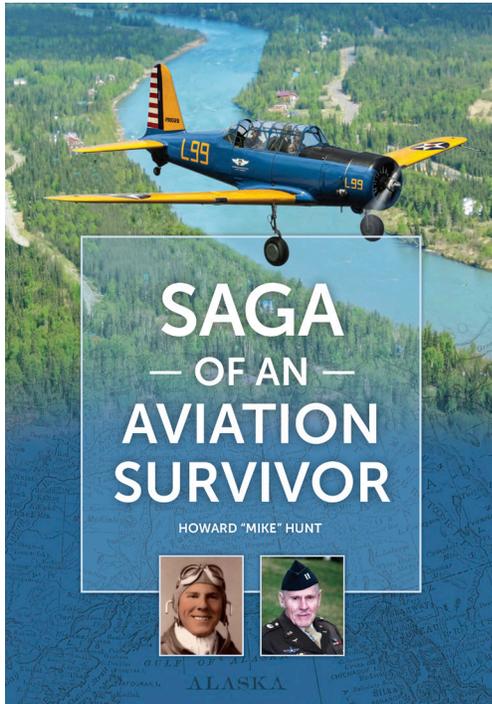


Saga of an Aviation Survivor

Howard John “Mike” Hunt

MEDIA KIT • 2022



This is the story of a dynamic, “can do” man. From the cornfields of Iowa, to an air military career that took him around the world, to taking case before the United States Supreme Court, to testifying before the United States Senate Select Committee on Small Business, to salvaging a DC-4 off the ice in Hudson Bay, Canada, to homesteading in Alaska. This is the autobiography of a man with determination, intention, and perseverance who lived his life to the fullest.

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Author: Howard John “Mike” Hunt

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Hunt grew up during the great depression. He understood that in order to get ahead in life, he would have to get an education. His passion had always been to fly. He saved enough money to take flying lessons, soloed at seventeen and obtained his private pilot license at age nineteen.

World War II was breaking out. He wanted to enlist as a pilot, but needed college credits to qualify. He attended Iowa State College and after two years, joined the Army Air Corp and started his military career as a pilot.

After his military career ended in 1947, Hunt, along with a small group of World War II veterans, obtained surplus military airplanes and started a non-scheduled airline in Alaska named Air Transport Associates, Inc. (ATA). Nationwide, non-scheduled airlines were feuding with the Civil Aeronautics Board and the scheduled airlines because the non-scheduled airlines provided low-cost air service. The scheduled airlines were receiving government subsidies and charging higher rates to customers. The federal government revoked ATA’s carrier operating authority and the airline went “belly up.”

Military pilot, bush pilot, entrepreneur, gold miner, and homesteader. Hunt was the “Jack of all Trades.” He never quit in the face of great adversity. He went on to live out his life doing what he loved most – flying his warbirds, prospecting, hunting and fishing. He has been honored with many awards including the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Alaska Aviation Museum Hall of Fame. His legacy will live on in the hearts and minds of those who knew and loved him, as a man who lived with passion and purpose.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



August 27, 1942. Lt. Howard Hunt graduation, Class 42H, Victorville, California.

Howard John “Mike” Hunt, (1922-2019) was an Alaskan pioneer who came to Alaska in 1949 to establish a new airline – Air Transport Associates. Hunt and his family homesteaded forty acres in Anchorage.

Hunt’s love of flying took him all around the world. He was a ferry pilot in World War II with the Army Air Corps, flying every type of plane the army had in its inventory including the B-17, “Memphis Belle.” Hunt was invited and attended the 2018 Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Ceremony celebrating the restoration of the Memphis Belle. He was the last known surviving pilot to have flown the Belle on a ten-day bond drive from Spokane, Washington to Tampa, Florida at the end of World War II.

Airplanes, especially warbirds, were his passion. He helped finance the restoration of three warbirds and eventually donated them to the Alaska Wing of the Commemorative Air Force (CAF). These warbirds are hangared in Anchorage and are flown at airshows around Alaska.



Howard Hunt, standing, and Duncan Miller, sitting in cockpit of BT-13, shaking hands. Nut Tree Airport, Vacaville, California, circa 2009.

