

Janis Kozlowski: So none of these flights were mundane for you, were they?

John Pletcher: Well, no *[laughter]*. But we had flown many hours before over water and under a low overcast. So we were accustomed to it and we knew that that weather, except for days when we would have fog, it would almost always be a little space between the clouds and the water. It might only be 100 or 200 feet but you could get in there and fly just above the water and just under the clouds and usually you'd have pretty fair forward visibility. But occasionally you'd run into foggy conditions and it was almost always windy up there. People used to say there won't be any fog when there is wind, well that's not true in the Aleutians. You can have fog rolling along with the wind, actually I guess its just clouds that are rolling along the water, and it can be just as bad as any fog. The Aleutians are a nasty place to fly as far as weather is concerned.

And believe or not, at that time it was so early we did not have any radio aids at Adak to come back to, nothing to get home on, no radio range, no non-directional beacon - nothing. And GPS hadn't even been thought of, I don't think, and the orders were that they wouldn't even turn a radio on for us regardless of what our condition was. Now they did have one radio station at Umnak but it was quite limited and we couldn't usually get it from as far out as Adak. Adak was about, as I remember it, about 250 miles west of Umnak and then the next island was Amchitka, next one was Kiska, much further on was Attu and just northeast of Attu was Shemya which had nothing on it at the time we flew over it. We could see that it would be a half-way favorable place to bail out, if you had to do that, because it was land and it was fairly level but there was no activity there and nothing had been built there yet. Later they built a base at Shemya and they operated B-24s out of there and C-47s. I don't think any B-26s ever operated out of there, not to my knowledge, anyway.

But you have to bear in mind that when it came time to start sending the B-26s back to the lower 48 because they were being replaced by B-25s, I had been up there, and my crew had been up there, for almost two years. I got there in March of '41 and I got out in February of '43, so I'd been there for almost two years. So I and Captain Dempster that I mentioned earlier flew two of the war-weary B-26s back to the states and we got as far as Denver and they grounded our airplanes *[chuckle]* so we left them at Denver and I never saw the airplane again.

Janis Kozlowski: How come they grounded them there?

John Pletcher: Well, they said that the fuel that we had been using in the States was not compatible with the self sealing fuel tanks we had. I don't know if that was true or not, but true to the usual military procedure, they pulled the airplanes into the hangar at Denver and took the bottom off the wing and took the wing tanks out and low and behold they found out they didn't have any wing tanks to replace them. *[laughter]* So, the airplane sat there in the hangar on jacks, torn apart, unflyable. So they said go ahead, your orders call for you to go to MacDill Field and also to take leave after you deliver the airplanes. So we called MacDill and they said, "go on leave", and report to MacDill. So we went on two weeks leave and then reported down to MacDill in Tampa Florida so we never did get the airplane down to Florida but they had lots of them down there when I got there – later model ones.