OH-3084, Steve Wolff, 7-8-2014, Laramie, WY In Flight

BOGART: OK. Today is July 8th, 2014. This is Barbara Bogart. I'm in the American Heritage Center with Mr. Steve Wolff, and we're going to be talking about his experience with aviation in the state, and other stuff will come up, I'm sure. Where are you from originally?

WOLFF: California, unfortunately.

BOGART: Oh, don't say that. Whereabouts?

WOLFF: I was born in Los Angeles, but spent most of the time in central valley around Fresno and Sacramento.

BOGART: Oh, OK. I grew up in -- I was born in California, too. Grew up in Southern California.

WOLFF: People in Wyoming usually kill you when they find that out.

BOGART: I know that, but if you say that, "But I got here as soon as I could," then that softens it. When did you come to Wyoming?

WOLFF: Two thousand and five.

BOGART: What brought you here?

WOLFF: Well, I used to fly corporate from California up to Billings, Montana, and I used to rent a car, and I came down to northern Wyoming. [00:01:00] Powell? It's up there on [Laurel?]?

BOGART: Mm-hm.

WOLFF: And really liked it. We're talking like in the mid-'70s.

BOGART: Oh, uh-huh.

WOLFF: So I thought, I mean, this is like 1950. So, I always had that in the back of my mind, and then I had an unusual job at one time where I worked two months on and one month off, and I was flying overseas. So, my girlfriend and I would spend most of the time of that month driving around up there, and we would go to Arizona, Montana, Wyoming, places like that. And then I got married, I think in 2000. My wife was from Thailand, and the idea was to move to Wyoming, and I'd been through Laramie several times, OK, driving, and then -- through like a restaurant thing here, OK. She didn't like it. So, that's what brought me to Wyoming.

BOGART: Oh, OK. And how did you first [00:02:00] get started in aviation? You said you were a corporate pilot?

WOLFF: Well, they don't have these people anymore, but I was one of these children that always liked airplanes, you know, from the like the first day. And, it seemed like a natural, just to go out into aviation, and the thing with me was to fly airplanes. Little did I know that I'm much happier as a mechanic.

BOGART: Why do you say that?

WOLFF: Well, first of all, you're gone from home all the time, and the child's vision of flying wasn't the adult reality, and for some reason I kept thinking it was going to get better and it never did. And, usually by the time you're 50, you don't make a career change. By then it's going to be pretty difficult. So, I had quit several times and did other things. I worked at a casino [00:03:00] one time, and I drove a truck for eight months and that type of thing, OK, you know, but my last flight was in 2007. I was in Africa at the time. And, my wife and I, we were living here, OK, and it was working out pretty good where everything was pretty well normalized, all right. So, I quit then and drove a semi-truck for Swift for about eight months, OK, and then got hired by the university. So, it worked out pretty good.

BOGART: So you finally got to be a kind of a mechanic, at the physical --

WOLFF: With what?

BOGART: You got to be kind of a mechanic at the physical plant?

WOLFF: Well, I just, I liked airplanes. I didn't like flying them.

BOGART: OK.

WOLFF: I mean, if you fly airplanes now days, you know -- I did a lot of airline flying. I started that like [00:04:00] in 1985. Before that I was doing corporate flying. But anyway, about 1985 I was flying for the military as a civilian. In those years, believe it or not, the Air Force and Navy never flew their own cargo, so they subletted that out to different companies, like Zantop, Transinternational, Southern Air Transport. Those were the people that fly all night, while everybody that has a normal life is sleeping. So, I'm one of the few people that ever got to do exactly what they always wanted, and I wanted to do that because when I was in the Air Force as an avionics technician, OK, these guys that flew -- it was called Log Air; Logistics Air Command. They flew military airplanes -- former military airplanes most [00:05:00] of the time, with civilian pilots, you know, and they and long hair. They weren't your typical airline pilot. They never wore ties.

