

Jacque Bunting

on

AVIATION IN KODIAK ALASKA

1966 -1996

By

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The following autobiographical interview was held on April 19, 1996 in Mr Bunting's motorhome while it was parked on the airfield at Kodiak State airport. Mr. Bunting is currently the bird control contractor for the State of Alaska at Kodiak. He provides this service anytime a commercial airliner is landing at Kodiak. Mr. Bunting has been involved in aviation in Alaska, and Kodiak in particular for the last 30 years. He knows and remembers many of the great aviation pioneers of Alaska. The interviewer is Kevin McCabe, pilot for a local air service and History of Alaska student. This project is undertaken for History of Alaska class at Kodiak College; Dr. Gary Stevens professor.

K.M. So this is an interview with Mr Jacque Bunting, a local Kodiak gentleman who has been involved with Kodiak aviation for the last thirty years; or at least been on the Island that long.

J.B. about that yea.

K.M. Jacque maybe you could start by telling me a little about yourself.

J.B. Well, as far as Kodiak goes I came here in 1966 out of Vietnam with the Navy and aviation-wise of course we had a little flying club on the base and at that time we had like seven aircraft and even one float plane. A little Seabee and I had my private ticket so I was allowed to fly all of these plus the T34 that we had from Navy Whidby. and as I stayed here I eventually got more ratings and unfortunately in 1969 I got transferred back to sub school new london, where I retired from...and came back here. And as soon as I came back I got a job with at that time Kodiak Airways. which used to run the Grumman Goose and the Widgeons and some float planes and land planesI not only got attached to them, I got the rest of my ratings ah up through instructor. And then the FAA cane along and said hey why don't you be an action prevention counselor for us, so I did that. and then eventually Kodiak western (went to Kodiak Western from Kodiak Airways) and eventually they sold out to - and I'm totally confused as to who they sold out to -...Sea Air I believe. Took them over.

K.M. Oh Sea Air out of Anchorage.

J.B. Anchorage yea - of course they're long gone now.

and then ahh during that time I was flying just doing instructional work and I helped paul Buker for a while --

K.M. Paul was ?

J.B. FlyRight and then ahh...after his untimely passing why, I did some instruction for him

and some other flying for him and then at that point well - lets go back to Kodiak

Western I stayed at Kodiak the first couple of years then I went to the bay area,

Bristol Bay, King Salmon and Dillingham, and became the area manger for the

airlines there. By that time we were a 121 operation, airlines. and I had King Salmon

and Dillingham although I mostly stayed in King Salmon. and, ah...out of there we

flew the 207's (Cessnas), we had a Volpar, we had a big single otter, a Grumman

Goose over there, and ah...we had the US mail contract so we serviced all the

villages on the - pretty well the peninsula over there. Then ah...after that, in late

seventies Kodiak Western at that point decided to sell out, so most of the stations were

closed. King salmon and Dillingham. and ...those people found other jobs, and it was

sort of at that point I said well i'm going to do something else, and the FAA had come

and said why don't you be our pilot examiner, so I started doing that um...and

accident prevention stayed there - accident prevention up to today.

K.M. That's pretty much when you moved back to Kodiak then - same time....

J.B. Yea 77, but... only I was over there, my family was all here.. kids were in school and you know...rather than disrupt them. So the wife came over in the summer with a couple of the kids ones that weren't at scout camp and this, and she'd stay a week or two, and um - Pretty isolated over there - but the people are nice, the general people. Through the years, when I go to Anchorage and go through that terminal over there, and there's people that say "Hey Jack how're ya doin'" and I look around and... I've got to go back into my brain and say "who is this." And then in a minute I'll figure out who it is. The famous Herman brothers from Naknak and King Salmon, and Igiagick that sits up on Illiamna, that little village up there. Ah... I have never straightened them out over the years, there's about three or four brothers - And Herman Herman just died, and there's Henry Herman, and there's Harold Herman - And... I have an awfull time keeping them straight. But the last time (I was) in Anchorage - ah - Henry was there with his wife, and they have a daughter that's um - I'll say crippled, ah sitting in the movie there with that little off seat, and we just went to see the movie - something to do, and the lights came on and this guy say's "Jack!" and it was good old Henry. So happy to see me... after all these years. But.. aviation's been good to me. I still get a little rumped when people do things wrong and as you know I've been one of those that will call you up and

