

Janis Kozlowski: OK, so what were the bases like where you stayed in the Aleutians?

Charles Donovan: Well, when I got up there, when we got up – the six of us, there was a contingent of Army, Coast Guard ... Army Coast Artillery, I'm sorry, not Coast Guard - Coast Artillery unit. And I was at Chernofski Bay first, and I stayed there for, oh, I forget how long now at Chernofski. But, then went over, back over to Umnak. And they had put in a ... the engineers, had put in an airstrip there with the Marston metal matting. And they put in this airstrip that was about, oh, I guess, maybe a mile, or two miles long. And then the first aircraft – the P-40s and P-38s, and eventually, some of the bombers would land at Umnak. And we were still reporting the weather and so forth and getting the weather for the pilots that were there.

And.... Well, lets see, we stayed there for ... well, as I said, two and a half years ... and just doing that basically. It was nice up there, you know - the weather up in Alaska and in the Aleutians. It was nice during the summer and spring. But, then in the early, or in the fall and the winter, why, we'd get these williwaw storms - you know about them? And, it was a challenge, but it was a nice challenge.

Janis Kozlowski: So, it sounds like you didn't mind the weather too bad up there.

Charles Donovan: No, we got used to it. Of course, I was originally from Buffalo, New York, so, the weather there [Chuckle] was bad enough anyway.

Janis Kozlowski: [Chuckle] I imagine it was, with that lake effect snow and all.

Charles Donovan: Right. Right on the tip of Lake Erie.

Janis Kozlowski: So, what kind of ... you were a young guy then - you were probably, what 20, or 19?

Charles Donovan: I was about 19 then.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. So, did you find enough to do there ... in your spare time?

Charles Donovan: Oh, yeah – well, reading and, you know, we'd hike around. And when we were at - the three of us - when we were at Chernofski Bay, we would go on the ... well, the ones that were ... two of us that were free would go on these little walks, you know, we'd walk along the shores and.... This one time, we picked up an old Silex coffee maker – it was a metal one. They used to make them out of metal then, instead of out of glass - the coffee pot. And then, we had found this ... it was an old Sunbeam heater. It was an oval shape, and it was concave and [had] brass innards. And then it had this metal facing on it. And inside there, there was this electric element. And we decided we'd pick that up, and the coffee thing. And then we got back to the Yakutat hut that we were staying in, and we decided we'd make ourselves a coffee maker.

So we used the element from this ... Sunbeam mak... Sunbeam heater, and put it on a piece of wood. And took an old pineapple can - pineapple juice can, I guess it was and stripped the bottom out so that we could have tabs ... and tack it on this wood. And then we'd set that coffee pot on top of it, and we'd make the best coffee you'd ever had!



A bit of recreation on Umnak Island. Photo courtesy Charles Donovan.

Janis Kozlowski: Sounds like you guys were pretty industrious for young guys.

Charles Donovan: Well, we had to be. [Chuckle]

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. Is that something you learned as you grew up, or did the Navy teach you those skills?

Charles Donovan: No, no. I learned that as I grew up, as a ... I learned that on my own - things of that nature. The Navy taught me plenty of course, but, not things like that.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. So, it sounds like you went hiking around for some of your off-time. Did you see anything interesting on those hikes?

Charles Donovan: Well, we'd see plenty of salmon in the creeks - in the streams there. And once or twice we'd see a caribou. But, that's about it. We didn't see any bears.

Janis Kozlowski: Did you know anything about these secret bases that ... Otter Point was supposedly to be one of 'em that was disguised. Did you see any evidence of that?

Charles Donovan: Well, we were there when they made them up – when they disguised them. Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: So, you knew all about the disguises?

Charles Donovan: Oh, yes. Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: And what kind of deceptive buildings and other things did they put up there - do you remember?

Charles Donovan: Well, there was just basically Quonset huts – mostly Quonset huts and tents. And then over at Chernofski Bay, they had the Yakutat hut – the wooden hut. But, mostly on Umnak, it was the Quonset huts. We were in a Quonset hut there.

Janis Kozlowski: They were the metal structures?

Charles Donovan: Yes, Yeah.