Subject/USFW Retiree: Boeker, Erwin (Erv)
August 31, 2005
Interviewed by: John Cornely

John Cornely:
I have the pleasure today of having Erv Boeker, a long time biologist pilot with Fish and Wildlife Service and volunteer extraordinaire to this day is going to do an oral history today. Without further adieu, we are going to turn the microphone over to Erv and have him talk about kind of an outline of his growing up, education, and his career with the service.

Erv Boeker:
I suppose I better start at the beginning, and anyway though, I was born on a dry land farm near Stickney, South Dakota in November of 1920, so I've been around quite awhile. I still, as a child of about ten years old, have vivid recollections of the Dust Bowl years and the things that happened back in that country during those years. I grew up on a farm and attended a rural school through grades 1 and 8 and, of course, helped my dad with the general farm work. There are a lot of things I could say about the dust storms and things and the depressed economy during those years, but I won't get into that now. While I was there, growing up I did a lot of hunting and trapping. I was always interested in wildlife and in nature, of course. But then I attended the Stickney High Schools from the years 1936 to 1940, I was active in all sports because one of my burning ambitions was to become a major league baseball player! Anyway, then I enrolled at Dakota Wesleyan University in Mitchell, South Dakota in the fall of 1940. While at Dakota Wesleyan, I enrolled in a flying course that was sponsored by the government; they called it a civilian pilot training course. It was a course which I got credit for, and I obtained my private license that way. I won't go into a lot of the details about things that had happened during those years, but the big thing was that the day after the Pearl Harbor attack, while I was at the university, I hitchhiked to Minneapolis and enlisted in the U.S. Naval V5 Flight Program. I guess one of the highlights of that trip was hitchhiking; it was about 20 below zero and maybe a 30 mile northwest wind blowing, and I almost froze to death before I got enough rides to get into Minneapolis. I was accepted in this program, and my first assignment was pre-flight training at Hutchinson, Kansas. That was kind of like the boot camp of the Army. There are a lot of stories I could tell about that, maybe we can get into it later. But anyway, upon graduation from the Naval Flight Program, where I got my wings and commission as an ensign, I was assigned to a Ferry Squadron, where I was trained to become an instrument flight instructor and then to American Airlines Captain School for multi-engine training. There's one thing I think probably I should mention here, is that the day before the last flight I made before my graduation, I had a mid-air collision out over Laguna Madre out of Corpus Christi. I was in an OSU Squadron and we were making gunnery passes on a sleeve towed on another airplane, and while this operation was going on, the guy behind me rammed my airplane, and I looked over the side and all I could see was a bunch of debris going down towards the ocean! I was able to right the airplane, I still had aileron but my rudder was gone, and I pulled the power off and I got the rate of descent flattened a little bit, but boy those waves looked bigger and bigger as I got near the water, so I decided I'd better jump! So I

bailed out, I pulled the ripcord, and I can still feel that canopy popping, and I was underwater. It was that close! Then, like a darn fool, instead of getting out of the harness of the parachute, I was drifting along and the waves were about six to eight feet high and they were curling, white cap, but I learned that on the rise if I'd inhale and hold breath until the wave flopped over me, I could survive that way. Well anyway, this went on for awhile, and all at once I got the idea that I'm not coming up anymore! I thought, "What's going on?" I looked down and I was all tangled up in shroud lines and the canopy was sinking, and with that, I threw the ripcord away. That was something that you could keep. But anyway, I got out of the thing and I was in the water for six hours before they picked me up. I had a "Mae West" life jacket on. Really, the only bad thing that happened in the whole thing outside of the accident was I was beating these damned jellyfish off of my face with my bare hands, and I was pretty well puffed up for a couple of days. The other thing I think was worth mentioning, see this was the next to the last flight before graduation, and my orders had already been cut for fire squadron, which I had requested, but because of the inquiry from the accident and everything, there was a two week delay. In the meantime, those orders came back. So then I was assigned to this ferry squadron and, I think I already mentioned I went to the Instrument Flight Instructor School and the Airlines Captain School. But anyway, upon my discharge in 1946, I spent the next three years as a civilian flight instructor and a crop duster pilot. All of this time though, I got so burned out with this instructing, a lot of these discharged veterans from the war, they were wanting to become pilots in the GI Program, and we didn't have any way of screening them before they enrolled. I would sit there maybe 8 to 10 hours a day dual in the summertime, going through the same mistakes with the kids and everything, so I got pretty burned out. In the meantime, I was always thinking about, "Well, I ought to continue and complete my college education." So I went out to Fort Collins and enrolled at Colorado State University, and came out with a Bachelor’s degree in Zoology in the spring of 1952.

