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Wyoming Aviation Oral History Series

Don Feltner

- **OCCUPATION: Owner/operator "Wings of Wyoming" – FAA-approved flight school in Cheyenne, WY**
- **BORN: Hazzard, Kentucky**
- **INTERVIEWER: MARK JUNGE**
- **TRANSCRIBED AND EDITED BY SUE CASTANEDA**

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MARK JUNGE: Today is 20 December 2013. My name is Mark Junge and I am in the office of Don Feltner, who is the owner of "Wings of Wyoming." It is a flight school here in Cheyenne in the general area of the airport on Evans Avenue. We're in a classroom--I can see the chart here behind your back, a flight chart. There are Christmas stockings hung all over the place and we are going to talk about Don's being Santa Claus. But Don, before that, why don't we talk a little bit about your background? When and where were you born?

DON FELTNER: I was born in Hazard, Kentucky and I lived on a tobacco farm up until I was about five years old. About that time, after two years in a row, dad said, "Hmmm. Maybe we should find some different type of employment." So we moved to Dayton, Ohio where dad got a job in a steel mill in Dayton. That's basically where I went to school--grade school, high school and that's where I joined the Air Force.

MARK JUNGE: Did you pick tobacco? You chop tobacco? What was that like?

DON FELTNER: Yes. It's hard work. It starts in March and ends at Christmas. You work on it all year long. Basically, at the end of the year when you've been working on it, you end up with enough money to buy a couple of pairs of shoes, pay some taxes and buy enough seed for next year.

MARK JUNGE: Isn't Hazard, Kentucky--there are a lot of coal mines there?

DON FELTNER: Yes, my dad worked in the coal mine and my grandpa worked in the coal mine.

MARK JUNGE: Did they have any stories to tell you about that?

DON FELTNER: Well, my grandpa on my dad's side, he actually left the coal mines after my father got married. My father was the oldest of 10 kids. He got married and was operating a family of his own. His father, my grandfather, was working in the mine one day and it caved in and killed his buddy right next to him. He said that was it. He went home and packed up his other nine kids, moved up to northern Illinois and got a job with the railroad. That's where he ended up raising the rest of his family--in northern Illinois.

MARK JUNGE: So your dad was what? What did he do?

DON FELTNER: He was a farmer and a coal miner. You've seen the movie where the guy works all night in the coal mine and then works all day on the farm...that was basically... they get the idea for those movies from someplace real.

MARK JUNGE: And this is what you boys wanted to do with all your life was chop tobacco?

DON FELTNER: No, no, no, no. I didn't mind running around the hills of Kentucky. It took me a long time to come to terms with this, because when dad moved us up to Dayton, Ohio, he kind of took me out of my element of running around, hunting and fishing, running around-- "like a wild Indian"-- was the term I used to use. Now all of a sudden, I'm in this crowded, dirty, noisy city. It took me a long time to come to terms with what dad did that for us!

MARK JUNGE: How many kids?

DON FELTNER: There were seven kids and every one of them ended up graduating from high school and going on to lead productive lives.

MARK JUNGE: As opposed to him and his siblings, probably?

DON FELTNER: Right. Even to this day, I see a lot of people back there in the hills of Kentucky with no life ahead of them because there is just no opportunity in the Appalachian Mountains.

MARK JUNGE: How did you get to Wyoming?

DON FELTNER: United States Air Force. Like many people, right out of high school, I decided, "Oooh, I want to join the Air Force" because I didn't want to be drafted into the Army. Vietnam was going on at the time. So I joined the Air Force and went away to basic training--a tech school to become a helicopter crew chief and got these orders for Cheyenne, Wyoming. "Wait a minute. Where is Cheyenne, Wyoming?" The only thing I knew about Cheyenne was that I had seen a TV show called "Alias Smith and Jones." It was just an old western and the big line I remember was--they were riding their horses one day through Wyoming--Smith says, "Hey, Jones! There's something particular about the snow in Wyoming--it never melts. It just blows around until it wears out." And that's about all I knew about Wyoming. So we did a little research. Cheyenne is the capital of Wyoming… lots to do.

MARK JUNGE: When you say we…

DON FELTNER: My wife and I-- we married two weeks out of high school. I had just turned 18 and she was still 17. We graduated in July 1970 and two weeks later we were married. We expected this big giant city. Back in 1971, Cheyenne was still a pretty small place. Also being from southern Ohio and Northern Kentucky-- by May, your gardens are planted and your kids are outside. I stepped out of my car outside of the Warren Air Force base gate wearing a short sleeve shirt at night on 11 May and thought, "Huh! The weather here is the same!" That was kind of a shock.

MARK JUNGE: Did you get transferred elsewhere? I assume you did because you were in the Air Force.

DON FELTNER: No. I came here with the Air Force in May 1971 and stayed there until I ended my Air Force career in February 1978. I put in seven years in the active-duty Air Force. I got out of the Air Force and decided that I wanted to do something else. Come to find out, the late 1970s was not a good time to be looking for a job so I drove a truck for about four years. At least that way, you will keep your military time. Very shortly after joining the Guard--weekend warrior--they offered me a full-time job as an engine mechanic on the C-130s. So I worked on the engines for several years, advanced up to being a crew chief on the C-130s and then stayed there until I retired in 2005. I ended up with a little over 30 years of service.

MARK JUNGE: But you were still in your 50s?

DON FELTNER: Yes.

MARK JUNGE: So what did you expect to do after that? You've got a Guard pension, but that's it. Did you expect to go into this business or did you…?

DON FELTNER: Actually, the aviation site goes back a little bit further than that. When I was in the Air Force on helicopters--as a crew chief, basically were assigned a helicopter--during Vietnam they were short of pilots so the crew chief basically flew as a copilot, so I got the fly all the time. A guy that I flew with quite often--he was actually a civilian flight instructor also on the side. He said, "Don, you do this well. Why don't you learn to fly airplanes?" Well, I never thought about it. He talked me into going out to the airport and taking a lesson. I fell in love with it! I started flying and got my pilot license. The G.I. bill helped me pay for it.

MARK JUNGE: You were basically a helicopter pilot?

DON FELTNER: Well, not a rated helicopter pilot. See, the crew chief position is not normally a flying crew member. The crew chief tends to all of the maintenance aspects of the airplane, but you get to fly too. So you're sitting there in the helicopter and there's nothing going on--sure, you get to fly. It's 1987 and by this time I was in the Air Guard. In 1987, I was doing more maintenance than flying. I kind of missed the flying side so I went and checked into the flight instructor programs so I could at least fly a little on the side. I became a flight instructor in 1987 and continued that as part-time throughout my military career.

MARK JUNGE: But Don, you didn't even fly an airplane.

DON FELTNER: Yes, yes, yes. I learned to fly airplanes in 1975 from the helicopter pilot who was also an airplane flight instructor.

MARK JUNGE: Okay. So he thought you were pretty good at both and said, "Why don't you be a flight instructor for the airlines?" Not the airlines--the Guard.

DON FELTNER: Not the airlines--for flight instructor. November 1970 until February 1978-- I was in the Air Force. In 1975, I learned to fly civilian airplanes. This is when I had become just a private pilot. Then I got out of the Air Force in 1978. In 1982, I joined the Air Guard until my retirement in 2005. Actually, I

just retired from active Air Guard. I had to stay until age 60 and do something called the "ready reserve." You're not actually going to work every day, but you are in the reserve. When you're in the Guard, you don't get your retirement or your retirement pay until you are 60 years old. So even though I left when I was only 52--or 53--I didn't get any retirement pay until I turned 60. In 1987, though, while I was still in the Guard --that's when I became an instructor. So, when I retired in 2005, I had to have some income so I went to work for Sky Harbor as the head of their flight instruction program and went to work for them for about two years. Most fixed base operator's--that's what the guy who sells gas and everything at the airport is called--buy their contract from the airport and a lot of them have to run a flight school. Flight schools, by nature, generally don't generate a lot of money. Basically, they only put enough money into it to keep it running for their contract.

