

H97-175-20
Earl Pilgrim
September 7, 1960
Fairbanks, Alaska

Earl was born September 11, 1892 in Durango, Colorado. Durango was still a wild town. People didn't carry guns with them but they had them stashed at home. His family moved to Minneapolis during his last year in grammar school. They lived there a year and moved to Seattle Washington. He attended the University of Washington and graduated in 1916 with a degree in mining engineering. He first came to Alaska in 1915 and worked in the Treadwell gold mine. They were 2000 feet deep and under the ocean. He went back to school and graduated in 1916. He mined in Idaho, B.C., Nevada and California before returning to Alaska. He spent a year and a half with the 27th mining regiment with the U.S. Army. He was a private and later sent to commissioner's officers training. He received the commission of a second lieutenant. At the end of the war he went back to mining. His last job in the lower forty-eight was superintendent of a zinc oxide smelter near Los Angeles. He came to Fairbanks to teach mining engineering and metallurgy. He stayed there for four years and left in the spring of 1926 to mine for himself. He has been operating in Alaska and practicing consulting work ever since. He owns Stampede Mine which is the second largest antimony mine in the United States. It is in the Kantishna District about 110 miles SW of Fairbanks. He has been interested in this property since 1937. When he first arrived at the college he was disappointed by the looks of the place. There was one building there which was later called the administration building. It was demolished only recently. The center part of the building and one residence for the president was there. There was a direct current power building. They only had a few students. There were six teachers and five students. When he left in 1926 it had grown in enrollment and there were a few more buildings. Dr. Patty arrived at the same time he did. Some of the real pioneers were still around in Fairbanks. Tom Aiken had mined in Colorado, the Klondike and then in Alaska. He operated a dredge at Candle. Frank Manley was another well known person. Tom Gilmore was also still in Fairbanks. He considered them real pioneers. Eric Burman was prospecting in the Chatanika valley. He was close to the Cleary Creek when he was told about Nome. He then moved to Nome. He was one of the stakers whose claims were jumped. He never did get his claim back. Ben Eielsen came up to Fairbanks the same time Earl did. Ben taught history in the high school. Ben had won the Harmon trophy and had flown in the war. Ben felt that Alaska was the ideal place for flight to be developed. He bought a surplus plane and made some of the first flights around Fairbanks. He later flew over the Arctic and Antarctic. He died in a crash on the Siberian coast.

Earl heard about a deposit in the Kantishna. Bill Taylor was a good friend of his. Bill was one of the owners of the property [The National Lead Company] and was a friend of his from the states. Earl had worked for him and got him interested in the property in the Kantishna. In 1936 Earl flew into the property. He turned the options over to the National

Lead Company. They carried the Kantishna mining books from the Trundy's cabin to Fairbanks. Now all the Kantishna District recordings are done through Fairbanks. He knew all the pioneer pilots in Alaska. He remembers when Noel Wien arrived as a young man in 1924. He knew Bill Shannon -- one of the famous dog mushers. He had been one of the mushers that carried the diphtheria serum to Nome. Maggie Smoke also carried one stretch of the route below Nenana.

Earl told a story about Eielsen and Captain Hubert Wilkin. Wilkin was knighted after he flew over the North Pole and became Sir Wilkin. On the flight where they left Fairbanks to fly over the pole Early wanted them to carry the American Legion flag with them. Since it was a small plane Sir Hubert Wilkin wanted it to be small. Earl took his arm band with the American Legion insignia on it and had it sewn by Mrs. Jansen. They had a ceremony out at the field. Ben Eielsen took it and flew it over the pole and they landed in Norway.

Earl's first trip into the Kantishna District was in 1923. He had heard about the district. The Kennecott Copper Company was doing some prospecting at Copper Mountain in the park. He bought a pack horse and he and his wife traveled into the park. There were no roads into the park at that time. He had heard stories from Dr. Bunnell and John Davis about the bears. They didn't have any problems on their travels. They made it into Kantishna. He met Bill Quigley and Fannie Quigley, who had once been a dance hall girl. They were mushing out to the railroad for a trip. When they got to Eureka Creek they met Hamilton and Fink who were placer mining on Moose Creek. Joe Dalton was also a discoverer of gold in Kantishna. He was a cousin of the discoverer of the Dalton Trail. He met a number of pioneers in the Kantishna including Johnnie Bouchet. Bill Jullian was also mining at that time. He made a number of trips into Kantishna before he starting working on the Stampede. They mined and sacked about 900 tons of high grade antimony ore. They produced more antimony than any other mine in the United States that first winter. From then on it produced until about three years ago. They have authorization from the state of Alaska to build a pioneer access road from the mine to the railroad. They have to build it with their own equipment and the state will reimburse them. They hope to have a road in the next two years. When they started working at the Stampede Mine they had been in with horses. He took some National Lead Company people to the mine. They couldn't believe it was possible to get ore out of the mine but he was given the OK to try. That was the winter they shipped 900 tons. They have shipped most of the ore to the railroad by tractor and sled. Some of the ore has been flown from a runway at the mine. He describes being dropped off at the mine the first year. The pilot landed on the Toklat River and he had to walk to the mine. His supplies had been dropped by air. He made many trips retrieving his stuff. He arranged to have a planeload of food taken to the mine. They used a tractor and sled to haul the supplies. He told a couple of stories about his dog, Kobuk.