

The year was 1948 and Ray Peterson and Vic Davis, both pioneering Alaska aviators in their own rights, remember it well.

Said Peterson, "On April 30, 1948, the Anchorage Elks Club chartered an Alaska Star Airlines DC-4 to Honolulu from Anchorage. The aircraft, N90515, carried 50 Elks Club members. Due to the distance of the flight, each leg of which took over 12 hours, two captains and a co-pilot were required.

"The captains were Bob Long and Bill Lund and the co-pilot was Clark Cole. Captains Long and Lund concluded it was imprudent to make the flight non-stop, electing to refuel at Cold Bay. The flight times were Anchorage to Cold Bay, 4:35, where they refueled, and Cold Bay to Honolulu, 12:05."

After they basked on Oahu beaches for a few days, the party took an excursion to Hilo on May 2. As it turned out they make quite a hit — they were the first civilian four-engine airplane ever to land there.

On the return flight, the Elks took another route. They left Honolulu on May 5 and arrived in San Francisco in 12 hours and 25 minutes. They began the last leg of their journey on May 7 when they flew from San Francisco to Everett, Wash., in 4 hours and 20 minutes. At that time, Petersen recalls, Everett was the "home base".

There's more Alaska aviation history here, too. Both Long and Lund flew for the old Star Air Service during and before World War II. Star has since changed its name, first to Alaska Star and eventually to Alaska Airlines.

Before he was a pilot for Alaska Star, Long worked as a mechanic for Ray Petersen Flying Service in Anchorage.

Both pilots have since retired but Petersen recalls, "I have always rated these men as outstanding pilots rating with the best among their peers. These men flew charters for Alaska all over the world in the old DC-4's. They were active in the air lift required during the Israeli Palestine dislocation during the '40s and were participants in the Berlin airlift. Clark Cole, the youngest of the trio, developed into an excellent captain for Alaska Airlines and Cordova Air Service during later years."

"I salute them all" Petersen affirms, "as members of a dying fraternity of iron men that flew the wood and rag crates of yesteryear, men that ask not why but when."