

OH-3056, Dwight France, 5-23-2014, Riverside, WY In Flight

BOGART: [00:00:00] I'm going to start again. This is Barbara Bogart. I am interviewing Dwight France at his home in Riverside, Wyoming. The date is May 23rd, 2014. We're going to be talking about Mr. France's involvement in aviation. OK. And as I said, so when and where were you born?

FRANCE: Well, I was born in Rawlins and April 3rd, 1947, and I have a twin brother. I was almost born on a separate day, but I think I made it at 11:43 that night and my brother was born at 11:36, so we were close to being different days and identical twins.

BOGART: That's funny. OK, so your family was from Rawlins, then, I guess?

FRANCE: Well, my dad was. He was born in Rawlins. And his grandparents ended up settling in Wyoming [00:01:00] I think when the Union Pacific railroad came through. And so then my grandfather and his father were both bank presidents and I decided after I got out of college at the University of Wyoming that I would rather do something other than banking and so I worked in the bank for, like, four summers while I was going to school and for a year or two afterwards, I guess. And I finally decided that flying

was my thing to do, and so I left and started my own air taxi operation in Rawlins.

BOGART: Oh, OK. Well, before we get to that, let's back up a little bit because you said your dad was also [00:02:00] -- excuse me while I mess with this thing. I want to make sure that the sound is loud enough. You said that your dad was involved with aviation, too.

FRANCE: Yeah, he bought an airplane. His first airplane was a Cessna 170. And then in 1956, he bought a Cessna 180 and sold the 170 and so we started when we were going to -- I guess it was in high school. I was about 13 years old, as I remember. We were flying back and forth. One would go one way and one would fly the other way and we'd go to Cheyenne to get our teeth straightened and that kind of led me into wanting to fly, and so both my brother and I got private licenses when we were old enough - [00:03:00]

BOGART: How old is that?

FRANCE: When we were 16. So, I think after that, but we really started out under the tutelage of my dad, and he still -- I have his 1956 Cessna 180 now.

BOGART: Now, where did he get that? Where did he buy it?

FRANCE: He bought it brand new, and he bought it in Cheyenne from Lou Domenico at that time, in Sky Harbor. And that's when he got the airplane.

BOGART: And how did he get interested in flying?

FRANCE: Well, that I really don't know. He had always had an interest in it, but before I was even born, he had that 170, I think, and he did a little bit of flying in it, [00:04:00] but he was also a fair-weather type pilot and pretty much just went out on the real nice days and he wouldn't take off or land on anything except an asphalt-paved airstrip. And I guess I probably used him for -- to get me into aviation, but I never really had thought about it until I'd graduated from college and I got a degree in Business Administration at UW and then, oh, I think in 1973 or '4, I started getting an interest in flying. And finally in 1975, I quit the bank and went to flying full-time.

BOGART: But you said you'd gotten your [00:05:00] license to fly when you were 16?

FRANCE: I think I did. Sixteen, or maybe it was seventeen, but I know my brother got his before I did, and he was, for a while, working for the Old Baldy Club in Saratoga and George Storer had a Turboprop at the time that he used and brought passengers back and forth to Saratoga and when I started my flying career, my -- Saratoga run was pretty much my bread and butter run, if you know what I mean. And I took clients from Denver up to Saratoga and back to

Denver and I did for a long, long time. I mean, until a lot of my clients finally ended up being deceased. But [00:06:00] that was my bread and butter run for years.

BOGART: And so what -- about what years would that have been?

FRANCE: Well, probably I started that in about 1978, I would think. That's when I purchased my first twin-engine airplane, and I bought it from an outfit in Saratoga. And then in the early '80s, Cessna came out with a new unpressurized twin-engine airplane which was a lot nicer. It was a cabin class type airplane and so I started flying that and then I bought a Cessna 340 and that's when my business [00:07:00] really took off is when I started flying pressurized twins. And a lot of people really liked that because flying back and forth to Denver, you could get above the weather and above the bumps and even though it wasn't a very long flight -- it was only about an hour from Saratoga to Denver -- we did a lot of flights that way and the Old Baldy Club people were my best customers.

BOGART: Sure. So, were you -- was your business based in Saratoga, then?

FRANCE: No, I based it in Rawlins because that's where I was living, and I built an FBO building and got a fuel concession going there in Rawlins while I was there and it -- the original building and fuel concession is still there

and it's being operated now by people at [00:08:00] the Rawlins airport board. Decided they wanted to continue to sell fuel and things like that, so I leased that to them.

BOGART: Well, what had been there before at the Rawlins airport?

FRANCE: Well, there was another FBO that was there for a while, and there were two of us, and they really didn't know a lot about what they were doing. And they tried to make a deal with just selling fuel, and it took more than just selling fuel to make things meet. And so -- but I think over the years, there've been three or four different people that had run an FBO service at the airport, sold fuel, and a couple of them did charter work, and -- but this was way back [00:09:00] into the '50s or before when some of those people were going.

