

Mike Kendall = M.K.
 Mike Moore = M.M.

M.K.: I'm in the home of Mike Moore, Kodiak, Alaska, for an oral history of his experiences early (in his life) in Alaska, growing up on a homestead in the Anchorage area. It is April 1, 1993.

M.M.: I'm Mike Moore and I was born in Landsing, Michigan in 1941, and my family moved to Anchorage, Alaska in 1946. They sold everything they had in Michigan and moved to Alaska. In fact, they caught the last steamship to sail out of Seattle to Seward via train from Seward to Anchorage. My dad arrived in Anchorage with \$120.00 in his pocket and landed a job the first or second day in town with the police department. His only training was as a night watchman. He was a policeman at night and a flight instructor at Merrill Field during the day. He started flying back in the mid 1930's at Francis Aviation. In fact, one of the IFR simulator goggles that you wear - the Francis' ones - that's the guy that taught my dad how to fly. They flew together for years. In fact, he came to Alaska numerous times. He had Beechcraft, Twin Beeches. They'd fly up and go hunting with Dad. They retained their friendship for years.

I started flying at a real early age, although I never got my license. I bought a J-3 Cub.

The Fish and Game would bring orphaned moose and bear cubs by our house. They felt sorry for me 'cause I had no kids my own age to play with. They were working to populate areas with different species that didn't have those species there. For instance, Cordova had lots of feed there, but no moose. So for two Springs we weaned moose calves and that's where they were taken. They were flown to Cordova and turned loose. We raised several bear cubs and we kept two of them. We had them for twelve years. They were actually pets and were the first bears in captivity that actually hibernated, and the first bears that had a baby. There's pictures somewhere of the sow pulling a dog sled.

The big thrill in the summer, during the 1950's, was the tourist buses. They'd come out with a bus load of people and I was a tour guide as a little kid. We had a log cabin that we built and in 1952 we jacked it up and built a floor under it. That year we had electricity and water finally. From 1946 to 1952 we hauled water and used Coleman lanterns for light and oil stoves for heat.

M.K.: Is the cabin still standing?

M.M.: It's still there sitting on top of the hill at Lake Otis, we homesteaded forty acres there. Dad built an airstrip there, which we flew in and out of. It's five miles from the Post Office in downtown Anchorage.

M.K.: When you got back into flying in the 1970's, you said for a number of years that you flew for the Iditarod, could you tell me about that?

M.M.: For seven years, I flew the race marshall for four, and three years I was the chief pilot. I was also involved in the Iditaski for the five years that it went, and I was also the chief pilot for that. I also flew for the junior Iditarod. So I've got quite a bit of experience flying from Anchorage to Nome, and it's a lot different kind of flying.

M.M.: I've done a lot of search and rescue. I belong to an organization called Christian Pilots Association. We did a lot of search and rescue. We had about a fifty percent find rate. The Civil Air Patrol and the Air Rescue Center in Anchorage would call us if they couldn't find them and we'd go out and see if we could find them.

M.K.: And you're flying just a Cub with just a turn and bank indicator and a compass for instruments?

M.M.: I did put an ADF in later on. The ADF really works good flying in the interior, because the VOR is line of sight and you gotta get a lot of altitude for them to work, as soon as you get behind any mountains or hills, you can forget it. Whereas the ADF will pretty much hold true, you would tune a radio station up, or an NDB, and it seemed to work pretty good. My dad was also in the Civil Air Patrol for quite a few years. And during the earthquake in 1964, I forget how many hours, I think it was something like 150 hours of flying time he had in less than one month flying emergency supplies and stuff to communities in southcentral. He flew for quite a few years for the Civil Air Patrol. He was one of their Beaver pilots. And of course he'd come from the old school. He started flying airplanes with big radial engines in them. He used to fly old biplanes too. His log books go up to about 3,000 hours and he never continued them after that.

M.K.: Do you ever log your hours?

