The Life of Robert D. (Bob) Jones, Jr.
Eagle River, Alaska

Interview conducted by C.M. (Chuck) Mobley
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Chuck: Mr. Jones, could you tell me when you born and where?

Bob: I was born in South Dakota in 1916.

Chuck: Had your family been there a long time?

Bob: Well, yes. In fact they lived and died in that region. My dad was a small town lawyer and lived in Milbank, a town of about 2,500 people.

Chuck: At what point, what happened between then and when you came to Alaska?

Bob: World War II. I came to Alaska as a member of the military establishment and I'm still here.

Chuck: What did you do in World War II?

Bob: I was out in the Aleutian Islands in an Early Warning organization. We were looking for approaching aircraft, of course, and that was our primary objective.

Chuck: You were in the Army? What rank did you have and where were you stationed?

Bob: I was a First Lieutenant. I was stationed several places. I went to Adak with the original troops that landed there and from Adak to Amchitka and ultimately those were the two primary places where I was stationed. I was on some of the other islands.

Chuck: Was this before Attu and Kiska or after?

Bob: Both before and after. I was there at the time that Kiska was occupied by U.S. forces.

Chuck: Did you go to Kiska?

Bob: No, not at that time. I've been there several times since but we were operating equipment on the west end of Amchitka where we were looking essentially right into Kiska Harbor. That was deemed the most useful thing we could do.

Chuck: What was Amchitka like then. It has changed a little bit since then, I understand.

Bob: Well, the facilities change but the rest of it doesn't. At that stage of the game, we were living in tents. There was a small detachment of about 40 people. We actually operated two radar units; one down at Bird Cape, which is the northwestern corner of the Island and the other was on Aleut Point, which is the southwestern corner of the Island. They were both long-range

units. During the time that the occupation of Kiska was taking place, we were, of course, pretty alert to what might happen.

Chuck: Did you get there at a point in time when there were still Japanese on the Island?

Bob: Oh, yes.

Chuck: So you saw Japanese planes coming over?

Bob: Yes. Actually the ones that came as far as Adak, as I stated earlier, I was with the original troops that landed on Adak and we installed radar equipment right away.

Chuck: What was the radar equipment like? Can you describe it?

Bob: It was pretty antique as radars go today! The frequency was about 100 kilocycles, we called it in those years – kilohertz is what we call it now. The oscillators were vacuum tubes rather what we use now. We use a magnetron today and frequencies, of course, much higher than it was then. Anybody who only knows modern radar would be appalled to see those old pieces of equipment. They were very large. One unit that we used was a mobile unit – on a truck/trailer, weighed seven tons! Nowadays, the antenna unit on radar, one can carry. That, of course, is the advantage of it, could be installed. When the occupation of Amchitka was in the making, that was in early 1943, we had the first portable radar that the U.S. Army ever used and

it was operated in a tent and means provided to rotate the antenna was hand cranks. It worked – worked very well! It was a British product. I had quite a little experience with the early radar forms.

Chuck: When they broke or malfunctioned in some way, was it anything in particular? Did they have any particular faults?

Bob: Actually, they customarily did not fail. Of course, we had scheduled maintenance shutdowns and the oscillator tubes on one unit was about "that big around and so high" – two of them were used and they were water cooled, or actually liquid cooled. We didn't use water because of the temperatures and 106 megahertz was the frequency that we operated one of them. They were each different, of course, but they were in that range. Nowadays, the magnetron, like the one that is in microwave oven, takes the place of that.

Chuck: When Japanese airplanes came over, what did you do?

Bob: Our responsibility was to warn the base. We were at one end of the Island and the base was at the other end – about 40 miles apart. Our objective was to detect approaching aircraft and send warning so that our fighter aircraft could engage them. It saved a lot of wear and tear on the engines if they could wait on the ground and receive warning that there were aircraft coming.

Chuck: What kind of Japanese aircraft did you see?

Bob: I don't remember. The aircraft they were operating out of Kiska were probably amphibious as they took off from the water. They were building a runway but they didn't ever get it completed.

Chuck: So you saw Japanese planes coming over?

Bob: Oh yes. Not frequently, because it didn't last very long. Once the U.S. Air Corps arrived at Amchitka with P-38's and P-40's, it pretty well ended the incursions of the Japanese. Then, of course, there were bombers that came in as well and they carried the war to the Japanese.

Chuck: So you were there when the airstrip was built on Amchitka? What kinds of equipment did they use to build the airstrip?

Bob: It was cats – that sort of thing. The only unusual feature of the airstrips then were that they were surfaced with pierced metal planking. They were designed so that the pieces fit together and they could be laid down rapidly and if the aircraft were not too heavy, they could work off that kind of a surface. The big bombers were too heavy for it. They would roll a groove in the metal planking – B-24's. One landed at Ogliuga. It was coming back from Attu, I believe, and they had some problem – whether they were hit or what it was, I don't remember, but they needed to land and so they came in to Ogliuga with full armor and they just rolled two grooves in the runway surface. To fly it out of there, they had to take all the armor

and armament off to lighten the aircraft significantly. The P-38's and the P-40's were able to operate from that kind of a surface.

Chuck: Did you ever see any dogfights in the air or anything like that?

