



March 20, 07

Good morning Mr. Tim Kelly;

Ed & Milinda May gave me your email wanting to know more about skiing in Umiat, Unalakleet and Haines area. And I understand it is for you and Dave Brand's Alaska ski history non profit web site.

After my discharge from the Navy in October 7th 1945 at the Bremerton, Washington Navy yard, I heard they were wanting communications personnel in Umiat where they were beginning to drill for oil in the Petron Naval reserve number four. They wanted personnel who new international mores code, bohmy tape, klin smith tape, etc. That was what I had been trained for and had just spent three years in the Navy on active duty for the duration of the war. I spent a few months for advanced training in Seattle and then flew to Umiat. The temperature got up to ninety degrees that summer. Every one had mosquitoesnets draped over their bunks. But a VIP personnel had flown in from Washington and they had sprayed the valley and I did not see one mosquito all summer. Then it began to get cold and the moisture in the air began to freeze and fall to the ground. Do not remember it snowing much. Was mostly moisture freezing and falling. Do not remember snow getting more than a foot deep. They had army skis available, Rifles, that took a clip of fifteen rounds and could shoot as fast as you could pull the trigger. We carried them over our shoulder when out skiing. Johnny Acord and Bob Rice were bush pilots flying supplies in DC 3's, which I believe they called the work horse of Alaska. Johnny Acord also flew a smaller plane. They flew for Sig and Noel Wien airlines. When we came in from cross skiing out in the valley one of them told us when they were in the radio shack, that they saw a big bear not more than a mile from where we were. And they had also seen a pack of wolves in the valley. That is why we carried rifles. One day I was walking in from an oil site with Al West and it sounded like some one set off a blast of dynamite out in the valley. I said what are they blasting out there? He said that is the ground splitting open. It was sixty below zero that day. He said when you are in the skiff and kicker in the river ^{at Umiat} you will notice the high banks. And the three foot of tundra hanging over the bank. It is the Ikpiuk River and in Eskimo language means river of high banks. As you go along you will see cracks in the river bank and some will be a foot wide or so. When the ground cracks open the wind blows and covers those cracks. When you are out skiing and cross them at a ninety degree angle you will not notice them, but ^{cross them} *with drifting snow.*

lengthwise and you could break thre the crust and drop a skii in those cracks. I skii'd out to the transmitter site a few times to pump fuel oil into a tank to keep the oil stove burning. One time while pumping from a fifty gallon barrel with my hood up and fur around my face with just an opening see out I turned to look towards camp and a black wolf was setting on his haunches looking at me. I stopped cranking and, Well!! hello black wolf. Where did you come from? and how long have you been setting there? We just set there on his haunches with ears erect and would cock his head sideways. And his expressions seemed to say who and what are you. I had on those white bunny boot s, but my feet were getting cold just standing and pumping fuel. so I went inside to warm them. When I came back out he was running off towards a place where steam was rising from a place where there was no river for steam coming from an over flow. I learned afterward, that steam will rise from a herd of caribou in that cold arctic air. So that wolf was probably following those caribou. Umiat is in the foot hills of the north slope of the Brooks rang. Mt. Umiat was the highest mountain close by, if you want to call it a mountain. It was only twelve hundred feet high. Another communications personnel, I have forgotten his name, but if he were to see this article on his "E" mail he would remember this incident. We left camp on skis and headed for mt. Umiat. We followed the Icpickpuck (sp) River staying up on its high banks till we got to where the river, threw the ages, had cut away the face of it and we were going to climb the face of this mountain. On the way up we heard a shot like it came from a shot gun. We were about half way up and we were on a place where we could sit down and look around. then we heard it again and again and it was coming from the river below. Then we would see a fountain of water shoot up after each sound. Then we knew what an overflow. was. We learned later, that the pressure freezing down is so great, that the water pops through the ice and makes that noise like a shot gun being discharged. We watched this continue till the water was flowing maybe six inches deep. then quit. Wish I could recall this fellows name that was with me. Anyway he said, my feet are freezing. I had on the white arctic bunny boots, but he did not. We had on heavy arctic parkas. I told him to take his shoes off and put his feet up under my parka and under my arm pits and put his shoes up under his arm pits. When his feet got warm he put his ski boots back on and we continued our climb. carrying our skis on our backs. When we reached the top the back side of this so called mountain was just rolling hills. We could see that we had a long run and fairly steep for this novice skier and I started down leaning my elbows on my skis acting as a drag to keep me from going to fast. I looked back up where my buddy was coming down and he was coming down like a skier should. I got to going to fast dragging my ski poles so I just set down. When I stopped I looked up to see how my buddy was doing and he was clipping them off coming straight down and while I was looking he did a flip in the air and his skis went flying. I thot sure I was going to be out here in this cold weather with a man with a broken leg or worse. When he quit rolling he got up rounded up his skis put them back on and came on down to where I was. I was really relieved to find he was not hurt. We had no more mishaps. We got down to the bottom. He like a skier should. And I got down by dragging my ski poles and setting down and turning my skis on edge to stop, then start on again. LATER WHEN

