



Ice cutter the "East Wind" with Mount Dundas to the right and ice berg 7 miles away

**Food:** "I couldn't complain about the food. The food was always pretty good."

**Supplying the Greenland Base:** "To get supplies to the Greenland Base, they would send an ice breaker up the Bering Strait (which connects the Bering Sea with the Arctic Ocean) between Russia and Alaska. Along about the latter part of June, the ice would soften enough so they could break a path so the ships could come in. Because all the fuel that was used to fuel the planes so they could get back had to be brought in by ship. They were able to move ships in during July, August and early September. All supplies used on the base, including all of the food, were brought in by ship during the short time span. So it was no wonder that some of the food began to have an odor and an "old" taste before a new year rolled around. But for the most part, they took good care of us."

**Number of men on base:** "I don't know how many men were on the base. It was huge. The Army was also there with us. They were supposed to guard us in the air. We had one helicopter crash and lost 6 men. We had one guy walk into the propeller of an airplane. And we probably had one or two that probably froze to death when they got out into the storms and got lost."



Supply ship - below unloading a caterpillar.



**What did you do on base? (especially during those four dark months):** "If it wasn't storming, we would have to get out and do minor maintenance on the air craft that were outside. We would only work an hour or so, because it took so much to heat those big hangars. If an airplane came in and was going to be there longer than eight hours, auxiliary heat had to be put on those engines to get them warm enough to start them. That usually took eight hours. I didn't have anything to do with the electrical power, but I imagine they had generators somewhere."



Wesley Nulle in front of floodlights on runway. Danish airplane in background



Wesley in the hangar office area

**Greenland temperatures:** "The coastline would clear during the summer - it would thaw out. In between the mountains and the valleys, you would see some tundra (a vast, treeless arctic plain). That was the only thing that grew up there, although you would see a few little flowers that grew about two inches tall and would get a blossom on it. I think it was about seven miles from the base and you would come to the ice cap that covers the whole country of Greenland. And we had one radar site sitting on ice that was 7000 feet thick. It never thaws on a Greenland ice cap in that area. It stays frozen year round. I'm not sure just how big Greenland is, but I think it is too small to be a continent. Denmark owns Greenland. There was one village close to us called Thule and it was off limits to us because it was for the Eskimos. There was only the air base and the one small village as far as settlements were concerned. There were no towns, no roads, no nothin'."



Inuit with his sled

**Eskimos:** "I really don't know too much about the Eskimos but they must have been able to fish and catch seals cause they lived off the land. You've probably seen pictures of little Eskimos kids in their furs. And that's actually the way they are. And, of course, they had their dogsleds for transportation. I never saw a polar bear. It may have been too far north for them because there is nothing out there for them to eat. And that ocean is froze over most of the time."



Glacier moving down a fjord

**Frozen Ice Island:** "We had a frozen ice island and it was called T-3. It was something like 2 1/2 x 3 miles in size. As part of the Air Force, we had an attachment of weathermen that were living on that floating island in the Arctic Ocean. The winds and shifting ice kept that ice island moving around. When we would try to fly in supplies for them, we would have the location pin-pointed on our map and when we would get there sometimes the island wouldn't be there and we would have to go home again. They would get a fix on it again with the radio and we would try again."

**Ice Shelves:** "When they talk about the ice shelves in Antarctica, I know just exactly what they are talking about. The ice on the ice caps is constantly moving, very slowly. It will come down off the slopes of the land and gets out there far enough, that eventually it moves out over the ocean and then breaks off. Actual ice rivers are called fiords. And that's where the icebergs come from. They break off of these ice rivers."

**Ice breakers:** "You've probably seen in the papers, from time to time, where they talk about the East Wind. That's the name of that ice breaker. And it's interesting how they do that. They'll cut through the ice until they can't go any further. Then they will back up and ballast the water from the front end of the ship to the back end to get the front end up. Then they'll hit that ice and push the water towards the front and down it comes and breaks through a little farther. Usually salt water doesn't freeze but in this area the ice might be 17 to 18 feet thick."



US & Danish flags flying on the base

**On duty:** "We worked 12 hour days, seven days a week (on base in Greenland) at the aircraft hangar because we had planes coming and going all the time. It was better to stay busy than not have anything to do. For entertainment we had movies - we couldn't leave the base. We played a lot of cards."

