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Note by McCartney: Although the narrator and interview share the same surname (Anderson), they are not related. This transcript is not a verbatim word-for-word transcript.

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Jim Anderson Interview 1 - November 27, 2009 Part I and Part II

UAF Oral History number: OH2018-08-01_PT._1

00:36

Allan Anderson (AA): I am here today with Jim Anderson of Anderson Aviation it is November 27th, 2009 – day after Thanksgiving and we are going to talk a little bit today about aviation. Jim, my first question was, I was wondering how – well you were born in Alaska – I was wondering how your people – your parents, grandparents came to Alaska.

Jim Anderson (JA): Well my paternal grandfather came over Chilkoot Pass – and big gold rush and all that good stuff. My daughter Lily has been checking up on him and found out that at one time he was running a coffee shop at the top of Chilkoot Pass. And she is looking for pictures to find something on that. This is something that I never knew about. But there is some oral history of him about 19 – must have been about '54. Somebody got him and had him write down a bunch of stuff. That is the only time I have ever seen it. But then – let see me grandmother came up about 1910. My grandfather was at Dawson – then he went to big strike in Nome – did pretty well there. Then they went out and got married and came back up to Iditarod and my mother was born in Ophir – first white girl born there. That was 1911. Then – well they mined all over down that part of the country – Takotna, McGrath area, Gaines Creek, bunch of them. Mom used to talk about it quite a bit – she passed away over a year ago.

2:01

JA: Old girl did pretty good – saw the mail carried the dog team, saw a man walk on the moon – quite a life. When you get to thinking about it. Then I was born here in Fairbanks. My brother and I. Got started in the airplane business before I got out of high school. Took a part time job at Fairbanks Aircraft on Phillips Field. Day after graduation – well the morning after graduation my Dad look at me and he said – you going to college. I said – I don't know. And he said if you go to college – room and board free, if you go to work it is \$100 a month. I said – I think I will go to work. There I was washing parts – washing parts, washing parts – finally they let me start working on the airplanes a bit – and kinda just went from there. Then I went out to – a year or so maybe longer – that was in 1954 so I ended up at North Aeronautical Institute in Inglewood, California in 1956 for a little over a year – got my licenses. Worked at Western Airlines for a while and then came back up – went right back to work at Fairbanks Aircraft again. Well – it has been good.

03:30

AA: Was Phillips Field – was International built yet?

JA: It was an odd one – they closed up Weeks Field – International was built – rather being built - they fused it a bit. But the Fairbanks Aircraft guys figured out what was happening – they got this ground from an old Homesteader name of Darrell Phillips – 99 year lease - some such thing and they built the

run-way and hanger and they managed to get a plane in the air before international was officially opened.

4:01

JA: So that – the run-way – the flight patterns interfered a little with each other. So it meant that people coming into International had to stay over a certain height when they crossed Phillips – but they couldn't close Phillips as it was there first. It was quite a gimmick. Of course, every now and then on a dark night you would see a C46 coming over Phillips just a low as possible trying to get into International. But everybody got along pretty good.

4:31

AA: Who owned the outfit you were working for?

JA: There were 3 guys – Dave Philips, Gordie Mitchell, and Jess Bachner and later on – let's see Dave left while I was working there, Gordie also left later on and Jess ended up with the whole thing then it changed to Bachner Aircraft – that would have been in the late '50's. Yeah – it happened before I got drafted – 1959 - there I was going in the Army. Had my student ticket for flying – my radio license, my A&P ticket – they said oh boy – you are going to be in hog heaven in the army – this is going to be great and I ended up in the 3rd Infantry In Fort Myer, Virginia in the Presidential Honor Guard. Never did get to look at a plane now and then.

05:37

AA: So it wasn't quite what they promised.

JA: No, of course not.

AA: Were you stationed there the whole time?

JA: Yeah, about 18 months – as soon as I got out of basic training. Whatever they call it these days –

AA: No traveling meeting interesting people.

JA: Oh we it was interesting – we stood guard for Khrushchev, everybody – found out the press was not a well-trained bunch – they would run right over you – they would try to keep them back and they would thunder by like a wild herd of Indians. Interesting though.

AA: Was this overlapping with Korean War –

JA: No I was lucky – I was in between wars. There were just starting to send advisors to Vietnam – and I got out in '61 – yeah – and that was good.

AA: Was 1961 back to Alaska?

06:43

JA: Yep.

AA: And back to working on planes?

JA: Oh yeah. I had all of two days before people started calling me to come back to work. Started working for Lou Applegate. I could see that was not going to work so good – got sick from welding. So went up the gold mine at Myrtle creek – didn't get any gold. Got a dollar worth of gold, moose and got healthier as could be running up and down the hills working on caterpillars. Yeah –that was quite a summer. Was up there for a couple months –kinda of fun. So – I can put down I was a gold miner – yeah – two months.

07:28

AA: Where was the gold mine again?

JA: Myrtle Creek.

AA: Where is that?

JA: Well the easiest way to say it now – it is up in the upper Koyukuk – not too far from Coldfoot. Don't know how many miles. Myrtle runs into Slate right below our camp and Slate runs into the Koyukuk at Coldfoot – that is the way I understood it.

07:50

AA: How did you get there?

JA: Went flying – yeah – older mine – years before the war. Yeah – it was something else. Fun – Different. Let's see – what else happened after that. Back to work at Bachner's then outside for a bit.

AA: Outside in the States?

JA: Yeah, went down to California – restless – right after I got out of the service – you don't settle down right away. Went down to see the Burns Aero Seat Company on winter – that was kinda a different deal. Amongst the Californians – then one day as I driving to work – no smog – and I looked around – I thought the hell with this. I told the boss – I had to go back home – the birch trees are turning green. He looked at me and said I'm from North Dakota and I hadn't thought of that for years. So he helped me pack up.

