

Joseph D. Hutchison: Anyway, we went from there to Whitehorse, Yukon Territory. And [when] we got there, it was; we hadn't eaten, except a sandwich all day. So, we went up and ate at the mess hall. And in the mean time, two of the guys on the crew gassed it up again. But, nobody filled the oxygen tanks; didn't figure we'd need them, I guess. Anyway, the oxygen tanks weren't refilled, but the gas tanks were. And he decided he was going to take off and go to Elmendorf. It was eight o'clock at night and they hadn't had any weather reports for eight hours. And we had no; the radio operator didn't have a SOI - that's a Signal Operations Instructor booklet for that trip. So he had no way of contacting the ground station, and we had no radio communication.

Oh, incidentally, I'll back track a bit.... When we were at Topeka, before we took off; the radio operator had to pass a proficiency test. And suddenly he didn't know what a radio looked like, or how to take code; he didn't even understand anything about it. So they naturally had to take him off for retraining, and left us without a radio operator. [The original radio operator was Parker] They tried to make me take the job. And I told them, "No, I'm not going to take it, because I never went to school and I don't know anything about it; all I know is the code and how send to receive code." So, they asked for a volunteer. And this corporal, Jose Valles said, "I'll volunteer, but that job is a tech sergeant's job," and he says, "I'm only a corporal." He says, "I'll only volunteer if I get the tech sergeant's stripes." And the pilot told him, "I'll get that for you as soon as we get assigned." He said, "No, I want them right now, I know better." So, he did get the ... he went from corporal to tech sergeant, right then.

We were taking off from Whitehorse. And as I said, it's at eight o'clock at night, it's a thousand miles or more to Anchorage, and all these other things - no weather report, no radio connection. And the navigator puts in a formal written objection to us taking off at that time - he turned that in at Whitehorse. And we found Anchorage, but it was fogged in, we couldn't land, we couldn't contact them. So, we were doing figure eights and circles and so forth above Anchorage for a while, while he made up his mind about what he wanted to do. Then he wanted a course for Fairbanks from the navigator. And the navigator said, "I can't give you a course for Fairbanks," he said, "I don't have a starting point, really; because you've been doing all of these figure eights and the circles and so forth. Besides, my equipment's in the back of the plane. And it's loaded so heavy, I, I'm too big; I can't get through." So, the pilot called for the smallest guy, who was Seeley. And had Seeley bring the box up to give it to the navigator. The door between the bomb bay and the rear of the plane had a faulty catch on it; it was like a kitchen door ... snap. And it kept blowing off from the wind blowing through the bomb bay. So the door would blow open. Anyway, the door was hanging open and I could see Seeley out in the bomb bay; he'd given the box to the navigator and started back, and suddenly collapsed. And then [Chuckle] I realized, "Well, the pilot's been climbing and didn't tell us about it, and he's gone unconscious from lack of oxygen."

Janis Kozlowski: Oh boy.

Joseph D. Hutchison: So I quick told the rest of the guys that we're climbing and [to] put on their oxygen masks. And I grabbed the walk-around bottle; and I was the next smallest guy in the crew, so, I went out there and pulled him back into the back of the plane. And he put on his mask and we went on.

Anyway, we kept flying and flying, and pretty soon we ran out of gas. [Chuckle] And we were somewhere over Alaska, but we don't know quite where. And all the gas gages are reading empty and the pilot finally said, "Well, I'm sorry, I made a mistake. And you've got my permission to bail out as soon as I ring the bell." So I [was] eager to get away from this guy - as far and as quick as possible. So I'm hanging practically [Chuckle] out of the plane, ready to go, and somebody yelled, "Don't jump; we spotted a light!" So I went over and looked out; I didn't see any light. But we were diving at the light; we didn't know what it was, or anything.

Anyway, when we got down near the ground, well there was a little runway there for; this was a company of Army engineers working on that segment of the Alaska Highway. And there was just enough runway for us to put it down on the ground. And we were lined up with it as we got there, so, anyway, we hit the ground. And the engines pooped out, because [there was] no more gas.