Noel Wien interviewed by N. Jacobs.

Tape H76-37A,B,C,D

NW: Well, even before the war, I was interested in flying. What little I could read there on the farm in northern Minnesota. It was just in my blood. Somehow I was going to learn to fly, and my four brothers, well they weren't too interested. They didn't have that drive for flying that I had. My older brother, Ralph, who was killed in Kotzebue in that diesal black experimental plane, he was sixteen months older than I was, and he said, "Well, you never can tell, you might become a great pilot someday." Long before I even got near an airplane or to touch an airplane, I had to learn to fly. I remember that statement he made.

NJ: Prophetic.

NW: Yeah, he had faith in what I was thinking and talking about. The other two younger ones who are here today, Sig and Chris, they both live in Fairbanks, they were younger, of course, and they never said much about flying. Fritz learned to fly and had between forty and fifty hours flying here in Fairbanks on a Waku 90X5 engine. But somehow he didn't have the drive to keep it up and continue flying, so he was a good mechanic and stayed with the mechanical end. Then when he got married it cost money and he couldn't get going flying even if he had wanted to, I guess. But Sig was a bachelor, and he still is; he went right at it and learned to fly and got his commercial in 1937, then went to Nome almost right away for a base of operations there. He put in more

hours in the arctic from Nome, Kotzebue, to Barrow, and east to Barrow, than any other person. So he built up a lot of hours--about 12,000 hours total. How many years, I don't remember. Well, it's since '37 up to about 1960, somewhere in there. So, if you fly a lot, and he had no wife to come home to, so he practically lived in his airplane, and he was always out at some base or some roadhouse somewhere, ready to fly when the weather cleared. So he, I think, caught up and beat me a little bit. I have 11,900 and something.

NJ: Have you really? Nearly 12,000 hours.

NW: Yes, but my son, Merrill, who's flying the jets now, has 23,000 or something, just about double, because it's steady, every day. He put in five years in the military, Air Force, too, and did a lot of flying there, C1-19's.

NJ: Well, going back to this first airplane that you got put together in Anchorage, what kind of problems...had you tried to get other airplanes?

NW: Well, there were no other airplanes for this country or that you could buy at a reasonable price. There were no cabin planes, there were no...

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NJ: The night on the airplane on the Toklat...

NW: I had it the next morning before the start of my walk.

NJ: And then you, and how far was it then into Nenana?

NW: Forty miles airline. I measured it on the map many times. But I think I made close to 80 miles because of going around all these swamps full of water, oh, deep water. I didn't want to get wet too far up, but I was wet above the knees all the time, in the snow, crawling some drifts.

NJ: And cold; it wasn't warm.

NW: Well, it was thawing every day, which helped some, and lots of daylight, so I tried to lay down with these wet leather boots up to here, and they were full of water all the time. I'd take them off and wring out my socks and do a little, but the boots were solid wet. So, I couldn't sleep because there was hardly a dry spot, even up against spruce trees, where I could lay down without getting water through my clothes. Another thing that was so tough was these burnt spruces; they'd burn and bend over and touch the ground on the tops. They seemed to be cross-wise on my path everywhere, so I was having to step on them, break them down, and go around some of them. It was zig-zag just like this all the way.

NJ: Rough going.

NW: Yes. But the first ten miles I hit a stream, a slow-running, it wasn't a glacier stream, it was a slow-running stream off the Toklat, but it leveled off so it was slow-running. And it had some big spruce trees along the river; that was about eight miles from the Toklat...not quite, maybe five miles, anyway, after crossing this muskeg swamp. And, you know, I've been running around this racetrack out here...ah, jogging, three miles every