08:53

JA: Back up north again. I forget what happened that time. Think I went back to Fairbanks Aircraft for a bit. '63 – was there for about four or five years – somewhere in there. Then I got mixed up with, Borate – bombers – Don Gilbertson and I bought a couple B25's - and that was quite a time. A couple years of that. Don't remember after that. Yeah – I have a good sense for business. Got into the firefighting business in 1967. The year Fairbanks flooded.

09:49

JA: So the SBA gave us some money 'cause the airplanes got wet and we went out and bought a Learstar was a modified Lodestar from Florida – brought that back up. In the meantime I had gotten married – so figured I had better find something that was steady. So ended up working for the North Star Borough teaching A & P mechanics for about another four and a half years. Then went off on my own.

10:20

AA: The Borough was training?

JA: Yeah, now it is over at Hutchinson now. At that time it was under the Borough. The first school was on Dale Road – placed called Oil City. Then they moved to Metro Field. I quit before they moved to Hutch. Yeah – that was kinda fun – I enjoyed teaching. Except - they forgot one thing. There was no vacation. It was just steady, one class after another - year long class –to get the ticket.

10:54

AA: No summers off for you.

JA: Nothin'. Finally had enough. And I had been working on the side on other airplanes. And all during this period I was also working on the Borate Bombers. I didn't realize it at the time – but I must have been tired all the time. It was just a state of life. Have been Anderson Aircraft ever since then. Well, in fact – started in '68 when I sold out to Don – then I went to work at the school and I worked on the side on small aircraft – Anderson Aircraft – and the take care – because of tax purposes. It finally grew up enough I could work at it steady.

11:41

AA: When you said you sold out to Don?

JA: Yeah my partner – I sold the bombers. That was interesting. A lot of great people in there – old time World War II pilots – and the stories they were telling and carrying on. When I was a kid – the B17 was the biggest airplane in the world. A couple of 'em showed up one summer for firefighting. And I was surprised at how much they had shrunk. They are not that large.

12:10

AA: You were surprised years later when you looked at them?

JA: Yeah –you know – everything had changed. First time I had seen one since WWII. Russian pilots were wandering around Fairbanks in their high top boots and breaches - yeah something else.

12:28

AA: What was Fairbanks like when you were a kid?

JA: Uh – thinking back on it – it was a great little place. Most everybody was broke – all winter long. Everybody gathered up for card parties – a lot more social life you might say – interaction between people. And it started getting bigger at the end of the war – it really started getting large. I think before that – I don't think there was 5,000 people in Fairbanks.

13:00

JA: You were in the woods when you- when - well the other side of Weeks Field. We lived on the edge of town – we were only 2 blocks from the runway. You could hear everything happening over there all the time – it was good.

AA: So the Aviation – you kinda just fell into that?

JA: Yeah – I got started – and then I realized that this was kinds fun. So I just kept at it. I lucked out – I got to interested working on something I enjoyed. It has been fine – that is what you find out about a lot

of the older mechanics is the same thing – they just enjoyed working on them. Right now – I don't now – wages are low and responsibility is high so I don't know what is going to happen next. And there is less flying – cuz of price of fuel. I don't know how it is in the States – I haven't been down there in ages. We have been staying busy – good Lord I have been at it fifty-five years – that isn't bad. Of course – I can't lose my job as I own it – or it owns me.

14:12

AA: What year did you build this hanger?

JA: Took two or three years - I think I moved in the fall of '93.

AA: So you had another hanger?

JA: Oh no. Had a house and property down in Broadmoor Acres - about a block off the river and the neighbors – people on the river banks – the Fouts – call it Fouts Landing, there was an eight hundred foot runway – right on the river. So all kinds of business came off of that - did a lot of work there – had a small shop – in fact the one that is tied to the hanger – about 26' x 32' – I think. I could rebuild an airplane but I had to reassemble it outdoors. Worked outdoors a lot to try to get money together for this. Just keep putting it aside. When I built this – it was all mine. No loans.

15:07

AA: So when you work in the winter – were you using heaters?

JA: Oh yeah – had some old worn out Herman Nelson heaters I would go out there and heat them up -- and during the pipeline wasn't much work for airplanes as everybody was off working. One day I stopped in for a beer and got to talking to a friend - he was in the trucking business. He said, "Hey – you still have those old heaters?" I said, "Oh yeah – I keep them around for the Northern Air cargo planes." "Oh boy," he said, "I have a deal for you." And I ended up heating trucks for a couple of winters. Basically – there some airplane work in there. Boy – I would leave to go heat up a couple of trucks and it might be a day and a half before I got back. They get me over there and they would not even let me go get gasoline – they would bring it to me. It went on and on – and It was a cold winter.

16:03

AA: What year was this again?

JA: Must have been the early part of the pipeline, must have been mid – early 70's. Yeah because I left school in '72 – suppose '74-'75. The pipeline was booming up and everything was going.

AA: That was a crazy time.

JA: Oh my, that was something else.

AA: Were you tempted to go for one of those high paying pipeline jobs?

JA: Oh sure, I was tempted – but then I sat there - I had three little kids and a house that self-destruct the minute I walked away from it for any length of time. So I had better stay in town. It was alright – it worked out. I must say heating up trucks paid a hell of a lot more than heating up airplanes. Oh yeah

trucks, cat – I could get a Kenworth started in about four hours at forty below. Yeah – just threw three heaters on them – tarps all over and just stay back and --

17:06

AA: Were you paid by the hour or by the truck?