Right after graduation I accepted a job with the Division of Wildlife as an airplane pilot here in Colorado. I had a lot of duties here, learned how to drop fish and all that type of thing. Another interesting thing is, during this period, I more or less became the father of the Walleyed pike in Colorado because I went back to Syracuse, New York and hauled two loads of Walleye eggs back to Colorado, and that was the first attempt. A lot of these eggs were hatched down at (Lahana) at the hatchery, put in the lakes out here, and got Erv's name on them! So anyway, I remained in this position until July of 1955, when the Fish and Wildlife recruited me to a National Wildlife Refuge Pilot's position in Region 3, and I was flying out of Minneapolis. This was a very varied experience too, I did a lot of the demands of the refuge pilots for flight time and I did a lot of aerial spraying and seeding in those days, and helped law enforcement people when they needed some aerial help. Another highlight was going to North Dakota at the Lower Souris Refuge for about a month to six weeks in the fall to work on the Waterfowl Depredation Program up there. We had lots and lots of mallards and pintails that would roost on the Refuge and then they would go out and feed in the wheat fields. I had a sack full of simulated hand grenades that I would drop on them to keep them out of there.

So, this went on until the fall of 1958, when the Denver Wildlife Research Center was reorganized here in Denver. My old buddy, Cecil Williams, who was one of the first directors, he was a friend of mine from the days when I was here in Colorado to begin with, he called one day and he said he needed me back here in Denver as a pilot, research pilot biologist. It sounded interesting, and he said that he needed somebody desperately to follow the few whooping cranes that were left in the population, and that was my first assignment. So, for about three years I tracked them up and down the flyaway, I lived with them up in the north at Wood Buffalo National Park and then in the winter time down in Arkansas. We also tried to delineate their migration routes and where the important stopover places were and that type of thing, and there are a lot of stories I could tell about that, too, but it would just fill up space.

One interesting thing I want to bring out about this whooping crane project. My main duty was to remain out in the flyaway during the migration period, and call into Denver every evening to see whether or not any reports of whooping crane sightings up and down the flyaway had been reported, and if so I was to go down there to verify it. It was a nightmare really, because almost invariably it would be something else, or the bird was gone by the time I got there. But the worst, I think, episode that occurred was when I was up at Regina, Saskatchewan and I called down there one evening and they said, "Yeah, we are glad you called." A Texas Games, Fish, and Parks official had called Denver and said he had a whooping crane under observation for two days at a little lake east of Brownwood, Texas. So boy, being real eager and gung ho in those days, I gassed up and I flew all night down to Brownwood. A guy met me at the airport and he took me out to this lake and he stopped and I looked around and I said, "Hell, that whooper must have left." "No" he said, "There it is." He pointed to an American Avocet! I had flown all that way, and I had to go back to Regina. Well, I had a poster that old Fred Bard up in Saskatchewan had made of whooping cranes, and I unrolled one of those and his eyes got as big as watermelon. "That's a whooper?" But anyway, I had several other instances like that, and I finally decided that I just would not believe anybody until I saw it myself. But to go on then, during that same period I got interested in the sandhill cranes too, and I did a lot of flying, mostly exploratory work to try to determine where these sandhill cranes, that would be the mid-continent populations of birds, were wintering, all over the panhandle of Texas, down into Mexico. Then about that time too, because of alleged depredations, the Service finally consented to have an experimental crane season in eastern New Mexico and in the panhandle of Texas, which was in the year 1961, and I was assigned to kind of lead this thing, which I did, and it was interesting. But all this time too, I got to thinking about someday we may have to propagate cranes in captivity in view of the fact that the whooping crane was declining so rapidly. So I talked the gurus into sending me out to Malheur Refuge for two years. It was going to be a one year thing, I was going to capture a number of about two week old birds and bring them back to Denver, and we'd rear them and see if we could get them to mate in captivity and that type of thing, but I found that almost all of the birds had this respiratory problem, which the vets out at Corvallis told me it was aspergillosis. It was just one of those things that happened down there because of the places where these birds were nesting. Well this didn't work, so the next year I went back and I collected eggs from known aged nests that I had made a record of, and I took, I think it was, 27 eggs down to New Mexico to {Bill