MARK JUNGE: Does it not make money anywhere or just in Cheyenne?

DON FELTNER: Anywhere. Typically, the flight schools that are tied to fixed base operators don't make a lot of money.

MARK JUNGE: Well, why do they have them?

DON FELTNER: They are required by contract by the airport to supply a flight school for the area. If the Air Force didn't do this, there wouldn't be any flight school there. You'd only have your flight schools at big places like Prescott, Arizona or Orlando, Florida or stuff like that.

MARK JUNGE: You would think that the market would dictate that they did--that they go to the big schools just like when the airports weren't deregulated and they cut out these small routes and had to get subsidies. You'd think if you wanted to be a pilot you would go to Arizona.

DON FELTNER: Yes, but--how many people do you know they could just quit their job and go to flight school? How many people have you come across through the ages that really want to go back to college but they are working in a blue-collar job or something and really need to support their family?

MARK JUNGE: I was thinking probably of a young guy just out of the service--in fact, I thought most guys did that--they either learned in the service or soon as I got out they went to…

DON FELTNER: Typically, that used to be true. The G.I. bill came around after World War II helped and all these guys get their law degrees, doctors degrees and helped them all to become these pilots. That's when the airline industry was really starting to grow. So, typically, a military pilot's license is not necessarily a civilian license.

MARK JUNGE: Why not?

DON FELTNER: You can go flying an F-16...so you can fly and F-16. Do you think you can jump from an F-16 to a 747? (They both laugh).

MARK JUNGE: No.

DON FELTNER: Okay, so, on the civilian side, it's all about the different ratings, the advancement through the schools. Then when you get advanced in the ratings, then when you go to work for somebody with bigger airplanes. Then they train you on their equipment.

MARK JUNGE: I work out at the YMCA, like I told you. I talked to a guy who said, "Look, the feds have changed their regulations and now you have to have 1500 hours. Who is going to be a pilot if it takes 1500 hours of flight time?

DON FELTNER: He is right, but he's only got part of the picture. If you are just "Joe blow" off street wanting to fly for the airlines, you've got to have 1500 hrs. to do that. So people go through and get their ratings, private instrument, commercial, multi-engine and they get their instructor ratings and then they instruct for a year or two. Or, they go crop dusting for a year or two. Or they go fly freight or game surveys or pipeline surveys or for the Highway Patrol-- air ambulances. See, that 1500 hrs. is only for the scheduled airliners. You don't have to have 1500 hrs. to be a pilot. You have to have 1500 hrs. to go to work for a scheduled airliner.

MARK JUNGE: Wouldn't that necessarily cut down on the number of people who are available to be pilots?

DON FELTNER: Yes. Yes. And the industry is actually starting to suffer a little bit from that right now. Great Lakes is having a heckuva time maintaining their-- because they actually had some people, who when that went into effect last August… August 13 I believe it was, when that law went into effect they actually had to lay people off who did not have 1500 hrs.-They were actively flying as copilots every day.

MARK JUNGE: Well, what is the purpose of the law?

DON FELTNER: It was a government knee-jerk reaction to an accident.

MARK JUNGE: Yes, but there've been accidents all along the airline industry.

DON FELTNER: Do you remember the Colgan airline$_1$ crash in Buffalo (NY) about five years ago, where basically, on approach in the class, the pilots stalled the airplane and killed, you know, 80 people? They said the guy didn't have enough experience… that he didn't have enough time.

MARK JUNGE: Buffalo, New York?

DON FELTNER: Yes.

MARK JUNGE: So he killed 80 people, and right after that?

DON FELTNER: Of course, the public starts yelling, "We've got to have enough regulation to fix this." Well, they didn't look just at this individual… Okay, so now, from now on everybody who wants to be a copilot-- They didn't look at just this individual one. Now from now on…ok, everybody who wants to be a copilot has to have 1500 hours. The pilot of that airplane had actually flunked five check rides. Five company check rides to be a pilot, he actually flunked five!

MARK JUNGE: How could they let him fly?

DON FELTNER: The dollar, I guess.

MARK JUNGE: Who let him fly?

DON FELTNER: Colgan Airlines.

MARK JUNGE: Yes, but not the government. At that time, was Colgan Airlines able to hire a guy they thought was incompetent? The federal government didn't step in and just say, "Now this guy..."

DON FELTNER: Now, wait a minute-- what role does the federal government have in telling a guy who they can hire? They don't.

MARK JUNGE: Oh, okay. So the 1500 hrs. is where the federal government DID step in?

DON FELTNER: Right. It used to be--and it still is--what they called an ATP. That's basically the highest rating-- the airline transport pilot. To get this rating, you had to have that 1500 hrs. or you could not be the pilot--you could be the copilot--but you could not be the pilot of a scheduled airliner without that. So this was already in place for the pilots and the system worked well. A pilot/copilot--they are a team. The copilot--she only had about 300 hours of total time. The company had hired her because she was cheap to hire. And a lot of companies do this--they will hire the inexperienced people, put them in the copilot's seat, and get them their training and then when they get to their 1500 hrs., by that time they are competent to move to the other seat.

MARK JUNGE: Then it wasn't her fault--she only had 300 hours of learning?

DON FELTNER: Right, but it is always the crew's fault because they are supposed to work together. Sometimes that crew doesn't mesh.

MARK JUNGE: If I were sitting in that copilot's seat and trying to be a copilot and I had 50 hours and we crashed--would that be my fault? I mean, would it be the team's fault or would it be my fault?

DON FELTNER: It's the team's fault, but it always falls to the guy who's in the left seat--the pilot.

MARK JUNGE: That’s really interesting.

DON FELTNER: But it doesn't really matter whose fault it was--80 people are still dead and that's the tragedy of the thing. The tragedy of the thing is, "we don't want to hurt anybody's feelings by telling them they can’t be a pilot." So we are just kind of like, "help them along, help them along"... I don't want to get into the politics and everything, but look at the school system, where they just pass kids on and on and on

MARK JUNGE: And that's tragic. Does that happen in the aviation industry?

DON FELTNER: I would like to think not, but as we have become shorter and shorter of pilots available--what are you going to do? Hopefully, some of these bigger flight schools that that's all that they do--

these colleges that have flight programs--they will step up or vamp up the program because the 1500 hrs. is only for "Joe Blow" off the street to be the copilot now. If you graduate from one of these colleges that have a degree program-- with an aviation degree-- now you can do it with 1000 hours. You can now be hired with 1000 hours. I said a while ago that the military and the civilian are kind of two different worlds--by regulation, two different worlds. But the military trained some pretty fine pilots. If you leave the military and you have taken the opportunity to get the civilian ratings, because when you go through military pilot training--when you get to a certain stage--you can actually go down and see the local "feds" and get your private license because you met all those requirements. At another stage, you can go down and get your insular rating but you have got to go take a checkride with a federal FAA examiner and get those ratings so that when you get out of the military-- yes, you may not know all the ins and outs of the regulations applied to the civilians, but at least you've got some experience in the ratings. If you go through that route, you only have to have 700 hours because the military turns out some fine pilots. The military also--you know, we talked about helping people along--the military has some pretty strict criteria-- at this point if you don't have this or that, you are out of the program. They can wash people out.