JA: By the hour – I don't know if you could do it now – with the price of gasoline. Those heaters could burn it up like you wouldn't believe. Of course everybody thought I had it made – was making a fortune. They would see me in the truck half asleep – with those heaters going and mounted on the back. Of course they did not see the rest of it – I would get back to the shop and spend half of the night working on heaters. Making sure they stayed together – oh yeah – it was quite a time.

17:38

AA: So you were havin' kids though this period of time?

JA: Yeah – got married in about '68 and then see first daughter was born in '69 – one in '71 and another one in '72 I think it was – 3 daughters.

AA: Where did Lillian fit into the picture?

JA: She was number two. And then Elizabeth is about thirteen months younger.

AA: And the older sister?

JA: Jennie - she was the first one – she is about forty-one this year.

AA: Are they all still in town?

JA: Oh yes – they all left – well Jennie didn't – she is handicapped – she has a birth defect.

18:24

AA: Where did you meet your wife?

JA: Actually I had known her up here slightly – and while traveling around in the states looking for B25 parts for airplanes – in '68, late '67 early '68 maybe - my partner in crime – said I know this girl over in Phoenix – said her name - I am sitting there -- I said – give me the phone – he was going to fix me up with another girl – Don was going to go out with Judy – I said Judy – this is Jimmy Anderson – she said – tell Don I will get him another girlfriend – so we got together – down to Florida – then back to Phoenix -- and talked her into coming back with me. She was ready to come back to Alaska – she had been gone for a few years. We got married – on the trip up Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

AA: Were you driving or flying?

JA: Driving – but I stopped – let's see we took the Learstar to Dallas, Texas – to have some modifications done. Bought an El Camino there - the company did – so I drove it from Dallas to Idaho – load of parts in the back of it. Drove up to Phoenix and stayed a bit and then drove it back up and worked on my house – which wasn't finished. Bachelor pad – and then back out and got Judy and her car and drove back up together.

20.09

AA: So you just kinda fell into the aviation end parts business. Did you ever do much flying?

JA: Learned to fly - but never did get that interested in it. To be truthful - it just seemed boring. You are sitting there - it would be fun - you know if -- but here I was -- scruffin' around trying to feed the kids and everything else - working on planes and I realized that I was flying the airplane -- Taylorcraft at the time -- I had two or three of those. I realized that going around the pattern once or twice a month - just couldn't get good at it. It you couldn't get good at it - no sense in fooling around with it - just gave it up.

20:55

AA: When you were working on planes were any of the old timers - think of pioneer aviators - I think Ben Eielson was out of the picture.

JA: Oh long before that, yeah.

AA: Wien brothers were --

JA: Oh yeah - we just lived down the block from the Wien brothers when I was a kid. Knew them and their sister. Went - uh let's see - I get kinda lucky there when I got into it - there was a lot of the old mechanics around and some of the pilots - and they'd always wandered around Fairbanks Aircraft - there was an old engine man - that taught me quite a lot - fellow named Eldred Kwan -- I worked with him for a couple of years. And there was - let's see -- Ernie -- gee can't think of his last name - he was an old, old timer.

21:57

JA: But they just - at that time - in the late '50's - there was a lot of the old World War II pilots up here flying in the bush. And uh - they were good. In fact they probable saved my life when I started flying they would wander by and tell me some advice. And - it was all good. Listen to the old timers - they would save your butt. Knew Sam White quite well. In fact - was kinda odd - and one time I was working - think I was working for Lou Applegate -- I went over to Hughes to work on Sam's L-5 and I went over - was tinkering around - got it all squared away -- it sounded good - worked good. Sam was happy. We went over to his room to fill out log books and get me a paycheck. I said - well Sam - I don't think you remember me. He said - hm - why should I? Yeah - I said - I am Andy Anderson's youngest son - I use to deliver your paper. Hmph - - next thing we were down stairs it was the roadhouse belonged to people by the name of James Trading Post and Sam was roaring - he got his paper boy fixing his airplane. Oh he was quite a fellow. The stories he could tell - wow - yeah - it was good.

23.25

AA: At this time - when you started working on planes - was Alaska still a territory at that point:

JA: Oh yeah, yeah.

AA: And the CAA was still in charge of things. And then at what point did the CAA change over to the FAA?

JA: I am not sure. The CAA - there was generally one or two guys was all. In fact - one was an uncle in marriage to Bud Seltenreich - he learned about fixing airplanes by Harold Gillam. And uh - my uncle Fred

- was actually one of the starter of - well he and Bud started Fairbanks Aircraft - and Fairbanks Air Service - one was a flying service and one was a maintenance thing - and that split. Holly Evans took Fairbanks Air Service and Fred and these guys had Fairbanks Aircraft. Fred sold out to Jess and Gordie and them.

24.26

JA: I don't know what the details were on that - Uncle Fred was quite a character - he flew a lot up here - but you don't hear about him cause he did not wreck anything. You only hear about the guys that crash - basically. Unless they write their books of how great they are.

AA: Did you ever run into a pilot from Kotzebue named John Cross?

JA: Yeah I met him. One of his sons were here a couple of years ago working on his plane.

AA: Which son?

JA: Milt - yeah - I just met John a little bit - he was pretty old then -- and I was over there working for a fellow **Maxson** Aviation and he came by and talked a bit --but I didn't talk to him - much -- I was busy.

AA: That is my Dad's wife father.

JA: By which ? He had several I understand.

AA: My dad had two wives - my Mom and then his wife that he married after mom and dad divorced is Sue Cross – his second wife from Kotzebue. Milton and her are brother sister.