Hughie}, a place down in Santa Fe where he and I reared these birds. In the fall, when they were adults, I took them to the Monte Vista Refuge, where they provided some pens for them and that type of things. I can interject one little story here that's been one of the highlights, I think, and that I'll never forget. I didn't see those birds for a year after I took them to Monte Vista, but I got back through there about a year later and old Pete Bryant was the refuge manager at Monte Vista at that time, and I asked him to take me out there to look at the birds. So we drove up to it and the birds were all out at about 200 yards from the gate, and they were kind of drifting away when they saw the car drive up, and I asked him if he'd unlock the gate so I could go in there. "Yeah" he said, "you can do that." So I went in there and I stopped and started to call them, we had names for all of them such as Uni, Crybaby, and.... You should have seen this John, when those birds heard my voice, everything stopped, and pretty soon that whole crowd came just like a bunch of puppies! They were picking the buttons on my shirt, they were purring! Oh, it was something to raise the hackles, you know!

But anyway, that fall then I decided I had really had enough flying for awhile, and there was some, I think it was Senator Udall, but we don't have to say this for sure, put some pressure on the Denver Wildlife Research Center to set up a wild turkey study in Arizona. I got wind of that, so I kind of kiddingly asked Cecil Williams and, oh golly, I'll think of the names later, if I could go down there and do that. Well by golly, they thought it over and said, "Yeah." They sent me down there. In the meantime though, they rediscovered the Aleutian goose out at the Aleutian Islands and Buldir Island, so before I could do anything else I had to go up there and see if I could bring some of those Aleutian geese back. So five of us went up there, we spent nineteen days on Buldir Island, and I came back with 18 Aleutian geese. They were aged from about three days to two weeks old. We took those out to Monte Vista. We got, I think, 7 mated pairs out of that bunch, and they went back to Patuxent eventually, and they provided the nucleus of the birds that went back to the Aleutian Islands. So, I could tell you a lot of stories about that trip too, but I won't at this time.

Now we're down to about 1963, when I transferred down to Arizona and I was officed with the Rocky Mountain Forest Range Experiment Station there, and I lived in Scottsdale. Anyway, I spent the first fall, had been looking for a likely place to conduct a turkey study, and it turned out that White River Apache Indian Reservation probably was as good as I could find, and so I set this thing up. While there, I was also involved with Rocky Mountain Forest Range Experiment Station with the pinon-juniper eradication project down in Silver City, New Mexico. Then, they decided that since I was with Fish and Wildlife Service, somebody in Fish and Wildlife Service should head up the Southern Bald Eagle Recovery Project, so I became the leader of that for three years. Then they made me the President of New Mexico and Arizona Wildlife Society Chapter. Then I was also appointed the Regional Pilot for Region 2, although I still didn't have an airplane at that time. Everything was really going pretty good, John, until one morning I got a call from Cecil Williams, and he said, "Erv, I got a problem up here." I said, "Yeah, hell everybody's got problems, Cecil." I said, "What's the matter?" "Well" he said, "you know, Ed {Wellen}, the only other pilot in Denver, is leaving, he's been called back to Washington." He said, "Ed's been called back and we're going to lose the airplane if you

don't get it." I said, "Well, I can get it, but what in the heck am I going to do with it down here studying turkeys?" "Well, you're no longer in the turkey study; you've been assigned to the Golden Eagle Depredation's thing." So that's how I got involved in that, so I spent about 12 years in that and set up, I don't know, about 20,000 transect miles that we flew to see where the birds were and when, all over the western United States.

