

Interview with Jess and Ann Bachner by William Schneider in Fairbanks, Alaska on January 12, 1985
H85-08, Part 1

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: We have the pleasure of being with Jess and Ann Bachner today here at Phillips Field. We're going to talk a little bit about your background, and living here in Fairbanks. This is Bill Schneider, and it's January 12th, 1985. So let's start off, Jess, by my asking you about your folks coming to Fairbanks and your early childhood here.

JESS BACHNER: Well, my folks came to Fairbanks way back in the early days, I don't know just exactly what date. Then they wound up in Livengood. Going to make a fortune in the mining industry which never happened. Eventually they moved to Fairbanks in, 'bout 1924, I think, '23 or '24. And my Dad went to work for the FE Company building some of their mess halls, and bunkhouses and that sort of thing. He learned carpentry through his own manuals that he bought. I was born in the old rest house, August 17th, 1919. So, I got a little time spent on Livengood before we did move back to town. I went to school half way through the eighth grade is all. And I quit and went driving truck, and, in the summer time. In the winter time we done work for the airplane outfits, Pollock and Wien, and Fairbanks Air Motive and some of those. Cleaning parts, and washing bellies, and gassing airplanes and that sort of thing. Until about 1936, I guess, we bought a truck, another kid and I, and we went in the wood hauling business. We hauled wood from out in the Livengood road. Made enough money to buy a new truck in 1937. We hauled wood with that, in the summer and fall till the road closed. In '38, we bought another new truck, we made enough money with that one to buy another new one. In that year we started hauling from Valdez. I spent that summer hauling freight from Valdez. Then that fall, I think was, we, I worked for [Al] Ghezzi driving truck, hauling a dredge to Livengood, pipe and materials for the Livengood Placer Company, who were then building a dredge over there. In the Hess tunnel, which my Dad built, also. And some of their buildings, mess halls and bunkhouses and so. Then I worked for Ghezzi continually then, of course, in them days the roads weren't open the year round, they were just opened in the summer time, from about May till 1st of October generally. In the winter time I'd work for the airplane outfits, assistant mechanic, and scrubbing parts and bellies and stuff like I said before. So, that's where I got tangled up with the airplanes. So I got a chance to work on a lot of the old timer's machines. Work with old Hutch, Ernie Hubbard, Ray Pratt, and Norm Weaver, Bob Ausley, oh, it goes on and on, Art Lean. And of course in July 1944, my friendly neighbors chose me, and I spent my two years in the military. Which was all spent in Alaska. I wound up back in Fairbanks in the Ordnance Department. And when I got out of the Army I went back to work for Ghezzi, but I only drove, I drove the first Kenworth that came to the country. Jimmy Morgan and I, and we only drove it for about, oh, I guess 6 months or so. And we fell through a bridge with a big load of produce, so we gave her up. Didn't want to do that anymore. That was before they started putting new bridges and stuff in, and that was a pretty big truck.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Where were you coming up from?

JESS BACHNER: We were coming from Haines to Fairbanks with a load of lettuce, tomatoes and celery. We had about 24 tons on. And all those old bridges were wooden A-frame bridges, you know, and they'd been there for years. They didn't quite hold up them heavy trucks. But

luckily we made it, the bridge went away, but we made it across. All we did was break a trailer spring. We patched that up and got ourselves on the way to home. Then I went to work for Fred Seltenrich, out on Week's Field. He had a, he started one of the first public maintenance shops for light aircraft, and fuel concession. That was in the days of the non-skeds. [non-scheds = non-scheduled or chartered flights] took care of that for a couple of years, until the fall of 1948, he decided to give it up. So we bought it. We didn't have any money, but he let us have it, and we eventually paid for it. We've been going at it ever since and this is, what you see now is what it's come out if it in the past 35, 39 years, or whatever it is. Since November 1948, anyway. Then we built Phillips Field here, in 1950. Miller Hangar, I think the first landing on it was June in '51, if I remember right. And a big cloud of dust. And it's been improved, and graveled and paved and one thing another ever since.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: What was the first airplane to land here?

JESS BACHNER: Was an Avian, just like the one you see out in the hangar right now. Holly Evans, Avian.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: We can back up a little bit and talk about your father. You said he was a carpenter, a self-learned carpenter.

JESS BACHNER: Yes.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: From Livengood, and he built the Hess Tunnel. What was the Hess Tunnel?

