

Interview with Joseph D. Hutchison

**Aleutian World War II National Historic Area
Oral History Program**

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Interviewed by Janis Kozlowski, National Park Service
Transcribed by Shannon Apgar-Kurtz, edited by Greg Dixon

This interview is part of the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Project. The interview with [Joseph D. Hutchison] was recorded with his permission on a digital recorder. Copies of the audio file are preserved in mp3, wav and wma formats and are on file at the offices of the National Park Service in Anchorage, Alaska.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:00:00] Well, first of all, let me ask you ... you served in WWII, how did you get into the service? Were you drafted, or enlisted? And which branch of the military did you go into?

Joseph D. Hutchison: I enlisted in the Air Force - Army Air Corp.

Janis Kozlowski: And where were you at the time? Were you in Michigan then?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Yes.

Janis Kozlowski: How old were you?



S/Sgt. Joseph Donald Hutchison – 21st Bomb Squadron, Ball Turret Gunner – Radar Operator, Asst. Radio Operator on Captain Irving L. Wadlington's second crew. Aleutian Islands, Alaska, April – October 1943. Participated in August 11, 1943 Paramushiru raid. Photo courtesy Joseph D. Hutchison, 21st Bomb Squadron, Staff Sgt., Adak, Umnak, Amchitka, Shemya and Attu.

Janis Kozlowski: 19. Was there anything particularly that compelled you to go?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Well, [Chuckle] there was a war on. I was in the ROTC in high school, and our instructor, almost the day we enrolled in the program, told us there was going to be a war in the near future and we should learn everything we could about it. And he was promoted from buck sergeant to major, I think, as soon as the war started. That was the beginning of it.

Janis Kozlowski: Did you have family that were in the military as well?

Joseph D. Hutchison: No. My brother enlisted after I did. Actually, he was the reason I got into the ROTC. He had been in it first, and then he dropped out of it after I got in. But, we went to the CMTC [Citizen's Military Training Camp] camps in the summer at Fort Custer, here in Michigan, for the field training. Our high school was an elite high school in the downtown area. It didn't have a playground, or anything; we had no place to march. So we marched on the roof of the building for our close-order drills.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh my, that must have been quite a site.

Joseph D. Hutchison: Well, it was a flat area.

Janis Kozlowski: OK. So where did you end up serving in WWII?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Up in Alaska.

Janis Kozlowski: The entire time?

Joseph D. Hutchison: No, I was moving most of the time. The little letter that I sent you essentially covers all of my duty in Alaska, pretty much; other than the background story [photos and letter in file]. I tried to enlist in the Marines out of high school and they laughed me out of the office, because I looked so young and ... just [like] a little kid. In fact, I had problems in the ROTC. Most of the promotions, you had to have your school grades up at least to a "B" average, and the guys that he wanted to promote to the officer rank could never maintain their averages. It was a tough school, and I was able to do that; and [Chuckle] so he had to promote me every once in a while. And he didn't like me because of that. So, eventually, I took the ... test for field rank. And I passed a perfect test. I knew I'd have to write a perfect test, because he was going to knock it down if he could. And so I wrote a perfect test. But he still came out with a major instead of a colonel. [Laugh]

Anyway ... then the day I got out of school, as I said, I tried to enlist in the Marines, and they refused me. So I went to work for General Motors. And then my dad told me not to enlist for at least a year after Pearl Harbor, because he had been in WW I and he knew what was going on. So, I waited almost a year. And then I went down and took the test for pilot cadet. And I passed everything, except that I had; the depth perception on my eyes - I failed. [I] went to the Navy and

the Army, and the same result. So, I enlisted as an aerial gunner ... and I took my physical at the American Lady Corset Factory [Chuckle] in Detroit.

Janis Kozlowski: [Chuckle]

Joseph D. Hutchison: [0:04:25] And we went on the train from there to Fort Custer. And on the way, I met two old retreads from WWI. And one of them, I don't know why he was there - he was from California, and this was the 6th Corp area; that was, I think, the 9th. But anyway, he was on the train with me and he became friends. And when we got to Fort Custer, we stayed together, because he had also enlisted as an aerial gunner. And then we went to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri and there I ran into...both of us ran into difficulty. He did first; they told him he was too old to be an aerial gunner - he was 42 at the time. And he told them, "Well, that's the reason I enlisted as an aerial gunner," he says, "you either have to let me be an aerial gunner, or I can go home, 'cause I'm not eligible for the draft." So they sent him through, and he told me about it.

And shortly thereafter I ran into the problem. We were being instructed [on] how to be a soldier [Chuckle] and stand at attention. And this Private First Class was running the instruction, and he said to stand at attention with your fist closed. [Chuckle] And I told him, "That's not right." And he immediately blew his stack and marched me off to the Lieutenant. [Chuckle] And the Lieutenant balled me out for a few minutes, and then he wanted to know what he was giving me hell for. And I told him, "Well, this guy was trying to teach us to stand at attention with our fists closed, and it wasn't right." He said, "What do you know about it?" I said, "Well, I know that you're supposed to stand at attention with your thumbs along the seams of your trousers, and fingers curled naturally." He said, "Where'd you learn that?" And I said, "Well, I was in the ROTC." He said, "What else you know?" And I said, "Well, what do you want to know?" I had memorized the manuals, because my instructor didn't like me. And so he kept asking me questions, and I knew all the answers; I spit them right back at him. He says, "I'm going to make you a drill sergeant here." And I said, "No, you can't do that Lieutenant." I said, "I don't want to be a drill sergeant." He says, "I'll get you three stripes, right now." I said, "I don't want to be a drill sergeant." He says, "Suppose I order you to?" I said, "You can't even do that, because the way I enlisted, I mocked it from learning from the older guy." So he says, "If you, [Chuckle] if you don't stay here," he says, "You'll be overseas in three months." And I said, "Well, I guess that's the reason I enlisted." And so ... that's the way it happened. [Both laugh] And I was on the next train. But it was nice; I had a private compartment from Jefferson Barracks, Missouri to Harlingen, Texas. It was the best train ride I've had in my life.