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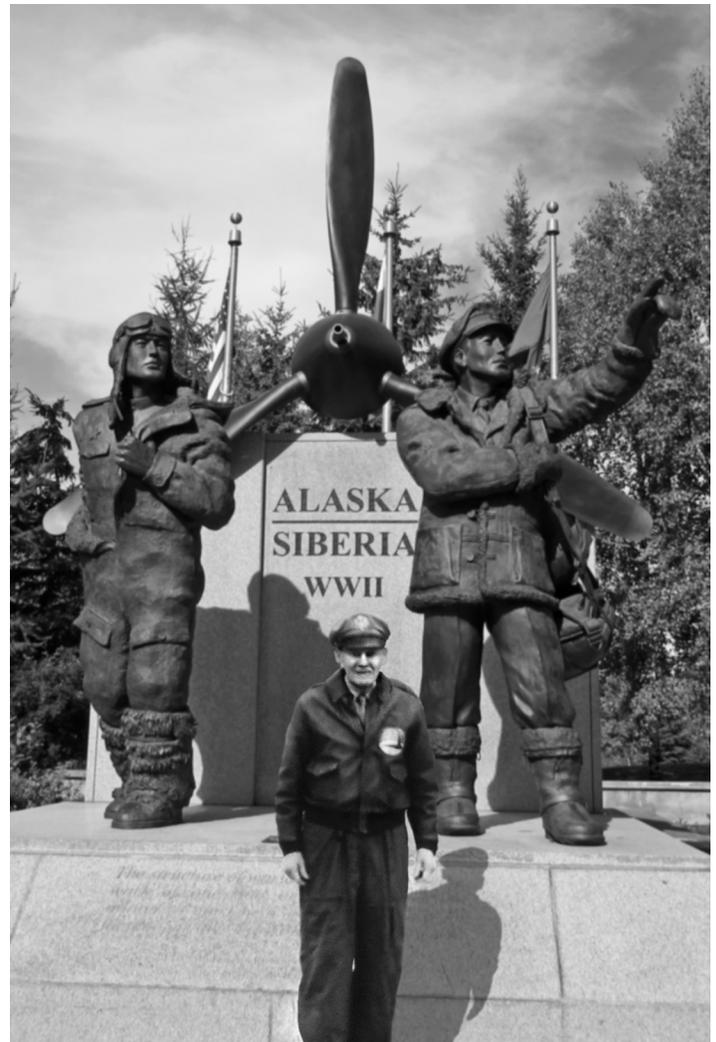
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Howard Hunt visited the monument to Lend-Lease Pilots in Fairbanks, Alaska.

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BOOK EXCERPT

Chapter 11 Ice Floe Rescue

Just as I emerged from the Columbus, Georgia, project, a new drama was unfolding in the Arctic. In May 1955, a United States Overseas DC-4, returning from a supply flight on the DEW Line, passed up Coral Harbour on the way to Fort Churchill, Canada, and ran into strong head winds. It actually ran out of fuel about forty miles north of Fort Churchill. Hudson Bay was frozen over at that time of the year so the pilot decided he could safely land on the ice. He was counting on a dog sled team to get some fuel out to him so he could fly the plane back to Fort Churchill. He set up for his landing, and just as he was flaring, he struck an ice pressure ridge. The landing gear collapsed. The plane went down on the right wing tip. The right gear was knocked off and some other damage occurred. This left the big DC-4 sitting out on the ice. What a sight that was!

The insurance company paid United States Overseas for the airplane. My partner, Amos Heacock, and I got an idea that maybe we could salvage this DC-4. We bought the airplane from the insurance company for \$5,000. We then went to United States Overseas and said, "If you will finance this operation, we'll get it off the ice for you." Ralph Cox, the owner, agreed.

We set the project in motion. In May, Arctic weather starts to warm up and there was little time left to get the plane off the ice. Our idea was to insulate this piece of ice where the airplane was sitting with hay and sawdust. We would then tow the pan of ice to shore and slide the airplane onto the beach. We would have the plane safely home.

Just in case that didn't work, we had a second plan. We procured thirteen surplus Army pontoon inflatable boats which we placed underneath the airplane. We had hay and sawdust delivered by rail car into Fort Churchill. From there we flew it out to

the ice using DC-4s. We had a helicopter and two Super Cubs brought in so that we could support our logistic operation. We had twenty-five DC-4 loads of hay and sawdust to drop on the site. The DC-4 came in low over the downed DC-4 and salvaged its load of sawdust or hay. I was out on the ice to supervise the operation. I felt they weren't dropping the hay and sawdust bags close enough to the airplane. I picked up my walkie-talkie and told the pilot, "Come in closer." On his next drop, he salvaged them right on top of me. I could see the bags plummeting down at me. I tried to get out of the way. One hit me right on the bottom of my leg and sent me skidding on the ice for fifty feet. I picked up my walkie-talkie and said, "That's close enough."