John:
Did you do that over Arizona, were you still in Arizona?

Erv Boeker:
I started, yeah. Then also, we would check about 400 Golden Eagle nests from Mexico up through Montana every spring and summer from the air, to get some idea of the nesting thing. It just seemed like I'd get involved in almost everything, I got down to the gulf of California two springs for Peregrine Falcon surveys, and I was up in Wyoming and Montana on the black-footed ferret surveys, and did quite a bit of work with the people working in the coal fields in Montana and Wyoming. Again, it was getting a little bit too much. I failed to mention before that when I went to Arizona I got married, and it was.... well, my wife had a lot of health problems. In fact, she was in the hospital for practically three years, and it got to the point where I decided I just couldn't be in the field that much. Some years I would be out nine months out of a year. Well, I was thinking about that, but then she turned for the worse and she passed away in 1973. I talked to the people here in Denver about, "Really" I said, "I think I can do more good as far as this eagle thing was carried out of Denver than to say in Tempe." So they consented to a transfer for me back here to Denver. So I continued to do these activities, and I also got involved with the eagle electrocution problem, the power line studying. I got that think all set up and went around the country, explaining to the other agencies like the Forest Service and BLM what they could do help alleviate this problem. I was really, I've got to admit, I was getting burned out with a lot of these things, and I wasn't seeing eye to eye with some of my supervisors who, I thought, were being pressured more to make decisions on political lines than biological lines. So I figured, well by golly, maybe I can get out. Well, it came to a head in a meeting we had down in New Orleans. Animal Damage Control had their annual meeting down there and I gave a paper on what I thought of my study of trying to figure out how to get a handle on the depredation problem of eagles on sheep and goats. Anyway, events happened there that I finally got the word to the superiors that I was ready to leave. So it took a lot of time and I was still kind of wondering if I had made the right decision. Finally, one morning I was going to go some place with the airplane and, who the heck was it, I can think of the name later, but anyway, our assistant. Well that was almost 30 years ago, but anyway...

John:
The assistant regional director, or?

Erv Boeker:
No, he was our financial guy. But anyway, he came in and said, "Erv, you can't even buy a load of gasoline anymore for your airplane, it's that bad." I said, "You're sure?" He said, "Yep, you've got to turn your credit cards in." Well, that did it, you know. So it

turned out that the airplane I had, I had to take back to Tallahassee to Law Enforcement, and that was a kind of a sad day because that old airplane, a Cessna 180, that I flew out of here, I picked up at the factory in Wichita, Kansas in 1958, and I flew it until 1978. I forget, but my total flight time ended up being about 16,000 hours. Not all of them in that airplane, but I did a lot of flying with it. But anyway, then I was offered this job in Billings, Montana, and I turned it down and then they turned me loose. That was in 1978, in September of 1978. About a month after that, the National Audubon Society called and wanted to know if I would go to Alaska and do a Bald Eagle Study on the Chilkat River. I didn't even know where the Chilkat River was at that time. They sent me up there and I met with a lot of local people, and it was a tough deal, John, because the D2 Lands Classification Act hadn't been solved yet, and those people up there, they had absolutely no use for any conservation organization, especially the Feds. In fact, they were using President Carter's silhouette as a target at their target range and that type of thing. I thought though, "By golly, you better try." So I went up and, I don't know if you want all that detail about it.

John:
Sure.