M.M.: Yes, I've got about 2,500 hours logged, but I know I have more than that. It seems that once you get over 1,000 hours, you get really lax about filling out your log book. On a lot of my trips like the Iditarod, you're following a race at the pace of the race, so what I do is I keep track of my total flying time, I just write down "Iditarod 120 hours." Most of the years that I flew for them I averaged between 60 and 120 hours. On the Iditarod we flew dog food, people food, we flew the checkers and the ham operators, to all the check points. The only ones we didn't fly to were McGrath and Nome. We flew them wherever they wanted to go. Sometimes the weather would interfere. I remember one day I was the only one to make it through Windy Pass. The rest of the pilots didn't make it. I got through by dead reckoning. If you do enough flying in an area, you can pull out a chart and be able to fly across a huge valley, like the Yukon River from mountainside to mountainside, and when you get in bad weather you're looking on your chart for a little 200 foot hill to make sure you're on the course that you want to be on. There it is, and you know you're on course. There is a friend of mine that crashed in the Alaska Range, and he survived for five days. He tried to go through a valley that had a tremendous wind howling through there. He went through it, turbulence was so severe he throttled back, but once he got through the saddle on the other side of the ridge, it was socked in. He had to turn and go back out, and when he turned down wind, his air speed dropped and he fell out of the sky, and crashed into the side of the mountain. No survival gear, he survived huddled in the wreckage with an engine cover and a catalytic heater. The heater gave out on the fifth day and that's when we went up there and found him. He was just getting ready to leave the airplane, and he would have never made it.

M.K.: You've been flying fabric airplanes your whole life. How does that stand up to the cold weather?

M.M.: It handles real good, a lot depends upon what kind of paint that you use. If you use the acrylic stuff, you've got to be real careful because it will crack. It will get what you call "ringworm." I got two ounce dacron and I use Stitz for my paint. I've never had any trouble with it, it doesn't crack, ice comes off of it real easy, it's very easy to patch and mend if you have to. The only problem that you will have with a fabric airplane is that you have to

be extremely careful about the cold weather in the wintertime, when it gets down to forty below, if you don't have to fly, don't fly. If you do, you have to be extremely careful in turbulence, and you want to make sure you make soft landings because the metal is extremely brittle. I pulled a gear fitting off landing in the pack ice in Nome. I hit a little pressure ridge and the plane stalled out at about five feet in the air, I gave it a little bit of power but it wasn't enough and, if it hadn't been for the pressure ridge I would have been fine, but the pressure ridge was coming down and the forward cinch cable just tore the gear frame right out of the fuselage.

M.K.: This is the same Cub that your Dad is flying up in Anchorage today?

M.M.: Yes. I bought it stock and rebuilt it twice. The last time we rebuilt it was when the plane was tied up out at O'Malley and the wind came in and tore it all up so we had to rebuild it. I completely rebuilt it from the ground up. The wings I tore completely apart and started from scratch. It's a PA-12, that's what we call a "Super Grouper." It has the same basic wing design that a Cub has although the stock PA-12 does not have flaps. We added flaps. In fact this last rebuild we went to huge flaps. We've got 7½ feet of flaps on each side. It stalls at 26 miles per hour and cruises at 110 miles per hour. In a lot of ways it out performs a Super Cub. Empty it gets off under 100 feet.

M.K.: I guess during the Iditarod they would load you down pretty good with hauling food and other stuff.

M.M.: Yes. One thing you always stressed to each pilot was to fly at your own ability, what you feel comfortable with doing. Some guys didn't want to haul much in their plane and that was fine, while other guys would load up good. We hauled even dogs and dropped dogs off. That was fun, to get a bunch of dogs in a Cub, which isn't a very big airplane, get about six or eight huskies in the back end, get them in fast, shut the door, get the engine fired up and get airborne as fast as you can. During the takeoff everything is fine and once you get in the air, I've had this happen a couple of times, one of them will want to fight or you'll have a bitch that's in heat and the males want to do their thing. Usually, just a real quick forward push on the stick and right back, and it straightens them right out. They don't bother you or anything anymore. Never had one go to the bathroom or throw up in the airplane.

M.K.: Do you have any Bob Reeve stories? I know you said that he and your Dad were close friends.

M.M.: They were close friends. I went to one of his birthday parties where the kids and all of the pilots that flew for Bob all got up and told stories. This was probably about four years before he died. It was at the Camp and Cook Motel. They were telling stories about Bob. He bought his first DC-3 and went to pick it up and when he pre-flighted it, it didn't have any fuel caps on it. So he looked around the airport, and back then it was the CAA, they found the CAA's DC-3 and took the fuel caps off of it and adiosed out of there.

