

## Chapter 26

### Remake Amchitka

Monday morning saw me on a Reeves Aleutian Airplane again on my way to Amchitka. We were to open up the island again in preparation for the "Big Shots". After analysis of data obtained by the first shot in 1965, it was determined by those who were supposed to know, that Amchitka could take the Big Ones (megaton or larger).

I won't highlight our trip out, as you are already pretty well acquainted with the Aleutian Islands; however, either on this trip or another one — I can't remember which — we found Amchitka completely closed down by the weather — fog so thick you could cut it with a knife. We overflew the island proceeding on to the end of the Aleutian Island Chain to the island of Attu.

This was a larger island than many of them up and down the chain, and was inhabited by some twenty odd personnel who manned a communications station there. We arrived there in the late afternoon — not too long before dark — carrying a large carton of supplies or something to be off loaded at Attu. The only equipment they had on the island was a large loader and forklift. The freight door in the DC-6 seemed to be just a little bit smaller than the carton — so they got it stuck in the door. There was no place for us to deplane, so we sat — and sat — and sat — for what seemed to be hours, with the barn door open on the side of the airplane, shivering and waiting. Things were further complicated by the fact that there were no lights on the rehabilitated World War II runway we were using — and no place to spend

the night on Attu.

Just as darkness set in, they managed to dislodge the carton, finish unloading and then we were ready for takeoff for Shemya, an Air Force Station probably seventy-five miles to the east. Facilities were available there to give us a bed for the night, and something to eat.

To enable us to take off with no runway lights, they drove a couple of pickups down the runway and turned them around facing our plane with their lights on, to give us a hint of where the runway was. The FAA would probably frown on this — but then, this was Alaska. This was not nearly our scariest takeoff or landing while in Alaska — we made it fine.

Only one more item about Attu before we leave it behind. In World War II, somehow (I don't remember the story), a lot of dogs were brought onto the island. The Japanese occupied Attu during World War II. They had attempted to march up the Aleutian Islands to mainland Alaska — and other points east and south on their way to the lower 48. Maybe they brought the dogs. At the end of the war, the island was deserted — except for the hundreds of dogs who were left behind, and all multiplied rapidly. These all turned wild, and at the time I was there, they told us they had to take protection with them as they would move around the island, so they could fight off attacks by these wild dogs.

At Shemya we got a meal, a bed, and even a lobby where they had television. Pretty uptown for a remote island.

Shemya was a small flat island. The runway was only some 40 to 50 feet above sea level as I remember it, and headed at the water's edge on one end, and ended at the water's edge on the other end. Long enough, but you sure hoped the pilot wouldn't abort his takeoff at the last minute.

The story was told that a few years earlier when the Super Constellation (Super Connie) was being used a lot, one came in for a landing, wheels down, but just a foot or so lower than the runway — caught his landing gear on the edge of the bluff and crashed killing all on board.

Flying in Alaska — anywhere — was a hazard to your health.

The next morning we arrived on Amchitka in pretty weather — which didn't last very long — but we got to our new home safely and ready to get started again.

When we left Amchitka at the end of Project Long Shot, we had a nice modern camp — as comfortable as could be expected on this island — fully equipped. Now, it was all gone except for three or four buildings. Our pryor office building was there, the hospital, and the old PX - recreation hall building. All the barracks had been removed to Adak, having been acquired by the contractor.

Everything must be done all over again.

The code name assigned to our new nuclear tests was Project Milrow, although I have no idea why we needed a code name — unless it was to identify a new set of awards at the end of the project.

The operations of the project this time was under the supervision of the Atomic Energy Commission out of Las Vegas, Nevada. The role of the Corps of Engineers was somewhat changed this time also. Although there were a few small projects we did as the Corps of Engineers, our primary role was to provide staff to the AEC Project Manager. Up until just before the shots, the AEC only had one employee on the island, and we acted as AEC employees providing engineering, construction, and administrative services as required. The operation and maintenance of the island was by an AEC contractor. This was a bit complicated but actually worked out well.

The Letter of Understanding between the Corps of Engineers and the Atomic Energy Commission set up an organization to supply adequate personnel as staff on the island at all times. This was to be accomplished by having two identical crews which would spend thirty days in Anchorage at a liaison office while the other crew worked their thirty days on the island. They were able to recruit personnel for a dual crew for all positions without any problem, except a replacement for me. So I took the position with the understanding I would spend all my time on the island, except periodically at my request, I would be provided travel orders to Anchorage for three or four days to remember what life was in the "civilized world."

This worked out fine, and a year or so later a new employee transferred up from the lower 48 to fill the position as my replacement on a thirty-day rotating basis. I don't believe I ever spent but one thirty-day period in Anchorage until I transferred in the fall of 1968 to Huntsville, Alabama — where I later retired from government service.