JA: Oh ok.

AA: So I always have to ask people about John Cross - I met him when I was five years old.

JA: He must have been quite a guy - God I don't know how many thousand - in single engine planes out in the bush.

AA: I was talking to Jordie when he was in Denali Center and he was telling some interesting stories about John Cross that I don't think I want to share with my family. Was there that much of a change - way things were run -- CAA to FAA - was things done on a friendly basis.

26.26

JA: Not really .

AA: Were things done on a friendly basis back in the day?

JA: Depends on who was the government inspector. First person I remember was a feller by the name of Mueller, pretty nice guy - he wanted things done right. And Bud Seltenreich - was here then. But Mueller knew better -- he was the first one I ran into. But generally -- I think then they had more people with more experience. Now they have people in there that are ex military - no idea about small aircraft at all. And FAA have gone to pure bureaucracy, paper work - paperwork -- paperwork. It is necessary - but some of those people are not qualified. 'Bout the only thing I can say about them.

27:17

AA: It becomes less of common sense --

JA: Oh, common sense is a lost cause over there. And they are consistent you know - they make up their mind that something is wrong- and you can prove that they are wrong and they still will not admit it -- let it disappear - drop out of the picture - oh yes -- it is strange. If I went to work with the FAA and one inspector tried to talk me into it - when I was with Wiens up on the DEW Line - and I sat there and looked at him - and I thought it over - and I said -- I don't think I would fit. A friend once said - they ought to hire guys like us that are fifty, sixty years old - get ten to twelve years out of us and probably make a pretty decent set up -- this guy laughed; we can't do it - we are untrainable. Guys that go to the academy - come back a different person. Don't know what goes on down there - oh yeah -- it is different. And of course, I have had my trouble with them - most all of it paperwork.

28:35

AA: Not filing out the right form?

JA: Oh -- good part of it - yeah - or you want to do something and they don't agree with it - and you go round and round, carry on.

AA: So you seen considerable changes in the -- well - all of aviation - from mechanic view point.

JA: Oh yeah -- yeah. It used to be - we were up here and parts had a long time getting here so you made a lot of the stuff - repaired it - did not throw anything away. It has gotten now where it is basically parts changing. Of course, you have to look at the price/part and the price of fixing it. And present day shop rates - it gets pretty close - and you have to sit there and figure it out. A lot of new stuff going in which we use to make up or fix -- but that is here -- changing times. And now - you can call up - get your credit card number and get your part here within two days. So it's made a big difference. Before you would call up -generally send an order out with a check in it. And then they would see if your check is good and in a week or so they would send your part. Which came up by slow boat - or somehow - time went by and you couldn't afford the airplane to be down that much - for a lot of people. And of course now, the FAA/PMA/STC --

30:15

AA: PMA?

JA: PM is Parts Manufacturing Approval -that is a government FAA thing -- and of - got to be certified - airworthy. Classic example - an alternator for a 180 Cessna - when it first showed up - it was about \$160-70 bucks for that alternator -- that was a lot of money then. You know that is thirty years ago or better-- and you go down to local Ford plant and get one for \$50 - same numbers and everything -- it just didn't have PMA stamped on it. So it made things sticky now and then - seeing as how it is the same damn thing. But it wasn't aircraft approved if it didn't have the sticker. It is the same way now - anything with airplane is higher priced. Of course, everybody has to keep themselves covered for liability - on and on it goes. Too many lawyers, too many lawsuits. Basically FAA now has kinda divorced itself from a lot of it. They give the written exams yet - I think - or you can get it done on the computer. The oral and practical exam you have to take is done by somebody else. They've kinda slid over to the side and farmed out a bunch of this - so the FAA itself is not liable. Of course, anytime there is a crash and people start suing the FAA end up on it as it has the deepest pockets and they approved the airplane. Which is part

[inaudible] on and this and this -- mechanic - which he don't have any money - and you can't get much out of him. So there you go -- or the pilot. And as my old friend - the Indian man says - when the pilot screws up - the truth ain't in them. Even Sig Wien lied to me he says.

32.23

AA: Like on an average day or an average week/month with working on planes - has your skill set changed? I mean - before you were having to weld cables and stuff --

JA: No, no, no, no you don't weld cables. Oh no - no cables are not weldable -- no way -- but you make them up - I still do that. But - You don't have to splice them anymore - you now can use the nickel press fittings. Thank goodness.

AA: That is what I was thinking.

JA: Splicing cables is an interesting thing - and we don't do it often enough to really keep tuned up. You have to sit there and work on that - but I haven't had to do that for years and that's a good deal. Can you imagine splicing a cable and find that you were an inch off and have to redo it! But - you still do a lot of welding on the fuselage frame. Fixing up the damage ones - small ones -- let's see -- most guys are gone. One fellow over here will only work on tubing fabric frames - another will only touch sheet metal. Most of our work is tubing and fabric - but we do some sheet metal. And some wood work - even. Which I don't know if anybody else around this area does it - I do.

34:05

AA: Back when you got started - most of the planes - well all the planes were - small planes were cloth?

JA: Yes tubing/fabric /cotton cloth - you had to recover them every ten or twelve years -- stuff would rot. And there were a lot of them around that had wooden ribs/wooden spars - that sort of thing. And then when the Cessna got going - and finally even Piper went to aluminum on their later airplanes. But with the ceconite - the new synthetic cloths - you can go for - well after about twenty years - you had better take it apart and check over your tubing and realign the fuselage - they all get bent from brush landings, sand bars with hunters and guides. We have one in here now - that has been together for twenty-nine years. There are some repairs to be made on the tubing - we haven't gotten into the fuselage yet. And that one there - I rebuilt it three or four times -- you just keep take a little bit of care - and don't run them into the mountain too hard - you can just keep rebuilding them - the only problem is the cost. Some are rebuildable like Cubs, Cruisers, Citabria are pretty close there- most of the others - fabric and tubing - the cost for rebuilding - just the labor is not worth it - cost about \$30,000 to rebuild one - is it really worth it? What is the cost for another one.... varies

36.11

AA: Isn't it getting tougher and tougher to find small planes?