M.K.: From reading some of his books I gather that he and the CAA did not see eye to eye all of the time.

M.M.: No. A lot of those pilots came to Alaska and they all gave something, and they all had to make a buck to survive. They came up with ingenious ways of doing things. I know my Dad, he hauled freight for some gold mine for a while. They'd load all you could get into this T-crate, it was overloaded, he took off from Merrill Field and landed on this runway that was a one way shot. There was no go around and you had to land hot and overloaded at a real high altitude. Bob (Reeve) was taking off from mud flats on skis to go up and land on glaciers. Another one that was relation to Bob Reeve was Don Sheldon. Sheldon found his

niche on Mount McKinley. He was taking that Cub of his and landing up there in the glaciers, some 12,000 - 17,000 feet in the air. When you think about it, landing on mountains, I've done some of it, not that high though, on skis in the wintertime is quite an exhilarating experience because you are landing up hill. What you do is literally fly the airplane and keep it going until you get up to the top and you spin the airplane around until you are headed downhill. If you don't, you are in deep trouble. You've got to go up far enough to where you turn around and take off downhill. There is no way that you can take off going up hill. At the high altitudes like that you use gravity to help you take off.

Bob was a neat guy, real personable. I went to school with Janice, who is now, I believe, the vice president. The one brother, he was younger than us, he was behind us. It's neat looking back now, we were all kids and went through grades one through twelve together. I went to their house several times as a kid.

M.K.: I just read a book about him and some of the things that he did are just fascinating. All of what he did he did because he had a family to support. Do you remember any other significant rescues that you were in on in the Civil Air Patrol?

M.M.: Not the Civil Air Patrol but I made two rescues. One was the lady who later became the Executive Director of the Iditarod. She was traveling with a film team on snow machines. We got this call that they needed a medivac. They had fallen and she had over-exerted herself and gotten soaking wet. She was suffering from severe hypothermia. They asked me if I would retrieve her and I said sure. I threw the backseat out of the plane and I was on straight skis that year. I flew out to the swamp and located them. There was a little opening that looked like I could get the Cub in it and out with her. It was going to be real tight though. I landed and they helped me taxi into the trees, it was tight. I put her in the back end and poured the coals to it and away we went. We cleared the trees by about twenty feet. I flew her into Lake Hood where they had the ambulance there waiting to pick her up.

The one I remember the most though, is the most gratifying. It was Colonel Norman Bond (?). An older guy who raced. We had always been concerned about him because of his age. They thought he was in pretty serious shape, his sled had been completely demolished. He was in the Tok burn area and nobody knew what to do. The race official figured they would send snow machines out of Nikoli. I thought that was going to take hours. I was way down by ? and I got into my cub and landed at McGrath, told them to fuel the airplane up and in and saw the race manager. I asked him what he wanted to do about Colonel Bond. He said that he was waiting for me to show up! I asked him if he wanted to go for a ride and he said sure. He jumped in the plane and away we went. We found him. There was a little swamp and it had some ice on it. The only way to get in there was with the Snyder Wheel Skis. The wind was blowing real strong and steady. I made a real slow approach, brought her in, landed on it, and got the plane stopped. I went over and checked him out, carried him over to the plane and got him in. I told the race manager to wait here. I said that I knew I could get the two of us out. I took off, the plane did so good that I just came back around and landed. He got in and I taxied back and away we went. He was really grateful.

Another rescue I did was a guy who lives up by Hayes River was snow bound. He was with another guy and they had two dog teams. I had stopped at his cabin to check on him and his wife said he had been gone for two or three days and she was really concerned because he didn't have any food. They had been out of food, they didn't have any food, all they had was dog food. I landed.

The snow machines were trying to break trails and they were probably ten miles away. I took my survival gear out of the plane. I had my survival suit and I gave it to him. I'll never forget those two guys, I had these food bars in the airplane - kinda like a chocolate bar - they looked like two kids eating their first chocolate bars. It was a real neat experience.

I used to do a lot of flying like that just to go up to people that lived out in the bush that never get to go anywhere or see anybody. I'd take them fresh vegetables, oranges, apples, sometimes just fly up to spend a few hours with them to say hello. They really appreciated that.

M.K.: Can you think of any other stories or anything about bear experiences growing up on the homestead?