Janis Kozlowski: Really?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: Was it a troop train?

Joseph D. Hutchison: No, it was a regular passenger train. But, they had gotten me a compartment; I was in there all by myself.

[0:07:50] And anyway I went through one month of training at Arlington, Texas. They were emphasizing that, "You ought to learn code," because, you know, "That's a big deal; your life may depend on it." So, I memorized code ... and learned how to send and receive it. And just on my own. And when we finished that month of training, they made me a staff sergeant. And I was the only one of the bunch that became a staff sergeant. But, we got on... loaded on the trucks to go to the railroad station out of there. And these guys were laughing and joking, and this sergeant comes walking to the back and he started giving us a hard time about talking. He said, "We gave you those stripes and we can take them away." And I was just mad enough I ... [Chuckle] told him, "Look, I didn't ask for these stripes if you don't [sic] want 'em, take them back." So he ... I lost one stripe. [Laugh]

Janis Kozlowski: Did you really? [Both laugh]

Joseph D. Hutchison: [Laugh] So then, the train we got on there was, [Chuckle] I think it was a Civil War thing - it had no heat. We had been down in the Gulf of Mexico for the month and had gotten used to the warm weather. The train was a coal fired engine. There were three coaches on it and half of them had broken windows; the toilets didn't work. They were so ancient they had a stove in the corner for heat. But, there was no coal or anything to burn. So then everybody got sick on the way. And we all had diarrhea ... and the toilets didn't work, and it was a mess. And as we crossed the; Green River in Helper, Utah, there was a freight train that was pulled over to let us go through. But, somebody forgot to throw the switch back, so we rammed into the rear end of the parked freight train. The engineer had seen it and tried to stop. He and the fireman both jumped, but the train did go in, and we went right through the caboose on the freight train and tilted a couple of cars off the tracks - boxcars. And they broke open. This was Thanksgiving Day, 1942, at Helper, Utah. They pulled us back off of the wreck area, and then took us into town. And they had to clean the train up, so [Chuckle] we had Thanksgiving dinner at a Chinese restaurant in Helper, Utah. And then they took us on to Salt Lake City.

[0:11:03] In Salt Lake City, they let us off at the city airport for Salt Lake. And we sat in the hanger there, until they got ready to take care of us. Most of us were so weak, we could hardly stand. Then they marched us around in the rain for awhile. They got a ... they issued us mattresses and bedding, and marched us around in the rain till they were wet. They found us a barracks, so we made our beds and went to bed. And a few hours later they woke us up, took us out to stand in the rain and read us a proclamation by President Harrison telling us it was illegal to sell liquor to Indians. We [laugh] had no liquor, and we sure wouldn't sell it to the Indians. [Both Laugh]

So anyway, I decided I didn't like that place right off the bat. And we ... the next day, they woke us up and told us we had to go to the mess hall for breakfast. And half of us were so sick we didn't want to go. They said, "Well you got to go. You don't have to eat, but you have to go." So they marched us down and ... first, I had to go in and shave and so forth. And I washed up, I pulled the plug on the sink, [Chuckle] and there was no plumbing connected to it. So, all the water [Chuckle] ran out at my feet. So, again I didn't like this place.

The next thing they did was to take us out and give us close order drill. But, the first thing they did: they had a guy on each corner of the formation with a shotgun and a guy behind us in a jeep with a machine gun on it. And I said, "Well, what the hell is going on here," you know, "We're not prisoners, we're all volunteers to be aerial gunners." They told me, "Shut up. Get back in formation." So, they marched us over to the tarmac and we went back and forth a few times. And then they made the mistake of making me in command, because they got tired of yelling at us. So I started marching the guys back and forth, [and] each time I'd turn 'em around I'd get a little farther away. And finally [Chuckle] we got away - about a block. And they were yelling at us to come back. And I told them to break formation and take off in all directions. [Both laugh] And they did; we were fighting back a little bit. Anyway, then they took us in to tell us what we were going to do there. They told us we had to be there for sixteen weeks. And sixteen weeks ... was more than I wanted.

I was one of the first ones to be called up to be interviewed. And they told me I had three choices: I could take radio operator courses; I could take armor gunner courses, or mechanic courses. I said, "Well, I'm not going to take any of them; I just want to be an aerial gunner." And they said, "Well, you better think it over; you get out and go down there and sit down awhile and think about it. And then you decide which one you're going to be, 'cause you're going to be here for sixteen weeks." And I went down and sat there, and I was madder than heck again. And one of the guys asked me, "Well, what goes on up there?" And I told him. He says, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm not going to take 'em." And he says, "I'm not either." [Laugh] Pretty soon, the whole bunch of them decided that they were not gonna. And so they had a, kind of a mutiny on their hands, and we were on the next train out.... [Chuckle] Well, actually we were there for two, or three weeks. It was on December 5th that we got out of Salt Lake City.

And there was again, three cars. And it was all gunners ... and one went to El Paso, one went to Tucson, and the other one went to Alamogordo. And I was on the one to El Paso. There were about, oh, twenty of us, and we were assigned to a squadron there which already had its orders for going to England. They had the planes out on the runway and were preparing to leave when we showed up. And it was the one that Clark Gable was in, by the way. I met him two or three times while I was there. He didn't go home. Most of them were at home on furlough; they hadn't yet gotten back.

Anyway, they loaded up and departed for England, leaving us behind because they didn't have room for us. Which put us a month behind the rest of the guys on the other two cars of the train. My buddies were in the other cars. So, I lost track of most of them.