Once again we had a catering contractor who provided the very best food available anywhere in the world — and more of it than we could eat (and much more than we should eat). Always there was a table of "goodies" very close to wherever we were.

There was one change this time which I thought was a terrible mistake. The contractor provided a liquor store which was used heavily — not by me — so consequently we shipped several personnel back to Anchorage in straight jackets. I don't feel we did them a favor by providing the liquor so handily — but they didn't ask me.

The contractor enjoyed the profits anyway.

Now let's start back at my arrival on the island. Several things became very important right away. Our three-man Corps of Engineers crew was in place, and I was shown to my bunk — in the hospital. We three, the AEC Project Manager, the doctor, and his male nurse occupied the hospital — along with the first casualty of alcohol who was strapped in bed awaiting a plane out — sedated to render him harmless to himself and others (I hoped).

Conversations with the doctor were very interesting and I watched as he surgically removed a mole from his nurse's leg. Nothing to it.

Our living quarters were not too bad — the contractor personnel occupied the PX - Rec Room as their quarters, which left our old office building for the office and mess hall complex. There was one small problem, however. We only had one small generator operating on this "all electric" island, which could not provide enough current to support the demands of the whole camp at once. A twenty-four hour operator was kept busy switching from one need to another.

First, we determined that the hospital should be kept heated and have power at all times

in case of emergency. (I also liked to sleep warm). This took up about half of all the capabilities of our power supply.

This then left the contractor personnel quarters, the mess hall, and office — buzzing to get this massive project on the road — with only enough power to keep one operation at a time heated and with lights. It's quite hard to work in an office in Alaska without heat, but we learned — at least part of the time.

A schedule was established and adhered to — where the power would be used in the contractor's quarters most of the night, until in the wee hours of the morning when the baking of goodies took place. After the goodies were baked a quick switch back to the quarters to give them a little heat to get up with, and to shower and shave. Then switch back again to the mess hall for breakfast, then during the day, the mess hall office had priority but constant switching from one to the other kept us going with just enough heat to keep our fingers working. We eventually had a quite adequate generating system but even then, we had some problems when shutting down for service or overloads taking them off line. Then it was again cold and dark except for emergency lighting.

Priority was given to the construction of our new camp on the Pacific side of the island. This was across the runway from almost all operations on the island. Don't blame me — I didn't design it. We did have a stop light for vehicle traffic.

Also at the top of our priority list was to get the freight barges on their way from Seattle, into harbor and unloaded. Actually our very existence through the winter depended on their arrival, and it was already quite late in the season for water freight in this area. In fact, while far out to sea, the lashings broke loose in heavy weather on one of the barges and a D-8 caterpillar bulldozer went over the side to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. It's still there.

Another time during heavy weather, a barge broke loose from its tug. They were more fortunate this time, as four or five days later, the tug was able to fasten a line to it again, and the barge and its contents were saved.

Upon arrival of one barge at Amchitka, the seas were so heavy they had to anchor a

couple of miles offshore in the open seas for nearly a week before the seas calmed enough to negotiate the channel into the harbor at Amchitka.

We also had all the well-drilling equipment and supplies to get unloaded on the island. Plans were — and we accomplished them — to operate the drilling rigs twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, until the holes were drilled. Some of the larger and deeper holes required over two year's drilling time.

All dates were very tight, and at times with the weather conditions as they were, it looked impossible to maintain the schedules we had set, but somehow we made it. Access roads to the individual sites had to be built — in tundra and peat moss — pads to set the rigs on, tanks to hold vast amounts of driller's mud, together with limited living quarters and office space at each drill site. All of this in weather where only about four or five months in the summer and early fall can any ocean freight make it to the island — and where sometimes even an airplane could't land for two or three weeks at a time.

I suppose here is as good a place as any to tell you about our drilling rigs. I believe we had four of them set up and drilling at the same time. The shots were to be set progressively larger, therefore, the holes were to be deeper and bigger according to the size of the shot.

We had the largest (most powerful) drill rig in the world on the island at 1.5 million pounds of thrust — then we had another one which dwarfed that one, at 2.5 million pounds of thrust. This rig drilled a 140 inch hole — that's almost twelve feet in diameter — to a depth of 6,000 feet. This was for the "big" one. I left the island before this one was completed, but stood on a drill platform looking into the open top of the hole (filled with driller's mud), as it was being drilled. The drill stems were six inch stainless steel bars, sixty feet long. Some rig. The drill bits were diamond studded — rented from Howard Hughes Co. — no telling what their cost would be.

The next larger rig drilled a sixty inch hole — then smaller ones down to thirty-six inch in diameter. However, most of the attention was given to the bigger one.