BOGART: OK. Do you have any idea when the airport was first built?

FRANCE: That airport was first built in Rawlins probably in the '30s or -- late '30s or early '40s, I would think. And before that, they had an airport up to the northwest of where the present airport is, and at that time, it was just primarily for the airmail service that was going through Rawlins and they were going east coast to west coast and they had stops about every 100, 150 miles. And Rawlins was

one of those stops. And my grandfather was actually in a picture where they came out and everybody was meeting the [00:10:00] mail plane when it came in. So I guess from that aspect, aviation's been in family in one way or another for quite a long time.

BOGART: I guess so. Well, what kinds of activities were there at the Rawlins Airport, let's say, maybe going back to the '50s, but certainly when you were there. You said fuel sales, maybe charters, what other kinds of --

FRANCE: Yeah, it was basically fuel sales and charter was about all they ever had there. And they did have -- used to be the Civil Aviation Administration, now it's the Federal Aviation Administration, or FAA, and for a long time, they had an office there because, well, Frontier Airlines got their start from Rawlins.

BOGART: Oh, I didn't know that.

FRANCE: Yeah, they did. And for a long time, I think [00:11:00] those people were there primarily just to give out airport advisories and current weather and things such as that. And finally, the government decided to cut back on all that kind of stuff and so they issued a contract and we had the contract for oh, six or seven years to do hourly weather between the hours of 6:00 in the morning and 10:00 at night. And that helped us get a better foothold on what

we were doing and then we finally got pretty busy doing the charter work. And we had kind of a boom period right in the '70s when I got started and the BLM office was quite busy doing things and then the Game and Fish was busy doing - [00:12:00] checking up on what the BLM was doing, more or less, but they had quite a deal going in the mid-'70s and we did a lot of flying, inventorying different kinds of animals and sage-grouse was one that I can remember spending an awful lot of time with and --

BOGART: So they contracted that work to you?

FRANCE: They contracted that to me and I helped them do it and we always had somebody with us. I didn't just go do the work. But it got to the point where, in Carbon County at least, I knew where just about every sage-grouse (inaudible) was. And so that helped, you know, in some respects.

BOGART: And when you were -- does that mean that you had an employee with you?

FRANCE: I either had a -- yeah, somebody from the BLM or somebody from the Game and Fish [00:13:00] was always there. But when we were doing the sage-grouse surveys, why, it was about always Game and Fish work that we did.

BOGART: What time of year would you do that?

FRANCE: That would -- primarily April, early. Well, March and April and usually into maybe the first week of May.

BOGART: And what was the weather like to fly then?

FRANCE: There was lots of days that we did not get to go because -- and it was one of these things you get up with the birds and you're out there, and they're only out there doing their strutting and so forth until 7:30 or maybe 8:00 early in the season, but usually it was over with by 7:30, so we'd just do a couple hours of flying early in morning and then we had the rest of the day to do whatever else we had to do.

BOGART: Now, [00:14:00] that contract work, is that what you count as charter service, or was that --

FRANCE: Yeah, that started my charter service, and the BLM for one, required that we become a charter company in order to fly them around. And, of course, that meant additional training and additional check rides and stuff like that. And in addition to that, why, we were licensed, I guess, or contract to fly with BLM for whatever kind of flying they wanted, and that also included the Forest Service, so -- but it included yearly check rides and things like that.

BOGART: That kind of makes me wonder. How did you learn to fly? Who taught you?

FRANCE: You know, when I first got started doing the flying, [00:15:00] and this was during the period of time I was going to college and stuff like that, I learned a lot of my flying from a guy by the name of John [Fryback?]. And he used to spray crops, and he finally got poisoned by the spray, so then he went to hunting coyotes and I used to gun for him. And so I learned an awful lot about my flying from him. But my dad was always a good instructor type, but he never instructed. He was just a private pilot. But I learned a lot of what I know today from --

BOGART: Now, was Fryback in Rawlins?

FRANCE: Fryback did go to Rawlins when he started, but before that, he was over in the Wheatland country and Douglas and stuff like that.

BOGART: All right. So, back to charter service. Who would have been your clients for that?

FRANCE: You know, I had [00:16:00] all kinds of different clients. Besides the Old Baldy people, I had all US Senators and Congressmen since Malcolm Wallop was -- and so, I did that. I did have several pretty well-known people that I flew and among them was Henry Ford III and George W. Bush. I flew him before he became president. And, oh, I had had several other kind of dignitaries that were either going in and out of Saratoga or a few of them

were going into Rawlins. Most of the traffic was in and out of Saratoga except for the congressional people.

BOGART: And where [00:17:00] would you fly them to and from?

