

Bob Gleason

Interviewed by Hilary Hilscher

March 2, 2000

Ed. Note: Augie Hiebert is also present.

Tape 1, Side A

Hilary: It is March 2nd and I'm here with Augie Hiebert – oh, fabulous, Eloise (Gleason) just delivered a fabulous plate of cookies for us – and with Bob Gleason. So (you were saying, Bob, how you met Augie, through) the fellow who built... who did the engineering on KFAR.

Bob: KFAR, yeah, well, that's when I first met Stan and Augie, right? First met you (Augie). Jim Wallace was an old friend of mine. Again, we had gotten acquainted through Ham radio. He lived in Mt. Vernon, Washington. We found out we were both going to school together at UW and we went through the University of Washington together you might say. So I had been in Fairbanks for... since 1931 and here comes Jim Wallace with a new station to build. And I don't remember too much about it except that it was a cold winter when it finally got going.

Hilary: All the winters are cold winters.

Augie: In Fairbanks they are.

Bob: Old Cap really spent money and did things right, didn't he?

Augie: Yeah, he sure did. Well, he said he wanted his people to be comfortable. He also said if you build right you don't have to spend all that money maintaining it.

Bob: Well, he built a lot of things in Fairbanks: the theater, apartments. The radio station is still there, isn't it, yeah?

Augie: It's not in very good shape now. It was not cared for. It was on permafrost and now... you used to walk up the stairs, now you walk down the stairs. It sunk. The thing has sunk and the left wing where the garage was has been broken. It is not used any more at all. What is around it, that 160 acres, is now a golf course and the radio station has moved to another place. The tower is still there. It will come down and they will destroy the building one of these days.

Bob: How tall was that tower? I forgot.

Augie: Three hundred feet.

Bob: Three hundred feet.

Augie: It is self-supporting (inaudible).

Bob: Well, you know Jim died last year.

Augie: Yes, I know. His daughter-in-law is in Anchorage. She married Jim, Jr., and they didn't get along too well and she has remarried and moved up. Jim had a couple of kids that were not exactly of Jim's caliber and then he married again and got into a terrible mess. I met him.

Bob: We met that woman.

Augie: You did. I didn't meet her. I was there right after she tried to kill him one time. It wasn't a happy marriage.

Hilary: Oh, no.

Bob: And I think the kids resented it very much.

Augie: Sure they did.

Hilary: You lived for a while in Fairbanks then?

Bob: I lived there from 1931 until they moved the headquarters to...(aside:) Just press down that little thing.

Augie: Press on it?

Bob: Yeah. About 1939 we moved the headquarters of Pan Am (Pan American)-Alaska Pacific to Seattle, which was a big raise for us. They moved us all to Seattle and didn't change our salaries but... no, but the salaries we were getting in Fairbanks were very livable and in Seattle...

Hilary: I bet.

Bob: ...they were pretty good.

Hilary: I'll bet.

Augie: We call that COLA (cost of living allowance) now.

Hilary: Yeah. Now you had been gone back up and out the Chain? Didn't you go up... you went out to the Aleutians?

Bob: That's a different story, Hilary. Yeah, during the war I was in the 11th Air Force and not really... I was in the 11th Region, which served the 11th Air Force of the Army Airways Communication System but, yeah, I... now you're jumping the gun on me because...

Hilary: Go back.

Bob: You want to get into the war?

Hilary: No start in '31, you bet.

Bob: Well, let's go back to the beginning.

Hilary: Okay.

Bob: My first job in Alaska was 1926. I got a job as radio operator and clerk with the US Army Engineers on a seagoing hopper dredge working in Wrangell Narrows, that's 1926. Then I went back to school. (In) '27 I worked in the salmon cannery as a radio operator in Kake, Alaska; '28 I did the same thing. This is UW's quarterly system, you know, and I used to go spring and summer quarters.

Hilary: My dad was doing the same thing working as a radio operator on the "green boats" and the "black boats" going up (to Alaska) and then he would take a quarter off he would go back to school. He would go to work. He would go back to school at UW.

Bob: Took me six years but it was six years... actually it was '29 that I went on the ship and that took a year out of my schooling.

Hilary: So you didn't graduate before you went on the ship?

Bob: No. Came back and finished school and it was depression times you know and the only job I could get was as a radio operator in a salmon cannery in Bristol Bay.

Hilary: And this was after the ship or before?

Bob: It was after.

Hilary: I want to go back to the story of the ship.

Bob: Well, it would take a long time on the ship, but on the ship... the book is a story on the ship.

Hilary: And I would like to get that too. Do you have that?

Bob: A book?

Augie: I think you sent me a copy of this book, didn't you?

Bob: I can spare you one.

Hilary: That would be wonderful. Okay.

Bob: Well, we will forget *Nanook* for a minute.

Hilary: Okay.