Erv Boeker:
Anyway, it was a real tough go. I know the first meeting they called me in to talk to the local people at the Chamber of Commerce about what in the hell I was doing up there. So I said, "We want to find out exactly why these eagles use this area so abundantly, and what we can do to make sure that we can preserve the cover and the habitat for them." It all began with a timber sale that the State of Alaska had allowed, a part of the Tongass Forest to a local sawmill operator, that called for the removal of about 10.5 million board feet of spruce and hemlock, that's what is predominately on the steep sides of the river, and a lot of cottonwoods on the plain. I guess everybody recognized then that if you denude all those steep slopes there, you'd get all this sedimentation down in the river and it causes the (unclear) and the largest run of chum salmon of any river in southeast Alaska. There was a (unclear) stretch in that river that doesn't freeze over in the wintertime because of some warmer (unclear). We wanted to figure out too how that happened, and that's what causes the river to be there. But, of course, the local people (unclear) a refuge or something (unclear) and that is your river, the water, quality, and the fact that you've got (unclear). After the first year, it got so bad that first year, John, that I couldn't even buy groceries in some of the stores. They didn't want me there at all. Then the second the year they kind of tolerated me, and the third year I was accepted, and the fourth year I was called for all of their meetings about planning and stuff like that. It turned out to be the most rewarding thing that I'd ever done in this wildlife field. But one of the things that made it happen, well there were two things. First of all, we needed more money than we could get. The Fish and Wildlife Service, the guys out of Juneau helped me a lot with banding birds and that type of thing, and surveys. But we needed (unclear) the fisheries, the waterfowl, and the forestries and all of that stuff. The state wouldn't kick in a dime because the people there, they felt like the local people, they didn't want the Feds in there. That first fall the Indians in Juneau put on a pot lunch for us, I was invited, and it turned out that I was seated next to Jay Hammond, who was then

governor of Alaska. We got to talking and we learned that we were within a class of each other in flight training at Corpus Christi before the war, and we knew a lot of the officers down there and everything, and so that created a kind of a bond. Before the evening was over, I had a chance to tell him why I was there and about this eagle thing and I interjected the point that we asked the state for some money and we were turned down, of course I didn't blame that on him. But anyway, a couple of weeks later, his assistant called me up there at Haines and asked me if I would be available on the following Wednesday afternoon, and said the governor would like to come up. I said, "Yeah, I'll make a point to be there, and I'll meet him at the airport." So he came in on one of these little puddle jumpers, and so I met him and I took him all around the area, showed him all of the birds that were there, and there was up to about 3,000 to 4,000 birds at that time. I showed him some of the best feeding areas, and pointed out what would happen if we took all the trees out of there. He was just really impressed, I could tell that when he left that evening. It wasn't more than 2 or 3 weeks later when Dave Klein, who was my supervisor out of Anchorage there, called and said, "Hey, guess what?" and I said, "What?" He said, "The state came through with $200,000 for your eagle study!" So boy, then we had it made.

But anyway, it turned out that we got 49,000 acres of the prime habitat on both sides of the river declared Reserve, and that outlaws, of course, any of the major like mining and logging and so on. I think everything is okay there. The big problem now is, and I kind of brought that on myself, I tried to impress those people up there that their major wild product was tourism, because the whole valley is too small for the number of people that were there, and there just wasn't any activity outside of logging and mining and fishing you might say. So, they caught up on that, and now we've got too many tourists and too many guys with jet boats and stuff that want to take the passengers from all of these cruise ships and stuff. So I am still involved with that program a little bit, they still kind of respect my advice, I guess. Along with that, one of the most vociferous opponents at the beginning of my study was a guy that ran a sporting goods store up there in Haines. He was threatening to get the people together and kill all of those god damned buzzards, you know. We kind of became friends, I kept working on him quite a bit, and the last year he said, "You know Erv, I've been thinking about this thing you told us about tourism" and he said, "What we need up here is some sort of a symbol for the bald eagle." It turned out, making a long story short, we got some funding, a man from Atlanta, Georgia came up there one time, and I took him around for a few days, and I guess he had money that just rolled out of his pockets, but he got interested in this thing, so he gave us $100,000 as a preliminary thing to set up a bill to build a building and this type of thing. It is now called the Bald Eagle Foundation, and it's really something. They've got a dioramic view of almost all of the wildlife in the valley from the roof down to the water. All of these cruise ships, some of them, you know, have got 200,000 passengers, and about everybody comes in there, and at $5 a head! So, they're making some money. They are also pretty interested in calling the shots on activities around there that might have an adverse effect on the eagles. So that part worked all right. Along with that, as you probably know, I am still kind of volunteering for Phil and some of the waterfowl and crane studies.