Later when I HAD ACCESS TO A WEASEL (A military land and amphib on track transportation vehicle) I loaded in my skis and headed across the valley floor to the foot hills. Clamped on my skis and started climbing stepping side ways like I had seen skiers do. Up ways it was not so steep so I tried the herring bone climb. Got so I could do that pretty good. Then on up farther where it was not as steep I could climb straight forward. Leaving the two tracks of the two skis. I stopped to look back and there was a white fox following about ten feet behind me. I STARTED TALKING to it like I did that black wolf. This fox had lifted one front leg and just stood there listening. I told this fox I could not stand here all day with a one sided conversation. And said I am going on up this hill and see if I could teach myself how to ski properly. He acted like he understood and immediately ~~and~~ took off going around me and up and over about a hundred feet and sat down on his haunches again and watched me. When I got even with him again he took off and went on up ahead of me. I lost track of him white against white. That fox had not left very long till a flock of about two hundred ptarmigan lit right where that white fox was setting. Would have been interesting to watch what would have happened if that fox had still been there. I made three runs that afternoon and was able to jump the back of my skis one way or the other to make turns. Another day the fellow, that was on Mt. Umiat with me and the station manager and I took the weasel and skis and crossed the valley floor to the foot hills for a day of skiing. The two of them could ski pretty good. They was trying to teach me how to turn without jumping the back of my skis one way or the other. never did master it. But my left thumb looks like it has a double knuckle to this day from that day of skiing.

Another time I was cross skiing across the valley and run across a moose track. I turned and followed the moose tracks to where the tracks went into a clump of bushes about a hundred and fifty feet in diameter. So, I circled this clump of bushes. The bushes was so thick and High I could not see very far in. I circled all the way around and no tracks coming out. So I went back to where the tracks went in. Took off my skis and went in. I found where she had stopped in the center and the tracks seem to show, that she was facing me as I went around. And when I came around took off my skis her tracks showed she went on out and crossed my ski trail. By the time I got back out and got my skis on and went around this clump of bushes, I seen where her tracks had crossed my ski trail, but she was no where in sight. I followed her tracks awhile, but never did get sight of her. That incident let me see how the mind of this moose was working. I have thought I would like to write a book some time on all the wild life animals I have been in contact with and the lessons of how smart wild life is. Especially the wolf. The contacts I have had from them tells me they are a very intelligent species. Back to skiing. I found the white arctic fox would follow my ski trails. So I set clip lock snares in my ski trail and caught two. I took them to Fairbanks and had them tanned. Those in the picture are the two I caught in the snares. I found I had to keep track of the weather. And that was part of my job to forward weather reports to aircraft during their flight plan. Because at times it did snow and blizzard conditions with fog and white outs. And if your ski trail got wiped out in blizzard conditions you could get seriously seriously lost. Flying out of Umiat I looked down and saw caribou by the thousands swarming into the Anaktuvik (sp) Pass