JA: Oh like this - the older ones - I think that one is '48. The Super Cub in the other room - that was a '57 - and they are just slowly drifting off the scene - Cessna still does theirs - but some models -- good Lord a 206 is about \$400,000 now. Still keeping up there -- the light sports - they have kinda a newer version of a J3 - which when it came out might of cost \$1,000 and now it is \$100,000.

AA: What's the price [inaudible].

37:03

JA: Beats me - I don't know - just the economy. See that \$1,000 back in the 1940 - what would that be worth today? You figure best suit in Sears and Roebuck was \$20 - who knows.

AA: I saw some pictures you had of some of your recoveries - do you have any that really stick out in your mind

JA: Oh boy.

AA: More than one?

JA: Yeah - I have several that stick out in mind. Yeah - the first one was before I went to the A & P School - it was a Super Cub that had dropped thru the ice in a lake. And that was - of course - early in the winter so it froze in solid. And - was suppose to go down and work on this thing with a pilot/mechanic name Glen Gregory - Glen had a Gullwing Stinson - and we loaded that thing up with all the stuff we needed and crashed off the end of Phillips Field. Well - that ended that part of the trip. So we went to square two. I drove a truck down to Takoma - I think it was - and old boy name Cleo McMann picked me up in his Super Cub to take me to Tanada Lake - okay. And on the way - Cleo spots a wolf - now wolf hunting was legal - aerial - and chopped the throttle and dives like a rock - and I about tore the airplane apart because I had been in one crash this week - and I didn't need another one. We were up there for about a week getting this thing out of ice - - I have pictures on slides. I will set that up and you can look at them. We ended up - using - cutting a hole in the ice -that thing had sunk - the wings was out of the ice and the tail was out of the ice.

39:15

JA: But the wings were frozen in solid - tip to tip - inside and out. The guy ahead of me - Grant - he had cut a circle around their plane and a path back - a big ice flow - and he had pulled it back to shore until the landing gear hit the bottom of the lake. With all the ice in the wings - you couldn't lift it -- you see - they would have collapsed. So he came back in to figure out, and then that's when he wrecked his airplane - so I went over with a guy name Art Smith - old timer - we get over there - Art was good - he is standing looking at this airplane and the ice and this and that - and he said Cleo - this is a two box job - go back to Takoma and get me another box of cigars. Then we went from there. After chipping around and chipping around - first morning trying to figure out something - all of a sudden Art says - wait a minute - we are talking about the Blackfish which will school up in the winter time and they will keep a hole open up in ice - and he asked the guy that owned the plane - it was a lodge there - do you have any outboard motors - so they chopped a hole in the ice and hung the motor in the back of the boat -- and the stirring melted the ice - well that was fine for the outside --

40.49

JA: Had a 50 gal drum on the shore - big fire going under it -- heating up water and cut holes in the wings and pour the hot water -- then covered up when were weren't pouring, nighttime -- must have been October - or somewhere in there. Late September -- then by gosh we got it going - put a tripod down on the bottom of the lake - it kinda held me -- I stuck myself in the water and hooked onto the engine so we could lift it up --it was cold. Got all of that square away - got it up on the ice and covered it all up with all we could find -- with fire pots - and other things and thawed and thawed for about a day - then Art crawled all thru that fuselage - with a hand drill - this was before battery pack drills - and drilling holes in the tubing to drain the water out so it wouldn't freeze and split. They said later when the

rebuilt the airplane - needed a new cover on it - they found one split tube that he had missed - that was it. That was surprising. He flew it back to town. They flew me back to Takoma to get the truck and the rest of the gear. That was an experience in itself - came thru Isabel Pass - the wind was howling and the snow was blowing - oh geeze - that was a mess. I got out - going towards Delta - long straight stretch and I have to take a leak -- so I stopped the truck and it wasn't too good of a truck - so I left the engine running - I am happily taking a leak and the truck starts rolling off and rolls into the ditch. And I am sitting there - now what - it is about 2 a.m. in the morning. There ain't nobody gonna to come by - and I started looking around and I figured it out - ditch was pretty shallow - there wasn't much snow - so I ricocheted out over the tundra and got back onto the road and headed to town. That was the worst part of the whole thing. Yeah - that was the first one.

43:00

AA: How long after you got the plane de-iced - I mean you have to drain the engine.

JA: Oh yeah - change oil - run oil through the cylinders, change magnetos - drained the carburetor - it ran.

AA: How long were you out there after you got it free from the ice - total -

JA: Oh about six days. Total -- yeah five, six days. Yeah somebody once asked me what it takes to pick up these wrecked airplanes - I have done it quite a few times. I said about a size three hat and a 19 collar. You just get out there and start working - start out with one plan - and shift gears and go to another one - and pretty soon you have it figured out.

AA: Do you need to take a break?

JA: Yeah I should - with my prostate troubles I have to pee quite often.

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00:18

AA: So, anymore recoveries that stick out in your mind?

