoons which were medium twin engine bombers.

[0:03:01] And next one was “how did you get to Alaska?” We flew our airplanes that we took overseas.

Janis Kozlowski: You flew it up from Whidbey?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah. From Whidbey we flew to several stops: Annette Island, Umnak, and Anchorage and finally ended up on Attu.

[0:03:23] We discovered that our daily life in Attu was cold – very cold. And in the free time we just played cards, wrote letters or go to the gym.

Janis Kozlowski: Did you guys have a name for Attu?

Joe Baldeschi: Uh.... I think, what was it? Not Massacre Bay. That name comes to my head but I’m not so sure.

Janis Kozlowski: I thought I remembered in an earlier conversation that you guys called Attu, “The Refrigerator.”

Joe Baldeschi: Oh. [laughing] That’s what I had said it was cold! [both laughing] It was more than a refrigerator, it was a freezer!

Janis Kozlowski: **[0:04:12]** Joe, what do you ... how do you feel about telling me a little bit about your background, about growing up in and being in Italy and all that?

Joe Baldeschi: Well, before I got into the service I was born in a little town in Pennsylvania called Ina, Pennsylvania, August 12th, 1924. I had the misfortune of losing my mother at age 3 and my Dad was a coal miner. And obviously he went to work early in the morning and got out at 2:30 in the afternoon blacker than the ace of spades. He cleaned up and then started looking for Joe and he couldn’t find me because he only had seven sister-in-laws that were gonna take care of me. But I guess nobody did because when he started looking for me he would find me sitting at the edge of a 1000 foot mining shaft and he panicked. He thought, “This kid is gonna get in trouble sooner or later.” And he met a gentleman that was going to have a little vacation in Italy in a village next to where my Dad was born. And he asked him if he would take me to my grandparents and he said, “sure.” And that’s how I ended up in Italy.

And I was raised by my grandparents but mostly by my father's youngest sister. And she raised me till the year I got back in 1939, I think, in November, back to America.

Janis Kozlowski: And how old were you then?

Joe Baldeschi: I was probably about 16 or thereabouts.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:06:04] Ok. And then how old were you when you enlisted in the Service?

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, God, what was it. I had to go through high school, probably close to 19.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok.

Joe Baldeschi: No! No, no, no. Yeah, close to 19 or 20, somewhere in there.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok, so you were a pretty young guy.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah. [0:06:30] But I wasn't the youngest of the crew. We had another one called Earl Silas in Jacksonville, Florida. He came in on a minority crews at 17 and he wasn't even 17, he lied to the Navy. But he got in anyway.

Janis Kozlowski: Really, so he was younger than 17?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah. And we flew together until the squadron was disbanded after the surrender to the United States. I was sent to the Philadelphia Naval Hospital for sign language training and reading lips training [shuffling sound as mike is repositioned] because they thought I was going to lose my hearing sooner or later and I got discharged. As far as discharge from the service I want to say September 26.

[0:07:37] Looks like June 1928. Oh that was going to Italy in 1928. So I wasn't quite 4 years old. [It was] March 1, 1945 when I went to Whidbey Island. No, when we left Whidbey Island we landed on Annette Island. March 6th at 7:30, we arrived at Attu. So we took five days to get to Attu.

Janis Kozlowski: What do you remember about that journey, was it a tough one?

Joe Baldeschi: Well, it was tough, you know, flying over those great Alaska mountains and forest with barely the treetops showing [shuffling sound as mic is moved] because of snow. It was challenging because the runways were not like we saw in the United States on the main island ... I mean the main land.

Janis Kozlowski: I guess those got built during the war so they weren't available quite then.

Joe Baldeschi: Right, right. They were very limited and ... well, they were limited in sleeping accommodations. We had to sleep in the aircraft in freezing weather.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, boy. Well, for five days of that you guys must have been pretty tuckered out by the time you got where you were going?

Joe Baldeschi: Well, we got there but it always was an adventure, and exciting to arrive at a place in a foreign spot that you've never been into--especially the last island in the Aleutian chain. That wakes you up right away. It's not that big, you can holler to your officers across the island and wake them up.

Janis Kozlowski: [laughing] [0:09:42] So what did you think when you first arrived there, at Attu?

Joe Baldeschi: Well, somebody had warned me that there'd be a great party – and there was. The aircraft landed and we taxied out to our revetment, we had a greeting party and before anybody got to the aircraft... We carry anti-icing fluid for deicing the wings, and they found out that this was Grade A and they didn't have any booze up in Attu, not even beer. So they drained it and replaced it with Grade C. [laughing] They took the Grade A and had a good time for a few days. [Janis laughing]

That was deadly too because at one time the Commander of the base held an inspection because two of them died from drinking that stuff. You know, they got blood poisoning or something. Because what they did, they took the Grade A and took a glass and put about four slices of bread over and filtered the Grade A through the four slices of bread. Then they'd mix some orange juice or whatever and drink it. So those were the people that really missed alcohol.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, that sounds like nasty stuff to drink. [laughing]

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, I didn't try it for sure.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:11:14] Now, what ... so you were trained as an aerial gunner and is that ... and you went to radio and radar school. Are those the tasks that you had on the PV-2?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, I maintained the radio communication and I helped the pilot because it was always foggy up there, you can't see. I'd try to read my radar and tell him what he was seeing.

Janis Kozlowski: So this was probably a little bit later in the war if you had radar, right? Because they didn't have that early in the war. Was this maybe '43 or later?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, we are talking about 1944 or 45.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: And how ... did the ... was the radar pretty good at the time?

Joe Baldeschi: Not too bad. I could make a difference, I could call a difference between a whale and a submarine. We had huge whales up there – you know, those grey whales.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh yeah, un-hnn.

Joe Baldeschi: They were 60, 80 feet long, huge son of a guns.

Janis Kozlowski: But you could tell the difference?

Joe Baldeschi: I could tell the difference in the signal. Maybe somebody would say, "You're a smart ass." I would say, "well, I had sharp eyes." I could tell the density of the blip.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, yeah, because they probably wouldn't be as dense as a sub.

Joe Baldeschi: No, because a submarine, you know, you were reflecting from steel rather than a whales blubber.

Janis Kozlowski: How deep do you think you could detect a whale or a sub in those waters?

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, I don't know how deep. They would have to be pretty close to the surface.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah. Because radar wasn't that sharp like it got to be.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:13:05] And do you ... did you fly with the same crew all the time?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: And who were the guys that you flew with?

Joe Baldeschi: Well, my pilot was Paul Stehle; co-pilot Richard Switzer; my navigator was very, very lightly trained – an ensign called Janssen. Then I had a crew chief by the ... Arthur Molten; an ordnance man Earl Silas. There were six in the crew: three officers, three enlisted men.

Janis Kozlowski: So, did you say Janssen wasn't trained very well?

Joe Baldeschi: No, because the Navy at that time they didn't have enough navigators so they shove them through school in a matter of a couple of weeks. And they give them some pilot training but they weren't, you know, not too much experience in flight time and handling the controls.

Janis Kozlowski: Did that cause problems for your crew?

Joe Baldeschi: No, not really because we had a great pilot plus a good co-pilot.

Janis Kozlowski: So he just got on-the-job training?

Joe Baldeschi: Well, he more or less dedicated himself more to navigation tasks – as a navigator.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, things he felt more competent to do?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah. Because I remember one time we landed, we were doing touch and go landings on a little strip in the state of Washington, outside of Tacoma, and the pilot put Janssen in the co-pilot seat. And we started to go – it was a very short runway, not really well paved – and he took the aircraft down

and before you know it he was heading for the cornfields. [laughing] The pilot took his yoke away from him and he straightened it out. With the twin engine, you know, you have to have the right rudder all the way pushed to the floor.

Janis Kozlowski: Right.

