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ORAL HISTORY  
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I, RANDALL K ACORD, of  
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mailing address Box 70437 city state

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Randall K Acord  
signature

9 May 1990  
date

RECORDING OF LADD  
FIELD, MADE  
SEPT. 1990

RELEASED TO UAF  
ORAL HISTORY  
5-9-91

ORAL HISTORY BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

NAME: Randall Keith Acord  
(first) (middle) (last)

(NICKNAME:) Randy (MAIDEN NAME:) \_\_\_\_\_

MAILING ADDRESS: 178 Eighth Avenue, Fairbanks AK 99701  
(city/state/zip)

DATE OF BIRTH: 2/27/19 BIRTHPLACE Hedley, Texas  
(city/state)

SPOUSE: Marion Hutchison Acord

MARRIAGE DATE: 3/29/52 PLACE: Seattle, Washington

CHILDREN: (none)

ALASKAN RESIDENCY: Randall Acord, a test pilot, was assigned to  
the Cold Weather Test Detachment at Ladd Field during World War II.

OCCUPATION/PROFESSION: He remained in Fairbanks after his discharge in 1946.

Military test pilot, commercial pilot and private pilot; also a  
food manufacturers' representative and operator of Acord's Charter Service (1948-55)

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF SUBJECT IN RELATION TO ORAL HISTORY:

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INTERVIEWER: (Self-taped, following an outline)

DATE OF INTERVIEW: June 28, 1991 TAPE NUMBER: 339

Randy Acord interview with Fort Wainwright Public Affairs staff, Major Frank Theising and Linda Douglass, September 1990.

(Note: This transcript has been edited for clarity.  
\*\*Indicates spellings and/or complete names not confirmed)

The original property of Fort Wainwright, which originated as Ladd Field, was obtained back in 1938 by General H.H. Arnold. He was a major then, and he came to Alaska looking for a cold weather test station. The problems that existed in the Air Corps, was cold weather. Arnold looked at possible sites, including Anchorage, and after studying the weather, selected Fairbanks.

The original properties Arnold purchased at that time were the Spencer and Busby homesteads, which were adjoining homesteads and were located approximately where what is now the North Camp. We called it the Quadrangle of the original construction of Ladd Field.

Arnold was an engineer in his own rights. He designed the original base for this cold weather test station. His idea was that if it was going to be cold, he should have a base that would be supporting to the point that under extreme conditions the people would be protected also.

This is why the original base was designed in a horseshoe shape, which we called the Quadrangle, with the hangar at the open part of the horseshoe. The powerplant, of course, was in the upper end of the horseshoe and all these buildings were connected by a tunnel. This tunnel idea was basically because of the frozen ground conditions that were unknown at that time, to eliminate these permafrost conditions the tunnel was the answer. So all of the utilities - the phone, the electricity, the sewer, the water, the steam - was all plumbed in this utilidor, which circled the entire building area. When this idea was laid out the sidewalks were put directly above the utilidors. The sidewalks from the utilidors to the entrance of each main entrance of the building was also above the utilidors. The beauty of the whole plan, and the original idea, is there was no snow to shovel, because any heat loss in the utilidor would melt the snow and kept the sidewalks safe for walking, if you wanted to walk outside.

The base surveys were started in 1939, and as the surveys progressed, the runway was laid out, the hangars and buildings were all laid out, under this plan that was dreamed up by General Arnold. As opportunities arose additional land area was combined with the original two homesteads and enlarged gradually as needed. Construction started in the latter part of 1939 and the base was pretty much completed by the summer of 1941.

The paving of the original runway, which was only 5,000 feet, at that time was a concrete paving and was completed in the summer of 1941.

It was very fortunate the base was in the early stage of completion before Pearl Harbor and it became a very important stepping stone in the original planning of the Aleutian Campaign after the Japanese bombed Dutch Harbor. I believe that was June 1942. The need for a transfer point for the Russian Lend-Lease Program was also a heavy traffic load, starting in August 1942.