JESS BACHNER: Well, it was a tunnel they built through the hillside there to get the water through from Hess Creek to Livengood Creek. And it was built out of wood stave pipe type of thing, you know, only it was big. I don't remember how big it was, but I know we hauled truck loads and truck loads of that stave material to build that, line that tunnel with. That was to bring the Hess Creek through the hillside so they'd have more water than Livengood Creek would give them to work the mining operation.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: With the hydraulicking?

JESS BACHNER: No they had dredges there. Well, they had some hydraulicking too, but they had a big dredge there that they had to float, and have running water for it to work with. And Livengood Creek just didn't have that much water, and of course in mid summer, if it didn't rain, it dry up, couldn't even get a drink.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: And then your Dad worked on some of the buildings here in town?

JESS BACHNER: Well, yeah, he worked for the FE for a long time, then he quit and went on his own and he built some of the buildings at the University. He worked on the Eielson Building, and he built the, oh, I can't remember the name of some of them. Couple two or three buildings he built out there. And he built most of the big buildings that made up Creamer's Dairy. The barns and the silos and all that sort of thing, when they were growing. And then he built

downtown, he built the Mecca Building, and Lavery Building. Then he moved to Anchorage, and he went to work for MK Company, during the war. He was the head carpenter for 'em, for MK Company during the war.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: By then you were hauling with truck, you were driving?

JESS BACHNER: Yes, we were driving truck. Then they built the Alcan Highway. I hauled fuel, we haul -- a materials for the Northway Airport first, the first year I guess. They were going to build that highway and they brought 4,000 colored people into Valdez. We were the supply train for that outfit that was building the Tok cut-off, from Slana to Tok. And I hauled mostly fuel in them days, had a big tanker.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: That was quite a construction project, I guess a lot of Cats...

JESS BACHNER: Yes, lots of Cats, and trucks and lots of troubles. Lots of mud. Then of course they promised those people they'd take 'em out that fall, but they never did. They wound up down in the Johnson and Robertson River country between here and Tanacross, in those Celitex huts, and they pretty near froze to death that winter, it was 70, 75 below down there for weeks at a time. And we hauled fuel to try and keep 'em alive. They were living in a forest, but they didn't know how to cut wood, or anything, so they'd burn kerosene in them stoves, they'd take the doors off the stoves and throw kerosene in the stove, 5 gallons at a time. Then back up to the stove and burn the back end out of their pants. So, it was quite an experience.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Was there a lot of outside workers that came in at that time?

JESS BACHNER: No, no, they was all Army, complete. I don't know what you call...but anyway there was 40 some hundred colored people, they were all colored. They were all colored, they were Army people, in the military, soldiers. What'd they call them, not Seabees, but Engineers I guess they called them. Somekind. They didn't know anything about the machinery. They taught 'em how to run a Cat, and if it run over the hill, why they'd go get another one. Just leave it there, cover it up. It was quite a deal.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Maybe you could take a moment and describe what the Road Commission was called in those days?

JESS BACHNER: Well, let's see there was still territory then, was before it was a State. They called it the Alaska Road Commission. Some of the kids that used to work there called it the Alaska Mud and Rut Commission, and that's about what it was, was just a bunch of mud with some ruts in it. There was one way with turnouts, and if like when we were driving truck the first two or three years, you had to know where everybody was so you could wait at the turnouts, so you could pass. If you got in the middle, somebody had to back up, somebody had to do something different, because there was no room to pass with them big trucks.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Did you have radio communication?

JESS BACHNER: No, no, no...nothing. Telephone, there was a single wire telephone system along the highway, you'd stop at the roadhouses and call the next station and find out who was coming, what time they left. Kinda kept track of each other, so you knew about where they'd be, or where you'd meet them. That's the only communication there was. That was long before radios, or CBs or any of that stuff. But I don't think we ever had any radios till, well, we, as long as I drove truck we never had any radios, never had any CBs, up until 1948. I don't know when they come in. A course all the trucks got CBs in them now, you know, they talk to each other all the time.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Did it take special skills to be able to drive that road with a big load of kerosene behind?

JESS BACHNER: Oh, yeah, pretty much we were dragging 24 foot trailers. Of course all that material was in 59 gallon drums, so you had to be pretty careful. You didn't drive 50, 60 miles an hour in them days like you do now. Even then it was pretty rough going. A one way trip to Valdez, in them days, with an empty truck was about a 12 and half hour trip.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Can you describe for us how you'd go, and places you'd stop along the way, on the trip? You'd be leaving from here ...