Joe Baldeschi: To counteract the torque of the engines, because the engines travel one way, you know, they create torque.

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm.

Joe Baldeschi: So you have to counteract it with the rudder. But, there were a couple of anxious moments but we made it.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:15:35] Did you have a lot of anxious moments in airplanes when you were flying in the Aleutians?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, that ... my young kid, I used to call him "my young kid" Earl Silas. By the way, he's still alive that son of a gun. And I remind him, I remember the first mission, we got out there and it was pretty clear weather. By the time we got close to Paramushiro we saw these beautiful puffs coming out, you know, like the fourth of July. There were white puffs, blue puffs, red puffs and Silas said, "Hey Joe, look at those, just like over –what do they call them? Entertainment park.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, amusement park.

Joe Baldeschi: Silas, they're not fireworks, if one of those hits us we're out of business. He thought he was having the fourth of July. [both laughing]

Janis Kozlowski: It was probably ack-ack fire, huh?

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, it was, yeah, it was.

Janis Kozlowski: But he'd never seen it before.

Joe Baldeschi: No, no. [Janis laughing] We were flying in a theatre of war you don't have to see it to know what is coming up is gunfire.

Janis Kozlowski: Anything coming at you is probably not good.

Joe Baldeschi: [laughing] Yeah, for sure, for sure.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:16:56] Now, what kind of missions did your crew fly?

Joe Baldeschi: We fly ... and I had the camera, I had the duties of the bow camera. We were flying mainly patrols, they call it patrol bombing missions. We did carry rockets, you know, under our wings.

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm.

Joe Baldeschi: And, we normally got out there, if you've ever seen the map of the island, it was Shimushu and Paramushiro that are the most two northern islands of the Kurile chain. They belong to Japan. And they had a couple of airfields and radar stations. We were out there knocking down radar stations and God, the Japanese had 100s of airplanes parked on those fields but the word that we got was that they couldn't fly them because they didn't have enough fuel. I said, "thank God." We didn't get jumped every mission. That's another subject.

Janis Kozlowski: So, were you trying to bomb those airplanes and airfields?

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, yeah. And also primarily the radar stations. They had ... the Japanese had radar stations along those islands to detect whatever aircraft were coming from the United States and get them out of the air.

Janis Kozlowski: So is ... since they didn't have gas to fly the planes you didn't get jumped that much from them or they didn't come after you?

Joe Baldeschi: Not really. I bet you out of 11 missions we probably got jumped three times. And that's scary when you see an enemy aircraft on your tail.

Janis Kozlowski: I bet!

Joe Baldeschi: [0:18:36] They used to come on our tail because, you know, when we got there we had twin 30 calibers in the tail and they have, like, what they call a "prayer rug." You kneel down and the guns went into a little window and you fire at everybody coming directly into you. Well, it wasn't a week that we were up in Attu that we got an order to remove the twin 30 caliber machine guns out of the airplane and put a camera in there. But wouldn't you know 24 hours later beautiful Tokyo Rose – have you ever heard the name, Tokyo Rose?

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, sure.

Joe Baldeschi: She's the one that used to come out at night and say, "while you sailors are up in Attu, suffering in cold weather and nothing to do, while your girlfriends or your wives are sleeping with somebody else." [Janis laughing] I

could have killed her. [both laughing] And she knew within less than 48 hours, she knew that we didn't have those twin 30s in the back of the airplane under the tail. Because when the fighters come up to intercept us they all come from the tail.

Janis Kozlowski: How did she know that?

Joe Baldeschi: I don't know how, she knew a lot of things. I was so mad at her listening to her, that it wasn't funny at times.

Janis Kozlowski: So she did get to people?

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. You can imagine, you know, somebody that left a girlfriend or a wife listening to her say that she's sleeping with somebody else.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah. But anyway.... Whatever we did, I guess, we come out ahead because we won.

Janis Kozlowski: That's right. In the end we did.

[0:20:38] So were ... those missions were pretty long going from Attu all the way over to the Japanese islands?

Joe Baldeschi: 760 nautical miles one way.

Janis Kozlowski: And so I guess you had enough fuel for it but just barely enough?

Joe Baldeschi: Just barely, just barely enough. And one time ... at the time that our aircraft got hit the fuel gauge was reading zero. And he says ... I could see it ... I could see the panel from my seat in my little radio shack because I was sitting right behind the pilot. And I panicked and the pilot said, "Hey Spagetti," he used to call me "spagett." He said, "Spaggett, don't panic." I said, "Why not, you don't have anymore fuel? You're going on fumes." He said, "well, I think you're right to say that but I think maybe one of the bullets hit some of the wires to the ... the electric wires to the meter and probably reversed the polarity of the electricity and the meters turning zero instead of, you know, reading it right." I said, "well, if you say so." And I guess he was right, because we made it back. But they were anxious moments, I'll tell you.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, I'll bet they were.

Joe Baldeschi: [0:22:03] It's not fun when you're flying ... and our instructions were to fly about 500 feet above the water so we didn't have much altitude to work with. Because the Japanese had their radar pointed at us so if we were up high they could see us better.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh.

Joe Baldeschi: Because radar, when you were looking at something close to the earth's surface from the water the signal is like grass growing, you know, like you see grass about 12, 14 inches tall? The signal, you know, whatever you're seeing doesn't penetrate. So we had to be down that low, so....

[0:22:45] And we got in ... one time we got hit on one of the ... one of the bullets which was equivalent to our 9 mm guns hit one of the propellers and in a three bladed propeller you increase the weight on one of the blades it throws it out of balance. And when it throws it out of balance and it rocks it just shakes the whole engine. It will shake the engine to pieces, you know.

Janis Kozlowski: So what did you do in that case?

Joe Baldeschi: Well, the pilot shut off the engine. Now we got to come back 760 nautical miles on a wing and a prayer. That's all we did is prayers, sing and try to take our mind away, waiting for Attu to show up in front of us.

Janis Kozlowski: So did the pilot ... was the pilot positive that you'd make it back or...?

Joe Baldeschi: Well, I think he had a lot of confidence that radiated back to us, you know. He was a good pilot, yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: So since you're still here, I'm assuming you made it back safe?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, I did.

[0:24:02] In spite of a shell coming in and trying to blow me up on a mission with two airplanes. Because the Navy didn't believe in sending out more than two airplanes, four at the most. And we were out, there were two of us and the both of us got hit. The one that hit my airplane wounded me and the other one got the other airplane and wounded Tommy Anzalone – two Italians.

Janis Kozlowski: Was this on ... was this May 10th, 1945?

Joe Baldeschi: May 10th, 1945. That magic date.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok. Can you tell me what happened that day?

Joe Baldeschi: Well we went out there, some of that ack-ack started coming up and we started doing what we had to do, you know, you knew you had bullets coming because you could hear them coming through the aircraft because we didn't have any insulation in the skin of the aircraft. They just ... you hear that noise penetrating through the sheet metal like you wouldn't believe.

On mine – I don't know what happened to Tommy – but what happened to me is that one round came through my radio compartment and hit one of my electrical – I call them, back then we call them electrical boxes, not electronic boxes – and it exploded. It exploded the box and fragmented in small pieces and they got stuck all over my legs. And by the time I looked up I saw two wires, electrical wires, because they were exposed without any insulation, you see every wire going through the airplane. And they were burning. And about three feet to my left and they were moving left, there was a 150 gallon tank – fuel tank – which back then they weren't sealed that well, you know, especially the caps. You get fumes out of it. And I just ... when I got hit I said, "how did ..." I looked up and I said ... I forgot that I was hit and I ... I think I had one glove left on my hand and another one grabbed those wires and I didn't give up I twisted and twisted until they broke because if that fire went close to that fuel tank you never know what could happen. If fumes were coming out of there there could have been an explosion and the airplane would have been in pieces and our bodies would have been in pieces falling into the ocean.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah.