The planning and construction of Ladd Field worked out extremely well with the labor force of the general community of Fairbanks, because when the war effort started most all of the men were either drafted or went in the service, and this closed down the biggest portion of gold mining, which in the area at that time was the main income for Fairbanks. The jobs being canceled out or terminated by the F.E. Co. and other mining operations in the general area made all of this labor force available for the construction of Ladd Field. So in the early days, I would say that a large percent of all the people that lived in Fairbanks worked in some part of the construction of the base.

The location of the main gate of Ladd Field, and later Fort Wainwright as it exists today, was a quarter of a mile closer to the construction of the base. In other words, a quarter of a mile east. It wasn't moved to the present position until somewhere along the early '50s, or late '40s. The old main gate was located about where we're approaching at this moment. That would be 10th and Gaffney.

Now just inside the old main gate, only about 150 yards was the NCO Club. The NCO Club was a wood structure, built of logs, was a beautiful building. It burned in 1944.

Turn down Applegate Road, which at that time didn't have a name, and had a gentleman that lived down here in a house that was built in the '20s, and his name was Ashley C. McKinley. He was a lieutenant colonel and he was on assignment to the Cold Weather Test Detachment at Ladd Field as an adviser in cold weather. The reason he was selected for this particular job, he was a navigator with Admiral Byrd on his first flight across the South Pole in 1929. He was a balloon pilot originally and then a navigator after that. He was a tremendous man and he was our troubleshooter, you might say, and he lived in this little house down Applegate Road, and was assigned to him by the military. He lived here two and a half years when he was in Fairbanks. This house, of course, was built by someone back in the earlier days, which I don't have a record of that.

McKinley became our base commander in Watertown, South Dakota for the Cold Weather Test Detachment. He served that post for two summers in a row, during the time the Cold Weather Test was assigned that base. It was the satellite base of operations for the Cold Weather Test Detachment stateside. It might be interesting to note when they built the big refrigerated hangar, which is a huge hangar at Eglin Air Force Base, it is now called the McKinley Hangar, named after Ashley C. McKinley.

Gaffney Road which we're on was named after Dale V. Gaffney, who was the first commander and later became commander of the Alaska Air Command, and was at Elmendorf for a short while until he moved it to Edmonton. During the last two years of the war, the Alaska Air Command was at Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

I don't remember the exact time of construction of the Bassett Hospital, but from the time it was built it was always named Bassett, and Bassett was named after a medical officer in the Aleutian Campaign in the Army and that name came into being right after the Army took over Ladd Field.

The area we're coming to now on the left, which is the Chena River, there was an awful lot of history developed around that area. That was our main float operations for float aircraft in the early '30s, and Will Rogers and Wiley Post landed there in 1935, and a lot of the pictures you see today are pictures taken at this point right here. When they got ready to make their Barrow flight, they took off from the Chena River and went to Harding Lake and topped their tanks off, and departed from Harding Lake on their tragic flight, which cracked out of Barrow.

During the war this portion of the Chena River was used as a float operating base for airplanes on floats. The lagoon was not there at that time. We just tied up on this side of the river, was the tie-ups where these drainage places went in.

The early pictures that you see or that we have available, the vertical pictures from the air of Ladd Field show these areas that go into the Chena (River) as sloughs, and they were filled in later on.

The road we're on now, which is Gaffney Road, was just a dirt trail. It wasn't paved until 1944, and it was very narrow and trees on both sides.

In 1944, the areas on the right, which was all open area, was called Reindeer Camp. Reindeer Camp is now the ballparks we have here. It was a camp of quonset huts, and there were probably a couple hundred of them, and there was 6,000 or 7,000 civilians and military mixed, worked there in the construction business. This is when it was really expanding.

The powerplant as you know it today, construction didn't start until 1949 and it was finished in 1951.

The road, as we're traveling by on the right, didn't exist until the railroad was put into Eielson. Most all of the railroad siding terminations for Ladd Field were off of Trainor Gate Road.

The original runway was 5,000 feet, was later extended and graveled until the summer of 1944, when they blacktopped the ends - 2,000 feet at one end and 2,200 feet on the other.

