

OH-3083, Cody Diekroeger, 7-7-2014, Laramie, WY In Flight

Part 1

[00:00:00]

Q: First of all, I'm going to check and make sure the machine is working.

A: (laughs) OK.

END OF AUDIO FILE

OH-3083, Cody Diekroeger, 8-12-2014, Laramie, WY In Flight

Part 2

[00:00:00]

Q: This is Barbara Bogart. Today is August 12, 2014, and I'm at the Laramie Airport. And I'm talking with Cody Diekroeger again. Let's see. I -- you sent me those two stories.

A: Yes, madam.

Q: They were just great. And did you know you're a really good writer?

A: Well. (laughs)

Q: So, what you wrote about was just great. But I -- but it would be cool to have those on tape.

A: Oh, sure, sure. Well, we talked earlier about some memorable times here that kind of stood out. And thinking about all the times I've flown to Wyoming, and I started flying in here in nineteen eighty -- early 1980s with Rocky Mountain Airways, as -- and the DeHavilland Twin Otter. And I remember one time we flew up the trip from Denver Stapleton Airport up to Cheyenne.

And talking to the air traffic controller in Cheyenne; just had a beautiful voice -- a woman -- that... Anyway, we got in Cheyenne a few minutes early, and so we had the passengers deplane. And the first officer -- the first officer and I went over to the control tower, which was right next to the gate where we parked the airplane. And this was back before all the security days and what have you.

So, we just opened up the door and went up the ladders up to the control towers -- or up the stairs, and -- because we wanted to see what this woman looked like. And I was, I think, 25 years old, and the first officer was a couple years younger than that. And anyway, we got up -- we went up these couple flights of stairs, got up in the control tower, and saw her. And she was gorgeous. Oh, she was -- she was just -- she was something else.

And she sounded -- she was as pretty as she sounded. And I think we stood there with our jaws just kind of (laughter) wide open, not knowing anything to say to her. She looked at us, then -- and then she was talking to other airplanes. And there was a -- I think another air traffic controller up in the -- in the tower, and -- an older gentleman, who looked at us and said, "Boys, she likes older men with money." (laughter) And so we merely knew we struck out on both counts. (laughter)

So, we kind of grabbed one more glance at her, and then went back down the stairs and into the airplane, boarded up the people, and flew back. And it gave us something to think about on the flight back to Denver. (laughter) And, it was... I don't know whatever happened to her, but she was a good air traffic controller. And she really made our day that day. (laughter) So, it was -- it was -- that was one of the more memorable trips into Cheyenne.

Q: So, Rocky Mountain; that was the airline that you had started, right?

A: Right.

Q: OK.

A: That's the airline -- the first airline I flew for --

Q: OK.

A: -- back in the early '80s.

Q: Oh, yeah. OK. I remember.

A: And then I flew for them for 14 -- or 13 years. And then -- and during that time, they became Continental Express Airlines. And so they -- but Rocky Mountain and Continental Express served Wyoming from the late '70s into the early '90s. It has had quite a history in Wyoming.

Q: Was Cheyenne the only city that you flew into?

A: No, Cheyenne, Casper, Laramie, Rock Springs, and that was -- Gillette. And, boy, I don't know if we ever flew into Sheridan or not, but Gillette; I made a few trips up there with the airline. And, but up -- I started flying for Rocky Mountain again in the early '80s. And in the mid-'80s, I was the captain on the DeHavilland Twin Otter. And we flew a trip up to Cheyenne in the summer time in July during Cheyenne Frontier Days.

And again, it was the -- things really looked different back then. And we loaded up the plane load of people on the -- for the trip back to Denver. And I noticed a lot of cowboys getting on -- a lot of boots and hats getting on and what have you. And anyway, we -- so we take off out of Cheyenne, go back to Denver Stapleton Airport. And we're climbing out of Cheyenne, and I noticed my eye started watering.

And I go, "What's going on here?" And I asked the first officer of the co-pilots, "Do you smell anything or? My eyes are watering." He said, "Well, yeah, mine are too." And we were wiping our eyes and what have you, and we thought we had a fuel leak, so we were getting kind of -- a little worried. So, we're looking around thinking, "Well, what's going on?" And it looked -- everything looked fine with the airplane. It was about a 35 minute flight back to Denver.

And this -- and this smell just didn't go away. And I thought, "Well, this is not good," and had the first officer call the company on the company radio and say, "Well, could you have mechanics meet us when we get to Denver because we got a fuel leak or something?" So, anyways, so we landed in Denver. It was an uneventful landing, and started to deplane the passengers. And along the way, there was so much hooping and hollering back there. (laughter)

They were having -- they were having a good time. It was -- it was -- they were -- like I said, they -- it was a real party back there. And, but anyways, so as the passengers began to deplane, we noticed that smell kind of went away -- kind of began to dissipate. So, and then I was looking at the passengers as they deplaned the

airplane, and, well, there was a lot of women on board too.