night, almost every night, because I knew sometime I was going down somewhere. So I wanted to keep in practice, and I ate the best food, and I didn't drink or smoke or carouse around any, and I wanted to stay in shape, because I knew I'd die if I didn't keep in shape. So, I thought I was in perfect shape. I could run from now on--jog--as far as I wanted. I'd go three miles arounf the track. Well, the first hour I managed to struggle for an hour, and finally I played out so badly that I couldn't have wiggled if a bear had been coming around, could hardly have turned around. I was so all-in from going down these holes and snow, and I was pulling my legs up this way, you see, over the snow because of sinking in the muskeg. Muskeg is a swampy stuff; it's not like tussocks, but almost as bad, with snow on top. In summer, if the snow is gone it wouldn't have been so bad, and I wouldn't have had all that to get over, see? I played out so completely, you can't imagine, and I'll never forget it. I had to lay down and rest, rest for half an hour. Then I'd go another hour and play out the same way, but before I got to the slough, I was gaining in strength. You do that, see, if your body will take it. If you're healthy, in other words, you gain from extreme exercise. Well, I hadn't had that extreme exercise before, and it takes you quick. Well, I thought, "Just awful. If I get through here, I don't know if I'm going to make it or not." But, you know, I got to that hill--they call it Wien lookout now on some of the maps. It's a thousand feet up but long slopes on all sides, almost a direct course, not quite a direct course from McGrath out of Nenana; you can see it from

Nenana. So, I got up there where I could see Nenana over this way and where it was. I wanted to get somewhere where I could see the hills of Nenana. I knew where I was then. So, I rested; I rested there. That was my first rest--18 hours of the hardest work I ever did in my life. At first, I was exercising. Well, the next two days weren't quite so bad, but almost as bad. I had no food, and I was hungry, and this eating of wild game and bird wasn't good; I didn't get enough. So, I kept losing, of course. Now, the Ididarod trail...oh, first I'll say, if I had have crossed the Toklat River, I would've landed on the west side, and then I crossed the river because there's just a slow stream among ice breaking on the sides. I had no trouble there, but I got my boots full going across there, too. But here was a trail along that side of the river. Now this was an indian trail, natives, from the mouth of the Toklat up to Knight's roadhouse, which was right on the mail trail, the Nenana-McGrath mail trail. That was 12 miles up the river. I didn't know about that, you see, and I didn't think, I thought this was a game trail--moose, caribou, and bear, or something trail. It didn't look too well worn, because they didn't use it much, so I didn't follow that up. I didn't want to waste any time away from Nenana; that was right angles, see, from Nenana. So, I struck out cross-country; I got better exercise. If I'd only...and there were people living there then because the mail had been going by dogteam.

NJ: You were two years in the country but still a little bit of a cheechako.

NW: I sure was; I was cheechako alright and if I hadn't been a

Minnesota farmboy with lots of hard work and good food--proper food, I meant to say, just simple food. So I had a good body to begin with, otherwise it was impossible.

NJ: That was probably a terrible experience at the time. It's an adventure to look back on it, but survival...

NW: But I got into Nenana; first I got to the Nenana River. Well, I had to build a raft to cross another low, slow stream, but first I'll say that first stream that I crossed--slow-running, near Toklat--I had a little axe that long, one of these little Boy Scout axes, and I carried that with me for wood and emergency. And I chopped a tree--the butt of it was that big--it took me two hours to chop that on both sides. I had cut a lot of wood in Minnesota, so I knew how to fell a tree just right, but it fell in the quite high bank, about 6, 7 feet banks. And the tree reached across this little slough, or slow-running river, but the butt went down, way down the bank, and then the rest of it bent into the water this way. And it didn't have many branches. Quite a ways up, or about the middle of thestream, there were very few that had any branches, just little sticks, like this, of dried stuff on it, and I had to walk this because it was deep. I didn't want to get wet all over because I would have gotten chilled, and I might not have made it then; ice water is what it was. Well, I managed to reach down and hold a little bit and then get across, but I was down in the water, walking in the water on this spruce. Well, I made it across there without getting wet all over. Then the next time was about thirty miles

farther on. Another small stream where the dogteams had been crossing. They weren't running now, you see, because the stream was open. Well, there was a gas case, an old gas case, there and I had this little axe, and it had a place to pull nails on the side of it. And I took the nails out and the pieces of box and some...just happened to be some four-foot pieces of wood that they had sawed there for something or another. They had been running mail there for a long time, you see. And I nailed these pieces together with the boards and those thin gas-case box nails. Well, I gave it a shove; it was about 12 feet across, something like that, of water, deep water, and I gave it a shove. I don't remember; I had a stick of some kind that I paddled a little bit with. But then just as I got to the shore it fell all apart because those small nails in the fairly rotten pieces of wood didn't hold very well, see? I just got down in the water a little bit like I had been before, but got to the bank. Well, that wasn't bad; that was pretty good.