In the summer of '44 they started the construction of the south runway and it was completed in 1945. The south runway where it is now, in March of 1944, we used as a ski runway for landing airplanes on skis. That's where I did all the flight tests on the P-38 on skis, and the P-51 on skis, and also the P-40 on skis were also tested there.

The end of the main runway, because of the main access road to the base, we could actually land on the road and roll on to the runway if we wanted to, but that was a very poor practice, we learned later on. The tower had a buzzer and a red light for the cars to stop, when an airplane was landing the tower operator would turn it on. It still exists today here, I see.

The original warehouseing and cold storage and refrigerated storage was located off Trainor Gate Road, because an awful lot of our products at that time came in by railroad. The railroad was put in first and Trainor Gate Road bridge was built because all our construction materials for Ladd Field had to arrive by railroad. The highways didn't exist that we have today. Where the telephone company is located now, we used to have a long barracks which was the original barracks constructed at Ladd Field. The documented movie or videotape that you have will show that long building for a very short time on the screen. There was a long barracks built here, it was almost 100 yards long, and the reason was so that everyone could have warm, inside walking areas. That building existed until the summer of '43 and it was torn down.

The original Quadrangle, and the building we see now, which is Building 1562, that building as it exists used to be a huge warehouse behind and joining on to the center part of the building. That huge warehouse was a Quartermaster Warehouse. It burned I believe in 1956, and part of the original concrete pad was there for a good while. Next to it on the south was the original powerplant, which was torn down, I believe in 1989 basically because of asbestos and the fact that its maintenance was getting to the point it wasn't economical to maintain. That powerplant of course heated the whole base at that time. This Building 1562 that I'm looking

at right now had two doors opening on to Gaffney Road access that was the fire station. The tall building was the Quartermaster offices; the lower office on the south was the Signal Corps and the Provost Marshal.

The building next to the powerplant on the south was used for many things after the war and during the war. It was a kind of storage facilities, it was built in 1944, 1945. I remember it even as a drive-in bank, right on this end.

And the buildings west of Hangar 1, none of those existed until later years. The west part, which is now Building 1557, Hangar No. 1, was occupied by the Russians for the maintenance of the aircraft in the Lend-Lease program. The hangar was our main office area.

On the north side, in the upper area on the northwest corner, Hangar 1, was the Cold Weather Test offices, and in the northeast corner was the base commander's office. Originally that was General Gaffney or Major Gaffney, in his promotions on up. The second commander was Colonel (Russell) Keillor, and that's where his office was also. The offices in the bottom of the north side of the hangar were shops and on the south side of Hangar 1, which we called it, the upper offices in the southeast corner was base operations; the upper offices in the southwest corner was the weather office, and in between was base operations. The first floor of Hangar 1, of course, were all the shops as we needed shops, both for Soviets and cold weather tests.

Building 1555 as it's numbered today was called the Air Corps Barracks. It was a "U-shape," with the bottom of the "U" facing the parade grounds. The south wing of the Air Corps Barracks is where Cold Weather Test Detachment personnel stayed. There was 256 of them mostly, it varied a few numbers pro and con, and the north of 1555 was the hospital. The lower area (basement) of present headquarters was storage room for the hospital. The center of the second floor was the mess hall and so forth, for all the GIs, as well as, in the basement, was the theater, the barbershop, the PX and the library. The entire south wing was quarters for the 256 Cold Weather Test personnel. Behind Building 1555 there was nothing constructed in the early days.

Building 1045 was the BOQ and that's all it was used for. It was the Bachelor Officers Quarters. That was our mess hall, our nightclub, our dining room, our dance hall, our barbershop and where all the officers on the base lived, both floors. There was four officers to each bathroom. In between what is called the BOQ and the Nurses' Quarters was the only garage we had, which is Building 1046 now. That's where we kept all the staff cars and our maintenance was done under civilian contract in the city of Fairbanks, and most of it was by Service Motors.

Building 1047 was known as the Nurses Quarters, and the nurses had most of the top floor and the Russian interpreters lived in the basement. The next building over is the commander's house, of course, where Gaffney and Colonel Keillor and the rest of the commanders on down the list of history have lived as they rotated through.