JESS BACHNER: Say we left from here to go get a load, you very seldom ever had to backhaul. We used to, for two or three years there, we used to have a backhaul part way, we'd go from here to Delta, Delta to Paxson's, Paxson to Gakona. Then we'd go up the Gakona Road to Nabesna and pick up a load of concentrates out of the Nabesna mine, then come back to Gakona, and then to Valdez. You're your own mechanic and you had to do your own, fix your own tires, and do your own servicing and your own loading and everything in them days. You get all serviced up and go down and load up and then head for Fairbanks with a load again.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Could you pick up fuel along the way?

JESS BACHNER: Very seldom we had to do that, we had big tanks on the trucks. We usually hauled enough fuel to round trip it. We had, oh, I don't remember, but it seems to me like we had, besides the regular fuel tank, which was only twenty gallons, seems to me that we had at least two forty gallon side tanks one on each side, under the vans. So you could usually make a round trip without fueling up. And another reason for that was that fuel was so much cheaper in Valdez. You were just spinning your wheels to be hauling fuel from Valdez up to here and then burn going back.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: You had one trip that was pretty rough there when you went through a bridge?

JESS BACHNER: Oh, yeah that was when we first had the Kenworth, some guy got a contract with the army to haul produce out of Haines and test, on a test basis. So we went to Haines, and we looked at all these bridges on the way down. And they looked all right, but couldn't tell, you know, whether they were rotten or what, but they'd been there a long time so we figured well all we could do is try 'er. It just so happened that this one bridge that fell in was just exactly the

right length for the tractor and the trailer. As the bridge fell in, the trailer kept falling and we made it across, except for we hit a bump on the other side and broke the trailer springs, so we had to stop and change the springs. Those old trailers in them days had a habit days of breaking their springs anyway, so we had a spare spring with us. We got out and it was kinda on the top of a crest of a hill, we got out and looked and hollered at my partner, I says "Hey the bridge is gone!" So we walked up there and took a look and the whole bridge was sitting down in the creek about 230 yards, sitting out in the middle of a sandbar. And we got back, there's a guy hollering on the other side, we looked over there and there was a Canadian Road Commissioner hollering at us. So we changed that spring on the trailer and got out of there real quick. But I think, if I remember right, that was the only trip that we made to Haines for produce and stuff. We made a few trips to Valdez and hauled some meat and stuff for 'em. But, uh, that experiment didn't work out too good I guess.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Did you have a favorite roadhouse along the way?

JESS BACHNER: Oh, we had several. Paxson was about the center point, and then Tonsina roadhouse, that's where I met my wife, her people run the Tonsina Roadhouse. When we'd go to Nabesna and make side trips, we'd usually stay over at Tonsina that night 'cause it'd be middle of the night by the time we'd be back down that far. We stay over night and then go into Valdez and service and do whatever we had to do and load up and leave early the next morning.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Ann says you drove through the Keystone Canyon then, too...

JESS BACHNER: Oh, yeah, when we first started driving down there that road was up in the hillside way up there. And it was a single path road, like I say, of course it was all rock they just made it passable and that was about all. And there was turnouts here and there, so you had to know whether you was going to meet somebody there, 'cause there was no possible way to pass anything. But we drove that for several years and that was a touchy one, especially with those trailers. It wasn't so bad with just a straight rig, not if you were pulling a semi, it was pretty tough. And then, a course, in the spring when they'd open the road, there'd be, I've seen as much as 35 feet of snow there, in spots in some of those canyons where they had snowslides and stuff. So it was quite an experience going through there.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: I bet that it'd be rough when it iced up, too.

JESS BACHNER: Well, it never iced up much, because it never was open that time of the year, see it was either springtime or summer, or once it snowed it was closed for good. They never bothered to open it all winter. They never tried to keep open at all. It just however it naturally come out, except when they opened it in the spring. See, they tried to open in the spring, as early as possible. Had to be thawing conditions, so that once they opened it, it would stay open for the summer.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: How about the Northway Airport and your involvement in building that...

JESS BACHNER: Yeah, the first year, when was that, 1942 I guess. We helped them open the highway. We hauled all that material to build the Northway Airport. It was mostly asphalt, and this asphalt was in wooden barrels, and it had to be heated and run through a mixing plant, it isn't flowing material like asphalt is today. We'd hauled it through, there was no road of course from Nabesna to Northway, so we hauled it, we'd go to Nabesna, and turn off and drive up Jack Creek for about 5 or 6 miles to a big barn at the Nabesna River. And then they flew it all over, from there to Northway. And some of those old airplanes, Pilgrims, they had Pilgrims and Fairchild 71's and Boeing 80 A, old Stinsons and Travelairs, and there was a fleet of airplanes there all one summer flying that stuff. They flew, well we hauled 9,000 ton of asphalt alone, plus all the building material and the fuel and everything else it took to build the airport with. The machinery to take it all apart, take over in the airplane and put it back together. It was something similar to when they started the North Slope, they hauled everything in airplanes, and put it back together when they got it up, wherever they were taking it, put it to work till they could get some airports built.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Boy, those were some old aircraft there...

