

ORAL HISTORY REPORT

Interview with Ed Naughton

by Alana Tousignant

Alana: How old were you during World War II?

Ed: In 1941 I was eleven years old.

Alana: Where did you live?

Ed: We lived in the town of Kodiak, about where Sutliff's hardware store is now - right beside what is now the boat harbor, except there was no boat harbor here in those days.

Alana: What was Kodiak like?

Ed: Kodiak was a salmon fishing village prior to World War II; and the area that is now referred to as the city dock where the processing plants are like APS and such, those buildings originally were a cannery operated by Kodiak Fisheries Company. Then once the war started the army took over that facility because it had a dock and the army needed a dock to land its freighters, their ships that brought in materials of war. And so they just simply commandeered that

dock. The fishermen in Kodiak were all salmon fishermen and they had small boats compared to what they use today. In fact a lot of fishermen fished out of dorys in those days and the dorys would have one cylinder gas engines in them, and then they would tow a bigger skiff that would have a net and they would carry fish in both boats. I guess the word that would describe Kodiak prior to World War II would be pastoral. It was very active in the summertime, and then in the fall the village life would just quiet down, and there would be almost nothing happening in Kodiak during the winter months, between the salmon fishing seasons. Some of my memories of that period was of seeing things like the salmon boats anchored- salmon dorys really - anchored out in front of the village of Kodiak in the area that is now the small boat harbor. And I can remember seeing whales coming up and blowing and swimming real lazy-like right in amongst the dorys that were anchored there. Then of course there was a fish cannery down at what in those days was called Erskins dock, ran by Frank McConogy, and that was called McConogy's Canery. of today's interests, the caneries had what they called gurry skows, and they would haul the fish wastes, the heads, the entrals and such, they would take that out and dump it in Woody Island Chanel or further out; so there was no need for companies such as bio-dry, because the waste was taken out and dumped and that fed other fish.

It was a very beautiful little town back in those days, and in the winter time they would put a lot of effort into

celebrating things like Thanksgiving, Christmas, and then Russian Christmas, New Years, and then Russian New Years. And probably that was the highest point of social life in Kodiak-the celebration of Russian New Years and Russian Christmas: because the Russian church in those days was more or less the cultural center of the town, or the village. There were activities like starring: where the people would create these magnificent stars, which was really a wooden framework and then highly decorated so that it reflected a lot of light; they put bright ribbons and things that would reflect like glass and such into it. They would go from house to house and they would stand there and twirl that star and then they would sing carols in English and in Russian.

We had two people in Kodiak, who after the war started became what we called enemy aliens. One was German and his name was Eric Muller, and he worked for Louie Thomson who owned a teamster operation where with his team of big black dray horses he would do any moving that had to be done in town with horse and wagon. These two great big horses, one was named Dolly and the other one - this is how things changed - the other one's name was nigger. Eric Muller worked for him and eventually they bought a truck and then they would deliver oil from Standard Oil Company which was down on Erskine's dock, and they would deliver oil to the houses of the community that burned oil. Most of the houses in the community burned coal or wood, but some of them were modernizing and they would use oil. Then when the war

started, because he was not an American citizen, he hadn't been naturalized, he was shipped off to a concentration camp. The other person we had in the village was a dear old man named Martin, I can't remember what Martin's last name was but everyone in those days knew him as Martin the Jap. Here he was an old man, couldn't hurt a fly, and he was shipped off to the concentration camps that all of the Japanese in America were sent to in Arizona. He didn't survive, he never made it back to Kodiak. Erik Muller did return, then he took over Thomson Transfer, from Louie Thomson's days. I remember old Louie had an accident where his horses stampeded on him, they ran and he was snagged in the harness and they drug him for quite a distance on a gravel road and ripped one of his eyes out on the rocks and his body was pretty badly bruised up also, to the point that he could no longer work as he had before. So Erik took over from him in that job and worked as the teamster and truck driver and then eventually bought the company from Louie, I would assume, and turned it into what is now called Thomson Transfer and is kind of a mainstay of Kodiak.