Building 1049 was known as NCO-14. This building housed around 300 to 325 Russians for three years. This was all of the enlisted men; they were the only persons that lived there; all were enlisted personnel. The officers lived in town and rented buildings or leased buildings. Some of them stayed in the Officers' Club, or the BOQ for short periods, if space was available.

Now Building 1051, as numbered today, was called the Transit Quarters. We had so many people going through this station during the war that they never had places for anyone to stay. This building was made available for overnight and most everyone was never there more than two days. It was only the Transit Quarters. But I might note that the design by General Arnold, NCO-14 and NCO-12 were so named that because they were supposed to be NCO apartments for the married NCO personnel. All married spouses were sent to the (continental) U.S. at the beginning of the war. Between NCO-12 and NCO-14 originally was built as a U.S. Post Office. I believe that was in the early part or middle part of the 1950s.

(Building) 1021, which is behind the BOQ, was known as the BOQ Annex, because we had too many officers coming through, this building was sometimes used for transit officers' quarters.

In 1945 or the latter part of 1944, I can't remember exactly, we ended up with a detachment of WASPS, of Women Auxiliary Corps for the Army Air Corps. The barracks was located about where the church is now. That's Building 1043.

In 1945 the barracks burned and we lost one WAC in the fire, which was quite a disaster at that time. Immediately before the summer was over, the building was replaced. It was a building similar to the standard World War II, two-story-type barracks. It was replaced and used until the war was over, then it was moved over to where the existing Officers' Club is today, and it was added on to, and became the Ladd Field Officers Club. In the later years of the '50s it burned, and they built the existing building they have today, which they have altered a couple times.

These other buildings in the late '40s, early '50s, the ski area was built for recreation, because in the Cold Weather Test Detachment, the other personnel here was the Six Air Depot Group, Base Group, 4th Army, etc. were working the Lend

Lease program, helping maintain the Russian Lend-Lease aircraft to get them out of Ladd and on their way to Russia.

During the war there wasn't too much recreation. We were working seven days a week at that time.

On Birch Hill there was a cemetery, and every summer we dug 30 graves to use during the winter. It seemed, unfortunately, that we filled most of them every winter. Some from aircraft crashes, some from natural causes and other problems.

In later years we found some aircraft buried in the area next to the river, which were dug up a couple years ago before they could build that new officers home complex they built. There were the remains of a B-24, B-25.

Back to that cemetery on Birch Hill, down at the foot of the hill there the little building is still here. It's a cement block building. That cement block building was used for body storage when there wasn't a grave available, or for some reason they had to hold the corpse for awhile and stored at regular outside temperature. Some of the bodies were shipped to other locations for burial.

This building, out in the open, was moved in in later years, and I don't know its present use. I have no idea why it was put there. It looks like it could be used as a USO or something like this type building.

The building east of the BOQ Annex, I don't know the number, but it was originally built as a PX in 1953, 54, 55, something like that, and they used it as a PX and lunch counter for a number of years.

Most of the Russian officers, incidentally, lived in what is now known as the office for the Chapel of Chimes on Illinois Street in Fairbanks. It used to be a three-story building and a fire burned the top story off, so they just took the top off and put a roof on it, and that now is the office for the Chapel of Chimes. The officers did most of their drinking at what is now still the International Bar.

The east ramp of Hangar 1 was all allocated to cold weather tests. Behind the BLM building, I'm a little ahead of myself. The first two years of cold weather test continued to grow and additional heated space was required. We only had the east side of Hangar 1. So General Arnold had two T-hangars build for us and we used these T-hangars for maintenance and running additional tests. Right behind this particular area were a large number of Butler buildings, which were the buildings we used for cold weather test of supplies and as a testing area. There were two rows of them and about six to seven buildings to a row, but these T-hangars, incidentally, were used by BLM and other government agencies for drying

parachutes or what have you, in the beginning, and they never ever did maintenance on them.