Bob: And jump back to after the war and I left school, had to leave on June 1 without graduating, yeah, without graduating, to take this job at Bristol Bay. I went up on the *Cordova* and I came back on the old *Victoria*. And that's a short job in Bristol Bay. Came back and I couldn't find another job but I got lucky and I got hired by WAMCATS (Washington-Alaska Military Cable And Telegraph System) to install a transmitter at Fairbanks and Valdez. This became very important because in Fairbanks I saw (Joe) Crosson and (Harold) Gillam, and Crosson encouraged me to... he said Alaskan Airways -- or American Airways which owned them -- is going to install radio and why don't you come up and be here and you'll be on the spot. They'll hire you.

And this sounded like a good idea to me considering... so I kind of made a stupid move then. I bought a couple of, three or four big radios and stuff and I went to Fairbanks. The idea was that I was going to sell these radios and maintain radios for the people in Fairbanks. And that winter I pretty near starved. What saved me was the red light district. The ladies...

Augie: Fourth Avenue.

Bob: Yeah, the ladies had... they wanted to be able to receive (radio from) the states. You know, there were no... KFQD was working I think but just barely.

Augie: 250 watts, yeah.

Bob: But you could get the states pretty well on a good night. So another fellow and I would put up big antennas for them, Don Abel, I don't know if you ever heard of him.

Hilary: Oh, yeah, you bet.

Bob: So we put up these 60-foot masts and signal-wire antennas and on good nights they would get pretty good reception. And they always paid promptly. So... only one lady ever offered to take it out in trade. So anyhow, I did that all winter and by spring I was broke. F. E. (Fairbanks Exploration) Company was going pretty good, of course, and I tried to get a job with F. E. in electric work of some kind. And a guy named Charlie Fowler, I think, promised me a job.

Augie: My friend. Charlie and I were best friends. He was a neighbor right across the street from KFAR. He and his wife used to make pancakes every Sunday morning for Stan Bennett and me.

Bob: Oh, great. Good grief. Well, anyhow what ruined that was the people who owned F. E. Company, (inaudible), you know?

Hilary: Uh-huh.

Bob: Were sending up all their relatives and kids and whatnot for jobs you know. And Charlie had to give them jobs instead of me. But he finally got me a job driving points. You know what they are?

Hilary: Huh-uh.

Augie: Uh-huh. Put a lot of kids through college. Dollar an hour wasn't it? Was it a dollar an hour or a dollar a day?

Bob: No, it was a month. No, no, no, we worked 10 hours a day, seven days a week. It is hard work.

Hilary: What is it?

Bob: Drilling points to thaw the ground -

Hilary: Oh, to thaw...

Bob: ...in order to dredge, dredging. And I did that and finally along in midsummer, I did get into electrical work and it was stringing wire and putting poles in the ground. The dredges move around, as you know, Augie, and you had to string new lines in for them and stuff. That's hard work too. So things were pretty rough. American Airlines still hadn't done anything and...

Hilary: And there was no more work for WAMCATS at this point?

Bob: No. Huh-uh. No, after I did that job for them, which I have commendations for incidentally, but they were in a bad position and they had no funds to hire civilians. They wanted me to enlist and I actually agreed to enlist. Colonel Olmstead told me that within a month he would get me commissioned if I would enlist and they would send me to a big job in Juneau putting in a new big thing. So I agreed to do that, but in the meantime Galleley, the chief engineer, who had hired me to do these two installations wanted me to do one more job for him in Fairbanks and that was to string that cable underground out to the transmitter site. And I said I don't know anything about... we were involved in...what do you call it when you join two cables?

Hilary: Splicing.

Bob: Splicing. And it involved splicing a 32-line cable and I didn't know how to. Well, I'll send you some instructions. He sent me a book and some splicing stuff and so anyhow I practiced doing those and I put this line in and that was about the time that I agreed that I

would enlist and still nothing had come through. So I actually went back to Seattle and I had just gotten there when Pan Am bought Pacific Alaska Airways. And sure enough, they sent a guy, a chief engineer by the name of McKenzie (sp?) from Miami, to install the stuff and he hired me as chief operator, \$150.00 a month.

Hilary: That must have seemed like a gold mine.

Bob: No, not really in Fairbanks. No, and it wasn't so I went to talk with Colonel Olmstead and he graciously said no, we're not going to offer you that. If you want to go with Pan Am, go ahead and go. So I did and that began my story with Pan Am and I went to Fairbanks. I came up by ship as far as, well, up to Seward and then train up to Anchorage and there Robbie Robbins, one of their early Pan Am pilots, picked me up and took me to Fairbanks. That was my first trip with Pan American.

Hilary: They flew you up?

Bob: Yeah. Uh-huh. Fairchild 71.

Augie: That was on the Electra?

Bob: No, no, Fairchild 71, single engine. Electras were two years later. Okay. So he got me to Fairbanks, I don't... do you want to go into more of what we did there?