Bob: No. I don't think the seaplanes, which is essentially what they were, were a match for the land base P-38's and P-40's. They had some Zero's there and of course, they were maneuverable to extreme but they lost a great deal of that when they made seaplanes of them.

Chuck: You got to Amchitka by ship? What was that like?

Bob: Well, just a ship that operated back and forth between Adak and Amchitka. It was 180 miles and one could load a detachment or equipment on the ship, come in to Constantine Harbor at Amchitka where it was unloaded.

Chuck: After the Battle of Attu, you were there at Amchitka during that time? Did you see wounded come in?

Bob: Yes, I was at Amchitka. No, the fight was going on at Attu and it didn't reach our area. Somewhere thereabouts then there was a major naval engagement and we were quite alert to the possibility of some reaching us but they didn't.

Chuck: Were you able to listen on a radio to the invasion of Kiska?

Bob: We could have but we didn't. At least I didn't. We knew the Kiska radar had gone out of operation about 2 weeks before because we could hear it. So we speculated as to whether we would find an occupying force there. As it turned out, of course, there was none.

Chuck: What happened after that? What was the rest of your military career like?

Bob: Well, after the fighting was over, we were just tidying up and holding the fort, so to speak. There was, of course, at Adak, major preparations for an invasion of the Japanese mainland and warehouses were built and supplies were brought in. That sort of thing went on in an aggressive manner but on Amchitka, we did not have any particular role. Amchitka does not have the fine harbors that Adak does.

Chuck: So was your entire military service in the Aleutians?

Bob: Yes. After the war was over, I was transferred to Kodiak where I stayed in the military and finished at Kodiak. I stayed on Fort Greely. It was a normal military post; nothing unusual about it.

Chuck: The coastal guns all still there?

Bob: I don't know about the guns themselves but the gun-emplacements are probably still there.

Chuck: Did you operate radar on Kodiak also?

Bob: Well, no. I didn't personally but it was in use.

Chuck: What were your duties?

Bob: I was a member of the Post staff; just a relative hand-full of people. Its function was to assist in transferring aircraft on out the Chain. Aircraft, in those years, did not have the capacity to fly as far as they do now. It was necessary to have a number of places along the line where, if it was necessary to land, there would be a place reasonably close to do so. We were operating DC-4's. That was pretty much the most capable cargo aircraft of that period. Things have changed.

Chuck: Now those were flying in not Fort Greely but there in the Kodiak Naval Air Station, is that right?

Bob: There were both – Kodiak Naval Air Station or, they called it NOB - Naval Operating Base, and it had as a part of it, an air station. The two were operating together.

Chuck: Did you fly in a DC-4? When was your first flight experience of your life?

Bob: I was a passenger in a DC-4. I didn't have any flight experience until after the war. I was assigned to the Air Corps as a radar officer and had close association with the pilots and the staff of the air base so I knew what was going on.

Chuck: What was the Kodiak operating base like?

Bob: Well, it was fairly typical of a small base. Of course, Kodiak had a nice harbor so ships came and went. When I was discharged from the Army in Anchorage, I went back to Kodiak and worked as an electronics technician on the Naval Base at Kodiak.

Chuck: What kind of planes were coming in and out of there then?

Bob: I don't really remember what they were flying then.

Chuck: I'm just trying to get a feel for what the base was like back then.

Bob: Well, I don't know how I could convey that really. It was not a large base. They operated fighter aircraft out of there. I don't mean to imply that at that stage of the war there were a lot of them stationed there. It was a place where they could drop in, fuel, and go on.

Chuck: What did you do for fun when you were there?

Bob: (Laugh) Well, I don't remember particularly. The great outdoors, of course, which we used to fish and that was in-season. We did all the usual things that soldiers and sailors do – go into town occasionally.

Chuck: Were you there when the President came through?

Bob: I was in the Aleutians when the President came through. I believe I was on Adak at the time. I didn't see him but I was out on one of the out lying outposts where the radars were situated.

Chuck: Do you remember seeing any entertainers come through?

Bob: Yes. The one I remember was a very famous violinist – Yehudi Menuhin. I was on Amchitka at the time he visited there. My taste in music runs to that class and that's why I remember him particularly. I met the individual personally. Most of time, we were out in the outposts because that was the nature of our business. When the USO performers came in, they went to the base; usually not out to the outposts! There wasn't any way to get there, really. But when I heard that Yehudi Menuhin was coming in, I made sure that I got into town at Amchitka.

Chuck: How many people were in the auditorium?

Bob: It was full! I don't have a recollection of how many that would be.

Chuck: Did he play by himself or did he have any other…..

Bob: He had a pianist.

Chuck: Do you remember what pieces he played?

Bob: No, I don't. At Adak, of course, it was easier to get in from the outposts because they weren't so far away. There was a rather well known author participating in the operation of the theatre at Adak – one of the "who done its" – you would recognize the name, I'm quite sure. We did get some well-known individuals there.

Chuck: Any women? Movie stars?

Bob: Yes, there were women. More likely, however, they were musicians, rather than movie stars – dancers, perhaps.

Chuck: What did Yehudi Menuhin look like?

Bob: Well, he was bundled up because he was not used to our temperatures and I wouldn't be able to describe, really.