Then the Nenana River--that's a big river, fast-running. It had broken up and the ice cakes were coming down, but on this side, the side I was on--that's the west side--was a little cabin. I saw smoke coming out of the chimney, stovepipe. Then I looked across the river, and here was an old man going in his boat between the cakes. He was going over, what he was doing, was going to feed his dogs on the other side. I went to the bank and hollered as loud as I could--I guess I couldn't holler too loud, or something.

NJ: At that point you were probably a little weak.

NW: You know, he either saw me or he heard me, and he fed his dogs and came right back. Then he fixed me a bowl of clam chowder soup in his little cabin. That was the best tasting food I have ever tasted. Man, it was good. Then he took me over again, took me over across. I had to cross this river to get to Nenana. Then I was ok, and I paid him five dollars, I remember. I had some money in my pocket. Paid him five dollars for the extra trip over. Well, he seemed pleased, but he...I don't remember whether he had heard anything about me being missing or not, but I think he had...going to Nenana. Well, I went to a restaurant; I hadn't had enough to eat yet, see, so I went to a restaurant and had some food--I think it was ham and eggs, which I had been thinking about. Then I went to a little hotel there and, of course, they didn't know me--I was kind of dirty and whiskery--they didn't know me at all, the guy behind the counter. And I signed my name, and he pulled it around and he said, "Say, you're that guy that's missing. Say, you've got to call Fairbanks right away." They had orders that if they should see me, or if I should come in there, accidentally, for no reason, be sure and call, which I did. And then, I was going to bed and sleep first, but "No," he says, "you've got to call right now." I promised. I forgot who he was; I knew him later, too, pretty well. Nice fellow. Well, there was a...the train had gone through the day before, I believe, but there was a motor-driven hand-car, a little single-engine hand-car, the next day going to Fairbanks, so I rode the hand-car. But I had just a leather jacket on me because I left my flying suit in the airplane.

NJ: And that's when you got cold.

NW: That's when I got real cold, sitting there, I forgot how many hours, in a breeze, you see. Gee, I got cold. And, of course, from my being wet, I already had a bad throat, cold, you see. And this, pret near, well, it was pretty bad, I had...But you know, the next day after I got in I took Ed Young, who had just come in--have you heard of him?--he was

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NJ: If you could go back a couple of minutes there. I don't quite know where I ran out of tape and had to change it.

NW: Yes, well, I landed as slow as I could and as far down this side. It was quite steep there, but it was cleared off for some reason.

Mr.J: Well, the airport at Ruby now is on top of the hill.

NW: Yeah, it's farther up on the same ridge.

Mr.J: You were part way down the hill.

NW: Well, we were right at the bluff where it drops into the Yukon. That was part of that field, ball field, ball diamond up there. Well, I landed just as short as I could there, on the upgrade, see, plunt(?) here, because I knew it was downhill on the other side and I had no brakes. Well, I didn't need brakes. So, we went over on our back on that soft spot right in the center. I had these four people in the back cabin: Norman C. Steinz, the big engineer that was going...

NJ: Of the F. E. Company?

NW: F. E. Company, who was going over to look over the Hammond dredges. And they bought them later, bought out the Hammond Company, two or three dredges over there and they were large dredges. So he and his secretary and another lady friend, Mrs. Dale--I remember her and I forgot the secretary's name-- and my brother, Ralph, in the cabin and 500 pounds of bookwork, book material of some kind. It was heavy, and they said at the time it was 500 pounds, that is, baggage and the bookwork for the four people. Oh, they were all in a jumble, flat on the back, see? And I was jumped out right away. I didn't go very far, and I had hardly felt it. Going over on my back because I was up near the radiator and I could touch.