But anyway, so I thought, well you know, that's what kind of like I'd like to do. So, I talked to them, you know, it was a long arduous trip to get where I wanted to go, but when I got there I didn't like it. So -- I mean, I just, I like being around airplanes all the time. I like working

on them, like looking at them, you know, and most of the planes I was really interested in were historical pieces, OK, from like World War II, the Korean War, that type of thing. By the time I grew up they were all gone. Of course, little did I know, I would be flying them anyway. But -- so I started flying about 1964 as a student at Sacramento McClellan Air Force Base, and I stopped flying for a couple of years when I went to college. I graduated with a BA degree in geology, [00:06:00] and which I never turned a rock, but it was something I was -- because I grew up out in the gold country there around Sacramento, OK, and I had a lot of friends that had small mines on their property and stuff, and as kids we used to play in them, and so it was kind of like a natural for me to go into geology, because I liked science anyway.

So, when I graduated in 1971, there was this huge recession mainly aimed at pilots. I mean, there was like 15 thousand pilots looking for 300 jobs, and I didn't have any experience then, OK, so I flight instructed for a while. That's -- if you're -- in the civilian aspect of aviation, that's just about your only avenue, OK, other than -- you know, if you go in for the military, you already come out with what they call turbine time, which is jet aircraft

time. So, it's much [00:07:00] easier to make the transition right into the airline. So, I did that for awhile, and eventually got into corporate flying, OK, and that's what brought me up to Montana and Wyoming, and lots of other places; Mexico, all of it.

So, about 1976, '77, the airlines started hiring again. They kind of go in ten year cycles, like 1945 when World War II was over, then the next big hiring was '55 and so on, like that. So, anyway, I got hired by a company called Transamerica in 1985, I think, and they were out on the West Coast out of Oakland, OK, and they did the logistics air command, all the military flying for the Air Force and the Navy, OK, and then they [00:08:00] went broke after six months, so I'm kind of an albatross when it comes to working for a company because just about everybody I've worked for has -- has gone broke.

So, but they sold all their airplanes to another company called Southern Air Transport, out of Miami. They're the ones that you always -- at that time, right about -- in Nicaragua, you know, doing all that clandestine stuff, the CIA and all that. So, I got hired by them, and I did more of the logistics air command. We would fly out of Travis

Air Force base, go to McClellan, go over to Hill Air Force base, Ogden, Utah. Let's see, did we split? No, we continued on down to Kelly Air Force base, San Antonio, spent the night there, and then went over to one at Robins, Georgia. Just made this loop for three days, OK? Then next time you'd go like this. And I was 50 at the time. [00:09:00] You know, I -- this was really what I wanted to do, before I did it.

And I just said, you know, I -- at that time you had to retire at 60, and two things was, one, I didn't want to do this for the rest of my life, and two, I could see down the road eventually that the government was going to get tired of paying civilian contractors to fly military cargo, OK, when they had all their own airplanes sitting all over the U.S. And that's exactly what happened. About 1993, caput, they were gone, OK. Fortunately, I had already left. So, at that time -- and they went broke too, by the way.
So, in order to make a lot of money in a short period of time, I went over to Angola, Africa and flew there nine years in the civil war. Same type of airplanes, OK. It was a [00:10:00] 24-hour operation. It was for the commies, by the way. My other friends were flying for the CIA out of [Kamena?] base in the Congo. We'd talk to each

other at night, OK, everybody knew. But, so I did that for quite a while, and that's where I was working two months on, one month off, all right.

And, we were flying most of the time in excess of 200 hours a month. A normal airline pilot here in the stateside, when I was doing it, a good month would be 80, 85 hours.

BOGART: Oh, OK.

WOLFF: Domestic you were allowed 100 hours. International, 120. We were flying double that, easy, because it was 24/7, you know. The one thing about it is they kept the crews at a minimum so everybody had good flight time and flight pay. The down side is you were tired all the time. I mean, really tired, and [00:11:00] it -- of course, I don't know if you ever had the problem with lack of sleep, but your irritability index is really high, and the other downside was they were shooting at us and we lost five aircraft, probably the total of, I don't know, 35 crews. So, but anyway, the pay was good, all right.