JESS BACHNER: Oh, yeah, but they got it all hauled. I remember they had a big boiler, was a big heavy boiler, I forget what they was using it for. I guess for the asphalt plant, and they reinforced the bottom of that big Boeing 80 A, and it still looked like a old workhorse, and you know, and they got that old boiler in there, but it flew, and they got it over there without banging anything up. I forget how, it must of weighed close to 4 ton I guess in there.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: And that plane had enough power to...

JESS BACHNER: Oh yeah, was 3 engine, had 3 Wasp Juniors on it. 950 horsepower, I think they were, no 450 horsepower each.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: So you were, you waited some at the Tonsina Roadhouse till you got word that the ships were in?

JESS BACHNER: Yeah, you see the boats only come in there, what, once a week, I guess sometimes. Sometimes they had an extra boat, but, a freighter or something. Normally it was once a week. A lot of times we would have to wait a day or two, so we'd wait at Tonsina, was good fishing there. It was a good place, good food there and everything, so we'd wait there till we heard the boats coming in. 'Cause you never know when they were coming either, they were never on time, or anything in them days either. So we spent a lot of time there, done a lot of fishing, I don't know if ever did any bird hunting or not, I guess not. Oh, another part I kinda forgot was in the first part of the trucking, there used to be a ferry there at Big Delta, we had to go across the ferry, on a ferry. There was no bridge across the Tanana. That was quite a deal, you had to pay a toll to go across, so much a ton mile for whatever load you had on, to cross that ferry, on that ferry. It was powered by the river, it was one of them cable deals, where they just turned the barge at one angle and the current took it across one way. You want to come back the other way, it turned it the other angle and it'd go the other way. But it took a couple men to run it. So that, oh, golly, I guess they didn't build a bridge there till, 'bout...when did they build that bridge...'bout '47 or '48, before they built a bridge there. Then it was a temporary one, it was a

wooden bridge and the ice would take it out in the spring, they 'd have to do it over again. It was quite awhile before they built a permanent bridge.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Tell me a little more about how that current would run that ferry across there.

JESS BACHNER: well, it just angled, the barge was sitting in the water, see, the water pressure against the barge would make it go one way or the other.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: So, they would just steer it, so that the angle was right...

JESS BACHNER: Right, it was on a cable, and they had a big wheel on it, just like a big steamboat. They'd turn that wheel and either pull one end of the barge end to the cable across the river, if they want to go one way, and if they want to go the other way, they turn it the other way and pull the other end in. Then the current just, going against the barge, and pushing either way, whichever way you want to go. I've still got some of the old ferry tickets, that I paid for crossing that thing.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Oh yeah ...So you'd leave here, and make your way to Delta.

JESS BACHNER: In those days when they first started, used to be about 4 hours from here to Delta, and another 4 hours to 5 hours from there to Paxson. And another 5 hours to Tonsina, then about another 4 hours to Valdez. Normally. And then a course, if you get stuck in the mud, there was spring, or it rained a lot, there used to be a lot of places where the bottom would fall out of the road, and you stuck half the time. Or you'd break a spring or something, you'd have to stop and change a spring. Flat tire, all that sort of thing. It kept you working, I'll tell you.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: So you'd overnight in Tonsina.

JESS BACHNER: Mostly, yeah.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Going back to that ...Have we forgotten anything that we should mention on that, Ann? That early period on freighting? A

NN BACHNER: Well, he was there when that glacier moved at Rapids...

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Uh, Black Rapids?

ANN BACHNER: Yeah, that was really something, 'cause I remember all the scientists coming up and staying at Tonsina and go to Rapids, I don't know what he was hauling. Freight, maybe, and that moved how fast, that came in a hurry.

JESS BACHNER: Oh, it was moving ...At one time there I think they said it was moving about 12 feet a day. Moving down the mountain into the river bed. They thought it was going to completely block it up, but it never did. It would thaw out and wash away fast enough so it never did plug up the, I guess, that's the head of the Delta River, yeah. Little Delta. But it moved

August, for, oh, 2 years there it was really on the move. I think, it seems to me like, I think of the peak time when it was moving the most, it was moving about 12 feet a day.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Let's talk a little bit about your getting into the aviation business.