And they were dressed in such a way that we finally surmised that this -- these fumes and what have you in the airplane was really the perfume these women were wearing. (laughter) And I -- it was -- to this day, I can -- I can really sense what it was like. So, we figured we had a planeload of cowboys and hookers, and that we were leaving Frontier Days. And again, they seemed to have a good time on the flight --

Q: Oh, that's so funny.

A: -- if they even realized they were onboard an airplane because I -- it was -- it was -- it was -- I think it was pretty entertaining back there in the cabin. And so that was one of our more memorable trips out of Cheyenne.

Q: That was -- that was a great story too. Did you have attendants on those flights?

A: Well, in those, we had -- the airplane -- the airline had two different kinds of airplanes. The 19-seat DeHavilland Twin Otter, which any airplane with 19 seats or less didn't need a flight attendant. So, the first officer, the co-pilot, was really -- was kind of the flight attendant, although he didn't go back and serve drinks or what have you, but... And I was the first

officer on the airplane for about six months before I upgraded to captain.

And so the first officer would come up -- after everyone boarded the airplane, the first officer would close the door and walk up the aisle and make sure everyone has their seatbelts fastened and what have you. And meanwhile, the captain is up there starting the engines, and working the radios, and what have you. And so that airplane was really a primary airplane that we served Wyoming with for quite some time.

And then the airline also had 50-passenger DeHavilland Dash 7s made by the same Canadian company -- DeHavilland. But the (inaudible) and 50-passenger plane was -- it had a flight attendant and two pilots. It mainly went to (inaudible) of ski resorts like Aspen, and Vail, and Steamboat Springs. But we did make some trips -- we had a run that ran from Denver to Steamboat Springs on up to Rock Springs.

Then, we would overnight Rock Springs, and then come back and stopped in Steamboat on the way back to Denver. And then I was the first officer on that airplane for about a year, then was the captain on it for five years, I think. I just loved that airplane. I just -- both those

airplanes I really loved. And, but I [00:10:00] also flew the four -- the 50-passenger DeHavilland Dash 7 to places like Cheyenne sometimes, occasionally. I don't think I ever flew it to Laramie, but I flew it to Casper quite a bit.

And sometimes when we would fly up to Cheyenne, Cheyenne was tagged on with Laramie. This was kind of a seasonal thing when the passenger loads weren't real heavy. We'd go Denver to Cheyenne, then hop over to Laramie, and then back to Denver. So, by the time we got back to Denver, we usually had a full plane. And my present job is chief pilot for Premier Bone and Joint Centers, which is based here in Laramie, formally known as Gem City Bone and Joint. My first day at this job was the first time I ever drove to this airport. (laughter)

I could find this airport from the air, but I drove by the airport and continued (laughter) on the highway because I -- like, "Where's the airport? I can't find it." And I went down -- went out west, took a few miles too far, and turned around, came back, and said, "Oh, there's the airport." So, it was -- so a lot of these airports, I -- or a lot of these towns in Wyoming, I'd been to, but only taking off and landing at the airports.



And so it was -- but I've been flying out of here now for 13 years. And today, we're seated in -- at the FBO in Laramie at Cowboy Aviation, which is going -- the building that we're sitting in now, that's been here since the '40s -- a lot of history here; it's going to be torn down and replaced with a brand new building. It should look really pretty. And, but it'll serve the next generation of flyers.

Q: And maybe be easier to spot through (inaudible). (laughs)

A: Maybe so. It's -- but we certainly enjoy operating in and out of Laramie. The airport staff is just phenomenal. And we're lucky to have our four airplanes based here in Laramie because the crew here; they pull the airplanes out of our hangar each morning and position them on the ramp. And then the -- our pilots will show up prior to departure time; go out and pre-flight the airplanes and get everything ready for the flight.

Today, I'm leaving on a flight in a couple of hours. We're going to Rock Springs today, and then come back tonight. And another airplane took off today early this morning about 6:00 this morning for Casper. Their physician had a surgery up there at 7:15, so we had to be up there a little earlier than normal. And then they'll stop in Cheyenne and have a clinic there this afternoon -

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Q: Oh, OK.

A: -- before coming in here.

Q: OK. Now, I have all these questions. When you're flying, do you -- you don't have a co-pilot, right?

A: No. We operate these airplanes single-pilot. Some companies will operate planes the size of ours... Our airplanes are King Air C90As. They will hold eight people, including the pilots. Sometimes we'll have a pilot and seven passengers onboard, so then someone will be sitting up in the co-pilot seat. And some companies will -- even on the airplanes of -- the size of ours, they'll have two pilots operate them.

For us, we find that this works very well for us. And that was really one of the hardest things I had to get used to coming from the airlines to this; is with the airlines, I always had a captain and a first officer, and then we had a flight attendant usually take care of the passengers. And so this was -- it was a bit of a transition. And it's a little -- once you get used to it -- because the workload is a little bit higher because normally, with a two-pilot crew, one pilot is flying the airplane, and the other pilot is handling checklists and talking on the radios.

