

Janis Kozlowski: I thought I'd just start out asking you some questions about your service during World War II.

Paul Polink: I want to correct one thing - I arrived there February of '45 and left in April of '46. I just wanted to correct that, because we were enroute for a while, and we stayed longer than usual at Great Falls, Montana. And I thought we got there in '44, but we didn't.

Janis Kozlowski: OK. So could we kind of maybe start at the beginning, and tell me how you got involved in military service, anyway. I mean, did you enlist?

Paul Polink: I was a senior in high school, and they had an Air Force reserve outfit – that you could join the reserves when you were a senior in high school and ... they wouldn't call you to active duty until you were eighteen. So, that's the program that I got into. And of course, in World War II, I would have been drafted anyway, and I preferred to go into the Air Force.

Janis Kozlowski: What made you choose the Air Force? Did you have a specific position in mind that you wanted?



Waiting for the bus to Anchorage. That's me in the center!

Paul Polink: Well yes, most of us in our class wanted to be “flyboys.” We wanted to be pilots, or bombardiers, or navigators. But, at that time, the war was so well along that they didn't need any more pilots or aircrews at that time. So, we were all, what you call, “washed out.” And we had a choice of becoming airplane mechanics, or radio operators. We cried for a few days and drank a beer at the PX, and ... eventually we got over it, because ... the other two options were not appealing to us.

Janis Kozlowski: So what did you choose - which path did you choose; or which one did the Air Force choose for you?

Paul Polink: They chose that I would be an airplane mechanic. And I didn't know a hammer from a screwdriver - I don't know how, but I passed those tests.

Janis Kozlowski: [Chuckle] So, you'd never worked on an airplane before?

Paul Polink: No. I never ... I was not mechanically inclined.

Janis Kozlowski: [Chuckle] It's funny.... I wonder ... do you know why they put you down that path if you really weren't mechanically inclined? Was it just an in alphabetical choice, or random choice, or ...?

Paul Polink: No, apparently, I graduated pretty high in my class. I'm not boasting, but ... apparently I deceived them on a test that I took about mechanics - I knew more.... Apparently, it's not all a pair of pliers and a chisel, whatever - hydraulics and electricity. I guess I scored rather high on a lot of those things.

Janis Kozlowski: [Um-hum] And so what kind of training did they give you so that you could be an aircraft mechanic, and where was your training?

Paul Polink: Well, I was sent to Keesler Field [Biloxi] in Mississippi, where there was an airplane mechanics school. And after I got into it, and began to see what hydraulics would do, and into electricity, I became quite interested - although I still wanted to be a pilot.