FRANCE: The congressional people would go anywhere in the state, primarily. They would go back and forth to Denver. A lot of them would come home on a Friday and go campaign or do whatever they needed to do for the weekend and they'd go back to Denver on Sunday night or something and catch a flight back to Washington. So, I did a lot of that over the years.

BOGART: So you would go get them in Denver?

FRANCE: Yeah, quite often, I would. And some of them -- John Barrasso was probably the last one I did a lot of flying for. He usually managed to get to Casper and then I'd go over to Casper and pick him up and take him anywhere in the state where he wanted to go and every single weekend, he was engaged in something. But, quite a person. And Alan Simpson was another one that I did an awful lot of flying for. [00:18:00] He and his wife, Ann, were real good customers, and I picked them up and delivered them lots and lots of places.

BOGART: Any stories of times flying with them that stand out?

FRANCE: You know, at this point in my life, I can't think of a lot, but I'm sure there were some instances that were more

exciting than others. And one of the things that I do remember is when they were on the campaign trail or on another trail, why, we always stayed with them. And there was one night, I remember, when the Simpsons -- I think we went to Riverton or somewhere and I told him. I said, "I just don't like the looks of this weather, and we're going to go back to Casper and land there at Casper and after the weather people have gone home and everything. And [00:19:00] I would just feel more comfortable --" And he was real comfortable with that. He says, "That's your decision and I'm going to leave that up to you and whatever you say is fine." And so he did and that one night, it ended up snowing a bunch and it was one of those situations that I didn't want to be out there and have a [black face?] just because of something I did that wasn't very smart. So.

BOGART: So, when did -- tell me again when you created your flying service? In the '70s, you said?

FRANCE: Well, I started in about 1975, and the first two years, it was really busy and I had two other pilots working for me full-time as well as myself and [00:20:00] I had a mechanic that was there in Rawlins to help me and we were quite busy until about 1980. And then the bottom fell out of everything and I would say it went from, like,

sixteen different FBOs that had air-taxi operators down to six. And that lasted most of the way through the '80s as I recall.

BOGART: Now, you're talking about in the state?

FRANCE: In the whole state.

BOGART: In the whole sta-- oh my gosh. That's a huge drop.

FRANCE: It dropped to 30% of what we did have.

BOGART: Now, what was driving the traffic? Was it oil boom?

FRANCE: Yeah, oil and coal and gas were all prevalent.

Uranium was prevalent at that time. So, it was just -- it was all pretty much mining related, [00:21:00] but there was a lot of different aspects of --

BOGART: So, describe a typical air-taxi flight. Who your client would be, where they would be going, and why.

FRANCE: Well, we would probably -- and a lot of them -- and some of that stuff, we might leave Rawlins and we, you know, the morning flights we might have just gone out for a couple hours and done some sage-grouse work or some big game counts or something like that, and then we'd come back. But some of the other flights that we did, not too many of them were flying the officials so much as taking the people that were in the local office and going out and doing something with them. And so -- you know, anywhere in the state was pretty much [00:22:00] open country as far as

they were concerned. I mean, they would -- because they were, at that time, trying to get a handle on what all might be available or what --

BOGART: So, they were kind of surveying from the air?

FRANCE: Yeah, they were. And we would do everything from antelope and deer and elk and sage-grouse and -- we didn't do too much -- we did raptors but we didn't do a lot of other bird species.

BOGART: So, it sounds like the flights were related to environmental impacts of --

FRANCE: I would say so. Yeah.

BOGART: Oh, OK. Not so much they're scouting locations, they did that on the ground in the Land Rovers and that kind of thing.

FRANCE: Yeah. But a lot of that stuff, particularly like the sage-grouse and stuff, we could go out there and find what they wanted to look at and [00:23:00] look at an area for a couple hours in the morning and we'd cover maybe five times the amount of land that they would see from the ground, so --

BOGART: Oh, of course. How high did you fly doing those surveys?

FRANCE: A lot of that stuff was under 300 feet, in fact, down to maybe 100. And on the sage-grouse in particular, we

would fly and we'd just look away from the sun, and you know, these things would stand out like little beacons when you'd see them. And it wasn't hard to locate them. And then we'd get the GPS coordinates or before they had the GPS coordinate system set up, why, we would try and, you know, just get by what it looked like maybe to the nearest quarter section or something like that, they would sit beside me with their maps and [00:24:00] try to document where all these things were. And I later figured out that they weren't always totally accurate. (laughs) But, you know, we did the best with what we had to work with at the time.

BOGART: When did GPS come into common use in aviation?

FRANCE: Actually, I would say the late '80s before it really became prevalent, and at that point, I mean, you know, you could get an accuracy down to within just a few feet, so they -- it was a really good thing. And a little while before they had GPS, why, we were using a LORAN system which wasn't as accurate, but it was better than what we had before, so --

BOGART: Well, now, when the bottom dropped out in, let's say the early '80s, then what did you do to compensate?