BOGART: And you did that for nine years?

WOLFF: Pardon?

BOGART: Nine years, you say?

WOLFF: Yeah, on and off, and the I flew in the Congo for two years out of Uganda, all right, mostly as an NGO for the

United Nations. We were doing a lot of work out of Entebbe for the UN. They have a peacekeeping for there, you know, so-so. But, we did all of their air lift capabilities. The UN is not allowed to own their own airplanes. They contract all that out. [00:12:00]

BOGART: Sure.

WOLFF: And then I did another couple of years based out of Kenya doing famine relief and air drops in Southern Sudan. That was -- that was kind of a lot of fun, but again, long hours, crummy airplanes, and working for the U.N. and the World Food program at the time, nobody is on the same page, you know. Everybody speaks English but they don't understand what they're saying. It's just a nut house. So, my last fight -- I'm trying to think -- yeah, we were in Kikwit -- Kikwit in the Congo is known for its Ebola virus, so we crashed an airplane there -- I was letting the copilot fly. I was checking him out as a captain, OK, and we made a [00:13:00] routine landing, and of course, with propeller driven aircraft, everything's got to work just exactly right. If it gets out of sync when the plane's on the ground, things kind of go crazy, and that's basically what happened; ran off the runway. Nobody got hurt. A lot of damage to the airplane, and I had the options then. That was my third time, and I'm superstitious, so after the

third time, I said, you know, it's time to do something else. So, after 23,000 hours, that was the end of my flying.

So, the Wyoming thing, I got interested in 2005, about October, because my landlord -- it's funny. The day that the [Blakes?] -- you know the Blakes at all? They have all these houses and apartments and stuff all over town.

BOGART: I'm new to town, so.

WOLFF: Anyway, they're real nice, OK. The day I signed the lease [00:14:00] to the house I'm in now, she says -- of course, I didn't know -- but she said, did you -- it was the 50th anniversary of those idiots in the DC4 with United Airlines that hit Medicine Bow Peak. I mean, they flew right into it, OK. So, she said, "Did you know anything about it?" I said, no. So, that kind of piqued my interested, OK, and Wyoming is a great state for airplanes hitting mountains, OK.

So, I kind of thought that I'd do some research on air carrier crashes. I don't care about the Cessna 150s or the small airplanes, OK -- in the state of Wyoming, and write about it from a pilot's standpoint of view, OK. And, while I was doing research for that project right here in this

building, OK, I came across -- and of course I was over at the [Coat] Library, too -- I came across this thing. It mentioned about Medicine Bow, OK. And, this [00:15:00] was -- so it'd be Easter of 2006, OK, and my wife, she didn't want to come with me, you know. I just looked at the maps. Hell, it's only 60 miles up there, OK, so I got in the car and I drove up there, OK. I got out, and I looked around and I said, "God, it's still here!" And, as you walked from where you park the car, you know, it's a barbed-wire fence -- original fence from 1929 -- it was like stepping into a time zone. And so, that's what -- how I got interested in Medicine Bow.

And then -- so I kept doing more research on it, and the first airway was built for the military and the airmail pilots, OK. It was kind of like -- it wasn't what you'd call a joint concern or a joint effort, but it was a joint philosophy, [00:16:00] OK, and it went from San Francisco to New York, and it passed right through this state, right through where we are. You know, this whole lower half of the state of Montana -- or, Wyoming, is a big corridor for migrants going both directions, all right. So, it was a logical place for this thing to go through. And, it

entered the state over by Evanston, 20 miles south of a place called [Night?].

BOGART: I've been there. I lived in Evanston for a while, so I've been there.

WOLFF: And what it was, was a series of airway beacons, OK, and again, they went all the way from San Francisco to New York, and on the ground -- let me see your pen. This is really cool. You can see one up there at Sherman Hill.

BOGART: Oh really?