At the bottom of the six thousand foot hole, they told us that the electrostatic pressure

would cause rocks to explode. To place the nuclear device where it was to be detonated, miners had to be lowered to the six thousand foot level to mine a tunnel 150 ft. long at a right angle to the drilled hole — then up 50 ft. — then again across for another 50 feet where the bomb was placed. The hole then was filled with layers of sand, gravel, concrete, and plastic to its top.

Our barges all got in and our new camp was under construction. This was about a mile south of where we presently lived and worked. The camp which we now occupied, would become our hospital/clinic area and quarters for some drilling and testing personnel as soon as we could move out. This would greatly enhance its capabilities and add more beds in case of emergencies. Fortunately, (I guess) most of its use was for straight jacket cases instead of illnesses or accidents.

Just a word before I move on, about our new camp. We built it on a parking apron used during in World War II. When built, the tundra and peat had been removed which left the ground level of our camp six to ten feet lower than the tundra level adjacent to it. It was already blacktopped so no site preparations were required. The buildings were built with an I-beam encircling the trailers every ten feet. (I believe there were three double wide trailers attached end to end, making a twelve-room barracks type building. Every other room was separated by a bath and put together in a manner where a hall extended from one end to the other down the middle. They were much like the ones we built for Project Long Shot except for the Corp's configuration.) There were 7 of these barracks, plus a new PX-Rec room, a movie theatre, liquor store, mess hall, office, and storage buildings. At each end of these I-beams, a hole was dug in the ground for a concrete anchor 2'x2'x6'. Out of this anchor I-beams were welded to those surrounding the trailers attaching them quite securely to the ground. Sand bags were placed on their roofs to keep them from blowing off. As the winter progressed, I was sure glad I had seen how well they were anchored. Many times I thought they must surely tear loose from their foundations. We also experienced an earthquake, powerful enough to cause lots of excitement in California, if it had occurred there.

Our Corps of Engineer barracks were shared with the AEC Project Manager, and a couple of Heads of Independent Testing Labs connected with drilling the holes. All the time I was on the islands we had two or three empty rooms in our wing, which was o.k. with me. Some of the barracks assigned to the contractor personnel got quite noisy and rowdy — a lot of fluid passed around constantly. Our barracks didn't escape this either, but was much quieter.

Our rooms were at the western end of the camp and our office was at the eastern end — probably a good couple of hundred yards away. Just adjacent to the office was the mess hall. In between were the other barracks (bigger than the one we lived in). These buildings were spaced some fifty feet apart. We had two or three pickups at our disposal, but no parking places at the mess hall or office, so we walked around the camp.

This arrangement caused some serious problems on a couple of occasions. We have mentioned the wind velocity a couple of times before, but during the winter months it was unbelievable. You will also remember that we had precipitation about 90% of the days. Translate this to winter it means snow (mostly pellet snow) and ice — lots of it.

Our work schedule was every day, seven days a week — no matter what the weather was, so snow and ice had to be dealt with. On one occasion — in fact several occasions — as the snow would melt a bit, the ice would sheet over making it nearly impossible to stand up on. This particular time the wind velocity was nearly 100 miles per hour — and gusting strongly. This is a literal happening — we had many incidents of winds *over* 100 m.p.h., and lasting sometimes for several days — work went on.

During this storm it was time to go to work with a stop over for breakfast along the way. So, off we go. The wind was from the west — this was the prevailing direction on Amchitka — so we had no trouble getting out of the door of our barracks. All went well — for about twenty feet — then it hit. It's very difficult to walk in 100 m.p.h. wind — but try it on ice sometime if you want a real thrill.

We could creep along the wall of the next barrack by holding on as well as we could, but then there was a fifty foot gap before reaching the next barrack. When we left the wall

protecting us, the wind took over — blowing us literally across the 50 ft. space until the west wall of the next barrack stopped us. This was repeated until we got to the mess hall. A good breakfast helped.

I must mention here that as we were creeping along from one building to the next, that sheets of plywood, and metal roofing — full sheets — were traveling periodically from west to east up the parking lot — sometimes just about head height. We were very lucky that no one was decapitated on the island. Toward the end of the winter, we finally got a covered walkway constructed linking all the buildings in the camp together. This was a great help.

There are many stories about the weather during the winter months. I will try to relate a few. For instance, we woke up one morning with snow drifted over the top of our barrack. Parked along the side of the building were all of our pickups. We're talking snow drifted at least twelve feet deep. Only small mounds could be seen to indicate where our vehicles were buried. A motor grader was able to clear the parking lot pretty well, and most of the roads were blown clear of snow, but there was nothing to do but to shovel the snow from around our pickups. Remember, work went on regardless of the weather.

One day while at work, with the wind velocity pegged out on our anemometer at over 100 mph. I heard our radio maintenance man for the island, call for help — as if he really meant it. I quickly looked out the window of our office directly behind my desk, to see what was happening.

His office/repair shop was in two of the green plywood buildings we had left over from our first camp, lashed together, and securely tied down with cables to substantial anchors buried very deeply into the ground. Two cables went over their tops — and this on a twenty foot building.

