

THE BILL BUTKOVICH STORY

BILL WAS IN ALASKA IN 1938 WHEN HE WENT WORK IN THE ALASKA JUNEAU MINE FOR 13 MONTHS. THEN IN THE SPRING OF 1939 HE WENT TO ANCHORAGE WHERE HE WORKED IN SEVERAL OTHER MINES UNTIL HE DECIDED TO ENLIST IN THE ARMY ON MAY 5, 1942. WHEN HE REPORTED TO THE 31st MATERIEL SQUADRON AT FORT RICHARDSON THEY WERE GETTING READY TO LEAVE SO HE GOT OUT OF BASIC TRAINING. ABOUT MIDNIGHT ONE NIGHT HE WAS PUT ON A BOAT BUT WASN'T TOLD WHERE HE WAS GOING. AFTER A VERY ROUGH SEA VOYAGE, WHEN HE WAS AS SICK "AS A POISONED DOG" HE GOT TO UMNAK ON MAY 20. HE WAS BILLETED IN A QUONSET HUT WHEN ONE DAY HIS SERGEANT SAID "BILL, YOU'RE GOING TO BE A REFUELER" TO WHICH BILL REPLIED "THE HELL YOU SAY! ... I DON'T KNOW THE FIRST THING ABOUT IT" THE SERGEANT REPLIED "YOU'LL LEARN." SO LEARN HE DID. AROUND THE 6th OF JUNE 1942, THE JAPS HIT DUTCH HARBOR AND THINGS STARTED HAPPENING. "WE HAD A COUPLE OF B-26s AND A FEW P-40s AND LATER B-24S, B-17s AND P-38s AND ALSO SOME P-39s WHICH WE GASSED FROM DRUMS. THE NEXT DAY TWO OR THREE JAP ZERO'S CAME TO VISIT. ONE STRAFED THE RUNWAY BUT THE OTHERS WERE BUSY GETTING OUT OF THE WAY OF OUR P-40s. I THINK OUR GUYS GOT A COUPLE OF THEM. CLAIRE CHENNAULT'S SON WAS THERE WITH A SQUADRON OF P-40s WITH THE YELLOW TIGER LOGO ON THEIR PLANES. THERE WAS A CANADIAN OUTFIT ALSO. THE B-26s HAD TORPEDOES AND WENT OUT LOOKING FOR JAP CARRIERS IN THE FOG AND CLOUDS. SOMETIME IN THE LATTER PART OF JULY WE WENT TO ADAK AND AT ABOUT MIDNIGHT DRAGGED OUR GEAR IN THE MUD TO A TENT FILLED WITH GIs. THE TENT WAS PUT FOUR FEET INTO THE GROUND AND SAND HEAPED AROUND IT SO THE ALEUTIAN WILLIWAWS WOULDN'T BLOW IT DOWN. THIS WAS OUR HOME FOR THE NEXT 15 MONTHS. WE HAD MORE EQUIPMENT ON ADAK THAN BEFORE. THERE WAS A 4000 GALLON TANKER AND THREE OR FOUR 2000 GALLON TANKERS. A D8 CAT WAS USED TO PULL THE 4000 GALLON TANKER BECAUSE THE TRUCK TRACTORS COULDN'T WORK IN THE MUSKEG SWAMP AND BLUISH CLAY UNDERNEATH THE MUSKEG. I EVEN GOT STUCK A FEW TIMES WITH "CAT". I IMAGINE THAT IF SERGEANT MARTIN WHETSTONE WERE THERE AT THE TIME HE WILL REMEMBER ALL OF THIS. THE WEATHER WAS THE WORST I HAD EVER SEEN. MOST OF THE TIME IT WAS OVERCAST BUT OCCASIONALLY WE WOULD HAVE A DAY OR TWO OF SUNSHINE. THAT TOUR OF DUTY WAS A GREAT EXPERIENCE. WE MOVED THOUSANDS OF GALLONS OF GASOLINE OUT OF BARRELS 12 HOURS AT A TIME. MOSTLY AT NIGHT. WHEN THE B-24s WENT ON A MISSION TO KISKA THEY WERE LOADED WITH 2140 GALLONS (APPROX. 14000 POUNDS) IN THE WING TANKS AND ONE BOMB BAY TANK. THEY WERE SO HEAVY ON TAKE-OFF THAT THEY WOULD USE THE WHOLE RUN-WAY OF STEEL MATTING. JUST BARELY CLEARING THE LOW BUSHES BEFORE THEY GOT OVER THE WATER. I WATCHED THEM STILL CLIMBING BEFORE THEY WOULD GET OUT OF SIGHT. IF THE ENGINES WOULD HAVE FALTERED THEY FOR SURE WOULD HAVE GONE INTO THE FRIGID

WATER. I HELPED FILL MANY OF COLONEL EARECKSON'S PLANES AS IS DESCRIBED IN THE BOOK "THE THOUSAND MILE WAR". I WAS VERY PROUD TO BE PART OF THE ALEUTIAN FRONT AND THE PART I PLAYED IN IT.

EDITORS NOTE: BILL PRESENTLY LIVES IN DUBOIS, WYOMING IN A HOME WHERE HE CAN LOOK ACROSS THE MOUNTAIN RANGE AND SEE ELK AND MOUNTAIN SHEEP ROAMING AROUND.

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This story takes place on Adak, AK. Adak was further back up the chain towards mainland Alaska from Shemya, and was often used as a "half-way" point for pilots en-route to Shemya. Sounds like the same weather, however! Still makes for an interesting story. George Smith