FRANCE: Well, it was kind of interesting. [00:25:00] I -- finally I had to let both my other pilots go. And they

were two pretty good pilots. Both of them went to work for major airlines afterwards. But I let both of them go and I quit paying myself. And I was still making payments, like \$11,000 a month, but I tried to get some of that stuff cut back as much as I could, just in order to survive, and at that time, I was still living at home, so I didn't have a lot of need for income if there wasn't any. And I guess, you know, this started picking up by, maybe '87. And by that time, we started getting a noticeable increase in the business, but I never did get back to what we [00:26:00] had around '75. It just never happened.

BOGART: One thing that I've been curious about -- it's not exactly related to the work that you did, but I had always thought that they inspected pipelines by air. Is that right?

FRANCE: Well, they did. And they do, yeah. And, in fact, one of the things that I did some pipeline work on after I, more or less, retired involved flying some pipeline stuff out by Wamsutter. But some of that kind of stuff -- and I didn't get involved in it a lot because number one, it wasn't paying real good, I didn't think. And by the time I finally got to the point where, you know, I could do [00:27:00] something like that, why, a lot of my other stuff had slowed down enough that I had the extra time to

do it and one nice thing about flying pipeline is that usually, you didn't have to take anybody with you and you'd just got to go do it and they sent pictures or whatever of the whole line that they wanted you to fly and --

BOGART: What were you looking for?

FRANCE: Oh, leaks or somebody else drilling too close to their pipeline or something like that. It was primarily environmental.

BOGART: And it was the pipeline companies that hired you to do that?

FRANCE: Yeah, it was.

BOGART: OK. They didn't run their own operations, then?

FRANCE: They didn't have their own, no. No, they contracted all that kind of stuff out and they -- to my knowledge -- there was a couple of firms that [00:28:00] had a lot of pipeline work and they had their own fleet of airplanes for a while, but as time went on, why, they figured out it was a little cheaper and easier to hire it down than to try to do it themselves.

BOGART: Well, how did the -- aside from the boom in the '70s, and then you said it picked up again toward the late '80s, how did that -- how did that -- what was the arc of the business during the time that you were in it?

FRANCE: Well, I did have some of the Old Baldy people in Saratoga, and they were pretty seasonal. I mean, mostly summer, like June through the first part of September. But they helped me, keep me going. But there was not enough work for [00:29:00] a lot of them to use me, or for me to hire additional help or anything like that, so -- and after I got -- I don't know, I think I bought my first pressurized twin about 1983 or '4, but it seemed like my business with those kind of people just doubled overnight. It was kind of amazing but --

BOGART: Because of the upgraded airplane?

FRANCE: Because they were pressurized aircraft, number one, and they were a cabin class airplane, two. And that made a lot of difference, I think.

BOGART: So, how many of those trips would you do, let's say, in a month?

FRANCE: Oh, gee. That's kind of hard to guess. Sometimes I'd be going back and forth to Denver three or four times a week [00:30:00] and other times, it would be once or twice a week, but it was pretty consistent and particularly in the summer months, even on some days, I'd have two or three trips in one day, down to Denver. And it was just about always going to the main airport there and picking up the

people and then bringing them over to Saratoga and then taking them back the same way. So.

BOGART: And that was the old airport? Stapleton?

FRANCE: Yeah, Stapleton. And I had a couple of customers that we did that with, even later on after DIA was the main airport. And -- but never had much problem getting in and out of that airport. It was always an easy one to get in and out of, and you kind of expected what was going to happen and [00:31:00] knew everything ahead of time, so it worked out pretty good.

BOGART: OK, so you had your Saratoga customers, the Congressional people, the contract work for the Fed. What other kind of charter service did you run -- or, taxi service?

FRANCE: Well, we did -- particularly early on, we did a lot of flights for the sheriff's office in Carbon County, and some of those were going to pick up people and some of them were search and rescue type operations, but we did quite a lot of that, particularly early on. And the county was pretty flush and we'd go all the way back to -- I remember one flight we did all the way back to West Virginia to pick somebody up on a bad check deal. And it was, I mean, maybe \$1,000 or so involved on [00:32:00] this check deal, but when we first started doing some of that stuff, would --

they always went in a single-engine airplane, but quite often, we had some weather issues en route and stuff that weren't real fun, but we always did them and that was just part of the deal. And most of my stuff, I think, those far states that I flew to -- I did some early flights all the way back to the east coast, but I would say, by and large, most of my flying was from the Mississippi on to the west coast. And it got a little bit more specialized later, I mean, like we had one client that liked to go to California and that's after I bought a Cessna [00:33:00] 421 and we could make that trip non-stop, so he really liked that part of it and --

BOGART: Is this a local person? Somebody who lived in --

FRANCE: It was. At one time, he owned the Elk Mountain Ranch and he has since sold it and moved out of the country, but for about 10 years, he was a real good customer. And some of them didn't really have a lot of qualms about what they spent on a flight, and obviously, he was one of those. So --

BOGART: So you've been a lot of places around the country, then --

FRANCE: Yeah.

