Chapter 2

Destruction and Pleasure Also

As soon as we deplaned, the destruction of the earthquake was evident. The Control Tower at the Anchorage International Airport had collapsed, falling onto the Restaurant collapsing that entire area of the terminal and killing an F.A.A. Traffic Controller. It was only by the grace of God that many others were not killed. The Airport was now operating from a temporary wooden Control Tower, while a new one was being constructed -- a good distance away from the terminal this time.

Much of the Terminal Building was destroyed. Polyurethane sheeting was substituted for walls throughout the building. We were told that utilities had just been restored a short while before our arrival. Temporary wooden steps provided access between upper and lower levels of the Terminal. This was my first look at earthquake damage, but much more would be seen during my stay in Alaska.

In order to keep in some sort of chronological order, a noteworthy incident developed almost as soon as we landed in Alaska. Of the twelve TDY personnel arriving on this flight, not all travel orders were alike. When we compared notes, Mr. Marty Davoren of the Boston Division Office, had the best orders. His included pick up at the Air Terminal, BOQ housing on Elmendorf AFB, P-X privileges, also a rental car (none were available this night). A military bus from Elmendorf Air Force Base was at the airport -- where the Alaska District, Corps of Engineers Office is located -- with a scheduled stop at the BOQ's. It was now

approximately 11:00 p.m. Anchorage time, and this was the last bus for the night. We all boarded, and since the BOQ was not mentioned on others orders, we quickly decided Mr. Davoren should be our spokesman. You will learn this *was* the correct choice.

Arriving at the BOQ with all our luggage – about a truck load between the 12 of us – we watched our bus leave, then went into the office for our rooms. A young airman was at the desk for the night watch, who advised us that no rooms were available, and that we were not authorized to stay in the BOQ on Elmendorf Air Force Base, as we were employees of the Department of the Army, not the Air Force. It was now midnight or later, after an 18 hour day, 4,000 miles or further from home, not met at the Airport, no other transportation to be had and no place to go if we had any – not to mention a truck load of luggage; and a clerk telling us we couldn't stay. This announcement was not well received!

But then, we had Mr. Davoren, a Contract Negotiator. After requesting the clerk to ask permission of the Duty Officer to give us a room, with another negative reply, Mr. Davoren asked the clerk for the Elmendorf Air Force Base telephone directory. The Commanding General's name and telephone number was listed on the first page. You guessed it – call him he did (it was then about 1:00 a.m.), at his quarters. He explained our situation, and without further ado, the Commanding General asked to speak with the clerk. Almost at once while repeating "yes sir," "yes sir," "yes sir," he produced enough keys for us to all be bedded down for the night in comfort. Our clerk's last jab at us was to assign us rooms some quarter-of-a-mile away. We had to carry our luggage and walk to our quarters. In all fairness to the clerk, we later learned the Corps of Engineers had a small BOQ in another area of the Base, where we were supposed to be assigned rooms.

A good nights sleep was in order at this time, which we did.

The next morning Mr. Floyd Akin, one of the Division Chiefs in the Supply Division of the Corps of Engineers found us and took Mr. Davoren and myself to the cafeteria for breakfast, then showed us around the base – where the Corps of Engineers office was – and also on a limited tour of Anchorage. I worked with Mr. Akin and Mr. Davoren for the

duration of my TDY tour, and became good friends with them both.

Although Elmendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson, the adjoining Army Base sustained damage, it wasn't as great as downtown Anchorage or other areas. Large warehouses had collapsed though, and when I settled in at the desk assigned to me in the Corps of Engineers Office for this period, a large crack in the concrete floor directly under my chair, prevented me from moving around. The parking lot in front of the building had slidden down the side of the hill onto railroad tracks some 50 feet below, carrying several cars with it.

Just a short distance between our office and downtown Anchorage, the Government Hill Grade School was located on the same hill. The school building split in half, dropped some 30 feet, with that portion collapsing, and sliding down the hill. At an earlier time that day, classes were being held, and the possibility of numerous deaths was averted, as everyone had gone home at 5:36 p.m. when the quake occurred.

Construction on several buildings was under way at the time of the earthquake. Most all workers had left for the day, or more lives would have been lost.

Let me continue this adventure from a subject standpoint, and leave the chronological approach behind. There is so much to say, and at times, it is impossible to place everything in chronological order.

Since this is not a book about work, I'll only take a few lines to cover this subject; then, get on to more interesting things. As I have already mentioned, I was on TDY as a Contract Specialist, and was assigned to work with Mr. Marty Davoren. This was interesting, and very educational. I must give Mr. Davoren credit for helping me to broaden my knowledge of government contracting a great deal during this period.

