



CHALKYITSIK—Except for the resourcefulness of Ft. Yukon Air Service bush pilots, the villages of Chalkyitsik and Venetie might have been a bit cold this winter. Despite a short runway at Chalkyitsik, the pilots transported 42,000 gallons

of fuel oil to the two villages using tiny planes as tiny tankers. As a result, the children of the two villages are going to school in warm classrooms.

—Photo by C.H. DARBY

Ingenious Bush Pilots Convert Small Planes Into Tiny Tankers To Furnish Fuel for Two Villages

By C.H. DARBY

It was a close call, but the residents of Chalkyitsik and Venetie can rest easily now. The fuel oil is in for the village schools and the children will make it through the winter in warm buildings.

When the first of September arrived and the annual fuel oil shipment hadn't been received for the big diesel engines and furnaces in the Bureau of Indian Affairs schools at either location, village parents began to worry.

The transportation contract called for 42,000 gallons of oil to be delivered, 25,000 to Chalkyitsik, and 17,000 to Venetie, from the bulk storage tanks at Ft. Yukon.

The problem was that the last boat had long since gone downriver, ground transportation was impossible and the snow was due to start falling at any time.

The answer was, of course, shipment by air, but again the villagers were stymied. The big Hercules and C-46 tankers couldn't land at the small fields because of conditions and length, especially at Chalkyitsik.

There the strip, though listed as 1,300 feet long, barely managed to end up with much more than 900 feet of usable runway. The first 300 feet had been cleared at one time but was now grown over with weeds, and running across the middle was a deep ditch just waiting to trap some unwary pilot.

It was going to be a cold winter if someone didn't find an answer.

Two well-known Alaska bush pilots, Tommy Olson and Cliff Fairchild, owners of Ft. Yukon Air Service, came up with the solution. Since the big ones couldn't do the job, they'd build a pair of "Tiny Tankers" which would be able to land and take

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