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Bud File (Claude Edward File, Jr.)

Karen Brewster, interviewer

January 24, 2018

The Pioneer Home in Palmer, Alaska

Note: The audio for this interview has been edited per the instructions of Bud File's son, Rory File

Karen Brewster asked Bud File when he left Adak. Bud File said he left in February, 1945. He had a major who got word to File about joining the Alaska Scouts. He left Adak to join the Alaska Scouts. He was a buck private most of the time he was in the Army and then stepped into the carpenter's position as a corporal. On their trip out of Adak they made several stops. The plane was very cold, but he had dressed warm. A couple of sailors got into the plane and they weren't dressed properly. One of them was taken off the plane later on a stretcher because of hypothermia. They got back to Fort Richardson and the scouts came to pick him up. He went into a surveying class. They went up to Lake Seward for training. He described the equipment they used and their surveying.

File said he had a friend who worked for the Road Commission. He was from the lower Yukon. They had a camp on the Steese Highway. When he returned to the office he and his friend, Thurman, found their draft cards. His friend was training dogs in the Alaska Scouts and he was his helper. File didn't like the way his friend trained the dogs. They had used sled dog teams during the war. He was friends with Muktuk Marston's granddaughter. He talked about seeing Muktuk Marston at one time during a USO party.

Brewster asked about the purpose of the Alaska Scouts. File said they started scouting Attu. Muktuk Marston was in charge of the Eskimos along the Bering Sea and the Arctic. During the war they scouted out the Aleutian Islands. The official name was First Combat Intelligence Unit. About six of them were sent down when the steamship Yukon wrecked. They were getting reports on the radio. The Yukon wrecked off of Seward. They traveled by train to Seward. They helped to remove passengers from the steamship onto a power scow. He described moving people between their power scow and a Coast Guard cutter. He estimated they moved between 50 and 100 people. The people had to wait about two days on the beach for rescue. He said this happened in March. They returned to Seward and saw headlines attributing the rescue to the Coast Guard. The town was full of Shore Patrol personnel to keep the Coast Guard and Army people from fighting. A few days later they were supposed to remove the mail from the steamboat. There was a steamship agent on the boat and a couple of Red Cross people. The steamship agent told them to take what they wanted because it was insured and expected to sink with the next tide. He ran into the pilothouse to see what he could find. He found the ship's log which was left behind. He gave it to the steamship agent. He took the compass out with a file he found in an officer's room. As he did this someone came in with tools to do the same thing. He also took flags from the ship. The Red Cross lady was removing things from suitcases, too. She claimed she was collecting it for the Red Cross. File went back to get the nameplate from the ship. One guy found a mink coat. They were in town for several days and he heard someone talking about their friend losing their mink coat. They returned to Fort Richardson on the train and had a snowball fight including the officers. He took the nameplate of the steamship and put it up in the recreation room of the unit. He took it when he was

discharged and the lieutenant wanted him to leave it for the unit. He traveled to Juneau on his way to Petersburg and he had the nameplate under his arm. The curator of the museum approached him and asked him to donate it. It was still hanging in the museum when he went for a visit.

While he was in the Scouts he fished for king salmon on the Eagle River flats on the Knik Arm. They had three set nets for gillnetting. They were camped on the shore. Later in the season they fished on the west side in front of Goose Creek for dog salmon for the dogs. The king salmon was put in strips and dried. It was supposed to be trail food, but he said a lot of it ended up in the officer's club. He had a choice of taking two different people with him to fish camp. He took a college kid from Oklahoma who was a communist. File was the cook and his helper was supposed to wash the dishes, but always had an excuse for not doing them. File told him when the communists were in control everyone would be chipping in to do the work. The college student said he was going to be an administrator. He was a young kid who had been drafted. He would talk to File about communism. File said they were on a military reservation where they fished. He fished for most of the summer when he was fishing. He was discharged in August 1946. He talked about a big bully, Carruthers, in his unit. They had boxing gloves in their unit. He ended up fighting him and was almost knocked out. They both ended up in bed for the day. Carruthers was challenged for a fight every Saturday night. He described being made sergeant.