BOGART: -- with your taxi service. What was the most unusual, or exciting flight that you took of that kind? You talked

about going to West Virginia, I think that was pretty special, but --

FRANCE: I enjoyed those kind of [00:34:00] trips because they were interesting and there was something that I hadn't seen before. So eventually, I probably got to see most of the United States except for Alaska, but most of the continental United States. I never did get up in the far northeast. I got down to where I could see into Florida and oh, Alabama and Texas a few times, but -- I didn't have any that were particularly outstanding that I remembered. There was one firm that hired me, and they were a power company that had a bunch of transmission lines, and they hired me to do [rapture?] surveys around their transmission lines. And we went Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, [00:35:00] Kansas, Nebraska, and even a little bit into South Dakota. And that was all about a week's work, I suppose, but we stayed real busy with them. I mean, we'd fly six, seven, eight hours a day if we had to. (coughs) Pardon me. I don't know.

BOGART: I hope I -- I don't have anything catching. I just have this chronic cough. So I do apologize for that. You won't catch anything from me. Let me go back to the -- you had a taxi service, an air-taxi service, and then you also ran the FBO at the Rawlins Airport?

FRANCE: I did, and it was just kind of a sideline that I did, but if I needed to get out early in the morning and the runway was not plowed, I did it. Just -- and it worked hand-in-hand because I got a little bit of money from the [00:36:00] county to be the airport manager and take care of things like that, but it also involved some work with airplanes that were down on the airport or aircraft crises or stuff like that, but really didn't have too much of that, but I did have a few of them, and tried to keep the airport all the time so we'd -- other people could get in and out as well as I could.

BOGART: And that leads me to the next question. Who used the airport at that time?

FRANCE: Well, we didn't have any commercial air service. We did have a freight company that flew five or six days of the week.

BOGART: And what company was that?

FRANCE: They're still in business and they're down in Denver. It's called Key Lime Air now. [00:37:00] But -- and they'd take some of their -- they finally ended up with some 19-passenger prop jets that they would haul UPS freight up every morning and haul it back to Denver every evening. And then you've got some of the other airports around like, well, Casper's a "for instance" but I would see -- they'd

either have something like a 727 or maybe even a DC-10 and they'd take all of their air freight back to, like, Atlanta every night and re-swap it out and fly it back to their destination in the morning and Atlanta was their area where they did all their swap-outs. So.

BOGART: So, who else used the airport, then? [00:38:00]

FRANCE: Well, there's a bunch of different private companies that used the airport on occasion, and I'm thinking of people like Sinclair Oil. They're based in Salt Lake City, but they had a couple of jets and since Sinclair is close to Rawlins and everything, they flew in -- and still do fly in, I think, on a pretty regular basis. The state of Wyoming had a couple different jets that they used. I don't know that they're flying as much now as they did, but they would be in two, three, four times a month, maybe, on average. And oh, we had another company out of -- don't even know for sure where their base is, [00:39:00] but they would fly into Rawlins and drive up to Wamsutter to see their facility out there. In fact, we had a couple of different companies that did that kind of work. And it was mostly energy-related concerns, but --

BOGART: And what was your responsibility with regard to them coming in and out of the airport?

FRANCE: Probably we didn't do a lot for them other than be available to them and later on, when everything else shut down, we ran the UNICOM service which -- we'd talk to the pilots and tell them what the winds were and what the direction was and how hard they were blowing and all that kind of stuff. And they got to where they appreciated their -- our knowledge and use of the airport, and they would often [00:40:00] call us before they came and -- "Well, how's your runway today?" And checking on things. But we got to know most of those folks pretty well. And --

BOGART: Now, I had seen somewhere that there was an airstrip at Sinclair when it was known as Parco.

FRANCE: At one time, yeah. At one time, there was. And I think that was almost back in the day when they had an airmail service that flew through Rawlins and I don't know that -- in fact, I can't remember it being used after I was involved. I think that was way back in the '30s, '40s, maybe a little bit later than that, but --

BOGART: Was it pretty -- I know that Parco, when it was Parco, it was pretty much a company town. Would it have been a company [00:41:00] airport, too, or airstrip?

FRANCE: I doubt it. I doubt it. And the FAA, or their predecessor, the CAA, used to have, and they still do, make an effort to kind of see that all these airports get a

little bit of money every year. And some of that kind of stuff -- it kind of comes and goes and now that the government is in the kind of position they're in, why, I don't think the money is near as free, but we got a crosswind runway and we got a -- our main runway resurfaced and new lighting and stuff like that. New airport beacon and that type of thing while I was the airport manager there, so - [00:42:00]

BOGART: And it's owned by the county, did you say?

