

# *Air Taxis Are Agassed*

By SALLY W. JONES  
Staff Writer

Anchorage Daily News

GALENA — For the people who live in the small villages around Galena, the energy crisis hasn't hurt much, because their culture isn't replete with Cadillacs, neon signs, and scores of other energy-consuming activities and gadgets.

But this month, the energy

(Continued on Page 6)

# Bush Fliers Are First Victims of Allocation ...

(Continued from Page 1)

shortage threatens to come home to them as perhaps it has nowhere else in the nation.

The fuel shortage threatens to claim its first Alaskan aviation victim—an air taxi operator who is threatened with extinction because he can't get aviation fuel.

And for the 16-odd villages Harold's Air Service serves out of Galena and Ruby, that means a probable curtailment of what, in effect, is a village ambulance service, supplier of food and medical supplies, and lifeline to other areas.

"Harold's is the first victim we've heard of," said James Dodson, executive director of the Alaska Air Carriers Association. His outlook for the rest of the small air carriers in the state is grim. Harold's he said, "probably is the first of many that will begin to experience fuel shortages."

For years, Harold Esmailka operated his taxi service out of Ruby. In September, however, he expanded his operations and opened a base in Galena, the central supply line for the villages that ring it.

His business jumped marked-

ly and by November and December he was flying about 100 hours each out of Ruby and Galena.

It was in mid-December that the sky fell on Esmailka's four-airplane operation. Suddenly, Standard Oil refused to sell him the fuel he needed from its Galena bulk plant.

The availability of that fuel, mailka said, was the reason he'd set up a base in Galena.

Said John Billings, Harold's pilot and manager of the Galena office: "Standard wouldn't fill our orders for January, and so we had to go to the Galena dealer to get it."

The Galena dealer for aviation fuel from Standard's bulk plant is Norm Yaeger, the operator of Galena Air Service, Harold's competitor.

Standard cut Yaeger's fuel allowance, too, to 2,000 gallons monthly.

With this fuel, Billings said, Yaeger must supply his own operations, refueling aircraft flying through, and Harold's Air Service as well.

"He's given us all the fuel he can," Billings said, and added, Yaeger also probably will have to cut back service.

For January, Yaeger was able to sell 500 gallons to Harold's. "We used 300 gallons of that the first three days in January," Billings said, and Harold's February supply will be cut to 300 gallons. The 500 gallons, Billings said, represent 34 hours of flight time — "not even enough to cover expenses."

Before Standard's action this month, both air taxi operators were flying at capacity — and business still coming in.

Ironically, Standard has on hand 21,000 gallons of aviation fuel — enough to supply both of Galena's air taxi operators and the aircraft that stop for refueling as well.

The Galena air taxi operators' plight is one that has the operators, village leaders, and the air association scratching their heads in bewilderment.

They estimate there will be a surplus of 9,000 gallons of aviation fuel in the Standard bulk plant when additional fuel is delivered up the Yukon River by barge in June. "It makes no sense that that fuel can't be used now," said Dodson.

The problem, they all agree, is federal government inaction and vagueness.

Last month, Alaska was exempted from fuel allocations imposed on a voluntary basis nationwide. Nevertheless, Dodson said, the federal Office of Energy Allocation has failed to tell oil companies what they may or may not do in Alaska.

As a result, he said, Standard Oil justifiably is following its national fuel allocation plan in Alaska as well as the Lower 48.

The Alaska air taxi industry is asking that it be allowed to obtain 100 per cent of fuel it needs for service, up to 150 per cent of 1972 usage.

The reason for this request is simple, according to Jimmy Huntington, long-time Galena-area Native leader, author, dog musher and official for the Koyukon Development Corp.

"Air taxis are the only form of transportation in Alaska's Interior," Huntington said. "Trav-

el by air taxi is growing by leaps and bounds."

"Some of those officials in Washington ought to come up here and see — we're not like the Outer 48. And 85 to 90 per cent of our business is carried on by air," he said. Big cities like Chicago, Washington and Seattle use cabs, buses and trains, he said, "but out here, our buses, cabs and trains are the air taxis — and perhaps people just don't understand that."

He estimates that 100 per cent of Alaskans living in bush villages have flown at some time in their lives.

Losing an air taxi service such as Harold's, Huntington said, "would be just like cutting our arm off."

Esmailka, himself, describes best the effect of curtailed air taxi services in his villages.

"In December, alone, we had to fly out three times for emergencies that were so bad we had to fly the people directly to the Fairbanks Hospital."

He's got 15 trappers in the wilderness working their lines, waiting for Esmailka, to pick them up when the time comes. "I've never lost a trapper yet," he said, and added his aircraft are their only way home.

Wien Consolidated Airlines flies most food and medical supplies to the villages, Esmailka said, but Harold's and Galena Air Services also fly their share. And if Wien is required to cut back some of its flights, Dodson said, the food and medicine probably will increasingly need to be sent by the small air taxis.

"I just spent \$12,000 installing single sideband radios in some of the villages," Esmailka said, to give residents there an extra lifeline to help.

Because of the airplane, Esmailka said, the quality of life in Alaska villages has improved — grocers can overturn stock more quickly and provide nutritional foods, and villages have adapted to modern travel in place of dog sleds.

(Continued on Page 9)

# Fliers Are First Victims

(Continued from page 6)

"Then all of a sudden in the middle of winter, they chop you off," said Esmailka. "You're darned right you're going to have starvation and malnutrition if the air taxis can't fly," he said.

And what Esmailka, Billings, Dodson and Huntington can't figure out, they said, is why Alaska's air taxis are being treated as if their service were a luxury. "Alaska's air taxis should be treated like bus companies or a railroad," Dodson said.

For now, Dodson and others in the state aviation industry are awaiting the appointment of an Alaska director of the Office of Energy Allocation. The deputy director for the Alaska region, they hope, will realize the vital role played by air taxis here, and will give oil companies specific guidelines from which to allocate fuel for aviation.