Joe Baldeschi: It would have blown up the aircraft. So, anyway....

Janis Kozlowski: Without your action you could have lost the whole crew.

Joe Baldeschi: The purple heart people says they heard the story because somehow it doesn't show up on my service record ... what I did. And they said, you know, the Navy should have given you a minimum of a service star if not the Congressional Medal, you saved six lives and an airplane. I said, "what do you want from me? It's not on my record." Well, we got it confirmed and the paperwork is with the Navy. When the bureaucracy gets through looking at it maybe I'll hear something. I don't know.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. Sounds like you are very deserving of it.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, well, some people say, "why don't you just send it to your two Senators and the Congress woman. Let them go after the Navy and say, "what are you doing about that?"

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, they might give you some help there.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, yeah, I think so.

Janis Kozlowski: So you did get the purple heart for that mission though, right? You and Tommy Anzalone both?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, we both got them at the same time. My standard remark to everybody is, that the Japanese were not interested in shooting down an American airplane. They were interested in killing two Italians that were flying in airplanes. [both laughing] They shot at the Italians! [Janis laughing]

Janis Kozlowski: Well, it sure sounds like it because they got the two Italians out there.

Joe Baldeschi: They sure did. They sure did. And....

Joe Baldeschi: No. Fortunately the wounds were, you know, they didn't chop off the legs, that's what they did. A little alcohol and bandages took care of the problem and we just kept flying ... well, we didn't fly two many missions after that because we started back.... **[0:28:47]** This was the month of May and in the month of August I was on my way back to the United States. As a matter of fact on the 18th of August, 1945 I left Attu at 1:12.

Janis Kozlowski: So they got you out of there pretty quick after the war ended?

Janis Kozlowski: So, were you out of service then after that mission, or...?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah. Got me out and send me ... well, they had some liberty scheduled but first I had to go to the Philadelphia Naval Hospital. And the physical exam when I came back they said, "well, you're hearing don't sound too good." I said, "well, who knows?" I flew a noisy aircraft, I heard a lot of explosions. "Well," he said, "before we discharge you we better send you to the Philadelphia Naval Hospital and get some training in reading lips and sign language." That's what I did for a couple of months and then they discharged me.

Janis Kozlowski: Did you ever have to use that?

Joe Baldeschi: Nah, my wife says, you know, my hearing is really bad now. It got worse and that I do a lot of lip reading. Maybe I do, I don't know. Sub-consciously I do, probably.

Janis Kozlowski: Hmm. Now....

Joe Baldeschi: What was it? **[0:30:06]** Oh, the famous day ... oh, July 25th of 1945 Tom Anzalone and myself got the Purple Heart. A dressed up Admiral came by and they called everybody to shape up and stand in line while he awarded the Purple Hearts.

Janis Kozlowski: You were still on Attu then, right?

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, yeah. Yeah, we didn't leave until August 21st.

Janis Kozlowski: Were you the only two that got them?

Joe Baldeschi: That's it.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, that's quite an honor.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, in the history of the squadron.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah.

Joe Baldeschi: But, then I got out of the service -- August ... **[0:30:57]** I think I was discharged in August ... January 15, 1946.

Janis Kozlowski: Then what did you do?

Joe Baldeschi: Then I was a bum. [both laughing] No, I enrolled ... I went to the college of St. Thomas University – now it's Scranton University – for a semester and maybe more than a semester now that I think about it.

Then I decided to get married. We got married – Marge and I got married June 26, no 22nd, jiminy I better not make a mistake – [both laughing] 22nd of June 1946. And we come out on the west coast and finish my schooling in aeronautical engineering and I did work on a couple of airplanes. I didn't go back to Pennsylvania because they didn't make airplanes in the coal mines, they did on the west coast, so I stayed on and I worked for maybe two or three companies. And in 1948 I started my own little business.

Janis Kozlowski: What kind ... ok. Oh, I was gonna ask you, [0:32:22] I know you had some pretty important jobs throughout your career that were aviation related. Can you tell me about those?

Joe Baldeschi: Well, I was always in aviation no matter what. I got out [of the service] and I went with a little – that was little, 100 people – company that was doing Ram jet engine development work. And then we did some after burner work. I think one of the first after burner designs came out of our section.

Janis Kozlowski: And were those for the military?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah. And then I became Chief Engineer of a small company that we were doing hydraulic and pneumatic systems for aircraft. And then after that I think I was doing some consulting work, yeah, most of the time until I started my new business.

Janis Kozlowski: And what was your new business?

Joe Baldeschi: I was doing electro-mechanical components in some small systems for missiles, aircraft and industrial applications.

Janis Kozlowski: So was it mostly military work?

Joe Baldeschi: I say mostly. A lot of it was directed to radar work and if you look ... if you travel the country and you see these big round domes or big radar installations with the big dishes turning, you know, turning around....

Janis Kozlowski: Yes.

Joe Baldeschi: If you go underneath there and you look, you'll see one of my products. The product detected the signal that the dish detected had to go on down through a console, right?

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm.

Joe Baldeschi: And you couldn't tie wires from a rotating member going to a stationary member because you know what happens? The bundle up, bundle up and they break. So you need more of like a union ... like a mechanical universal but it had to be electrical universal joint which picked up the signal, it rotated, and then you take the other side and go to the stationary member. That's how you get a signal or an electrical flow from a rotating member to a stationary member.

Janis Kozlowski: And that ... does that product..."

Joe Baldeschi: You remember the best explanation.... You ever see those 76 balls up on the pole at a gas station?

Janis Kozlowski: Yes, un-hnn.

Joe Baldeschi: That rotate, right?

Janis Kozlowski: Right. Un-hnn.

Joe Baldeschi: If they rotate the same thing applies to them. If you drop three wires that you need to go up there to light it up tied to something that is stationary as the ball rotates it's gonna twist the wires.

Janis Kozlowski: Right.

Joe Baldeschi: And it twists them to the point that it's gonna break them.

Janis Kozlowski: Right.

Joe Baldeschi: That's why you need that electrical rotary joint in there. And that was my product. Not ... I never did commercial stuff. It was all military stuff.

Janis Kozlowski: Is that product still used today?

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, yeah. That little company of mine is still roves [these last two words were probably not correct]. It's not bigger than I had it but it's still doing the same thing and I still consult for them.

Janis Kozlowski: What's the company name?

Joe Baldeschi: [0:36:05] Danmar Industries – D A N M A R.

Janis Kozlowski: And where is ... what kind of applications is that product used for today?

Joe Baldeschi: Same thing. A lot of radar, special camera installations, military camera installations.

Janis Kozlowski: And did I ... did you tell me that it was being used in satellite applications now?

Joe Baldeschi: Not in the satellite itself. They got a ... I used to produce some pretty small ones. You could see some of them are less than an 1/8th of an inch

in diameter with 8 or 10 circuits in it. Now they're up to 10, 15 inches in diameter with a lot of power for radar installations.

I did some projects where they ended up ... geez, I think Apollo 13 was one and of course, they hardly ever tell you what the end application was because it was confidential anyway.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, right. So you just made them and didn't really know exactly where they were being used.

Joe Baldeschi: Right. A lot of them went into our NASA work.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok. [0:37:28] So, was the training that you got during the war, did that influence what you did after?

Joe Baldeschi: Well, it got me started, because in radio and radar I had to learn some electricity, right?

Janis Kozlowski: Right.

Joe Baldeschi: And I didn't have any training directed. I had some in Italy though. I had enough to get started with.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok.

Joe Baldeschi: But the Navy training helped.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok. Well, can I go back for a minute, I wanted to ask you some questions about being in the Aleutians.