The dances that were held during the New Years period (Russian New Years and Russian Christmas) were usually masquerade balls. They were held in a hall that was called Blinn's hall, it was next to what eventually became the E&B bar but of course it was Blinn's bar back in those days. It was the usual thing to have people come to those dances all made up in masquerade and everyone would try to keep everyone

else from identifying them. I can remember that there were...oh for instance Edna Hester who came to the dance dressed as a clown and she was doing acrobatic dances, things that we never dreamed that Edna could do! Nobody could guess who in the world was that. There was a lot of fun, just a lot of fun, and there were some fantastic dancers in the village back in those days, because dancing was one of the favorite outlets and social situations. People would make their own music, somebody would pick up a guitar, somebody would pick up an accordian, somebody would pick up a saxophone, and then somebody would sit at the piano and they they would just provide the music for everybody else to enjoy and to dance to. Then of course there were the church services, and it was just taken as a given that on these various occasions, and especially on easter time, that the bells of the Russian church would ring over the community, and of course the community was very quiet so those sounds carried quite a long way. I remember there was this one man who rang the bells, his name was Kashevarov, and he could really make music with those bells.

The community was supplied by the Alaska Steamship Company, and we would get about one boat a month, so it was a very exciting thing when a ship arrived. In those days the ships names were things like Kerso, Star, Iakina, Cordova, Yukon, Denali; all these ships have long since disappeared, in fact America has very little shipping of that type anywhere. Everybody's life revolved around the fishing in

the summertime. I remember that everybody would charge their groceries at Kraft's store; Kraft's store would function not only as a grocery store but as a mercantile store where all the equipment you needed, all the clothing you needed to live in Kodiak, they handled. That was also the case with the W.J. Erskine Company, which was the successor to the Alaska Commercial Company, the original Russian Company store. Kraft's also functioned as a bank because that was the only safe in town, so people would get their settlements after fishing and they would just take their money and hand it to Ben Kraft and say here take what you need to cover what I've charged and the rest of it will go to part of what we'll charge this winter. Ben would carry a lot of people, sometimes there wouldn't be enough money made in the fishing season to cover the bill and he would still carry them. [I was reminded that Erskine had a safe too]

Nobody would go hungry. That kind of characterized the community back in those days. We were all up against the problem of surviving so everybody helped everybody. I can remember that when the fishing seasons were on if somebody got half a dozen halibut they would come in and land their boat and if somebody wanted halibut they would come down and ask, "can we have some of the halibut," and the response would always be, "sure take it". The same thing with salmon and codfish; back in those days there was quite a bit of codfish around and people used it a lot as food. One of the interesting things, from my standpoint, is that when there

was a lot of codfish there was no king crab, then after the codfish disappeared the king crab showed up. King crab was post World War II, in the late '40s it became a marketable product from this area.

Probably the natural bridge into World War II would mention of the arrival of the Navy. There were a squadron of PBVs that came into Kodiak in 1939, and in my mind's eye I can still see them coming in, they flew in formation, in a stairstep formation, one above and behind the other and they landed. A sea plane tender had arrived a few days prior to their arrival and had set out mooring boeys. In those days they were truly sea planes, they landed on the water and they stayed on the water, they didn't come out of the water the way sea planes do today; now they have amphibians that can land on water but come out of the water. One of the pilots of those PBVs I met after the war, way in the early '60s, he was still in the Navy and he was telling me that when he came into Kodiak in a subsequent flight but in that same time frame, that the fog came in and that he couldn't see to land where they were supposed to land so he had to land out in Chiniak Bay and taxi all the way into Kodiak, and that was scary enough for him because the water is not smooth as you get out of the bay and your chances of surviving a landing in that kind of water is about 50%. About half of the planes that attempt to land out on rough water don't make it. So then he told me that that incident was enough to convince him that he should stick with the fleet Navy not the