When the thirteen Army pontoon boats were air dropped, they bounced like big basketballs. The pontoon boats would go bouncing, kaboom, kaboom, when they hit the ice. We placed twelve of those boats under the wings and fuselage of the DC-4. The other one we put inside the plane in case the ice ripped everything off, we could still save the airplane. The airplane might be in the water, but that one pontoon inside the fuselage would keep it afloat.

I hired a crew of native villagers to help prepare the airplane. The two engines on the left side were still in good shape. Part of our plan was to use those engines for power to help propel our pan of ice to shore. We painted the airplane black with Perroxtone, which is a saltwater preservative. By the time we had the airplane ready to float, open water was all around us.

As we were working on the ice pan, one of my workers fell through a hole in the ice. I happened to hear him yell for help. I immediately grabbed a piece of rope and went running to his aid. I got to him in time and drug him back onto solid ice. We placed him inside the airplane, removed his wet clothes and stuffed him into a sleeping bag along with dry clothes. The man was in shock so we airlifted him back to Fort Churchill for medical aid. The water was so cold that survival time would be minutes at best. My workers were afraid while out on the ice and would not come out unless they had their canoes.

I lived out on the ice for about three weeks. One night, I remember a very fierce storm causing the ice

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to crunch and grind all night. I spent that night in a life raft by the back door of the airplane. Every once in a while a big chunk of ice would break through a soft spot in the surface ice and come up as big as a house. It was terrifying and, had one come up under us, it would have destroyed our whole airplane camp.

After we got the airplane ready to float, it was only necessary to keep track of it from the air. When we had enough open water around the plane, the plan was to pull the pan of ice to shore with the airplane resting on it. . . .

The Rescue Coordination Center at Fort Churchill warned me about flying over the ice pack in a single-engine wheel plane. They said, "If you don't come back someday, we're not even going to look for you. That's dangerous work."

I said, "I know it is but I have a bull by the tail and I can't let go. If I let go, the project is gone." Those were sobering words, but what were we to do if I didn't continue the project? The project would collapse and we would lose all our investment. If you keep your name on the damn-fool list long enough, there is a good chance you will get called by the Grim Reaper.

After we got the airplane ready for floating, the main objective was keeping track of it. The ice floe drifted around in Hudson Bay. Some days I couldn't even find it while flying in the Super Cub. I would fly out there looking for the DC-4, but I couldn't locate it. I would think, Oh, my God, I wonder if it sank. I would keep looking and eventually I would find it. Navigation is quite a problem that far north. If you fly out in that Arctic haze over the ice in Hudson Bay with a lot of open water and a magnetic compass, when you dip the wing of the airplane, the magnetic compass does a 360-degree turn. When this happened, I would wonder if I was still headed

in the right direction. I would try to navigate Indian fashion. I would pick out an iceberg up ahead and try to maintain a straight line heading toward it. The magnetic compass wasn't of much value. . . .

I then located several villagers with boats. Between them, they had two old whaleboats and three canoes. We went out with that armada and hooked onto the piece of ice and started to pull it to shore.

The whaleboats were in terrible shape; it took one man on each boat bailing to keep them afloat. We hooked on and for three days we pulled on this big piece of ice. It was such a massive ice chunk that we couldn't get it to move very fast. It would move in one direction and then would collide with other pieces of ice. Bits of ice were chipped away from the ice pan under the airplane. The morning of July 3, 1955, the whole pan of ice came apart and floated away. The airplane settled on the pontoons and stayed afloat. Now we had a lightweight piece of cargo that we could maneuver. On July 4, we reached Fort Churchill with the airplane on the pontoon rafts.

Fort Churchill had a large platform slipway to launch boats. We made arrangements with the harbor master to run this slipway out in the water. Then, at high tide, we floated the plane on top of the platform and tied onto it. When the tide went out, the plane was sitting on this railroad-type platform. In order to get up over the abutment, we had to collapse the nose wheel and jack up the landing gear to elevate the airplane tail to clear the shore abutment. Once we got the airplane ashore, we disassembled it and loaded it on seven flat rail cars for transport to Wildwood, New Jersey. . . .