And so you divide up the responsibilities, and then, but with us, single-pilot, we get to do it all. (laughter) And, well, it's clean up the back of the airplane when we land and what have you. So, but it's -- like I said, it works very well for us. And the airplanes are such a big part of our medical practice that really, our medical practice might not even exist, certainly, to the -- on the scale that it is now if we didn't have the airplanes in order to...

We fly to 12 different cities outside of Laramie, and a lot of these towns... We have nine orthopedic surgeons, physicians all with different subspecialties; a spine surgeon; we have a pain management physician; we have a foot and ankle physician; we have a sports medicine physicians; we have hand and upper extremities physicians; we have some specialized in knees and shoulders.

And so many of the -- most of the towns we fly to, the population base is such that it really -- it could not support a medical practice like ours. Just not enough people keep all the doctors busy. And, but this way, we have a physician with different specialty in a particular town every day of the week. And again, without the airplanes, we couldn't do that.

Q: Now, I -- one of the towns I was in last week, I drove by the Premier Bone and Joint Clinic. So, you have your own buildings in each of these towns?

A: Yeah, we've got our own clinics, and we have one or two vehicles at each airport that we fly into. And so it's really... Some of our patients don't realize that the doctors leave out of Laramie early in the morning and fly to their town. And that's really the impression -- we don't mind that that's the impression that they have because we really want everyone to feel as though these doctors are -- they're doctors, and really part of their hometown because the doctors really are because they are there once a week.

And it's -- and we've been doing this for 40 years. And actually, flying for, I think, about 30 years -- maybe a little over that. And -- because when Gem City Bone and Joint, now Premier Bone and Joint, first practiced, it was just here in Laramie. Then, they branched out to a few other cities, and they were driving. And then they started chartering airplanes. And then they eventually bought an airplane, and now, we're up to four airplanes. And so it works very well for us.

Q: Do you own the hangar here, or lease it, or what?

A: No, we lease the hangar from the airport.

Q: Oh, OK.

A: And it's -- the hangar is large enough to hold our four airplanes, and so it just -- it works out very well.

Q: And who services that? You might have mentioned this before, and I've forgotten. Do you -- do you have your own mechanics, or do you hire mechanics? How does that work?

A: We -- we're very fortunate to be tied-in with a aircraft maintenance firm down in Denver at Rocky Mountain Metropolitan Airport. It used to be called Jefferson County Airport. It's about a 25 minute flight from here. And these guys -- Hawkeye Aviation -- they've been maintaining our planes for three or four years now, just doing an excellent job. We've got to do everything we can do to make sure these airplanes can fly every day that they're scheduled to fly.

And each of our airplanes flies about 225 hours a year. Our longest flight is an hour up to Gillette. Some of them are as short as 30 minutes over to Torrington, or Rawlins is just a little bit shorter than that. The trip I'm going on today -- Rock Springs -- is 45 minutes. But, so we don't accumulate a lot of flight time on the airplanes, but we have to make sure these airplanes can fly every day. Many days, we have all four airplanes out.

Today, it's just two. But, so we have to have a maintenance provider who knows the airplanes very well. And we just had an airplane in for [00:20:00] maintenance down in Denver all last week. And I brought it back -- flew it back on Saturday. And so it's -- we're very fortunate to find a maintenance provider who can -- has the expertise and all the tooling and all the equipment necessary to support our airplanes. And then they do King Airs and Learjets and what have you for other companies too.

Q: But let's say it's flying in and out of here at the end of the day. Is anything done to it, or it's just put in a hangar?

A: It's just put in a hangar. Now, if we land and find that something is wrong with the airplane, the maintenance staff in Denver; they'll hop into a car and drive up here.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: And so they're just -- they're fantastic. We've looked at having our own maintenance staff, but I'll be honest with you, the cost involved in all the equipment, the tooling, and what have you, and we're not just to that point. Maybe if we were flying the airplanes more than we are now -- more hours each year -- it could -- we could warrant that. But what we got setup right now just

-- in the 13 years that I've been here, this is the best setup we've had as far as maintenance goes.

Q: That makes sense.

A: These airplanes are -- fuel is our highest cost on an hourly basis, and maintenance is our second highest cost. And without fuel and without maintenance, the airplane doesn't fly. But these airplanes are very dependable. They're not -- we've done a lot of research on other airplanes that might be a little bit faster than these or maybe a little more fuel efficient, but weighing all the different factors and what have you, these airplanes just -- it's hard to find another airplane that would work better for us.

Q: And does -- is the plane suited also to the kind of flying that you do in Wyoming?

A: It's -- and that's a good question. It is. The engines are -- we don't have much difficulties starting them, even if they've been sitting outside all day long, and it's below zero, they just always start. There are some other airplane engines that -- and that's why we've ruled out some other airplanes -- that they don't handle the cold weather very well. And, but these Pratt and Whitney PT6 engines are just almost bullet proof. So, they handle that very well.