Everything we did was an emergency. On my first day, someone requested I rent a cabin cruiser for an inspection tour of the Knik Arm, and the Cook Inlet. All businesses that weren't destroyed already had all their equipment under contract – somewhere. Finally, I

was referred to a Doctor who had a private boat we might rent. Without the help of local people, I would never have known about this boat. Obviously, competition was nonexistent, but remarkably, there didn't seem to be much price gouging. In fact, many people were volunteering their services and equipment in some instances.

Other items in the performance of our work required considerable adjustments for this Oklahoma boy. For instance, many of the purchases required telephone orders to the lower 48 states, – Seattle in particular, – but some required contact with the east coast where there was a 6 hour time differential. Any calls to the east generally had to be made before 10:00 a.m. It seemed all Alaska needed to make calls at that time, which overloaded the telephone system, requiring long delays. Some workers would go to work at 4 or 5:00 a.m. to make their calls before the circuits were filled up.

Not knowing the personnel you were working with, or the peculiarities of the District was minor, but still noticed.

Later into my tour of duty, Mr. Davoren and I were assigned the task of checking the contract files of those written during the earthquake period for completeness, obtaining documentation if possible, or otherwise making the contract documents acceptable for a GAO audit. When checking, we found vast gaps in documentation – sometimes only a signed contract by itself with no supporting papers, even on completed contracts. We made every effort to obtain full documentation, and if not, we wrote memorandums acknowledging they were missing, – we knew it – but due to the public exigency, immediate action was required and time did not permit all steps to be followed. I later heard the GAO audit team gave a good report on the contract files.

In my settling in for three months in Anchorage, when comparing notes, we found the per diem rate was reduced for living in the BOQ (I had already moved to the correct one). By sharing an apartment we could better cover our expenses with the higher per diem rate. Anchorage was an expensive place to live, and all working in Alaska were paid a 25% COLA (Cost of Living Allowance) to meet the higher expenses.

One of the gentlemen from the Tulsa District, a contract specialist from the Ft. Worth District and I pooled our resources, made deposits and rented an apartment from the Alaska Housing Authority, just down the street toward Anchorage, from the Corps of Engineers Office. Location was very important as bus services had not been resumed since the earthquake, and the necessities of work, food, etc. needed to be in walking distance. A small grocery store was only four or five blocks away – a soup and sandwich cafe was close to the store, and our office some two or three blocks in the other direction. The Corps of Engineers Office was the first building inside a side gate of Elmendorf AFB.

All went well for a while. Then one night sometime after midnight there was a knock on the door. I slept on a couch in the living room area of the apartment, so I was the one to get up to answer the door. A nice young man (I say nice because he did not immediately slug me) was there who asked if we had a water leak – his light fixture was dripping water on the bed where he and his wife were trying to sleep. I am always sympathetic to such a request, so I told him I'd check. When I turned the light on, the entire floor of our apartment was awash – buckets of water were everywhere. I went to the kitchen sink and when I opened the cabinet to the door below the sink, water squirted several feet from a broken hot water supply line. I cut the water off and assured our neighbor we would clean up the gallons of water on our floor. Politely he apologized for having awakened us and went to console his wife.

The three of us worked for a couple of hours, and finally determined we had mopped up all we could, then retired for the remainder of the night – we thought!

Soon I heard that familiar knock again. Open the door I did, and, again the same nice young man was there. I'm sure you've figured this out by now – yes, *another* broken line – same sink, this time the cold water supply line was broken. The same floor full of water – the same dripping light fixture below – the same clean up.

By this time the night had run its course and a bright beautiful morning faced us as we finished cleaning up. Needless to say, I was at the Alaska Housing Authority office when they opened. They were apologetic and repaired *both* lines within just a few hours. They held for

the rest of our stay. I have often wondered what the conversation was in the apartment below us – but then maybe I'm better off not knowing.

Another incident occurred while at the apartment, though I wasn't involved other than partaking of the benefits. My fellow apartment dweller from Ft. Worth was an outdoorsman, and had stated that his desire for roaming over the county was the reason he volunteered to come to Alaska.

The Alaska Railway system had an arrangement whereby anyone desiring to get off the train could notify the conductor where they wanted the train to stop and let them off and they would stop the train as if there were a station there. Word could be left with the conductor, and they would also stop to pick anyone up on the day they requested, and at the location they requested. (Everything in Alaska is identified by mile markers). My friend decided to go north toward Fairbanks to the Susitana River for a weekend fishing expedition – alone. He told us he built a lean-to and a campfire and slept the night out o.k. He further related to us there was evidence that some animal had visited his camp during the night, but he had slept through it and didn't know what it was. This area of the state is inhabited by bears, moose, and wolverines, any of which might do an individual substantial damage. Having caught a nice string of fish, he returned to Anchorage with his catch. He fried them for us and we ate them with relish – very tasty. We inquired of him what kind they were, but neither he nor any of us knew. They were extremely delicious – tender to the point of falling apart when touched – and illegal. We later found out they were baby salmon, far short of the legal size.

