

Jerry Holt
on
the Navy in Kodiak
Rolls Hole
Afognak Recreation Camp
Alaska Troopers on Kodiak
Beachcombers Ship/Bar/Hotel
Small plane Crash survivor

by Gene Wyman
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@ Jerry Holts residence
659 Anna Way, Kodiak, AK.

JH: We bought a sailboat and we missed a lot of that, that particular period, we missed a lot the ,ah, pipeline boom the oil boom.

GW: You of course came up here in 1967 then, so were you stationed at the base?

JH: Ya, ya for awhile I was the Administrative Officer and then I became the Security Officer, I stayed out there for three years before I retired.

GW: No stories, No fun stories about security out there? Was it real quiet?

JH: OH... ya there wasn't a whole lot happening on base there was a lot of stuff happening around the base. What happened was, after the, after the tidal wave, there were a number of people around here that were homeless. The Navy used to own all of Belle's Flats out there and they had a, old quonset huts and warehouses and just all kinds of stuff out there. Well, a lot of people moved in, the Navy let them move in after the tidal wave. So that was a big flap when it first got here because these people wouldn't move out. They liked it, well the rent was free and so they were living back there and there was some kind of I was sitting in the Security office one afternoon, must have been about

probably '69 and a one of the gate guards came rushing in the office and said to the guy just arrived out there, that he looked terrible, he had a bandage around his head, blood all over him and he said he just shot a man out in Bell's Flats. Well, it was Navy property at the time, it was sort of iffy I guess, so any way we responded to it and went out there and in one of the gunsets was a guy lying there dead. Shot by someone, over a woman as you might guess. So we had a number of things that happened like that things were a lot rougher around here back in those days.

The hippies were just starting to show up here, from down below and they were bringing in drugs and that sort of thing. That did not go over at all with the people who lived here in Kodiak. One of the first ones that came in was shot down out there in Belle's Flats, shot and ambushed. I think he was shot with a .44

GW: One of the hippies?

JH: Well he was a drug dealer, he was a hippie drug dealer, whatever he was somebody that brought drugs into town and they didn't like people like that. So some concerned citizen knocked him off and we never did find out who plugged him. It was known who the person was. but nobody, particularly the police, particularly cared to figure it out. Kinda good riddance to bad rubbish.

GW: Was there the alcohol problem? I was up here in the mid seventies, there was an awful alcohol problem. Did you have those problems back then?

JH: Oh sure, those was big problem in Kodiak, there was a lot of money back then, a lot of money came from the halibut and there were characters that would come in off these fishing boats and they threw money around like water. The entire complexion of Kodiak was different then. That kind of wild life style was ,oh, sort of, it was expected. There was one guy who used to come into town when ever the boat came in. He would go in the, I think he usually used to hang out in Tony's, or Solly's, it was Solly's and he would have a whole pocket full of money when he would get paid off at the end of the trip, a number of thousands. He would give some kid, put the money, all but a thousand dollars , put in the envelope, tell the kid take it home to his wife. Then he would just sit there and he'd drink and buy drinks for the house, and whatever until that thousand dollars was gone and then he would go home. Now, he would do that every damn time.

They had a tradition up here in those days that was called "six-packin". You could go into some bars and sit down and order a drink. The next thing you know, there is six of the same thing sitting in front of you. Some guy across the bar would "six-pack" you. Then you could do it back to him. I, you know it could get pretty bad, you know you are sitting there and the whole bar is in front of you.

GW: Did you ever do that to others?

JH: Indeed, as a matter of fact there was one time there was down at the Village bar, a guy called up from, actually I think he was down in Mexico, I think he was on vacation down in Mexico,

someplace down there. Anyway he called up the bar and said "you got lots of people in there? Well "six-pack" the house and I'll pay you when I get back." These guys, the bars, used to be the bankers. The fishermen would come into town and they would have this whole roll of money. He would give it to the bartender, the bartender would put it into an envelope, write down the amount, put it in the safe or whatever they had behind the bar. when this guy would need some more money, he would come in and get it. The bartenders would write down the amount he took out. Some would say, "I want you to, I don't care how drunk I get I don't' want you to give me more than whatever, \$500.00". He would come back, and of course almost invariably he would drink up the \$500.00 and then they would want more and they would hassle with the bartender about whether he drank it up.

GW: Did almost all the bars do that? Or certain ones?

JH: It was pretty common practice.

GW: I have heard stories of the ship, the Beachcomber? Do you know how that boat got here? How long was it here? or anything?