JESS BACHNER: Well, of course, like I told you before, I worked around the old timers there for a long time, but basically earned my living at trucking. But then, after I got out of the Army, I got tangled up with Fred Seltenrich, and got my mechanic's license, and started to learn how to fly, no I started to learn to fly before that. I started to learn to fly in 1942, I guess. But I never got my license till about '46 or '47. Anyway in the meantime, I worked for Fred there for a couple of years, and his basic business was, of course, we took care of a lot of small airplanes, like I said it was the first public maintenance facility for light aircraft. But his big thing was fueling the non-scheds. He had 2 big fuel trucks, we used to fuel 'em, and wintertime, heat 'em up, get 'em ready to go. I built a trailer with 3 big Herman-Nelson heaters on it, just pull it around with a jeep, just pull up to a airplane, and throw those 3 heaters on it, one each engine, one on the cabin, and couple hours, they're ready to go. Well, that done pretty good for us, that made us some money, got us over the hump for a start. And we rented the old Gillam hangar, when we bought Fred out in '48, we rented the old Gillam hangar from Northern Consolidated who had got it through a merger with all those other people that were around there. Northern Airways, Bobby Miller's outfit, and Jimmy Dodson and, oh, I forget, Pollock I guess was part of it. There was several, anyway, and wound up to be Northern Consolidated, but they had no use for the Gillam hangar. So, we rented it for, gee, pretty near nothing that's where we got our start, we were there till they decided to close up Week's Field and run us off. And then, this old man Phillips, who this Phillips Field is named after, come along and said he had this land over here, and he offered it to us on a fifty-fifty basis. We'd wanted to build an airport and run it, he'd take fifty percent of the take from the land rentals for our use of his land. And that's the way it still works today. We've still got another 27 years on this lease to go. But we built it in 1950, and we built the hangar in spring of '51, and we've been building on to it ever since. Up until then, I guess the last we built on it was before the flood, wasn't it...yeah.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: You built the little warehouse out here just afterwards?

JESS BACHNER: Yeah, that's right. When we, after we got through cleaning up around here, we got a chance, somebody ordered that warehouse, and when it got here they couldn't pick it up, and we got it for pretty near cost, so we bought it and put that warehouse up.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Tell me about the Fairbanks flood, and what it did to the flying business.

JESS BACHNER: Well, it stopped everything for quite awhile. We were shut down for pretty near six weeks, I guess, or maybe more than six weeks. Took us that long to just clean up the mess. And then a course you're cleaning up forever, you still find stuff that laying around here that you missed you know, that's full of mud and silt, papers that are all wrinkled up, corners, parts that are moldy. But we got over it pretty good. But it sure was a job.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: When you mentioned scheds, non-scheds, what do you mean?

JESS BACHNER: Well, you see, after the war, they surplused a lot of these airplanes, like C-46's and DC-3's, some DC-4's, oh that was about it I guess at that time. Most of the guys had C-46's, and it was open, that was before the CAB had locked 'em down for, into controlled routes and stuff. And a lot of these guys bought 46's and DC-3's and stuff and they started hauling produce and people and stuff from Seattle to Fairbanks and Anchorage. And they called 'em non-scheds, non-scheduled airlines, see. They'd just go when they had a load. They weren't scheduled to go anywhere at anytime, when they got a load, they'd warm up and go. But, the Fed's got over that real quick and shut 'em down. So that didn't last too long. They got away with it for 2 or 3 years, but that's about all. But it was quite a job, specially in the winter when you had a lot of warming up to do. Sometimes we'd warm up as many as 5 or 6 of 'em a day.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Well, I'll bet you've seen a lot of changes over aviation business over the years.

JESS BACHNER: Oh, yes you bet, a lot of changes in the types of airplanes. Started out with all those old low powered airplanes, now they're all high powered, turbo, and turbine airplanes. And a course, now they're pretty near, about to extinct the piston engine airplanes. Cessna's quit building them, and Piper's quit building, practically. All going to turbines. But they're so expensive, it kills the, actually kills the light aircraft industry. So anybody wants to fly for fun, they've gotta hang on to what they got. Or trade on the used aircraft market. And they're awful expensive. Parts are getting impossible to get. A lot of the parts people, due to lawsuits and everybody so sue happy, you know, they sue you at the drop of a hat, for everything. Bendix Corporation they don't want to make any more mag parts, and Delco-Remy just went out of business and A.C. Sparkplug is gone out of business, oh, you could just go right on down the line and half of the parts people have gone out of business. So it's getting hard to get parts for those old machines.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: But you've been in the business 30 years or so, and probably have more parts than anybody?