NJ- You were hanging by your seat belt?

NW- Yes, oh yes. Though I sat right beside the six cylinder BMW engine.

NJ- You climbed out on the left side on that?

NW- Yes, climbed right out quick, and I was up on the wing and opening the door before they got unjumbled in there. The six place, passenger cabins was what it was, well five comfortably, three across on a wide seat and then two moveable chairs that were tied down with one single cable in the center, but there was an awful lot of room in that cabin. Six or four could sit on that wide seat. Well, anyway we got them out and they didn't like that. Norman Stines hadn't been flying of course, he says well, we're not going to do that anymore. And they hired a boat.

NJ- He wouldn't go on with you?

NW- No, I couldn't have taken off with him, impossible, with all that baggage too, but I did take off with Dick Wood and my brother Ralph and gas enough to go to Nome, 300 miles.

NJ- You repaired the prop, you had to bring a new prop down did you?

NW- Dick Wood the president of our company and the bank, president of the bank and a fellow named Young, in a fast boat, brought the propeller down. I forgot how long, a couple days, I guess. But we had the airplane sitting right side up, but first I'll tell about the work, how we did it. The whole town of Ruby was up there every day helping. Though we had quite a few fellas that were able to, had to take the bolts out of the wing. Here it was upside down and the wing was lying on the ground of course. So we unbolted it then we had a number of men lift the engine part, the fuselodge up and then others pulled the wing, dragged it straight out sideways to get it out from under. Then we were able to roll the fusellodge over on its wheels and then a little later all could get under the wing walked over the tail and walked it up lifting a nine hundred pound wing. Right up in place again, put the bolts back in. Theres four bolts, its simple to assemble, just one place to put them and that was all. The rutter had been damaged a little and went over, but the ladies of Ruby got there sewing out and sewed it up and we had to rebend, it was metal tubing frame in the balanced rutter. That was a balanced rutter because it had no fin in front of it. And it was to, a new pilot, it was always hard to get, get the thing to stop wiggling. First time I got in it why my feet went like this and the peddles in front were another bar, they were peddles hinged at the bottom and this way, just up and down hinged in the back just the length of a foot. So it just flipped back and forth you couldn't stop them somehow, it wasn't pressure at all

it was, it just started going this way and the rutter was going this way. Kind of a funny feeling. And finally I got in New York, I tested it see in Garden City courtesy of Garden City thats where I tested it. So I got used to it before I came to Alaska, which I'm very glad I did. And you just fold your feet tight, solid don't push. Pretty soon you can do it just enough and you handle it just fine, no trouble at all. But gee whiz, when you start that. So, I was saying it had no fin on it see, it poor balance that way, but otherwise it was good long fuseloged see it worked fine. They used these same airplanes on there first airlines in (tape went out)

NJ- Well now the ship that he was with in, when you were there, where was it? It was on the south side of East Cape wasn't it?
NW- No, not near East Cape. Its 400 miles up the coast at North Cape.
NJ- Oh it was. When you went over there, I didn't know it was up there.
NW- Yes, it was three miles off shore and we landed, what had been an open lead but drifted very rough, one mile off North Cape. So we got by with it but was very rough. In the fall of the year Hollister the manager of the boat in the fur buying, said that it blew 40 to 50 miles an hour for thirty days straight without a single let up at 30, 40 and 50 below. With that extreme temperature and high wind the snow gets so hard. The temperatures what makes it hard. And the dog sleds were just sliding off all the uneven places sideways. Runners wouldn't cut

in at all and you couldn't put your heel in it, course we had Mukluks on, couldn't anyway. But they had such an awful time to cut the drifts down in this big open lead where I landed. They used shovels and maybe they had a pick or two, but they worked hard and long on taking the bumps off, but the bumps are so hard and my shock absorbers were froze up, the air oil, I...