JA: Oh boy - several of them. One was when I was working for Wiens - we went up to get a damaged Beaver up above Arctic Village - on the ice on the river, the Chandalar - I think it is - me and one other feller went up there, one Herman Nelson Heater and one motor and the warmest we saw was thirty-five below in the middle of the day. That was in November -- yeah - just about this time because we spent Thanksgiving at the village. And - we had -- the wing was damaged - the gear was damaged and we made up an big old plate that we - on another Beaver wing -- and got this figured out kinda brought around - leading edge a bit - - real heavy stuff -- and then we got up there and we had a drum of gas -- and put that out - -- and -- Spanish Woodless -- pulled the wing down as far as we could and put this plate on the damage part of it. You have to remember no battery packed drills at this time. We didn't have a generator - and uh - drilled the holes with hand drills to screw this big thick aluminum plate down. Then ran cables in -- I got some pictures of it here - ran cables in from the wing tip down to some fittings on the fuselage to help brace it a bit firm buckles in it then jacked it up and got the gear all cabled into place and tied together. It looked like it was going to work --everything fine. Oh it was cold -

it was so cold - the fellow that went up with me had never been out of the hangar. He had never gone out on a bush job. But I knew he knew how to take care of himself in cold weather and I knew he had good gear and everything - so this was fine.

02:13

JA: Trouble is, he had thin plates and Wiens turned us loose in the super market so we had plenty of grub, bought the steaks - the best we could - and we were up there cooking up - and this steak froze to the plate while I was standin' up eatin' it. You had to put a layer of bread down then put the food on that on the plate so it'd be insulated and then - we are done - it is daylight. And we are about direct line - between three, five miles from the village - but I figured - what the hell - we will taxi down to the village and tell them what we have done' cause we didn't have a radio or anything. So - we got everything loaded up - couldn't move. The skis were froze down. So we jacked the skis up - they were wheel skis and we scraped the bottom of the skis - fooled around some more and then - trying to get it broke loose. By this time - the tail wheel started to dive itself up into the bulk head - it was already damaged - but this finished it off. So we jammed some spruce trees back there to keep it in place and we taxied that damn airplane down the river - pitch black - at night. And I didn't realize the river had so many turns in it.

03:33

JA: And I am sitting there - I am driving along - Arrow Hill is my partner's name - fine guy - and he is watching the gauges - I said I don't think you have to worry about it overheating or anything -he said - well I will keep an eye on things. We are going along - and I said Arrow - I know I could fly this thing - but I don't know how we would find Fort Yukon. We have to keep going. Of course, it wasn't turning too good - we were going over sand bars and willows - occasionally we fly over a sand bar - and it lands again - by gosh - we come around a corner and a guy out there wavin' a gas lantern - oh boy, we have made it. So we skid to a halt - everything is fine, got things unloaded, took the batteries out and went to up stay at the school house. Next morning we walk down to the airplane to figure out what else we got to do - if there is anything we can do -- we got a message out on the missionary network the Wiens that it was flyable. And I was so disorientated - by the time we got there at night - late afternoon - it was darker than hell - that as far as I was aware - were on the wrong side of the river and the airplane was pointing in the wrong direction. I was that disorientated. I didn't know where I was at until I saw that lantern - I was beginning to wonder if we were ever going to find this place. The people told me - we heard you start it - then it quit - then we heard you start it - it is getting dark - and we keep hearing it - hearing it. Then they came around with the lights on - they were there waiting for us. It was an interesting trip.

5:07

AA: You flew it?

JA: Then the Wiens pilots came up - uh -Darwin Kellogg came up and I flew back with him. The way it's listed for ferry permits - only crew necessary for flight. So - pilot and me. 'Cause I might have to work on it when we got to Fort Yukon. That was fine - tightened up the cables a bit - and away we went. Arrow came in on the mail plane - and he said I had a wonderful trip - he said we stopped at all the villages - carried on. He said if you have another trip, I am going with you.

5:45

JA: And he said later - we were having a couple of drinks - how come you got me to go on this trip - I had never been out in the bush? I said well - Arrow I believed you could take care of yourself in cold

weather - you had good gear and you weren't gonna get excited about anything. I figured you could hand prop that airplane - if we had to. He looked at me - Arrow was a Finlander - he looked at me - you Swedes ain't dumb. Oh he was quite a guy. He wasn't too tall - 5'8" or so - 5'10" maybe but he weighed about two hundred and fifty pounds, he was just a mass of muscle. He was good.

6:33

JA: Talking about it later - he said it was actually fun. I said - you didn't think that in the morning - freezing out there, unheated tent on the ice.

AA: How did the plane end up so far up river from the village?

JA: He'd come around - and couldn't get into the village on the ice - because of the smoke and everything and fog from the fires. So they like to go up and land further out in the clear - and he came in - the Beaver has a selector for the flaps - you know you put in 1 way and pump it up and down - well when he came back around - when he made his passes at the village and couldn't make it - he had pumped the flaps up. When he came in to land further up - he hadn't switched - so instead of the flaps going down - they went up and it just fell out of the sky. Upright. One wing bent all to hell and the landing gear spread out. Didn't hit the prop or anything that way - it was alright. Oh yeah, quite a trip.

07:35

AA: Are there still people going out doing this type of recovery anymore?

JA: Not so much anymore, the helicopter has improved so good. Instead of going out there and spending a bunch of time and carrying on - on this and that and hoping you get it fixed - and there is not too many guys that want to do it anymore. Or have know-how. They just hire a helicopter and go get it. There is an outfit down in Palmer - they got a great big surplus thing and chopper and you tell them where it is - give them the coordinates and they come roaring up - pick up the airplane and bring it into here or where ever - and set it down - and they are gone again. Don't know what they charge - but that is just the way it works now. They came in here one year with one and dropped it off and I'm helping them get the stuff off the wings - nets and stuff - to keep it from trying to fly underneath the chopper and the mechanic there said - uh - I asked him - how many they had picked up. He said - well he didn't know about this year - he had just started working for them - but the year before they had picked up thirty. These guys are based in Palmer I think it is, yeah. So you can see how things have changed. Previously the helicopter was small - they had to disassemble - and half the time they dropped them - completely destroy things.