MARK JUNGE: As I understand it, it had something to do with winning the war, although there are a lot of other factors, we had better pilots.

DON FELTNER: Okay, absolutely more experienced pilots. Just because of the world situation and the economics, the military now is turning out fewer and fewer pilots. We do not have near as many pilots as we is to have. We don't need as many anymore. We are not flying as many missions. We fly different equipment. Plus, a lot of people are looking at this and are opting to stay in the military 20 or 25 years and fly for the military for 20 or 30 years rather than getting out after eight, 10 or 12 and going to fly for the civilians.

MARK JUNGE: Why? why don't they just stay where things are secure and where they're going to have a pension?

DON FELTNER: Right! And that's what more and more of them are doing now.

MARK JUNGE: So, it's a chance, by going into the private enterprise, there's a chance that you won't get what you want; whereas the military--it's a little easier to manage your life? You are not in the military now, are you?

DON FELTNER: No.

MARK JUNGE: You are in private enterprise. What are the advantages?

DON FELTNER: Well, between me and you, the main reason I left the military when I did after 30 years-- I had just completed my sixth deployment to the "desert" and I'd had enough. I had been to Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait-- yes, I am a veteran of several wars.

MARK JUNGE: Did you see tough times or action?

DON FELTNER: You know, for those of us who were on the crew chief side--the maintenance side, you see what's going on but you are not physically in harm's way at every moment like the ground troops and stuff.

MARK JUNGE: Nobody's coming by dropping a load of bombs on you?

DON FELTNER: There are bases that get mortar attacks on a regular basis, but it's not like somebody's pointing a pistol at you every minute of the day and night.

MARK JUNGE: Did you see any action then? I mean, did you have mortars thrown at you?

DON FELTNER: More than once we could see ground fire. Now our airplanes--our C-130 airplanes--we were actually one of the lead units in the Afghanistan war. We spent 9 1/2 months flying in and out of combat every day, and, by the grace of God, in the first 9 1/2 months, we did not have one bullet hole in the airplanes.

MARK JUNGE: How do you account for that? Luck?

DON FELTNER: Yes, probably the luck, the training-- the guys knowing--getting the training on how to invade areas, how to escape areas, how to arrive at certain areas, and, we did a good majority of the fighting at night with night vision goggles. You know, the enemy we were facing was not necessarily the best trained or best-equipped army in the world. They were going to win through attrition because there were just so many of them, so luck had a lot to do with it. A lot of it was the training because before we went over there, we constantly were training how to avoid and how to fly in and out of places so we had some pretty good crews:

MARK JUNGE: And it seems to me like your job--you were an aviation maintenance mechanic--it seems like there would be a lot of responsibility on your shoulders, especially if you're the person who is checking to make sure everything was done.

DON FELTNER: Well, we took a lot of pride in the fact that when we sent an airplane out, we knew we had checked all the nuts and bolts and we had a pretty good idea that the airplane was going to come back.

MARK JUNGE: Yes and when it didn't? If it didn't?

DON FELTNER: We didn't have any that didn't. We did not have any that didn't come back.

MARK JUNGE: Oh really? C-130s?

DON FELTNER: Yes. There were other units that did, yes. There were other units over there with us that did lose airplanes and crews.

MARK JUNGE: Were you a grunt--what they call a "grunt"--or were you an inspector? Or were you a team leader on maintenance? Did you actually turn the wrenches or did you supervise?

DON FELTNER: As the crew chief, I did it all. I did everything from supervising the people that were working on my airplane--the fuelers, people cleaning it to changing engines if I needed to dumping toilets.. .whatever needed to be done.

MARK JUNGE: I shouldn't have said "grunt." What I meant to say was..

DON FELTNER:. The wrench turner.

MARK JUNGE: Right.

DON FELTNER: Yes, because when you think grunt, I automatically thought of the Army guy in the mud... but as the crew chief, I was basically the team leader. I would supervise all of the maintenance and everything on the airplane. However, when the airplane went someplace, the crew chief was the only person who went with it so that if we broke down, I had to do things to be able to get the airplane going again.

MARK JUNGE: Well, if you didn't have any parts, what you do?

DON FELTNER: There's things you can do.

MARK JUNGE: Bailing wire?

DON FELTNER: Well, you carry with you something called a "combat kit." In it, there are limited parts… stuff that's most likely to go wrong. So anyway, Now you understand the chronology. In 2005, I went to work for the local FBO--fixed base operator. I would run it and I kept wanting to build the program up but, "No, we want to spend the money on that."

MARK JUNGE: Sky Harbor said that?

DON FELTNER: Right. Because the other program had worked this way and they had their programs that they had devoted their money into that basically brought profits back into the company. One day I finally said to the president of the company, "Look. This school is never going to grow like this." He says, "Do you want it?"

Yeah.

So we got an agreement with the airport just to break the flight school off from Sky Harbor and making it a special entity. The airport agreed that Sky Harbor did not have to run a flight school.

MARK JUNGE: Were they subsidized in that respect? When they had it, where they subsidized?

DON FELTNER: No.

MARK JUNGE: So they didn't see it as a business at all?

DON FELTNER: They didn't see it as the profit-making side of the business.

MARK JUNGE: And you did?

DON FELTNER: Well, I saw it had potential. What we've done over the years--we incorporated on Valentine's Day, 2007--then we ended up taking the company over, taking the flight school from Sky Harbor in September of that same year.

MARK JUNGE: When you first went into this, or decided that you were going to go into this, were you confident that you could make a living?

DON FELTNER: Absolutely not! But! I had a wife who is retired that had a pension and I was retired and going to get a pension.

MARK JUNGE: What is her name?

DON FELTNER: Veronica.

MARK JUNGE: Veronica. And she worked for the…?

DON FELTNER: The telephone company.

MARK JUNGE: So she had health insurance. Did you have health insurance-- your own policy--for you and your employees?

DON FELTNER: Yes I have insurance--retired military through Tri-Care.

MARK JUNGE: Did you have any doubts?

DON FELTNER: Yes! And I still do! When we have months like the last two or three months where we have weather that to where our flying has been way down-- because if the props aren't turning, then money is not coming in.

MARK JUNGE: How tough is it to get students?

DON FELTNER: Actually, there is a pretty good base of students here simply because we have built ourselves up to what is called an FAA-approved flight school. "Uncle Joe", if he has an instructor's license and an airplane, he can take you out and teach you to fly. But there is a different set of rules covering FAA-approved flight schools and that's what we've got here. We actually had to build program with syllabuses, lessons plans, ground school classes--we basically have training for the instructors, maintenance programs for the airplanes-- we had to build all of these programs. We built all of these programs up and the FAA approved them. Since we did all this, if you have some sort of a scholarship or G.I. bill, then you can now use those at this school. If "Uncle Joe" is teaching you to fly, then you can’t use your G.I. bill.

MARK JUNGE: Does ground school come concomitantly at the same time?

DON FELTNER: One of the great assets in our school is that our ground school and the flight training is done concurrently. So you'll learn a little bit in the ground school and go put it to use on the airplane. It works great that way. The normal way is to go out to Laramie County community college (LCCC)-- if "uncle Joe" is teaching you to fly, sit through ground school class for three months, sitting in a classroom

and trying to learn these things that you've never seen and then three months later, go try to put it to use on an airplane. That's the way it's been done for years and years and years.

MARK JUNGE: The way you do it, do you think it's more effective?

DON FELTNER: Absolutely! Our students graduate from our program with an average of 20 hours less than the time than the national average is just because of incorporating the flying with the ground school, the textbooks, the DVDs and flying--incorporating them altogether--they get the material quicker.