WOLFF: Yeah.

BOGART: OK. Oh, it's the big arrows.

WOLFF: Have you seen those on the ground?

BOGART: I have not. I've heard about them, but I haven't seen them.

WOLFF: Yeah, well, there's one up at Sherman Hill. It's kind of -

BOGART: There's one [00:17:00] at Superior, too.

WOLFF: It's kind of beat up, but they all point east, OK, and then -- the airways that go south to north through the U.S., they point north like that, and they're about 50 feet long, OK.

Anyway, so at Medicine Bow, there's one of these right at the base of the tower. The tower set right here. You continue on down with the concrete, so it's -- there's four

legs like this, and the tower is about 50 feet high. So -- and it's still there at Medicine Bow. This one points to Rock River. So, anyway, they go all the way across the state, Nebraska, and fortunately, we are one of the very few states that have these left. Once you get into the middle of Nebraska, they're all covered up with wheat and corn, and all other kind of stuff, but you can go anyplace out here and find them. They're really -

BOGART: Where all have you seen them?

WOLFF: [00:18:00] Well, let's see -

BOGART: I've been to Night, but I don't remember seeing that. I remember seeing the tower.

WOLFF: Well, a lot of them have been dug up, because after they were decommissioned, the feds came in and bulldozed them.

BOGART: They were concrete?

WOLFF: Yeah, so it's in the remote areas where you would find them, and the reason why Medicine Bow was so unique was, is from 1929 until right this minute, it was an airport, OK. Like, this one up at Sherman Hill, there was no airport around, OK. Right now, there's a microwave station right here at the base. So, that's -- that's what preserved Medicine Bow, all right. The one at Night's been all bulldozed, but you can still the foundation. A lot of

these places had residence to maintain the beacon [00:19:00].

BOGART: Right.

WOLFF: OK. Particularly in the remote areas, all right. So, there's one at Bitter Creek you can see. The one at Leroy is gone. The one at Granger is gone, but there's still foundations there. There's one, it's site 31. I'm trying to think of the mountain. It's over by [Hannah]. I'll think of that in a minute. The one at Rock River's gone, but there's still -- I call them debris fields, OK, all right, and the house foundation is still there. There's one about 15 miles east of the one at the summit, it's on the [McIntyre?] ranch, which is really cool because it's very well preserved since it's on private property. OK. So, the ones that are available to view right now, would be Summit, the McIntyre Ranch, [00:20:00] and they were numbered.

BOGART: And how -- every so many miles?

WOLFF: Well, it depended on the terrain, OK. Now, the airway was broken down from San Francisco to New York so no segment exceeded 1,000 miles. So, the first air -- part of the airway went from San Francisco to Salt Lake, OK. And then every ten or fifteen miles the numbers started. So, a beacon, say from --

BOGART: For that segment?

WOLFF: Pardon?

BOGART: For that segment?

WOLFF: Yeah, for that segment, yeah.

BOGART: OK, so each segment was separately numbered, OK.

WOLFF: And this is confusing because the next segment the numbering started over again.

BOGART: Right, right.

WOLFF: So, the -- if you were coming out of San Francisco and you were over by Concord, around that area, and Danville, some of these up on the hill, if you were ten miles away from San Francisco, which would be zero, the number would be one. It's the mileage with a unit digit dropped, [00:21:00] OK. So, you get all the way over to Salt Lake, it starts over at zero again. Now, Medicine Bow is site 32 because it's 320 miles from Salt Lake.

BOGART: Oh, so it is a mileage system then.

WOLFF: Yeah.

BOGART: Numbering system, OK.

WOLFF: Do you know where Skyline is?

BOGART: Yes.

WOLFF: Right there, OK, with all this -- what's up there? The vet, the theater used to be up there. There's all the --

the mini store, stuff like that. Well, one of these used to be up there.

BOGART: Really?

WOLFF: Site 37. You can still -- you can still -- if I went out there, I could show you were some of the stuff is left. Anybody -- I talked to the owners of the property. They said well, we've lived here for ten years. We ride horses over this all the time. There's nothing out there. Well, there is.

