

ALASKAN HISTORY

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID WEISE

BY

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This interview is being conducted by Thomas F. McBride on April 2, 1993 with David Weise, who was a crewmember aboard the Coast Guard C-130 aircraft 1600 which on July 30, 1982 crashed into a mountain on Attu Island, Alaska.

TM Dave, my first question is how did you get interested in aviation?

DW I always liked planes and flying and I knew some people in the Coast Guard, they were with ships, but I wanted to be in the aviation field and a friend of mine told me that they did have guaranteed aviation schools. It took me about six months talking to recruiters and they finally agreed to give me a guaranteed aviation school. So I went to boot camp then to Elizabeth City to AM¹ school. I left there the first of August 1980 then came up to Kodiak Alaska.

TM So is that when you got interested in Alaska?

DW I just got orders to Alaska.

TM So what were your thoughts when you found first found out you were coming up to Alaska?

1. Aviation Structural Mechanic

DW At first it was like "oh, Alaska", but when I got up here I liked it. I like to hunt and fish, being from Montana originally, so there wasn't really a big change for me.

TM David, the day of the plane crash, how did that day start out?

DW I got up about six o'clock in the morning, went to the galley and had some breakfast, went out to the plane to get it ready to go. We were just going to take mail and a few things over to Attu and then come back to Shemya and pick up a USO² group that we had, had out there, and we just left them there at the airport with all their instruments and baggage and stuff up on a pallet, so that we could just come back, load up and go with that. We had one woman that was going to go over to Attu and stay and do a college course on Alaska. We got ready to go and the weather was marginal and foggy and drizzly.

TM A typical day down the chain³.

2. Uniformed Services Organization
3. Refers to the Aleutian Chain

DW Yeah, we just got the plane started and we headed over there and we had the older APN-59 radar which is basically a pretty good radar for land and everything else. I was the loadmaster⁴ on the plane and there was a scanner⁵ in the left seat that was just training and a dropmaster⁶ was in the right hand seat in the SAR BIN⁷, and I was sitting in the seat pallet right behind the SAR BIN.

TM So you had only one seat pallet?

DW Right.

TM Were the troop seats down, I know that you were hauling passengers, so then there was just the seat pallet?

DW Yeah, just the seat pallet, there was enough room with just the seat pallet. We had already taken three people over to Attu, two that were going to be stationed there and then the woman from the college in California.

4. A crewmember responsible for loading cargo on the airplane
5. Second crewmember in the back of the airplane.
6. A crewmember responsible for dropping equipment from the airplane.
7. A place where rescue equipment is kept, with two search seats.

TM So the day wasn't anything special. It was an RON⁸ wasn't it.

DW Yeah, had been out on an Attu log and we brought the USO group. Spent Thursday night there at Shemya. We were getting ready to come back to Kodiak Friday. We were just going to stop and pick up the USO group then fly directly back to Kodiak.

TM What was your first clue that something was wrong?

DW Well I was on and off headset⁹ because I didn't have to be and they were going to do the before landing safety checks, I was in the back on the pallet anyway, so I just got up to look at everything and I was getting ready to sit back down in my seat, in the seat pallet. That's when I heard the engines spool up and I knew something was wrong because I have never heard it like that before. Then I remember the nose coming up and that threw me back in my seat. So I never got a chance to get strapped in. Then the next thing I remember is hitting and then going forward into the SAR BIN.

8. Remain Over Night.

9. Used for communications.

TM So the weather was bad enough to cause this accident?

DW There was fog right down to the ground. It might of made a difference because we were in the wrong bay and we were up a little bit higher, and the fog was right down to the ground there, it may have been up enough over at the airport to get in. Since we were up in the mountains where we shouldn't have been, it was right down to the deck.

TM After being thrown into the SAR BIN, what do you remember next?

