

Call Number: 02-00-25

Bob Reeve Interview, 7/6/1970,

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Notes: Originals on 7 inch reels. Master copy on CD.

A woman [the interviewer] tells Bob that he was going to tell her how flying had changed. Bob says he wants to share how he first came to Alaska. He said he was flying airmail to South America for PanAmerican Airways and he was involved in a flying accident. Bob got fired because of the accident even though he feels the plane failed. He said that did something to him. He made up his mind then and there he was never going to work for anyone else; he was going to be his own boss. He decided he was going to be a bum or a success. He mentions how the first chapter in his biography is titled "He Looked Like a Tramp." He found salvation from reading a book by Jack London. Jack's conclusion at the end of the book was that a hobo works and wonders, a bum works for drinks and wonders, and a tramp dreams and wonders. Bob considered himself a tramp, the elite of vagabonds. Bob lost all his money from stock investments when Great Britain went off the gold standard in February 1952. He bummed his way as a guest at the Northern Pacific Railroad in Seattle and then was a stowaway on the Old Admiral Washington that landed in Seward. He came up through Anchorage and looked around and the found a bush pilot who had married a fellow's daughter. The man had a delicatessen and he got three square meals a day. Bob found an old airplane in Valdez and he fixed it up and started out in Old Eagle Rock and made a number of trips across Nome. Bob made a bunch of money flying into the Chisana mining area. It was 60-70 below and he flew into the field of the Chistochina and he had a stake of \$5,000 maybe \$4,000 after Bob paid his expenses.

Bob heard about a Fairchild Plane for sale at Alaska Airways in Fairbanks. Bob had gold and it was priced at \$15 an ounce. Bob was loaned \$3,000 on a \$5,000 security at 12 percent interest from a bank. He held onto the note for a long time. In those days there was no cash in the country. Absentee landlords had goldmines all over the country and go spend the money in Seattle and California. Canneries would bring in hundreds of cannery workers and take out millions of cases of dollars. The cannery workers never got off the dock and would leave when they were done. Bob figured finding a gold mine of his own would be the best way.

A phone rings at 4:40.

He got a property in the middle of Columbia that was name the Rough and Tough Goldmine. It was named that because they had some groceries going down to the mine and the initials were R and T (R stood for Reeve and the T was for Bob's partner Thompson) and the person at the grocery store said "That must be the Rough and Tough mine." Bob sold the mine and as time went on there was much more competition. He knew he had to start out again because he had a family and two kids and so they

moved to Fairbanks and started brand new. Joe Stalin and Adolf Hitler got into war and for once people realized Alaska was undefended and so they built a number of airports. Reeve participated in building airports principally on Northway where he hauled in 5,000 tons to build it. Bob made a stake of \$25,000 dollars. He couldn't believe he became a capitalist. During the war he had a contract with the Alaska Communication Systems and he flew all over the Aleutians and western Canada and he became broke in 1943. He had to ditch the Aleutians and had to ditch the old plane. He got another Fairchild airplane. Bob was flying to Aleutians and Alaska Peninsula and it was obvious there might be a need for transportation and after the war you could buy a C-47 for \$4,000 down and the rest when they catch you "as you might say." He got one. In 1946 they had a steamboat strike and he got the First DC3- C-47 (airplanes) and in 53 days he made 27 round trips between Seattle and Fairbanks and he made \$90,000 dollars in 53 days. He put in 480 odd hours as a pilot at that time.

He used to come in here when there was the CAA and the big airlines said he wasn't taking care of his airplanes. He was arriving in Spokane and doing his maintenance work and then getting up early and flying over to Seattle. He brought his records up to prove he had maintenance and the big airlines were chagrined they didn't get Reeve. 8:30

He started an Airline down in the Aleutians there in Cold Bay, Dutch Harbor, Umnak, Adak, Umshika [sp], Shemya, Attu, and after wrestling with the CAB he got a temporary air certificate and got a permanent one in the 50's. In those days you send a pilot with \$1,000 dollars and tell him to bring back the change. Bob's airline company now has 12 airplanes with 6 different kinds of engines, wings, tails, and generators. They have one Grumman Amphibian, one Helio Courier, two C 47s, 4 C 46's, 3 DC 6's and one Lockheed 188 Turbo Prop. The diversity helps the diverse things the pilots have to do. Cargo transportation is one example. They fly 2,000 hours a year and bring supplies to the county. They have about 175-180 employees. They don't get highly educated people with Master's from Harvard. They get good grassroots people where they are only interested in making a living.

Bob holds 8 jobs, he's president, the chief executive officer, the General Manager, the superintendent of operations, director of finance, director of public relations and labor relations, and finder of lost baggage. He says in modern age there's 7 people with those jobs and they stab each other in the back to get that number one spot.

A man says "Every time I come down here, he's talking to a pretty girl." Reeve says "She came with Cole Basham." and the tape cuts out at 12:25.

He works 7 days a week because after 5 days of running like a striped tiger he needs a day to go get his mail and have solitude. He's proud of Reeve Aleutian Airways. Four of the members are his family. Dick Reeve is a captain and vice president of administration, Janice Reeve is a chief stewardess, Dave Reeve captain on the line, and Whitman Reeve, a graduate of University of Alaska, is a radio technician. Whitman was the fastest mover on his feet Bob ever saw.

His job principally is when the customers give him hell, he parcels it out to whoever deserves it.

Jean Craig is the secretary. Bob is discussing her life and how she is in charge of passenger service and reservations. 16:25

Bob decided that it was possible to land planes on glaciers. He said he was successful because of using skis and flying onto mud. Bob said his biography is authentic. Some events of Reeve's life were inappropriate for human consumption, he says.

Bob is asked about others who fly. Jack Croconair [sp] was with him when he was blowing off of the glacier and when he flew into the side of mountain. Charlie Simmonds saved Bob's life by pulling him out of the water. Bob and the interviewer discuss a picture of Kirkpatrick who pulled him out of a crevice one night. Eddie Rickenbacker's signature is mentioned by the interviewer. Bob is very aware that he is his own boss. A man walks in and Bob says "Hal, how you doing old boy?" and the recording stops.