Chuck: What was Kodiak like after the war? Lot of people?

Bob: The base reduced in size pretty steadily and the town – this was, of course, before the earthquake, so the town looked quite different at that point than it did afterwards. The downtown district was pretty well washed away.

I was at Cold Bay in the Aleutian area when the major earthquake occurred in 1964 so I was out of touch with Kodiak. I didn't reach Kodiak until several years later, by which time all of the consequences of the tsunami and the earthquake had been erased but I knew some of the people who had been there and they described it. They were just simply running around the town in their boats, sea-going boats, good-sized fishing boats. There was water everywhere!

Chuck: Have you seen tsunamis?

Bob: I was fortunate enough not to be down at the water's edge when the tsunami came in. I've been in the Aleutians during, or been at Kodiak, when a tsunami hit Cape Sarichef and Scotch Cap on the west end of Unimak but that was far enough away that I didn't get my feet wet. If I had been in Scotch Cap, I would have gotten quite wet!

Chuck: Well, people died there, didn't they? Had you seen it before or after it got washed away?

Bob: Yes, I did, afterwards. It was 2-3 years. They didn't attempt to rebuild it; it was just washed off. Everything hanging over the edge – bits of metal hanging from it. I don't remember exactly – it was a fairly old-like station at the time. That was in 19--, I don't remember.

Chuck: I don't either. I have seen pictures of it. Did you have much to do with lighthouses over the years or ever go into any?

Bob: No, I didn't have anything to do with them, but I was at Cape Sarichef and I never got to Scotch Cap. I was right offshore from the ship but not ashore.

Chuck: How did you get into the Cape Sarichef lighthouse? What were the circumstances?

Bob: By flying. There is, or was, a landing strip there. There may still be, I don't know. There was a road system – kind of a patchy one, but a road system from Sherichef to Scotch Cap. When they rebuilt, they rebuilt on the mainland, rather than on the Island.

Chuck: Did you know the lighthouse keeper?

Bob: No, it was a mixed bag at Cape Sarichef. The Dew-line station was built there. That was how it came to have an airport and usually, it was in connection with those folks, that we went there. The Coast Guard, of course, manned the light station. I don't remember how large a detachment but it was not a large one.

Chuck: Back to Kodiak – after the war, you said you got a job on the base as an electrician. How long did that last?

Bob: I left there in 1948; probably, about 2 years. I moved off the base as soon as I could. I lived briefly on the base and then moved into town. I just

preferred to live that way. There came a time when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was employing someone to live and work in the Aleutians. I applied and landed the job and that was when my employment by the Navy ended.

Chuck: So you applied for the job and it was administered out of where?

Bob: Juneau. The regional office was in Juneau then. My first assignment was to go to Cold Bay which is where I lived for 27 years.

Chuck: What was it like when you first got there?

Bob: Cold Bay hasn't changed significantly. Well, there was an air force field, Thornborough field. I went there and it was not in operation much longer. Through the first winter and it began diminishing and the base, part of it went through a sequence of changes and to who was running the show, and I don't remember what the order of events was. For a time, Northwest Airlines operated it and then Reeve Airways operated it and eventually, the FAA assumed charge of it. The State took over its normal functions but that took place over a number of years. Things moved slowly.

Chuck: Where did you live when you first got there?

Bob: In one of the yak huts. There were a lot of them around at that stage of the game. They were just small sheds – about 20 x 15. They were made into housing units. They were made of wood. There were quonsets, of

course, which have a metal exterior and there were huts which were made of fiberboard. Thornborough field was made up of yak huts, made of ordinary wood, nailed together. The interior floors were plywood and the walls were essentially like fiberboard. They were barely adequate and maintenance was pretty steady; tar roof.

When we had the big fire, we burned several of them in the course of it before we got the fire under control. It seemed that at Cold Bay, things would catch on fire pretty easily. I think it was through carelessness; lack of maintenance. The fire usually would start around a furnace where oil had been allowed to drip on the floor and generally this happened at night when no one was around so the fire would get a head start before anyone had time to do anything about it. That particular night, the fire broke out somewhere around 10:00 – 11:00 p.m., and the yak huts were close together and the barracks were connected by an alleyway that was boarded over. Of course, it is a windy climate so that once a fire gets started, it's on the move and Northwest Airlines had just packed up to leave. The FAA had just taken over and there was paper everywhere as a consequence of the move that Northwest Airlines had made. It caught fire and blew from one place to another. The only way we could put it out was to take a tractor and just bodily move a burning building away from where it was close to another. We weren't equipped to fight fires. That was another one of the things that was changed the next morning. Everybody was out. I remember it quite distinctly. It was sort of a turning point in the way the base was operated.

Chuck: What year was this?

Bob: It would have been in the early 50's. It came during the winter as most of those things do. Most of the barracks buildings were lost. They weren't occupied and when one of the yaks caught fire, it was just simply shoved away.

Chuck: Was that an occupied one?