[0:38:07] Um, now you said you got married maybe a year after you got out of the service. Did ... was Marge your girlfriend while you were in the Aleutians?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: And were you able to keep in contact with her or was that pretty hard to do?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, we got engaged through the mail as a matter of fact. I mailed her an engagement ring before I shipped out of Whidbey Island.

Janis Kozlowski: Really?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, I did. But you ask her, "When did Joe ask you to marry you?" She says, "I can't remember." [both laughing] You can't remember because I never asked you, it just happened. [both laughing]

Would you believe that she was about the first one that I met when I came back from Italy?

Janis Kozlowski: Really? So you found her right away.

Joe Baldeschi: [0:38:55] Well, you know, I come into a hornets nest. My Dad had remarried and she had seven of her own kids so you know who the black sheep was, right?

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, yeah. Right.

Joe Baldeschi: I remember we had just moved from one town to another after about two or three months after I arrived and I was standing on the kitchen table replacing a light bulb. And all of a sudden I see the door opening coming into the kitchen from the outside stair case and there was Marge I guess. She was a little teeny bopper. And one of them was my step sister who was a nurse and the other lady happened to be Marge's older sister who was a nurse. And that's how we met.

Janis Kozlowski: She must have been pretty cute, huh? She caught your eye.

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, she was. She was, and I keep telling her, "You didn't have any choice. You couldn't find anybody better. You hit the jackpot when you found me." [both laughing]

Janis Kozlowski: I'm sure she'd agree with that.

Joe Baldeschi: [laughing] yeah! We've been rolling for 62 years coming up.

Janis Kozlowski: Wow, that's a long time.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, I tell everybody, you know, I'm about 5 foot five, at least my ID card in the Navy said, 5 foot five and a half. When our son got married, I said, "look before you listen to that tune, before you walk into that chapel and go do what you want to do, look at me." And he says, "What am I supposed to look at Dad?" I said, "Take a good look." Finally, he said, you know, "Are you gonna tell me what I'm supposed to look at?" "I used to be six foot four before I got married!" [both laughing]

Janis Kozlowski: So she cut you down to size, huh?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, she did. [Janis laughing] Yeah, she did. I keep calling her “kid” because she looks like a kid yet. She’s pushing 82 also. I’m pushing 83.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:41:05] So did you keep in touch with her when you were in the Aleutians? You must have.

Joe Baldeschi: Just a letter every now and then. You know, when you had time to write a letter. The mail was traveling pretty slow from Attu to where ever.

Janis Kozlowski: I bet.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:41:23] Did you know what was happening in the rest of the war while you were in the Aleutians? Did you hear things?

Joe Baldeschi: Not too much. You know, we used to get a mimeographed bulletin from the South Pacific but nothing from the mainland. Every now and then we could tune into the Armed Forces radio station and get some bits of information from the mainland but that’s all.

Janis Kozlowski: So did you

Joe Baldeschi: We were pretty much alone on Attu.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:41:58] Did you feel like you were making a good contribution to the war effort?

Joe Baldeschi: Well, I hope to tell you [laughing] ... flying blind the way we did and flying back to Attu when you couldn’t see the island – because Attu looked like a cotton ball down there, always covered with snow or clouds, mostly it was all clouded in. Half of the time we would come in blind.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, boy. That must have been frightening.

Joe Baldeschi: On a wing and a prayer, you know. You know you hit it when the pilot drops the yoke and you hear the wheels hit the steel mat. Now you know you’re back.

Janis Kozlowski: That must have been ... those must have been some pretty hairy flights you made.

Joe Baldeschi: Very, very ... because the Attu runway only was a one way runway. You flew towards the ocean when you took off, which was fine. Coming back the same runway ended at the end of the mountain. If you overshot the field you were in trouble.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, yeah.

Joe Baldeschi: Serious trouble. As a matter of fact, the instruction to us was if you come in and you skid or you don't have enough runway, they had snow equipment, you know, cleaning the runway every day. So they'd pile up piles of snow on the side of the runway 10, 15, 20 feet high. They said, if you're skidding or you don't have enough room just head the airplane into a snow pile there because it will serve as a cushion.

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm.

Joe Baldeschi: You'll get shaken up but you're not gonna get wounded or break any bones.

Janis Kozlowski: Did that ever happen? Did anybody have to run into that snow pile?

Joe Baldeschi: One time. They didn't want us to push the throttle forward and take off, which you could probably do but then you had to turn left to get back to the other end of the runway and you come through those two mountains in Attu and it was like a wind tunnel – wind coming down. If you dare bank your airplane 45 degrees and fly across that gully you better start praying because it's gonna throw you into the drink. And sure as hell, I think I've got one photograph where they were digging out the pieces of one airplane did it, not ours, it was somebody else. He decided he was gonna turn around, push it up and turn 45 degrees to make his 180 and that wind just took the aircraft and threw it right into the water.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, boy.

Joe Baldeschi: So they went into the water full power.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, that's not survivable.

Joe Baldeschi: No, that wasn't the best place in the world to take off and land. We got used to it because, you know, we were doing it daily. But....

Janis Kozlowski: [0:45:08] Well, you must have had a darn good pilot to....

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, we did! Old man Stahley ... too bad he just passed away about two years ago.

Janis Kozlowski: Did ... now was he a Navy trained [pilot]?

Joe Baldeschi: I think Stahley started to fly barnstorming airplanes in the middle part of the country when he was 17. So you know, because these farm boys, they didn't have anything to do but to fly. Then they did some crop dusting for the farms.

Janis Kozlowski: So he was probably a little more experienced than some of them?

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, I'm sure. I never did ask him but I'm sure he had some flight training with small airplanes before he got into the Navy.

Janis Kozlowski: And crop dusting is pretty demanding flying so if he did that he probably had very good experience.

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, yeah, he knew ... I had all the confidence in the world. Yeah, no matter what happened he'd take us back.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:46:13] Well, you mentioned a couple of times different weather phenomena that were difficult. What do you remember about Aleutian weather overall?

Joe Baldeschi: Overall it was bad weather to fly in. You know, you always encountered fog, clouds, snowstorms. It's a tough territory. Plus the fact, you know, Ed used to tell us in briefing where we used to end up ... you know, Cape Lopatka is an extension of Russia out in whatever they call it ... the territory ... oh jiminy ... but anyway, it almost met with ... I bet you it wasn't 10 miles between Paramushiro and the tip of Cape Lopatka, Russia. And there you're looking at the Bering Sea, that water was cold. They used to tell us in briefing that if you get in trouble you have to ditch the aircraft. Be mindful that you have an eight man life raft inside ... in a package in the side of the main door of the aircraft.

Janis Kozlowski: Un-hmm.

Joe Baldeschi: So you pulled the chain and the door flies out and hits the water and the salt water activates the release mechanism and an eight man life raft will deploy. Now you swim to that life raft, get in, take off your wet clothes and put on dry clothes that will be inside of the same pocket otherwise you're gonna freeze to death. They gave us seven minutes to do that. How do you know ... you know,

when you ditch an aircraft you're gonna deploy the door probably at 100 or 150 miles an hour, right? How do you know where that door is gonna end up?

Janis Kozlowski: Right.

Joe Baldeschi: And you get in the water, you got to look at it, it could be 100 feet or it could be a mile or mile and a half, two miles. And you're gonna swim that far? Jump in a life raft, change your clothes and put on dry ones within 7 minutes? I don't think so.

Janis Kozlowski: No, that doesn't seem do-able.

Joe Baldeschi: That was the briefing instructions.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:48:48] Did you have an alternate landing spot when you went over to the Kurile Islands?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, we did, Petropavlovst in Russia. It was on Cape Lopatka, inland. But before we even got to Whidbey Island, you know, we talked to people that had been out there before and they said, you could go to – they used to call it 'Petro' – they said, "you can go to Petro, but don't try it. At all costs try to come back home because you're not gonna like it." Because to go to Russia, they said, they didn't feed them, they had to eat out of garbage cans. That's what they fed our American people that tried to save their lives, right? And they said, some of them came back to the United States their stomach was so bad filled with cancer that they died anyway. So, don't go to Petropavlovski. At all costs try to make it back to your own.