FRANCE: Well, it's a joint -- it used to be, at one time, it was a total city airport. And the city, when one of the prior airport managers was there, they didn't plow the runway for maybe three days after a snowstorm. And when I first said, "Well, that isn't going to happen when I'm around." And then they ended up making it a city-county airport and they had a joint [power?] board that ran the airport, and it was comprised of five individuals that I think -- and they were on five-year terms, and those people, they had some aviation interests anyway, so it helped a lot, but they [00:43:00] kind of saw to it that things were done as it was needed, and I think that helped.

BOGART: Like the improvements to the airport you were talking about?

FRANCE: Sure. Yeah.

BOGART: Was there ever any commercial passenger service in Rawlins?

FRANCE: Other than Frontier Airlines, to my knowledge, no. And that was way back when they were flying the old DC-3. And in fact, we had a mayor at that time and Frontier wanted to upgrade the airport so they could handle the Convair 580 which was a pretty nice airplane for that day, and while they were doing that, we had a mayor that said, "No, I'm not going to do this because I'm a railroader and you might compete with my business." And so that was the end [00:44:00] of Frontier. They left Rawlins on account of him.

BOGART: Gosh. Now, when was that?

FRANCE: Well, it would have been early '60s, late '50s, somewhere in there. And --

BOGART: I know over the years it's been hard to maintain passenger services in a lot of Wyoming communities, but --

FRANCE: Well -- and at one time, Rawlins was looking. They even built a new little terminal building and they used to have an old white line shack, that I called a line shack, that basically they had somebody that would come out and put some fuel on the airplane when they wanted it and it was a -- somebody, one of the Frontier Airlines employees that did all that kind of stuff. And then they built a

cinderblock building which was a small building, but it was -- you know, had bathrooms [00:45:00] in it and had a ticket counter and so forth. And shortly after that is when Frontier pulled out.

BOGART: Were there any repercussions for that mayor?

FRANCE: Not to my knowledge. But you had to be -- you either were for the airport or you were against it or you didn't care. And so, I think he was one of those that might actually have been against it due to what I'm seeing, but it was so many years ago that I don't know what the answer was and it's been 70, 70-some years ago probably now.

BOGART: Yeah. Were there -- OK. You mentioned a lot of people who used the airport. Were there also private [00:46:00] owners that had their own planes?

FRANCE: Oh, yeah. At one time, we probably had 15 or 17 [based?] airplanes in Rawlins. And I think that was even before I got involved in it at all, but then things just started to keep dropping down and dropping down a little bit more and at one time, I was up to having seven airplanes and I'm down to two now, but it is just -- you know, I think commercial aviation or general aviation in general is probably way less than -- it's too expensive now compared to -- you used to buy aviation gas for 35 cents or something like that. I can remember when it was [00:47:00]

32 cents. And now it's up to \$6 and some places are almost 7. In fact, some of them are over 7. So, when you start looking at that, why, it's pretty easy to understand that the only ones that have the money to do anything with are - - you know, it doesn't make a bit of difference.

BOGART: Yeah. I've heard references to an outfit called the Flying Farmers. Were they ever in Carbon County?

FRANCE: Not to my knowledge. They might have had a presence there, but I don't think, to my knowledge, I didn't ever see them, or saw any evidence of them, at least. So. But I think that was an organization that, at one time -- and, you meet different ranchers and stuff like that that have their [00:48:00] own airplane and they put it in their own barn and have their own little dirt strip and they don't go very many places, but when they do, they've got their own airplane to do it, and they go out and check their livestock with it and that's kind of the operation they ran.

BOGART: OK. I hadn't thought that they would keep them on their own premises. Because they don't want to be running up to Rawlins all the time to get to their plane.

FRANCE: Some of those guys -- and back when, when 80 octane fuel was available, there were a lot of airplanes flying around that were just using car gas. It was -- it was as

cheap and it ran about as good as what they had, and then they started getting into the higher octane rating stuff for the more -- well, I'd say they were [00:49:00] higher-end airplanes that maybe were Turbocharged, some of them were Turbocharged, and stuff like that, and they started using 100 octane gas, or 100 low-lead, and now the lead and the fuel, even though they call it "low-lead gas," it seemed like we've got problems. And a lot of those problems kind of started out on the west coast in a certain state I know of, but they seem like they've done their share to hurt the aviation industry in my book. So. But people in California and thereabouts -- I know a lot of them don't care what the price of fuel is and stuff like that. In fact, after I ended up selling [00:50:00] one or two of my airplanes out on the west coast, why, I found that that was still one of the areas where aviation wasn't hurting so bad.

BOGART: Oh, because the higher gas prices didn't faze them at all?