Bob: Yes, it was. But what was going to happen was obvious to all of us and the people that occupied that building got most of their things out before the fire reached it. It was simply bodily shoved aside. We had a fire engine but we didn't know how to use it! We learned, starting the next day!! It was a very old vehicle that the engine was mounted on. It would have been something probably acquired during the war years and the water tank on it was rather small, a couple hundred gallons, something like that. I believe it was a Ford vehicle. We had much to learn. After that, we were better equipped in both training and actual gear that we had.

Chuck: Now, you were not in the service, but you were living on the base?

Bob: Well, by this time, it had become a FAA station.

Chuck: Even though, you were with the Fish and Wildlife Service, you were sorta considered part of the federal folks there?

Bob: Oh yes. You see, we had large land holdings there. I, first, and subsequently other people, have been stationed there on the wildlife refuge.

Chuck: So when you first got there, were you the first person out there for the Fish and Wildlife Service?

Bob: No. Frank Beals was there. He lived at Kodiak and was responsibility for the Kodiak Refuge but as an additional responsibility, the Aleutians, he occasionally made a trip through the Aleutians. I knew him quite well and I liked him very much. I met him at Amchitka. He was there, and of course, he was interested in what was happening to the sea otters. He broke me in, so to speak. He was my boss for quite a period of time. It was a correspondence sort of a situation because I think he washed his hands of the Aleutians when I went out there.

Chuck: So what did Frank Beal look like?

Bob: Dark haired, a rather good-looking individual. He had been in the Aleutians prior to the war when the Bureau of Fisheries, well, let me think here – it was before the formation of the Fish and Wildlife Service. The Bureau of Fisheries operated the ***Brown Bear***. She was a vessel that belonged to us in the Aleutians to attend to administrative matters and to take research workers out there. O.J. Murie was one of the people that went in that capacity and Frank Beal was working with him. You may know of O.J. Murie's wife whose is still active from a wheel chair, I believe now, in Alaska. That was before 1941, certainly, so he knew the Aleutians, pre-

military installation time and I met him, as I said, at Amchitka. The reason I happened to meet him was I was one of the officers charged with certain wildlife management responsibilities as an additional duty. Mostly on Amchitka, we were looking after the sea otters. So it was in that capacity that I came to meet him and then, of course, when I moved into Kodiak, I became much more familiar with Frank's lifestyle because he lived there. It was, still is, the headquarters for the refuge.

Chuck: His house?

Bob: Well, it was then. Things at the beginning level, and now of course, there is a headquarters arrangement which does include the house in which he lived.

Chuck: What kind of things do you remember him teaching you?

Bob: Well, where I would find certain things and there were administrative things that I needed to learn – paper work and it was to a large extent, what kind of birds or mammals one would find in which groups and that sort of thing.

Chuck: Did he ever go out into the field with you?

Bob: Not after that, after 1948. He was with me on Amchitka in, probably 1944.

Chuck: So even when you were in the Army as a radar officer on Amchitka, you had some wildlife management responsibilities? Primarily with the sea otters?

Bob: Yes, that is what we were concerned with. We were to look out for anyone shooting at them and that really was the long and the short of it. We were to keep the unnecessary killing down. Everyone was equipped with firearms. We lived by them and they were always within easy reach and the temptation is to shoot it at a target. If there were other violations, the pilots flying out to the west end of the Island were using an offshore rocky area as the target and it happened to be an area where there were large numbers of sea otters. I complained about that. We had no responsibility for any licensing. It was just considered that anyone on the military establishment then could fish.

Chuck: When you got to Cold Bay, was there any kind of watercraft that you had. Did you have a boat that was given to you?

Bob: We eventually acquired boats, yes. But to start with, I was strictly on my feet; didn't have any equipment but we gradually acquired that over a period of time. We got some fine boats. In 1951 was when we (let's see, I went there in 1948). I didn't live continually at Cold Bay because my responsibilities were out in the Aleutians as well as at Cold Bay. I spent a large part of my time out there and we were observing what was going on at Amchitka because that was the center of the sea otter population at that time.

Chuck: So if you didn't have a boat, how did you get there?

Bob: Well, in those years, the military operated a small ship service up and down the Chain. As a federal employee, they hauled our equipment and it was always by ship that we acquired anything. Except on occasion when we were going to Amchitka to spend a number of months working we would charter Reeve's DC-4 airplane and would haul from Adak to Amchitka that way. There are some fine runways on Amchitka.

Chuck: When you say "hauling gear" – what kind of gear are we talking about?

Bob: Everything from fuel to clothing, engines to power the boats, whatever we had to do. We were interested in the waterfowl population on the Island and we were in the process of eliminating foxes from the Island and the equipment that we needed - it was a mixed bag.

Chuck: So in 1951, you got your first boat?

Bob: Let me think. We got two dories in 1951. I don't remember whether or not those were the first boats but they were close to the first ones. They were 20 feet, overall. They had oarlocks. There is one just like them outside the house here. I can show you a model. I made this. It is a kit; not something that I cut out myself. We put a transom in across and the engine would mount in 'there.' It was not like an inboard in the fact that you could

life the engine out. You could use it strictly as a rowboat and they are fine rowboats.

Chuck: Did you ever put a sail on them?

Bob: I'm equipped for a sail on this one. The one outside was built in Massachusetts.

Chuck: So you got these two boats. Did you get engines for them? What kind?