They -- and they do very well when the temperatures are very high. And we're operating out of very high elevation airports. Laramie is the highest airport we operate out of; a little over 7,200 feet. In the summertime, the air is thinner; the engines don't perform quite as well as they do in the wintertime when the air is colder or denser. But still, these work very, very well for us. The airplane handles -- Wyoming is noted for -- known for winds, and these airplanes handle crosswinds very, very well.

Q: Oh, OK.

A: Some of the airports we fly into; it's just a single runway. And so it's -- the airplane has got to be able to handle the crosswind, and sometimes a pretty significant crosswind. It's -- and so -- and then the airplane will land... Most of the -- all the airports we go into are pretty good about trying to keep the runways clear of snow and ice, but sometimes it snows so much, so hard, that they can't keep up with it.

And so if -- so we can certainly land in a couple inches of snow, and the airplane handles it just fine. And so again, you're right. We face a lot of environmental weather factors here in Wyoming that make it somewhat challenging and unique compared to other parts of the country. And again, in other parts of the country,



another type of airplane might work better. But these just work very, very well for us.

And I don't mean to sound like a spokesperson for Beechcraft, or that makes the King Airs, or Pratt and Whitney makes the engines, but they've done a pretty good job of creating an airplane that... These King Airs were -- they first came out in the -- about 1964, I think. And they've had various models since then -- updated models. And, but this basic airframe and design has been in place for 50 years, and it works.

Q: OK, another question. This is kind of related back to when you were talking about Rocky Mountain Air used to go Denver, Cheyenne, to Laramie. What's it like to fly over the summit as opposed to drive over it (laughter)?

A: Well, that's -- I much rather drive it -- I mean, excuse me, fly it. It's -- I -- my wife and I have a small ranch north of Cheyenne, and the hardest part of my job here at Premier Bone and Joint is just the drive over every day; 65 miles one way driving over I-80 over the summit. And it takes me -- when the weather is good, it takes me an hour to get here. A flight from Cheyenne over here is 10 minutes, and so it's much easier to take to the skies than to the highway most of the time.

Q: Right, but it doesn't -- so, going over that summit and flying it; it's no different --

A: No.

Q: -- than flying any place else.

A: No.

Q: Oh, OK.

A: It's really not because the summit is up at, I think, 9,000 somewhat feet, and which is the highest point on I-80 in the U.S., which I thought was kind of fascinating. But we usually -- when we have a clinic in Cheyenne, and then -- and then we're flying over to Laramie, we'll go up to maybe 12,000 feet. And we just kind of go up 12,000 feet, (inaudible).

And, but it's, like I said, just a short hop. And it's -- really, the -- we get into some pretty good -- turbulence-wise, some challenging conditions sometimes. Sometimes coming up -- coming back into Laramie from Rock Springs, or Riverton, or Rawlins somewhere to the west, descending over the snowy range about west of Laramie, we can get some pretty bad turbulence.

Q: Oh, really? OK.

A: Also, hit some -- can hit some pretty bad turbulence kind of between mid -- halfway between Douglas and Laramie or Casper and Laramie, kind of where the Shirley Basin and the Laramie range; sometimes those bumps will come from nowhere. And it's usually just like maybe just one big jolt, and then it's fine. So, it's just -- sometimes we

can kind of anticipate turbulence by looking at the clouds or what have you, but not always.

Q: OK. So, and I've always wondered about that; how a pilot can anticipate turbulence, especially if it seems to be clear. And there's no way you can tell, right?

A: There's such a thing as clear air turbulence. And I flew 737s at Frontier Airlines back in the late 1990s, and we'd run into clear turbulence sometimes at thirty somewhat thousand feet, and you just -- you don't see it. And sometimes you can rely on reports from other airplanes that are maybe out ahead of you or in that area when they encounter some turbulence. But sometimes it -- you try to anticipate things, you try to avoid it. Sometimes it's -- you just can't avoid it. You just -- you don't know it's there.

Q: I -- this probably shouldn't go on the recording, but I'll tell it anyway. My stepdaughter came out to see me from Indiana a couple of weeks ago, and it was thunderstorming. It was apparently a really rough flight, but she said that 2/3 of the way through the flight it was just like being on a rollercoaster. She said the pilot came on and said, "Hey, you kids back there in row 16; quit rocking the plane. (laughter)" And that broke everybody up.

A: I bet so. It's -- well, everybody... I used to fly with a -- well, I flew for Rocky Mountain Airways, and I made

probably 1,000 trips between Denver and Aspen. And we used to pick up a lot of turbulence on that route. It was a 45 minute flight, but it was over a pretty tough terrain and what have you. And I had flown with this one captain I'll always -- I learned a lot from this man.

