

Janis Kozlowski: You had a ... first of all what happened to your Thanksgiving Dinner that day when you went to Attu did you get it when you came back?

John Pletcher: Yeah, when we got back - we got back at about 6 pm - and it was just getting dark. In fact they had lights on, on the ground to outline the runway. Most everything was blacked out as they were during World War II but the runway was outlined with light and it was after sun down, it was dusk, but not pitch dark. So we were able to land and the B-24 weather ship had come in and landed, and it was so light, having exhausted most of its fuel and everything, that apparently they came in a little bit fast and he had to ride the brakes pretty hard and blew a tire. [*laughter*] He didn't hurt anything but he blew a tire [*laughing*] and he said, "Well, you guys set the traffic pattern downwind [*laughter*]". Well there wasn't much of any other way to come in except from what I considered to be south to north. Because if you took off the other way you took off toward a mountain and you had to make a turn so if you had some problem and couldn't make a turn you were faced with a mountain that you couldn't climb over. So we always took off away from that mountain if it was at all possible and so did everybody else. But anyway, that was the story about the B-24, but everybody got back from that mission without any big problems, nobody got hurt.

Janis Kozlowski: Now, what about this ... I think you know something about this mission here where the airplane came back with a big hole in the side of it [*see picture 6 of two men standing next to a hole in a forward section of a B-26 and 7 of the nose section of a B-26 torn open*]. Can you tell me what happened there?

John Pletcher: Yeah. This fellow on the left in this picture is Frank Gallagher – he was our squadron commander at the time down there. And the other fella, bare-headed fellow, shorter fella, we knew him only as “pinky” - he was the Martin factory representative. And that hole in the side of the airplane was an airplane that I had flown. It was on a mission out to Kiska and they had a ship that was – I think it was grounded – but it was drawn in next to the shoreline in what they call Gertrude Cove. There were two coves out there at Adak - Kiska rather - and they had this one ship pulled inside of it, parallel to the beach, and there was a cliff on each ended in a cliff, about, oh I guess it was about 100-200 feet high. From the photographs that they had of the ship they didn't know about this cliff, they couldn't tell about the cliff. So, I and a wing man were sent out to bomb that ship and our deal was to fly over the island and over this bay, over the ship and bomb it on the way out. Well, lo and behold when we came over the land and we were low, we were just about as low as you could get, when we came over that, lo and behold we couldn't even see that ship because it was hidden behind the cliff. By the time we could see it, it was too late to line up on it and bomb it.

Well, on the way out my ship, which is shown in this picture here [*picture 6 and 7*], got hit by some piece of artillery from the ground, from the Japanese, and apparently the round did not explode. That came right at the hinge point of the nose wheel door on an angle from the rear to the front, about a little steeper than a 45 degree angle and angling in toward the center of the airplane slightly. So it entered by the hinge and then came out through the side of the airplane further up and in the process it cut out, broke out a stringer that ran lengthwise around the curve of the nose and it curled back the skin on the nose as shown in that picture. That round or shell whatever it was, it may have been a 37mm or whatever, the shell came between the skin of the

airplane and the upholstery in the cockpit – the first airplanes had upholstery in the cockpit – and in the process it cut the bundle of radio wires leading to the co-pilots control box which was right at his right elbow. That round would have come probably within at least 6 inches to a foot of the co-pilots elbow and it disabled his radio; he couldn't talk over the radio. So I was unable to contact him by radio but I could holler at him. And that's how close it came. If it had come one foot closer to the center of the airplane it would have come right through the co-pilots seat. It probably would have knocked out everybody in the cockpit. It would have probably brought us down, so we were just darn lucky that it didn't come further in to the airplane. But it came through and out and there was no evidence of gunpowder burns or anything on the metal on the airplane so obviously it did not explode. It was the just the round going through that tore that hole in the airplane.