Bob: Yes. One of the old 9.8 horsepower Johnson's. Now this antecedes the war. We had a 22-horsepower Johnson and then we finally acquired two 4-cyclinder Evinrudes. They were small pieces of equipment, 4-cyclinders, two would fire opposed and then the other two would fire opposed. They were pretty good pieces of equipment. They were 10-horsepower engines. Those were the starting kind. When we started building a transom in this boat, there was only one manufactured product that would fit because it needed a small cowl. That was the Mercury engine and so from the time we started operating that way, that was what we used because of the limitation of the cowl size. The engine sits right straight in there so the power head is up about 'this' high and this limits the radius of turn if you have an engine with a big cowl. Most of the Mercury engines that we acquired were twins – 25-horsepower, 35-horsepower. Thirty-five was getting pretty much to the limit for that boat. She is a displacement hull. When you take an ordinary dory and put a transom in, this is what they tend to do, they tilt.

I put hydrofoils on either side aft. They are on this boat out here so she became quite a little faster. We had two 4-cyclinder 35-horsepower engines. This precedes the electronic ignition age. They were making brake magnetos in them. Believe me, I got to be quite an expert at keeping them running because we traveled long distances. We would travel from Amchitka to the west end which is 40 miles and then to Kiska which is 50 miles – in a 20-foot dory. This is the famed "Cape Cod" dory. They have quite a reputation of being sea worthy and we would put a dodger on it; put a decking on it and from there aft, put a strong back in the middle and then put a canvas cover over it so that only the cockpit would be open. There were times when I was quite happy to have that situation. She could have seas breaking over her and still survive. It happened more often than I like to remember.

You'll notice these thole pins; you don't see a thole pin on a modern vessel but they are on that boat out there and they were on the ones we used in the Aleutians. They are fastened to this member and pulled loose and hang down so they are out of the way. They are made of oak, of course, and they are a splendid rowing arrangement. When I wanted to buy some thole pins in Seattle for our dory's, I had difficult finding that many. That would have been in the mid 50's but I prefer them to a steel rowlock because I can replace them on any beach in the Aleutians. The steel rowlock is busted and then you are out of business completely.

Chuck: Did you ever crash one of these dory's up on a rock?

Bob: No, although I sheared one of the hydrofoils off. I was going into a narrow channel on an island out at Amchitka and there was just barely room enough to get in and I didn't quite make it so then I had to dive for the thing. We used brass screws on stainless steel so that if it did strike something, it would shear the brass rather than tear up the boat. It did what it was supposed to do. I lost two of them but in conditions when they were both aboard ship. One occasion was when the water was coming aboard so fast that it filled the boat. She was on the stern of a Navy vessel and simply, the weight of the water just broke her. The other one, when she was being hoisted. Normally, there is a loop in through these two holes in the stern and you pick them up on those two but you have to get a high lift. If you lift from down low, it will put strain on the boat and the sailor rigged that, did that. It pulled the stern piece out and the boat fell on the rail of the ship and smashed! Those were the only two that I lost.

Chuck: What was the worst storm that you were in one of these things, or were there too many?

Bob: (Laughter) I'd hesitate to name any one as the worst. Some of them are more difficult to manage than others. If you're jogging with it, it is quite a lot easier than if you're heading into it. I remember some of both. We kept a bailing device handy. It was not something to get plugged either, I'll tell you. It was a bailing can and we used it frequently! It was the only means we had of getting around from point to point. We kept three dories. One at Cold Bay, one at Adak, and one at Amchitka, or later at Shemya. I

traveled from Amchitka to Adak, not frequently, of course, because that is 180 miles and you are out in the open sea for a good part of it. I liked to have a boat that could take some rough seas and still survive!

Chuck: So, several times you took one of these from Amchitka to Adak? Did you ever get stranded out there? Ever run out of food?

Bob: No, not really ever stranded and we were careful to not run out of food! We sometimes got down toward the end of it if we were on an island. For a short period of time we carried the amount of food that we required and then a bit more.

Chuck: Did you eat much subsistence items?

Bob: No. We would catch fish, of course, but we just didn't do that.

Chuck: Let's jump ahead here – you said you spent 6 months a year at Amchitka, all the way into the mid 60's.

Bob: At Amchitka, or elsewhere in the Aleutians. We spent quite a lot of time at Agattu. Agattu was the most productive Island in the Chain of Aleutian Canada geese, before the foxes were introduced there. We were doing our best to destroy them there and that is one of the cases where we were in time for the nocturnal sea birds. We got them off before we had lost them completely. I don't know of any effort that has been made to re-establish those birds and I hope there is one, because there are some islands in the east of Atka, islands of four mountains – some of those islands had

very large populations of sea birds that foxes pretty well destroyed. When a person released foxes on an island, they looked upon the sea birds as a resource to feed the foxes. All that has been turned around now.

Chuck: So, when you were at Amchitka, you were doing waterfowl studies. Can you describe those?