Anyway, then we went to Tucson, and that's where we picked up our pilot. And most of that month, was him getting used to flying the plane; we were just riding along and going to classes in the meantime.

Janis Kozlowski: Now, was this Wadlington?

Joseph D. Hutchison: No. This was, Ware, Lt Richard Ware.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, OK.

Joseph D. Hutchison: [0:16:42] Anyway, the next stop was, Alamogordo. And we showed up there and the first thing they said was, “We’re sorry to do this, but in a month, ten of you guys are going to be dead.” – And that was a nice way to greet us.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah.

Joseph D. Hutchison: We found out, though, that that was pretty much true; they exceeded the amount ... there were planes crashing all over the place. They didn’t have enough instructor pilots. We didn’t get a copilot, until there at Alamogordo. Up until then, well, he had been flying with an instructor pilot, or with another guy learning how - two of them.

Anyway, we picked up our copilot at Alamogordo, and the pilot let him take off on his first ride. [Chuckle] And he’d naturally thought we were the best crew in the world ... [he] showed up, you know, bright and shining, right out of flight school. And anyway, he took off and he reached down to pull up the landing gear, but he grabbed the wrong handle - grabbed the flaps. And we ... slide off; were just barely off the ground. And so, we fell kind of to our left and hit real hard on the left wheel. Well, that was one time when the pilot did the right thing - he slapped the guy’s hand away and pushed the flaps back down and pulled the throttle wide open. And we staggered into the air; we came around, made a circle around the field, and came down. And everybody was shaken pretty good.

This was the first time, and only time, I saw my tail gunner scared. He and I both got out of the plane, walked over to the wheel that had hit the ground, and he was shaking. And he lit up a cigarette, [Chuckle] and as he struck the match on the tire, the tire exploded. [Laugh] And both of us took off running across the airport. There were many plane mishaps at that field.

We then went to Clovis, New Mexico for our third phase. And he ran into - the pilot, ran into problems everywhere he went.

At Alamogordo, we had one pass while we were there - where we could, they would run the truck down to El Paso. And we had special passes, because it was so long down there. And we only had the one pass. We could stay out after curfew. And there was a lot of ill feeling between the troops that were stationed at El Paso and us, because we were supposedly favorites. But, when we climbed on the truck to go down there, there was another crew on the truck first. And we were at the back of the truck, and my pilot came walking up - the last man. And he said, “Hello,” or something like that to this other pilot. And the other pilot turned around and chewed him out. And he looked at us and he said, “If you guys know what’s good for you, you’ll get off of that crew, because I’m telling my crew right now,” he says, “If you’re in formation with us on the way over, then [to] shoot you down.” That’s apparently how bad his officers felt with him.

So ... learning from that and having run-ins with him myself, I decided, “Well, I’m going to try to get off of this crew.” So, I made up ... a roster [Chuckle] and a program. And I cut magazine articles out, you know, where they were saying, at the time, “They were having trouble getting

gunners,” because ... things were getting kind of rough. And I went in and made my pitch to get off. And the major listened to me. And after I was through, he says, “Well, we know all about your pilot and your crew.” He said, “And if I let you off, who’s going to replace you? Everybody knows about it.” He says, “You’re just stuck with it.” Everybody else on the crew had, at one time or another, tried to get off of it too; with no success.

[0:21:29] So then we went to Clovis. And one of the things that he got into there ... he had a habit of taxiing the airplane too fast on the ground and not slowing down to make a right [Chuckle] turn, or a left turn. It felt like he was driving a motorcycle instead of a four engine bomber. And then, he would stop all of a sudden. And he damaged the brakes on a couple of airplanes. And this one day we did that. And we pulled up in front of the headquarters, and he came roaring up there and then stomped on the brakes. And the expander tubes in the brakes ruptured. The crew chief came up and looked up, shook his head and said something to the pilot. And the pilot was still sitting in his seat, and he stuck his head out the window and chewed the crew chief out. And later that day, we saw our pilot walking up and down the tarmac with a rifle on his shoulder and a pack of rocks on his back. So, evidently there was some ranking officer in there that had seen what happened. So, that’s just, you know, more ... things that went on.

Janis Kozlowski: Isn’t it surprising, that that guy didn’t get washed out of pilot school?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Yeah. The story I heard was that, he had gotten his commission in the ROTC in college. And that his father was supposedly a two-star General. So, he had some pull somewhere. Anyway, he could fly the airplane OK, but it was just his personality - he was just a great big, over grown brat.

Then, Clovis was our last training base. They gave us six days travel time to get from Clovis to Topeka, Kansas for [our] port of embarkation. And I showed up just at the last minute; I had gone home and took my time. But, the only way to make it back to Topeka was to fly. So, I went to the city airport to catch a plane to Topeka. And [Chuckle] the guy at the desk said, “And so you think about when do you want to leave.” And I said, “Right now.” He says, “Well, you can’t, there’s a war on; you can’t [Chuckle] walk up and get a ticket and get on a plane right then.” I said, “Well, Ok. I don’t care; I’ll probably just go get bumped off anyway.” He said, “Where are you going; Port of embarkation?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “Do you have anything to prove that?” I said, “Yeah, I got my orders in my pocket.” He said, “Let me see ‘em.” I showed ‘em to him and he said, “Oh, you got the highest priority there is!” [Laugh]

The plane by then was already loaded and started taxiing out to take off. And he called it back. Pretty soon there was some little short, fat man got off madder than hell and they put me on. And that’s how I managed to [Chuckle] to get back in time to keep from getting my stripes taken away. Right after me, the guys that came in late lost their rank, because they weren’t back on schedule.