I couldn't see anything happening. I was only some 200 feet from his building — so I called the AEC Project Manager and we contacted him on the radio to see what his problem was. He was reluctant to answer us. We later found out he thought that part of his building was in

the process of disintegrating — and he was right.

He had a pickup parked immediately outside the door of his office, but was afraid to leave the building to go to it. We also found out shortly that this fear was justified. The AEC Project Manager told him to just stay put and he would be over to see about things.

To shorten a long story, when the Project Manager got there he was also convinced the building might go at any time — so it was time to evacuate. Just one problem — the radio man didn't like his odds of making a dash for it — so he wouldn't leave. After much coaxing, he made a run for the AEC Manager's pickup — leaving his own behind. Well, Ted Toren, the AEC Manager at that time, wasn't in the mood for trading pickups, so he also ran for his own pickup.

Just as they both got into the pickup, cables started snapping. The second plywood hut — the one on the south side — tore loose and with a tremendous bang, crashed into the north hut, losing its entire roof — intact — which cleared the north hut, landing squarely on top of the radio man's pickup. If he hadn't run for the AEC Manager's pickup, we might have had our first fatality.

I watched all of this from my office window just a short distance away.

Just out the front door of our office building was one of the hundreds of natural lakes on the island. It was only some two feet deep, and probably 20 or 30 feet across in any direction — not very significant — but, it almost cost another life one night about 10 or 11 o'clock.

Some of the contractor personnel were working late on this particular night, so someone was in the office at the time of the incident. Our crew was in our barracks at the other end of the camp.

On this occasion, we were having an intense ice storm. I believe the man involved worked with the drilling crews — I don't know what his capacity was. On this particular night, because of some unknown reason, he had to come to the barracks area for instructions. The work proceeded whatever the weather.

Just as he was driving in front of our office, a gust of wind caught his pickup — literally

pushing it off the road into the lake. The pickup overturned, settling upside down in two feet of icewater. There was plenty of room for air above the water, but because of silt in the bottom of the lake, he couldn't open either of the doors. This left the only exit available through the windows — which would roll down (or up as this case was) okay, however; this required him to be completely immersed in the water to crawl through to safety.

Remember our wind velocity was near 100 mph — sufficient to blow his vehicle off the road — all of this while an ice storm was in progress. Let your imagination work on what the wind chill factor must have been. Think colder than you have, and you will be closer to it.

He was able to get out of his pickup in the lake — but had about 30 feet of open ice-covered ground to clear before reaching the office where some heat and help was available. Because of the wind, the wreck had not been heard by anyone. He made it to the office, but just barely. He came very close to freezing to death — and didn't get a scratch on him from the accident. In fact, there was very little damage to his pickup.

Such was life on Amchitka.

Fog was another tremendous problem on Amchitka. Even with delineators every 50 feet (where possible), there were still times when you would "lose" the road you were driving on. A bit scary, but with just a few exceptions we made it alright.

On one occasion — at night — one of the workers was going from our camp to one of the drilling sites. This required crossing the runway which was probably 300 feet wide — and no place for delineators. When this road was engineered, I must assume that either the survey crew, or the draftsman who laid it out, was very drunk, or they had hired crews from some Jr. High School. The road crossing the runway was offset about 50 feet from one side to the other — on Amchitka, with fog like we had? Anyway, on the north side of the east-west runway was a drop-off of about six or eight feet ending abruptly in the tundra.

On this night, we were having one of our "good" fogs — you don't know what fog is, until you have seen one on Amchitka. Our worker left camp expecting to be at work in about ten or fifteen minutes, but while crossing the runway, he forgot to either zig or to zag, whichever

one was appropriate at that time — so off the side of the runway he went headfirst, missing the opposite road by some 50 feet.

He wasn't hurt and the tundra cushioned his abrupt stop, without doing much damage to his pickup.

Another day (not night this time), another pickup, and another storm. Again, no one hurt, but also again, a near fatality.

While driving on the open road toward the drilling sites, the driver was suddenly very thankful to be alive. A 55 gallon drum — airborne in the wind storm — crashed through the windshield of his pickup, coming to rest in the seat beside him. If a passenger had been riding with him, he would have been killed — or if it had come through the driver's side of the windshield...

The driver was not hurt, and for one more time, a fatality was avoided.

The work went on.

I guess an amusing story would fit in here pretty well.

When setting up our offices, we requested our Anchorage office to purchase a cup anemometer to be sent to Amchitka. In certain circumstances claims for damages by a contractor may be determined by the official weather report at the time the claim developed. Since no official weather station was established on Amchitka, we kept a weather log. We were also interested in keeping track of the weather for our own benefit.