JH: It was here when I got here, but if I remember right, LEGS McGrew bought it, down in Seattle, it was going to be scrapped. He bought it for, don't hold me to this, it seems to me it was something like \$25,000. It was pretty cheap. He had it hauled up here. They dug a trench in that little cove down there and then

they ran it in and then they just filled in around it. Of course now it was high and dry so they turned it into a hotel and niteclub.

GW: That's the old Salvation Army parking lot, right?

JH: Well, yeah on the north edge of the parking lot is where it was. It was pretty wild, but we still enjoyed going there. They used to make a thing called a "steak sandwich" that had no, you know it, it didn't look like a steak sandwich at all and it was really reasonable. So if you were out partying in the evening or whatever and along about two o'clock in the morning you could always go to the Beachcombers and get this steak sandwich and it was decent. It was a piece of filet bout that thick you know (shows a gap about one inch between fingers) and french fries and the whole bit. It was a neat place, but it did get pretty rough. I remember one time we had a trooper here, I can't remember his name, boy he was big, he was built like a house, great big guy, must a been 'bout six foot four or five, and he had to easily weigh 275, he was just big. There was some kind of a riot going on in the Beachcombers one night, and he went in and about five minutes later they backed him right out of there. I don't know if they had any reinforcements. See back then there was only one trooper in town, well when we got here there was only the one trooper in town, and his name was BOB LOCK. Bob was kind of like the law west of the Pecos. Bob was the law from here to out to the entire Aleutian chain. He used to make a patrol out there, he went out with the Coast Guard twice a year. They would handle all the little villages along the chain and so forth. Bob was the, he was like

the judge jury and magistrate and the whole thing. If somebody committed a crime in the village, when the ship pulled in, they know when the ship was coming, they would have the offender on the dock, they didn't have jails, where were they going to go, they would have him there in the dock and they would say alright this is what he did, if it was real bad, like every now and then a murder or something, well Bob would take him back to Anchorage. A lot of times he would just hold court in them right there. Whether that was legal or not I don' really know. It worked, he was quite a guy.

GW: You were the Security Officer, where was your jurisdiction then?

I have heard the gate was at Deadman's curve, was it there when you were here?

JH: When I got here the gate was right where it is now. The Navy property ends at Deadman's Curve. We sort of shared jurisdiction with the state. There was always a kind of friendly argument about who had jurisdiction on the road. It never became important enough so that it had to be brought out in court. I tell you what the base law enforcement people and the city law enforcement people got along real well.

GW: Did they ever have Cinderella liberty?

JH: NO, not when I got here. They had in the past, during and a few years after the war, again that was the gate was at the curve. I think they did make the guys come back.

Have you ever gone on the base and you go down the main road by the gate. Look across your left side by the chapel and you see a square depression in the ground. Well it used to be called Roll's Hole, the skipper, Captain Roll. He came up there and he said "Well we got winter time and skating is good recreation in the winter, so we are going to build a skating rink." I don't' guess he had seen the skating rink, he did it all out of the truck. So he got a bunch of people together and he said I want you to scrape out a hole down there so we fill that thing full of water. So they did, they scraped it out, and of course it never did work. Although I did this last year, I think it was, I noticed it had gotten some ice on it. I don't know how they managed to do it. Roll's Hole.

GW: Do you remember the winters being any worse, better, same?

JH: The worse winter that I remember is the winter of 70 & 71. That was the year I retired from the Navy. There was a fella here at the a course of oh Gordy Edgar and he was of course the forest service rep here. And at that time the forest service owned all of Afognak. that was before the Native Land Claims Act. and so they were laying out the cut that they were going to do out there at xxxxx Bay and anyway Gordy and I were friends and I had gotten out of the Navy that fall and didn't have much to do , I wasn't working and he said why don't we go on up to the Danger Bay and go trapping? We were going to trap otter. so it sounded like a good idea so we packed a bunch of gear into a goose and we went up there right after new years and landed there. and there was a little

cabin there, forest service cabin, that a that the forest service guys used when they were lining up a sale. So we used that. and we were pretty well equipped . we had a rubber boat , a kicker, and all that sort of thing and the idea was that we was going to use that boat going on the bay and not go too far up the shore and set the traps up and About two days after we got there the temperature went down to zero or 5 or 10 below or something like that. The bay froze in. We were up there for three weeks. We spent three weeks on snow shoes tramping all over that area setting traps. The whole three weeks netted us 1 beaver and 3 otters. But that was a really cold winter. I remember snowshoeing right through a herd of elk and they just stood there and looked at you. Maybe as close as from me to you. This was after probably a couple of weeks and it got cold and they just stood there and looked at you they didn't even move. At that time the elk herd at Afognak they figure was somewhere around 2500-2000 animals and after that winter they were down to about 500-600. They had a BIG winter kill. Eventually I think it went down to 250 animals. Its above that now with all the lumbering over there it will never get back to 2500-2000 head but that was too bad.