But he would get on the [00:30:00] phone or the PA, and then make an announcement to the passengers that we're hitting turbulence, and he said, "Oh," he said, "It's just mother nature reminding us that she's still there and she still can do things. So, just -- again, it's -- it -- this airplane handles the turbulence very well, and just don't worry. Keep your seatbelt fastened, and we'll get through this. And sometimes mother nature kind of makes herself known, and so be it."

So, again, we -- sometimes we get some pretty good turbulence here. I -- also, I should mention as far as the weather goes, we pick up a lot of ice around here sometimes. Really, mainly not so much as they do back east where the ice might be more -- ice conditions may be more widespread. But here, when we pick up ice, sometimes it'll be just in a small area, but sometimes we pick up quite a bit. And you can't really anticipate it.

Q: While you're flying.

A: Right, right.

Q: OK.

A: It's just because lots of times, it's when we're climbing out of an airport or descending down in where we've got to go through the clouds. You never pick up ice, unless you're in the clouds. And sometimes in the wintertime though, we won't pick up a lot of ice because it's just too cold out. Up at altitude, if we're in the clouds -- if the temperature is about 40 degrees below zero or colder, that's too cold to pick up ice.

And I didn't know that until I was flying with this very senior captain at Rocky Mountain Airways a long, long time ago. We were flying to Steamboat Springs, or Aspen, or what have you, and they have seven. And you have a gauge in the airplane that gives you the outside air temperature. And we were flying through the clouds, and he said, "Well, you think we're going to pick up any ice today?"

I looked outside, I said, "Well, we don't seem to be picking up any right now, but we're in the clouds and what have you." And he said, "Well, what's the temperature?" And I said, "Well, it looks like it's about 42, 43 below," and that's centigrade. But 40 degrees centigrade -- 40 below centigrade is the same as 40 below Fahrenheit. It's just --

Q: OK.

A: -- funny how those two coincide.

Q: OK, OK.

A: But he said, "Well, we won't pick up it up anyway it's too cold." And so we keep an eye on that. So, sometimes -- because he questioned me. He said, "Well, if we were picking up ice, would you want to descend or climb?" Well, the common thought is -- would be staying in the warmer air. Well, sometimes it pays to climb and get into even colder air, where again, it's just too cold for ice to form. So, again, it was something I learned 30 years ago, and still to this day, I remember that.

And so we keep an eye on that flying here in Wyoming.

And again, sometimes we have to rely on reports from other pilots, if they picked up ice. Sometimes the air traffic control will ask us, "Are you guys picking up any ice in your area? And if so, what's the outside air temperature and what kind of ice?" There's different kinds of ice you could pick up. "And to what degree are you picking it up," and what have you. So, that's a more of a factor, say, in the springtime; icing conditions are a little more prevalent than they are any other time of year.

Q: Because there's more moisture in the air at that...

A: Yes, exactly.

Q: OK.

A: Exactly. Really, the springtime is the toughest time of year to fly here. And summertime is tough. Wintertime; other than those few really, really nasty days, it's really a little bit easier because the airplane just performs that much better. And the biggest thing in the wintertime is just the runway conditions and the... Sometimes we have to hold up our arrival at the airport because they're up there -- the airport is closed because they're up there plowing. Then as soon as they get really plowed, then they open the airport back up, so.

Q: So, spring -- what is it about the spring that makes it more difficult to...?

A: It's just the winds, the temperatures, the moisture. All can vary -- can be very -- can do sort of picking up ice in the air, and also, contaminating the runways with ice, and then combined with fairly strong winds and what have you. There are some times we may have to cancel a flight because the ramp, or the taxiways, or the runway is just too slick to taxi-on combined with the strong winds.

And the last couple of years, we cancelled a few clinics, and we hate to do that because we know it's an inconvenience for patients, but. And it usually happens -- seems to happen towards the end of April, first part of May that again, we'll taxi out, and the runways and

the taxiways are so slick, and the winds are blowing so hard, we really can't keep the airplane pointed the direction we want to go. So, we'll just taxi back in and say, "Well, that's -- tomorrow -- we'll just wait until tomorrow."

Q: So, and in the summers because the air, as you say, is thinner because of the warmth, and...

A: It's thinner, and then you have the thunderstorms. So, we have to fly around the thunderstorms to try to -- just like the airlines, you try to provide as smooth a ride as you can for the passengers. And so you get to a lot of the thunderstorms building up, so we have to maneuver around them. And it's -- this particular summer has been really one of the easier summers we've had.

We've had a lot of thunderstorms, but not to the degree that -- as in past summers. So, this really, again, has been one of the easier summers to handle. But again, summertime can be a challenge. The fall is usually pretty nice, other than we get some snowstorms in October, and kind of catch you there one by surprise, so.

Q: We shouldn't after all these years because we know.

(laughter)

A: Exactly, we should learn to expect it, but it...

Q: The kids out on Halloween with their (inaudible).

(laughter)



A: Yeah, it's just not Halloween, unless it's a blizzard out.

Q: Exactly (laughter), exactly.