The engineer in Anchorage kinda got mixed up a little — and requested the Supply Division of the Anchorage District Office to purchase a *hand held* cup anemometer with the capacity to measure wind velocities up to 200 mph. The Supply Division had a good laugh and called us on the island to ask who was going to stand out in a 200 mph wind to hold the anemometer in their hand. They wanted to meet the guy that could hold it.

We got a 100 mph anemometer to mount on the wall of our office building. This was *almost* adequate.

Just a couple of more weather stories — then we will move on to another subject.

As you travel from our camp to the northwest end of the island, the elevation above sea level increases to about 1250 feet. Not too high you say — but consider the fact that the island is only a mile to a mile and a half wide at this point — this makes some pretty steep slopes. Mix these slopes with our weather, and you have some pretty hazardous conditions.

The road — barely one lane — rides the ridge of the mountains at their highest points and was barely wide enough to hang both wheels of a vehicle on. It was necessary to scrape off the tops of the mountains to obtain enough flat surface for the road. This was 1250 feet elevation and fell away to the north very abruptly to the shoreline of the Bering Sea. This was not a pleasure route.

To get to this point — only obtainable in a four-wheel vehicle — the first incline of the road where it starts up the mountain, has a 27% grade, for the first couple of hundred feet.

As new drill sites were opened up, self-sustaining camps — barracks, mess facilities, bath facilities, and offices and quarters for the drillers and various testing labs had to be constructed complete with access roads. All buildings were designed as prefab trailer units, which had to be transported to the sites — in Amchitka weather. The site in question was some 20 miles from the staging area at the dock.

The day came when it was time to move the trailers up the mountain. As was almost always the case, very strong winds were prevalent from the southwest. This put them broadside to the trailers as they topped the mountain. The truck driver was required to negotiate some curves most of us would be uncomfortable with, if driving a VW bug.

They *almost* transported all the trailers to their sites — except one. At the highest point of the road in an unprotected pass, the wind huffed and puffed and one trailer took a roll down the side of the mountain, almost making it all the way to the Bering Sea. The trailer was completely destroyed, and looked like some of the houses in Anchorage after the earthquake. In fact, the area was so inaccessible, no attempt was made to salvage any of the

furnishings which might have been left intact. I imagine it's all there today, if you want to go look for it.

The one point about this that was so unusual was that the truck pulling the trailer didn't blow off the road — and hear this — the wheels and metal frame of the trailer remained on the road *attached to the truck*. No one had any idea how this happened.

Scratch one trailer — no injuries again — another fatality averted.

We have commented before somewhat, about the size of the drill rigs, but didn't mention that their derricks stood nearly 100 feet tall. During certain operations, all the drill stems must be pulled out of the hole and stacked on the drilling platform with their tops positioned within the framework of the derrick. This required an employee to stand on a small platform at the top of the rig to catch the upper end of the drill stems and stack them in the same order they were on the floor below.

This was a dangerous job at best. I don't know what the weight of a single drill stem was, but six-inch diameter times 60 feet long, stainless steel bars, will weigh quite a bit. The weight was carried by the hoist pulling them out of the hole but the positioning had to be manhandled into place by a single man. The stacking of the drill stems was an art. The upper end and lower end guided to their place and aligned to prohibit any "rolling", which could be fatal to the workers.

Now, add to this 100 plus mph wind — standing and trying to control these drill stems. The work went on — but with a bit of a problem. Solution: The workers were tied to the derrick with just enough movement to allow them to stack the drill stems. One time while I was on the island it was necessary to hold up for a short while. Miraculously, I don't believe anyone was ever injured this way.

It's time to forget the weather for awhile, and move on to something a bit nicer.

I was on Amchitka to celebrate both Thanksgiving and Christmas in 1967. I've already commented on our food, but for these two holidays, they went all out. I doubt if I could tell

you all the entrees on our menu if I tried, but let me try anyway.

*Roast Pig*

*Cornish Hens*

*Turkey and Dressing*

*Prime Rib*

I'm sure I have omitted something, but telling the menu doesn't really tell the story. You remember seeing pictures of meals at formal occasions where the roast pig would be intact — head and all — roasted with an apple in his mouth? This is what we had. The prime rib was cooked to rare, medium, or well-done. The server would ask — which one, and how much? — About an inch and a half thick of the well-done roast suited me fine.

Along with the entrees came everything you could expect to go with it. We all ate until we waddled.

Don't let me give you the impression we didn't eat well at other times, we did; including the menu above on different occasions all except the roast pig. We also had steaks, chops, chickens, ham and you name it — all on a regular basis. If our airplane tickets had been charged according to our weight — the cost from Anchorage to Amchitka would have been far less than the cost of our ticket back to Anchorage.

