

Call number: 94-13-18 PT. 2

Name and place: Fred Hupprich, interviewed by Margaret van Cleave. Louella Hupprich [wife] is present in the room.

Date: June 7, 1994 recorded at home of interviewee

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Series: Pioneer Tapes

Margaret introduces the second tape with Fred Hupprich who continues telling about his working between a couple of freighting companies.

About in 1952, Fred's brother and he decided to get out of trucking business and try booze business so they bought a bar in Nenana. Prior to that, in 1944, Fred had started taking flying lessons. He started working for Alaska Airlines and got 6 hours in with the meager income he got. Then he turned 18 and had to sign up for Military that took him to Anchorage for 6 months at first in April of 1945, and the rest of the 18 months he was in 6 Mile out of Fairbanks. He got out of the Army in November of 1945 and didn't have work so he worked odd jobs like hauling snow for the city.

In 1952, he picked up the bar business and finished his flight training. He and his brother had 2 or 3 different airplanes over the course of 6 to 8 years. The bar business wasn't doing well enough in order to Fred and his brother George's family live on it. George didn't want to start driving again but Fred gave it another go and drove for Mitchell again.

3:11 In winter of 1955-1956, Fred started with Alaska Freight Lines again and Al [Albert] Ghezzie and Alaska Freight Lines got the contract of supplying the Distant Early Warning Line sites up north with fuel. There was a winter road through Circle City and they hauled barrels of fuel with Cat trains over land.

In summer of 1956, Fred hauled regular freight and cargo out of Valdez and Anchorage, and that fall, AFL started a contract hauling more supplies for the DEW line sites and decided to go through Eagle, Alaska. They built a nice bridge there and started clearing a road. Fred started with driving a supply truck there, hauling mail and groceries. Then finally he decided to work driving one of the 12 big Mack trucks that could haul about 200 tons each. They had tractors hauling bobsleds too.

5:16 They were hauling rebar steel and they loaded equipment on the river bank in Eagle, about 8 miles upriver from Eagle, and they started the winter trail. It was 1,900 to 2,000 miles to where their first drop off point was. They drove over land and that winter Fred mostly drove a Cat bulldozer that was ploughing snow. The Mack trucks were rubber tired and there were 6 trucks in each train [Fred gives the specifics of the trucks.] Prior to leaving Eagle, there were Cats that pulled bobsleds that were loaded with 50 tons in each sled, and pulled by T-8 tractors, that made trail ahead of them. They were on the road for 3 months and they went 20-30 miles a day. The tractor that Fred was driving was a light T-8 and he had to help trucks to get over hills.

They got to Coronation Gulch, which is up in Northwest Territories, and they were to deliver their freight of rebar steel and concrete to site 14 at Victoria Island. On their way to Coronation Gulf, they hit a lead in the ice and one of their trucks fell through. They didn't lose it, however, and the Cat train got their load so it wouldn't bear down on the ice that was only 5-foot thick saltwater ice which is softer than freshwater ice. The bobsleds that were hauled by cats distributed weight better.

9:00 The trucks got back to mainland and started taking their trucks back. They run out of fuel and they stopped by an airfield where big airplanes could land and an airplane picked up the crew. Next summer, Alaska Freight Lines came with barges to get the trucks to Seattle. Fred made \$6000 dollars in 3 months which he considers good money, but he bought a new car and the money was spent fast.

Margaret asks what months that happened, and Fred tells that it was in winter of 1956-1957. They started from Eagle close to freezeup time, around late September or October, and when the river froze up, they had a crew and they made an ice bridge by laying brush and spruce trees on the ice and pumping water over it to freeze it. They kept building it up until it was 5 feet thick and big enough for all the heavy loads. Margaret asks how wide the bridge was and Fred tells that it was around 150-200 feet. It held the trucks up well.

12:21 After all that happened, Fred drove until 1960 when he was sick of driving and decided to do something different. Fred's brother George sold the bar in Nenana and moved back to Fairbanks where he started a liquor store at Minnie Street and Steese Highway. Fred started a truck and tractor business of his own and he built a little shop to do it. He specialized in landscaping and digging basements, and putting in sewer systems. He ran that business until the flood year of 1967 when he sold the business.

Fred “got shiny eyes” and thought that he better get married too, so he looked her up and talked her into getting married. He decided to find a good, steady job with retirement behind it so he went over and got a job with State Highway Department in the spring of 1967. He worked there for about 5 years, operating equipment.

14:48 Fred was tired of operating equipment and his friend, George van Wide, a regional supervisor of sports fishing, offered him a job as a mechanic. They had a little shop at Creamer’s Field and they needed a man to operate outboard motors and do welding. Fred accepted the job and got transferred from the Highway Department.

They didn’t have anything to work with, so Fred had to bring in his own tools. Slowly they got more tools and over the course of years from 1972 to 1985, Fred built the shop into a nice maintenance shop for sport fishing equipment. He was the only worker there, so he was his own boss.

16:42 In 1985 Fred’s supervisor George van Wyke decided to retire and they sent a new man in from Juneau. The first thing he said to Fred was that he hates sports fishing and he’s a commercial fish scientist. He was unsociable and kept things to himself and in Fred couldn’t get along with him. Fred’s job was made to include maintaining the grounds like mowing lawn and planting flowers, and Fred declined. He had about 16 years with the fish and game and 5 years with the highway department so he decided to retire from working for the State. His wife worked and they had plenty of money.

Years later, he got social security and that’s how they are living today.

Margaret thanks for the interview.

[End of the recording.]