A: So, we can -- we've got enough of a history with our flight department, I track all these things. I track all of our weather cancellations and mechanical cancellations, which we just have virtually none. But we have maybe five or six clinics a year that we have to cancel because of the weather. And it's almost always, again, right in the middle of spring.

And so we can kind of anticipate that. And many times, we'll have every -- the doctor and his staff; we wait here at the Cowboy Aviation, and sometimes we may have to wait a couple of hours for the weather to get either better here in Laramie or get better at our destination.

Q: That was going to be my question; the determining factor is both here and where you're going.

A: Right, right. And occasionally, that will happen. And when that happens, then we contact our staff at our satellite clinic that we're flying to, and then they can contact our patients and schedule them later on in the day.

Q: Now, I have a question about the staff because I know the doctors fly. You said they fly with an assistant, and then sometimes the receptionist as well. So, when people

are hired at Premier Bone and Joint, are they -- is their willingness to fly part of their job application?

A: It's -- well, it certainly factor into it, in that we've had some people that have become part of our medical practice that have never flown that much before, or their flying has been in much larger airplanes. And so the first time that they fly with us, while we go through the same (inaudible) briefing that flight attendants (inaudible); how to work the seatbelts; how to put on the oxygen mask; how to use the tray table; and the lights; and the vents; and what have you; and where the fire extinguisher is located; how to open the door in case of an emergency.

And so everyone is briefed on that. And it's -- so really, we have to run this like a small airline, and with the same emphasis on safety as the airlines have. But the -- since we operate single-pilot, well, that pilot is responsible for doing all those things [00:40:00]. And there's -- there are some places in the...

Sometimes if we get someone who hasn't flown very often, we'll have them sit up in the co-pilot seat because if they can see out ahead of them, sometimes that makes things a little bit better. And then once they get

accustomed to the feelings, and the sounds, and what have you of flying, then when they sit back in the cabin, they're just a little bit more comfortable.

Q: OK. I wondered about that because I'm a little -- I'm a nervous Nellie when I'm flying anyway. And it's been a long time since I've been in a really small plane. So, I was just curious how people would respond to it.

A: It's -- and then after a while, why, people get so used to it. It's just like getting in their cars. And we really -- our flight department is really a transportation department because the airplanes; we use that as a mechanism to get from point A to point B. And then once we get to point B, then we get in another form of transportation; in one of our cars or vans, and then go to the clinic. And then at the end of the day, we do the reverse. And so again, it's just imperative that the airplanes are ready to go in the morning, and then if the weather is good, then we just launch out of here and it's business as usual.

Q: So, you take off your pilot's cap and put on your chauffeur's cap when you get there (laughs)?

A: Well, pretty much so, pretty much so. And then when we get to the clinic, sometimes we put on our -- sometimes the nurses call us -- refer to us as their cabana boys (laughter) because if they -- if they need someone to go pick up x-rays, or pick up lunch, or pick up some

supplies for the clinic, well, then that pilot goes out and does that. (laughter)

And so some days, we don't have a whole lot to do in between flights, and some days, we have a lot to do, depending on the clinic and the demands of the clinic for that day. But it's been fun over the years to get to meet a lot of our patients. We've -- because when they find out that the doctors flew in, they like to ask us questions about the airplane and what have you, and how long we've been doing this, and how often we fly into that -- their particular town and what have you. And so it's just -- we've got some really nice patients out there.

Q: So, you get a chance to meet...?

A: Yes, yes. And I just -- I really -- I meet a lot of them outside of the clinics. Typically, for me, I get up about 4:00, 4:30 every morning, go out and feed the horses, and then get ready, and come to work, and then fly to wherever, and then I got a couple hours of down time. So, I'll go and have breakfast.

And people -- I'll see people at the restaurant, and you'll see on the side of our car our Premier Bone and Joint logo. And then they'll ask me, "Were you with Premier Bone and Joint?" I go, "Yes." And, "What do you

do?" and I tell them. And then many times, they'll say, "Well, one of your doctors did my knee, or my shoulder, or whatever years ago." And I ask, "Well, how are you doing?" "Oh, just fine (laughter), just fine."

And I hear a lot of good things, and it -- and that's one of the best things about working for this company because our physicians set a very high standard for themselves, and they put so much time and effort in their patient care. And that feeling kind of filters on down to the whole company. And that's why -- I mean, I'm very fortunate to be able to work with three other pilots who -- we try to bring our A-game with us every day because it's -- it is a big responsibility.

And we try to do things as well as they can be done, factoring in all the different things that could happen because we want the flights to be as uneventful as possible, just like with the airlines. We -- with the airlines, you always want to try to make the flight one of the least eventful part of someone's trip. And we try to do the same thing here.

And so we've got to again, be cognizant of the weather; be cognizant of what's going on with the airplane; be aware of any of our passengers may not be feeling well or

something or what have you. And then again, be aware of the demands of the clinic that -- because we're...

Typically, the clinics will start about 8:00 in the morning -- 8:00 or 8:30, and go 'till 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon.