JESS BACHNER: Well, yeah, but you can't replace them, when you run out, you're out. Like right now, we're sitting here, can't get any, what was it yesterday the guy wanted ...oh, Bendix mag parts he needed some distributor blocks and some points, I guess it was. And you can't get 'em. We've had 'em on order for 6 weeks, and they don't come. So I don't know what he's going to do. Have to buy something different I guess, or find something in the junk pile.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: History of light aircraft, is something that you've kinda majored in the last 30, 40 years.

JESS BACHNER: Yeah, well, see, there wasn't, there was a few light aircraft before the war, but it was basically after the war. There was Piper and Taylorcraft, Taylorcraft went broke, and Piper bought him up of course. Piper pretty near went broke, in '46 and '47, he over built, and couldn't sell the airplanes, 'cause the guys who got out of the army didn't have any money, it was pretty tough going there for awhile, but it got going about, oh, in the early 50's, it got going pretty good. Our best times were probably from 'bout '56 to '75, I'd say. And that was when the most of the, when they were really selling, and building lots of light aircraft. When I say light aircraft, I

mean aircraft that use flat engine ships, opposed to cylinder engines, not round ones. 3, 2 and 3 and 4 and 5 place airplanes up to 6 place, single engines, and light twins with flat engines. But now that's gone way downhill again now too, the cost of things, most of the airplanes you see out here, right now, they just sit here they never move. Guys can't buy gas for 'em. They just pay the parking, you know, they hardly ever fly. A few 'em, but I say that less than half of them do any flying that amount to anything anymore. And they used to be flying, the area used to be full of 'em here all the time.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: But it used to be, at least for rural Alaska, the light aircraft was the supply link and supply horse.

JESS BACHNER: Yes, that's true. Even way back in the early 30's when Noel Wien and those people started, they were bigger airplanes, but they were still single engine airplanes, you know, they had the old big round engines on them. But there the ones that really opened up the mining country, and the trapping country, and all that. But of course, when the light aircraft come along, there's lots of that going on now too, with aircraft like Cessna 185's, 170's, 180's, 185's, 206's, 207's and light Twins, Aztec, Navajos, some Beeches. Not too many Beeches in this part of the country, 'cause their landing gear won't take the rough stuff, hardly. But they've played a big role in it, and they still are, but it's...course snowmachines and those kinda mechanical contrivances are taking over a lot of it too. Snowmachines are getting so dependable now that these guys don't think anything about taking off on a snowmachine and going 200 miles across the country.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: What do you think your biggest challenge has been in maintaining these small aircraft?

JESS BACHNER: Oh, I don't know. It's a matter of keeping up with them. They keep, you know, they never build two alike, you gotta keep, everytime they come out with a new model, you gotta buy a new bunch of parts. That's probably the worst thing, is trying to keep ahead of them, keep the things on the shelf that you need to keep 'em going. Then of course, the cost of labor and everything got so high, that we had to get out of the rebuilding business, cause nobody could afford it. That's mostly a do-it-yourself deal now. So, we've kinda backed down on that. We'll sell 'em all the parts and pieces, but they can't afford to have us to do it, they can't pay for it. It's too expensive. So, they're all doing it in their own garages, and their own shop...

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Do they have to get that signed off then ...

JESS BACHNER: Oh yeah, they gotta have somebody look at it and sign it, but that's a, like I say, there's an AI around every corner now. So, some of 'em, sign it off by mail, some 'em sign it for 25 bucks and never see it. It's like one guy told me yesterday, he says it, all I have to do is have a current photo, and, in color for him, and he'll sign it off. Then nothing's done about it, so they can't, a legitimate shop can't compete with that.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: And there've been changes too, in the type of aircraft...

JESS BACHNER: Oh yeah, back through the '50's and the early '60's, it was mostly fabric airplanes, you know, they were metal structures, very few wood structures anymore but, metal structures covered with fabric. Now the last, since then, since the '60's...

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Since the '60's there have been some changes.

