

Summary for H75-16-01

George King, with unidentified male interviewer in Juneau, AK 1955 or 1959

An unidentified male interviews George King (owner of Boundary Lodge on the Taylor Highway), in Juneau, AK in 1955 or 1959. King and Captain Roy Jones were the first commercial pilots in AK (in 1922), says King. He also states that he was the first solo pilot in AK, and the first parachute jumper in AK. He was later a partner of Joe Crosson and Ben Eielson, in Fairbanks. Eielson, called the father of aviation, was in commercial operation in AK in 1923. These three men promoted Pan-American Airways. King says they sat in Juan Tripp's office in New York for 2 weeks, with Priester the chief engineer, and sold the idea to them. After Captain George Wilkins (later Sir Hubert Wilkins) made a flight across the North Pole with Eielson, Sherman Fairchild and Juan Tripp made Eielson executive vice president of Pan-Am. Eielson bought Fairbanks Airplane Service from Paul Lavery, son of Bill Lavery, Anchorage Air Transport run by Russ Merrill (lost in Cook Inlet), and Bennett Rodebaugh. Noel Wien, King states, sold out to Vic Ross. Note: King's version of these transactions diverges from the accepted account, in which Wien Airways of Nome, Bennett-Rodebaugh, and Anchorage Air Transport were the three Alaskan companies bought by Pan-Am. Crosson was appointed chief pilot for the Pan-Am venture, says King.

At this time King was in the hospital in New York, having crashed a German junker previously. He then went to Germany; he was ferrying junkers for them to other countries. He then promoted a flight from Moscow to New York across the Bering Strait. He was to receive \$10,000 from Veto and Tidewater on completion. He flew a junker with an American wasp motor in it. He had a German copilot, Capt. Schnable, and a German mechanic. They flew as far as Irkutsk/Lake Baikal, on the Trans-Siberian Railway. It was at this time that Ben Eielson was lost at North Cape, Siberia. Crosson and Harold Gillam were in the party that found the wreck, a Hamilton plane. The oil and gas set aside by Veto and Tidewater for King was used in the search for Eielson. At Lake Baikal King and his crew heard the news about Eielson and turned around and went back to Germany. In addition, the oil supply in Fairbanks in the Wien hangar was all burned in a fire there.

Roy Jones flew a plane he bought in Pensacola, FL, King tells. The mechanic was Jerry Smith (not to be confused with Jerry Jones of Pan-Am). King joined Jones from mining in Cornucopia. They lost their end on Lake Heckman in Ketchikan. After that, they bought a Hall Scott Boeing plane with one pontoon from Dr. Divine in Juneau (of Taku Lodge). They lost that plane too, had no money left, and subsequently went broke. That's when King went to Fairbanks to join Eielson and Crosson.

Eielson's work with Pan-Am didn't last long when the Nanook was lost at North Cape, across from Cape Prince of Wales. Boilin was the plane's mechanic. King says that Mrs. Boilin was later married to his younger brother, Capt. King, who works for AK Freight Lines carrying barges to Whittier and Seward. The Boilins' son, Bill, was chief pilot for Bob Reeve's Aleutian Airways out of Anchorage. King's older brother, Leonard, has a store in Haines and is building a lodge over at Chilkat Lake, says King.

King majored in geology in school. When he came back injured from the war, as a part of vocational rehab he was sent to college at the University of Washington for a year and a half. He wanted to major in aeronautic engineering, but his coordinator told

him there was no future in it, so he majored in geology, since he had experience with mining. He later studied geology at UAF. His professor there was Dean Patty, now Dr. Patty, president of the university. Just before he left Bali for here, he found a deposit of vermiculite, a biotite mica that expands under heat and can be used as an insulator. He was familiar with this mineral, and later, when he lived up in the Fortymile country, two engineers told him they'd heard a story about vermiculite being in that area. They asked King about it and he said he hadn't seen any. Then, one day when the road between Eagle Cutoff and Boundary was being fixed, King was driving along and saw some black, shiny deposits, which proved to be vermiculite. He staked some claims and dug some holes. He tried to call George Cooper, Don Able, or Holsworth, the commissioner of mines. He brought samples out for UAF to do a scientific rundown on. He's very interested in this, for himself and for the future of the state. It's right on the road, he says, and could be transported easily to Big Delta. Vermiculite is used in concrete and plasters.