M.M.: We didn't have any real fear of bears because we had these two pet ones. My dad used to take the sow down to Campbell Creek because she loved to play in the water. People used to come down and picnic because there was a nice beach right there with a sandbar. My dad came out of the woods with her on a leash and this lady looked up and said, "Oh, how cute. Did you just catch him?" My dad said, "Yep!"

Steve McCutcheon (sp?), who is another lifelong Alaskan, he used to own Max's Photo, they used to use a professional photographer and get bear pictures in the wild of Sister eating berries or flowers. It was quite neat in how they got to these spots because they had to take the bear along. Dad had an old 4 X 4 that had no top, just a windshield. What a lot of people saw was this old 4 x 4 coming down the road with this bear. They couldn't see my dad because the bear would stand behind him with his paws on the steering wheel.

M.K.: You guys had mostly black bear over there, didn't you?

M.M.: Yes. Grizzly bears, they're something else. They're more vicious than any other bears. I've never had any real close calls with bears. My dad was a guide for thirty years, forty years. We used to have fifteen horses and I was always two weeks late for school because I was to take care of the horses and help the hunters. We took up the Governor of Vermont, Mortimer Proctor (sp?) was his name. He owned the Proctor Marble Mines. He was a neat old guy. He'd come up to get a moose and a sheep. I spotted a goat and he got that goat. He was so tickled, he never figured he'd be able to get a mountain goat. The area we hunted when we first started hunting that area in the mid 1950's, you could ride a horse up through these bowls and there would be these big beautiful rams all, lots of them. The area never was hunted that hard and I think what happened was that either the earthquake or a real bad winter killed them, or unfortunately, the military and their helicopters. I've got a ram down in my bedroom it's a full curl, little better than a full curl. I got that one when I was fifteen. I got one that was bigger than that but I gave the head away to someone else.

I shot lots and lots of moose. In fact, I was raised on moose meat. It took me a long time to get used to beef. In fact, I still would rather eat moose meat. It's a real lean meat and it's really good.

M.K.: Were you effected by the earthquake any at that time up in Anchorage?

M.M.: Yes. I was in military school in Georgia at that time. The stories when they got down there were pretty wild and I didn't find out for a month what the status of my parents was. I found out through my sister, she had gotten word from them finally through a ham operator.

M.K.: That certainly was an interesting era.

M.M.: Yes, it really was. You couldn't walk anywhere in the 50's and early 60's. It's kinda sad the way things are now. It's a big city and I enjoy that small town, everybody get along, way of life. I can remember when the park strip was the original airfield. Planes used to fly in and out of there. Then they moved over to Merrill Field. Then after Merrill Field they moved over to International Airport and built that up.

I was out at Chitka Island in 1969 and a guy driving a roller had fallen over and crushed a guy real bad. I was listening to the radio and Reeve said they'd land and pick him up. Visibility, when I say visibility was zero, I mean visibility was zero. I had parked along side the edge of the runway and listened to the GCA guy talk Reeve's DC-6 in. I heard the plane. I never saw it. I heard it land but never saw it. It taxied by me, it taxied over, picked the guy up, taxied back out, and took off.

M.K.: They had nerves of steel.

M.M.: The Alaska Reeve pilots were known for that. They were leaders and the first commercial bush pilots. They knew every route out in that chain.

M.K.: He kind of got dislodged out of his stomping ground of Valdez and Fairbanks. That was the last place left and the CAA started splitting stuff up there.

M.M.: He was a big supporter of the military. He actually trained a lot of military pilots to fly out in the chain and stuff. They came to him for advise.

M.K.: Did you dad ever get involved in training any of the military pilots?

M.M.: No. He got them afterwards in Northfield. He worked for Al ?. Under the GI Bill, the GI Bill only paid enough money for 4½ hours and you had to get them soloed in 4½ hours. They came up with a system to where they could solo a guy in four hours without any problem. What it was, those first three hours of dual instruction, the only thing the student pilot had to do was hold the stick and work the rudders and the instructor worked the throttle. That's how they did it.

M.K.: What kind of planes were they teaching them to fly in?

