

John Pletcher: He was in B-26s and the day that the Japanese bombed Dutch Harbor he was flying a mission because they had located some Japanese ships. He had flown a mission with a B-26 and had been carrying a torpedo and he dropped the torpedo and apparently it was not effective. But anyway, he came back and landed at – I'm not sure if it was Cold Bay or at Umnak, he flew out of Cold Bay on the mission – but he came back and loaded with bombs and went back out to try to find the ships. He came back in and it was dark, it was night, it was in June, but it was cloudy and no lights on the ground and no radio-aids to help him. They heard him fly over Cold Bay and knew that he knew about where he was. But apparently he flew out north of the islands trying to let down and, in my opinion, he flew into the water without ever seeing it. Because a few days later the nose wheel and one body and some other debris washed up on the north shore of the Aleutian Islands so they know that that's what happened to him.

I knew him well and knew his family and we had stopped near his home town when we came back with the LB-30. We stopped at a place down in south Colorado where he was from and I had met his wife. He had had his wife up here so it was a pretty much of a personal loss to lose somebody you had flown with and all of that. If he had had -- if they had turned on a non-directional beacon I'm sure that he could have oriented himself. I think that he probably had enough fuel that if he could have had a non-directional beacon he could have flown back and forth across using up time until it got daylight and he might have been able to let down through the clouds and make contact with the water and got back into Cold Bay. He didn't make it and we're sure he went into the water north of the Aleutian Islands north of Cold Bay somewhere.

Janis Kozlowski: So you, you all had this pilot training and you had some really good pilots flying in the Aleutians but the weather was probably more than they had trained you for.

John Pletcher: I think the weather was probably more our enemy than the Japanese were, really, because weather caused a lot of our accidents. As a matter of fact, we had two airplanes – I think they were B-17s, I believe – that ran together in-flight. I don't think they ever saw each other, but they ran together and, they were on instruments, of course. But we in the B-26, we made it a rule that we never went on instruments unless it was absolutely necessary because once you lost contact with the ground or the water you had no means of navigation, to know where you were or whether you might be headed toward a mountain or what might be ahead of you.

I had sprained an ankle when I was at Cold Bay and had been sent out to the hospital at Vancouver, Washington for awhile. And when I came back for flight duty, the group commander was in Elmendorf. There were two B-26s there that had to be flown down to Umnak and so they got a crew together for me and I flew wing man on Colonel Erickson's wing. He flew a B-26 and I was following him with a B-26 as his wing man ferrying those two airplanes from Elmendorf down to Umnak.

We had to go on instruments out of Elmendorf through a cold front and I was wing on him in the clouds and finally for some unknown reason I lost sight of him and I had control of the airplane but I couldn't see him. So I called his co-pilot who was a classmate of mine, Frank O'Brien (sp?) and I said, "Obey, I've lost sight of you, I'm down below you somewhere. You tell me when you change course or change altitude and I'm going to fly 1000 feet below you and parallel your course while we go through this front". And sure enough, he kept giving me course changes and

he kept flying with me paralleling his course at 1000 feet below him and when we finally came out the other side of the front, out into clear air, I could see his airplane ahead and was able to climb up and get on his wing again and fly on down to Umnak. That was one of my experiences on instruments in B-26s. I had never flown a B-26 on instruments before [*laughing*].