Bob: Well, we were also doing about three things at once – working with sea otters and we were trying to document the waterfowl use. Amchitka is one of the better waterfowl islands in the Chain. What we wanted to do ultimately was to re-establish the Aleutian Canada goose which had been almost destroyed by the introduction of foxes in the islands. Amchitka had been one of the better goose producing islands, although, the best one in the Chain was Agattu. We were in the process of eliminating the last of the foxes on the islands. Amchitka was the first one that we demonstrated that we could do it and then we were interested in documenting where we could find remnant goose populations which entailed a lot of travel in the Aleutians because we had to go from here to there to find them if possible. Of course, our interests were not limited to the Aleutian Canada goose. The sea bird populations that nest in the islands were hard hit, particularly the nocturnal birds. So the elimination of the foxes was important in the restoration of sea bird populations.

We tried our hand at eliminating rats but gave that up. That is just shoveling it against the tide. All we had access to was poison and that was just not good enough, and besides, you have to watch where the poison goes. You

don't want it to go into the eagle population. Amchitka has a large eagle population.

Chuck: How did you get rid of the foxes?

Bob: We used poison but when we got it down to the end, we used poison under the quonset huts and pacific huts that were left on the island so the eagles didn't have access to it – none of the birds did. We used traps and we used shotguns, rifles, anything that we could get within range. I didn't personally ever use any of the traps, so I don't know what kind. I suspect they may have been leg-hold traps but I'm not sure that is true.

Chuck: What kind of rifles and shotguns did you have at the time?

Bob: Well, we used a slide action 12-gauge. I think it was a Winchester Model 12 and I personally carried a 257 Roberts, which is a very good long-range rifle. If I could get within 300 yards of a fox with that, it was close enough. The last one I killed on Agattu Island was a vixen, carrying a fork-tailed petrel nestling. That was on Agattu. It took a lot of time to get it done. It (removing foxes from all islands) still isn't done – we began in probably 1950. That was on Amchitka. Amchitka has been free of foxes since about 1962. Since then, other islands have been cleared. Agattu was cleared and I'm not current as to what the total is at this point, but quite a number of small islands that are particularly useful to sea birds and such things. The Aleutian Canada goose has been re-established on some of the islands, though it hasn't been on Amchitka. We found that we were

competing with this big population of bald eagles and when you take a captive goose and release it on an island, it's not really in charge of events. It was trying to establish some on Amchitka was discontinued – my hope is that once the nearby islands become occupied, that the wild population will re-establish.

Chuck: What was it like trying to find local populations that you could bring birds from? What was it like trying to find nests?

Bob: Well, the Aleutian Canada goose had to come from the Aleutians, of course. We found them on Buldir, which is in the western group. It's an island on which foxes were never introduced. They survived. We went to Buldir in 1953; my assistant, Vern Berns, and I took the dory with us. Vern lived various places, subsequent. We went on board one of the Coast Guard ships and we hit good weather and hoisted our dory over the side at Buldir and it was perfectly calm, which is a very rare day out there.

While it was calm like that, we decided to use the dory and go around the island and see if we could see any flying geese and we did. We saw quite a number of them flying around the island. We landed then and began looking for broods on the ground and found them. Then we came back the next year, equipped to catch some of those goslings and take them back and we still have those birds. I don't think those are being used for re-establishing the populations in the Aleutians now. I think what they did was to catch molting geese on other islands, Buldir, for example. This would be before they had molted and they could clip the primaries, release them on islands where they

would grow new primaries then they could find their way back to California, where they winter. My memory is that they were taking goslings along with those adult geese so that there would be a nucleus. The person who did most of that is on the Maritime Refuge – Vern Byrd. He ran the re-introduction and he can tell you precisely what they did. He still works at the Maritime, in Homer, if he is home. In the Maritime Refuge, he is often away.

Chuck: What did you do with sea otters at Amchitka?

(end of 1st tape – sides 1&2)

(side 1 of 2nd tape)

Bob: Well, the person who was doing the work was Karl Kenyon. I helped him. We were marking some of them and there became a point where it was decided to harvest the first sea otters and I remember – this was in January. Using a boat at Amchitka is pretty limited. I was doing the retrieving, wearing my wet suit with a dry suit on the outside of it. I don't remember that particular operation as one that I liked but it was cold!

Chuck: How did you capture them?

Bob: We had a rifleman. Sea otters are "sitting ducks" for shooting. They lie on their back. A good rifleman can zero in on them quite easily. Unlike a seal that often sinks, sea otters float. I haven't had any experience trapping muskrats or beaver – but I have had enough experience with sea otters to know.

Chuck: When people talk about you at Fish and Wildlife Service, here in town, everyone invariably refers to you as "Sea Otter Jones."
Bob: That's the name I acquired – in the early 50's. A lot happened in those years. We began to learn how to handle them in captivity. They must be clean and if they are living in cold water and their fur is not clean, they are wet. We had three sea otters that we caught at Amchitka, and held for a period of time. I took them to Adak where we held them then we took them down to Seattle where they were in the Woodland Park Zoo for a while and then they were shipped on to the National Zoo. I was responsible for those animals while they were at Adak and it was there and at that time that I acquired the name "Sea Otter." It stuck!

Personally, my major work has been with the black brant. There is a model of one there. That was done at Cold Bay where the entire population gathers in the fall. I have followed them on their migration. I don't mean to say that I was flying with them (as much as I wanted to). When they moved south, I was able to join them down in San Quentin – where I went on a number of occasions, in Baja, Mexico, and in the Straits of Georgia – that's inside Vancouver Island. I have done some work there.