Building 1004 originally was Pompeo Hall. Pompeo Hall was named after Master Sergeant Pompeo\*\*, who was a crew chief on a B-24, and we lost him on Dec. 21, 1943 in a crash out on Charley River. We never did find the airplane until Lt. Crane\*\* walked in 84 days later. He was the copilot. He walked into an old trapper's cabin near Woodchopper, and Bob Rice, an old friend of mine, a Wien Air captain for years, flew him in on a Gull Wing Stinson when he was on the mail run, and that is another long story. We should document that sometime.

Building 1001 was called Haynes Hall and I don't know the story of the Haynes name. We would have to go back and research that a little bit. I just don't know.

During World War II and after, this area east of Haynes Hall was all trees. There was no construction whatsoever. In the early days all during the war, we didn't even have a road around the east end.

The hill which you're looking at on the east end of the runway, where the approach lights come down, used to be about 80 feet higher than it is now. In 1944, or it could have been the spring of '45 when the B-29s were coming to Ladd, the B-29s had a problem of cylinder head temperatures. If you didn't get them up to a certain speed when you took off the cylinder head temperatures would go overboard. So we cut that hill down so the B-29 wouldn't have to climb after he took off. He could get that speed and avoid that temperature problem. So after it was cut down about four months after they changed the design of the engines on the B-29s and took the carburetors off and put on fuel injection systems. We never had the temperature problems anymore. We got a lower hill anyway.

Us fighter boys used to use that as an excuse to pull up real quick when we took off. They'd call us into base operations once in a while and give us a little chewing because we were trying to show off because there was a hill there, and we'd just leave it on the deck and when we got to the hill, we'd pull her straight up; and we'd say, "Well, colonel, you wouldn't want us to hit the hill, would you?"

This area, now the golf course, was all virgin country and there's been rumors over the years that there was a log cabin here that was an NCO club, and that was built by Soviets, but that's not true. The log cabin was built by the NCO people of Ladd Field about, I'd say, in the early '50s --- maybe '52, '53, '54, and later on, of course, it became the golf course. The Ladd Field area was absolutely fantastic the way they enlarged it, and started increasing its size. As a result

they built four hangars, and they're the same type of hangars, the old Birchwood style that we have all over the world, all exactly the same pattern.

They built Hangar 2, 3, 4 and 5. Hangar 2 and 3 still exist down on the southwest side of the south runway. Hangar 4 and 5, now numbered 6 was Hangar 5, 4 was on the west side of Hangar 5. The Soviet Union, the Russians, had just moved into it and had been operating out of it for a short while when on a Saturday evening about 7 o'clock it caught fire, and by 10:30 that evening it was gone.

This is probably the basic reason they built the south runway and put the 7,500 foot runway on this side, was to service these hangars without having to cross the flight line of the other runway going to Hangar 1 on the north side. Closest to the river of the original camp, the Quadrangle and Hangar 1, most of the expansion for the Air Force took place on the south side of the runway, which is south of Hangar 2 and Hangar 3. That action started, of course, when they built the commissary and so forth and a lot of the Air Corps barracks, incidentally, during World War II were not here at that time, but there was a lot of the operations of the base were on this side, which we'll get back to a little bit later.

What is now called Building 3001, McKinley House, I believe you call it the NCO Club now, was built in the early '50s and used by Pan American when they were flying to Fairbanks with the DC-4s, DC-6s and later 707s. This was their passenger terminal and it was used for that purpose until the time Pan American withdrew. The reason for PAA using this base to land the big aircraft, Weeks Field was unable to accommodate airplanes of that size.

Over by the trees to the northwest of Hangar 2 used to be Hangar C. It was a large Butler metal building, and in that building was a large terrific machine shop, and in the cold spell of 1947, Col. Shanahan\*\* was taking off - he was commander of Cold Weather Test - was taking off in a C-54 in the ice fog and he lost it on takeoff. He rammed the nose of that C-54 into Hangar C and practically destroyed it, and no one got hurt very bad except the pilot and copilot. Shanahan lost one leg; it was 52-, 53-below zero and his leg froze before they could get him out of the cockpit. The base that building was on is still there. You can see it. Hangar C.

This is what road? Neely and Meridian Road, here between the fence and the existing building over to the west was all warehousing to the end of the war and they were all metal buildings, and I see four of those buildings still exist.