09:00

JA: I had to use them once or twice later on - never did like it. If there was a way to get it out in one piece - I would do it. And the last one - oh there were several others in between - the last one belonged to Sandy Jamieson, the artist -- was up in the Coleen_River. And the helicopter - and the landing gear had broken - course it got the prop wing tip and everything - and the helicopter people wanted something like thirteen thousand bucks to get it to Fort Yukon -- because of distances involved -- this was a small chopper -- this is what, fifteen years or so ago. I think I had - just had moved over here - so I rigged up a bunch of stuff and went up there and got it back together. That is about the last one I have done. That was an odd one there. To fix the wing - it wasn't bent too bad - but the leading edge was all cratered up - and the leading edge material to repair it the best way is stove pipe. It is partially formed and you just cut off the corrugated part and form it in the rest of the way. And there is a picture of me with a spruce - chunk of spruce tree - and I am hammering trying to get some ribs straightened out a bit so I can get a

little bit of structure straightened out and my wife - at that time - sent that picture to a relative in Germany - that damn picture must have gotten all over Europe, beatin' with a big hammer down on this wing, oh, it was funny.

10:41

JA: Sandy was amazed - he said that was something -- I was only there a couple of days. Coleen_River - is beautiful country -- way up - the upper end, a nice river, moose/caribou running around - it was neat. It was a good trip.

AA: What time of the year was this?

JA: Fall, hunting season, he was up hauling hunters - guides too. Sandy's pretty much an all-around guy. Painter/carpenter - I don't know what all else. Something else --

11:12

AA: I was a little curious - I mean now people go to like they want to be airplane mechanics - they go down here to Hutch - and they take A & P courses - what was involved in your training? Did you just work for so long?

JA: Well the rules are that you can go to an approved school and most of them are two year. Hutch is still one year. The Northrup program I went to was just one year but that was so far back it was a little different again; things were a bit simpler. Uh - or you can work for 36 months - get letters written that you've done all this and that - and then go take your oral and written tests, your practicals and then get your license.

11:57

AA: I guess more of my question was - after you learned to be an airplane mechanic - what was involved in the formal training that you had to go through?

AA: Well it was a bit over a year - and it just went in segments -- there was some in recovering and engines and welding and electrical and everything else there was. There was about five or six trades involved in fixing a small airplane. There is a curriculum built up by the FAA - the one over at Hutch is probable on the same lines. In fact - I used - when I was teaching at the A & P School - I had my own notes from Northrup and I used them for a lot of guidance -- and then we had our own curriculum written up. So - it worked out pretty good. And when you get out of the school - you basically gotta a license and then you go learn your trade. Just like a lot of them.

12:54

JA: But you got the ground work. There is always a lot - at Wiens - in the coffee shop -- a lot of discussion about - a guy that had worked three years at Wiens - then had go over and got his licenses and carried on - or somebody in the school. I always took the principle - it is fine - it works both ways. But the guy that has been to school has more ground work on the theories and whys and what fors - instead of just go fix it and get squared away. Plus you are living in the types of airplanes - I know guys that have only worked one type of airplane - yet they have their licenses. So -- I - when it comes down to it - I would rather have a guy that had been to school. But Terry, he's an exception. He as at the A & P School - then he worked on aircrafts then he went 302 - he worked for - I don't know how many years - retired out in his 50's - came over here and said he would like to work on airplanes again. Well he had a lot of the basics -- he's a damn good mechanic - and it worked out fine. Normally - I can't afford to hire

somebody right out of school - I have to spend too much time with them. You can't charge a customer for that - so basically you got two guys working - getting' one man's wages. To go to work for a larger outfit - get your experience -- then go off and do what you got to do. It is about - basically the way it works out.

14:24

AA: What aircraft were you working on when you workin' for Wiens?

JA: Oh my - they had DC4's, 46's, 3's and Cessna's, Beavers - but I was basically - because of my background - I was doing the fabric work. There was a shop out back of the hanger - I was there for a couple of years - just recovering surfaces. Remember the 46's and 3's - DC4 and even the Constellation they had - had fabric control surface -- and the Beechcraft - Twin Beeches also. So - I am doing something one day - and I went out with the lead man - and I said about what -- all this junk laying out - it is getting destroyed. You know control surfaces - and they didn't have a fabric man - he had left - old timer - name of Rasmussen. Well the guy said - you do this - and I said - oh hell yes. So I ended up in fabric shop - had my own little place. Time went by - and then there was -- I will building a house and kinda broke - and everything was screwed up - and they had an opening on the DEW Line as a mechanic - one DC3 up based at Barter Island and I put in for that. Lo and behold - they said go for it. It was perfect for me - I was broker than hell - so that had free room and board and all the overtime you had to put in - when you are working alone - of course - and flying everyday too- I was also the flight attendant - I stayed up there for about a year - until I got all refinanced I got out of debt and squared away - then I came back to town. But yeah - that was an interesting -one - that was good - flew six days a week - worked on the airplane - off times and nights - and Sundays - until the FAA showed - up and said you can't do that - you have to have 1 day off. Ok - so I worked Sundays and put the time on the other days - everybody was happy. Gosh - we flew a lot.