[0:25:17] At Topeka, we were trained as replacement crews; so, an entire crew would be replaced, not individuals. They put us through the lines, we made out our wills and powers of attorney, and any allotments, and ... all the fine paperwork that needed to be done. And then they

took us over and they briefed us on three routes: One to England, one to North Africa, and another one to the South Pacific; all three you were told, you know, how to do each - the trips for all three of them. You didn't know which one you were going to get until they called you.

After they finished up they said, "Now we got one special briefing for one crew." He says, "Everybody can leave except...." And everybody looked at us [both laugh]. They said, "Lt. Ware's crew stay." So, they briefed us on how to get to Elmendorf. And we said, "And when do we leave?" And he said, "Right now." So, [Chuckle] we loaded our stuff on the plane; it looked pretty bad. It was heaviest load that they had piled into a B-24. Before we even got to it, it looked strange; it had a bunch of antennas and stuff that we had never seen on a plane before.

And incidentally, while it was up in the Aleutians, somebody painted a picture of it, which is very true. We appeared in the *Life* magazine, I think of April, in 1943; two page[s]. I had a copy of it for a long time, but we had a fire at the house here and I got [lost] half of it. But it shows all the markings on it. They painted the guns out underneath it. You know, it had two machine guns under the bombardier firing forward - the pilot shot them.

Janis Kozlowski: Do you remember who painted the picture?

Joseph D. Hutchison: I think they were painted out in the picture. It's shown in a revetment up on Adak. It's actually very; it's almost a snap shot if it. It's very true.

[0:27:48] Anyway ... where was I?

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, you were talking about the plane being loaded up ... heavily loaded, and the antennas you had never seen before.

Joseph D. Hutchison: Oh, yeah. Well, we climbed in and took off, and immediately I smelled gasoline. So, I looked out the right waist window.... No, that was not true, that happened later on. We flew and landed at Great Falls, Montana. We landed at Great Falls, Montana, and got arctic equipment; and loaded that in the plane, too. By that time, we were sitting practically [Chuckle] on top of; you couldn't walk around on the plane, because it was so badly loaded.

When we landed at Great Falls, the brakes failed. And he put it in the sub-depot there for repairs, and they didn't do anything for a few days. And the guys were having a great time in town because it was a great town for enlisted men. But for some reason or another, they hated officers; which didn't make him happy at all. The only thing he could find for amusement was to go to the movies.

Anyway, I had another run in with him there: I wanted to buy of, an extra pair of long johns - I figured it was going to be cold enough up there that it would be a [Chuckle] good idea to have a spare pair. So I went over [and] tried to buy some, and they wouldn't sell them to me - you had to have an officer sign for it. So then I bumped into him and stupidly asked him to sign for it. So, I got a chewing out again and an answer of "no" naturally.

So anyway, he decided that we were going to take off on a test flight. And they hadn't done anything at the hanger. We got in, and we told him, "Well, we didn't need to get in for a test flight; he could go ahead and test it himself." He said, "No, everybody's got to be in." So we got in and took off. And then is when I smelled the gasoline. I looked out the window and it was running down the side of the airplane. So, I got on the intercom and called him and told him. He said, "I know about it." He said, "We'll see about it when we get to Edmonton in Canada."

Anyway, we went on past Edmonton and landed at St. John's, British Columbia; which was just a little bay, a little field - practically a dirt strip. It was a steel mat, as I recall. Or, no, it was Macadam [a type of road construction].

Anyway, the plane was so heavy it practically went practically right through the landing strip. And the brakes didn't work again. So, they pulled it off to one side of the runway, crossways of the runway. And the engineer and the assistant engineer went to work trying to fix it themselves. Well they did their thing and the pilot decided, "We're going to take off." Well, it had been sitting there for a couple of days and sinking into the muskeg, or whatever the heck it is - the soft ground up there. And when he tried to move it, it wouldn't move. So then he started revving the engines up to full blast and then slowing down; rocking it like you would rock a car trying to get it out of the snow, or something. And eventually, it broke loose. But, he was under full power at the time, so it jumped - ran clear across the runway. And before he could turn it, or anything, there was a C-47 Canadian Airlines plane parked there; it had a little stairway for passengers to get in. And he stopped it, but not until the number one propeller tangled with that stairway - chewed up the stairway and bent the propeller at right angle - the tips of it, were at right angles to the rest of the propeller.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh my goodness.

Joseph D. Hutchison: And you don't get new propellers for B-24s, at that time, out in the middle of Canada.... So, what do we do now? They stood around talking about it for a half an hour. And pretty soon, a Canadian guy with two hammers and a file walks up. And he stands there, and straightens that propeller out by banging, having one hammer in one hand and the other in the other, and tapping each blade - it was a three bladed propeller. Then he took his file and smoothed it out a little bit, and we took off. And as far as I know, [Chuckle] flew with that propeller the rest of the war.

Janis Kozlowski: They wouldn't do that today.

Joseph D. Hutchison: No.

[0:32:53] 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 grounds 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 sergeants 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.

[0:39:08] So they flew gas in for us the next day. And we flew out and got to Anchorage. But, we couldn't go down the chain; the weather was so bad down there. They kept us around Anchorage, I think for over a week, waiting for the weather to clear up so that it was safe to fly down there.

Anyway, when we finally got to; orders to go on down to Adak, we went down to the plane and here was a bunch of second lieutenants and one major lined up with foot lockers, bags and so forth, all wanting to ride down. And as I said, we had over loaded the plane to begin with - 11 of our equipment, and then the arctic equipment. So, we had no real means of carrying them. But, anyway, they put on four, or five second lieutenants. And the major road up on the flight deck with the rest of the, the pilot and radio operator and so forth. And these other second lieutenants were in the back with us gunners. And we were down, flying low over the water. In fact, I got on the intercom and told the pilot, I said, "You better get a little bit more altitude." I said, "You're leaving a wake in the water." He gave me a hard time again; he said, "I've got lots of room up here." (The plane was real tail heavy). And in the picture that I told you about, somebody has painted the name "Mush" on the side of it, and it probably pertains to the attitude of the plane when it was flying.