The barrack where our crew stayed was more private than the rest of the camp — no through traffic. When you got to our barracks it was to visit us. We decided we would make a shuffle board down the length of our hall. The trailers were long enough to avoid any seams where they were put together. Thus, we had a natural place for a shuffle board. Linoleum floors didn't work too well, so we confiscated corn meal from the catering contractor, to give the puck enough slide, used tape to outline our ends — then we were ready to go.

I'm not sure if any of us had ever played shuffle board before — I know I hadn't — but before long we were pros. I teamed up with Ted Toren, the AEC Project Manager, and we

took on all who dared to be embarrassed by our superiority on the court. They kept trying, so every afternoon we spent an hour or so in heated arguments as to who was the greatest — but really, everyone knew.

Sometime during this eighteen month period I was on Amchitka, I was sent on TDY for most of a week to Las Vegas — business only. I have never seen so many light bulbs in all my life. I'll bet GE and Sylvania hope they never declare a blackout there — their stocks would crash immediately.

I met and worked with my counterparts in the Atomic Energy Commission, trying to learn to speak the same language. I was also scheduled to watch an underground nuclear test blast from the command room at the Nevada Test Site, but had to forego this because the Alaska District omitted sending my security clearance to the AEC with my travel orders. The site of the blast was classified — just as the island of Amchitka was.

After my TDY in Las Vegas, I took a few days leave and swung through Oklahoma on my way back to Amchitka.

I made it back without incident. We now had an Alaska Airlines Boeing 727 chartered to make two round trips each week from Seattle, through Anchorage, to Amchitka. Generally there would be 130 to 175 employees on turn around flights, as well as a constant buildup of personnel coming to the island for their first time.

There are two or three more incidents regarding Alaska flying that I should cover here while telling about airplanes — the Alaska Airlines in particular. I was a passenger on one of the flights but missed the others.

While flying from Anchorage to Amchitka, Adak was a planned landing on each trip. On this flight the weather had been mostly clear, although we found out when landing, there was a fairly strong cross wind.

Our pilot decided to make a straight in landing which would have been fine, except, just

before our wheels touched the runway, a strong gusty cross wind hit us. We were already committed to land — mountains head on at the other end of the runway, and no time to abort the landing anyway. Consequently, we touched down on *one wheel* — the wind holding the left wing up. I was sitting on the right side of the plane by the window — watching our right wing tip riding just a couple of feet above the runway, for a long time.

It seemed hours before our pilot got the left wing down, but he did, and we made it safely. But — one little extra puff of wind and you would have been reading about the crash of an Alaska Airlines charter plane on Adak Island, in the newspapers in the lower 48.

This next incident I missed — but because of it, we lost nearly 100 contractor employees who worked on the island. Their reason: No more Alaska flying — ever!

The Boeing 727 chartered jet left Amchitka with about 150 employees on board. All was well *on Amchitka* — however; by the time they reached Anchorage (1500 miles away), the weather (high winds, ice, and fog with practically zero visibility), had closed down the Anchorage International Airport — also, both alternate airports logged for this flight had the same weather. Since there were no airports within their flying range, their options were to fly until they ran out of fuel and then fall out of the sky; or, *attempt* to land on any runway, no matter how dangerous it might be anywhere they were allowed.

Conversations continued between the pilot and the Anchorage Airport controllers — they, being certain in their own minds, that *no 727* jet could survive an attempted landing there. They then brought into the conversation controllers at the Elmendorf Air Force Base — across town from the Anchorage International Airport. Being an emergency landing, the Air Force granted approval for them to land at Elmendorf, and prepared for the worst possible scenario and got ready for the emergency landing attempt.

The runways were completely covered in ice — not snow — and the winds were far above safe landing velocity, but; somehow they reached the end of the runway and touched down.

A retired pilot was flying on this plane who later told that this was the worst landing he had ever seen or heard of where anyone had been able to walk away from. (Don't blame the

Alaska Airlines — it would have happened in any comparable airplane.) We use the term "Walk Away From" figuratively, as no one *walked* away from it.

The plane stopped in the middle of the runway some couple of hundred feet from the terminal building. The Air Force had met the plane with transportation to the terminal, but as soon as a passenger set foot on the ice, the wind would catch him, and away he would go. Passengers were flying everywhere, being blown all over the area. Arms and legs flying one way and baggage (carry-on) flying another. The Keystone Cops would have made a hit movie out of this. Air Force personnel were chasing passengers and baggage from all over the area for two hours, trying to round them all up. They would count heads, then go looking for others. No one was seriously injured, though shaken up and bruised a bit. Finally, all were accounted for.

Ho Hum! Just another day of flying in Alaska.

Amchitka now had a GCA (Ground Controlled Aircraft) airport with a certified Air Traffic Controller. The FAA was proud of us. Now that we had the jets making charter flights, it was necessary to have a modern airport.