But anyway, Laramie is site 37. Sherman Hill would be site 38, McIntyre is 39. There's several [00:22:00] by Fed -- do you know where Federal is?

BOGART: I'm trying to think.

WOLFF: It's on Iron Horse Road, over there by Iron Mountain?

BOGART: OK, I know where that is.

WOLFF: That would be 41, then you go to Cheyenne Airport, and then there's one over by -- anyway, it goes all the way across the country till Pine Bluff. I think Pine Bluff is 45, and a lot of these, there was more than one spot. Like, Medicine Bow, because of the lighted airway with the beacon started in the early '20s, OK, so Medicine Bow, the first one, was about a mile to the west. If you know where to look you can see it, OK. And so -- and, the reason why

I brought that up, because Pine Bluff is two different spots.

BOGART: Oh, OK.

WOLFF: So, they had the lighted airway, OK, and the beacons, again it depended on the terrain, you know, would be maybe 30 to 50 miles apart, somewhere in that aspect, you know [00:23:00]. If there was a lot of mountains in between, they might be closer. And this -- this was a low altitude navigation thing.

BOGART: Sure.

WOLFF: The -- like, if this was the beacon tower, OK, and it had the rotating beacon on top, the lens, you could -- it could be tilted, and that’s called azimuth of course. And the azimuth was tilted up to shine 1,000 feet above the adjacent beacon, to hit the pilot right in the eye like that. Now, you could see the beacon sweep a long, long ways. Maybe 50 miles on a clear night, but you had to get closer just to like, see the flash, OK. And, on top of these towers, in conjunction with the rotating beacon is what they called course lights, and they were about 18 inches in [00:24:00] diameter, OK. And there were a lot of beacon sites that didn’t have airports close, or there was a lot of beacons that were not on airports.

Now, the ones that were on airports, and the ones that had airports within two miles, these course lights flashed green, and if you go out to the Laramie Airport at night and see that green sweep, that's the last vestige of this thing right here, OK. Now, if there was no airport at all around period, like up at Summit, the course lights were red, and they shined up and down the airway like this. And they had a, kind of like Fresnel lens affair, OK, and it was designed so if the pilot got off course, the flash would increase, you know, or if you came back on, you know, it would be more straight like that. So, it was [00:25:00] a real complex affair, all right, and they had guys called mechanicians that worked on them, you know, like a pilot would fly over and night and say, oh, the course light is out, OK, he would call somebody when he got on the ground, and -- by telephone, and they would pass that on.

BOGART: Just to interrupt for a minute. The course lights, were they also on the tower?

WOLFF: Yeah.

BOGART: OK.

WOLFF: Mm-hm. The tower had a six foot -- not like a catwalk, but a platform on top that supported everything and it was for maintenance, and those course lights were on each side, OK. Now, the one at Medicine Bow was kind of like this

because you made a turn there. Sometimes they were straight up and down like that. But the problem with all this was, when it snowed or was foggy or rainy, it was totally useless. You couldn't see it. So -- and everybody realized that, OK.

The problem was that, in the beginning, is this was the quickest [00:26:00] and the cheapest way to go, and everybody knew at the time, in the early '20s, partic-- this -- a lot of this was developed in the National Bureau of Standards, OK, back there in Washington, DC. These guys, you know, they were just normal employees, you know, and that's one of the reasons why they're -- this has never gotten any notoriety, as opposed to the Transcontinental Railroad. You know, that was a private affair, you know, and there was all kinds of collusion and subterfuge and stuff like that, but this was just guys, eight to five, that just developed all this, and -- but they knew at the time -- I'm talking the early '20s -- that radio was the answer, but they just couldn't get things worked out right, OK. And that -- it took a while, up until about 1924, they were getting close, and by '27, '28, they actually [00:27:00] got it working to where it was.