MARK JUNGE: And plus making other brain contacts when they are up in the air thinking about these things.

DON FELTNER: Right. Now they are taking something that they just learned from the textbook or DVD and they are applying it. Then that day, or the very next day, we are putting them in the airplane while it still fresh in their minds.

MARK JUNGE: If nothing else, it saves you the cost of gas. I mean, if you're able to do 20 less hours with these people up in the air with these guys-- you don't have to spend the time or...

DON FELTNER: Well, that's true. But the training-- the cost of training is based on the number of hours that you spend in the airplane because some people do take more hours than other people. You take a young man or woman who is 17/18 years of age and they're still in the learning phase--they know how to study and stuff. Boy, they just take right to it and they do it in a minimum number of hours. We work with a lot of people that are older, they have raised their families and they are now in their 50s or 60s--it's a little bit harder to study and to learn.

MARK JUNGE: Right. The mind is not as flexible.

DON FELTNER: Right. It's not that they are any less capable or anything--that's just the way it is in human nature. The older we get, the harder it is to retain items. I actually had one student that took his check ride to become a pilot on Monday; two days later he turned 75 years old.

MARK JUNGE: What kind of a pilot was he?

DON FELTNER: Pretty good! I don't know if you know Doran Lummis...

MARK JUNGE: Yes.

DON FELTNER: He is Cynthia Lummis's father-- I taught him to fly and he was well into his 60s. Excellent student. And the more mature, if I can use that term. Yes, their reaction time is not as quick -- it's like this one gentleman who turned 75 two days after he got his pilot's license--he knew his reaction time was not as quick and everything, so he would plan things out ahead of time to where every landing would be planned. "I am going to do this at this time and that at time." It was so that he didn't have to make these huge corrections and stuff.

MARK JUNGE: That leads me to the question that I've been wanting to ask somebody like you for a long time: what kind of a person does it take to be a good pilot?

DON FELTNER: Someone who is aggressive, can take charge, analyze the situation and make the appropriate decision based on the material that they get.

MARK JUNGE: It's more than just common sense, isn't it?

DON FELTNER: Yes. You're familiar with type A/type B personalities? Type A personalities normally leave the program.

MARK JUNGE: Six just seems to me like these guys are disabled to focus on what's ahead of them.

DON FELTNER: That's true. And believe it or not, the dropout rate for pilot training in the US is 50%.

MARK JUNGE: Because people find out or instructors find out?

DON FELTNER: Normally the people make the decision themselves that it is not for them. I can usually tell within the first three or four hours whether the person is going to be able to complete the training. Just because they have the ability to do it doesn't necessarily mean they have the drive to do it because it does take a certain amount of commitment. A lot of people in our society nowadays are all "entertain us, let me see the TV, let me see my cell phone, blah blah blah." A lot of people are not willing--and this is the number one reason for that 50%--they are not willing to make a commitment. For every hour that they spend in the air, they're going to spend four hours studying.

MARK JUNGE: Do you have to be good at math?

DON FELTNER: You don't have to be, but it helps.

MARK JUNGE: Really? Physics?

DON FELTNER: Physics? Basic science, to where you can understand pressures and air flows, helps. But it's not required.

MARK JUNGE: Let me ask you about this Jessica Dubroff$_2$--Do remember that crash?

DON FELTNER: Yes. I was here. I was right there at the airport when it happened. I had my own opinion on that that I don't want to get into a lot of detail on. I was going to bring that up in the conversation when you were asking me about people who quit. In all of my 27 years of instructing, only three times have I had to take somebody aside and tell them that they need to find a different hobby or different something that they want to do. Most people realize it on their own beforehand. We, as instructors, have an awesome responsibility to ensure that that person is not only physically capable, mentally capable of doing this, but that they also have those judgment skills and they can do these things. The Jessica Dubroff accident was no more than a case of sensationalism-- somebody trying to make a name, trying to make a movie--that's all that was.

MARK JUNGE: Somebody could've said at the airport, "You need to deice." Or, did they deice?

DON FELTNER: Ice was not a factor in that. Ice had nothing to do with it.

MARK JUNGE: Oh, I thought it was.

DON FELTNER: No

MARK JUNGE: They were overweight?

DON FELTNER: I it t was one of the factors, but they took off and flew underneath a thunderstorm. They tried to out climb a downdraft. The downdraft is 4000 foot a minute and the airplane is only capable of climbing 200 to 300 foot a minute. Guess what?

MARK JUNGE: So that draft sucked them down?

DON FELTNER: Yes. They tried to maintain altitude but it kept pulling them back and pulling them back. When you get to a certain speed, the airplane ceases to fly because you have got to have a certain amount of airflow across the...

MARK JUNGE: Is that what you call a stall?

DON FELTNER: Yes.

MARK JUNGE: Does it hit the tail first?

DON FELTNER: No.

MARK JUNGE: It stalls and goes nose first?

DON FELTNER: Normally, if there is enough room. Many times when it stalls and they are close enough to the ground, many times when it stalls it doesn't have enough room to go all the way over.

MARK JUNGE: I don't understand why anyone would be allowed…

DON FELTNER: Now, wait a minute. Stop right there! Once again, we live in a free society. This is one of the prices that we pay for that. Somebody said, "Well, the towers should've told them that they couldn't take off." No. That is not the towers' role. The role of the tower is to separate traffic. The only time that the tower will tell you not to take off, to hold on, is if there is another airplane in the way. The tower did advise them of the weather. An airliner--who was it that had United contract before Great Lakes--Mesa, I think it was, rolled out to the runway--the airliner looked down the runway and said, "Huh. We're not taking off." They went back into the terminal. Those two people--the instructor and the girl's father—rolled down to the runway and said, "We've got a camera crew waiting in North Platte, Nebraska. We've got to go." And they took off in a small, underpowered, overloaded airplane. Now, you've probably got a limited amount of knowledge about aviation--let's just say you're a pilot and you pull onto the runway and you take off--and an airliner, and airplane with jet engines and train crews and all of these other capabilities says, "I'm not taking off!" Would you take off?

MARK JUNGE: No, but I would assume the tower would clear me to fly--they would save me if there was a problem that I couldn't take off.

DON FELTNER: No, no, no. We live in a free society. The tower does not tell you…

MARK JUNGE: So in your own judgment, even though you see this big airliner…

DON FELTNER: The only time that the tower is going to tell you that you can't take off is if there is a conflict with another airplane. I'll bet if you went back and saw the tapes, the tower would have said, "be advised…" And the airliner went back to the terminal.

MARK JUNGE: Do they have audiotapes or visual?

DON FELTNER: Audio.

MARK JUNGE: They kept this as evidence, I would assume.

DON FELTNER: Anytime there's an accident.

MARK JUNGE: Whose fault was this? It wasn't Jessica is because she was how old, seven?

DON FELTNER: It was the flight instructor's.

MARK JUNGE: Wasn't her dad there too?

DON FELTNER: He was in the backseat.

MARK JUNGE: The flight instructor should have said, "Hey, Bud, I don't think your daughter should try this." That was his responsibility.

DON FELTNER: Well, yes.

MARK JUNGE: They're all three gone right now.

DON FELTNER: Yes, it was tragic that it happened but it was nothing more than sensationalism. If you are going to do some sort of a record-breaking thing in an airplane, the best time to do it is in the fall of the year. We don't have a lot of thunderstorms in the fall, there's cooler air, the weather is better and you can do these things.

MARK JUNGE: When was this?

DON FELTNER: April--right in the middle of tornado season, thunderstorm season all the way across the country. Here is the deal--she (Jessica Dubroff) was 10 years old. The fall before, a flight instructor with his grandson--because the grandfather happened to be a flight instructor--did the same thing and his grandson was 11. If she had waited until the fall--because her birthday was in May--they had to get this done before she turned 11.