Anyway, while we're flying that low, the pilot and this major, I think, decided that it was time to pull a trick on these brand new second lieutenants. And so he called back, and said that ... "When the bell rang, for us..." We had these chest type parachutes, where you wore the harness; and to put the chute on, all you had to do was snap a couple, into a couple of hooks on the chest. So he said, "When the bell rings, you guys snap your parachutes on and make like you're going to bail out." Well [Chuckle] you don't bail out from ten feet [both laugh]. Anyway, this is the big joke on these second lieutenants; one of which was Larry Reineke, who you've, I'm sure, run into already, as - he became our intelligence officer assistant. And, he [the pilot] rang, and naturally, we did what he told us. And these lieutenants they had checked out parachutes, too. But they were the seat type parachutes and they didn't know how to put them on, or anything; they went nuts trying to get into a parachute. You know, there was cramped spaces there, because, we had bags all over the floor. So it was - you couldn't stand up in the area. So, that was a real big joke to him.

Anyway, we landed at Umnak that night with it getting pretty late and it was dark. And they just found tents for us to sleep in. And we took off the next day and continued on to Adak.

Janis Kozlowski: So, how many days in total did it take you to get the airplane down to the Aleutians with all this going on?

Joseph D. Hutchison: I really can't remember for sure.

Janis Kozlowski: But it was quite a long, long way; a long time?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Yes it was. It was a couple; it at least a week, or two.

Anyway, the whole crew was upset at the pilot's antics. And the navigator was the leader. We all decided to stick together and get rid of this guy, if we could. So we determined that we would ... when we landed, the first thing we would do would be, "Change into our dress uniforms and go up, according to rank, and salute the commanding officer," who wasn't there, his assistant was there. And tell him that we refuse to fly with this pilot, and state the reasons. Well, that's not looked at lightly if you look at the Army regulations. But, we had decided to stick with it. And so the next day, they tried to decide what they're going to do with this guy. So they came up with, "Well, we'll give him a test to see...." The operations officer couldn't believe, you know, our story about how bad he was. He flew as copilot and observed his flying. When he came back, was, "The plane kept kind of skidding to the side." I couldn't figure out what it was about; I was standing on the flight deck kind of looking over his shoulder. Finally, I decided [Chuckle] he was trying to land the plane on a spot of mud on the windshield.

Anyway, he got it down safe. And they went back up to the headquarters and decided what they were gonna do. And they called us in and told us that, "well, they had grounded him." But that didn't mean a thing, because they had pilots, but to what were they were going to do, ah, they had a pilot that had volunteered to take the crew over. But they told us, "That he was in the hospital." I don't know whether he was in the hospital, or where he was - I think he was coming back from a furlough, or something. Anyway, he had accepted the crew, but he couldn't take over for a week, or two, for some reason or another. And that in the meantime, there was a war going on, and we would be flying with, where; whether we liked it or not.

[0:45:43] And they gave us our first assignment. It said there was a Japanese taskforce that the Navy had been playing hide-and-peek with out there, and as soon as they could pinpoint where they were, they were going to send us and two other crews out, and we were going to attack them at deck level. Well, they said, "Well, we don't expect any of you to come back, but we're not; we don't want you to think that we're mad at you, or anything, because you're a new crew. But ... we hate to lose you, but we also hate to lose our friends that are on the other two crews."

So, anyway, the taskforce eventually turned around and went home. So we didn't have to go out and do that. And we then we started our regular bombing missions, and then pretty soon, well, we became a lead crew. And the rest of the deal is pretty well outlined on the papers that I sent to you.

Janis Kozlowski: You had a pretty eventful first part of your career there.

Joseph D. Hutchison: Yeah, kept moving pretty good.

Oh, incidentally, our navigator was the one that made the decision that the B-24 could fly all the way to Paramushiru and return - which provoked the missions to the Paramushiru. That's what started them. They asked him; he had been, I understand, a college professor of astronomy and navigation before the war.

Janis Kozlowski: Really. So, then that was a natural fit for him then?

Yes, he was very well qualified and a natural leader. And Reineke, the intelligence officer, that second lieutenant (he was thirty-five years old, which was very old for a second lieutenant at the time) had gotten together and figured out that it was within the range of the B-24; we could make it there and back. So then, when the Kiska and Attu business was finished up, well, we started running bombing missions. I was on the August 11th mission - the first one, which was, I guess, about the third try. Some captain, or Lieutenant Halperson [sp.?] or something like that, made a trip. He flew over and dropped some bombs somewhere, he don't know; it was all fogged in, he don't know whether he dropped them in the Atlantic Ocean, or the Pacific Ocean. [Chuckle] But he went out and tried. And then they had another mission; all the brass wanted to be the first ones to bomb Japan. We were the first people who, you know, [that] got close enough to where you could bomb territory that was Japanese - pre-war.

Janis Kozlowski: So your crew did take a B-24 over to the Kurile Islands then?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Yes.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:48:54] What other kinds of missions did you fly, other than over to the Kurile Islands. What did you do before that?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Kiska mostly. Well, one to Attu, but ... mostly all Kiska; and this one mission to Paramushiru. But the 21st Bomb Squadron that I was assigned to was never assigned to be up there. They were sent up as a, for a two week coast patrol duty. Actually I think they were sent up there because I think the Navy had broken the Japanese code and they knew there was an attack going to be made in the Aleutians. I think the 21st was sent up there to be there when that happened. But I got nothing to back that up.