Hilary: Now was there radio on the plane at that point?

Bob: There were no radios on any airplanes in Alaska at that point, none. None, whatsoever, including everything out of Anchorage. Well, some military may have had some rudimentary stuff but there was really no, nothing. So I was very surprised and very disappointed when I found they were not going to put in radiotelephone. American Airlines had already applied for a station license in Fairbanks and got it: ground-air radiotelephone.

Augie: They did?

Bob: Yeah.

Augie: First time I ever heard that.

Bob: Yeah, but Pan American no. They were going to do it like they did with their over ocean flights and I said, "What?! You don't have room for radio operator?" "No. You're to teach the pilots."

Hilary: To (do Morse) code?

Bob: To code, yeah. So in 1932 that's what I did and it was pretty rough really. Some of the pilots didn't want anything to do with it and a few of them took to it very well, liked it.

Like Robbie Robbins. He was the (inaudible) and the brain. He could send with a key and the worse the weather was, the more he would send.

Hilary: And fly with the others?

Bob: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, anyhow...

Hilary: So the pilots themselves had to do the communication?

Augie: That's right. I led you astray this morning. I told Hilary that Pan Am had to have a CW (continuous wave which used Morse code) operator on every plane. I didn't know the pilots did that.

Bob: The pilots did it.

Augie: I didn't think a pilot was smart enough to do that.

Bob: No, by the way, I had to get them a license too. I had to get a (inaudible) radiotelegraph permit. Thirteen words a minute.

Augie: That took some doing.

Bob: Yeah. So anyhow, I was doing that for a couple of years. 1934, in the fall of '34, Pan Am paid a little attention to this, to their baby there in Alaska. They had been trying of course. Trippe's idea was to fly through Alaska and through Siberia to the Orient.

Hilary: Right.

Bob: And he sent up a vice president from New York, Bob Thatch, and that's written up in my little book. You got the magazine.

Hilary: Yes.

Bob: Incidentally, the radio telegraph story for the radio operators is written up in a Society of Wireless Pioneers.

Hilary: Oh, good.

Bob: Which I think I have a copy of that.

Hilary: Wonderful.

Bob: But you have to remind me to dig it out before you quit.

Hilary: Okay. When the pilots had to use their radio or the CW sets, who did they communicate with?

Bob: Me.

Hilary: And you were in Fairbanks?

Bob: In Fairbanks, one station, Fairbanks, that's all we had, 250-Watts CW, yeah.

Hilary: And what kinds of things did they communicate? How's the weather?

Bob: Mostly weather. That's primarily weather and "I'm landing at Ruby" or "I'm landing at Nome" or whatever, you know.

Augie: I didn't realize that program into Nome was actually Siberia but it makes sense because what's in Nome? But they ran that Pilgrim to Nome for years.

Bob: Yeah, that was part of the Star mail route contract.

Augie: Oh, I see, yeah.

Bob: That went to Bethel.

Hilary: Yeah.

Bob: We're kind of jumping around.

Hilary: This is great.

Bob: (We) get to the fall of '34 and he sent these guys up and he had gotten permission, Trippe had or somebody Pan Am had gotten permission, to go to Siberia and that is when we went and you got the little magazine that has that.

Hilary: I have the, no, I have the ACS WAMCATS newsletter. So I would like to get it.

Bob: Well. I have a copy of that I can you get you.

Hilary: Great.

Bob: But you got to remember to write and ask me.

Hilary: Okay.

Bob: That's in the Alaska Journal. That's Bob DeArmond's old...

Hilary: Okay.

Bob: So we flew over... we flew from Fairbanks to Nome and over to Siberia, (inaudible), and back to Nome, which had not yet burned down. It burned down that winter.

Hilary: Right. So you got to go on that trip?

Bob: I was on that trip. Yeah, I communicated. Besides our station in Fairbanks, I went on the marine frequencies and talked to the Signal Corps Station at Nome, which guarded the marine frequencies. So when we came back, we had a hard time getting from Norton Sound over to the Yukon. That's out in this area.

Hilary: Right.

Bob: And we scared up (inaudible) pretty much. I've forgotten who else was on that trip but it's all in this little magazine. But when they got to New York apparently Batch and others convinced Pan Am we needed some better equipment, and we needed a radio station, another one. Said you better put one over there on Norton Sound so you can see to get across...

Hilary: To get across.

Bob: And contact one. So they authorized me to put in a radio station at Koyuk.

Hilary: At where?

Bob: Koyuk.

Hilary: Koyuk.

Bob: K-O-Y-U-K.

Hilary: Yeah.

Bob: Which is, well, it's nearest the mainland and right in Norton Sound. There's a FFS station there now. But, so I got a 33-volt Kohler plant and a small transmitter and receiver Pan Am sent me, and Jerry Jones flew me over to Koyuk and we rented a cabin from an Eskimo. Pretty damn poor cabin, let me tell you that.

