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James Hutchison (James T. Hutchison, 1900-)

Neville Abbott Jacobs, narrator and interviewer

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Jim Hutchison was an Alaskan pioneer and aviation mechanic. Hutchison came to Alaska in 1919 with the Army from his home state of Pennsylvania. He met his wife in Valdez and the family moved to Fairbanks in the early 1920s. He worked for Fairbanks Exploration Company for a while. He was fascinated by airplanes and worked for an airline. It was company started by Carl Ben Eielson. Hutchison started working for the company the same year Eielson was killed in Siberia in 1929. Hutchison said he met Eielson in Fairbanks. They played basketball together. Eielson was teaching in the school in Fairbanks. It was decided that Eielson could play with the high school team because there weren't enough good players. They won more games because of him. Eielson hired different people including Tom Jerrard who was a pilot and a good mechanic. Jerrard hired Hutchison to work for Alaska Airways which was Eielson's outfit in 1929. Hutchison said Eielson had to fly a Hamilton and took a schoolteacher to Nulato and then went to Teller. He then flew over to Siberia on his first trip with skis on the plane. When he returned from his first trip he replaced the skis which were heavy with wheels. Dorbrandt egged him on to fly again to Siberia. They took off from Teller, but Dorbrandt returned after an hour and Eielson continued on and the weather was bad. Eielson and Earl Borland missed their landing by 75 feet on a frozen bay. Eielson hit the top of a hill and crashed. Hutchison ended up going over to Siberia during the search. Hutchison said after Gillam and Crosson left Fairbanks to go over to Siberia Gillam busted up his plane and knocked the landing gear off. Gillam sent for Dewalder and necessary pieces to fix the plane. Pat Reed was also working on the search. No one knew the way to Nome. They got Matt Niemann from Anchorage to fly a Fairchild and lead them to Nome. Niemann had just been married for a day or so. Ed Young was in Nome and was supposed to pick up the airplane and continue over to Siberia to continue the search. Matt Niemann took off from Fairbanks with Major Deckard and Sam McCally. Pat Reed, Bill Hughes and Hutchison were in the other plane. Hutchison was going over to fix Gillam's plane. He had all the equipment to make the repairs but they didn't have an oxygen or acetylene tank. They flew over Nulato and into a snowstorm. Niemann turned back. Hutchison's plane started to land and they hit a bluff and broke five feet of the wing off. They landed and then Hutchison and Bill Hughes ran back and picked up all the busted pieces. It was snowing so hard that by the time they got up to the point where the plane hit the cliff the pieces of the plane were all covered up by snow already. They were on the Ungalik River behind Unalakleet. They were down in a canyon. They were

trying to fix the wing and on the third day they were there he could hear dogs barking. There were two dog teams out for trapping. Hutchison wanted to send a message with the mushers so people would know where they were. Pat Reed didn't think it was necessary since he expected to have everything fixed soon. After a week they took off and landed in Unalakleet forty miles away. They stayed in Unalakleet for four days and then flew on to Nome. Hutchison stayed in Nome and the wing was repaired. Gillam had already patched his plane and flew it back. Hutchison was stuck in Nome for a month and a half. They patched up their plane and Pat Reed flew it over to Siberia. Reed busted up his plane when he landed in Siberia. Herb Larson went over to Siberia to fix Reed's plane. When he got over there he found out they needed a welder so they sent for Hutchison. They patched up Reed's airplane and Reed was able to fly it out. Hutchison was stranded in Siberia for eight days by bad weather.

Hutchison was asked what happened to Dorbrandt who had turned back on the flight to Siberia. Dorbrandt died in Fairbanks from pneumonia. Hutchison said he had quite a trip with Dorbrandt. Dorbrandt was flying Judge Clegg and his secretary to McGrath. Dorbrandt cracked up his plane at McGrath. Charlie Thompson told Hutchison to go to McGrath to fix the airplane. He flew down to McGrath with Barnhill and the snow started getting heavy. They landed on the South Fork of the Kuskokwim and stayed the night at a small roadhouse. Hutchison took care of the plane while the pilot took off for the roadhouse. The next day they got into McGrath and Dorbrandt said Judge Clegg wanted to go to Flat. Barnhill ended up taking the judge and his secretary over to Flat. Hutchison welded the fittings on for the landing gear and asked if there was anything else wrong with it. Dorbrandt said yes, but Hutchison looked inside and could see that the carburetor was knocked off and it was lying against the firewall. He described fixing the plane. He went over to the old town and found someone with an old outboard motor and got some aluminum pieces from him. They flew back to Fairbanks.

Hutchison talked about fixing Frank Pollock's plane. He said Pollock had taken off on a flight to Chicken in a Stinson. His passenger was a mother and her newborn. On the way he busted a rod in the plane's engine. He went down and as he landed the wind changed and the plane was busted. When he didn't show up they sent a plane looking for him. They knew his route. Bosley picked them up. Norm Weaver went out to look at the plane and said he couldn't fix it. They took the tank out and all the wires and other parts of the plane. Frank thought it could be fixed and took Hutchison over to the wreck. Hutchison thought they could patch it up to fly back to Fairbanks. He got the parts needed for the repairs together. They patched up the plane and Hutchison was brought back to Fairbanks. Tillman was then taken out to the plane. They got the engine parts in and Pollock was able to fly out the airplane. Hutchison was left by himself for a while and he decided to go fishing. Frank Pollock returned to pick him up in a Blanca and was very happy to have his Stinson repaired.

Hutchison worked for Interior Airways when the radar network known as the Distance Early Warning System (DEW) was being constructed along the Arctic Coast. He and Cy Hetherington flew up to one of the DEW sites to see what they could do about a damaged aircraft. Hutchison said the plane they repaired is now in Alaskaland in Fairbanks. They were told the middle of the airplane was ripped out. When they got there it was only one weld that had been ripped out. The landing leg was also broken in two. He decided to try to fix it. He welded the piece back onto the plane. It was -30 degrees and the

wind was blowing. He sent a part to Barrow to be repaired. He talked about Norm Cole. He fixed the landing leg and they straightened the prop. Hetherington was a pilot and he flew the plane out.

Hutchison talked about Fred Maier. Hutchison said he was stuck on the Kobuk for about eight days with Harry Brown. Fred Maier came in with a prospector. They tied up the plane. The next day they warmed up the plane to get ready to go.