It used to be the marines every year took and had a field exercise. They went over to the recreation camp at Afognak Lake and a it was suppose to be a field exercise but really they took along a lot of beer and rifles and so on and so forth and went out there to hunt Elk. The year that I got there they had ambushed a whole herd of elk coming down off the mountain. I couldn't believe it. You could see that when these elks started moving, there were so many of

them, that they would make a big wide swath, a pathway, down through the grass. You could see it coming down this mountain and a I got down into the valley and so forth and then you started seeing the kill that these guys had ambushed the herd. I don't know how many animals they killed. But then of course they had to pack them out. They learned something about packing meat. It takes two. You'd go along the trail and you'd see pieces of animal. There were leg bones and stuff like this, that they suddenly figured that they couldn't carry that any more, but that used to be a big deal.

GW: Did you ever go out on any of the hunting trips like that?

JH: No not really. I spent a lot of time on Afognak. I had collateral duty as the Admin officer. They recreation division was in my dept. And I got pretty friendly with the recreation director, Jerry Adams. But anyway and his big project when I got here was to a get the recreation camp going, on Afognak Lake. Ah, there quite a history to that camp. Have you ever been over to Afognak Lake?

GW: Just flown over.

JH: Well, about, I guess about a quarter of the way up the lake, it would be on the north side, the north shore, there's some buildings, used to be a hatchery; built by Alaska Packers back in the twenties or thirties. And largely it was a public relations gimmick, because Alaska Packers were held responsible for the wiping out of the salmon in Kodiak. They about wiped out the Karluk fishery. Its never fully recovered. It is a whole lot better now then what it was. But.. anyway they built this hatchery over there on Afognak, and ran it for a few years and then the war came along and the Navy took it over and they used it as an auxiliary seaplane

base. And so after the war the Navy kind of let it go, they ran it as a rec camp for awhile, then they kinda let it go. Then a guy picked up a use permit on it. He ran it for awhile. He was accused by the Navy of dynamiting the stream and stuff like that, so he lost his permit. The navy took it back. When I got here, they were trying to built it back up again. They had a tug on the base and the tug, during the season would make a run over to Afognak and take a bunch of people over there. We had a managers cabin and a permanent staff over there, 3 or 4 people, a bunkhouse and a couple of houses that families could stay in, and a banya. It was really nice. I spent as much time over there as I could. Had to go over there and supervise. HAHA We ran that pretty much until the Navy left and then it was converted when the land claims went through. It's too bad it happened because now its been trashed. People go over there hunting and stay in it and instead of taking care of it they trash the place. A couple of the buildings are almost completely torn down. They used it for firewood. There's a stack of cans outside the one house about four feet high. But it's a beautiful place.

GW: You were talking about some of the moral facilities they had the camp over there. Do you remember the ski chalet?

JH: OH YEH!! I remember the ski chalet. (chuckle, chuckle). That was the other thing that they were trying to get going. We spent a lot of time and effort on the ski chalet. They were gearing up for it when I got here, they had a rope tow, they didn't have as an elaborate set up as they have now. They had the rope tow and a few other odds and ends and a bunch of equipment that they loaned out.

I think in the three years that I was involved with it maybe half a dozen weekends you had snow on the slopes. Cause you know how the weather is here, it will snow, and you will get everything ready to go skiing and so forth and you might get one day or you might not and then the rain comes along washes it all away and you have to start all over. That whole area on base is something. We raised two boys.. Our one son Rob, I was talking to him last night, he was talking about some of the things he did as a kid. He is 36 years old now. He talked about the area in and around Boyscout Lake and some of the things that they discovered, the buildings and stuff left when they moved out, and he was talking about one he found , he said it was two story, completely dry inside and windows that looked out over the bay. There were two stories to it and it still had a bunch of stuff in there, some stuff from back in the forties, newspapers and thing like that. they were going to use this as some kind of a clubhouse or whatever, and after they found it, they could never find it again. They went back up there and they couldn't find it again, it was real dense in there and there were all kinds of roads, trails, and they are all over the place. You can seriously confused.

GW: Are there any maps or charts of the roads?