NJ- Again for awhile I guess before ? finally took off.
NW- Two weeks or so there and Frank Derbent that was flying the Stinson byplane that I had before. He was making life so miserable for Ben Eilson and he was mean enough to take off in bad weather and then, he was telling Eilson, he says "you have no guts", he says, "you're afraid" and all that sort fo thing. Others have told us what conversations went on. This Derbent was a mean, he'd been in a reform school when he was a little fella and know one could control him. The Stinson brothers, Jack Stinson and Eddie Stinson told us all about him. He'd been working for them. And when he came up here, for Anchorage Air Transport, he wanted to come up here and fly for me. He wouldn't get along with them down there because he was mean and drinking heavy all the time, gettin married every so often and maybe the ? bad boy you might say all the way up. Well, he says " I got six thousand hours or I don't have an hour", he says, "I would like to come up and fly for you." Well I was gullable and I said, "Maybe he's all right."

NJ: It's so easy to believe people.

NW: Yes. He was a big fellow, and it looked like he'd make a

good pilot. Well, we hired him, and then we had all our troubles. You know, he'd come drunk. And he wanted to fly the Hamilton. Well, I checked him out first on the Stinson bi-plane, see, that early one we bought from Sir Wilkins, built in 1926 with a 4-B. ...brand new, you might say, six months old. So, anyway, when we sold, then we got rid of him, but Alaskan Airways still had on, and that's when he was flying the Stinson to fly up the north cape. They had both made one round-trip up there for furs--got by with the weather.

Mr.NJ: That was in 1929.

NW: Ah...Fall of '30. Oh, excuse me, you're right.

Mr.NJ: Well, you said you got married in 1929, I believe.

NW: May 19, '29, and then that Fall, in November. That's the worst month to go over there; that's when the bad weather comes.

NJ: That's when Eielson was lost then.

NW: And that's when he was lost. The second trip over, then, there were two weeks between the two trips.

NJ: And Frank took off from tower. He told him he was going to go on over and he got Eielson in the air.

NW: He took off ten minutes ahead of Eielson, and, you know, he'd never see him again, naturally.

NJ: And he turned around and went back, didn't he?

NW: Oh, he got to Bering Straits, and there was fog over there on the other side, and he turned right around and came back. He was a real coward for the weather, but otherwise a good pilot, see. Turned out to be, with practice and experience, yeah, that we all gave him. Well, Eielson didn't see him. If he was under him, he'd never see him. See, it's so hard to catch an airplane coming toward you, underneath. If you're the same level, just about at the right place, be all right, but Eielson would be up farther. He'd climb right away, but Dorvant probably knew this and just came diving down close to the ground back to Teller. Never saw him, so he thought, Dorvant had, Eielson thought Dorvant had gone on, so he just keeps on going through this fog, up and down through it and finally got into fog. He couldn't see anything, and he didn't have an instrument rating. And he had only a total of 350-400 hours, anyway, we've heard from his brothers and sisters and such since. We don't talk about that part of it. He was a good pilot, and he had made Wilkins polar flight, you see. He was a famous pilot then. He could have had 5,000 hours as far as

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Mr.NJ: crossed that pass up there.

NW: No, I see, here it isn't, Jeff(?) Anyway, we got down below the Colville, and that northeast wind, prevailing wind, that comes in across the arctic. Here comes a fog-bank; it was up to 5,000 feet at our altitude and on a little higher, and it was solid. It was like a wall, just drifting in. And we went down then to the ground in front of it, thinking we could get under

it, and go on, straight on to Barrow. No, it was right on the ground, absolutely on the ground, flat, flat ground, of course, everywhere. So, I didn't want to waste any more gas, looking or even going toward Wainwright. But I made a mistake there. I was kind of leading. Russell Merrill let me do the leading because I'd had a little more arctic experience, but not much. And, I decided to land on a lake before we'd run out of gas. And I landed fine, run along good on top, but I had the old Fokker F-3 wheels on, two inches bigger than the original Stinson wheels or the same as Russell Merrill had. And the Stinson had brakes on and the gear was farther foreward, and the tendency not to nose over as much. The tail was heavier. But Russell Merrill's Travel-air, the gear was more normal, under, and he landed fine without nosing over. But I was able the next day to take off with one of the Fox film men, Ewing Scott, the leader, and a few hundred pounds of film and cameras. He wanted to get the film out of there because it couldn't stand freezing. So, I took off fine; headed for Barrow, and I found Barrow. I found Tusikpak Lake, that big lake up there, first, then I found the coast. It was hard to find the coast, only by the dog trails.

