

Janis Kozlowski: So these weren't things they taught you in flight training, though. You had to improvise a lot and learn.

John Pletcher: We improvised a lot up here and a lot of the time a crashed airplane became the parts depot for the living airplanes – the ones that were still functioning. So if somebody cracked one up on the base and it was pretty well damaged it became a parts supply for whatever usable parts it had that were needed. So, except for engines I think they - I'm not sure they ever took engines off a crashed airplane - but as far as generators, starters and things like that were concerned, yeah, they would strip them, or wheels or any parts that had gone bad.

It was the same with the fighters. We had a squadron of P-39s based at Adak part of the time and they had more problems, I think than we did. The P-39 had a rather flimsy nose gear with quite a long strut and not very strong. If it hit a very solid obstruction the nose gear would collapse on it, of course, then it would get the propeller and you'd have an airplane that was probably damaged beyond what we'd call field maintenance. If you could get the airplane back to Anchorage where they had more maintenance capabilities they could have repaired them but out there in the advanced fields they didn't have the machinery and equipment to do major repairs.

Janis Kozlowski: So they just parked them and scavenged them in that case?

John Pletcher: Yeah. So the attrition rate on airplanes was higher than normal, than a normal airbase would be. Because, in the first place, when they first landed at Adak the runway was just wet sand. It was rolled down, bladed down with a grater and rolled with a big roller to pack it and then they started putting down steel matting what they called, I think they called it "Marston matting". And that wasn't named after the officer up here that was named Marston, it was named after a town down on the east coast where it was first designed and used and that's why they called it Marston - the town was named Marston. There's a story in one of the books about it, John Cloe may have information on it.

The steel matting was hilarious in a way because when you landed on it, if there was a soft spot in the runway it would press that matting down; it was perforated - had holes in it. And after a few take-offs or landings of airplanes running over it and the rain you would develop a little mud hole there and this matting every time you run over it would chug down in that mud hole and chug up and down. So that matting got quite rough. You would hear an airplane land and you'd hear this matting where it was over one of those spots where it didn't touch the ground. You'd hear this matting rattle *[laughing]* so you'd hear an airplane land and you'd hear this go rattle and then pause, then maybe a rattle again, and then another pause, *[laughing]*. You knew the guy was hitting the high spots and rattling the low ones.

Janis Kozlowski: Did it ever cause any damage to airplanes on landing or take-off for that matter?

John Pletcher: I never did but up here, and nowhere else for that matter, but there were some that were damaged on landing and some of them because of the steel matting. They continually repaired and worked on that matting trying to keep it usable. It did keep airplanes from sinking out of sight - that was for sure. You know, wet sand, like on a wet beach you can drive on a wet

beach but don't go out there when the sand is dry because you'll get stuck. But on a wet beach, you can drive on a wet beach, well you can do the same with airplanes. Like out there that was sand, volcanic sand and when you bladed it out smooth and rolled it with a roller and packed it, it was like a wet beach might be down in Florida. You could land the airplane on it very satisfactorily most of the time.