Sometimes not quite that long, sometimes longer than that. And if we're some place where the weather is bad, we may have the airplane put in a hangar somewhere. And then when we anticipate the clinic will be done soon, then we got to call out to the airport and have them pull the airplane out of the hangar. And -- or if there is no hangar, then we got to maybe make a quick trip out to the airport and make sure that if it snowed, we have to sweep the snow off the airplane.

Q: Have you ever been stranded in a place where you had to spend -- stay overnight and couldn't get back to Laramie?

A: Yes. And there have been -- it's been a few years, probably -- oh, geese -- five or six years ago, I think. It was snowing so hard, we had a number of airplanes out. I was in Sheridan. Another airplane was Rock Springs. We were trying to get back into Laramie. This -- it was snowing so hard, they couldn't -- the snow plows couldn't keep ahead of it, so they had to close the airport. And, of course, the airlines could not fly in here. No one could fly in here.

And so we diverted into Rawlins and spent the night, which worked out fine because we have a clinic there, and we have our own car there and what have you. So, we called ahead and had the airport get us some reservations -- hotel reservations, and we spent the night there. And then the other airplane I think diverted to Casper because that particular medical staff was going to be doing Casper the next day. So, it worked out fine.

Q: Oh, yeah. That makes sense.

A: And so that doesn't happen very often, but when it does, we've got to -- we try to have contingency plans for everything. We've had some occasions when -- it doesn't happen very often, but say we have an airplane in Rock Springs or something and we have a flat tire. Well, it's a little different than a flat tire in your car. And we've got to somehow get a mechanic out there to repair it.

So, sometimes we've had to route airplanes from someplace else to Casper or to Rock Springs to pick up that -- those passengers and bring them back to Laramie, and then -- or get an airplane to Laramie, pick up a mechanic, and fly him to wherever he's needed and what have you. So, we've got to -- the airlines have a... It was my first job at the airlines with Rocky Mountain Airways; a flight

dispatcher who was kind of a coordinator of everything.  
It was a fantastic job.

When I took the job, I didn't know what a flight dispatcher was (laughter), but I saw the ad in the paper, and said, "Well, I'll give it a shot." And, but it's kind of the nerve center for an airline. And so we've got to kind of have somewhat of a dispatch system here in order to organize some of those operations that are kind of off schedule.

And it just doesn't happen very often, but when it does, it's like, "Well," so I get on the phone with the other pilots, and they may have to (inaudible) plane to someplace else. So, it takes some orchestrating to get everything done, but it works. It's helpful to have four airplanes because then it does allow us to address some of those irregular off situations. But again, they happen very infrequently.

Q: Now, here's a strange question. Do you wear a uniform when you're flying?

A: No, no. But it -- this was the first flying job I've ever had I didn't wear a tie. When I was a flight instructor, my very first flying job, I wore a tie. When I was a charter pilot, I wore a tie. And then the commercial airlines, I wore a uniform. And I remember my



first -- my first day here, got in the airplane, and something just doesn't feel right. (laughter)

Well, I wasn't wearing a tie. And, but you get used to it. And it's -- it was -- but it's like the one nice thing about the airlines is you always knew what you were wearing to work every day. (laughter) You didn't have to choose, "Well, what shirt [00:50:00] am I wearing today?" But, no, things are a little more casual here, and it kind of fits with Wyoming, in general.

Q: OK, because I was at the Saratoga Airport, and I saw a corporate jet come in, maybe one of those shared (inaudible), and he was dressed.

A: Yes, yes. Some of the charter operators and some of the fractional operators -- that's -- they're flying different people all the time. And since we're flying the same folks all the time, it's kind of like we're flying our family, to be honest with you.

We feel so close to everyone, and but they want us to look presentable. And so we wear casual business attire. But there's -- as I know you can probably appreciate, there's times when -- there are times when we're wearing our long underwear and about everything we can put on, and -- to handle some of the winds and weather here in Wyoming.

Q: I -- and speaking of wind, some time in the past six months, I think, I heard a story about I think it was an airline or, it was caught in some kind of a shear or something along the eastern side of [Laramie?]. And it sounded like it was a regular kind of feature.

A: It's a -- sometimes -- and it's interesting with the -- with the avionics, or the radio (inaudible) we have in these airplanes. We get an instant read-out all the time of the wind direction and speed of --

Q: Oh, OK.

A: -- whatever altitude we're at. And that wasn't -- before the advent of GPS and all that, you just didn't have a lot of that as readily available as you do now. But -- and it's interesting to watch -- as you're climbing over the mountains, you watch the wind speed and direction changes. And sometimes that will create a wind shear type of activity --

Q: OK.

A: -- when the wind speed or the direction suddenly changes. And then the airplane -- and that certainly affects the airplane. And we -- usually, when the winds are very, very strong up at altitude, and sometimes the wind will -- and the friction with the wind that's going across the ground, the winds can be moving at different directions at various altitudes.