Mr.NJ: That's a very hard coast to follow. I flew that DEW Line for two years up with twin Beeches, but that coast is very hard to follow.....

NW: So, I found Barrow all right, and we loaded up with shovels and gas, extra gas, right away. Hart and I took off right away; he came back with me. You know, we couldn't find the airplane; clear and unlimited. That was 100 miles, direct line, northeast

20, about 20 mph average, northeast wind was drifting. I had no way to tell on the compass; I had compass in the airplane, but I had no way to tell, returning, just where I should keep that compass. And if you're off a mile or two, you can't see an airplane sitting on a lake, and I missed it, maybe by 3 or 4 miles. Flew all around in there and came all the way back. And I think the next day we had a good day, too, or, almost immediately, because we wanted to get up there before this fog-bank would roll in again. In May, you know, that's when the bad weather comes--the fog rolls in. So, we took off again, and I still couldn't find it, and I racked my brain as much as I knew how. Where should it be? This way or that way in going up there? I went to the river, Tusikpuk, I think it is, right near the lake there, and I followed that out to where I thought...we were 15 miles farther east from that river. I found that out coming back in. And if I'd only come down to that river and landed on a lake near tha river, or on the river, it would have been simple. I never thought of that, and I didn't really know how far that river was when we did land 'cause I hadn't seen it yet. So, I'd strike in from the river about where I thought it should be, but you could be off 3 or 4 miles so easy, and, you know, we made 6 flights out there in about 20 days. Fog would roll in so often, and I flew many days...

NJ: And he didn't gather any moss to put up a smoke signal.

NW: Well, it would have been hard. He had nothing to burn there; all covered and no brush, hardly any brush, all snow, you

know, tundra. There was nothing to burn and no open places. The sun hadn't really melted snow off the banks where it might burn something. Well, the sixth trip Matt Niemann and them came up with the other Travel-air via Kotzebue, Ruby and Kotzebue. And, on one of my trips in there...well, I made one five-hour trip. I zig-zaged back and forth out there, and I couldn't understand why I couldn't find it. It'd be a little black dot on the lake if I got somewhere near. Well, the fog was rolling in as these banks of fog that hit the ground, and then places between them like this. Well, it was pretty thick; I couldn't go any farther, so I landed by Tommy Brower's reindeer camp, and we hired the man that was there. He was a young fellow then, with a wife and a baby, and I slept in his tent for one night, and I got my mouth full of reindeer hair because they had reindeer all over the bottom of the tent. Gee, this was rough. I was always cleaning the hair off. Somehow the hair finds your mouth.

Mr.NJ: Everybody used to sleep in reindeer sleeping bags in those days, even the bush pilots carried them.....

NW: I remember he was burning, they were burning this oil that they chopped out of the lake, chunks, you know, kind of hard oil on the surface of the lake.

NJ: Oh, petroleum oil type.

NW: Yes, it was petroleum oil. It was right near that area there. Well, I was...well, let's see. This camp was near that lake, that big lake, but one side or the other.

Mr.NJ: Cape Simpson is where that big oil seep is up there.

NW: Yeah, well that's near where we were. Of course, I didn't know anything about oil being there, but he was burning this in a five-gallon can; that's all he used for burning. He'd go chop it out of the lake before I landed there. They were just on the bank of the lake with the reindeer herd was quite close.

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NJ: What happened then when you got into lake and Russell Merrill had taken off?

NW: Yes, ah, he hadn't taken off; he'd started on foot. First, he had left with his sleeping bag; he wanted to be able to get in and sleep on the way, but it got too heavy for him so he came all the way back from a mile out or something like that, and left the sleeping bag. He told this on the note, on his diary. That diary is in the "Flying North," just word for word of Russell Merrill's. So we started out again, but he put everything down. He was a Navy-trained pilot, and he was used to putting notes down continually on anything that he did. So, that was good. Oh, we'd hear a sad story(?), he'd say, "Beautiful day here. No, Noel. No sound. Haven't heard him." Short words, you know, short sentences. Again, no sign of Noel, and it was getting pitiful. He had left 8 days--I get to that now--he had left 8 days before we found the camp. We knew he'd be either dead or out on the coast somewhere, so Matt Niemanan went directly north to the coast and I went to Cape Halcutt. You know where that is.