And what it was, it operated on the same frequencies as a car radio, somewhere about 400 up to 1600 is the -- is the car radio. That's kilocycles. This operated down in here about 200 kilocycles to 400 kcs, in that area. And, it had -- the station on the ground was kind of like this. It had four courses, and generally the courses -- excuse me -- overlying the lighted airway. Mostly for convenience sake because this was already established, all right. Usually two of the courses were superfluous, so we can eliminate that, OK. And then down the middle it was divided again -- so let's [00:28:00] see -- I think you had an N here, an A here, you would have an A here and an N here. So, this transmitted a beam out, OK, of -- and the pilot had to tune his radio. Each site was different, different frequency.

BOGART: Oh, OK.

WOLFF: And he would listen in the headsets, all right, and if he drifted too far off to -- in this case, to the right, there was a code here with the A, and there was a code here for the N. If you drifted too far to the right, the A would predominate in the headset, so he would know to correct to the left.

BOGART: Oh, I see.

WOLFF: If he's right -- right down the center, this was called an interlock, OK, he would here a solid tone.

BOGART: Oh, OK. OK.

WOLFF: So if he drifted too far -

BOGART: So it was kind [00:29:00] of like, dot, dash, dot, dash. If you're hearing that, you're -

WOLFF: Yeah, exactly, but the big problem was getting this interlock thing to work, OK, all right. And, once they did that, everything fell into place. They were really dangerous because each radio site, as we'll say Medicine Bow, had one -- the next one would be like over at Bitter Creek, and so on, OK. Each one had its own characteristics, and a lot of the characteristics were determined upon the terrain and soil content, OK. If the soil is real alkali, OK, the dust and stuff would kind of creep up onto the transmitting towers, you know like that, and cause problems with static and stuff. And then at night, this thing called night effect -- of course -- I don't know if you've ever had the experience, but you might be out in Oklahoma [00:30:00] some time, you know, like two in the morning in the car and pick up a Los Angeles radio station? That's called night effect. The same thing applied here.

BOGART: Oh, OK.

WOLFF: Yeah. So, what would happen is one course would -- like, this would come out a little bit and stop. And you

had to -- like I said, you had to be really cognizant of the peculiarities of each radio station, OK. It was called -- they were called low frequency radio ranges, all right, and they also -- when they went over mountains like this, they would -- sometimes the beam would curve, OK, and since it's in this frequency range, any time that there was thunderstorms around or something like that, you would just hear static in their headsets all the time, OK. And, because of that, in theory, when you got right over the top of the station, you heard [00:31:00] nothing. It went -- it went up like this. This is the ground, OK, and the station is here. It went up like that, and the electromagnetic radiation is out in here. This is called a cone of silence, OK, and if you were down real low you can see how narrow that is, you could fly right over it and miss it.

BOGART: Oh, my gosh.

WOLFF: Yeah. And of course -- and if you were up high, you know, it was a not a problem. And you could tell, which was a good thing, when you were over the station because you didn't hear nothing, and you could look at your watch and say OK, I just crossed Medicine Bow at 12:10, Bitter Creek is next, my ground speed is such-and-such, I should

be over there at 1:10, you know, an hour away. So, that's how they used to check what was going on.

BOGART: Oh, OK. OK.

WOLFF: Now, so they started building all of these low frequency radio ranges, and they [00:32:00] met in 1931 at Medicine Bow.

BOGART: Really?

WOLFF: Yeah, so it's kind of like aviation's Golden Spike.

BOGART: Yeah, that's interesting.

WOLFF: Yeah, so I found that all out with my research and stuff, OK. So, as a consequence, I went over to State Historic Preservation Office, talked to Mary [Hopkins], and we got to talking about it, and she says, well why don't you put it on the National Register of Historic Places? So, that took about three years, digging into everything, and of course the government, their format is crazy and you know, they do most of the stuff with the State Historic Preservation Office over in Cheyenne, so it was going over to Cheyenne and talking to them like that, you know, and you've got this form you have to fill out and you fill all this stuff, and you have to push -- you have to write about it, give all the background and stuff, like that.