friendly say "why did this happen?" And that's the way aviation is. The idea behind it all... living in Kodiak and all over, pretty well, Alaska, is to keep aviation safe. We all have accidents we've all lost good friends ah.. I know, you know, on this island many people that have been lost. And even though I'm an accident guy and I know the feds. are investigating and all that ...um one of the big ones we just had, I finally walked up to the operator probably three weeks after it happened, ..And I know the feds have talked to him, and the NTSB has talked to him, and they've looked at the records, and all this and people have gone and ah...but by that time you can get the person to honestly sit down and evaluate what has happened. There's nothing that's going to correct it except maybe some procedures in the company, but...you're not going to bring the people back. But at least the operator...whosoever air service it is. Will sit down and re-evaluate his training program. Re-evaluate his thoughts on weather. What's the limits going to be?

K.M. Right

J.B. I mean, we know, out here it's for you guy's, is what a mile?

K.M. Well 500' and 2 (miles visibility).

J.B. 500 and 2 ya. So. But we know that other people, and not necessarily on this island are flying less than that, and not staying clear of the clouds. They're pushing it.

K.M. Kodiak Western, they pretty well had what Penn Air has now... The peninsula and Kodiak and ah...

J.B. Yeh. Penn Air of course came off from Peninsula Airways and that's why you're seeing all the Cherokees (Piper airplanes) We didn't have any Cherokees. um.. we were talking the category of the 206/207 up through the Goose. And then we had the 401/402, and then we got a Martin 404, and then we went to a DC4 and then ah... that was sort of about, at the bitter end there. um... I don't know what happened to that airplane... the DC4 was sold to somebody. The Martin blew an engine and then went south to be sold to somebody else. The geoses were bought by employees. Hal bought one. um

K.M. Hal is Hal Dierich?

J.B. Yes

K.M. Is that when he started Hal's Air Service?

J.B. Right

K.M. You worked with him too?

J.B. Right, and then I worked with um ...after Hal, and his passing, I didn't do much except for FlyRight. And um.. I didn't do any of their air taxi, I did some of their check pilot duties, I did some of their teaching, um Fred Patterson to fly floats, um I think he had the rating, but he didn't have a lot of time. So I worked with him for a while. And I taught a lot of other people to fly floats, Captain Crumm from the Coast

Guard. And I sort of hung around after that...Hal upset me cause of losing him...and the business went under real quick. um although something unique about that... is the fact that when somebody perishes in an aircraft accident...and if you're in the business with the guy as far as collecting bills and trying to get everything done and and all this; and closing the business up to everybodys satisfaction.. We ended up with no lawsuits and we had 100% collection on all the bills. Because the gentleman was liked so much. Everybody wanted to make sure his widow got what she deserved... and they did it.. And it was amazing. One of the few times I saw that. You see Kodiak is an aviation oriented community and so is King Salmon.

K.M. Right, All of Alaska really.

J.B. All of Alaska, all of Alaska is the same way, Anchorage, Merrill Field.

K.M. You were Talking about Sea Air, (and how) they bought Kodiak Western. Is that how they got their start.

J.B. No they were in Anchorage. They were in Anchorage, they came here, they bought Kodiak Western and they moved out here to the airfield by what is now the Northern Air Cargo hanger. in that lot over there. They were flying I know they had a helicopter that took a 985 engine

K.M. Oh an S58.

J.B. Ah and they had an amphib 206 and they had ah....

K.M. They had an amphib turbine beaver for awhile didn't they.

J.B. They had a Beaver.

K.M. And Twin Otters Right? But they didn't do those to the villages did they?

J.B. Well yeah, that beaver was on floats and he would service some of the lodges. Maybe silver bay.....They didn't stay around very long. They bought this hanger up here and then ah... economics got to them. He didn't go bankrupt but the economics got to be to much. ButI think Kodiak has been a big turmoil ah. Now Island Air which is now... It' used to be SCAT years back.

K.M. SCAT?

J.B. SCAT. South Central Air... They called it SCAT

K.M. Afognak natives owned it for a while didn't they?

J.B. Yeah. Dave Henly SR. um Harry Acord, Bill Bluit flew out of there I believe.

K.M. Wasn't Riley working for them or flying for them?