air arm of the Navy. At that time that I was talking to him he was the commander of the pacific fleet, so he apparently did pretty well in the black-shoe navy; in the navy the flyers wear brown uniforms and brown shoes, and the flees sailors wear black shoes and navy trousers. So the PBYS arrived and it was the advanced party to check out the possibility of building a navy base in Kodiak. President Roosevelt had ordered the construction of a number of bases all over the world actually and they called them destroyer bases because they needed a place for warships to store supplies: ammunition, fuel, that sort of thing. That's what Kodiak was supposed to be is one of these bases that were being built for resupply of warships, because they anticipated there would be a problem with Japan, so they looked at the map and decided that Kodiak was in a very strategic location for controlling the North Pacific Ocean. So then the Navy hired the construction company called Simstraight Puget Sound to start doing the work to build a base here. Prior to that the only thing you would find there was a few cattle and bears; it was really way out of town and very remote. Shortly after that work began the war started. Then there was a real crash program to get that base built.

Alana: How was life in Kodiak changed by the war?

Ed: It changed life in Kodiak completely, it was absolutely a different community altogether because suddenly Kodiak was

a boom town; the population exploded, there was no housing, people were throwing up tarpaper shacks any place they could. It was very complex because the United States had bought the Tsar out in Alaska and that happened in 1867 and it was 1912 before the U.S. government started coming into Alaska. There was no way that they had started providing services like town site surveys; so in the old days nobody claimed land the way that it is done today. If somebody needed to build a house they would ask the person that they would be neighbors to "is it ok if I build a house over here?", and generally the person would say well sure, go ahead. all of the sudden there were just skads of people building tarpaper shacks, building houses, building tents. For instance, my mother's sister Betty came to Kodiak and all the time she was here she lived in a tent, and they were very comfortable, they were very satisfied with that life, and they lived here for years.

The people who came in were hard working and hard drinking, and the town just absolutely boomed. During the war Tony's bar was famous, the operation that they now call Tony's, but it was not in that location it was out where Kraft's parking lot is now. It was advertised as the longest bar in Alaska. When the civilian workers plus the military would be on leave they would be in that bar. It might be eight or ten people deep at the bar and all that the bartenders would do is open bottles of beer and pour shots of whiskey. They would report to work with a number three wash tub and a baseball bat, they never rang up any of the sales

they would just push out the beer, get the money and throw it in that wash tub. The baseball bat was handy for foiling any attempt at robbery. It was a wild, wild place in those days. A lot of the people in those days were "fringe" type people, they weren't used to living by the rules of society. From a sleepy little town where they might have sold a keg of beer a week it just boomed into a place where whole shiploads would come into Kodiak with nothing but beer. I worked down on the docks at that time and if we had a thousand tons of freight come in about 200 tons would be food and supplies and about 800 tons would be beer.

Alana: Was there ever a shortage of food during this time?

Ed: No, the Alaska Steamship Company could pretty well keep up with supplying the food that was needed. Plus once the big push was on to build the base the Navy started hauling in the food and everything that they needed. There was always a synergistic relationship between the base and the town in those days; if the town needed a service that was available on the base that was not available in town the base would supply it. For instance my first pair of eyeglasses I got from the Navy dispensary on the base because there were no eye doctors in Kodiak. There wasn't any contention between the town and the base back in those days, later that sort of thing developed. During the war everybody's tension was focused on fighting the Japs—you notice I said Japs not

Japanese, because in World War II you referred to them as dirty slimy Japs, you didn't call them Japanese.

Alana: Were there a lot of restrictions during the war?