DW Some I remember some I don't because when I went into the SAR BIN I hit my head pretty good and knocked my self out. But I still can remember hearing voices and everything else. I remember hearing Mr. Shearer's voice yelling at me to keep rolling, keep rolling, because I guess I was rolling away from the flames. I am not sure where I got out, but basically what we can figure is when the plane came apart at the 245¹⁰, the SAR BIN came out and everything came out behind it. I just came out

10. Refers to a partition or wall which divides the front from the back of the airplane (245 inches from the front of the aircraft).

through the hole in the airplane. A lot of the flames stayed behind us because the wings snapped off when we hit the ground. Then we slid forward and the wings and fuel stayed behind us. Everything was starting to catch on fire. Then Mr. Shearer was telling me to keep on rolling, keep on rolling and I rolled down the hill away. One of the other guys said I was doing okay so they just left me there so they could get the other guys out of the plane. I was sitting on part of the tail that was broken off, I was just sitting there looking all around at everything. I had numerous lacerations of my face, my arms and legs and either the way the pallets came together or my weight going into the SAR BIN, my leg was in front of me or something and I crushed my ankle and snapped it and it came out the side of my flight boot.

TM So Mr. Shearer was the pilot on the plane?

DW No, he was the co-pilot, and Mr. Whyte was the pilot.

TM What about the rescue operation that went on?

DW I guess that the guys at the station at Attu, they had heard us go over head and they thought we were just leaving because of the fog and weather and they went back inside and they never heard

us crash or heard anything at the station. We were probably only four miles away, that's all.

TM And they didn't see anything?

DW No, then they picked up the ELT¹¹ over at Shemya and they called over to Attu to see if we had landed over there. They said no, but that they had gone over head and that they had heard them, but we never saw them again. They figured we crash landed in the water. The Mellon¹² was right in between Shemya and Attu and they had a 52¹³ on the back of it. So the 52 took off and they started to doing a sweep back and forth over the water up to Attu and didn't find anything. Then they got to Attu there they started stair stepping up the hills. All of a sudden they saw the wreckage and flames and everything through the fog. They landed there, got everybody together, the most critically injured to begin with and put them in litters¹⁴ and then put them in the 52. They had the Navigator¹⁵, Radioman¹⁶, the Dropmaster, Mr. Shearer and myself in the helicopter on the first trip out. The

11. Emergency Locator Transmitter.

12. A Coast Guard ship 378 feet in length.

13. A single engine Coast Guard helicopter (HH-52A).

14. A device used for carrying patients.

15. A crewmember aboard a Coast Guard airplane who Navigates.

16. A crewmember aboard a Coast Guard airplane who keeps track of communications with other aircraft or surface vessels.

The only crewmember on the helicopter was the pilot, everyone else stayed behind with the rest of the people. The 52 had been flying for so long looking for us, because it took a little over six hours from when we crashed to when they picked us up, they had to stop back at the ship and refuel, then head us over to Shemya.

TM So did they take you via ship or helicopter over to Shemya?

DW They stopped on the boat, just fueled the helicopter real quick and it took us to Shemya. They had already told Shemya that they had found us and that we had crashed and that they needed all the emergency equipment. There was a Medical KC-135¹⁷ out of Fairbanks enroute to Shemya. They also brought a Coast Guard C-130 out of Kodiak out to Shemya with DR. Nimeroff¹⁸ on it. The crew was comprised with people who knew people on the airplane, so they could tell if they are really out of it or how bad they are doing. Somebody to talk to that they know. Dave Osborn is the one I knew. He was talking with me in the OPS¹⁹ Center there in Shemya where they had us until the KC-135 got there. Then they loaded us into that and flew us to Anchorage. The Navigator was burned pretty good

17. A military refueling aircraft. Military version of a Boeing 707

18. A Coast Guard Doctor also specializing in Hypothermia.

19. Operations Center.

and he also had broken his back and they lost him I think three times enroute to Anchorage. They revived him and brought him back to life.

TM During that six hours between the time you crashed and you were picked up by the helicopter, what did everyone do for survival?

DW The ones that could move around and get things, they got everything they could find. The rafts had come out of the wings so they got the rafts. One survival sled had made it out of the plane. Everything that they could find that was usable, like insulation from the plane or anything like that, they used to bundle us up as best as they could. They used the raft to block the wind. Basically we just all huddled together and stayed there to keep warm until somebody could find us. Didn't have a lot of stuff for first aid or anything, it was just anything they could find to wrap around wounds. Me with my open fracture and lacerations to my head and I was bleeding pretty good and I had lost a little over three pints of blood.

TM So I guess the weather out there, you said it was foggy?

DW Yeah, it was foggy and misty and temperature was probably 40 to 45 degrees, somewhere around that area. Pretty chilly.

