

John Pletcher: My checkout in the B-26, by the way, I had been flying B-18s that we had brought up from the States when our squadron came up – we came up with nine B-18As and they were the first bomber airplanes to arrive in Alaska. The fighter squadron with the P-36s came up at the same time and their airplanes came up on a boat on the St. Mihiel. Our airplanes were the first bombers to get up here and they were B-18s. They weren't suitable for combat, they were alright for patrolling and that sort of thing. I had been checked out in the B-18, but my checkout in the B-26 was four take-offs and four landings without leaving the traffic pattern and they said, "You are now a B-26 pilot". My crew had never been in one, so we got in an airplane and they said, "Well, here take this airplane and go and fly and get acquainted with it". So we took an airplane [*chuckle*] that we knew little about and flew off down the Copper River Valley and down over, and came up through over Seward and all the way up along the Alaska Railroad. A strange airplane, one that we didn't know a thing about but they said, "Well, you're a pilot you're supposed to be able to fly anything" – so we did. And a lot of things went that way in the early days of the World War II - a lot of things didn't go exactly according to the book and according to normal procedure.

Janis Kozlowski: They must have had a lot of confidence in your training.

John Pletcher: [*chuckle*] Well, you know, we were all young bucks and we were indestructible – everybody felt that way. It would be somebody else, it won't be me, you know. I had several friends up here, but I was always confident that I could handle anything that happened and luckily nothing that I couldn't handle ever happened to me. That doesn't mean that I could have handled anything if it happened but if I had lost an engine on take off I don't know whether I could have handled it or not. I had confidence that I could, but that's the way you had to be and same way with the fighter boys. A lot of those fighter pilots had never been in anything bigger than an AT-6 trainer and here they get into a fighter that's maybe got 1000 hp or more and it's a hot rod and they have to be confident that they're a supreme pilot.

Janis Kozlowski: Do you recall losing any of your squadron mates or pilots in your crew?

John Pletcher: Not out of my crew, but, I remember losing a classmate that was an airplane pilot by the name of Joaquin Hawley, he was one of the flight commanders. He took a B-26 flight out on a mission to Kiska to bomb ships in the harbor, at Kiska, and one of his wingmen got a direct hit in the wing, lost a wing and went into the harbor, Kiska Harbor. And of course that lost his entire airplane and crew because they went right into the water. That was one that I knew for sure. We had a couple of pilots who had to make belly landings because of being caught out in the weather or mechanical problems but all of those people survived. The one that went into Kiska Harbor, of course, was a total loss of people and airplane both.

A friend of mine that I had flown with as co-pilot – in fact, he and I were on a crew that went down to Dayton Ohio and picked up a B-24C which had been designated for the British. The Air Force called it an LB-30, it was a four engine airplane, and we picked up three of them down there. This pilot, Thornborough, picked me as copilot to go with him and we flew that LB-30 back from Dayton by way of West Palm Beach Florida and Sacramento California up through McCord Field in Tacoma Washington and along into Elmendorf.