Hilary: And this was in the fall?

Bob: Cabin in the fall, yeah.

Augie: Sort of loose words for what it was.

Bob: Yeah, and Don Abel again acquired driftwood and put up some poles, and Don and I slept on a single bed. You know, these beds they used to have that had a little thing you pull up on the side and make it a little wider. Don and I slept in that schoolhouse for a week together and we were both big guys, you could hardly turn over. Anyhow we did. And we hired Jack Stewart... there's a picture of that station in one of the Alaskan books. I don't have any, but...

Hilary: Okay.

Bob: It's in his book and so KINU, the call letters -- we were in business and Fairbanks could talk to Koyuk. We hadn't put in anything else just the (inaudible), so then we got...I've forgotten, I get the order mixed up here a little bit, but I think next we put in Nome and then they sent us the two Electras. That's the biggest thing that ever happened to us. Twin-engine pilot, co-pilot and we had to put radio in those, but we made the co-pilot the radio operator then, which was better.

Hilary: How interesting. And so no more code at this point?

Bob: Still code.

Hilary: Still code?

Bob: Still code, still code.

Augie: These Electras are similar to Twin Beeches you see flying around now. They were about the same.

Bob: Yeah.

Hilary: Okay. Boy, that was a huge step up.

Bob: Yeah. During that winter, the winter of '34-'35, Chuck Huntley and I built similar little radio stations at Tanacross, Burwash Landing, Whitehorse, Skagway, and Juneau and these were all little bitty pip-squeak stations you know, Augie, 100 watts.

Augie: Throughout you (inaudible). I didn't realize.

Bob: The problem was to supply power for them, which we used a small core plant, rigged, up a switch, we had two 12-volt batteries for the transmitters and a 6-volt for the receiver and we'd charge the whole works at once and so on. So anyhow, in March 1935 the first Electra. Don Abel, meanwhile, had been moved down to Juneau and he was the guy who was in charge of the construction of the airport at Juneau. There was no airport. They worked there all winter.

Hilary: And Bob, these stations at Tanacross and all those, did you have a person at each one of those?

Bob: Oh, yes.

Hilary: So you had staff?

Bob: Yes indeed.

Hilary: You had to staff them?

Bob: Right. Jack Stewart went and married, but that other station, later on we tried – we always tried to get husband and wives because one could do the... feed the guy while he was on the air. So, yeah, and I could go out and say... later on, we built better buildings and so on – but these were all built in that rush period and we began our operation into Juneau from... it was to be a foreign air mail route from Fairbanks to Whitehorse to Juneau.

Hilary: Uh-huh.

Bob: And the only trouble with it was really the weather.

Hilary: I remember when Wien (Airlines) used to fly from Juneau to Whitehorse to Fairbanks in the early 70's and I was flying that route a lot at that point for business. So weather...

Bob: Well, Juneau is still a hard place to get in and out of, but with modern electronics you can get in and out of pretty near any weather.

Hilary: Yeah, that's so true. So were you still flying into Siberia at this point?

Bob: No, no.

Hilary: So that was just that one trip?

Bob: They tried and apparently something came unglued with the Russians. There was no more of that.

Hilary: Yeah.

Bob: At that time...

Hilary: But you had... you were flying to Nome for airmail at that point or not yet?

Bob: We were flying at that time. I've got a map on the radio I'm going to show you that we were flying. The routes were, well, Juneau, Whitehorse, Fairbanks... Fairbanks, Tanana, Nulato, Nome, and then from Fairbanks down to Bethel through McGrath and Flat, and then they had another route which was only flown once a month. That was up into the Chandalar country up north.

Augie: Didn't you... was Prince Rupert an alternate stop? I stopped at Prince Rupert one time.

Bob: Prince Rupert never had an airport.

Augie: It didn't?

Bob: Huh-uh.

Augie: Figment of my imagination. I remember stopping at Whitehorse in that Electra.

Bob: Yeah, you did, but...

Augie: Not Prince Rupert?

Bob: No, Prince Rupert was much further down and Ketchikan didn't have any airport either.

Hilary: Right. So then this route went on, you had to staff it. You had to get power for it.

Bob: We had to feed them. We had to order for them to get it in the summer all that, yeah.

Hilary: Yeah.

Bob: Yeah, it was pretty good. We got really good young men. The depression was helping. You could get people. And we got some very good people. In fact, we had trouble with only one man. His name was Sisonvine (sp?) at Tanacross and he was there with his wife and one of our guys stopped there once and she told them that her husband was getting very aggravated and upset. So anyhow, we finally had to take him out. I don't think he was...he was sort... he was off his rocker really. Good operator.

Hilary: So this was still all continuous wave at this point?

Bob: All continuous wave.

Hilary: And how long did that go on?