JH: I used to have some, I may still have them because when I was leaving as Admin officer to go to security ,they were getting ready to throw away a whole bunch of records. I think that I may have kept some of those old maps. That area there and the one by the Burma road and the one by Buskin Lake

The guy that we bought this house from, fella named John xxxxxx

a real Alaska character, John made his living as a wrangler, carpenter, a fisherman, I know he was a lot of different things. Not too long before we bought the house, he was in an accident and he lost one leg and pretty much the use of the other one. Up until that time he had been scavenging copper and lead from the area up around Buskin Lake. In that whole area and it is still there, there is cable all over the place. There used to be a power or a communications cable going to all of the different facilities that were set up there, they had 100,000 people during the war. So ole John would go up there and without any real serious concern about the who the stuff belonged to, he would get a hold of some of this cable and, I think he had a "cat" or something, and he would just rip it out backwards. Took about as much as he could cut it up in chunks and throw it in the back of his pickup truck and then he would bring it down here. If you would go out and look at the hill at the upper lot, there is kind of a steep hill, John had some corrugated roofing that he had put up there and he would build a fire under the roofing, put the lead, covers and stuff on the top of it. He up some molds of bread tins, he had those on the lower end of the corrugated roofing so when the lead melted it ran off into one of these bread tins. He figured the lead paid all of his expenses for recovering this stuff, or any expenses he had and the copper that he recovered was free. That was part of his claim for lost income. He won a settlement of a million and a half, which at that time was the biggest personal injury settlement they had during the war up here.

GW: Who did he sue?

JH: He sued an insurance company. Usually you sue another individual, or a an entity, in this case he was hit by a insurance company employee who was coming home from an insurance company party and he was drunk. Well so was John. John was out there in the middle of the road with the light out, his car had stalled out, and he was over by Homer someplace, he was out there in the middle of the road the car was crosswise, and he was under the hood fumbling around with something, and this other guy came along and smacked him.

GW: Do you recognize any of the area on the Burma road area?

JH: About four or five years ago the government had a big clean up. They cleaned up an awful lot of stuff.

GW: There are a lot of old foundations thru out the area, do you know what they were for?

JH: When I got here they were all vacant, we kept some ammunition out by the Buskin Lake. Most of the stuff was vacant.

Mr. Holt gives a dossier of his Navy career. He enlisted in 1950 as an aircraft mechanic. There was limited advancement potential so he changed into avionics as a missile technician. In 1958 he joined the surface Navy. He was in Vietnam in 1966 with the Seaforce as an advisor. He returned to the states in 1967.

For the few minutes hour he talked about his 36 foot sailboat and the adventures he and his wife had in the Caribbean. For a while he owned the only sailboat in town (Kodiak). Mr Holt is a

gemologist and a jeweler. This is more a hobby than a full time business since he is retired.

JH: There is something interesting, there is a stream with placer deposits not too far from here. There was a guy out on the base he was a corpsman, panning was a hobby of his. He went out somewhere in the general area of Anton Larson Bay. He came back with whole handful of really nice nuggets. He never told anybody exactly where that was. There is an old gold mine over there. There are a couple of gold mines on the island. They are hard rock mines. One is out by Anton Larson the other is out by Amook, Munsey's Bear Camp is actually the mine building. As a matter of fact, the mouth of the mine is about 300 feet or so from the main building. There is a rock in the bay where there is a wreck, I think the name is the Columbia, it sunk I have never been able to get it straight if they had loaded the ore and sunk or if it had sunk before they loaded the ore. There are some people that say that it has got a load of gold ore sitting in the wreck.

(Some conversation about gems)

JH: You know there is another gold location down at what they call seven mile beach, down at the south end of the island. Back during the depression there were miners that worked down there, all the time.

(JH recalls others that have mined at the areas)

JH: The Navy had a flying club out there at the base so I joined it. I learned to fly, I had an old Aeronca Sedan on floats, sold that and got a PA-12 flew that for a while, sold that and got a

sailboat, but when we got back here I bought a Citabria on floats. I had that for a number of years. I used it mostly for fishing, I miss not having an airplane.

(JH tells the story of Captain Cleland flying an airplane from Boy Scout Lake about 1967)

From here JH tells about the Navy flying club and the aircraft.

JH: Jerry Guire was the recreation director was my partner in the airplane, I couldn't yet fly it, we were going to fishing one day, it was a beautiful day in June, we were up there in Lily Lake, Norma, my wife, was going to with us, so we didn't want to take off from the lake with three people, cause it's a short lake, so we were going to land in the channel and pick her up. Jerry and I are in the airplane we start up the lake. I still to this day don't know what happened, I think he may have pulled it off too soon, or something and anyway we mushed back on to the lake and stacked up on the far end. So there we are without an airplane for another year.

Talks about his son Rob their accident in the Brooks range.

Recants the fatal flying club accident on Afognak.

Talks about Jerry McDonald's accident.

Mentions the attitude of increased safety awareness of the aircraft taxi service pilots, compared to earlier pilots.

Take off with an overloaded airplane.

(We knew we were towards the end of the interview)

JH: There are old pilots and there are bold pilots, but there are no old, bold pilots.

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