M.M.: J-3's, T-Crafts, those were the basic planes with tail rudders. There were a few Globe Sleuths (?) around then that they used for advance training. The bulk of it was in J-3's, P-11's, Super Cubs or T-Crate's. T-Crate was a real good airplane for a student because the angle for glides in a T-Crate was straight and level. That thing would go for miles. The students had a little problem landing them because they didn't want to stop flying. They were a good safe airplane. There was side-by-side seating in those which was better for a student. I learned in my Cub and you've got the instructor behind you cupping his hand and screaming behind you.

M.K.: Do you remember any good stories from when you were learning to fly?

M.M.: My most memorable was my solo across country. I had to fly from Anchorage to up by Glenallen, and from Glenallen over to the Park's Highway, over to Cantwell and then over to Anchorage. Of course, before I went, I had to check the weather and I had to call my instructor. He had called the weather and it sounded like I'd have a nice lovely sunshiny trip. I started out and got to Glenallen and I went into flight service. I didn't need fuel but I went into flight service and checked on weather. He said Cantwell was reporting 1,000 feet and snow. I decided to go ahead and go on. I got to the, I forget the name of the road, but there's a little road that goes back in there out of Cantwell heading for Glenallen for a ways, and I started hitting snow. I picked that road up and had enough sense to follow that road. I knew the road would go where I was headed. Boy, when I got to Cantwell it was really

snowing. I landed and I was supposed to get fuel there. I got antsy. The guy never showed up and never showed up, so I took off and headed down Broad Pass for Talkeetna. I started down there and again I felt that the sensible thing was to go over by the road in case something happened. So I did. I got pretty close to Talkeetna and I ran into snow changing into freezing rain. The windshield iced up and I couldn't see out of it. I decided to turn around and head back to Broad Pass because there was an airport there. Just when you get to Cantwell, FAA had a site there. I made it back there and landed. I hitchhiked home and went back about a week later when the weather cleared. I finished my solo across country.

I met this one guy, we became friends, his name was Chip Morrow. He'd bought them all down south. He had 250 hours probably, 300 maybe. He decided to sell out and move to Alaska and they were going to fly up in their new airplane. They were following the Alaska highway and made a wrong turn. Kept going, knew something was wrong but kept flying. Pretty soon he ran out of gas. He'd waited too long and wrecked the airplane trying to get it down. Everybody got out of it unharmed. You see a lot of that in young pilots without too many hours. Heading out, thinking they know what they're doing, and once they get committed to something and realizing that they've made a real bad mistake. They just get completely terrorized and the pressure is so great that they cannot make a good logical decision.

M.K.: Have you ever done a lot of flying around the Kodiak area?

M.M.: Some. I brought my plane over one year and flew quite a bit. I've flown Riley's Cub. In fact, I got my float rating over here. I've been around the island for some time. I don't find it as interesting. I lived out there at Knick (sp?), had the airplane sitting over at Wasilla. One the kids were a little bit smaller, I'd load up the two boys and the girl, Moms, and camping gear all in that PA-12. Cindy and Kyle, they were just little kids then, they'd ride in the baggage compartment on top of all the gear and we'd go camping for the weekend. Fly over to some river and land on a sandbar and spend the weekend fishing and camping. That, you don't get here. We had friends up at Sweatnoff (sp?), Hayes River, and we used to periodically jump in the airplane and go over and spend the day with them or the weekend. We got to know a lot of people on the Yukon River and all the way to Nome. There are a lot of neat people up there. That's the only thing that's sad about moving to Kodiak is that we lost touch with a lot of them. They write every Christmas and ask when we're going to stop by and see them. Joe Delia, he's another old Alaskan. He's the post master up at Squintnaw (sp?). There's been articles in the newspaper and somebody's probably writing a book about him. He's an old trapper. He's trapped up there for forty something years. He had a cute story. You know, trappers have an area that they trap in and another trapper, that's a trapper, won't move in and trap in that trapper's area. It's a code of ethics. Well, some young whippersnapper from Wasilla or somewhere decided he was going to trap it. He moved into Delia's area. Joe was a little upset at first, but then he got to looking at the guy's sets. He saw the humor in it. He went back home and got a couple bags full of hot dog buns. What the guy was doing was taking a hot dog and putting it on a stick. The guy knew absolutely nothing about trapping. Joe went and put buns on all the hot dogs and the guy pulled his gear and left.

M.K.: I can see how you would miss it up there. Kodiak's a neat place but I used to do a lot of flying down in southeast. I think that would be a neat place to own a plane and fly around like that.