Brewster asked about the survey of the North Slope. File said they were just checking out the country. He didn't know exactly where they went since he was discharged at the time. There was also a survey of the Kuskokwim which didn't go well. The North Slope survey was in 1946.

File said when he was discharged he got on a bus and went into Anchorage. He found a small room to stay. He went on a shopping trip. His roommate had worked with his younger brothers. File returned to Petersburg. His parents were at Central at the time. He returned to Petersburg because he thought he would be a fisherman. He did for a few years. He was asked to do carpenter work for people and decided he could make a living doing that. When he was fishing he wasn't working all year long. He had his own small gillnet boat after he was married. He talked about meeting his wife. She had been a next door neighbor in Petersburg. He was 12 years older than she was. When he returned to Petersburg he would see her every so often. They were married in 1953. He talked about fishing from his own boat. He wasn't making enough money. He had crewed for someone else for a while.

Break in recording

Brewster asked when he stopped fishing and started his carpentry work. He said he was 40 years old when he stopped fishing. He has made a few halibut fishing trips since then. He talked about fishing with a Norwegian for several years. He was occupied with construction work and the cannery, Icicle Seafoods. They moved to Seward for a few years with Icicle. They moved up to the area and built a house on Soapstone Road off the Glenn Highway. They had four children at the time. While they were in Seward their 17 year old joined the Army. His wife's name was Esther Ann Thorson. Her father was a fisherman and her mother came to Petersburg with the Salvation Army. Brewster asked about his work in the cannery as a carpenter. File said there was always repair work and they were always expanding. He worked on the docks in Petersburg. In Seward everything was inland from the shore. They did have a small loading shore. In Petersburg a lot of the cannery was on pilings. They were always working on replacement work on the docks. There was talk about building a cannery at Adak. He was excited about that idea and then it fell through. Carpenter work was what he was good at. The cannery didn't pay

scale but it was steady work. He enjoyed that kind of work. He commented that his life has been jumping from one thing to another. He thinks he has lived a more interesting life than most people.

After they sold their place on Soapstone Road they were looking at homesteading on the Kuskokwim. They built a 24 foot skiff and went out to look for land that was open. At that time during the Carter administration all public land was frozen. They had sold their home and weren't sure what they were going to do. They decided to move south and buy a place down there. They moved down to eastern Washington in 1980 and bought a place down there. They lived there for five years. They decided to move back to Alaska. They moved back to Petersburg and spent a couple of years there. They lived in a cabin the first year they were there. When they were in Washington they had some farm animals and he worked as a carpenter. His wife worked in a restaurant for a short while and a store for a while. When he was raised the man supported the family and he didn't want his wife working. When he was growing up they lived on very little money. He supported his family on one salary.

After 1985 the state land was released. They were living in a scow outside of Petersburg. His wife liked living there. They saw lots of animals. He sent in an inquiry about open land. There was land in the Interior. He liked Highline Lake. They went to the Steese Highway and his wife didn't like the area. The road outside of Central was not kept up. They stopped at Healy to look at some land there and decided not to settle there. They ended up taking land at Hyaline Lake. They had 40 acre lots there that were heavily timbered. He flew out to look at the properties and stayed for a couple of days. He described looking at the land and choosing a homestead of 15 acres. He took his wife back to look at the property. They measured the property out. They slashed out the property lines. It was later surveyed. They camped out while they were there. He talked about losing and finding his wallet. He described his wife's personality. She was adventurous in spite of her upbringing.

They returned to their property in January. It was minus 30 degrees. They hauled materials to their homestead by sled. He set up a tent with a stove in it. They didn't have wood for the stove so they didn't have a fire that night. It dipped down to minus 39. They had to tramp down the snow with their snowshoes. There were other people living on the lake. They were the Pinkertons. At the time he was 65 years old. His wife was 13 years younger. He always wanted to get a homestead. It was located thirty miles west of Palmer. It was 18 miles south of Skwentna. It was hilly terrain. They had a creek running below them. He described their lot. Brewster asked if he used a lot map. File said they did. It was rougher than he thought. There were forty acre lots, too. He talked about one of their neighbors who were from Sitka. The first winter their neighbor's cabin caved in from the snow. File talked about clearing the trail when they were marking out their property.