But anyway, the 21st showed up just in time to run the first bombing mission from Umnak down to Kiska. They just arrived, and the 36th Bomb Squadron was already there. But they had B-17s, and they were getting loaded up to leave, and they said, "You guys just unload your equipment, load up with bombs and come with us." Then they had trouble with the B-17s, and the B-24s went off, I guess, without them. On that first mission, I think the commander of the 21st, his plane was shot down; took a direct hit in the bomb bay. So, the 21st had the first casualties in the Kiska campaign.

The 21st was part of the 30th Bomb Group. And right after the 11th of August Paramushiru mission that we were on, they were ordered back to California to be shipped into the mid-Pacific.

They were headed first for Hawaii and then I think, Funafuti. They were in the 7th Air Force. We were supposed to be with them, but we got back too late to go. So they gave us furlough of twenty-nine days, and told us to report back to Salina, Kansas. We got back there and they told us that we were going to be a training squadron for B-29s; one of the first training squadrons. But they had no more use for guys that were just gunners, 'cause nobody was going to be shooting at each other in training. So, we could take our choice - we could either, go to school and get a higher classification, or we could go back to reassignment somewhere else.

[0:52:01] Well they'd had been leaning on me to be a radio operator for so long, I decided, "Well, I might." I just, I liked the 21st - it was a good outfit. So I decided, "Well, I'll stick with them, I'll go to the radio school and get that over with." So then I went down to Scott Field, Illinois and went through the training course there.

In the meantime, the 21st had moved from Salina, Kansas back to Clovis, New Mexico, [Chuckle] where I'd first left from. And so, that's where I reported - to Clovis. And I was a flying radio operator instructor there for a month or two. And I had gotten married in the meanwhile, and we had found a nice little apartment in town with a half of a duplex house. And we really had a pretty nice deal for the first time. And it was right in the middle of where all the officers lived though, and I was only a staff sergeant. And my wife kept getting knocks at the door, wanting to know when we were going to leave [Chuckle] so some that officer could have it. And she said, "Well, we like it here, we're not going." So one night, I was flying as a radio operator; somebody needed one. And I got out of the plane and my communications officer met me, he said, "You're up for a transfer." He said, "I stopped the last one" - they had tried it before, "But this time," he says, "I couldn't do anything for you." He said, "You're going to Wichita Falls, Texas." Some officer wanted the apartment, and they had strings pulled and I was being shifted out.

So, I was under the assumption that I was going to be permanent party at Wichita Falls. I showed up with my wife, and we had a baby girl at the time. And they told us, "We don't know anything about permanent party, all we do here is basic training." So they took me [Laugh] I was learning how to brush my teeth and tie my shoelaces again. So, I was not very happy there. And suddenly it appeared on the horizon, about 20,000 gunners fresh back from Europe. And all over the world, the war was coming to a screeching halt about that time, and they could replace them. So anyway, teaching me to tie my shoes and brush my teeth was one thing, but teaching 20,000 staffs and tech sergeants and buck sergeants to do the same thing, they had another revolution on their hands.

[0:55:06] In order to break up the mess, well, I was the first one there. So I was first one called into the office and they said, "Well, you're going to be transferred; you got your choice, which one do you want - the eastern technical training command, or the western technical training command. And I said, "Well, I've been out west here for a long time; the eastern looks like it might be a good choice." But, then I thought, "Oh, Scott Field Illinois is in the eastern technical training command and I dislike that real bad too."

Janis Kozlowski: [Laugh]

Joseph D. Hutchison: So I had to decide. Anyway I came to the decision, "Well, I'll try it and see it if I can get away with it." Well I didn't; I went back to Scott Field.... And then they, you know, were sending me back to the same radio school I had just graduated from. And I wasn't happy about that. But before I could get too upset about it; pretty soon the arrival of a whole big gang of tech sergeants and staff sergeants that were all chosen as eastern training technical command. So Scott Field couldn't handle it either; they had to be nicer for a change. So me being the first one again, they called me in first. And they said, "OK, you got your choice, which do you want?" And I said, "Well, the eastern technical training command, I guess." And they said, "Well, OK, get your bags and march over to the permanent party area; [Laugh] just walk across the field."

So anyway, I go there and they said, "Well, what job do you want?" And I said, "Well what jobs do you got?" And so they gave me a whole list of them. I looked on the list and the thing that looked best to me was, a mail clerk. And I said, "OK, I'll take, mail clerk." So they sent me over to replace a sergeant. And he was the nicest guy; he was regular army, and he tried and tried to get signed for overseas, and they wouldn't let him. And he had just gotten married, bought a car [Laugh] and I show up and tell him, I am replacing him. So I felt real bad about that, but somebody was going to do it, anyway. So....

But, anyway then, they had a, I was there for awhile, and it got to be old home week. And they had two more tech sergeants [that] showed up. I got there first, so I was still the boss; I was running the mailroom, and they didn't care anyway, 'cause they'd rather pass the mail out at the windows. So, even though they out ranked me, well, I was running it.

And pretty soon, they changed the officers for the mail section. And a WAC lieutenant shows up. And [Chuckle] she liked me. And she gave me a hard time. I tried to keep away from her, 'cause I knew it was trouble. Anyway ... at Christmas they had a big officer's, had-to-go-to affair. And my captain came in the mailroom and he wanted to know, [of] anybody that's not going home, or anything, at the time of this party. And I said, "Well, I was; what do you want?" He said, "Well, I'm desperate, I've tried everything I can find and I've run and run out of gas; I need somebody to babysit at my house for the evening." He said, "The baby will be asleep, you won't ever hear a cry. And you help yourself to the refrigerator; anything you want." And I said, "Well, I don't want to do that." Anyway, he finally prevailed and I agreed to go over there. Well in the middle of it, there is a knock at the door. And I go answer the door and it's her. She's still chasing me. And I better do something about this. So, I was posting notices on the bulletin board at the mailroom the next day, or shortly afterwards. And I see this one, where you can sign up for ... the transport command. But, it would entail another tour of duty. So I volunteered for that.