FRANCE: Didn't seem to faze them much. So. But --

BOGART: What did you -- you got interested in aviation because your dad flew, right?

FRANCE: Pretty much, yeah.

BOGART: What is it that you liked about flying?

FRANCE: Well, to me, it's the freedom to be able to go where you want, and when you want, and not have to watch for the traffic cop, and things like that. And I enjoyed it. It was -- to me, it was a real relaxing [00:51:00] way to travel. I guess a lot of people wouldn't agree with me, but I think it's a -- still the ultimate way to travel. And when we got married, in fact, we took a flight and we went to Elko, Nevada the first night and then we went to Reno the second night and then Lake Tahoe and then finally into California. And we're going to do it again this summer. We're not going all that far, but we're going to go to Lake Tahoe again after we've been married for thirty years and so -- and that's the method of travel we wanted.

BOGART: Now, when did you retire from your business, or get rid of your business?

FRANCE: Actually, it was in September of [00:52:00] 2011. End of September.

BOGART: Oh, so not that long ago.

FRANCE: Yeah. So -- and I've been pretty much out of it. I'm -- didn't do any charter work, so to speak, after that, other than just a little pipeline work or something like that, which you really didn't have to have a taxi license to do, so --

BOGART: So, where are your planes?

FRANCE: They're both in Rawlins. Well, one of them right now is in Cheyenne and I have a daughter who has a private pilot's license and the other one's in Rawlins. So.

BOGART: So your daughter is in aviation, too, then?

FRANCE: Well, no. She's actually an attorney, and she's a practicing attorney with a law firm in Cheyenne and she [00:53:00] does a little bit of flying on the side and she got her private pilot's license while she was still in school and learning, so -- but nobody else in my family has jumped in and --

BOGART: Does she fly here to see you, when she comes home?

FRANCE: She does, on occasion. And I think now that she's got one of my airplanes down in Cheyenne, she's going to fly it more and hopefully -- you know, it's a high-performance, single-engine, [retractable-gear?] airplane and it's more than what she learned to fly in by quite a bit. So she needs to keep on top of that one a little more.

BOGART: Well, when -- in all the flying that you did, what was [00:54:00] a scary moment, or a moment when you wondered, "Should I be doing this?"

FRANCE: You know, I really didn't have a lot of moments and, as far as flying in the weather and stuff like that, that didn't really bother me because you had IFR minimums that you had to abide by and they deemed those to be safe

standards and so as long as you flew within those standards, that really didn't bother me a whole lot. I didn't really ever have any major mechanical problems which -- knock on wood, I really am thankful for, but we just didn't have very much in the way of exciting moments that I can remember.

BOGART: I would think that flying [00:55:00] in Wyoming would present some challenges, but --

FRANCE: Well, it's like anyplace else, but you know the terrain. You know where you're at, and, you kind of know when you're going to -- you know, if you should be going or shouldn't be going. Wind is one thing that Wyoming always has plenty of, and the winds -- never been bothered by the winds in Wyoming. And we've landed in some 50- and 60-knot winds and stuff which would keep a lot of people on the ground, but when I had to go, I went. So. I don't remember -- you know, we might have turned down one or two charter trips in all of the work that I did because of weather, but the one [00:56:00] -- the 9/11 flight, I had a charter to Denver that morning and I happened to be watching the TV that morning, and I thought "Gee, this doesn't look good," and about that time, the second airline hit the second building, and I thought, "I don't think we're going anywhere now." And I called the guy in

Saratoga and told him, "I don't think I can do it today," and he was pretty upset about it, but on the other hand, if I'd have got him to Denver, I might have been spending a week in Denver and he might have spent a week in Denver, and I don't know how it would have turned out, so --

BOGART: Did they shut down only commercial aviation, or did they shut down general aviation, too?

FRANCE: They shut down everything for about four or five days and then when they finally started allowing flights, the first thing they opened it up to was the commercial scheduled flights, and some of the other [00:57:00] companies like the people with the business jets and stuff like that -- they were pretty well shut down for at least a couple weeks, as near as I can remember. So.

BOGART: I remember being on -- I had to drive from -- I lived in Evanston, at the time -- drive from Evanston to Denver that week, and there was traffic on I-80 because so many people had rented cars in California because they couldn't fly back east and so there were hundreds of cars with California plates on the interstate just because they couldn't fly. It was interesting.

FRANCE: Wow. I never thought of that, but I imagine it would be very true.

BOGART: I mean, if you've been up and down I-80, you know what the traffic flow is, and when the cars outnumber the trucks, you know something strange is going on.

FRANCE: Yeah. For sure. (laughter)

BOGART: Oh, gosh. Well, I sure appreciate this. This has been fascinating. It really has.

FRANCE: Well, I'm glad I could help you out a little bit.

[00:58:00] I didn't really do much, but --

BOGART: Oh, this is great.