On one particular day, we had fog — what am I saying, on every day we had fog — only on this day it was a little worse than usual. Our ceiling was perhaps no more than forty feet, with visibility limited to perhaps 100 yards. Not very good conditions for landing a 727 jet. But, we had a confident controller, and I won't comment on the airplane pilot's confidence. I know if I had been the pilot, I would never have attempted a landing in these conditions.

I was always interested in airplanes landing and taking off, so my boss and I decided we would desert the office for a few minutes and drive up to the end of the runway to watch this landing. Of course we parked right at the spot where, if the plane would have crashed, our hard hats wouldn't have made much difference.

As we gazed up into the fog — we couldn't tell whether we were seeing 10 feet or 100 feet — we heard the plane approaching. Heard — not seen. Then, as if by magic, it was there — just a few feet above us, and right on the center line of the runway. This would have been a

perfect GCA landing, only the pilot chickened out, and almost too late, decided to abort the landing.

After seeing he had aborted a good landing — he had come within ten feet of the runway — he decided to circle and try again. On his next pass, he missed the runway by 50 feet and had he attempted to land, he would have set down in the tundra. This would have given about the same effect as attempting to land on water with the wheels down.

This landing was also aborted, and the flight proceeded on to Shemya, returning the next day for a landing in clear weather.

I believe this is the spot to relate to you that this same air traffic controller who brought the above flight in so competently (first try), on another flight, on another day also brought the flight in just about perfectly — then went totally beserk while the plane was still on the land. One more victim of the alcohol sales on the island.

The doctor on the island got him sedated, wrapped securely in a straight jacket, and in the company of the male nurse we had on the island, sent him back to Anchorage on the same plane he had just brought in.

We also lost our man who took care of our barracks. A very friendly young man who did an excellent job for us.

One night he was sitting with the group in the mess hall when all of a sudden he ran into the kitchen, grabbed a butcher knife and began running between the tables slinging the knife over his head. No one was hurt, but the Alaska State Trooper on the island had to overpower him to take the knife from him.

Once again the doctor sedated him — the usual straight jacket — and the trip to Anchorage. Chalk up another to the local alcoholic beverage sales.

While I'm talking about the Alaska State Trooper, let me tell you about a dirty trick he played on me. First, let me tell you he was a good friend of mine — a real nice young man. In

fact, I had started my studies to obtain my private pilot's license (me — who three years earlier was afraid to get on the plane to Alaska). He was qualified to get me through the book end of the training, although to qualify on the flying portion, I would have to wait until I got to Anchorage. I never completed this training, so I never received my license.

The layout of our offices began in the corner of the building, with the AEC Project Manager's office. I had a private office next to his, then the rest of the Corps of Engineers and and AEC employees occupied a larger office next to mine. The contractor occupied the rest of the office building.

On this day we were all busy (I thought), at least I was — doing my job just like I was getting paid for. All of a sudden my eyes started watering. This persisted for several minutes, then they started to burn also. This didn't seem to be a natural happening, so I got up from my desk to investigate.

I first went into the AEC Project Manager's office to see if he was "crying", but there was nothing wrong with him, so I then went the other direction to my "friend's" and "fellow co-workers" office, and lo and behold they had a visitor — the Alaska State Trooper. A half-hearted attempt to look innocent was on their faces — for about five seconds — then they all burst out laughing — out of control laughter. Now, I was crying and they were laughing — something seemed to be wrong.

Sitting next to the door to my office, my friend, the State Trooper was in hysterics — with a mace in his hand. You are right — while I was hard at work, he had — with my co-workers' approval — been squirting little dabs of mace around the corner into my office until he had gotten sufficient quantity to fix me good.

Then I had to abandon my office for quite some time with an open window to allow the wind to decontaminate it.

I still haven't been able to return this favor to my friends and the Alaska State Trooper. Someday...

About this time the AEC had sent one of their scientific types to the island to do his thing.

He was a fairly likable type, but had one major flaw — as far as I was concerned at least. He hated commas.

I have always loved commas, and you may have noted I use many of them. I have a never ending supply of them, so if I have one left over at the end of the day, I'll just stick it in — most anyplace. This has worked pretty well for me over the years, and anyone I have worked with has soon become accustomed to this — but not this man. He was Stubbbboorrnnnn.

He was sending a report to the Las Vegas AEC office everyday, and since I didn't have a typing pool, I did all the typing for our office along with my other duties. I have always disliked typing, and will always do everything I can to keep from doing it, but on this job with only being able to fill a few of the positions the organization charts called for, I had to do the typing.

Let me tell you that the copy this man gave me to type from was like a jigsaw puzzle — up and down the sides of the pages, marked out except maybe for one or two words in a paragraph, with inserts on a separate piece of paper — all left for me to figure out and put together. Now I'm a pretty congenial person, so I went right ahead and tried to decipher his drafts so the people in Las Vegas would *think* they had an intelligent employee.