Brewster asked about building a cabin on his property. File said he sawed out logs into boards. He built a 10 by 18 foot cabin. He had a pole shed behind it. He dug out a basement and shored it up with square timbers. Later he put pilings under it. The first year he had a very small garden. They had lettuce. The next year he had a bigger garden. They had goats. They got a Newfoundland Pyrenees mix dog. He talked about the dog barking one morning when a bear came on their property. He ended up shooting the bear and skinning it. He had to justify shooting the bear. He gave the hide to Fish and Game. They had moved to their homestead in 1990. They lived in their wall tent until about May. They moved into another shelter with a larger cooking range. The shelter was made from plastic tarps. He talked about another home site he had outside of Petersburg. He built his own cabin on Highline Lake. He used a chainsaw to cut boards for their cabin. They moved into their cabin in the middle of October. He had a

barrel stove in it. He dug out a small root cellar. They melted snow for water and later used a spring on their property.

Break in recording

File talked about their cabin. They stored hay for the goats in the shed. He had a chainsaw for cutting fuel wood. He said it would be a big job without a chainsaw. File talked about using a whipsaw. A Swede saw was used to cut up the smaller pieces of wood. He didn't own a snow machine. They stayed at their cabin for eight years. They returned to Petersburg and stayed in other places for six years and he and his wife separated. He returned to Highline Lake. He did use a four wheeler to get out to the lake. When they moved back to Petersburg they bought some state land. He and his wife were not getting along. His wife started having problems and they separated. He returned to Highline Lake. His wife died a year later. File talked about the qualities of his wife.

Brewster commented on all the work he did at his homestead with just a chainsaw. File said Pinkerton would always come with his snow machine when a plane came with supplies. File said it helped. His next door neighbor also helped him. File moved back to Highline Lake in 2004. He moved to Palmer in 2016. The Pinkertons sold their property. His new neighbor stayed out there in the winter. When File was gone for six years there were a lot of houses in the area. A lot of people would come and visit him. The Pinkertons moved to Idaho. Brewster asked if he had to prove up on his land. File said it was state land and they had to live on it for the cheapest rate. They had to live on it 25 months. He talked about his nearest neighbors. File said he did a little trapping while they were out there. There was someone out there making a living by trapping and big game guiding. File talked about the furs he did get.

Brewster asked if he hunted at Highline Lake. File said they never saw a moose in season. The trapper told him there was a special season for moose hunting for locals. He got a moose with the trapper's help. The moose turned out to be very tough. He turned it into jerky. He talked about how much the Pinkertons helped them. Brewster asked them how often he went into town. File said in the spring and the fall. It cost 220 dollars each way by plane. It was over 400 dollars the last time he went out. When they had goats and chickens his wife stayed home when he went to town. Brewster asked what he bought in town. File said he bought groceries.

Brewster asked him about his skiing career. File said he took first place in Alaska in 1951. He said in Petersburg there were a lot of skiers. There were a lot of Norwegians living there. The basketball coach didn't want his students skiing. He said there were skiers in their 60s. There was a lot of snow in the 1940-50s. There is less snow now. He talked about skiing competitions. Cross-country wasn't very popular back then. The Army had a team from Fort Wainwright. During one competition he started last and started passing everyone. After busting a ski pole he continued on. He thought the person who finished first took a shortcut. He described one year when he had to break trail after a foot of new snow. He used army surplus touring skis. He described another race when he lost to two Norwegians. He was 28 years old the year he won the race. He would ski out at his homestead. They usually had about five feet of snow each year when they first came out to Highline Lake. In later years there wasn't as much snow on the ground. Brewster asked if he noticed changes in the time he was there. File said there were a lot of black bears and brown bears. He shot a lot of black bears. He shot a brown bear at his neighbor's house. The bear had been prowling around their house and had already caused some damage to the house cache. They would eat black bear meat, but not brown bear. He talked about another neighbor and their children.