[0:49:54] We pulled a vote one time on one of the missions we thought we weren't gonna make it back. And we sort of voted to go to Petropavlovski and then we all changed our minds – let's keep trying. Give my old man Stahley all the confidence in the world that he can fly this aircraft on one engine and get us back. And thank God he did.

Janis Kozlowski: That was the time when you hit the ... when the bullet hit the propeller and you had to shut the engine down?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, because at that time I remember, that aircraft before you took control -- because you got to do certain adjustments when you fly with one engine --by the time he got full adjustments made and takes control he's dropping off the air and we just about hit the water and he just gets it back up again and we get back up to about 1500 or 2000 feet, then it dropped down again, you know, that's scary.

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, you can see just about the end every time that airplane falls because it falls without any power. But he got it up and finally stabilized the other engine and tuned it up to whatever the setting they use and tuned up the controls and we just had to depend on that one engine. I had no doubt we were gonna make it back because the aircraft didn't show that much instability once he had it all set up. But it was an anxious four hours.

Janis Kozlowski: I'll bet. Yeah, that's a long time to be worried about your life.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:51:34] Now, given the weather conditions and some of the hits that you took in your airplane, did you lose a lot of crews or aircraft in your squadron?

Joe Baldeschi: You know what, we lost one. And you know why? They came in, they had problems. They went down to land in Shemya, a little island about 20, 30 miles southeast of Attu, totally flat. They went in and pancake landed. That means they landed without landing gear. They slid down and slid down and slid right over almost to the ocean. The aircraft became unflyable from that point on. They sent them back to Juneau, sent ... I forget what crew went back to Juneau to pick up another airplane to replace it.

Janis Kozlowski: Did the crew make it out ok though?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah. They did.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, that's a pretty good record for the type of weather you flew in and those long missions.

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, yeah! [0:52:46] You know the ones that took it in the nose? In Attu there was a B-25 squadron and the rivalry between the Navy and the Air Force was tremendous. You know, the Commander of that squadron versus our Commander – they always went head to head on it – who was the best flyers, you know.

Janis Kozlowski: Who were those two Commanders, do you remember?

Joe Baldeschi: I know I remember mine – Glen David.

Janis Kozlowski: Glen David?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah. He passed away after our Tampa reunion, I think. Yeah, he passed away about 10 years ago.

Janis Kozlowski: So was the rivalry about flying? Getting crews and airplanes back?

Joe Baldeschi: No, they figure that Air Force people are better flyers than Navy people, you know. That's all you have to say and you got an argument going. [laughing]

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, I bet. Yeah. [0:53:45] Your housing ... was your housing for the two were separate though, right?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: And you each had your own air fields?

Joe Baldeschi: Well, we used the same runway but different quarters. I don't even remember where they stayed. We stayed pretty close to the field in Quonset huts. You talk about cold facility, right? A sheet metal building.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, probably no insulation.

Joe Baldeschi: No, nothing, just plain old steel.

Janis Kozlowski: And what did you sleep on?

Joe Baldeschi: We had bunks. That's one thing about the Navy they always gave you a lousy spring and a lousy little mattress but at least you slept clean and dry.

Janis Kozlowski: How did you keep the place warm?

Joe Baldeschi: An oil stove.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok. And how many guys were in these Quonsets?

Joe Baldeschi: Uh, jiminy, I would say probably 15 or 20, maybe 16.

Janis Kozlowski: Wow.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:54:58] What kind of food did you guys have there?

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, the food wasn't bad – standard Navy ... you'll have macaroni and cheese and very little meat. Geez I'm trying to remember. They had major foods ... they weren't bad. Plus, if you had a mission you got up early enough [coughing] ... excuse me ... you go to the chow hall. For everybody that had a mission scheduled you go over there and you get real eggs.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, because you guys were on a mission that made you a special....

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, yes. Strictly a good American breakfast, with bacon or ham, whatever.

Janis Kozlowski: Wow. So it wasn't too bad ... the food wasn't too bad?

Joe Baldeschi: No. I know I never had complained. Plus the fact that Spam was the old favorite. It's like it's a favorite now. I read the newspapers and factory sales are going up like mad because people can't afford fresh meat. They're buying ... Spam is doing it's number again.

Janis Kozlowski: I think Alaska's always been the number one consumer of Spam. I'm not sure why but [laughing]

Joe Baldeschi: We ... there was always Spam in our hut. You cut a slice of Spam and try to toast two slices of bread and that's it. It tastes good, especially at night.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, for a snack, huh?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: A before bed snack.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:56:42] So what was it...what did you think about staying on Attu? Was it a place that you really couldn't wait to get out of?

Joe Baldeschi: Not really. Not really, because I had an attitude as, "here I am." Wherever they send me, I'll make it all right.

But, you know, you get accustomed to that weather, also. You know, when it was about 10 degrees it was hot for us. We'd go out with dungarees and a t-shirt. [Janis laughing] Now you couldn't find a fly, you couldn't find a bug, you couldn't find nothing that lived in Attu except that we found a nest of a wolf's den.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, really.

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, yeah. We had about four little, tiny – I don't know if they were silver fox or what type – little, tiny – no bigger than a handful. We took them to the hut and boy, you don't try to handle them because those tiny, little babies had teeth like needles.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, just like a puppy.

Joe Baldeschi: They get a hold of you, they bite down and they're gonna go through your finger, like it or not.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, boy.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:58:04] So, for fun did you ever walk around the island? Did you see any evidence of the battle that had occurred there?

Joe Baldeschi: Well, we didn't have to walk around. We were warned in the first place that not to go into certain areas because in some of those caves in Attu they said that there may be some Japanese left over, you know, from a year or two before. We chased them out ... somebody chased them out of Attu and the Navy felt there might be half a dozen here or there hiding in those caverns, you know, and you don't want to gamble your life on it, so. They pretty much kept us away from those areas.

Janis Kozlowski: What was there for you to do in the area there? Did they have a rec hall or something?

Joe Baldeschi: Nothing. No, they had one building, called the hangar, but it didn't ... we didn't have airplanes in there we just.... If they had maintenance they'd go in there. And they had a gym there so you could go to the gym and become Charlie Atlas or whatever they call them. Just keep pumping up your muscles.

Janis Kozlowski: So they keep you in shape that way.

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, yeah. [0:59:26] I even got on the boxing team.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, did you really? I saw pictures of people boxing.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: Was that a big thing there?

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, yeah, they had boxing matches, you know, coming down even from Anchorage, boxers coming down to challenge boxers on our island.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, no kidding.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, I forgot, I know one of them came the night I was scheduled to box. They brought in some kid, I forget from what island. They said, "Hey Baldeschi, you're in trouble. That guys got 15 knock outs in the first round." I said, "I'll take care of him." I got in that ring with the guy, the bell rang and in about 20 seconds later I didn't know where I was. He just let me have it and I was down on the deck and listening to the birds sing and the mice turning.

Janis Kozlowski: Really? He must have been pretty good, huh?

Joe Baldeschi: [laughing] He put out my lights in a hurry.

Janis Kozlowski: Wow. Do you remember his name?

Joe Baldeschi: No, too many years ago.

Janis Kozlowski: That wasn't Joe Lewis, was it? [laughing]

Joe Baldeschi: I think Joe Lewis was the referee. He was up on the chain of the Aleutians.

Janis Kozlowski: I heard he was there, somewhere down there.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, I think he was the referee that night, but, you know, I wasn't too familiar with boxing and who the big names were, so.