16.36

JA: Part of this one summer - yeah about a year - the pilots timed out - normally was eighty hours and they had gone to one hundred which was the maximum for overtime - so they sent up another flight crew and I am screaming - wait a minute - I am flight crew too - take me to town. I only came in about every two months. Spent two to three days -- and went back up again. I was getting a bit tired of this. Anyhow - no - no - you gotta to stay. We don't have nobody else. So I think in one month - must have gotten one hundred and fifty some hours flying time plus working on the airplane. But it was a good plane - didn't take much to keep it going if you got on top of it - then you were alright.

17.23

AA: Where did you - where exactly did you fly - did you fly all the way around?

JA: No, went from Barter - Barter was our main base - I guess you would call it. And then we flew it would be south - no, no - it was the other way - we went west across the coast to Barrow - then south from there. So we went in to Flaxman from the American side - Flaxman -- uh - Atqasuk was pile two, and Lonely was pile one and then Barrow and then further south to Wainwright and Point Lay -- and then sometimes we went the other way over into Canada. We went there a bunch of times too. We were going across there one winter night - or day - moonlight - was real sharp and great - middle of bloody winter and we came across seals line up at a crack in the ice - must have been a hundreds of them. We thought --what the hell is that - so we got down pretty low and those seals were going in the ice - in the crack in the ice as we would come across them - just pump/pump/pump. Most fascinating thing you ever saw - no camera. Yeah.

18.40

JA: Crews went over to Cape Perry - I don't know what they called their station – a lot of times to Tuktoyaktuk too. I think that is one of the outlets to the Mackenzie was there – yeah. The Eskimos over there were a little different than the ones in Alaska - I think they were more pure Eskimo. Just a little different again.

AA: A little different looking or acting?

JA: A little different looking. They were smaller/thinner - tough looking bunch. We went down in the village of Tuktoyaktuk once - or twice. Had to see the Hudson Bay store and all of that. Basically just stayed at the sites - except for Barrow. You had to go into Barrow and get the mail and stuff for the company. Party a bit – Oh yeah, quite a job - had a room at Barrow - had a room at Barter - but it paid better than anything else. What with the free room and board and all -- yeah - it was an interesting one - that is where I got my DC3 time - they guys let me fly a bit now and then. Yeah - some guy asked me once - years later - gee - an instructor -- you ought to get your license - I said oh gee -- I don't know what for -- he said look - if you just go take the written I will fix you up. I said well -- ok - and then he said - how much time have you got? And I thought for a minute - and said - do you count DC3 time - six years now - he got up and walked out. He did not even have DC3 time.

20.36

AA: When you think back to all the mechanics you have worked with do you have some that really stick out in your mind?

JA: Oh yeah - that old engine man – Eldred Kwan, he was fantastic -- worked with Ernie Hubbard a bit - and for air frames and stuff -- he was - oh God - he was good. In a way - he spent so much time in detail, it was beautiful job - but for most people it was pretty high priced - I think. Of course - that was so far back - you could overhaul a Super Cub from end to end and sell it for twelve, thirteen thousand dollars and be ahead of the game. Let's see - who else? My - those two stick out the best of anything. The whole crew at Fairbanks Aircraft were very, very good and real good to me - teaching me stuff. Dave Phillips was very very good. Joe Spinely was probably one of the best sheet metal - he was at Wiens -- he worked at Fairbanks Aircraft also - maybe it was Bachner's by then. Yeah - I think he worked over there after he got out of the services - then on to Wiens. I think he was still pounding rivets when he was up in the '70's.

22:10

AA: Did you happen to know the Greimann's growing up here?

JA: Oh yeah - they lived down the street.

AA: I took heavy equipment classes from Paul Greimann, Jr.

JA: Yeah - yeah - there was an older brother - Paul - no which one was which - one was the youngest one - there was a couple of girls - which one did you deal with?

AA: Paul Jr.

JA: Paul Jr. - there was an older one too - but he died young from diabetes or something - leukemia or something -- their house is on 8th Avenue --big log place - and the story was - the old man went down there, was trying to get a loan to do some work on his house - and they wouldn't give it to him any money because he was too far out of town. It was on the out-skirts of town. Yeah - their Dad had a garage here for years - bus service - all kinds of things - pretty big building down there on -- the Greimann Building - it has been torn down now - I think. It was abandoned for years.

23:20

AA: Where was it in town?

JA: Uh - let me place it here - I want to say -- Lacey/Noble - around 1st and Noble -- 1st up to 2nd -- I think that is right.

22:48

AA: Do you have any topics you would like to discuss today?

JA: Up to you --

AA: I think I will wrap it up for today - I have spent all night at work - puking -- from my neck - so I am a little on the burned out side. I will play with these a little bit -- and I am sure I am going to have more things I want to talk to you about -- when it would be a good time for you.

JA: No problem with that -- when you get back in the office - during the week or something -- then I got these three I picked up - and then there are a couple more albums of wrecked planes and stuff.

AA: If I could take some of those pictures and scan them - I would like to if that's okay with you

24:34 -- Yeah, this one has one carousel of slides of wrecked planes -

AA: I don't know how to deal with slides - I will go talk to -- the people at the archives - and see what they have - they have equipment where you can make prints off of slides --

JA: Okay. Let's see here -- which one you would like to take -- you want to take one with you now -- or -- then we will get back together next week - or sometime -- ?

AA: Yeah -- I can get started on scanning them -- then I can bring you a disk - I will make a copy of all the pictures I put on disk --

JA: Okay.

AA: Do you have a computer here? Yeah --does it have internet --

JA: Yeah -- yeah.

AA: Someday - not today cause I am right on the verge of getting sick again - let see I want to be sure to save this right -- there we go.

