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Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center
Bob and Evangeline Atwood Resource Center
625 C Street
Anchorage, AK 99501
Phone: 907-929-9235
Fax: 907-929-9233
Email: resourcecenter@anchagemuseum.org

Guide prepared by: Arabeth Balasko, Archivist

TITLE: James E. Elsner WWII 18th Fighter Squadron Collection

COLLECTION NUMBER: B2020.007

OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

Dates: May 30th, 1944

Extent: 1 photograph, 1 folder

Language and Scripts: The collection is in English.

Name of creator(s): US Military; Donated by James E. Elsner, one of the 18th Fighter Squadron Members from 1944

Administrative/Biographical History:

The following biography comes from the Courant Newspaper article written on 11/12/2020 in West Hartford, Connecticut, and was shared by the donor, James E. Elsner –

“Jimmy Elsner’s first assignment was the U.S. Army’s signal corps, but he wanted to fly and took an exam to become an aviation cadet. He would serve in a little-known sector of the war.

Japan’s invasion in 1942 of Attu and Kiska Islands at the western edge of the Aleutian Chain was part of the empire’s failed strategy to draw U.S. forces north and away from the Battle of Midway. The occupation marked the first time since the War of 1812 that a hostile power seized American territory.

In May 1943, about 15,000 American soldiers arrived off Attu to take the island back. The fighting was fierce and ended with a massed attack – the first such all-out charge the Americans would face in the island-hopping campaign.

Almost all of the Japanese invaders on Attu were killed. On the American side, 550 soldiers were killed and another 1,500 were wounded. About 1,200 Americans suffered injuries from the cold.

To ensure that Attu would not fall back into Japanese hands, U.S. military leaders sent forces that included two fighter squadrons to the island. Jimmy Elsner was assigned to the 18th Fighter Squadron and arrived in March 1944. He flew a Curtis P-40 Warhawk that he named “Carolyn,” in honor of his mother.

“The mission really was air defense,” Jimmy said. “We were scrambled any time they thought they saw a bogie (refers to a false blip on a radar display) – they thought the Japanese forces might come back. That’s why we were there.”

After the war, Jimmy went back to Connecticut where he and his wife of almost 70 years, Dorothy, raised three children. He worked at G. Fox as a purchasing agent, then at the former Society for Savings, a Hartford bank.

Elsner, who lives in West Hartford, also continued to serve in what became known as the Connecticut Air National Guard. He flew until 1968 and retired in 1971 as a lieutenant colonel. During his career, he got to fly six different fighters, including the Air Force’s first operational jet fighter, the Lockheed P-80 Shooting Star. He eventually transitioned to flying C-47 and C-54 transports.”

Scope and Content Description:

This collection contains one image with identified Air Force military personnel from the 18th Fighter Squadron who were stationed in Attu, Alaska in May 1944.

CONDITIONS GOVERNING ACCESS AND USE

Restrictions on Access: The collection is open for research use.

Physical Access: Original item in good condition.

Technical Access: No special equipment is needed to access the materials.

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Preferred Citation: James E. Elsner WWII 18th Fighter Squadron Collection; Anchorage Museum, B2020.007.001

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Acquisition and Appraisal Information

Image donated by James E. Elsner, one of the members of the 18th Fighter Squadron.

SUBJECTS

Airplanes
Aleutian Islands (Alaska)
Attu (Alaska)
Dogs
Fighter Squadron
Military bases—Alaska—Aleutian Islands
U.S. Military
World War II

Detailed Description of the Collection

01. “18th Fighter Squadron, Attu, Alaska – Major George L. Hicks LIT, Commanding Officer”

Back Row; L to R: Slt. Bates, H.C.; Capt. McGovern, M.A.; Slt Calkins, R.C.; Slt. Watters, J.L.; capt. Zeder, F.M.; Slt. Brown, C.N; Slt. Bonyng, R.W.

Second Row; L to R: Slt. Bartlett, C.J.; Slt. Bundy, D.L.; Slt. McCarthy, J.E.; Capt. Diefenbeck, J.A.; Slt. Black, A.J.R.; Capt. Anderson, L.W.

Front Row; L to R: Slt. Elsner, J.E.; Major Hicks, G.L.; Slt. Robinson, T.J.; Slt. Martin, R.W.; Slt. List, C.W.

Picture taken May 30th, 1944. Dogs in the picture are Stuka and Zero., both belonging to Lt. Robinson.

Image donated by James E. Elsner, with handwritten notations reading: “Attu, Alaska, May 1944, Lt. J.E. Elsner, 1st Row, left – Age 25”

Guide written: Arabeth Balasko, [2-2021]