MARK JUNGE: Well, let's go to her side of it. I'm her father or I'm her flight instructor and I know she can handle it...

DON FELTNER: She can handle things… what are we saying?

MARK JUNGE: She's a competent pilot.

DON FELTNER: No, she wasn't. In no way, shape or form, was she authorized to be a pilot. You cannot solo an airplane--that's when you become a pilot--when you solo an airplane and you are at least 16 years old.

MARK JUNGE: Well, then how could she even have legally gotten into the cockpit?

DON FELTNER: Because she was with an instructor.

MARK JUNGE: But he had control, right?

DON FELTNER: Absolutely! So guess who was really flying the airplane? Now, could she manipulate the controls? Possibly. Could you teach a 10-year-old to manipulate the controls to possibly take off and land? Probably.

MARK JUNGE: Do you use that as a case study when you teach your students?

DON FELTNER: When I teach my instructors. I have a copy of the Time magazine that featured that the very next month that I keep on my desk at home that I teach every one of my instructors--it's because of the awesome responsibility instructors have and they need to take it serious. Many, many, many instructors--and this is just the nature of the business--the only reason they are instructing is because they are building time to go work for the airlines. They don't really have a lot of instructing. I'm not going to take anything away from them because a lot of them end up being pretty good instructors.

MARK JUNGE: At this flight school, you teach instructors how to teach others how to fly?

DON FELTNER: Absolutely.

MARK JUNGE: I thought you taught people how to fly.

DON FELTNER: Sir, we teach private pilots instrument rating, commercial pilots, multiengine pilots, flight instructors, multi-engine instructors and airline transport pilots.

MARK JUNGE: Oh, okay. I had mixed up the student with the instructor.

DON FELTNER: Any rating that you could get in an airplane, except for seaplanes-- because we don't have any seaplanes here--you can get at this flight school.

MARK JUNGE: I gotcha. Jets?

DON FELTNER: No. Because jets is something--it's not a rated--it's something called a pipe rating. Remember a while ago when I said if you get your commercial, go through all your training and then

when you go to work for somebody they train you on their individual equipment because let's think about the cost of learning to fly in a jet. It would be cost prohibitive.

MARK JUNGE: Because of the cost of the fuel?

DON FELTNER: Not the fuel, the airplane. You can't find a new jet for less than $20 million.

MARK JUNGE: So if I want to learn how to fly a jet, I can't do it here, right?

DON FELTNER: You don't need to. You get your ratings and you become a pilot. Then when you get hired by whatever airline, if they have jets, they teach you their equipment. You get your "ratings" at the flight school.

MARK JUNGE: Here's where I am confused, Don. Aren't jets very much different in the way they handle and the way they take off than a regular airplane?

DON FELTNER: Just faster. Just faster.

MARK JUNGE: That's it? Nothing special you need to know about jets?

DON FELTNER: You pull back on the wheel, the nose goes up. You push forward on the wheel, and the nose goes down. Push the throttles forward and the engines go faster. Push the left panel and the nose goes to the left. Push the right panel and the nose goes to the right.

MARK JUNGE: Gosh. That's a revelation to me!

DON FELTNER: I'm going to give you a test this afternoon so you can get a license. (They both laugh). I enjoy this stuff way too much. I have a blast! I instruct because I really enjoy doing it.

MARK JUNGE: I can see where you're good at it. You are enthusiastic but I want to go way back. What was your first interest in aviation.

DON FELTNER: This may sound corny, but it wasn't long after we moved to Ohio. We would go to church on Sunday morning, come home and have a big Sunday dinner. And then before church on Sunday evening, the family would go for a ride. There was this little country airport that my dad liked to go out to. They would park and they would let me stand there and watch the airplanes take off and land. That may sound a little corny, but that was it. To me still, to this day--I have over 30 years of experience as an aircraft mechanic and 40 years of experience as a pilot--it still amazes me to this day how we can take a piece of metal and it flies. Think about some of these huge airliners--they weigh almost 1 million pounds--900,000 pounds. A 777 dream loader--fully loaded--is like 880,000 pounds. If you threw that into the water, it wouldn't float! Yet, with the pressure from the air across the wings, the thrust in the engines, it flies through the air at 600 miles an hour

MARK JUNGE: Okay, where we are going to go now is that I want to know something about "Wings of Wyoming" and then Santa.

DON FELTNER: “Wings of Wyoming” was incorporated February 14, 2007. My wife blames it on my knee surgery. I had a knee replaced and I was lying around in this drug-induced stupor writing out a business plan: "Hey, this can work." So I put together a Board of Directors and…

MARK JUNGE: How did you know it would work?

DON FELTNER: Well, I put a lot of thought into it, put a lot of research into it and put a lot of prayer into it. People can say what they want about the power prayer, but even if.... I believe in divine intervention in everything, but even if a person doesn't--if they take time to pray, it slows them down to meditate and think about what they are doing.

MARK JUNGE: I think you're right about that. And that's pretty profound.

DON FELTNER: I don't want to belittle my faith in God but there are times when you just need to slow down and think. And, I saw the need for it. Every day, I saw people wanting it and wanting to advance. People wanted to use their G.I. bill benefits and they couldn't because it was not an FAA-approved flight school.

MARK JUNGE: But you also have to be hardheaded about it--you had to come up with an economic plan.. You had to come up with an economic justification--you couldn't just say, "well, I like the idea of teaching these guys because they are nice guys." Right?

DON FELTNER: Yes. In a small business like this, the economic side does not work. It doesn't simply because we take every dime we make in profit and it goes into the airplanes up grading radios, upgrading engines so we don't take any profit out of the school--it goes right back into the school.

MARK JUNGE: So, the only thing you've got in your life--at the end of the road--is a nest egg.

DON FELTNER: Well… yes. The school itself--if I was to sell the school tomorrow--its reputation and the fact that it is an FAA-Approved flight school is worth several hundred thousand dollars. The airplanes--we have built equity into all of the airplanes. The airplanes are worth way more than what we owe.

MARK JUNGE: How many do you have?

DON FELTNER: We have four airplanes. We have two Cessna's, a Piper and a Beech Baron.

MARK JUNGE: Okay, you got four airplanes. How many instructors?

DON FELTNER: We have seven instructors.

MARK JUNGE: Besides yourself, who else works for the company?

DON FELTNER: All of our flight instructors, for economic reasons, are on contract. We've got Rodney who is retired Air Force and works part-time. We have another fairly active instructor who is still in the Air Force full-time. He just works on evenings and weekends. We've got another instructor who works full-time for the airlines so he comes and works with us on his day off. We have another instructor who is a financial advisor-- he sell stocks and stuff--he just does this part-time.

MARK JUNGE: How many people are right on the premises?

DON FELTNER: Normally, there are three of us here.

DON FELTNER: Me, another instructor and usually a mechanic. We have two mechanics besides me.

MARK JUNGE: How can you run a business on a part-time basis when you have people and students who want your services?

DON FELTNER: Scheduling. It's all scheduling. Every student is assigned a primary instructor and they work one-on-one with that instructor.

MARK JUNGE: They schedule it themselves between the two of them?

DON FELTNER: Right. We have online scheduling so they don't have to come out here--they can do it all online.

MARK JUNGE: Do you turn wrenches on all of your airplanes?

DON FELTNER: Yes.

MARK JUNGE: So are you the one who can actually approve maintenance on a regular basis?

DON FELTNER: Yes.

MARK JUNGE: Is that a special license?