Jumping back in time, King relates that he came north in 1910. He ran away from home. In those days, everything was horses—he graduated into a 6-horse teamster at a young age. You got \$175/month for running a 4-horse team, and \$225/month for a 6-horse team. He paid no taxes, and paid just a dollar a month for medical expenses. King feels that he had more money then than now, because money went further: haircuts were 25 cents, ham and eggs were 45 cents, overalls \$1, and a pair of shoes \$2.50. King says he was born in 1893.

King was the first solo pilot in AK, he states, with Joe Crosson. Previously he had flown with Eddie Hubbard, who Bill Boeing had taught to fly. He'd never soloed with him, or with Roy Jones, though. Noel Wien gave King his acrobatics skills. Wien was formerly a flying circus man. Sig Wien, his brother, and he were in public relations in Fairbanks.

King tells that he drifted out of aviation and got back into mining. When he married, his wife frowned upon flying, so he left his Waco plane on Weeks Field. Eventually it began to be vandalized, so he sold it.

He belongs to the Yukon Order of Pioneers in Dawson, and the Pioneers of Alaska. The Yukon Order started at the mouth of the Fortymile River before Dawson days, probably around 1890 or 1892, says King. Gold was only discovered in Dawson on August 17, 1896, and the stampede took place in 1898. Jack McQuesten had a big trading post at the mouth of the Fortymile, says King, and the first girl in Dawson came over from there.

King says he'll be 66 years old in June. He talks about Lindbergh's famous flight. His own round-the-world trip was supposed to convince the world there was a future in the aviation field.

King says he had a hand in getting Eielson Air Force Base named after Eielson. The colonel in charge was Col. Woolls at the time of the dedication. Col. Peck was there, too. Capt. Wilkins and King roomed together at this event. They were treated royally and had private drivers. Major York was King's driver. Ltnt. Trapnell was Governor Mike's driver.

In the early days of aviation they flew by the seat of their pants; there were no navigation instruments. He tells the stories of when he and Jones lost their plane on Lake Heckman. There was a fish hatchery there run by Mr. Patching. After a trip to Bell

Island Hotsprings, they took Mr. Patching to a remote lake and back successfully. Then next time they took off, it was in hot, dead air. The plane was waterlogged and when they made a turn they stalled and fell into the lake (Lake Heckman was named after J. R. Heckman, a Ketchikan banker). Jones was an excellent swimmer. They both looked for each other under water. They towed the plane, which was floating by its tail up on the beach. They packed the motor out 8 miles; King strained his back and had to see a chiropractor later.

That's when they bought the plane from Dr. Divine. Back then, you had to judge the weather yourself. King mentions Eielson's plane, Jenny, and Dick Woods and Bob Bloom. Eielson, King says, was the aviation inspector for the entire West coast of the U.S. at one time.

King state that they built some of the first skis for airplanes in Livengood, with Charlie Schick, a carpenter. Then they bought skis from Elliott Brothers in Ontario. They used to land wherever it was convenient: gravel bars, caribou domes. Nome and Wiseman had Army signals; they'd check weather with those. They put a motor with twice the power of the first in the Jenny. There were no stabilizers back then, so they adjusted the balance with the flying and landing wires. The new motor made her noseheavy so they rigged it themselves to balance it.

The engine in Jenny quit on King one day at 4,000 ft. (?) He landed in Bennett-Rodebaugh's field. Ralph Wien, who was killed afterwards in Nome, at that time was a night watchman in Fairbanks at the Fairbanks Exploration Co., and came to check on King when he landed. Some honeymooners who'd seen the plane come down also came over to check it out.

The next day King and Crosson toted Jenny back to their field; they didn't want it to be on their rival's field. The old Jenny is now up at the UAF Museum, says King.