BOGART: Yeah, I've done those nominations, so I know.

WOLFF: So, I do all that, and then I'd go back [00:33:00] and I'd say here, it's all done, and she says well, OK. Why don't you do this? So, OK. Go back, do it, you know.

BOGART: Yeah.

WOLFF: I'm thinking, why didn't you just tell me all this the very first time I came over here? Then, of course -- and this is a real big problem now -- it is on the National Historic Registry, OK, but -- let's see if I can draw this out.

We formed the society called The United States Airways Heritage Association, OK?

BOGART: Oh, OK. So, this is national?

WOLFF: Well, it's mostly concerned with Medicine Bow, but it's to help anybody that needs research done, because I've got a big database now, and I've got a lot original documents. A lot of them. And I contacted -- see, Medicine Bow [00:34:00] had three houses up here for what they called airway keepers, because it was a 24/7, 365 day operation, and these guys worked 12 on, 12 off. Of course, they got 90 days leave every year, they got OT for Sundays, comp time for overtime, but there was a family that -- anyway, the section line runs right across like that, OK? This is section nine, this is section 16. Section 16 is leased

from the state. It's about 130 acres. This is all dirt, by the way.

BOGART: Sure.

WOLFF: Section nine used to belong to the Union Pacific Railroad. It's 17 acres. About 1940 the town of Medicine Bow [00:35:00] got up enough money to buy this. So, the whole airport now is contiguous, except for this -- no it's not. That's a lie. But, we wanted to develop this and put it back the way it was in 1929, OK.

BOGART: OK.

WOLFF: Well, have you ever been to Medicine Bow?

BOGART: I've been through there.

WOLFF: Yeah, well don't bother stopping. They -- it's like -- I don't know how to -- let's see. It's like going to an audition for a vampire movie, is about the closest I could put -- they're just -- and I was told this, before I even started this project, by Nancy Anderson. Do you know here, over at -

BOGART: I don't.

WOLFF: Yeah. Nancy said, "Steve, you're going to have a lot, a lot of problems with these people." OK, and it's been a lot of [00:36:00] problems, OK.

BOGART: Not to interrupt your train of thought, but I need a little context here. The airway system for the air route,

where the beacons were, those evolved eventually into landing strips, or -

WOLFF: Like what?

BOGART: Landing strips?

WOLFF: Well, see, it was an emergency landing strip.

BOGART: OK, all right.

WOLFF: OK. You've got me thinking again. The two -- in the beginning, these pilots landed everywhere, you know?

BOGART: Right.

WOLFF: There's this guy named [Coleson?] eventually killed ten people and himself, over there 11 miles west of Cheyenne at 2:00 in the morning, October 5th of 1935, I think. He just flew right into the ground. Everybody thinks it's a big mystery, but I know exactly what happened, you know, I've been there many, [00:37:00] many times. But, once they got the radios set up, this radio range navigation thing, the pilots didn't need to stop except at Cheyenne and Rock Springs were the two major terminals, OK, and if the weather was good like it is today, they just flew straight through.

But prior to that, and particularly prior to the radio ranges, the weather was always unpredictable, the motors quit all the time, they all had all kinds of problems, and

I mean, if you go to Bitter Creek today -- they had one of these at Bitter Creek, by the way -- and you go out there, I mean, even today -- what is it, 2014? It's pretty isolated.

BOGART: Yes.

WOLFF: It's really isolated, OK, I mean, there is nothing there. If Interstate 80 wasn't so close, you would be on the moon. And so, these guys mail pilots, when they flew, they had all [00:38:00] kind of survival gear with them; blow torches and hacksaws to work on the airplanes, they had food, canteens, they had rifles, particularly in the winter time. I mean, they're up there on the side of Elk Mountain crashed, and they're walking out with snow shoes and stuff.

So, these fields were all emergencies. You wouldn't stop at Medicine Bow unless it was a bad day.

BOGART: Right.