JESS BACHNER: Yeah, they've went more to metal airplanes, they're all sheet aluminum and metal structures, different type of structures. You don't use much tubing in them anymore, so there's no welding, it's all formed units, and riveted together and bolted together. Metal covering. So, it's an all together different ball game. But even then you can't afford to, there's very little repair, and they, these high powered machines now, and they wreck 'em, they really tear 'em up. So, they aren't hardly worth fixing. Parts cost too much.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Been some changes in the price of fuel too, I suppose that effects flying.

JESS BACHNER: Oh yeah, well you see, fuel's up to, what, we're selling it for a \$1.91 a gallon now. So, it costs a handful of money to fill up the fuel tank, you know. And these things, they don't, go very cheap, they burn...Well, the average engine now in the light aircraft will burn anywhere from 8 to 12 gallons an hour, depending on the horsepower. Like, say, a 150 burns about 8 and a half gallons an hour, and a IO 520 Continental, it burns about, anywhere from 11 and a half to 13 gallons an hour. Depending on what the conditions are. So, it's a little expensive just for fuel alone.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Let's talk a little bit about repair in the old days, when you used to make house visits.

JESS BACHNER: Well, yeah, we done a lot of that. We'd go out and load all our junk and our tools in the airplane, and go out in the snowbank and dig one out, and fix it up and bring it home. But it was tough because there was no communication, nobody knew when whether you got there, when you wore gonna be back, or you didn't know how bad it was wrecked, the guy just said, "Oh, it's just hurt a little bit, all you need is a piece of tubing and a welding torch, and fix it up in a couple of hours, and bring it home." Well, I went on one of those trips once to Kantishna, with Hutch, for Pollock Airlines and that's what the guy told us. We got there and he'd run this brand new Stinson, SR 10, down through a stump patch, and tore the whole landing gear section out and everything. 7 weeks later we got home, after welding a new whole section in it. Patching it all up. We had a lot of fun on that trip, we were down in Fannie Quigley's country in the Kantishna. We rented one of her cabins, it was about a 10 by 12 log cabin. The mail plane come in once a week, and every mail plane she'd get a gallon of Everclear, course she had to use up about half of it the first night. So we could depend on every Wednesday, in the middle of the night she get up and shoot the smokestack off our cabin with a 30.06, and we have to get up in the middle of the night and get up there and put the smokestack back. And then we had some other fun, too. Ol' Hutch he'd get to playing with the radio and put his teeth on the stove. Bob Ausley, the other kid that was with us, he decided it was too cold, so he'd get up and put a stick of wood in the stove, boil Hutch's teeth. In them days, the teeth, the false teeth were formed in wax, you know, of course, they'd melt all over the bottom of the bowl. So we sit there all night

trying to put his teeth back together, but that didn't work. So, I'd have to grind everything up into hamburger and soup for him. We had a lot of fun, some of those trips. But when our first business started we done a lot of work for Wien, and we were flying lot of those old 170's, and 180's, and they'd bust 'em up for one reason or another. We'd go out and pick 'em up and bring 'em home, fix 'em for 'em. There was always a big snowbank job out in the brush somewhere. Sometimes you'd be gone for 2 or 3 days, and sometimes you'd be gone for a week, you never know. We done a lot of that, it was tough duty, we finally gave it up. We had to quit it. Course for the same reason, it got so it wasn't worth it anymore.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: When you were young, you were doing some mining?

JESS BACHNER: Oh, my Dad thought he was gonna get rich mining, digging holes in the ground, which never happened. Yeah, we... well, my first experience was, oh, I don't remember what year it was, but I went back to Livengood with an old friend had little placer mine there, the hydraulic system. Worked one summer picking rocks. You'd move 'em from one side of the cut to the other, and then you'd get 'em all over there, and then you'd move 'em back to the other side again. You do that about 8 or 10 times, you wear out a pair of gloves on both sides every day. But there was no money, there was no gold, there was no water, and if it didn't rain, you didn't have any water to run through the sluice boxes. It was just a Chinese fire drill, you know. I didn't care much for that mining, still don't. But then my Dad insisted that he was going to, found a place out here on Kreger Crook just over the hill out here. We went out there for two winters, and dug holes in the ground. 196 feet deep, 8 foot square. We'd go out in the fall and cut a 100, 200 cords of wood I guess it was. Fired two boilers, I got to do the cooking, run the hoist, fire the boilers. There'd be one man, two men down the hole, one on top, there's three of us. Then we'd get down to just above bedrock, and it was wet ground. Get down there and stick the pick in the ground one morning, and the water squirts up about 30 feet in the air, and you get out of there real quick. The water'd come up within about 60 feet of the top. And the ground was so dry, that it'd immediately swell shut, and two or three days you have to, the 8 foot square shaft was swelled shut. So he'd start over. He'd move over and start over. He'd done that three times, so that was enough, we quit. The picks and shovels are still in the bottom of them holes, I'm sure. Now all the places are all fell down now, the cabin is fell...I was out there about 10 years ago, looking around and there was nothing left. Everybody had stole everything that was there, the cabins all fell in. I think the only thing that was left there, was a big double drum hoist, that was too heavy for anybody to move, so that's probably still sitting there.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: So you never got rich on gold?