Bob: Well, with Pan American and Alaska it went on well until the war and then Pan Am still stayed on radio telegraph and carried a radio operators on DC-3's, S-43's which were on the run from Seattle to Ketchikan and Juneau, on the S-42. It was all radiotelegraph, but they did have supplemental telephones they used with control towers. No, Pan Am never left radiotelegraph until after the war and I was in on that too, but that's another thing.

Hilary: That's the next jump, yeah.

Bob: That's long after the war.

Hilary: So this was through '35 (that) you got the route in to Southeast and mail routes, and then you continued on with Pan Am at that point?

Bob: Yeah, but in about '38 we started operating from Juneau to Seattle, Juneau - Ketchikan - Seattle. That was with an amphibian, S-43. And that carried a radio operator also... In fact some of our ground operators left and became flight radio operators. Then (we) went from that to the S-42, and the four-engine flying boat. Then they went to... well, we had a DC-3 for a while which was great, but Pan Am took that and sent it to China. China

needed it. China National Aviation Corporation was, of course, fighting the Japanese and then they gave us LodeStars.

Hilary: Now, LodeStar...

End Tape 1, Side A

Tape 1, Side B

Bob: (Had a) range that the DC-3 had, but here's something important: when we got the LodeStars, Crosson and others decided to go inland, not go down the coast. So we built radio stations in Prince George, BC; Taku Landing, BC; and Dease Lake, BC. And at those three stations we put in beacons, thousand-watters, so the radio operators all had direction finders on there and we were beginning to get on instruments. So you could get in and out. You could get to Prince George pretty well, but, again, getting to Juneau was a bottleneck.

Hilary: Yeah, yeah. So that was a whole switch then in technology at that point?

Bob: Yeah, they were a lot faster airplanes too. You got there faster.

Augie: I wasn't as air-sick as long as I was in the Electra.

Bob: They were a little bit faster, yeah, they were. Okay. So that was a little running on... (So) on Dec. 7, '41: as I said, almost immediately Pan Am became a military contractor for NATS, Naval Air Transport Service. And all the people that worked for Pan Am were automatically in the service. You know, you were in no danger of being drafted if you were in Pan Am.

Hilary: So were you still civilian at that point then?

Bob: I sure was. I was still communications superintendent. I got that title after McKenzie, who I mentioned earlier, in November 1932 he got drunk and rode around on the running board of a... I think, it was Thanksgiving Day, but anyhow he got pneumonia and he almost died. They sent him back to Miami and left me there. Of course, in the meantime I had hired other guys for these other stations. So it was about six months later before they gave me the...

Hilary: You got the title?

Bob: The title. I guess I got a small increase. I have forgotten.

Hilary: So at this point then, Pan Am was on contract or part of NATS?

Bob: On signed contract.

Hilary: And you were still a civilian but in no danger of being drafted?

Bob: That's right. I was 35 years old, married and two children, but we left out some things here because in 1934 Hap Arnold led a flight of the B-10 bombers up to Fairbanks and Anchorage. But on that flight, all they had arranged for themselves was to communicate with the Signal Corps stations, and different frequencies and people didn't know anything about weather or nothing. So when they got to Juneau, our people got a hold of them and they carried their communication over with a man named McClellan, Harold McClellan. He was a major, I think, at the time and they carried... two planes carried radio. One of them was a fellow named Vance Muir (who) was the operator, and we got a hold of... I had our guys get a hold of Vance Muir or it turned out to be Vance Muir, and so they then they used our facilities from Juneau to Whitehorse, and Burwash Landing and Whitehorse, Fairbanks. Weather reports, you know, everything they needed. Well, this impressed McClellan somewhat, and I guess Hap Arnold -- I don't know. So when the war began, well actually in January of '42, they first came after me and wanted me... offered a major's commission and they would send me up to Alaska to put in the same sort of stuff.

Hilary: But you were still... you were in Alaska? Or you were going to school? You were still in Alaska at that time?

Bob: No, I was in Seattle.

Hilary: So you were going to school again?

Bob: Now wait a minute, no, no. No, I said after the war.

Hilary: After, sorry.

Bob: Yeah, so well, there were a lot of pressures on me. My family, a lot of people wanted me to stay with Pan Am but they began putting, you know, Pan Am in New York. And Colonel McClellan by that time went up to see Blurs (sp?) who was my boss, communications engineer of Pan American, and I have a letter in there somewhere... anyhow they wanted... he got Pan Am to agree to let me go if I would go. So I didn't do anything until the Japs bombed Dutch Harbor and then I thought, well, hell's bells, I better do it. By that time, they offered me a commission of captain but I was to be put in charge of the whole territory of Alaska (for) communications (for the) Air Force. Army Airways Communication System.

Hilary: So the AACS.

Bob: AACS.

Hilary: Right.