M.M.: I remember as a young pilot all these neat things that a person could do.

I remember the first time that I wanted to go to a place called Polly Creek and go clam digging. I asked this guy where Polly Creek was and he said, "You can't miss it. Just fly down the right side until you see a whole bunch of airplanes and that's it." I had 4½ hours of fuel on board. I got to flying for about an hour and think that maybe I left a little early. There was beach all the way down. Pretty soon there was a big hill with rock cliffs and you think that there's no more beach. I remember what that guy had said. I went over the ridge, and on the other side, boy was he right. There were planes everywhere. There were Twin Otters, Beavers, and they all were just laying out there on those flats out there. When the tide goes out the sand instantly goes hard enough to support any twin airplane. This was down in Cook Inlet just when you get to Snug Harbor. We had a ball. There were so many planes taking off and nobody watching, there were a couple of fatalities down there. I would take these five gallon pails, with snap lids on them, and I'd get some salt water in them. You just land the plane, get out, and you could fill a bucket up in fifteen minutes with razor clams. Since you put them in that water, once you get to Anchorage, all but the bottom layer is all cleaned out, the sand is out. We'd build a fire on the beach. It was a lot of fun.

We had places we'd fly during certain times of the year. On the 20th of July we'd go to Cook's Camp (?). There was an old dirt strip, it was a sand strip. The only planes that could work it were tail guiders and they had to be Cubs. It eliminated a lot of people. It was a long strip but it had big holes in it. You had to be a good pilot because you had to land between these big holes. We'd set out tent up. There was a sow and two cubs that were usually around there, but they never bothered us. One night they started to, Momma got a little scared. There got to be so many people learning how to fly, that when we talked about these places on the radio we didn't call them by their names. The Tutstan (?) River, to all of us who went down there, was called the "Plum Forty." The "Plum Forty" meant that it was plum full of fish and it was forty minutes flying time from Anchorage.

I met Von Mitten, he was a dentist and a brand new pilot. There was a little creek that in April and May was some of the best rainbow fishing that you could ever imagine. It was a little creek called the Ivan River. It was just passed the Big Sioux. When the oil companies were doing their seismic testing they had built this little road. It was just barely a one lane road. Every so often they would put down some gravel for turn around for the dump trucks, but it was very narrow. They built it across the swamp that was just parallel to the Ivan River. You'd go down this little road, shut you plane off, and hike over and get you limit of rainbow. We'd just gotten our limit and I heard a plane come in and the wind was blowing, cross wind. I didn't give it any thought. Pretty soon we were walking out and we met this guy and two other people. He introduced himself and I introduced myself. He asked me if I owned the airplane up there. When he said that, I thought that he must have smashed into my airplane. I said yes. He asked if he could get a ride back to town with me. I asked him if he had just landed and he said, "Well, yes, sort of." He had quit flying the airplane as soon as the wheels touched and the wind just threw him right off the road and into the swamp. It flipped over backwards. I flew to Anchorage and got Bob Merlin, who's a mechanic, flew him back there. It took us about an hour and a half and we had the airplane ready to fly. The prop was bent, the windshield was split, all four of the lift struts were buckled. We dug a big hole and tilted the plane up. Got it to stand up vertically and stopped it there. Straightened the lift struts and laced the windshield and straightened the prop. We towed her back up to the road, fired her up and he flew back to Anchorage.

M.K.: It's amazing that these guys can get the planes out of some of the places that they do.

I'll let you get back with you family. I appreciate you, I've got some great stories here. I might even come back for more!

M.M.: Just one last thing that I can think of. I got to fly illegally in an air show back in 1948. Merrill Field had an air show that was a real 1930's style air show. One of the things that they did was have a bunch of pilots with their planes all lined up. We had to undress down to your skivvies or bathing trunks. Once you got down to the trunks you could run to your airplane, take off. You had to make a spot landing on a certain spot. You had to change clothes again. I got to fly in the baggage compartment. They had flour bombing where you drop little bags of flour and try to hit a spot.