Before I leave the Alaska Railway too far behind, let me make a few short comments. It was built from the ice-free Port of Whittier through Anchorage, the Mount Mckinley National Park area, and on to Fairbanks; for the purpose of supplying these areas with essentials during the long frozen winters. Heavy snow and extreme temperatures require constant work to keep the trains moving. Snow plow units with blades 10-12 feet tall are attached to the front of the trains to keep the tracks open all year.

Stories are told that moose attack the train continually, in many instances killing themselves, while trying to butt the train off the track. Other wildlife were noted by travelers on many trips we were told.

Between Anchorage and Whittier, a long tunnel was built to cross the eastern end of the Chugach Mountain range, thus shortening the distance to Anchorage/Fairbanks by many miles, allowing the use of the ice-free port of Whittier. (The port at Anchorage freezes over in the winter.) There are several ice fields near Whittier. I was privileged to fly over some of these at a later date.

Whittier is to the eastern edge of the Prince William Sound area, the epicenter of the Alaska Earthquake.

I'm sure that by now, you would like to know about Anchorage – its beauty and, its destruction. You are already aware that most everywhere I went, I had to walk. That was generally alright, as I had always liked walking; however, some of the trips were long, and I must always return to the apartment at their end. It was some 2 miles from my apartment to downtown Anchorage, so wherever I went from there I chalked up miles pretty fast. The accumulation of the following incidents were over several trips.

Where do I begin? For the moment I will skip over the geographical beauty; – the mountains, Cook Inlet, looking north some 250 miles on a clear day and seeing beautiful but awesome Mount McKinley (at 20,320 feet, it is the highest point on the North American continent), or looking west across the Cook Inlet to the Chigmit Mountains who have their own ice fields and remain covered with snow all year long; the mud flats of Cook Inlet with its very high tides; or the jade, gold, copper, iron, mostly unmarketable because of its location. I promise I will try in my inadequate way, to cover most of these topics before I complete this work.

First thoughts of Alaska always start with glaciers, mountains, wildlife, – *or,* the City of Anchorage, looking down Fourth Avenue toward the mountains closing in just past Fort

Richardson. Some banner will span the street, advertising the next event, such as Dog Sled Races, Blanket Toss, or some other event and always the one declaring "Anchorage, The All-American City."

I believe I would be amiss to start anywhere other than here, also. Fourth Avenue was the main street of Anchorage, and straddled the fault line which carried the shocks north from Prince William Sound. Heavy damage occurred in the downtown area, as well as the residential areas to the southwest.

Before we start on the destruction, let me first tell you about the Visitor's Center in Anchorage, located on the City Hall Square. You may have seen it in travelogues, as it is famous, particularly for two items. First, it is a log cabin – not like we might recall having seen in the southern 48 states; but, this Visitor's Center has an overhanging porch which gives it the appearance of a cave. This is further enhanced by its having a grass sod roof – yes, grass grows over its top creating a very unusual sight. This is one of the most photographed spots in Anchorage. In other parts of Alaska we understand grass roofs are used now and particularly so in the early settlement days.

The second noteworthy item is a 5,445 pound copper nugget displayed at the side of the entrance. Residents tell of mountains of copper in the wilderness areas – unable to be developed as access and transportation costs exceed the value of the ore. We also learned, at least at that time, technology had not attained a satisfactory way to break down copper nuggets of this size.

One more item was present at the Visitor's Center – a Totem Pole. For an Oklahoma boy, I was quite fascinated by the intricate carvings, the unusual faces, and particularly the dye used, as it was obvious that they were very old and the colors penetrated throughout the wood. There was not as many totem poles in Anchorage as in other parts of the state, the southeastern islands in particular. Native club houses in those areas were sometimes designed as a totem pole face. I understand there were significant meanings to the various tribes regarding their totem poles.

From the Visitor's Center, a short walk around the City Hall revealed flowers everywhere – all with near perfect blossoms. In the parking area there were planters between each parking meter including multiple varieties, displaying almost all colors of the rainbow, creating a spectacular array.

One more item in this area was an "Alaska Deep Freeze" located in the parking lot of the City Hall. We have already discussed to some degree the wild animals of Alaska, but not much about the "natives" living outside the few populated areas.

In late fall or early winter, the temperature creeps below the freezing mark, usually remaining there until spring. During this time of the year the hunting season opens – the most popular game is the moose. Since much of the rural population of Alaska have no electricity (or only small portable generators if anything), they have learned that by building a small log cabin on tall stilts, they can store enough meat for the winter, and by building it high enough off the ground it will prohibit wild animals from tearing down the doors and destroying their food supply.

This log cabin on stilts is called an "Alaska Deep Freeze".