Bob: Not ACS (but the) Army Airways Communication. So I went up there, I guess, in August. I signed up and they flew me up. In fact I went up on a NATS plane.

Hilary: So this was, I'm sorry Bob, which year?

Bob: '42.

Hilary: '42, okay.

Bob: My headquarters were in Anchorage, Elmendorf Field.

Hilary: Right.

Bob: And I was sent to see General Buckler, Butler.

Hilary: Buckner?

Bob: No, no. Butler.

Hilary: Butler.

Bob: Butler. He was Commanding General 11th Air Force. Buckner was Commanding General of the whole works.

Hilary: That's right.

Augie: Buckner was Army. Butler was Air Force.

Hilary: Butler was Air Force, yeah.

Bob: Yeah. So anyhow, Butler had his office in the top floor of one of the new hangars that had been built at Elmendorf and I went up there. I'm a civilian and all I got on is a uniform and I don't know anything about the military.

Augie: Assuming all those guys... you knew how to do it, huh?

Bob: I didn't know anything. So I finally got there and went to the sergeant (who) said, "Wait here. The general will see you." And I waited went in, and I can remember it to this day. I finally got in... (inaudible) to shake hands with me and he didn't stand up. I was standing there and he said, "Are you Colonel Sirmeyer's (sp?) replacement?" And I said, "Yes, sir." And he said, "Do you know if I have to take every damn station you got for the Aleutians, you got to do it?" And I said, "Yes, sir." And I stood there, and after two or three minutes he finally said, "That's all."

Hilary: That was it?

Bob: That was it. The next day I took off for Ketchikan and Juneau and put one of them at Fort Glenn and one at some place out on the Aleutians. That was what I did. That was my beginning with him.

Hilary: So how did that leave Juneau and...

Bob: They still had other stuff. They had Pan Am.

Hilary: Okay.

Bob: Yeah. Well this became a big problem. Hilary, it was how to integrate all these different things. The Navy had stuff. The Air Force had some other stuff besides AACS. CAA (Civil Aeronautics Administration) was in quite a bit already.

Hilary: Was it?

Bob: And... you had the Department of Transport in Canada. It became a big hassle really and me in the middle of it. And on top of that the CAA guys were very aggressive in that they wanted to... they had started building stations in Alaska and they wanted to build them all to statewide specs, everything immaculate, you know. For instance, they got Cordova built and they were missing two lead in insulators for the antennae and they wouldn't put it on the air until they got them, and it made me so damn mad. Stuff like that, but it got worse. One time I went with Marshall Hoppin, who was then the head of CAA in Alaska and who else, I've forgotten, but we went down to Edmonton to see General Gaffney, who was in charge of the northwest operation. And I can tell you this, the argument got pretty severe about (whether) AACS was going to take over some facility from the CAA asset band (as) accorded by Presidential Order number 6734 and that the War Department... that the civil facilities were subordinate to the War Department.

Hilary: Sure, yeah.

Bob: For instance, at that time CAA turned over to the AACS their stations at San Francisco and Honolulu .

Hilary: Wow. Uh-huh.

Bob: But they would not let us run any of these (or) integrate any of their facilities.

Hilary: In Alaska?

Bob: They wanted to stay separate. It got so bad that Marshall Hoppin said to General Gaffney, "The CAA is not responsible to the President, it's responsible to the Congress."

Augie: Oh, boy.

Bob: Yeah, and they never did completely back down from their position. But anyhow, we got things pretty well put together.

Hilary: So when these different systems were in place, they were redundant in some cases.

Bob: Some cases. Some they weren't. But for instance, the problem was to get the kind of service you needed from the stations and my job was to try to get... for instance, down the Aleutians we wanted a report from all stations and we wanted them in sequence. We wanted regular times and so on. So we had quite a time, but the Navy was very good. We had some differences but anyhow things got going pretty good. And then when we got the Japs off Kiska and Attu, and Butler left for some place. But I have a commendation from him, which was very unusual for a civilian guy to get. Actually it was recommendation for a Legion of Merit, but Buckner turned it down, I was told. They gave one to his postmaster but not to the guys who were doing the work. But anyhow, so at that time I said to my AACS bosses, let me out of Alaska ... let's see what Europe is like. And I got orders to proceed to Seattle and then I got orders to proceed to Asheville, North Carolina, which was the headquarters of AACS, and there I got my new orders to go to India.

Hilary: India.

Bob: Yeah.

Hilary: That's right, and you spent some time in India.

Bob: India and China, both.

Hilary: Right.

Augie: What year were you in China?

Bob: I was there from June '44... well, I was in India and China from June, no, from May '44 until April '45, almost a year.

Augie: What part of China were you in?

Bob: Well, at first I was in... I was a lot in China and not seeing anybody. My headquarters were in India first, and I had stations in China, several of them, including (inaudible).

Augie: Did you deal with the Navy in China? My brother put up a communications system in China.