FRANCE: In all my years of flying, we had a successful career, the whole thing. And I think that it probably takes a little bit more than the average guy to be successful in something like that, but I always found a way to make it work.

BOGART: Did your business training help, do you think?

FRANCE: Well, it didn't hurt anything. And I -- if I'd have done everything over and I've thought about this several times, if I'd have done it all over today, I probably would have got a degree somewhere in the wildlife end of things and maybe been more prone to it. But the business degree certainly didn't hurt anything, and it helped me run [00:59:00] the business.

BOGART: I would think so, yeah. To what extent was your wife involved in the business?

FRANCE: She was for a number of years, and the latter part, she became my office manager and took most of my scheduled trips and stuff like that, and booked them, and stuff like that, for the people. And she also was a certified weather observer while she was doing some of that stuff which I really appreciated because you couldn't find anybody that wanted to work until 10:00 at night, but she did. And I paid her for it, but it was one of those things that somebody had to do.

BOGART: Right. Just kind of all in the family, I guess. 10-4.

FRANCE: Yup.

BOGART: OK. Well, I will -- the only -- this may seem silly to you, but you [01:00:00] mentioned your brother several times when we first started talking. And what is his first name?

FRANCE: Sherrod, S-H-E-double R-O-D, and he retired the same day I did. Neither one of us knew the other one was going to retire. But he started out, actually, in the commercial flying business and moved into banking. I started out in banking and moved into commercial flying, but (laughing). It all worked out fine, but I tried to use him for a pilot on a few trips and he was too occupied at that time in the

bank to be able to get away, so it didn't work out for either one of us very good.

BOGART: Does he have a plane?

FRANCE: He does, but he hasn't flown it for -- it needs a new engine and he hasn't flown it now for, I'll bet you, 15 to 20 years. So it's just sitting there collecting dirt.

[01:01:00] But when we were both flying, we both had Cessna 210s and -- in fact, I'm on my third one, now.

BOGART: You must like them.

FRANCE: I do. (laughter) They're great airplanes. They'll do twin-engine work on a single-engine operating cost, so that's pretty nice.

BOGART: How many people do they carry?

FRANCE: Well, it'll hold six. And it's got about -- well, it's over 900-pound useful load, so you can fill it up with gas and head out with a heavy load on a long trip.

BOGART: What kind of range would it have?

FRANCE: Oh, I've always limited myself to about three and a half to three hours and 45 minutes, but if you [01:02:00] wanted to lean it back a little bit more, there is 90 gallons of fuel in there. I suppose it burns 16 an hour, so that's four and a half hours of fuel at least with a little reserve.

BOGART: Now, when you're making a trip like that, let's say, you know ahead of time where you're going to stop? Where fuel is available?

FRANCE: Quite often. And there's some places that I've stopped that I know have better fuel prices than others. And you try to avoid the big airports that have lots of traffic, if you can, because you know they're going to be higher, price-wise. So instead of going to DIA for fuel, why, you might go to, oh, one of the other satellite airports or something like that.

BOGART: This may seem like a silly question, but do you carry a directory with you, or is it a -- how do you know about them?

FRANCE: There's [01:03:00] -- yeah, anymore, you can get a lot of that information just off of the internet. And you can check fuel prices anyplace you want to go, but it used to be, you'd take a book and it'd have all the airports in Wyoming and then you could go through and if you wanted to, you could call ahead and see, "Well, what's your fuel price today?" and -- but in my travels, why, I often learned that -- well, like Boise versus Caldwell, Idaho, or one of the other airports that's fairly close to it, there's a considerable difference, I mean, like almost a buck a gallon.

BOGART: Oh my gosh. That's a big difference. Huh.

FRANCE: You try to do that when you can.

BOGART: Now, in general aviation, when you take off, do you have to file [01:04:00] a flight plan?

FRANCE: We don't. We're not required to, but when I was doing air-taxi work, most of my flights were IFR, or Instrument Flight Rules, which does require a flight plan. And so -- but if you're going to go from A to B and you want to skip over all these other destination airports and just go to the one where the passenger wants to go, why, that's the easy way to do it. And then one thing about when you're on an IFR flight plan, why, they follow you and they have radar tracking and stuff like that. And they usually have you up in the radar environment, particularly with the type airplanes I was flying. They [01:05:00] seem like they're -- they give you a little better service and watch over you a little better.

BOGART: Yeah, that's kind of a security, knowing somebody's paying attention to you. OK. Well, now it's time for paperwork.

FRANCE: Well, OK. You'll probably have to call and make heads or tails out of some of the stuff I discussed with you, but anyway, it's been great to talk to you.

BOGART: Oh, this has been wonderful.

FRANCE: And don't hesitate to call if you have any other questions or (inaudible).

BOGART: OK. OK. Well, OK. Here's what this is about. Let me shut this off, here.

END OF AUDIO FILE