I went to Gulkana the first year they had the same type of deal there. I entered in the competition. It was kinda neat. It was a two day thing. One day was competition and anybody could enter. It cost like five bucks to enter and you could enter any competition you wanted. The second day was the acrobatics. They had static air show, they brought A-10 War Hogs down, they had biplanes doing all their stuff on the second day. The first day was real neat because you had bush pilots. Guys who had been flying in Alaska for twenty years bringing their Cubs down and doing short field take offs and short field landings. I didn't do too bad. The first year I took first place in short field landings. Two years later I went and I was going for short field take off, this is what I was going to try to place first in. The announcer remembered me from two years before because he called it Mike's helicopter. When I rotated, and that plane went in the air, I stood it right on its tail and just right straight up. They couldn't believe it. In fact, the second year the FAA got a little upset and told me no more hot dogging. I pumped the tires up real. The first year, I knew I couldn't beat these Cubs off because they were too light. But, the third year I had a brand new engine. I had a 160 Lyco. I figured I could get them. I had these thirty inch air streaks, so I pumped them up real hard so I would have no friction. But they still beat me. They got a better gust of wind than I got. I took second place that year. It was a lot of fun because everybody camped. There was no place to stay so you took your tent up there. They had a lot of parking area so you just pull you plane, find a spot, tie your plane up, pitch your tent right along side your airplane and it was a ball. We had more fun. They had it on Mother's Day. Last I knew, they were still doing it. It was exciting. The FAA ruined it a little bit when they came in and were doing a lot of tire kicking. They were writing tires up for illegal tires. Everybody was having a lot of fun until they showed up. It was kinda sad that that did. Nobody was getting hurt. The guy that owns and builds Arctic Turns, that's the Super Cub, Bobby Beal was his name. He showed up with a brand new Arctic Turn and they had a grudge competition. Short field take off against a Super Cub. He made the statement that he could beat any Super Cub off. The Cub beat him off, just barely. The amazing things this guy did. They took off down the runway. The Super Cub just barely beat him off by about ten or fifteen feet maybe. Beal got his Arctic Turn in the air and went right up, up, up. Dropped the nose just for a few seconds and he couldn't have been more than 300 to 400 feet above when we can do it legal.

They had another deal similar to that in Clam Gulch for short field take offs.

M.K.: I'd like to go to something like that just to see the planes that come in.

M.M.: The Thompson brothers built their own, what they called a "Cubby." They built an airplane that's fashioned after a Super Cub. If you look at it real close it's a lot different than a Super Cub. It's got Fowler flaps, and it really didn't do all that they had anticipated. There were a lot of other airplanes that could beat it. I've got a friend that built up a Cub. He ordered an air frame and did all the rest himself. He's got a 180 engine. He sent the engine outside and had it blueprinted. It was putting out about 230 horsepower. It's awesome.

A friend of mine, Danny Davidson, one of the pilots that I flew with for years, he took the Super Cub up and flew it for the guy up at Gulkana and won first place. They had short field take offs, short field landings, then they had power off, spot landings, then they had flour bombing. I never did do good at flour bombing.

At Iditaski we had a call for Tang. They were out of Tang at the check point. We had cases of these little personal containers that you can stick a straw in. So I said no problem, I'll just air drop it to them. The Little Susitna River, it's a pretty narrow little river. In fact, the Cub will just squeak in there. You have to be careful because if there's a tree leaning you've got to go underneath it. I made this low pass and there was a snow drift. I was going to try and have the case of Tang go into the snow drift. I told Chris, "NOW!" She pushed them out. I pulled up on the stick and I looked back and all I could see was this big yellow area. It hit solid ice and over half of them had just exploded.

M.K.: There's a knack to dropping things from the air like that.

M.M.: There's a rule that I always had, I didn't do it once and I almost got killed. That is, if you do air drops, you've got to have two people. The pilot flies the plane and the other person drops the item. They needed a saw at that same check point. I carried an emergency saw with me. I got in the air and reached underneath and got my saw out of my survival gear. I've got a seat plane door, I opened the side up and it takes two hands, one on the stick and one on the throttle. You've got to use one to throw the item out. I must have moved and moved the rudder and headed right for the trees. I just rolled it right up and it was close. It was close, too close for comfort. I broke one of my rules.

M.K.: Are you guys going to move back up there when you're done in Kodiak?

M.M.: Well, that's debatable. Maybe soon. We miss Anchorage. I was hoping that we could last it out here for at least ten years.

This file is part of the Kodiak History Project.

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