What's known as Gymnasium 2 was built in the early part of '44 and was built away from any other structures on the base, and we concluded at the time it was because we were using the

building for all flammable tests, all of the flow benches for all types of carburetors, and the engine run-up of overhauled engines and all of this kind of work was done here. The machine shop work was done in Hangar C, so they had to transport back and forth between those two buildings.

Driving through what is now called the south post, I guess, most of this was an ammunition dump for Ladd Field. All these 3000 numbered buildings were all constructed in early '50s, middle '50s - I'm guessing at that a little bit. Over 10,000 personnel were based at this installation, and I would say it probably hit its peak about 1948.

The powerplant was built in 1949. I think Mullens\*\* was the contractor, I'm not sure about that. When they laid out the original foundation and bases for the whole complex they already had poured some of the flooring, concrete, and found they were off eleven and a half feet, so they had to chisel all the concrete and start over. It cost them about \$120,000 at the time. I knew the superintendent that was on the job.

There was no children, there was no families here. The families didn't come to join their military counterparts until probably 1946. In fact, when the war started in '41, right after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, all of the married couples that were here had to send their wives and families outside. This was territorial days at the time. There wasn't a state, so things were controlled entirely different. The transport of women into Alaska, even if this was their home was quite difficult getting a permit from the military.

The Russian interpreters that we had, there were about 17. Four or five were men and the rest were women. Two of our interpreters were husband and wife. Of course they were made soldiers in the Russian Army in order to take this position. They were former members of the Metropolitan Opera in New York. They were very talented. Last May (1990) when this group of Soviets were over visiting Fairbanks, one of the women who was an interpreter was here. She was married to a Peter Gamov\*\*, who was a pilot, and he flew in here once, but he did most of his flying between Yakutsk and the front. He made something like 432 trips between Yakutsk and the front, because that's where they changed over and let the professional ferry pilots take them in instead of the ones who came over here on more or less R&R.

Of course a lot of this is history I've accumulated in my own thoughts, especially the history before I arrived here. I arrived on the 23rd of July, 1943. I came up to replace a Six Air Depot Group pilot who only had 17 hours of twin engine time, and he was test hopping a Soviet Russian B-25. He had three Soviet pilots on board with him. He was taking off to the west and lost an engine just after takeoff, and he crashed right in the middle of the road, or almost on the

road. The plane caught fire and burned. It was just before 5 o'clock, and there was a bus load of people going into Fairbanks. They had to stop and wait until the wreck was cleared, because they wouldn't let them pass, and there's quite a few people in town still around that was on that bus.

I was requisitioned out of the training command to replace this pilot, and when I arrived here, I had already had quite a bit of P-38 experience out of Williams Field in Arizona, and they needed a project officer for the P-38s for the Cold Weather Test, and I was fortunate enough to be assigned over to Cold Weather Test instead of going over to the Six Air Depot Group. I continued in that position for three and a half years as well as engineering officer for the fighter section for about three years, and then at the end of the war, after the war was over, I stayed on to become project officer of the P-80, which was already set up for me. But Major Bond was killed at the factory, I believe in August or September 1945. When the P-80 crashed and he was killed in attempting to bail out, they grounded all P-80s for about six months, and that canceled the tests here. I never did get to fly jets. But in the meantime, I started the paperwork to get out, and base command found out, when my paperwork went through, there were only four pilots at Ladd Field that had flown between Fairbanks and Great Falls. So they froze all four of us in position until we could check out pilots between here and Great Falls, so we receive a new copilot every trip to the U.S. to check out as many pilots as possible over the Northwest Staging Route.

It was a great experience. We had the world of knowledge at our fingertips in the Cold Weather Test Detachment. We had 45 of the top engineers from all the different major manufacturing companies in the United States. They were our advisers and watching everything we did. And we were running tests for them as well as for the military, and we ended up solving an awful lot of the cold weather mysteries, which was always an interesting thing to General H.H. Arnold. The more cold weather problems we could eliminate, the happier he was.

I lived in the BOQ right here for three and a half years. I could tell you a lot of party stories out of that, too, but we better not put them on tape, huh?