(Tape skipped)

Bob: Okay.

Hilary: Uh-huh.

Bob: So I hurriedly got out of service. If I had stayed in two months more I would have gotten that advancement to colonel that you get automatically. They pass that... but anyhow I didn't. I went back to Pan Am (inaudible), whole new thing. Aren't you getting bored?

Augie: No, I'm not. I'm learning all kinds of stuff. I'm getting my camera right now. I want to take pictures.

Hilary: Yeah and I have (one too)... So you ended up in San Francisco then?

Bob: Yeah, sure did.

Hilary: And did you get back up into Alaska then?

Bob: No. Alaska was part of my responsibility then with Pan Am, but Pan Am was itself withdrawing from Alaska.

Hilary: Right.

Bob: It wasn't doing much and I was concentrating almost totally on getting the routes running to the Orient and to Australia and New Zealand.

Hilary: Oh, boy.

Bob: And I went on all those surveys.

(Tape stopped. Restarted after a several-minute break.)

Augie: ...and it didn't change a thing. Then the girls would go all over town. Then they weren't controlled. My wife was an Army nurse. She worked at the hospital there and she's a real tough orthodox lady and she didn't believe in prostitution, but she said we tested those girls every month. They were clean. When they disappeared, when they dispersed them, she lost control of them. So absolutely the wrong thing to do.

Bob: I'll have to tell you a funny thing that happened to this guy MacKenzie (sp?) who came up. He had been in Puerto Rico for a long time. He was an excellent guy, but he and I were staying in the Nordale Hotel and, I don't know, we had been there a couple of weeks. We had been working hard. So then one day he said, "Do you know anything about this red light district?" And I said, "Well, yeah. I'm pretty familiar. I put a lot of radios down there." "Well," he said, "I think I'll take a trip down there." And I remember he pulled up one of his socks and put some money in his sock and he left. And this was on a Saturday night or something like that. Anyhow Sunday he didn't show up. Monday he didn't show up. And Joe Crosson said to me, "Where the hell is Mac?" And I said, "Damn if I know. The last time I saw him, he put some money in his sock and he was

going down to see what the girls were like.” We went down there and so we finally found him. He was still drunk. They used to get them drunk and get all their money.

Augie: Oh, sure.

Bob: But anyhow that’s the last time we had trouble with him down there, but the next time he got (inaudible).

Hilary: I want to go back to the stations that you had like in Tanacross and those places. What would a typical day be like for those operators there? I mean, how much of the day would they actually be sending and receiving information.

Bob: Well, in the first place, let me tell you, you mention Tanacross. I’ll tell you. This was a cabin -- Ole Fredrickson was the trapper that we rented it from -- and their typical day was to keep the fires going, be sure they had enough wood. If it was a married couple, the wife usually did the cooking and so on. And they had a first schedule for weather report and then...

Hilary: Which would be like in the morning they would...

Bob: Uh-huh. And then if there was to be a flight, they would tell them, and then they would tell them when the flight left you know, and they started talking to the airplane and (inaudible).

Hilary: Right.

Bob: And they would stay with it as long as there were any airplanes flying. In the wintertime it was pretty easy because the days were short and they only flew in the daylight. In the summertime it got to a real... for instance, me in Fairbanks, I’d be alone there, although I had other operators. I used to hire Signal Corps guys to come out and stand watch for me because somebody would be going to Point Barrow or taking a missionary down to Point Hope, or some damn thing, and he’d decide to fly all night, you know. So we had to stay open as long as they were flying.

Hilary: And so you would get information that the plane had left?

Bob: Yeah.

Hilary: And how did that come to you?

Bob: How did that come to me?

Hilary: Yeah. How did you get that information that the plane had left?

Bob: Operations guy or dispatcher would tell me.

Hilary: And so would they have... would it be radio, Morse code? I mean how did?

Bob: How would I get the?

Hilary: Yeah.

Bob: Sitting in Fairbanks?

Hilary: Yeah.

Bob: I'm in Fairbanks. I would see the airplane leave.

Hilary: So, but if they were leaving from a remote spot, say Nome. You wouldn't get that information?

Bob: Oh, yes I would, right away, soon as they left.

Hilary: And so that would come over ACS?

Bob: Oh, no.

Hilary: You had your own?

Bob: We worked point-to-point too, oh yeah.

Hilary: Oh.

Bob: Yeah, all stations. That was their main job was to...for instance, as Augie well knows, HF (high frequency radio) can be kind of erratic.

Augie: Tell me about it. I used to copy press every day on that stuff.

Bob: So, for instance, I lost track of what I was going to say there.

Hilary: If a plane left Nome...

Bob: Yeah, if a plane... if Jorie Jones was on at Nome and he was going to go to Teller, they would tell us he was going to Teller and we would try to talk to him while he was going over to Teller. Not too successfully all the time, but we would try. And similarly if a plane was leaving Juneau going somewhere they would tell us, but we concerned ourselves primarily with the flights that were approaching us or needed our information.