Janis Kozlowski: Now, did that end your boxing career that night? Did you quit after that?

Joe Baldeschi: It started it and it ended the same way. [both laughing] I decided to become a weight lifter.

Janis Kozlowski: Become a what?

Joe Baldeschi: A weight lifter.

Janis Kozlowski: What's that?

Joe Baldeschi: Lifting weights.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh! Weight lifter, oh, I see.

Joe Baldeschi: I do have a couple of pictures that you wouldn't believe I had a 30 inch waistline.

Janis Kozlowski: Really.

Joe Baldeschi: Now I'm trying to get it down below 38. [both laughing]

Janis Kozlowski: [1:01:29] Hey, I remember you telling me a story about ... did you say the chap ... there was a Chaplain on the island that....

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, yeah, the poor father.

Janis Kozlowski: What did he do ... did you say he used to bless the airplanes before they left?

Joe Baldeschi: He was up early in the morning regardless. When we had a mission we had to get up at 2 in the morning because the aircraft were parked in a revetment. A revetment is made out of dirt. It's a u-shaped made out of a dirt wall, you know, they shovel up dirt until it's maybe 10 or 15 feet high and you put the aircraft in there. At least from most of the sides it's protected from snow flurries and wind. So they had us up at 2 o'clock in the morning and man I tell you some mornings it was so stinking cold and we didn't have any face masks. You walk down ... we used to walk down to the revetment – maybe a 15 minute walk – I tell you half way down, your tears come out of your eyes and they freeze on your cheek it was so cold. And wouldn't you know, the showers were down there. [laughing] How would you like to walk in freezing weather to go down and shower in cold water?

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, it was a long ways from your hut.

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, geez, yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh.

Joe Baldeschi: I tell you it was at least half way between our hut and the revetments on the airfield.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, boy.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, that wasn't too nice. We didn't have all the facilities that the [word unclear] would have.

[1:03:12] And then sometimes you'd get buried by the snow in the Quonset hut, you couldn't open the front or rear door.

Janis Kozlowski: Did somebody have to come get ... bail you out?

Joe Baldeschi: No, we had ... we were smart enough to keep a couple of shovels inside. So we'd dig a tunnel and dig it out.

Janis Kozlowski: So whoever got up first and had to get out had to dig their way out first.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, you betcha. But whatever ... whoever he was he woke up more than one of us. "Ok, guys we got to get up and pitch in, shovel snow."
[Janis laughing] It was

[1:03:57] You know, I keep saying there were memories but they were good memories. You know, we got along. There were never any fights among anybody in that hut or negative words. We got along like brothers – better than brothers.

Janis Kozlowski: So did you make ... made friends with some of them?

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, yeah, most of them. Because time now, you know, most of them are gone.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah.

Joe Baldeschi: I can ... I bet you that maybe out of 119 that maybe 10 or 12 of us are still moving around.

Janis Kozlowski: Do you still have reunions?

Joe Baldeschi: Well, no the last reunion was in, what? '97 at Whidbey Island. It was a reunion called by Fleet Air Wing Four, which our squadron was a member of Fleet Air Wing Four. I think we had four or five squadrons. And there were

maybe, I know there were over 500 at Whidbey Island from all the squadrons. It was a nice reunion. Of course, nobody would admit that they were 40 years older. Everybody was over 65 and 70.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh boy [laughing].

Joe Baldeschi: But they had a good time.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah.

Joe Baldeschi: I only attended two: Tampa, Florida, not Tampa, Florida; what the heck is that Naval Air Station? Anyway, in Florida and Whidbey Island. But the squadron had about half a dozen reunions.

But Will Swinney said he could never find you [meaning Joe]. He tried all the jails [both laughing]. No, he found me by a letter to the Palm Desert sheriff Department.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, boy.

Joe Baldeschi: He said, "I must have sent out 500 to 1000 letters to find you."

Janis Kozlowski: And the Sheriff's Department found you?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, well you know, Swinney, I understand he told me that every department Sheriff and police department in the country has a master telephone book of all the Sheriff's stations, all the police departments, address and phone numbers. So that's what he used. He said, I must have sent out 5000 letters to try and find you. And one time, my crew chief, Artie Mouton, he said, "Oh, we had a reunion in San Diego." I said, "you've got to be kidding." He said, "Yeah, we drove up to San Francisco." I said, "Yeah, where did you ... what route did you take?" "Oh we took that interstate 5." I said, "You son of a gun you were two blocks away from my house." [both laughing]

Janis Kozlowski: You could have gone to that reunion yourself.

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, I would have walked.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, that's a shame.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, but I enjoyed that one in Florida very much and the one in Whidbey Island. Now I try to get Swinney to send out invitations. I said, "You don't have to do anything just find us a hotel, negotiate a deal. We are gonna all

stay in the same hotel. The rest of the time we'll organize something to do." He said, "I'm too tired, Joe. Health-wise I'm not that good of a shape anymore."

And he did sound bad. So now he even changed his email address so that gives us a message not to be bugged about who's living and who's dead, you know – to keep track of them.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, that's a shame because you guys seem like you were all real close.

Joe Baldeschi: Oh God, like brothers, you know.

Janis Kozlowski: Now....

Joe Baldeschi: Look at me, you know, my wife said, you know, "You keep saying, 'if, if'" You know Tommy Anzalone died what two years ago this past June?

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm.

Joe Baldeschi: And it's too bad I didn't get to spend a few days with Tommy, you know. She said, "well, you know where the telephone was, you had a directory to find him." And it's true and then I really felt bad when I met the family: all three sisters, Susan and her kids and the other two sisters and their husbands, I said, "boy what a family."

Janis Kozlowski: Well, you always think you have another day to call somebody up and talk to them.

Joe Baldeschi: [1:08:51] I'm trying ... I'm trying to find a guy by the name of Ernie Orchard. He's been playing ... Swinney said, "that son of a gun you can't find him." He said, "we sent Christmas cards and we got them back." You know the Christmas cards got the address we sent them to but he sent them back, "not here."

That guy gave me a nickname by the name of "oochie bowba." One night the word came out that said, "hey guys, free beer – three-two beer arrived in Attu. The first time we had anything like liquor because we were not allowed to have liquor, right?

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm.

Joe Baldeschi: So he said, "let's everybody go down." Well, back then and even now I'm not much of a drinker anyway. I went down and I had about a beer

and a half and I was really flying high. So I decided while I can still walk, I'd better tramp through that snow and go back to the hut and lay down, right?

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm.

Joe Baldeschi: But back then when I was a little high I sang like a son of a gun. I mean, Sinatra was a bum compared to me. [laughing] I sang every thing and one night after that beer deal, I come back to the hut and some of them had scheduled flights at 2 o'clock, you know, so they had to get up out of bed. So they got up about midnight they don't have too much time to sleep. And I just laid back in that hut, I had the top bunk, singing away and this fellow Ernie Orchard used to holler, I remember like it was yesterday, "Oochi, shut up!" I wouldn't shut up, right? And he said that three or four times, "Oochi, shut up." And it got quiet. After about the third or fourth time I felt this closed fist splash right across my face. He said, "Damn it, shut up!" [laughing]

I want to find him, somehow.

Janis Kozlowski: What's his name again?

Joe Baldeschi: Ernie Orchard.

Janis Kozlowski: Ernie Orchard?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: So he was in one of the other squadrons that ...?

Joe Baldeschi: No, he was in our crew, in our squadron.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, I mean in your squadron but in a different flight crew.

Joe Baldeschi: Different crew, yeah. We were probably six or seven different crews in that one hut.

Janis Kozlowski: [1:11:28] Oh, so did your whole crew stay in that one hut or did they split you all up?

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, no, same place. The officers were in a place on Attu called, "Gehres Point." They had themselves like a nice building something like Motel 6. They didn't have Quonset huts and they had a full bar.