TM Yourself and the Engineer²⁰ were pretty badly cut up?

DW Sloboda could still walk around and everything but he had broke his arm. I can't remember, but he tied it up or something just to hold it in place. He was able to move around and help people. The Navigator and Radioman had both broken their backs. The arms of the Navigator got burned pretty bad so they were really trying to take care of him because he was basically in the worst shape.

TM Now that you look back, its been almost 10 years, then you were a Loadmaster and in the back of the airplane. Now you are an Engineer, if you were in the same situation again is there anything that you would do differently. Have you ever thought about that?

20. A crewmember aboard a Coast Guard C-130 aircraft responsible for backing up the pilots and other crewmembers.

DW Yeah, talking with Sloboda and Shearer and everything else, because Shearer didn't feel right about where they were at before we crashed, he was saying something was wrong and that they were in the wrong place and he told the pilot to pull up and turn left a couple of times and finally the co-pilot took control of the airplane and slapped his hands out of there and pulled up and turned left and if he wouldn't have done that we would have hit nose first right into the hill. Since he did that we bellied in instead but, being up front now if you don't feel comfortable or something like that you can force them to or push the issue more to get out of there.

TM You were configured to land at Attu, so that means your gear was down and your flaps were down. So you were all set, so obviously with all that your airspeed is some what slower. If the gear wasn't down and you weren't in a landing configuration do you think you were better off or worse off being dirty²¹ vice being clean?

DW I think we were better off with the gear down. Things I have read from Lockheed²², they said that the gear absorbed a lot of the impact shock. If we would have been gear up, it would just have crushed in the belly and everything.

21. Refers to the airplane configuration (flaps and landing gear extended).

22. The manufacturer of the Coast Guard C-130 aircraft

TM So, just to go back a little bit, after you were taken off of Attu Island and you were in Shemya getting ready to go to Anchorage. What were you thinking about then?

DW I guess they had me so doped up that I slept all the way. I remember bits and peaces here and there. I remember getting off the plane in Anchorage and putting us in an ambulance to take us to the hospital. Then they went and X-rayed me from head to toe and then I went into surgery. I was out for another... I went into surgery at four am on the Saturday morning, this happened at 8 am on Friday morning. So it was sixteen hours from when I crashed till I got to the operating room. Then they put me in intensive care. I woke up and started remembering everything again. It was Sunday at one o'clock in the afternoon.

TM Does it bother you to talk about it now?

DW No, because when I got down to E-City²³ and since it was the first C-130 the Coast Guard lost, everybody was asking me questions here and there, so they had asked me, do you mind getting up in front of the airstation at a meeting and just let everyone ask you questions about it. I said no, it doesn't bother

23. Elizabeth City North Carolina.

me at all. That way everybody got to ask their questions and find out what was going on and what happened and stuff like that. I kept in contact with one of the guys and the other ones I always saw or asked about. I've seen all but a couple of the people on the crash and there doing good. Three of us are still in the Coast Guard flying. I've seen the Navigator and he's in a wheel chair, he's doing good. He, from his burns and everything, lost part of his fingers and they figured he was going to be paralyzed from his neck down, but he is paralyzed from the waist down. The Radioman is walking again. They did some operations on his back and reconstruction. The Dropmaster broke both of his ankles and he is doing fine.

TM Now, he was strapped in, right? He was sitting down in the right scanners seat.

DW Yeah. He, because of instinct, put his two feet up against the 245, so at impact his weight and everything coming forward broke his ankles. And I broke my one ankle, cracked five vertebra in my back, and numerous lacerations.

TM You said earlier that there was some passengers on board.

DW One of the seaman²⁴ that was going out to Attu. He died in the plane crash and fire. The other guy that was going out to Shemya I mean Attu he broke his arm or something, and the woman she broke her ankle ah cracked her ankle. She was basically in pretty good shape.

TM They were all sitting in the seat pallet?

DW Yeah, the one that died he was sitting in the seat pallet directly behind me and he got trapped in the seat pallet from parts of the airplane... things from the over head and everything else. It was on fire and no one could get to it.

TM Is there anything else that you would like to say?

DW No, not really, that about covers it.

TM I appreciate you taking the time to come in and go through this with me.

DW No problem

24. Enlisted rank equivalent to an E-3.

This file is part of the Kodiak History Project.

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