Brewster asked how the Natives and non-Natives got along. File said the Natives and whites tended to gravitate towards one another. About a third of his cohorts were Natives. He talked about his friend, Thurman. They ended up in the military together. When he went into the scouts it was about half Native. He stayed friends with Thurman. He met up with Thurman a couple of years after they moved to Highline Lake. File talked about losing about forty pounds since he was in the military. Another person in their bunk was a Seventh Day Adventist. He didn't carry a gun. He was the latrine man. File said he saw him drinking and smoking which wasn't in accordance with Seventh Day Adventist practice. File said there wasn't trouble between the Natives and non-Natives. He talked about being named head of his hut, but he didn't do any bossing. When he was foreman in the cannery he enjoyed that. Discussion about being in charge in the military and on jobs.

Brewster asked if he still owned his property at Highline Lake. File said he signed it over to his son. He can still visit the place when he wants to. When he left the place with his wife the first time he did try to sell it. None of his children lived on the homestead with him. One of his grandchildren enjoyed staying there with him. Brewster asked him if he had any further thoughts. File said there were some fine people at Highline Lake. He misses being out at the lake. He talked about leasing a place on the Little Susitna. Brewster said it is a big change in his life to move into the Pioneer Home. File talked about living at the Pioneer Home.

Brewster asked File if he had any advice for a young person wanting to homestead. File said you have to learn as you go. He wasn't raised with plumbing or modern conveniences so homesteading wasn't hard for him. He talked about how he was raised in his childhood. He said some of the young people who were homesteading didn't stay for very long because they couldn't make a living. He talked about one couple he thought would be able to stay on their homestead. He discussed another neighbor who was raising children on the homestead. The neighbor had a business to train people to construct log cabins.

Brewster asked what he thinks about his life. File said he raised four kids and he thought they turned out OK. He said there were some things he would have done differently. He regretted quitting his job at the cannery. He did jump from one job to another when he was single. He worked for a contractor in Petersburg for a few years before he worked at the cannery. Brewster asked about his education. File said he quit going to school in eighth grade. He did attend some high school when he was in Washington working for a logging operation. He was on Neah Bay. He was working with hand tools. He worked bucking windfalls. One of the more experienced loggers showed him how to do his job. He later partnered with other loggers. He was later partnered with a crabby logger. He learned from him. He was encouraged to attend school on his GI bill. He attended school at Kleelam. He lived in a cabin while he was attending school. He was challenged in his classes and was making good grades. He quit to come to Alaska. He took his test in Seattle and they mailed his diploma to Petersburg. His wife quit high school and both of them went for tests for their GED. He learned mechanical drawing when he was attending school in Washington. He was taught to work hard. He thought he was a slow learner. He learned later in the Army that he was hard of hearing. He did try hearing aids and they didn't work out for him. He has tried listening to audio books.

Brewster commented that File has had an adventurous and pioneering life. File said he has had a lot of fun, but there have been some boring times. He said he has had fun visiting with the interviewer. File said he will tell a bear story. They had a big dog which they got as a puppy. They let him sleep inside during mosquito season. The dog got used to sleeping in their bedroom and insisted on sleeping under

the bed. To get under the bed he had to lift it up a bit. When he rolled over he would lift up the bed. One night after dinner they saw their goats run past the window. He went outside and saw a black bear chasing the goats. He went back into the house to get his rifle. The dog would react when he saw the rifle and he was ready to go. He told his wife to hold onto the dog. As the bear ran by he shot it and it kept going. They released the dog and he ran right to the bear in a clump of ferns with a shot through the heart. He usually didn't shoot running game. They did eat the bear. He said you should take the fat off the bear when it is eaten. File said he was an expert shot in the Army and he was a better shot after he got out of the Army. He told a story about fishing near a family who gave him a little trouble. The family was from Norway and came to Alaska to fish every summer. He started target practice to pass the time and the family pulled up their nets and moved away and gave him a wide berth from then on.

File told a story about fishing on the Stikine flats. He was fishing with a Norwegian fellow. He ended up having a disagreement with another fisherman from Wrangell because File set up his net too close by. The disagreement ended up on the shore and File was on the losing end very quickly.