DON FELTNER: No, it's an A&P license for the regular oil changes and any maintenance they need. All of the airplanes have to have what is called an "annual inspection" at least once a year. We have an aircraft inspector out of Greeley, Colorado and he is here constantly. He not only does our airplanes, he does other airplanes in area.

MARK JUNGE: What's an AMP?

DON FELTNER: Airframe and power plant. You can work on the airframe and power plant.

MARK JUNGE: Why did you call it "Wings of Wyoming?"

DON FELTNER: Well, we wanted "Wings Over Wyoming" but that name was already taken. There is an airshow in Casper that has that name now. I wanted to keep the "WOW" logo.

MARK JUNGE: Okay, how many more years are you going to do this?

DON FELTNER: I actually had plans when I turned 60, about a year and a half ago, to kind of fade out of the picture and let somebody else take it over because of certain economic times and changes within the industry that haven't progressed the way I wanted it to. Rodney and Tony… I'm turning more and more duties over to them to where I can kind of pull back.

MARK JUNGE: Are you still going to fly after you retire?

DON FELTNER: Absolutely! Another one of my jobs here in Wyoming….I am actually what is called a DPE... "designated pilot examiner". When you want a pilot's license, when you get ready for the check rides to get the license, I'm the one who gives those check rides. I certify all of the pilots in Wyoming, a lot from western Nebraska, some from northern Colorado and southwest South Dakota.

MARK JUNGE: Really, you are spread that far out?

DON FELTNER: Yes.

MARK JUNGE: What's your reputation here--Wings of Wyoming?

DON FELTNER: Reputation?

MARK JUNGE: Yes, why wouldn't somebody go down to Denver--let's say somebody from Scottsbluff--why wouldn't they go down to Denver?

DON FELTNER: Convenience and... cost plays a factor because of our cost of living here in Cheyenne. We can do things a little bit less expensively that they can, say in Loveland. Plus, we are an FAA-approved flight school--the one in Loveland is not so they (people) can use their G.I. bill here.

MARK JUNGE: Why don't you run a charter flight business?

DON FELTNER: I don't have time.

MARK JUNGE: Could you do that as a sideline?

DON FELTNER: I could if I wanted to buy more airplanes and hire more people, but right now I'm at a point in my life where I kind of need to start backing out a little bit.

MARK JUNGE: Why?

DON FELTNER: Because I don't play as much golf as Obama.

MARK JUNGE: Oh boy! Wait a minute…we weren't supposed to get into politics.

DON FELTNER: I'm not into politics, but the man has played over 700 rounds of golf since he got into office. Since he's been in office, I think I played four--that's just not fair! Okay, he may be a little bit busier in his job than I have in mind but... I will always be involved even if I'm not running the flight school. Always be involved if I'm just part-time instructing or giving check rides.

MARK JUNGE: Are you saying, basically, that you're tired of being an administrator and having all of the responsibilities but you still love aviation?

DON FELTNER: I would love to have a manager who took care of the business side and all I did was come in and work with the students. That would be great!

MARK JUNGE: What about turning wrenches?

DON FELTNER: I would do that too.

MARK JUNGE: Really? You are a people person. Does that help?

DON FELTNER: I'm a little bit gregarious, yes.

MARK JUNGE: Does it help in the business?

DON FELTNER: It's a must because how can you… picture the airplane...did you look inside the airplane and see how much room was in there?

MARK JUNGE: I know there's not much.

DON FELTNER: And I'm not a little bitty guy. You're sitting in their shoulder-to-shoulder with someone in a confined...plus, you're teaching them stuff that can be life or death. It's pretty serious. What I have to do and what I do constantly is that I get to know the students. I get to know every student that I fly with and get to know something about their personal life. When someone comes in to either fly with you or do business with you or something and you know that their son had a problem with hitting a fastball and you bring it up, "Well, how's he doing?" That just makes their day that someone has put an interest in to them. Someone that has a sick grandmother, "Well, how's grandma doing? Is she doing any better today?"

MARK JUNGE: Where did you learn this? Were you born with it?

DON FELTNER: I come from a big family and a lot of stuff I learned from my military career. One of my extra duty jobs that I was in the Air Force was that I was in EEO counselor. So I learned--I worked with people that had some pretty big problems like sexual harassment problems…

MARK JUNGE: Oh, equal employment opportunity.

DON FELTNER: Yes, EEO. We had a union over there and I was union president for a while...

MARK JUNGE: And you are a Republican?

DON FELTNER: Oh yeah!

MARK JUNGE: And you were the union president?

DON FELTNER: Absolutely.

MARK JUNGE: How does that square in your mind?

DON FELTNER: Well, why not? If the unions were run properly, which they are not, unions should not be endorsing political parties. They should be concerned with their people and their company.

MARK JUNGE: Do you like unions?

DON FELTNER: At one time, I think the unions played a very important part in our society. Remember the coal mine that I talked about? When the coal miners would go to work and you lived in company housing and you bought at the company store; at the end of the month, you are always little bit short of what you made-- if that isn't slave labor, I don't know what is-- but the unions changed all that. They changed history on all that. There are other places where the unions haven't done such a good job-- they've actually run businesses out of business.

MARK JUNGE: Let me ask year, before we quit, about Santa-- tell me about that.

DON FELTNER: Santa is a non-union job. (They both laugh).

MARK JUNGE: Are you sure about that? There are a lot of Santas around...maybe they're organizing and you don't know about it! Tell me about this experience as Santa. As a preface all of this, I saw you act as Santa Claus and your wife act as Mrs. Claus about a week ago or a little less at the airport. I want to know how you got roped into that, number one; number two, I want to know what kind of experience it was.

DON FELTNER: Well, years and years and years ago--20 years ago--we became grandparents. When our granddaughter--she's a junior at UW now--when she was about two years old-- typical grandpa, I put on a Santa suit and played Santa Claus. She loved it. Then somebody heard I had a Santa suit. "Can you come over and play Santa Claus at our Christmas party?" Oh sure. I can walk into a party and say "Ho, ho, ho." Those kids, when they run up to you, Santa may be just a fantasy but you see the sparkle in those kids' eyes--it's realism to them. It's physical. It's a dream they can grab a hold of. The kids that just come running up to that.. yeah, there are certain number of kids who are just afraid of Santa and they cry. I refuse to let parents put a kid in my lap who is crying. It's not a good experience for them. We don't do that. Over here at the airport, when you walk into the door and there are 100 kids in there who all want to see Santa. Everybody says, "Well, they just want something." I got this little collection of stuff I've gotten over the years-- "Santa, I made this for you." "Santa, I brought you a cookie." "Santa, would you bring my brother this?" It's not all selfish. You say, "What do you want?" "I want a Barbie doll." That's part of it. But these kids' hearts -- it's worth it!

MARK JUNGE: What were some of the reactions that you got this time? I'm curious, because I was there.

DON FELTNER: I can't think of anything unusual this year at the airport but Santa also shows up over the Air Guard for the kids who have a lot of parents that are deployed (you have to excuse me on this) but "Santa, would you bring my daddy home?" (Emotional). Sorry. What an idiot.

MARK JUNGE: No. I understand.

DON FELTNER: So when you can put out something that is real to these kids where they can touch… Yeah. So do I get tired of putting on that suit a half a dozen times a year and going to all these engagements--especially when I'm not feeling well--yes, but… an hour with the kids goes by like that because you're having so much fun!

MARK JUNGE: What about your wife? How does she feel about it?