John:
Erv, tell us, you know, I know for several years now that you've done a fair amount of volunteer work in the migratory bird program, tell us about some of that in a little bit more detail.

Erv Boeker:
Well, I guess the first thing, and that happened way years ago when I was still involved with Colorado Game and Fish. At that time the Fish and Wildlife Service decided that on each of these winter surveys they would send some state person along, so I got to fly the east coast mid-winter waterfowl survey with Ed Wellen and old Jerry Stout in an old Grumman Goose. That was kind of interesting too because, well going back again, one of the reasons that I probably went back to school to get a degree in wildlife, when I was still instructing after the war, I was down on the Missouri River in Platte, South Dakota one morning when the game warden there called and he said, "Erv, we got a bunch of Canada geese frozen in the ice off of one of the islands." That was before the dams were in there. So, I flew in over there and there was a nice, open spot there and I landed and we went out there and we chopped all these geese loose. I got back to the airport and about that time, this airplane came in and it was Ed Wellen and a game agent out of Aberdeen, they were doing a waterfowl survey on the Missouri, and so I gassed them up and I asked them, "How in the heck do you get a job like this?" That's where I met old Ed Wellen, and he said, "Golly Erv, I think if I were you, I'd get a degree, you've got plenty of the flight experience that it calls for." That really helped, and I did. My first job with the Division of Wildlife here, I thought, well that'll be some good training too, because all of this Navy training didn't. So I gained that in these three years pretty quickly, because when I think of some of these things that we did, John, it was (unclear). I had an old 172 Cessna, we would take three people and baggage, and that thing (unclear). I can still remember (unclear) on the flight going west, I'd sit over a (unclear) mountain there, trying to get enough altitude to get over Corona Pass, and sometimes I couldn't make it. But anyway, there are a lot of those kinds of stories. But, where were we?

John:
Tell us about some of your crane and goose work in recent years that you've helped.

Erv Boeker:
Oh, well yeah, one thing that... well, for a number of years, it's about maybe about 10 years, I'd fly that survey down in the San (unclear) with (unclear), well specific job, I guess the reason I could go with them was to take photographs of some of these flocks, which I never thought was... but anyway, that's beside the point. But anyway, I think I was able to give them some ideas and some help, like with aging, and one of the things too that, it's still kind of an unknown, but when we were doing that crane work (unclear). So I got the idea, by golly, go to some of these roosting sites and measure crane (unclear) because it's great habitus (unclear). So, we could pick those out pretty good, but there was (unclear), and we never could figure out what they were, but the size differential of these two things (unclear) in later years that came up with this intermediate variety or subspecies. It's this bird that seems to be increasing down there in San (unclear) Valley.

So, I got the bright idea that, by golly, why don't we measure ducks downs (unclear). It seems like the population is increasing a bit. So, I got the idea, you know, I still think, this doesn't have to go into anything, but we made a mistake by cutting out (unclear). That's pretty much what I did with the cranes. I did volunteer and I made one trip down to Mexico (unclear).

John:
Erv, you've mentioned several times Cecil Williams, who was with the Denver Research Center here, a lot of the younger folks in the Fish and Wildlife Service may see a couple of books Cecil has written or edited, but he (unclear) and I think a lot of the new folks don't know anything about. I wondered if you'd just share a little bit more about who Cecil was and some of the things (unclear).

