

Janis Kozlowski: Well you must have had some time several days at a time when you couldn't fly because of weather?

John Pletcher: Oh, yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: So what did you do? Jump these hummocks, er...*[laughing]*

John Pletcher: Well, sit around a stove if you could find one that was warm, some place where it was dry. We'd sit there and shoot the bull and if somebody had a deck of cards you'd maybe play cards if you knew how to play cards or...

One time at Adak, we had one enterprising GI, he had gone out to one of the ships that had come in with supplies. He had gathered up magazines from the ship, old magazines that he could gather off the ship and they were magazines like "Life" and "Time" and all those old magazines and "Readers' Digest", whatever reading material. And he had a tent set up and he was selling these a nickel a piece *[laughing]*. Well, I'll tell you what, a lot of those magazines got thoroughly read by many people *[laughing]*. It didn't matter if it was six months old *[laughing]* it was something to do.

Janis Kozlowski: What about newspapers or mail?

John Pletcher: Not very many newspapers. They did get mail down there, occasionally. In fact, they did pretty well on mail because they had, what they called, troop transport squadrons - they organized two of them. And they had mostly C-47s, the freight cargo version of the DC-3, and they were flying supplies and personnel down to the islands, like from Elmendorf down to Cold Bay, and Umnak and Adak and vice versa. They were taking anything back that had to go back to Elmendorf or Anchorage and they would bring down mail that had accumulated at Elmendorf. The basic squadron headquarters, you might call it the permanent headquarters, was still maintained at Anchorage so they still had a detachment at the base at Anchorage at Elmendorf for all of the squadrons. So we had had some place there where the mail could come and be sorted and sent out to the islands if the guys were out on the islands. And that was the job of the people back at Elmendorf - they knew who was down in the islands, they had rosters of who was down there. So if mail showed up for people that were down there, they'd go in the mail sack and the next troop carrier freighter that went down took a bag of mail down.

Those guys flew in some horrible weather. They had a time down there when they had one C-47 that landed, at Adak, and the wind was blowing so hard he stopped on the runway and with the engines running and sat there with the engines running while the truck backed up to the door and they unloaded his airplane. He kept the engines running because if he shut it off it would have blown the airplane backwards off the runway. How they refueled it I don't know, they may have brought a fuel truck up behind it and refueled it over the trailing edge of the wing because they sure couldn't do it over the front with the engines going. But they had some pretty bad winds. And, by that time they had gained a little bit more radio communication, so navigation was a little better then it had been when we first got down there.

But boy, talk about flying by the seat of your pants and by memory of landmarks... One of the first things they told us to do as a squadron - when we got to Elmendorf when we first came up

with the B-18s – go out and fly around and get acquainted with the terrain, so you know where things are up here: where the mountain ranges are, where the lakes are and where the places are where you might be able to land and survive and all that sort of thing, because you may need it. And that's what we did. So we got to do a lot of sight seeing around Alaska, familiarizing ourselves with the terrain.