Q: Oh, my.

A: And as you're descending or climbing through these altitudes, why, you'll run into those shear conditions. And it's really the airplane is just adjusting for, "Well, let's see, if the wind was at this speed, and this direction, and now it's this other." So, that's what makes it bumpy and what have you.

Q: Oh, OK.

A: And sometimes the winds -- around here, the prevailing winds are really kind of -- out of the northwest -- they're really strong winds -- northwest to west. And as they come up over the mountains, it's kind of like water going down the river, or a stream over the rocks. And the wind will come over the mountains and kind of start curling around and what have you. And that can create a lot of turbulence.

Q: OK.

A: And so sometimes when we anticipate that, we'll -- especially coming into here into Laramie from the west, we'll stay up pretty high until we get fairly close to the airport. And then we'll pull the power back to idle and descend on down through to try to avoid some of the -- so that choppiness or some of those waves.

Q: It's closer to the mountains?

A: Right, right.

Q: Oh, I see. OK.

A: It's a condition known as mountain wave.

Q: Oh, OK.

A: And just like waves in the ocean or waves in a river, the wind can do that over the mountains.

Q: Oh, OK.

A: And you don't -- you don't get that on the east coast or in the mid-west, but you'll get it here in Wyoming. And sometimes that mountain wave will extend quite a ways out to the east from the mountains. And it can create some pretty challenging conditions.

Q: Is that why they build the DIA so far out?

A: Well, the -- they -- now, I flew into Stapleton Airport for many, many years...

Q: That was on the east side too.

A: Right. And the DIA is a little bit further out. And some people thought, "Well," because DIA -- or Stapleton had a lot of problems with wind shears. And they had detectors all around the airport. They started putting that in back in the late '80s, I think, and it would issue these wind shear alerts.

And sometimes we'd close the airport because of this wind shear alert. They usually don't last -- or these wind shear conditions usually don't last more than 15 minutes or so. But -- and some people thought, "Well, if the airport is a little bit further out east, DIA will run

into that." Well, it's just as prevalent there, to be honest with you.

Q: Oh, really?

A: Yes. It's -- that whole area there is pretty prone to that. And we -- but nowhere do -- where we fly in Wyoming do they have those kind of wind shear detectors. So, we can -- we pay particular attention to what the winds are doing on the ground. I remember on time we were flying back from Rock Springs, and it was in the summertime, and a lot of thunderstorm activity around. And the winds on the ground here were shifting around, and around, blowing up to 50 to 60 knots, which is 60, 70 miles an hour.

And even though the weather was -- the clouds -- it was pretty clear, we held up in the air for maybe 30 minutes before those conditions could dissipate because even if that wind was coming right straight down the runway, we were worried we'd get it on land, but then I was worried about taxing it back into Cowboy Aviations. And so it was -- we just thought the prudent thing to do would be stay out here where it's nice and smooth, circle around a little bit, wait for the conditions to improve, and then -- and in the end, that's what happened.

Q: Now, all this flying that you've done, and you've talked -- you talked about that last time. And I don't remember

if I asked you this before. Have you ever had your own plane?

A: No, I never have.

Q: OK.

A: I always wanted it, but never could afford it.

Q: Well.

A: And then -- and it's -- we -- with this particular operation, we have four pilots to four airplanes, so you basically keep the same pilot married to that airplane. It just makes things a little bit easier. Even though the airplanes are all identical, they all fly just a little bit differently, but each pilot kind of takes kind of ownership in that airplane.

And even though the medical practice pays for all that, it's -- and we don't use the airplanes for personal use, but it's... Although there's times when I kind of fantasize, like, "Well, if I put a landing strip out here in my pasture, and then I could just hop into the airplane and be to Laramie in a little bit."

But then I think about, "Well," I'd be worried about what are the winds in Laramie, and then is it snowing and what have you. And it'd be nice to be able to afford an airplane like the King Airs that can handle all that stuff, but -- and it's probably -- the prudent thing for

me to do is just stay away from buying an airplane and just keep driving, I guess.

Q: Well, at least you get to fly.

A: Yes, yeah. And it's really -- I flew to Gillette yesterday, and one of the smoothest flights I can remember in such a long time. There wasn't -- it was just beautiful; smooth as glass. It was about a one hour flight up there. We left out of here a little after 7:00 in the morning, and just really, really a nice flight.

And there were some clouds out to the east, and on the horizon, and where we were was clear, but the winds at altitude were very, very light; that blown about 10 knots or so, and just really, really a pleasant day. We just need more of those days here. So, it would just make things just that much -- that much more enjoyable.

Q: Well, I would love to see the inside of the plane.

A: Oh, sure, sure.

Q: But I'm looking at the time, and I know you have --

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: -- that call at 10:00, and then I did -- I would like to meet these other two gentlemen (inaudible).

A: Perfect. Perfect.

Q: OK. I'll shut...

END OF AUDIO FILE