Erv Boeker:
Well, he was a very interesting fellow. He was real active with waterfowl when I met him. In fact, he goes back to the Clarence Cottam days and that group of the old pioneers, and he did some, I'd have to go back, John, to get the full details, but he was one of the most respected waterfowl people in the days when I knew him. He had, I thought, some pretty good ideas about what waterfowl needed, and when he came in as the director of the center here, he divided it up into several sections; he had wetland ecology, upland ecology, and chemical. But his interest was with wetland ecology, and he set up a lot of these study areas in Saskatchewan and Alberta, guys like (unclear). That was his major interest. I knew him when (unclear). They had nothing but respect for Cecil. I always felt fortunate (unclear).

(unclear) Harvey was with and he and I remained great friends and I had a lot of respect for him too. I can even tell you a story about a fishing trip. He and myself went up to Ontario fishing one spring (unclear) suspicious about that weather, and I said, "Guys, I think what we ought to do is get in that boat and go back." "Oh, hell no!" (unclear) Well, at about that time (unclear) and it started to snow, we tried to get the boat out of the water because the waves were getting so strong, you couldn't cross (unclear) and so there we were! I was fortunate, I had a (unclear) suit and rubber boots, and I think Herb just had leather boots on, his feet got wet. We spent a bad night. We had one box of cough drops, that's all we had to eat! Well, anyway, I kept him awake because I wasn't the most comfortable, I'd keep saying, "Wouldn't a roast mallard and some mashed potatoes and gravy and dressing be good?" "Shut up!" he'd say. But anyway, the next morning the wind was still blowing pretty hard but it was clear, and I just happened to have one of these little mirror signals that we use in airplanes and I thought, well somebody in a cruiser would come by, and by gosh pretty soon here I heard this boat, and finally (unclear) saw the signal and came over, and they picked us off of there and took us back to that cabin that we were staying. We were in pretty miserable shape, but I took one of those lake trout along (unclear).

Another man I had a lot of respect for was (unclear). I left Denver to go back to Minneapolis. J.D. Smith was a man whose position I was to take back there because he had gone over to law enforcement. So, I got back to Minneapolis on a Friday afternoon

with all of my belongings in the back end of my 1947 Ford car, I had no place to stay, except I had a cousin in Minneapolis so I parked there. That was on a Thursday; on Friday morning I went to the old Buzza Building, that was the regional office at that time, and introduced myself. That's where I met Fran Gillett and Forest Carpenter, Harvey, and Hennekey was another guy there, and J.D. Smith. The point was, on Friday afternoon I was to leave for Lower Souris on this depredations thing, so I had to go out and get a flight check with Smith Friday morning, which I did. I got my things together and Friday afternoon I took of for Lower Souris, and I didn't get back for a month. In that time, my car and everything was sitting in front of my cousin's place, and when I finally got back I spent a day doing a lot of personal things. The next morning I went into the regional office and, "Well, Erv you're back, how did things go?" "Pretty good" I replied, and I told them all about it and everything. "Well, when did you get back?" And I said, "The day before yesterday." And I could still see the look in Fran's eyes, he said, "Gosh, I don't know how we're going to handle this, you haven't been with us long enough to qualify for any leave yet." So he didn't know how we were going to that and Carpenter said, "Fran, what are you talking about?" His face got all red, he realized he shouldn't have said that. That's just something that doesn't have to go into this, but it happened. It turned out the refuge manager of the Aleutian Complex in those days was "Sea Otter" Jones they called him, Bob Jones.

John:
I've heard of Bob Jones.