DON FELTNER: When we first started doing it, I didn't notice a lot of enthusiasm on her part. She actually made my suit and everything. She's just a great seamstress and florist. Martha Stewart has nothing on my wife! But anyway, at one of the-- at Christmas house--they have a Mrs. Santa there. She decided it was a pretty good idea because a lot of Santas don't have a Mrs. Claus. The next thing I know, she came out in that outfit that she had made. And she really looks good in it!

MARK JUNGE: She did. She did! She really looks like Mrs. Claus.

DON FELTNER: She just enjoys it as much as I do.

MARK JUNGE: where did you get the gifts that you hand out for stockings?

DON FELTNER: They are usually provided by-- like the airport here-- they provided them.

MARK JUNGE: What was in that stocking?

DON FELTNER: They vary from year to year. This year there was a little foam airplane, a candy cane and a few different things. At the Air Guard, they actually have a wish list where the interview the parents and see some little old thing the kid wants so they wrap it up and give the kids… they are very organized over there at the Guard.

MARK JUNGE: I saw a kid being pushed on you and you just would not go. He wasn't upset--he didn't cry--but he didn't want any part of you. Do you remember that kid? They kept trying to push him and he kept turning around and going into his mother's arms like "I don't want to do this."

DON FELTNER: Right. That's the point where I tell them, "You can sit here in the chair beside or me stand beside me and have your picture taken..." but I won't hold a kid who is afraid of Santa.

MARK JUNGE: But he didn't cry. He just kept looking at you. Do you have any flying stories--interesting stories about flying? I mean, I was going to ask people about air crashes eventually-- I was going to talk to somebody who was involved or knew of someone who is involved in like the Bomber Mountain crash west of Buffalo (Wyoming)$_3$-- there was an air crash up there. But I mean just stories, interesting stories.

DON FELTNER: Well, we try to keep incidences and stuff to a minimum but at our school here--"Wings of Wyoming"--we have never, never had a student injured or hurt. And, we only had one airplane were they actually did some damage to the airplane.

MARK JUNGE: Do you have any comical stories about some of the people you…

DON FELTNER: Well, I've got several. I don't know if I can share all of them. One of my favorites--and a person would have to know a little bit about different types of airplanes--but our Cessna's, there are papers, there's an airplane called a Maul. It is a single engine high-wing airplane used mostly by bush pilots. I was in the pattern with a female student and we were doing landings over the top of Frontier Mall. The tower called and said, "Okay, whatever the aircraft number was, cleared to land--report the

'maul' in sight -- because the (Frontier) mall was coming up in the other direction." She said, "Well, I'm over it right now." (They both laugh). I guess that possible bit of a stir because the mall was supposed to be over there. So, language once in a while can cause a little bit of…

MARK JUNGE: Did you ever fly anybody important like a celebrity?

DON FELTNER: Sen. Simpson. I used to fly with him on a regular basis when I was working charters for another outfit. Great man! Great man! Have I seen Chuck Yeager?[4] Yes, I've seen Chuck Yeager he was here once of the airport on his way through somewhere else. He was kind of cocky! But you know, it's okay to be cocky if you're good. And he's good.

MARK JUNGE: Did you ever have any scary moments with one of your students?

DON FELTNER: I've had a couple of incidences where I needed to intervene immediately. Normally, we try to not let her progress to that point. Twice I can think of, I had to take some action but normally not. Aviation is described as "hours of boredom interrupted by seconds of terror." I've never had an incident in all my hours of flying where... "We've got to go land and that cornfield." It just doesn't happen. Unless you've done something wrong in your preflight planning and didn't get enough fuel, chances are that's not going to happen.

MARK JUNGE: What is the nicest airplane that you like to be in or to fly?

DON FELTNER: Probably just a small Cessna's because they are so easy to fly. They're just so aerodynamic. Old Clyde Cessna[5] knew what he was doing when he created that airplane. It's fingertip flying, it's hands off flying most of the time.

MARK JUNGE: This has been fun. I really enjoyed this!

DON FELTNER: Well, thank you.

[1]**Colgan Air Flight 3407**, marketed as Continental Connection under a codeshare agreement with Continental Airlines, was a Bombardier Dash-8 Q400, registration number N200WQ, on a scheduled regional airline flight from Newark, New Jersey to Buffalo, New York. On February 12, 2009, at 10:17 p.m. EST the plane crashed into a house in Clarence Center, New York after experiencing an aerodynamic stall. All 49 people on board were killed, along with one person in the house. The accident, which triggered a wave of inquiries over the operations of regional airlines in the United States, was the first fatal accident of a commercial airliner in the U.S. since the August 2006 crash of Comair Flight 191, and was the most recent until the crash of Asiana Airlines Flight 214 on July 6, 2013 in San Francisco. It remains the most recent fatal crash of a U.S.-based commercial airline. Families of the accident's victims lobbied the U.S. Congress to enact more stringent regulations over regional carriers, and apply greater scrutiny to safe operating procedures and the working conditions of pilots. The Airline Safety and Federal Aviation Administrative Extension Act of 2010 required some of these regulation changes. The accident was investigated by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), with a final report issued on February 2, 2010. The NTSB determined that the accident was caused by the pilots' inability to respond properly to the stall warnings. – *Wikipedia*

[2] **Jessica Whitney Dubroff** (May 5, 1988 – April 11, 1996) was a seven-year-old pilot trainee who died attempting to become the youngest person to fly an airplane across the United States. Twenty-four hours into her quest, her Cessna 177B Cardinal single engine propeller aircraft, flown by her flight instructor, crashed after takeoff from Cheyenne Regional Airport in Cheyenne, Wyoming, killing all on board: Dubroff, her father, and her flight instructor. Although billed by the media as a "pilot", Dubroff did not possess a medical certificate or a student pilot certificate, since they require a minimum age of 16, or a pilot certificate which requires a minimum age of 17, according to U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations. There was also no record-keeping body at the time of her trip recognizing any feats by under-age pilots. Nevertheless, national and local news media picked up and publicized her story, and closely followed her "record attempt" until its abrupt ending. The U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigated the crash and concluded it was caused by the flight instructor's improper decision to take off in poor weather conditions, his overloading the aircraft, and his failure to maintain airspeed, which resulted in a stall. The NTSB also determined that "contributing to the [instructor's] decision to take off was a desire to adhere to an overly ambitious itinerary, in part, because of media commitments." – *Wikipedia*

[3]**Bomber Mountain** is the crest of a ridge line within the Big Horn Mountains of the U.S. State of Wyoming. It borders the south side of Cloud Peak, the tallest peak in the range. It is about 23 miles (37 km) west of Buffalo. Bomber Mountain got its name from an aviation accident that occurred in 1943. On 28 June 1943, a B-17F-55-DL Flying Fortress, serial number 42-3399, nicknamed "Scharazad", departed Pendleton Army Air Base in Pendleton, Oregon destined for Grand Island, Nebraska.[2] From there, the bomber would join the other members of the 383d Bomb Group and continue to England to participate in the ongoing World War II bombing campaigns. Around midnight, the captain radioed that their position was near Powder River, Wyoming. They were not heard from again. After they failed to arrive in Grand Island, the plane was declared missing and the Army mounted a search effort with no results. A second search was conducted the following year, concentrating on the Wind River Mountains, Absaroka Mountains and Big Horn Mountains, but still no wreckage was spotted. On 12 August 1945, two cowboys spotted something shiny on a ridge line in the Cloud Peak area of the Big Horn Mountains. They discovered the wreckage and the deceased crew, and contacted authorities, who conducted an operation to recover the bodies of the crew and return them to their families. It was believed that during earlier search efforts, the paint color of the aircraft blended in closely with the mountain side, making the wreckage difficult to spot. After a few years, the paint wore off, and the shiny aluminum underneath made the plane more visible. No official cause for the crash was ever determined, but it is presumed that malfunctioning navigational equipment, and a moonless night combined with bad weather caused the pilot to not see the ridge until it was too late. After a petition by veterans groups in Wyoming, the previously unnamed ridge was christened Bomber Mountain on 22 August 1946 by the U.S. Forest Service. In honor of the crew members, a commemorative plaque was placed on the shores of Florence Lake, 1.5 miles (2.4 km) from the crash site. -- *Wikipedia*