Mr.NJ: Yeah, right up the west corner of Harrison Bay.

NW: Yes, aha, a little bit east of our direct course. I went direct to Cape Halcutt to get someone from there with dog teams to go out. Well, on the way home Matt was following the beach which was bare--had melted bare of snow. And he found Robertson and Clark; they had left 8 days before Russell Merrill had. And they were about dead.

NJ: The two photographers.

NW: Yes, aha.....east of Barrow, that's all I remember. And John Hagness, who was a store owner and keeper at Cape Halcutt, started out right away after we arrived there. Let's see, I was alone, I believe, then, but I got him to go out. He started out immediately. He went non-stop for 10 hours or so, and he found Russell Merrill, who had just arrived on the beach, but was about to die, too. He...when John...the way he explained it, he was a former Nome sweepstakes dog-team winner--Nome to Canvill(sp.) via Council and back. He was one of the winners way back. A good man with a dog-team. He just kept on going till he found him, and he found him right in the trail--on the Barrow trail, you see. He said, "I saw him in a distance. It looked just like a polar bear. They look dark or black at a distance," he says, "and I was sure I was running up against a polar bear." And I was only 300 feet from him--he was still walking--300 feet from me. He laid down in the snow, a little bit on the side of the trail. And he said he was sound asleep, and I was trotting right along with the dogs. It took no time--10 seconds or so, maybe 15--to get to him. He said he was sound asleep already.

NW: And he had to shake him to wake him up. And he was ok...he said, "Well, are you headed for Barrow? I wonder if there's a chance to bum a ride with you." And he has that, or she has that--Jean Potter has that--in that book. And he--John Hagness said, "Oh, I don't know. I have an awful heavy load; I doubt that I can take you." "Well, that's fine." Russell Merrill said, "I'll make it. I'll make it. That's good." And he said--John said," No, I'm out here looking for you. I'll fix up some....

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NW: ..the 15th of April, 12th or 15th. So, I brought my brother up there, and my brother, Ralph, flew a D (?) Oh, now we have to get a propeller first 'cause Merrill nosed over trying to take off. He had no shovel, and he used his snowshoes trying to shovel down a little bit, but that was almost impossible. He nosed over right away, being light on the tail and the small tires and bent his prop. So, Sir Hebert Wilkins and Eielson, that same spring, ...it's competition, were not interested in coming out to pick us up. Cost us a lot of money, too. And we were just tickled pink to have any kind of gas up there. And we had to try to find them. Yeah, it was bad, and the Fairbanks competition were not interested in coming out to pick us up or to look for us. They wanted to let it go as long as possible. Yes, the pilot wanted...or Bennerodvik (sp.) Company, Bennett and Thompson Company wanted $5,000 put in the bank in Fairbanks before they would strike out to look for us. They didn't like the Barrow area anyway, and they were not...

Mr.NJ: Well, that was kind of like Columbus sailing off the edge

of the world when they went over that Brooks Range. And it still is for a lot of those bush pilots and helicopter pilots that go up there that have never been up there before....the weather hasn't changed any up there. It's still the same ol' weather as when you were up there.