[1:00:01] Then they sent me to advanced radio school - a radio navigation school at Reno, Nevada. And I graduated in the last class of that. And they offered me a promotion to tech sergeant and a regular trip between California and Hawaii; which sounded pretty good. But I said, "Or, a discharge." And I said, "Well, what kind of a plane are we in?" And they said, "A C-46." Well I had had some previous mishaps with a C-46 and I didn't like them - I didn't trust them. And I said [thought], "And there was an awful lot of water between California and Hawaii," and I decided, "No, I'll take the discharge." So, they gave me the ... told me to go

down to California - Barstow, California. There was a base down there. Anyway, I got discharged down in southern California, [and] I hitchhiked home. [Chuckle]

Janis Kozlowski: And that was after the war was over?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Yeah, the war was finished then. They had dropped the atomic bomb before I went back to Scott Field the second time, or right at that time. Anyway, they had a big bonfire right after I left to go to Reno, Nevada ... to celebrate the dropping of the atomic bomb. And then I had this month of radio school. And then they offered me the discharge. So ... I went home.

Janis Kozlowski: Did you do anything that involved radios when you got out of the service?

Joseph D. Hutchison: No.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, what did you end up doing for a profession?

Joseph D. Hutchison: I went back to General Motors as a draftsman. And then the reason of me being the first one to volunteer from there; they had tried to get me to stay, they offered me deferments for the whole war, I wouldn't have to go. But I said, "That's not what I had planned." [Chuckle] Anyway, they were still mad at me for volunteering. And so I was having a hard time at General Motors. But, I got discharged just in time for the big General Motor's strike. It was six months, where the only income I had was this [Chuckle] "Fifty-two twenty club," they called it - \$20 a week for fifty-two weeks. And we had a rough time getting along on that amount of money. Anyway, the strike finally ended and nobody would hire me because, they said, "Well, you'll go back to General Motors as soon as the strike is over." So, I couldn't get a job anywhere. Anyway, I went back and it didn't work out. After seven years, I finally was able to quit, and I went to Ford, and I had a very happy time at Ford. I was there about a year and got promoted to design and development engineer on the Edsel. [Laugh]

Janis Kozlowski: Sounds like you made a good choice there, in moving.

Joseph D. Hutchison: The difference between Ford and General Motors, to me, was at General Motors, everything I did was wrong until I proved it right. And at Ford everything was right until I was proven wrong. And that does make an awfully big difference.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, I bet.

Joseph D. Hutchison: And I happily was hired into the appropriate department at Ford. And several of the guys' right around me, become vice-presidents. And almost everybody in there, with the exception of one or two, was eventually promoted to engineer from draftsmen. But I was one of the early ones. When Edsel was formed, I was the sixth guy into the Edsel department. And then I was the sixth guy left [Chuckle] at the end.

Janis Kozlowski: [1:04:14] Can I ask you a few more questions about the Aleutians?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Sure.

Janis Kozlowski: What islands did you actually serve on there?

Joseph D. Hutchison: What islands?

Janis Kozlowski: Yes.

Joseph D. Hutchison: I was on Adak mostly. And then we went down to Amchitka for a month. And then we went back to Adak. And then we were the first bomb group to be assigned to Shemya. Larry Reineke, our intelligence officer, was pulling weeds and stuff down there; clearing room for tents. And I thought for a long time that we were the first B-24, or first four engine plane to land on Shemya. But, he told me later that there was at least one other plane that had beat us to being the first plane on Shemya.

Janis Kozlowski: You still got in there pretty early. So did you sleep in tents the whole time you were in the Aleutians?

Joseph D. Hutchison: No. In fact, the only time I was sleeping in tents on the Aleutians was on Amchitka, and that was a mess. But, on Adak they had already had Quonset huts up, so we had a Quonset hut there. And on Shemya, they had a new thing, which was actually the nicest thing I had. It was the size of a tent, but it was shaped like a Quonset hut; I forget what they called them [Janeway Hut]. But it was a fabric, kind of a quilted cover that that fit over this form. And then it had a little bitty stove in the middle - a kerosene stove.

Janis Kozlowski: So was that the best quarters you had then?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Oh yeah, they were nice. It was just little, for eight man, tent kind of thing.

Janis Kozlowski: I don't recall seeing a picture of those, I'll have to take a look and see if I can find one.

Joseph D. Hutchison: I forget what they call them. But they were really nice. The inside was white. And we didn't have electricity; a candle would light up the inside so you could read - because of the white walls.

Janis Kozlowski: How was the rest of the accommodations, like food and recreation and that kind of thing? What do you remember?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Well, I can't complain about any of that. Well, recreation - about the only thing was, they had some skeet shooting down on the beach at Adak that I went in. But, most of the time, [it] was just playing solitaire.

Janis Kozlowski: Were there guys that were depressed, or had poor morale because of the lack of things to do?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Well, I actually didn't run into anything like that. I heard about them, but ... things were pretty well under control by the time we showed up there.

Janis Kozlowski: But, did you say that you were there; you got to the Aleutians before the bombing of Dutch Harbor?

Joseph D. Hutchison: No.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, no. OK.

Joseph D. Hutchison: [1:07:20] The 21st was up there at that time, I think. But I was sent in, you know, on a replacement crew.

Janis Kozlowski: OK.

Joseph D. Hutchison: So, I got up there in April of 1943.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, OK. I see.

Joseph D. Hutchison: And then we went home; I got back on my birthday in 1943. And October the third, we landed in Seattle.