[1:11:57] Well, I remember Stehle, my pilot, come knocking on the door one night, the rear door, and he opens it up and he pulls out a bottle of liquor. I said, "what are you doing that for?" You know, "if Commander David finds out your Lieutenant stripes are gone." He said, "I don't give a damn." He said, "I'm gonna have a drink with my boys. I fly with them, we risk our lives, you know, together we risk our lives, so I can have a drink with them." But it was a dry island, except the officers.

Janis Kozlowski: Well they probably figured you guys wouldn't get up for your flights if they let you drink. [laughing]

Joe Baldeschi: Probably so. [laughing]

Janis Kozlowski: **[1:12:45]** Hey Joe, did you tell me that there were guys that painted nose art out there? On the airplanes?

Joe Baldeschi: That did what? Painted?

Janis Kozlowski: Painted nose art on the airplanes?

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, jiminy I wished I had a picture of all the aircrafts ... I had a beautiful looking bride on mine ... on the side of the aircraft with a veil and all, you know from her head to her boobs.

Janis Kozlowski: Was that somebody out there painted it?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, I don't know how they got there. But, I don't remember them being there when we were in Whidbey Island. They might have been painted at Whidbey.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, ok.

Joe Baldeschi: Every one had a different image on ... painted on the aircraft. It looked like the same artist did all of them.

Janis Kozlowski: Did you fly the same airplane all the time?

Joe Baldeschi: All the time.

Janis Kozlowski: So you had the one with the bride, with the long veil on it?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok. [1:13:56] Did ... do you have any other remembrances from the Aleutians that you want to tell me about, something that I hadn't specifically asked?

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, I'll tell you one incidence. Are you familiar with a place called Yakutat, Alaska?

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, yeah.

Joe Baldeschi: Ok. We landed in Yakutat, Alaska, early evening and believe me back then it was a nothing island. We got out of the aircraft and one of the other crew members --- he was the only crew that we lost, I remember his last name was Carr, C A R R. He was the radio man. And he said, "Baldeschi, let's go into town." I said, "where the hell you gonna go. There's no lights, no nothing." And we looked at one side, those huge forests you have up there evidently if there is a road you see those trees forming like a -- not a tunnel, but a passage way. And he said, "I bet you that's a road going into town. So we're gonna sleep in the aircraft anyway." So we went out and sure enough we ended up in a clear area. The only thing that was there was a barn and painted red. And igloos all the way around that area -- there must have been half a dozen with igloos.

So we went over to that building that was painted red. It was a Saturday night. Low and behold they were having a dance. The Eskimos were having a dance. They had an old broken down piano, two broken down guitarist that had maybe a string or two in it. So, we get in there and the only two white faces were me and J.B. Carr, right?

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm.

Joe Baldeschi: So they had a little break in the dance and by then I used to hit the piano keys by ear, right. I get up there and start playing Elmer's Tune. The placed almost rolled wild. [laughing]

Janis Kozlowski: They liked that, huh?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, I got out of that stage. I said, "you know what...." I looked at J.B. Carr and I said, "I'm gonna have a dance. If I find somebody I think that might be half way decent to dance with. I spotted this good looking little blonde chick. And back then my nose went right to her And we started to dance. The minute I did you get those piercing Eskimo eyes staring at me. Ugh.

I started the conversation, I said, "What are you doing here? You're the only fair complexion blonde. You look like a little Irish chick?" She said, "My Dad is an Irish man. He came to this island to do some whale fishing or whatever and he got married and here I am." I said, "I'll be darn."

It was kind of an anxious night. But I did find the next morning, I went back and one of the igloos ... I went into one of them and there was this little, old lady with little trinkets she was selling, I remember I bought Marge a pair of seal skin bedroom slippers from her.

Janis Kozlowski: Do you still have them? Does she still have them?

Joe Baldeschi: I don't know whether she still has them tucked away some place or not. Yeah, it was quite interesting.

Janis Kozlowski: [1:18:40] Was that the only time that you encountered Native people in Alaska?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, the only time. And I finally got the nerve to talk to a couple of people when I bought those little slippers. I said, "What do you do for a living here?" Well, they go out whale fishing. They catch a whale and they come in and cut them up. They take as much blubber as they want for them, for food, and they sell the rest of the blubber. That was the means of survival.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, yeah.

Joe Baldeschi: Very interesting.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah. Those are the side experiences.

Janis Kozlowski: [1:19:29] Were there parts of your wartime experience that shaped your life, you think?

Joe Baldeschi: Uh, I don't know. It's hard to say. I was then and I think I'm still now, even though my wife says, "No, you're no," sort of a bashful guy. She says, "Yeah, sure, you're bashful. I listen to you when you make speeches to Rotary meetings. You're not that bashful then."

Yeah, I'm gonna send you a picture as a matter of fact of me and Marge that was taken the night I was introduced as Governor for the Western District of the United States [received, scanned and in Joe's file]. You know, they took different areas that had a Governor and they got us at Marriott Hotel, south of San

Francisco and they introduced all 32 of us. You had to have your wives, you walk up like a wedding, you know. Walk up the center aisle you got up on stage and they introduce you to the world of Rotary, new Governor. And some lady took a picture of us. I think it was probably the best picture that was ever taken of the two of us.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, I'd like to see that.

Joe Baldeschi: I just went down and got a colored copy about 5 x 7. I'm gonna send it to you.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, great. That's wonderful.

Joe Baldeschi: Those were good years -- my rotary years with the Governorship. Well you only serve for one year. But, it lasts a life time.

Janis Kozlowski: It sounds like it was right up your alley too. You did a good job at it and they appreciated having you and....

Joe Baldeschi: And listen, I love to help people in need. We did a lot of things in my district. I think I was the first Governor in 65 years history of that district that ever started six new clubs in one year.

Janis Kozlowski: Wow.

Joe Baldeschi: And it was kind of fun. I think there was one Governor before me, about 15 or 20 years before me that started two new clubs and then nothing until Joe came by. And I made that part of my years commitment to start six new clubs at least.

Janis Kozlowski: You must have really devoted your whole life to that year in Rotary.

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, you do, day and night. But that's good because I used to take Marge, you know, wherever we went anyway. You know, whether we went out of the country or in the country. Because when you get to be Governor then you can really get the real flavor of what international means in Rotary. You know that's why they call it Rotary International - it's got 176 countries in it. So we met people from all over the world.

Janis Kozlowski: It sounds pretty interesting.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, and then we made international conventions and you meet some more. You know, you get 28, 30,000 people coming into those conventions.

Janis Kozlowski: Did you go back to Italy?

Joe Baldeschi: No, I didn't go back to that one in Rome. I don't know why. I wasn't Governor by then. I was President of a club. I should have gone but I didn't. Now, this year it's coming into Los Angeles. Matter of fact it's just around the corner, it started the 12th.

Janis Kozlowski: Are you going to part ... oh, you ... so you didn't participate this year?

Joe Baldeschi: No, I'm not gonna participate. I may just show up, but, you know, just to shake hands and meet old people but

Janis Kozlowski: Is it like a week long event?

Joe Baldeschi: That starts on a Tuesday and it ends on a Sunday.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, that's a pretty big convention.

Joe Baldeschi: Oh yeah, you're talking about ... I bet you LA will have close to 30,000 people from all over the world.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, my gosh, I had no idea.

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, yeah.

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, that's huge. The one we went when I was Governor-nominee that was Philadelphia. And then up in ... Vancouver and one in Birmingham, England we went, we had close to 28,000 there in Birmingham.