The project required a lot of imagination, vision and energy. We had to make do with what we had. We couldn't do it in accordance with Federal Air Regulation (FAR) or anything like that. Once you have a project moving, you must make it go or else you are going to fail. I was much relieved to be back on the mainland with the DC-4. My adrenaline glands were all hyped up as I was already planning our next adventure.

This salvage operation was written up in *Life* magazine, June 27 and July 18, 1955, and in *Calvalier* magazine.

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ALASKA AVIATION MUSEUM and COMMEMORATIVE AIR FORCE

The goal of the Alaska Aviation Museum is to preserve, display, educate and honor Alaska’s aviation heritage. The Museum is located in the heart of Alaska aviation on the south shore of Lake Hood, Anchorage, Alaska. Lake Hood is the busiest seaplane base in the world with more than 87,000 takeoffs and landings per year. The Ted Stevens International Airport, the air crossroads of the world, is located nearby.

The museum presents one of the finest displays of Alaskan aviation history with interactive displays, memorabilia, photographs, films and artifacts from personal collections of Alaska’s pioneer aviators.

The national Commemorative Air Force began with the purchase of a single airplane in 1957. The mission of the CAF is to keep warbirds flying. The CAF, chartered as a non-profit in 1961, is a national organization headquartered in Dallas with hangar facilities in Midland, Texas. The CAF has wing chapters around the country including one in Anchorage. Air shows are staged all around the United States featuring B-17s, B-24s, and a variety of other warbirds.

The overall mission of the non-profit National Commemorative Air Force is to restore and preserve military aircraft, as well as showcase the restored aircraft at air shows across the country. The Alaska Wing was established in 2006 with the donation of the Harvard MK-IV.

The Col. Howard “Mike” Hunt Alaska Wing of the Commemorative Air Force takes that original mission of preserving historically significant military aircraft to the Far North of Alaska—the only state to be invaded during World War II.

By maintaining these aircraft in flying condition, the Alaska Wing is able to preserve the important connection for Alaskans to that deadly conflict in such a way lest we forget what happened so many years ago.

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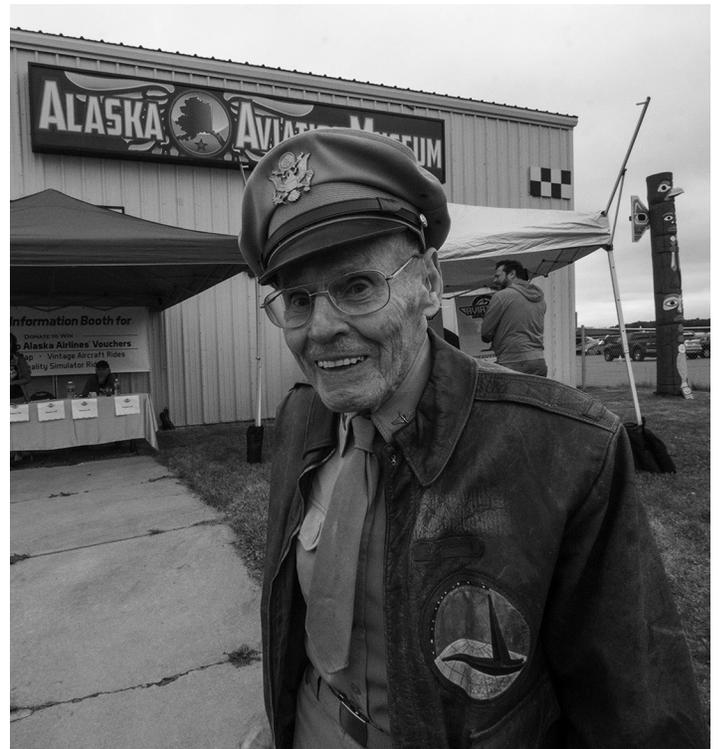
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Sales of *Saga of an Aviation Survivor* help support these organizations.



Warbird BT-13 in flight over Alaska, Ed Kornfield piloting, Col. Hunt in the back seat, circa 2011.



Col. Hunt at the Alaska Aviation Museum. Photograph courtesy of Rob Stapleton, Alaskafoto.