Janis Kozlowski: So, you were there for the battles of Attu and Kiska. Did you know what was going on at the time?

Joseph D. Hutchison: We knew, but not very much. I saw the battle ships and everything out there. And actually, we were flying over while the battle ships were bombarding it. But I didn't see or hear anything, because it was so foggy.

Janis Kozlowski: And probably, they didn't tell guys on the ground back at Adak or Amchitka; wherever you were - what was going on?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Well, they had it on bulletin boards. But, you know, it'd be a day or two late. Most of the time, you heard the ... talking.

Janis Kozlowski: So a lot of, maybe what you learned was, later on, after the war, you found out what....

Joseph D. Hutchison: Oh, most of it.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, hmm.

How about in other theaters of the war; when you were in Alaska, did you know what was going on over in Europe and Africa and other places?

Joseph D. Hutchison: There were little blurbs on the bulletin board that we saw. Radio, even if you had a radio out there, the reception was so poor that you couldn't tell. You mostly get [sic] it through official channels - anything that you got.

Janis Kozlowski: [Ah-huh] And what about the weather? What do you remember about that?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Well, most always ... cloud. The bottom, the cloud most of the time would be, oh, maybe five hundred to a thousand feet up. Occasionally, the sun would break through; that was the thing about it. One nice thing about the Aleutians, there were; I didn't have any insect problem. And when the sun did come out, all of a sudden there would be these little wild flowers all over the place; pretty, different colors and so forth. I picked a bunch of them and put them in a book and brought them back for the wife. But, you couldn't tell really too much about them.

Janis Kozlowski: That's interesting you mentioned that. Other people have said the same. It must have been a spectacular flower display there.

Joseph D. Hutchison: Yes, it was amazing, you know, how quickly they would come out after the sun would, when it did break through. [But] it wasn't very often.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, one thing; was it a disappointing thing when you found out you were going to Alaska, instead of some other theater of war?

Joseph D. Hutchison: No, I didn't think too much about it. I, you know, had never been to Alaska, so I decided it would be a good thing to do.

Oh, that's another thing, too. The Vietnam War came along later, you know. And my son-in-law enlisted, and he was a First Lieutenant up at Big Delta - right [Chuckle] right where we made our emergency landing. And while he was stationed there, my granddaughter was born. So, she was born right where I almost kicked the bucket. [Laugh]

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, so you have an Alaskan in your family?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Oh yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: [Chuckle] Well, you know, it took a long time after the war before there were any kind of recognition for WWII veterans. And, you know, the recent building of the WWII memorial in Washington D.C., are those, is that kind of recognition and that kind of commemoration of the war; is that kind of thing important to you?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Yes it is. In fact my wife is one of the original sponsors of it.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, that's great!

Joseph D. Hutchison: She's... [Talking to his wife in the background, "What did they call it Lola? [Unintelligible response] When you made the contributions to the World War II memorial in Washington?"] She was one of the first ones to contribute to it.

[1:11:35] Oh, and remember, I told you about the forty-two year old guy that I met and he was a tail gunner?

Janis Kozlowski: Right. [Um-hum]

Joseph D. Hutchison: Well, he was the; we wrote back and forth. And he was sent to the Black Hills area. And I got a letter from him one day, telling me that he was a tail gunner on a B-17 and that they were going to go up to forty thousand feet the next day. And he was tickled as a little teenage kid. And so I answered his letter, and my letter came back marked deceased.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, what a shame.

Joseph D. Hutchison: So, he crashed up there in the B-17 somewhere about that time.

Janis Kozlowski: Is that the only crew member that you lost during the war?

Joseph D. Hutchison: We didn't lose any on our crew. But after we got back, most of the officers eventually signed up, or volunteered for reassignment. And talking to Larry Reineke, our navigator; Lieutenant Smith, was on B-29s. And he had completed a tour, except for one mission. And his crew had gone, but he had been sick, or something, and missed one mission. He had to get that final mission in to complete his tour and come home. And he didn't return from that one final mission. So, he was lost or killed in action. And our copilot also was in B-29s; he became first pilot in a B-29 and...

Janis Kozlowski: Was that Stacy Hall?



Captain Irving L. Wadlington's second crew. April to October 1943. 21st Bomb Squadron shown on Amchitka Island. Led the third element at Parmushiru, August 11, 1943. Courtesy Joseph Donald Hutchison. Photo courtesy Joseph D. Hutchison, 21st Bomb Squadron, Staff Sgt., Adak, Umnak, Amchitka, Shemya and Attu.

Joseph D. Hutchison: Yes. And Reineke told me that he had made an emergency landing on Iwo Jima. Reineke became the only intelligence officer on Iwo Jima. And he debriefed all of the bomber crews there. And he said that he debriefed Hall on one mission where he had landed at Iwo. But the rest of them, I don't have any idea what happened to them. I did hear that Ware had finished the war, but had died several years back.

Janis Kozlowski: [1:13:59] So, did you keep up with any of your crew members?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Only Bohannon [William Roy Bohannon of Sulphur Springs, Texas, now deceased] a little bit. He was the oldest enlisted man on the crew and he stayed in the Air Force after the war. He was on flying status at the age of 65. And he finally retired. He had married a school teacher in Texas, and he went into the television repair business.

Janis Kozlowski: And did you say, Reineke; do you keep in contact with him?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Yeah, pretty much. He kept in contact with me, mostly. But, he's died now too, you know?

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, did he? Is he from New York?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Yes.

Janis Kozlowski: OK. We do send the calendars to his family, not to him specifically; it's to his family.

Joseph D. Hutchison: Yeah, he died in; I think it was '93 when he died.

Janis Kozlowski: OK. Does anything else come to mind?

Joseph D. Hutchison: Not right now.