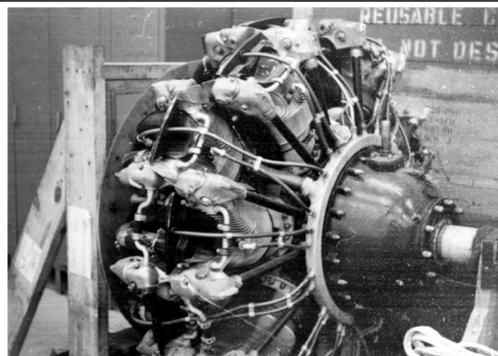


C-124 in the hangar



H-19 helicopter in the hangar

**Hangars:** "Every plane that came in had to identify itself before it got close to the base. If they wouldn't identify themselves, they would open the hangar doors and out would go planes to meet them. I think it took 5 minutes to get one of those fighter planes off the runway. We could pick up Russian aircraft on the radar once in a great while. That was the reason for the DEW line. They figured if the Russians would invade, they would come from the north over the North Pole. We had other bases in Alaska but they were not in our command. There were two other bases in Greenland. One was probably a couple hundred miles below the Arctic Circle and the other one was down at the southern tip of Greenland. At the time, they didn't know if Greenland was a solid mass of land or if the ice cap was formed on top of islands. There were no shrubs or trees - nothing. It was a desolate piece of country. I was never at the southern tip of Greenland, but I understand it has vegetation because I know they had sheep herds. It is a long ways from northern Greenland to the southern tip. I have never been back to Greenland and have no hankering to go back! I didn't keep in contact with any of the men that I served with. I was never in one outfit long enough to develop close ties to anyone."



R-1830 engine for a C-47 plane

**Describing planes:** "All of the planes in the arctic were painted with red tails and red wing tips. And that was so they could find them if they went down for some reason. Some of the planes had skis attached so they could land on the Greenland ice cap."



C-119 in the hangar - note the red tail

**Building construction on Thule Air Base:** "The buildings were all built about 4 foot up off the ground so the air could go through it. The reason for that was so the permafrost wouldn't thaw out from under the buildings (permafrost is when the land is continuously froze). Our air craft hangars had refrigerated floors in them so they wouldn't thaw out the ice underneath the buildings. If it started to thaw, the buildings would start to shift, sink or break. The buildings that were built up off the ice were weighted down with slabs of cement to keep them from sliding or shifting."

Every building was equipped with its own water and sewer system, and everything had to be hauled by truck to or from these buildings. So you can imagine what kind of a work force it took to run that place. As far as I know, the sewage was disposed of in the ocean. Our drinking water came from a lake up by the Greenland ice cap. Evidently they could get under the ice far enough to pump the water. The water was pure because of the terrific cold weather all the time. I don't think they ever put chemicals in it and the water was GOOD."



Headquarters that shows how the buildings are elevated.

"The Thule Air Force Base was under construction when I was assigned there. The government had hired civilians to do the work. They made tremendous amounts of money. If they committed to an 18 month contract, their wages were tax free."



Hangar construction

**Other personal history:** "I grew up in Manning. Then in my junior year, my folks bought a farm near Charter Oak. I attended Charter Oak high school my last two years. My folks never liked it there and they moved back to Manning. My dad's name was Alfred and mom's name was Anita. She was from around Halbur. Dad and Mom always farmed. They farmed my grandpa Bill's farm which has been in the family since the 1880s. My granddaughter lives on the farm now."

I had thought that I might make the Air Force my career, but in the end decided to return to Manning to farm. I was an only child and the farm was there for me. In 1956, I married Rosie Muhlbauer, my high school sweetheart."

I spent all of my time in the Air Force on the east coast and in Greenland and never came close to going to Korea that I know of. I think the Greenland base is closed now, as far as I know. Although there might be some scientists working at the base now. The early warning system is gone now, too. That is all done by satellites now. I don't think any of that is being used. And I know Bill Ranniger was down to the Turk Islands in the Caribbean and they were at that island that I flew in and out of, and they said that was all rotted down. The government had spent tremendous amounts of money, and there it goes."

I flew in and out of the Bahamas, Turk Islands, and San Salvador. That is where Columbus supposedly landed the first time. They had a monument there for him."

We also flew into Cuba. (Some of the pilots had to go over there quick and get their whiskey). Fulgencio Batista was in power at that time and it was a mixed up country then already. There was a naval base there - Guantanamo Bay."

I was also in Goose Bay, Labrador, which is located in central Newfoundland. We passed thru there on our 12 hour flight from Newfoundland to Greenland in an old WWII plane. Everything was froze up when I went, so the only way up there was by air. We didn't have any cargo planes, just fighter planes and then pretty soon they started coming with a few bombers with jet engines."

**Wes remembers the two Boeing B-47 Stratojets bombers that collided and crashed over Irwin on August 19, 1963.**

"That was one of our first bombers - a B47. That was quite a plane, too. Then pretty soon they came out with a B36 which had ten engines on it - 6 propeller engines and four jet engines. Then after that came the big B52s in the late 50s. I never did see a B47 up close because they were under high security at the time because they were bombers."

**Dan Peters in-depth story will begin next week.**