

Janis Kozlowski: This airplane, here, in this photo number 9 [*picture 5 of B-26 #01320 quarter frontal view with a man standing by the right landing gear*], is that also one of the early models that you flew here in Alaska?

John Pletcher: Yeah, well we had none of the later models. All of the original B-26s up here were straight B-26s, not even the A model.

Janis Kozlowski: And, did you have any modifications that were done specifically for Alaska?

John Pletcher: Well, there were several things that were done here in Alaska that, one of them specifically was, and I don't know if this was even officially authorized, but in some of the B-26s they took the navigator position, bombardier navigator in the nose, took that position and installed two 50 caliber machine guns and two 20mm cannon in the navigator's compartment. They cut holes in the nose, plexiglass nose, and stuck the barrels of the guns out through the plexiglass nose of the B-26 and these guns were fired by the pilot. I know because I flew planes that were equipped that way and fired the guns. And they were two 50s and two 20mms.

Now, in talking to one of the flight engineers that had been at Fairbanks, at the engineering section up there, he claimed he didn't know anything about that. They had asked about doing that and then been refused and as far as he knew they had never installed them. I - and this was Joe Schneider (sp.?), no longer living - and I told him, I said, "Joe I know they did it because I flew the airplanes and fired the guns". [*laughing*] It was news to him, but this was to be used for strafing if it became possible. Because our tactic, because of the weather, the clouds were usually - if we could fly at all - the clouds were low and our main objective was to bomb shipping. And we call this deck level because it was down on the low level right close to the water, and these guns could be fired by the bomber on the way in.

I did that out at Attu, on a mission out to Attu, fired the guns at the ship that I was bombing. And you still carried the bombs, of course, and the bombs were triggered off by the co-pilot who had a trigger mechanism on an extension cord. There was also a lever in the cockpit, sort of jury-rigged as you might call it, so that the co-pilot could open the bomb-bay doors. He opened the bomb bay doors and your co-pilot could drop the bombs and the pilot could fire the guns and that's the way we made the attack at Attu. And that attack was on Thanksgiving Day of 1942, about 3 o'clock in the afternoon.