Hilary: Uh-huh.

Bob: Weather primarily. We talked, we had a correspondence course in weather observation from Pan American and everybody took that, pretty good.

Augie: You know, there were fadeouts where you wouldn't receive or transmit. You wouldn't receive anything. Did you... how did you handle that when you'd absolutely lose control of point-to-point in planes?

Bob: No. I'm glad you mentioned that. When we were getting the licenses for the stations from the FCC, I tried to get a low frequency authorized also for point-to-point.

Augie: How low?

Bob: Anything below 500, let's say.

Augie: Oh, yeah.

Bob: Okay, but we couldn't. The only aeronautic frequency, the lowest one they had was 1638. All right. Now we put up T-antennas and pretty good grounds. (Aside: look at the) swans going by (outside the window of his house.)

Hilary: Yeah.

Bob: Those are the ones that go back to your country (Alaska, in the summers.)

Hilary: Trumpeters? Tundras?

Bob: Oh, they're Tundras.

Hilary: Wow. Fabulous.

Bob: We put up T-antennas... is all we had cut for a particular frequency. I have forgotten what good grounds... and we found we could communicate between each of our stations in 1638. So if the Electra came along, for instance, where... Fairbanks would normally work Tanacross, Burwash, and Whitehorse, and Juneau and get all their weather. Each guy would relay it in.

Augie: Oh, yeah. So it really would work on 1600?

Bob: We were lucky. It was low enough for the ground wave, it did work. Now the exception to that -- Juneau to Whitehorse -- over mountain range was a tough cookie, you know.

Augie: Still is.

Bob: Yeah, but we got by there. We had built a radio station in Taku Pass on Canyon Island primarily for weather, but we found that Taku could work Whitehorse when Juneau couldn't. So we had ... and Taku was only 30 miles from Juneau. So that is what we got by on for a long time. Oh yeah, early on I tried to get local from point-to-point but Pan Am wouldn't go after it for me and not until after the Carnegie...

Augie: The statesiders didn't help you much, did they any? Too grounded in their old traditions.

Bob: When the Carnegie Report came out, I put some like lines under it (that) said "Ludicrous and (inaudible). This is what I've been trying to tell you."

Hilary: And when was that?

Bob: Oh, I don't know, before the war.

Hilary: Uh-huh.

Bob: Yeah. I've got a copy of it somewhere around here.

Augie: Did you get involved in that program that Dr. Burkner was involved in at the University of Alaska?

Bob: Yeah.

Augie: (Yehudi)? where they swept between 500 clear up to 14?

Bob: I didn't get involved in it. It was his report that I used.

Augie: Yeah, yeah, okay, that's the one.

Bob: Yeah.

Hilary: And why was the FCC opposed to low frequency?

Bob: It wasn't FCC. It was...

Bob: Lee didn't understand that and people didn't know. This was one of the reasons, well, this is one of the reasons why so many people came to Alaska from the states and didn't understand that sometimes you can't use HF up here.

Hilary: Right.

Bob: For instance, I remember meeting a Navy captain on a ship coming up from, I don't know where) who said, "Well, you just got to find the right frequency." I said uh-uh.

Hilary: Uh-uh: not here.

Augie: Let me tell you a story of what used to happen up here. You'd be transmitting back and forth shortwave and you'd lose it. It was gone. So the common, the general assumption was your radio went haywire. So they'd take the radio all apart and two weeks later they would put it back together and it would work because the fadeout was over. That happened to me a couple of times.

Bob: This guy McKenzie... I didn't mention, incidentally, in '38 when I was in Fairbanks - '38? Anyhow, I built a Ham radio station there so I knew a little about the fadeouts so called... but McKenzie, he had brought with him, of course, the little station we built in Fairbanks (which) had two receivers, pretty good ones. And one morning I came out there and I was a few minutes behind McKenzie. This was soon after he had gotten there. And he said, "Something has gone wrong with our receivers." And I said, "Well Mac, take it easy." He said, "I can't hear a damn here thing on here. They've both gone. How can that happen?" And I said, "There just isn't any bouncing off the ionosphere right now." And he said he tried...

Hilary: Weren't you involved with that situation in Valdez and Cordova where there had been a radio blackout and then there had been fear when those two stations didn't come back on that the Japanese had gone in there?

Bob: I wasn't involved in that, but I know about that.

Hilary: Yes.

Bob: John Dudley writes about that.

Hilary: Yeah, They had to go in and check, and found out it was just equipment failure.

Augie: The transmitter didn't work.

Hilary: Yeah. Yeah.

Augie: Yeah, there was a lot of stuff went on. Well, you have all John Dudley stuff?

Hilary: I do.

End of Tape 1, Side B