Chuck: How did you get interested in the black brant?

Bob: The entire population is on Izembek Lagoon in the fall and in the spring and that's at Cold Bay. If you look at a chart, you will see Cold Bay, which is at right angles to the land. It is 40 miles in length. If you go across the peninsula, there is another bay which lies parallel. It is a lagoon and it is

Izembek Lagoon. It has the world's largest stand of eelgrass. That is very attractive, particularly to brant. It is also attractive to Emperor geese and to Canada geese. Those birds gather there in the fall. The Canada geese don't gather there in the spring, but the brant do. One interested in wildlife can't live in Cold Bay with waterfowl populations of that scale without becoming interested! It would be a peculiar individual, indeed.

Chuck: How did you find the black brant in Mexico? In Baja?

Bob: They have been studied along the line and information has been published as to where appear in winter. One can go with assurance to find them there. I read all the literature that provided that information.

Chuck: How would you characterize the work you did in the 50's?

Bob: In the 50's and early 60's, anywhere from 3 to 6 months, would be spent in the Aleutians and the balance of it on the Alaska Peninsula – Cold Bay, that is.

We introduced caribou to Adak Island in 1958 and 1959. I was responsible for caring for the animals at Adak. They came as calves; very young calves. They came from the Nelchina Herd. They were flown to Adak in late May and in early August, they were free on the Island so we were still looking after them. The first group consisted of 9 and the second group about 18. I took this photograph of this animal. It was released on Adak in 1958 and in January, we went back to see if we could find it (them) and check on them

and we did. They came right to us. You can actually identify plants in that picture. The conditions were just right to capture fine details. It has been a successful introduction but it has only been successful because the population has been held at a low level. If they start to multiply uncontrollably, they quickly overgraze. Reindeer do that and of course, reindeer and caribou are of the same species.

Chuck: What was the next biggest boat you got after the dories? Eventually, you must have gotten a bigger boat?

Bob: No, not I, though there is one there now. A fine ship, too. I started to mention that we had three dories in the Aleutians. We could go to where one was and operate from there and then put her back in storage, then fly to another place and use the dory that was available there. It was the most reasonable way for us to do our work. We became rather skillful in the operation of that boat. They are heavy boats. I used, I say "I" because it was almost my responsibility to get the dory ashore and launched with the aid of air rollers. They are a wiener shaped sack that you fill with air at low pressure and the boat can then be rolled. We carried a come-along and of course, the dory had her anchor so that we could bring her bow ashore, set the anchor and start pulling with the come-along and roll the boat up out of the water. We could ride out a bad storm on the beach and then put her back in the water and go on our way. Most of the time, the air rollers were inflated. We carried three of them, together with patching equipment and they were a lifesaver! One person wouldn't stand a chance of getting her out without rollers and I did it repeatedly. Sometime, there would be a second

person around but I was accustomed to doing it alone. Sometime, it was nip and tuck but that's the way life is.

Chuck: Did you ever have any famous biologists or naturalists that came out that you worked with or that used you or took you out or anything like that?

Bob: Yes, the curator of mammals at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago – wanted a display of sea otters and had secured the O.K. from the Service to take the sea otters. He came out in the winter and I remember an episode in the dory and he had his fill with one trip! It is quite cold because you're out before God and everybody and I remember he declined to make that a common journey. While he was there, we got one of the big winds up in the vicinity of 100 knots and he couldn't believe his eyes. He had been in Patagonia and he said "this equals anything I've found down there."

Chuck: You mentioned that you had also met the Murie's?

Bob: Yes, O.J. Murie. He was dead by the time I went out – no he wasn't either, but shortly thereafter. I had correspondence with him briefly. He produced a book on the basis of the work he did in the Aleutians.

Chuck: I heard Marlin Perkins was out also. The "Wild Kingdom" guy?

Bob: Recently, there have been a number of them who have gone out and they go on board the ***Tiglax.*** It is much more comfortable to do it that way.

Chuck: Speaking of eagles, did you participate in bounty shoots of eagles.

Bob: No, indeed.

Chuck: I was talking with a fellow in Kodiak and you might know him – if I can remember his name – anyway, he had a photograph of himself and another fellow and they bounty hunting for eagles in the Aleutians.

Bob: Two-bucks a copy. That was a bounty that was offered by the Territorial Legislature and there were eagles bountied in the Aleutians. I have no evidence that they influenced the population of eagles now but it was not a good deal. That took place before I was in the Aleutians. To the trappers that were on the islands during the winter, it was a financial resource as far as they were concerned. I know what their viewpoint was likely to be but there are quite large populations of eagles in the Aleutians. We had to hustle sometimes to keep from letting the live stock industry back us into a corner. They wanted to produce sheep. I'm sure there was some competition but I didn't know how much justification they had in wanting to eliminate the eagles. By the time we got to that point, the conservation attitude had gained considerable ground so that the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society – all would come to our aid in hustling public opinion. I always took the view that the eagles belonged there and if there was going to be sheep put on the island, it would have to be arranged between the two of them. They would get along together. They wanted to use some of the islands in the western part of the Chain. We always held the line on that.