NW: It couldn't change much. No. Well, they didn't come out. The pilot was ready--I'm not going to say who it was--the pilot was in the cockpit of his airplane ready to go out. And he was to get $1,500 if he just went out of sight of Fairbanks toward that direction of Livengood. But, he was still waiting for a shower to go by when Matt Niemanan wire form Kotzebue--he'd come back down as soon as we found him--he took off immediately to come down, to send a wire to Kotzebue to tell him that we were all safe. And the wire came in , and I remember Scott,--ah, Ewing Scott was the leader of the expediton--he just about broke the taximan's back, pushing him to speed up, speed up, get out there before that guy takes off. He was so mad at this company in Fairbanks--competition--for not wanting to go after all of this time, you see, and Fox film company in Hollywood was just wild. They sent that $5,000 up right away to help them get out, see. Well, he was to get this $1,500 if he just took off, which would be mighty easy for him. He was a good pilot, and he flew all around this central area here. And they got out there, and the engine was running. He was sitting in the cockpit, just ready, but had a lot of time, of course, to ramble around for himself, tying himself in. And Scott got out there and rushed to the cockpit and he said, "They're all safe. The flights are all

off. No need for any flights." He was so mad at that company he would have done anything to keep them from going or having to pay them anything. So, they didn't get a cent out of it. And this pilot went over to Nome--while I was lost up there, we were lost--and Ada--we weren't married yet, this was '28, see--and she was very inquisitive. I was still going with her, 1927 on to 1929. She danced with this pilot and asked if there was any chance, "Do you think there's any chance that they're alive yet." 'Oh, no," he said, "they've been gone. They're just--you can cancel out on them. They're gone." That's what he wanted.

NJ: Wishful thinking. That's a terible thing. Isn't that tragic?

NW: Yes, we knew them so well. They were dirty competition here--mean, mean type. They weren't the helping type at any time. Well, we shouldn't talk that way, but...when someone's missing, you'd like to save their lives.

NJ: Well, that's true. I remember driving up the Alaska Highway in 1951. A car went off the....

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NJ: ...but at the same time I couldn't associate the name.

NW: Yes, entirely Norwegian. That is, my mother was Swedish; my dad was Norwegian, and they both came from the old country, and we were all born--except my younger brother, Harold was born in Lake Wobaganan, Wisconsin, where he was working for the Weyerhauser Company sawmill, big mill there at that time, early 1900's. I was born there in 1899; my brother, Ralph in '98 or

'97--he was 16 months older than I was. So, we were born there, 30 miles south of Superior and moved to northern Minnesota--it was called Ashawa at that time. Now for 40-50 years it's been Cook, Cook, Minnesota, 30 miles north of Virginia on the Mesabi Iron range--Hibbing, Chisholm, Eveleth, Gilbert--those towns. Just 30 miles north. It was pioneering up there, too, just wagon roads out. We were 6 miles west of Cook, and the wagon road was so poor that we went by boat down the Little Fork River. My dad wasn't there to do it...

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NJ: Well, you're original 1 or 2 airplanes grew into quite an establishment.

NW: Yes, from the Hissler(?) Standard and on. I'm only sorry that we didn't save that Hissler Standard, but at the time we needed money so bad that that $750 was a great help.

NJ: But you started on a shoestring, and you put a tremendous amount of work through the years into maintaining the airline.

NW: Absolute shoestring. I had to borrow my $300 to put my share into this $750 to buy the Hissler Standard, and Gene Miller put in another $350 each--$700--and my...

NJ: And that carried one passenger.

NW: Well, two in front. Yes, two in front. And my brother, Ralph, his third share in the airplane was doing all the work after ours. So, I had to pay that $350 back--maybe it was $300--kind of slipped my mind, but we needed a little extra to buy gas.

And a fellow here, a sourdough, he was--Phillips was his name--he run the Horseshoe Cigar Store in Fairbanks, loaned me the money, without a note or anything, just gave me the money, and he said, "Pay me when you can." So I paid him quite soon after that, the first thing I wanted to do, and interest on the money--it was 8% interest or something like that. And I was tickled pink to be able to borrow. Couldn't go everywhere, even in Fairbanks, and borrow. I could have possibly done it, but there wasn't too much money floating around Fairbanks at the time. The mining was slow and he just borrowed this. There might have been some that would have taken interest in it and want to keep the interest, see, and we didn't particularly care to have too many bosses telling us what to do either. So, I was fortunate--I didn't have any money when I came in that spring of '27 back from Minnesota. I'd been out one year then, a whole year.

NJ: You'd been away a year?

NW: Yes, aha...[end of tape]