Erv Boeker:
Yeah, while I'm talking about him, it was he that used to make these trips up and down in a damn little dory, and the Coast Guard, every time they heard that he was out there somewhere the comment was, "Oh my god, got to go rescue him again!" But it turns out that he was on one of his trips when he got weathered in at Buldir Island, and he made the discovery of the Aleutian geese still being present there. So that word got back to Washington, and I can't tell you for sure how I was chosen. All I know is that one day, well who was the regional director then? Well, anyway, I got word that they wanted to know if I would go out to this Buldir Island. So we put together a team, we had a guy from British Columbia and we had a game agent, Bill Zahn was his name, out of Anchorage, and Carl Kenyon, who was a (unclear) marine biologist out of (unclear), and (unclear) Burns, who was Bob Jones's assistant. So the five of us went out there. Well, we got everything put together, of course I flew up to Anchorage and then we flew out to Adak, on Reeves Aleutian Airline. There, we were picked up by (unclear) who took us to Buldir. Well, we were on the island (unclear) the wind never went below 40 knots, the temperature hovered between (unclear), and it rained incessantly. We had nylon tents, and the wind would just blow the rain right through them. The damned captain of this cutter, he wouldn't come closer than a mile to Buldir because there were just no beaches there, and a storm was coming up the day we landed and we had two ships boats and this dory, old Bob had to take his dory along! The storm was brewing as we unloaded, and by the time we got everything off of those boats, we just had to put them up against the beach wall, and the wind was blowing sand over everything and everything got wet. We had to chase sea lions away first! But anyway, that was just one of the things! But we

were wet for 19 days, but we did get these little geese. A white ship, a Coast Guard white ship was to pick us up on a certain day, but they didn't show. We had one of these coffee-grinder transmitters, and we called there for a day, we couldn't raise anything but Japanese and Russian fishing fleets. Finally one morning we get up and look out there, and here is this damned Coast Guard ship anchored out there. So we made contact and they came in and got us. The water was so damned rough, we got next to that ship and it took us a half an hour for the guy to get along side so we could get the boats moored. I still remember this captain was on the bullhorn, telling us (unclear). But anyway, we finally got aboard, and that night it was so damned rough, John, that the ship was rolling at least 40 degrees both ways, and I was thinking about my poor little geese up there, just knocking against one side or another. I had them in a heavy cardboard crate and I cut up a blanket and put some on each wall for a little insulation. But they came through good. We got back to Adak, and I was to go back to Anchorage on.....

End of dictation

Key Words: Erwin "Erv" Boeker, Cecil Williams, National Wildlife Refuge Pilot, North Dakota Lower Souris Refuge Waterfowl Depredation Program, Denver Wildlife Research Center, research pilot biologist, whooping crane research, whooping crane flyaway migration routes from Wood Buffalo National Park to Aransas, Regina, Saskatchewan, sandhill crane research, 1961 experimental crane season in eastern New Mexico and in the panhandle of Texas, propagate whooping cranes in captivity program, Malheur Refuge, Monte Vista Refuge, Senator Udall, Arizona wild turkey study, Charles "Pete" Bryant, Refuge Manager for Monte Vista Refuge, Aleutian geese, Aleutian Islands and Buldir Island, Rocky Mountain Forest Range Experiment Station, White River Apache Indian Reservation, pinyon-juniper eradication project in Silver City, New Mexico, Southern Bald Eagle Recovery Project, President of New Mexico and Arizona Wildlife Society Chapter, Golden Eagle Depredation Program, Peregrine Falcon surveys, Wyoming and Montana black-footed ferret surveys, eagle electrocution power line study, National Audubon Society Bald Eagle Study on the Chilcat River, Alaska, D2 Lands Classification Act, Tongass Forest, Alaskan Governor Jay Hammond, Haines, Alaska, Dave Klein, Alaska Bald Eagle Foundation, migratory bird program, Ed Wellen, Jerry Stout, Grumman Goose, Clarence Cottam, wetland ecology, upland ecology, J.D. Smith, Buzza Building, Fran Gillett, Forest Carpenter, Bob "Sea Otter" Jones, Bill Zahn, Carl Kenyon, Adak, Alaska