Crew

William R. Ronaghan (pilot) [2]

Anthony J. Tilotta (co-pilot)

Leonard H. Phillips (navigator)

Charles H. Suppes (bombardier)

James A. Hinds (aircraft engineer)

Ferguson T. Bell, Jr. (radio operator)

Lee 'Vaughn' Miller (assistant aircraft engineer)

Charles E. Newburn, Jr (assistant radio operator)

Jake F. Penick (aircraft gunner)

Lewis M. Shepard (assistant aircraft gunner)

[4]**Charles Elwood "Chuck" Yeager** (/ˈjeɪgər/; born February 13, 1923) is a retired brigadier general in the United States Air Force and record-setting test pilot. In 1947, he became the first pilot confirmed to have traveled faster than sound. Yeager's career began in World War II as a private in the United States Army Air Forces. After serving as an aircraft mechanic, in September 1942 he entered enlisted pilot training and upon graduation was promoted to the rank of flight officer (the World War II USAAF equivalent to warrant officer) and became a North American P-51 Mustang fighter pilot. After the war, Yeager became a test pilot of many types of aircraft, including experimental rocket-powered aircraft. As the first human to break the sound barrier, on October 14, 1947, he flew the experimental Bell X-1 at Mach 1 at an altitude of 45,000 ft (13,700 m). Although Scott Crossfield was the first to fly faster than Mach 2 in 1953, Yeager shortly thereafter set a new record of Mach 2.44. Yeager later commanded fighter squadrons and wings in Germany and in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, and in recognition of the outstanding performance ratings of those units he was promoted to brigadier general. Yeager's flying career spans more than 60 years and has taken him to every corner of the globe, including the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War. In the 1980s, he was prominently featured in Tom Wolfe's book The Right Stuff and in its 1983 film adaptation. – *Wikipedia*

[5]**Clyde Vernon Cessna** was born in Hawthorne, Iowa on December 5, 1879. When he was 2, he and his family moved to rural Rago in Kingman County, Kansas along the Chikaskia River. During his boyhood he used his self-taught innovation and mechanical skills to improve farm machinery and to develop new farming methods. He later became a successful car dealer in Enid, Oklahoma. Clyde's interest in aviation began in 1910 after witnessing an aerial exhibition in his home state of Kansas. It was this exhibition that led him in future years to pursue his career in aviation. After realizing his interest in aviation, Clyde left Oklahoma and moved to New York where he worked for a short period at the Queen Aeroplane Company where he first learned about the construction of aircraft.

First flight

In 1911, he set out to build his first airplane, an airplane he named "Silverwing." His first design was a monoplane, constructed of spruce and linen and which took the form of an American version of the Bleriot XI. The engine was a modified Elbridge motorboat motor, dubbed the "aero special", which was a 2-stroke, 4-cylinder engine with a maximum of 40 hp (30 kW) and 1,050 rpm. Upon completion, he sought to test the aircraft at the Great Salt Plains (adjacent to the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge) in Alfalfa County, Oklahoma. His first attempt at flight ended in a ground loop, which required $100 to repair. After repairs, Cessna attempted flight 13 more times, each time ending in some sort of failure. Finally on his 13th attempt, Cessna got a glimpse of hope as his aircraft bounced up into the air for a short time before crashing into the trees as he attempted to turn it. After his crash, Cessna exclaimed in frustration, "I'm going to fly this thing, and then I'm going to set it afire and never have another thing to do with aeroplanes!" Finally, in June 1911 Cessna had his first successful flight. The crowds that had scoffed at his failures changed their tone and began calling him a "daring hero" and nicknamed him the "Birdman of Enid". Cessna continued to teach himself how to fly over the next several months until December 1911, when he made a successful 5-mile (8.0 km) flight and a successful landing at the point of departure. After the success of the Silverwing, Cessna permanently quit his work with the automobile industry to pursue his interests in aviation. Between 1912 and 1915, Cessna developed several new monoplanes, all powered by a Anzani 6-cylinder with 40–60 hp. During this time, Clyde often flew his aircraft at holiday events and county fairs, an endeavour that at the time proved to be lucrative. It was in 1916 that Clyde acquired a vacant building to begin building a new aircraft for the 1917 aviation exhibition season. His factory served a dual purpose, as he also opened a flight school in which he had five enrolled student pilots. However, in April 1917 when the United States declared war, the exhibition flying market ground to a halt. With his primary source of income grounded, Clyde returned to his old home near Rago, Kansas, where he resumed his duties on the family farm.

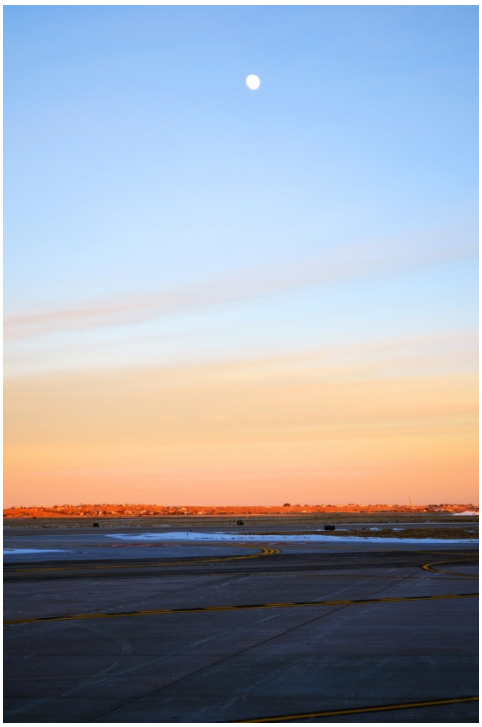
In the years following World War I public interest in private flying increased, leading Cessna in 1925, along with Walter Beech and Lloyd Stearman, to found the Travel Air Manufacturing Company in Wichita, Kansas. While Cessna was president, the company soon became one of the leading US aircraft manufacturers. This success may be attributed to Cessna's advanced design concepts and aircraft that attained international recognition in the course of establishing numerous speed and distance records.] After two years, Cessna left the company with plans to start his own firm,[6] due to design disputes with his partners over the monoplane versus the biplane.

On September 7, 1927, the Cessna Aircraft Corporation incorporated. In the later part of 1927, Cessna struggled to design and build an efficient monoplane. The "AW" was completed near the end of 1927, a single-wing aircraft with top speeds of up to 145 mph (233 km/h) and a maximum cruise time upwards of 7 hours. The first plane flew on August 13, 1927. In the following decade, the company produced many racing and sports aircraft generally known for their tradition of safety, performance and economy.

Despite the success of new models, the Great Depression led to a catastrophic drop in aircraft sales, a bankruptcy filing for the corporation, and the complete closure of the company in 1931. In 1934, Cessna reopened his Wichita plant, which he soon sold to his nephews in (1936).

Later years

After selling the Cessna Aircraft Corporation to his nephews, Cessna returned to a life of farming.[6] Upon his nephews' request, he agreed to participate in the company but served mostly in a ceremonial capacity and stayed out of the company's day-to-day business. He died on November 20, 1954 at the age of 74 in Wichita, Kansas. – ***Wikipedia***

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