Ed: Oh Yes, one of the first things that happened with the start up of the war was that all civilian dependants of the military and of the civilian workers who were accompanying them up here in Alaska were immediately shipped out back to the states. A woman could be up here if she was single but if she was married to a service man she would have to leave. I remember there was one soldier at Fort Greeley that his wife pretended to be single, but she had a house in town and every chance he got he would go meet her whether he had a pass or not he would sneak into town and it came to the point where swim the across the mouth of Gibson Bay in order to walk the beach to get to town. Those of us who were in the civilian community were not shipped out, they let us stay here. However out in the Alutians they did relocate a lot of people from the Alutian Islands down to southeast Alaska. In fact when I was in southeast Alaska I was always meeting people who had been relocated during the war and had never made it back to their homes in the Alutians. The people who were on Attu Island when the Japanese invaded it were interned in prisoner war camps in Japan. It was essentially an Aleut population and there were two white people on the island - the Jones they were school teachers - they were also

interned in Japan in prisoner war camps.

As the military build up came it restricted our movement. I remember there was a line, an imaginary line drawn from the beach just short of the city dock out to the red boeey in the harbor; you couldn't go past that line, if you did the army would send a boat out and get you and take you back. Those of us who were young and would go fishing in the trout streams and lakes and that sort of thing, it was really dangerous because there were armed sentrys everywhere and if you stumbled into a place you weren't supposed to be it could be disasterous. We had one incident where a kid and I got lost in the fog and the first thing we knew we were walking into a machine gun nest. It's just lucky that the guys were willing to wait and see who we were before they started shooting. I remember one of my favorite things to do was to carve little sailboats, and if the wind was blowing northeast I would launch this boat with a paper sail and it would blow toward the base. I found out later, or my dad found out later that the army was investigating me because they wanted to know if I was some kind of a spy that was sending messages.

Everywhere in the country there was food rationing so you would only buy certain ammounts of food at a time, depending on how many people in the family. That restriction was considerably relaxed for Alaskans later and we didn't have really tight restrictions on the food that we could purchase the way the people in the lower 48 did because our

supply could be cut off at any time by Japanese interdiction.

There was only one incident where we thought we were going to have to use our air raid shelters. Everybody was required to dig a trench and have it ready in case of an air raid. There was an American squadron of Army aircraft coming and they forgot to turn on their little radio that identifies them - they called it an IFF, to identify friend or foe. They detected these planes approaching, with the aircraft warning detachment, and there was no radio signal identifying them so they hit the air raid warnings. Everybody ran for their shelters and then we sat and waited to see what was going to happen. I remember that everybody had to decide real quick what to take with them when they went to the trenches because you never knew if your homes were wiped out during a bombing raid you didn't know what was going to be there when you got back. It always struck us funny that my mother grabbed nothing but her chime clock, and stuck it under her arm and ran up the mountain with it.

Alana: Were you allowed to move around outside of the town itself?

Ed: Yes, but the places we could go were very restricted. We couldn't go beyond what is now Mill Bay and there were coast artillery units out on Miller Point and Spruce Cape and they wouldn't let us get close to that. Then of course they had built the highway from the base out to Cape Chiniak where

they had an additional airstrip for fighter planes. They had the Bellair Cobra fighter planes stationed out here. The incident I mentioned where the air raid warning was sounded - we weren't aware of how many of these fighter planes were stationed in Kodiak. We ran up to our trench and from there we had a real good view of the base, and we looked out there and here comes all these fighter planes like a swarm of bees. They were taking off from the airstrip and then they would circle and gain altitude, then they vectored out over the ocean in the direction that the planes were coming in. As we were standing there watching, after a little while here comes a bunch more fighter planes, and the lightnings and bellair cobras from Anchorage while these other fighters were out looking for these aircraft coming in suspected of being Japanese. During that air raid scare there had been sailors in town on liberty and I can remember some sailors standing right beside me and they were looking out and they saw their ship setting out to sea. They said "Whoa, there goes our ship", and they named it. Many years later and I remembered the name when Nancy Freeman's father came to Kodiak; we were talking about if he had been here before and he said "Yeah, I was here during the war, I was on ..." he named the same destroyer we had watched pulling out.

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