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Elizabeth and Robert W. Hiatt

Reg Emmert and Paul McCarthy, interviewers

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Paul McCarthy asked Dr. Hiatt about his background. Dr. Hiatt said he finished his doctorate in west coast crabs in 1941. He found a position at Montana State University and switched over to ornithology. He worked in that area for a couple of years and published a few papers. He then moved to Hawaii and the war broke out shortly after he got there. He left Montana to take a position in marine biology. They stayed twenty-six years in Hawaii. He moved up to the Dean of the Graduate School and then Vice-President for Academic Affairs. The last couple of years he served as acting president of the university. He took advantage of early retirement so he could do something else for ten years in 1969.

Dr. Hiatt said at Berkeley where he did his graduate work there were very few research professors. Almost everyone taught and did research. They were expected to be scholarly teachers and scholarly researchers. He said that influenced him about how a university faculty member should function. When he went to Montana he taught and did research as well as in Hawaii. He brought people onto the staff that were interested in that mix of activity. He feels they built up the finest program in marine biology in the nation and it still persists to this day. He didn't spend time on birds, but turned his attention to the mid-Pacific. He spent his time on tuna fishes which are the principle commercial fishes there. He later turned his attention to coral reefs. He participated in the Bikini Island tests. He then took over the direction of the Atomic Energy's Laboratory and held that role while he still participated at the University of Hawaii. He thinks there should be a mixture of teaching and research for faculty. Mrs. Hiatt said it was hard making the break from Hawaii. They were leaving their grown children behind. She made the transition to living in Japan.

The interviewer asked Dr. Hiatt how he became interested in the Diplomatic Service.

Dr. Hiatt talked about starting his career in Montana. He said it left an impression on him. He said the opportunity to come to Alaska may have been influenced by his experience in the Rocky Mountains. They were living in Japan and had three and a half years in the Diplomatic Service. He wasn't sure he was interested. He said after discussing the possibility with his wife. He had a choice of going to London or going to Alaska. He talked about the attraction of building a statewide system in a growing state and it was more than he could pass up. Mrs. Hiatt said it was a difficult decision. [this section of the tape is difficult to understand] She said she remembers flying over the state for the first time. The interviewer asked about the change in lifestyle from Hawaii to Alaska.

Dr. Hiatt said he spent his entire career in science until he started his administrative duties in 1963. He did spend a year at the Naval Research Office in London. He decided that after 26 years at one institution it was time to do something different. He contacted the Department of State Office that handled all the scientific attachés and consulates abroad and said if there was something opening up in Japan he would be interested. He went to Japan on January 1 or 2, 1970. He talked about diplomatic service ranking. He had a top state department job. He was able to put together a program in four years that is still in effect today. They enjoyed being in Japan and learned a lot. He is in good standing in the international scene.

The interviewer asked Dr. Hiatt about academic research. Dr. Hiatt said all of the research institutes were established before his time at the university. He said they were established in different ways. The Geophysical Institute was put here as a federal project. It was a model that they attempted to operate in Hawaii. The Alaska Institute was well known. The G.I. was integrated into the campus later on. In the 1950s and 1960s there was a growth on institutes on campuses. When he arrived here he said there were two classes of faculty on campus. They had a teaching faculty and a research group. He wanted to reorganize the campus to integrate the two groups. He said he hoped to have one faculty group after ten years. There was a difference in salaries. He brought onto the campus some people who knew something about this situation. He thought the research people were not cooperating. Results showed the reverse, that the teaching faculty did not want the research faculty to be teaching. He set out quietly to make changes. He organized the colleges into different groups. This would make it possible for people to both teach and do research. He said most other universities do the same thing. He discussed the different reasons why the University of Alaska was not set up this way. Setting up the teaching and research was the highest priority on this campus for him. He said he wanted research conducted that related to Alaska. He said these were difficult issues to solve. The interviewer thought the institute's research could not be used by undergraduates. Dr. Hiatt said one of the problems in Alaska was a small student body. Hawaii was much larger. He said if you don't have a large student body you don't have the opportunity to have a lot of staff and to make it possible for the research faculty to teach.

The interviewer asked Mrs. Hiatt about changing her lifestyle when she came to Alaska. Mrs. Hiatt said ever since her husband changed to administrative duties things changed for her. Up to that point she had been teaching in Hawaii. After her husband took on administrative work there was more traveling involved. Once they moved to Japan there was a lot of coordination work. There were large numbers of people invited into their home. She talked about enjoying her life in Japan.

The interviewer asked about the statewide system. Dr. Hiatt said when he came to Alaska he understood two things. The morale of the faculty had to be changed. He discovered that the conditions of employment were not very clear. He said salaries were low. They were within the lowest tenth percentile. The system didn't have a plan of development. He had to think about guiding the university. He said they made efforts to improve the faculty situation. They started to work on the academic development plan for the statewide system. There are now three main centers. Community colleges didn't have much of a role except to meet the needs of the communities where they were located. Some had been established by school districts. They wanted to get a system and make the university as a whole related to Alaska and Alaskans. He

said the root maps are laid out. They now must work on details. He thought the academic development plan was a good one. They laid out emphasis for the three main units and also for the community colleges. It gave them their own distinction. He talked about the different areas and their specialties. He said these will give the community colleges enthusiasm. He believes it needs to be worked on consistently. Dr. Hiatt said a major university has to be like just about every other university at the undergraduate level. Anchorage and Fairbanks will both have comprehensive programs. When it comes to graduate programs there will be emphasis.

The interviewer asked about a computer system. Dr. Hiatt said in Hawaii they realized they had to get into computers. They started with an IBM 350. They ended up going on to larger computers. When he arrived in Alaska they had a medium sized computer. The model they had wasn't adequate for their system. They had to go to a major unit or to set up separate computers. They decided to go with a system that could be expanded. He said the system they have is a good one. They are getting the whole university on that computer.