JESS BACHNER: No, no never got anything out of it, except a lot of hard work. Go out and cut that wood. Course there was no machinery in them days, well, one year we had a Cat. Yeah, we had a 30 horse hold Cat. But to two years before that, we hauled all that wood with horses. There was an old guy up there who had the horses, and we hauled that wood down the hill with horses. Stack it and saw it, tried to cut it into 4 foot lengths to put in the boiler. We'd drag it down the hill, 16 foot lengths, cut it up, stack it. So we had horses to put up with too, besides everything else. Feed 'em with water, and take care of 'em. It'll take about a month and a half to cut that much wood and get it down.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: So, you've dealt with a lot of different repair cases?

JESS BACHNER: Oh, yes, yeah, we get, you know, these guys will get the cheap job done, and every once and awhile they bring it in, they think maybe before something happens, they better get it looked at pretty good, so we'd look at it. It's unbelievable some of the stuff you find. Like we found control cables that'd been routed the wrong way, and they'll wind up two or three inches short so they'll tie 'em together with a piece of safety wire. And you find bolts they forgot to put the nuts on, on the wing strut fittings, all kinds, all sorts of things like that. Oh, I don't know, well, Cessna's, now this is a factory defect that we found in Cessna's here about, let's see, when was that? It was 6 or 7 years ago, I guess. It was in the 185's and 206's. We had two or three customers got new airplanes, and the first inspections we found the aileron cables wrapped around the fuel lines that come down the right hand doorpost. And they were wrapped clear around the fuel line, just sawing away at the fuel line. If they'd went for another fifty hours probably, they saw the fuel line in two and spill all the fuel all over, and maybe caught fire or something. Those are the kind of things you find every day. Find engines, we find people that, do-it-yourselfers, put standard bearings on an undersized shaft and then they wonder why it sounds so loud. All kinds of things like that, you know. We had one guy bought an airplane and, I think it was in Colorado somewhere, Luscom. And he flew it all the way up here, had an 85 Continental in it, and he says, "I can't", he says, "I've flown quite a few airplanes, but he says this one rattles pretty bad, he says I can't use..." He was a preacher at Fort Yukon. So, we got to looking at it, and said oh boy, something's wrong internally on that thing. We took it apart, and sure enough, they'd put standard bearings on a 10 hundred crank shaft. But it made it all the way from Colorado to here. Pretty fortunate.

WILLIAM SCHNEIDER: Well, that's a lot of responsibility. Do you ever have trouble sleeping at night, wondering if the mechanics got the job done right?

JESS BACHNER: If you do it right. No, we don't have any of those kinda guys around here. All our guys know what they're doing. Yeah, we've had the same crew for, all the guys, well what we've got left, been here 7, 8 years, some longer. Well, we've had guys who were here for 12, 13, 14 years.

ANN BACHNER: UNCLEAR.

JESS BACHNER: When was that, '61? Yeah, 1961, I went and got a new Tri-Fisher at the Lockhaven, Pennsylvania factory. They had, they were fabric airplane of course, and their dope process, they'd changed to speed it up, and they were spraying hot dope on these machines. They put the fabric on the fuselage, and then wet it down to shrink the fabric, so it would take all the wrinkles out, and then he'd spray with this hot dope. And of course it never penetrated the fabric, the dope'd just sit on top. So, we come with these airplanes, we've sold about...gee, I forget how many, I think we redone the limit on them, though. Anyway, we were coming home, we run into a temperature inversion of about a hundred degrees. It was sixty some below on the ground, and sixty some above in the air. Then when we come down through that temperature inversion into the cold, that thing just exploded. Sounded like firecrackers going off in there. When we got on the ground, there wasn't a piece of fabric that didn't, there wasn't a piece of fabric two inches square that wasn't cracked. So we had to refinish the whole airplane. And I think if I remember

right, we refinished about, 10 or 11 of them that year. From them bummed out jobs. Oh, the guy drove the hockey puck through it, yeah. That was the same trip.