J.B. Yeah I think he was. And that did pretty good. They never had anything serious happen with them... They had the one widgeon go in the lake one day but that was because some guy was taxiing on the runway and didn't call anybody. Long before we had any requirement to call the tower... so the widgeon hopped over him and ended up in the lake. And ... Minor injuries, we went down there and, old Riley Morton saw that we were stuck without a boat and people were standing up on top of the airplane, it

was upside down, and people were standing on the hull and everyplace else...and one guy had a baby in his arms. So Riley finally fired up his little super cub and zipped out there and got alongside and put everybody on his floats. Then he just cranked it enough to get ashore.

K.M. Who did Steve Harvy's dad fly for?

J.B. SCAT. I don't know if it was South Central or what, they called it SCAT

He (Harvy Sr.) was killed at municipal (airport) in a Beech 18. Ah...I think Aviation (in Kodiak) has taken a turn for the better, though, we're getting smart enough to put a little bit more safety measures in place.

K.M. So let's see, what other ones do I remember, there's ATS, Fred Ball, now there's an aviation family.

J.B. That sort of started after Kodiak Western sold out, Air Transport Services he called it, had it up here in the Island Hoppers hanger.

K.M. Was he another one that bought a goose from Kodiak Western?

J.B. I don't know where it came from originally, I'm trying to sit back and think of all the pilots we had, Jim Clements and all of them guys that flew them for a long time, and the number rings a bell but in my little thing down there I'm not sure I could remember that number. I remember Hal's number, I remember 45D sunk with a bear in it over in Geographic (bay).

K.M. Sunk with a bear?

J.B. Well they had tranquilized a bear, and the weather got bad and they were over by geographic and the pilot decided to set down there for a while, the plane ended up inverted and the story I got was the bear woke up, little hard for me to swallow, but evidently they swam ashore and unfortunately they almost died of hypothermia.

K.M. Was there more than one guy?

J.B. The pilot plus fish and game. Evidently the bear drowned as a result of it but I don't know if it was still tranquilized, or drowned when it went in... I never got the straight story. I know when we pulled the goose up, the bear was still in it.

K.M. Now you mentioned John Ball, he's a long time Alaskan that many people may not know about.

J.B. John Ball is Fred Ball's dad. John is up in his years now- in his seventies I know that.

K.M. He's related to the Ball brothers there's four or five of them from Anchorage.

J.B. The whole group right. Well Albert's his brother, who used to run Kodiak Western in Dillingahm, and then there's Johnny, Fred ball's dad, and then there's Gary and Newt and Bert and ..they all fly, every one of them, except Newt I think.

K.M. They had North Pacific Transport for a while. Hauling fish off the beach.

J.B. And then they were going to buy ah... Wilburs, and I don't know what happen there.

...Butthe Balls have been flying for years, Johnny Ball is an exceptional pilot. now he doesn't fly, his eyesight's getting a little bad, coordinations getting a little off.

Ah...The thing I liked about Johnny, and I worked with him for two years in King Salmon, he's a very knowledgeable pilot, but...the time that I took off out of pilot point, cause he has Sunday off, and I had a lot of load for him, it was a little foggy around the airport. I had been there a couple of times, but usually on the airport direct King Salmon I said "John it's getting a little scuzzy" and he said "Yeah just go out an hook a right a Dago lake" and I looked at him and said "oh yeah, sure." After I got in the airplane I looked at the chart and said "DAGO LAKE", "never heard of it." and then it's just right off of pilot point, and that's where the old PBY sat for years and years, the one that they finally got out of there and put in the museum.

K.M. Well they call that (aircraft) The Lady of Dago Lake.

J.B. That's right. And the next time I go to Anchorage I'm going to look at it. But ah...

Johnny Ball is a good pilot. Johnny Ball has had a few accidents. But the one thing about Johnny Ball is he never hurt anybody. He's had engine failures on takeoff, ah windshifts that should not have occurred, people upside down, I think he got hurt worse than anybody. While I was over there, he tried to get off some gravel bar, and it didn't work, and he went upside down, and some guy with a (Cessna) 185 pulled him out of there.

K.M. So Fred was his son and he started ATS and that ran for what six or seven years.

J.B. Oh yeah, long time, and then um Pen Air slowly moved in. ATS was a good outfit. I liked ATS. They had Mark Kozak then and Fred and there was another pilot involved

there and Hardy was there....but that was a good outfit, and then Penn Air wanted to move in and that was a sort of make an agreement and another facility...But that was alright. We used ATS for going to Mother Goose lake for hunting, they were real good. Kozak was ah...on my mind as exceptional. Of course Fred...I don't know it would be tough to knock him for being a pilot. He's a good pilot.

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