The problem arose when after spending an hour or so trying to piece together one of these reports — typing a nice error free? copy for him to sign, he would take his ball-point pen, and mark out all the commas he could find. This reached a point after a few days, that he even marked out the comma between Tulsa, Oklahoma — with his ball-point pen (unerasable) — demanding re-typing.

Patience is one thing, but this had gone far enough. I felt pretty secure in my job, as they had been trying to find an alternate for over a year, so what the heck?... When this happened, I put a sheet of paper in my typewriter and typed it completely full of commas. I then, personally delivered it to him in the office where the whole crew were seated, and invited him to have that sheet of commas to play with. He could mark them all out, or just do whatever he wanted to with them, but; from that time on, either leave my commas alone, or I would type his reports just like he wrote them — up the sides of the page, inserts and markouts, the same

way.

He never marked another letter or report up after that day, and we became good friends. My comas were all secure and unharmed after that.

Another amusing incident regarding personnel happened in our barracks. I have mentioned that the A.E.C. and Corps of Engineer personnel occupied most of the rooms, but there were a couple of rooms at the end of the barracks that were assigned to two of the well testing groups. I don't recall who they were, nor who the gentleman in question was. That is just as well, as the incident would have probably occurred with anyone who detested western music as much as he did — not the type of rock they call western music today, but the good old kind we heard back then.

Let me start at the beginning. I had a reel to reel tape recorder, a stereo system I had built myself, and hours of music — including western, but also religious, popular, semi-classical, and music of the big band era. All of our group liked to hear any or all of this music, but when this particular gentleman was in his room — which wasn't very often — he would complain something awful when I would play western music.

John Reynolds liked to tease and play tricks on people, so; he thought up this idea of wiring our testing lab friend's radio into my music system so we could "pipe in" western music to his radio at anytime we decided — *even if his radio wasn't on.*

This was fairly easy to accomplish by anyone who had practiced playing tricks on people all his life and knew just a little about electronics. Several of us had radios on the island, but reception was very limited even under the best of circumstances. The Armed Service Radio Network broadcast from both Adak and Shemya, but our 225 to 250 mile distance from either island was stretching its limits. (I was able to hear the Oklahoma - Tennessee bowl game that New Year's Day.)

The solution — limited though it was — was to use an outdoor antenna, stretched from each end of our barracks, a distance of some 200 feet. Since we didn't have any hardware or electrical stores close by, we made do with a four-wire telephone cable.

Mr. Reynolds (Civil Engineer) and our electrical engineer merely followed the color coded wires, using a single color for all the antenna wires to connect back to each radio. This left three unused wires — so out of my stereo, they tied into the external speaker connections — switchable — with two of these wires; then while our testing lab friend was out doing his job, they removed the back of his radio and wired these speaker wires directly to the speaker of his radio. Bingo! Remote speakers — switchable from my stereo — controlled by my volume control, and producing western music at my command through his radio. A quick check of the system proved it to be working perfectly.

Now, for our big day. Everyone was there — all the Corps of Engineers employees and the A.E.C. Project Manager, ready for our revenge on anyone who didn't like western music. We were all set up and in walked our man. You never saw so much innocence on these half dozen faces — all our mothers would have been very proud of us. We were all sitting in the hall — as we usually did. Our friend followed his time proven schedule also. A quick hello to us — then into his room closing the door so he wouldn't have to listen to our music.

As soon as he got settled in his room — remember this was some 200 feet from my room — I started a good tape of western music — only this time I switched on the remote speaker switch with very low volume. I only left it on for just a few seconds, then cut it off and returned to my chair in the hall.

Sure enough, in just a minute his head extended out of his door looking in our direction — but; we were all sitting just like we were — still able to keep that innocent look, but just barely.

The next time I turned it a little louder — then off for a repeat of his looking to see what we were doing.

We played with him for awhile like this, then it was time to complete our shock treatment. This time I turned on our good western music, increased the volume slightly and left it on. I must say here that I didn't have any speakers on in my room at all — just the tape player running. The music was only playing through his speakers.

This time he came out of his room and walked the length of the hall to where we were —

but heard no music. Now we had him.

He explained to us that his radio was playing western music — which he didn't like — and his radio wasn't even on. He said he had unplugged it, and it still played on. Would our engineer please come and find some way to turn it off.

When they went to check on his radio, I turned it off at my stereo. When they got to his room — no sound at all. They looked strangely at him, discussed it for a while, then came back.

We thought we had done enough for the day — he was an important employee on the island, and anyway, we were running out of straight-jackets on the island.

I guess our conscience got the better of us, anyway, John Reynolds went down to talk to him after a bit, and told him what *he* had done — you don't think I would be involved in something like that, do you?

Needless to say, our friend was unhappy with what we (I mean he) had done, so John changed his radio back and apologized to him for what he thought was a good joke.

We didn't try that again. It *was* funny though.