Janis Kozlowski: Wow, I had no idea it was that large.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah. And then they recognized the old Italian at one of the director's had one its own institute. At that zone institute somebody goes to Marge and says, "Don't leave Marge." She says, "Why?" on Sunday at the breakfast. "Don't leave." I says, "Why?" "You have to stay for the plenary session at 11 o'clock." Well, Ok, if you tell me not to leave for whatever reason. They didn't want me to leave because I was voted the number one Governor in 32 districts.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, my gosh. That's quite an honor.

Joe Baldeschi: I said, "That's why they were whispering, don't let Joe go, don't let Marge go." It was fun, a lot of work, but it was fun.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, it sounds like you really excelled at that.

Joe Baldeschi: If I could move a little better with my legs I think I would try it again. But that's too much moving, too much traveling.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, sounds like a lot of work over that time period.

Joe Baldeschi: Oh yeah, oh yeah. A lot of people that you babysit, you know. And you go around, you have to visit your clubs and deliver a half hour to 45 minutes speeches mandatory by Rotary International. So it takes a lot of time.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, I bet it would.

Joe Baldeschi: And you have to monitor all your committees all over to make sure that the projects are on schedule and they're gonna do what they're gonna do.

But I had them trained. I said, "Look all of you chairmen, you make a commitment now and this is your project, I want it done and done correctly. Because if you don't I'll follow up two weeks before the date and if I don't think it's going anyplace I'm gonna take it over and complete it for you. But if I do then you better watch your neighborhood because there might be a black limousine with black windows slowly driving in your neighborhood." [laughing] And it could be my brother Guido in Chicago or Afton in Detroit. Now do your job. [Janis laughing]

Janis Kozlowski: So you got them all scared, huh?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, I got them indoctrinated. But anyway, all in all I look at the steps I took since I got on that boat in Naples and up to today. I said, "Boy, you sure traveled a lot of by ways and smooth roads, and rough roads and here we are."

Janis Kozlowski: Yup, and you did well.

Joe Baldeschi: Still breathing and standing up.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, you did well.

Joe Baldeschi: Now I go visit in this valley, I got 12 clubs to go visit them, you know, just rotate. Whenever they meet I got their schedule and I go to whichever one I want.

Janis Kozlowski: It keeps you busy then.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah. I don't want to be an old fuddy-duddy that sits in and watches television and reads the newspaper and has breakfast, lunch and dinner and then go to bed.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, you need to be more active than that.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, that's not for me.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. [1:28:18] Well Joe is there any other things that you wanted to tell me about that I missed asking you about?

Joe Baldeschi: I think we pretty much covered it. We don't want to through my steps when I hit this country by the time I get out of the Service because that was another life. It wasn't easy, it wasn't pleasant, but the heck with it. You know, it's over with. I didn't come into a good environment on the home front. My stepmother was just ... I call her a bitch and Marge says, "Why do you call her a bitch in front of people?" I said, "People understand when you call somebody a bitch what she really is." Which she was.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah.

Joe Baldeschi: I think she passed away since.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, she did.

Joe Baldeschi: She tried to stop me in every direction. She had five kids going to school and I come all polished up and dressed up for school in the morning. I walked down that staircase and she's sitting there blocking the staircase. "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to school." She says, "You can't go to school." "Oh, why not?" "Oh, because you can't go to school." Some reason she just didn't want me to go to school.

Janis Kozlowski: Really?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah. And then when I got out of the service she.... We had a house with five bedrooms. She had seven kids of her own, six of them were out of the house. The day I got discharged from the Naval Hospital in Philadelphia I jumped on a bus, two hours later I was back home. I walked in that side door on

the little porch and she was sitting in one of the rooms on the sewing machine. She didn't even lift her head. When she opened her mouth she said, "Now that you're discharged, what are you gonna do?" I said, "I'm gonna take off this monkey uniform and go down to the University and sign up. Maybe I can catch the spring semester." She said, "I don't have room for you here." "Oh, yeah? Thank you anyway."

I turned around walked down the street of that little town in Pennsylvania and fortunately I met my uncle Jim, one of my mother's brothers. And old Jim was a big lunk, good guy, you know --- one of those type of people. He said, "Jesus Joe, when you gonna get discharged?" I still had my uniform on. I said, "I did this morning." He said, "What are you doing walking down on Main Street here?" I said, "Because she doesn't have room for me up there." He said you go down ... you know.... He was walking off going to work on the mines. He said, "Go down and see your Aunt Anita, you know where we live. Go tell your Aunt Anita that I sent you down and you're gonna stay as long as you have to." And that's where I stayed until Marge and I got married.

Janis Kozlowski: It's a good thing you had that other family there.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, yeah. Uncle Jim was a ... I knew when I first met him when I first came from Italy he was just a Prince of a guy with a heart as big as a balloon.

But we made it anyway.

Janis Kozlowski: It's too bad about your step mom she didn't know what a nice guy you were.

Joe Baldeschi: [1:31:46] Oh, let me tell you. You know what it really was when I came from Italy I walked into that house for the first time. I walked in and she had in the middle side room a black onyx looking piano, an upright. And I looked at it and I thought I died and went to heaven. I thought, I'm gonna move into a house with a piano. Because I think God gave me music the day I was born, right?

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm.

Joe Baldeschi: Before I knew it I was sitting at that bench and I laid both hands on that keyboard. She came over and grabbed the top of that cover of the keyboard and slammed it down on my hands. It's a good thing she didn't break all the bones in my hands. [She said] "If my kids can't play, you can't play either." I said, "Ok."

Janis Kozlowski: Geez, that's awful. Where did your brothers and sisters stay?

Joe Baldeschi: I don't have any.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, you don't have any.

Joe Baldeschi: Oh no, it was her seven kids.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh that's right because you were only three when your mom died so she didn't really have a chance to have any others.

Joe Baldeschi: No, I just have one brother. Every time I get up in the morning I go to the bathroom before I start our little business. I start to shave and I look at that guy in the mirror and say, "Hey idiot, what are we gonna talk about today?" [both laughing]

Janis Kozlowski: Just you and him, huh?

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, that's funny. Well, I've been talking to you for probably an hour and a half now you're probably all talked out for now.

Joe Baldeschi: Oh, yeah. Well, if you ask my wife, "No, Joe is never talked out. He keeps talking." [both laughing] I don't want to hold you up anymore anyway. I think you got ... you can do whatever you want with it.

Janis Kozlowski: [1:33:38] Well, maybe we'll sign off for now but I'll get this all transcribed and I'll send it back to you and I'll give you a copy of the recording too. Maybe your son or your grandson would like copies of it.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, my grandson would for sure.

Janis Kozlowski: Do you want me to just send you one or do you want more copies?

Joe Baldeschi: No, I can duplicate them.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok, well if you decide you want me to make more I'd sure be happy to do that too.

Joe Baldeschi: Ok. One is enough.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok.

Joe Baldeschi: And I'll put that picture in the mail tomorrow morning.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, that'd be great, I'd love to see that.

Joe Baldeschi: Yeah, yeah. And you can call me and say, "I thought you married a young lady, where'd you get that old lady from?" [both laughing] Of course the picture is now, Jesus ... it's 2008 I was Governor in '88-'89 – 20 years ago. Can you imagine that?

Janis Kozlowski: Wow.

Joe Baldeschi: Time is going by too fast.

Janis Kozlowski: I'll say. You know my Dad always told me it would and I didn't believe him, but I do now. I know exactly what he means.

Joe Baldeschi: The older you get, if you stay busy the faster it goes. You don't pay attention.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, that's so true.

Joe Baldeschi: Ok, Janis.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, thank you very much for today. I sure appreciate it Joe and I'll be talking to you soon.

Joe Baldeschi: Well, thank you for all you're doing. We appreciate it. Ok.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok. I'll talk to you soon.

Joe Baldeschi: Thank you.

Janis Kozlowski: All right. Bye-bye.

Joe Baldeschi: Bye-bye.

Interview end at 1:35:11