Chuck: What islands in particular?

Bob: That's passed out of my memory. It was all a level of correspondence. There are sheep on Umnak and there are sheep on Chernofski Harbor. That's as far west as they got. But you see, those islands are not a part of the refuge. The refuge begins at the west end of Umnak and it was the refuge that opposed their introduction.

Chuck: How about St. George and St. Paul – was that part of your beat?

Bob: No. My wife has been there but it is a different federal entity altogether. I don't know what its legal status in that regard is now, but a lot of changes have occurred and those people are their own bosses now.

Chuck: Let me jump to something else – when you first saw Kiska, what kind of military junk was there still left out there?

Bob: Small submarines. I think they were 2-man subs and of course, wrecked ships, guns, ammunition, and caves. They lived underground. I never went into one. I like it out in the open.

Chuck: Was it hard to do your biological work when there was all that neat military stuff to look at?

Bob: No. It's rusting. The geese were on Little Kiska and there were some Japanese guns on Little Kiska and the geese nested right with them.

Chuck: I've been there.

Bob: Oh, you have? I was there fairly recently. I went there as a guest of the refuge and we went ashore on Agattu. That's the big one.

Chuck: That's why I know the Fish and Wildlife Service boat. When I was 2-weeks on Kiska, we stayed on that boat – whatever that boat's name is – ***Tiglax.***

Chuck: What about old prehistoric, archaeological, Aleut sites?

Bob: There are a number of them. We came to know where they were and we, to the best of our ability, kept them from being looted. At Shemya, they used the tractor to do that! Shemya was kind of a lost cause. On Agattu, I know where there are a number of barabaras. You can see them because they are eroding and the sea urchin spines and human bones and bones of sea otters come out.

Chuck: Did you ever work with any archaeologists?

Bob: Oh yes, I have – Bill Laughlin at Anangula. He was interested in my biological knowledge and I gave him my point of view of the ecology of the

islands in prehistoric times. That was the sort of thing that he was interested in.

Chuck: Did you participate in the excavations?

Bob: I'm not qualified to do that. We spent hours discussing the ecology of the near shore which is where the resource lies. He was quite interested in that. He had a whole team and there have been others who have come to Cold Bay. They were interested in Izembek, in particular. I've forgotten the names of them at the moment.

Chuck: When the late 60's and 70's came along, what were you doing then in your career?

Bob: My major work in the late 60's – well, you missed it by one year. In 1970, I went back to school at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks and graduated in 1973 with a masters in wildlife management. Then I went on and started in further studies and went to UBC and then back to Fairbanks. I reached a point in my career where I had no use for the degree so I didn't finish. By that time I was in the office here in Anchorage. I worked out of the Anchorage office, went up to the Yukon Delta and then down in Cook Inlet to the Chisik Islands and then did some work with walruses.

Chuck: So when did you get out of the Fish and Wildlife Service?

Bob: In 1981, I believe is when I retired. I worked for 3 years as a re-employed retiree, operating a 30-foot boat, the ***Sea Otter,*** for the Service in the Prince William Sound, Cook Inlet. I operated the boat and when it was necessary to bring her from King Salmon to here, I went out there and brought her up the river, to the lake, and over the pass to the Cook Inlet side. We operated here in Cook Inlet; to Seward and back and then we took the boat over to Whittier and operated in Prince William Sound.

Chuck: Did you take archaeologists out then?

Bob: No, I didn't do that. I was operating the only metal-hulled vessel that the Service could put in the water in Prince William Sound. She is 30-feet long and one summer we were assigned the job of visiting all the kittiwake colonies in the Sound and virtually all of the kittiwake colonies in Prince William Sound are beside glaciers. There was a lot of ice to go through and with a metal, welded, aluminum hull, she could go through the ice, provided it was done carefully. That was one of the assignments that I drew. Another was, in winter; we were actually counting the numbers of different birds in the inshore areas of certain islands. This was before the Valdez oil spill.

Chuck: Well, this kinda takes us up to the end of your Fish and Wildlife Service career, doesn't it? What did you like about it the most?

Bob: Living at Cold Bay, I guess. To a biologically oriented individual, there is no better place on earth, and few that will match it. It is alive with creatures. The Alaska brown bear, caribou, river otters, sea otters, waterfowl

of several different types, seals, -- just never away from wildlife there. It's the place where it is at – as some of my friends would say. Winter populations to study, fall populations to study, spring populations – you can't beat it! We were interested in the eelgrass beds because they are the "goose that lays the golden eggs," so to speak. In many ways, we became quite interested in the ecology of the Lagoon.

Chuck: Did you ever participate in any sea rescues?

Bob: No, I never did. I guess I was lucky in that respect.

Chuck: It sounds like you had a pretty accident-free life out there.

Bob: Oh yes. I did.

Chuck: What was the most scariest experience that you ever had.

Bob: Well, I suppose several times in the dory would qualify. It's not a good deal to get scared when the chips are down because you don't have all of your thought capabilities available. I would get scared afterwards. I guess as far as I'm concerned, the times when it is necessary to go through surf to reach the beach would be the times that scared me the most because the forces are powerful.

I could go on but I am going to have to give it up for now.

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