WOLFF: And a lot of them did stop, OK, but other than that, you would never use it.

BOGART: OK. Then did they evolve into regular airports, or was that a totally separate process?

WOLFF: Well, yes and no. Now, in the case of -- in the case of Laramie, the one up at Skyline stayed around -- the very

first airport, by the way, for Laramie, is underneath [Wasakee?] Hall.

BOGART: Oh, really?

WOLFF: Yeah, [00:39:00] if you go up 15th Street and you go east, OK, up to about where 25th was -- which wasn't there at the time. We're talking 1921, OK. The cemetery was there,, so the northern boundary was the cemetery, OK, the southern boundary -- 15th was the west boundary. It was 80 acres. The southern boundary was Grand Avenue. That was the first airport.

BOGART: Oh, OK.

WOLFF: And it was -- if you look back in a newspapers, Laramie Boomerang or Laramie Republic, whatever it was then, the city council got all together, OK, and they wanted to have the mail pilots stopped. The Half Acre Gym used to have a big painting on the roof, "Laramie. Stop Here," like, you know? And then, you know, north of [00:40:00] town here a little bit, there's that house that sits up on a little mountain all by itself?

BOGART: Yeah.

WOLFF: You know where the big W is?

BOGART: No. I haven't -- I know -- I've heard of people talk of a W Hill, but -

WOLFF: OK, well that was put there by the Iron Skull fraternity in like 1921 or ’22. Now, that wasn’t there for the mail pilots, OK, but they used that. You know, they would fly over. If it was good weather and you were flying between Cheyenne and Rock Springs, you wouldn’t even come to Laramie. You knew from previous experience, when you cut across the hills down here, OK, you would come out somewhere near Medicine Bow or Cooper Lake or someplace down there, and you could just keep going straight. Why make a dog-leg like this, OK?

But back to your question, Laramie site 37, the emergency field, which is what it was, stayed around until about 1937, and about 1934, [00:41:00] ’35, they started thinking about the Laramie Municipal Airport, where it is now, and United Airlines brought their engineers from Cheyenne over and looked at this one up here, OK, and the way it was laid out was too crazy and no room for expansion, so they got the bright idea of going out west of town, which was really brilliant. It’s one of the first airports I’ve ever seen that was built in the right spot, OK. So -- but, when this was shut down -

BOGART: The one up on Skyline?

WOLFF: On Skyline, they moved all the equipment and everything over to the new airport, so it doubled as a municipal and emergency field, so it became site 37. They took the beacon and everything up there.

BOGART: Oh, OK. OK.

WOLFF: [00:42:00] You know where Cowboy Aviation is? That little tiny building?

BOGART: No.

WOLFF: Before they had the big terminal. The terminal, the brick building that we all use, used to be Laramie Flight Service Station, and that was where they talked -- if I went in there to take a trip, I would go in there and look at all the weather, file my flight plan at the desk, blah, blah, blah, all that. Well, the very first one is the small building before Cowboy Aviation, a little wooden building there, and those buildings all had numbers on the roof. I forgot to tell you. Here -

BOGART: Do we need another piece of paper?

WOLFF: Yeah. Here -- here is the roof of the Medicine Bow office. It used to be a power house, OK, in the beginning, but it’s now a teletype office where they disseminate weather and they talk to airplanes and all that kind of stuff. OK. This is the north side. On [00:43:00] the

north side it had these big letters, SL-O, because we're on the Salt Lake to Omaha airway.

BOGART: Yeah. Yep.

WOLFF: Over there Nevada, you would see SF-SL; San Francisco to Salt Lake. And then on this side, the south side, would be the number 32. So, in the day time the guy would fly right over and say, OK, 32. I know where I am.

BOGART: I know where I am. Yeah. How interesting.

WOLFF: And that was all of course lit at night from the tower. And these arrows were painted -- you know the yellow stripe that's on the highways?

BOGART: Mm-hm.

WOLFF: OK, it's kind of like the international orange -- no. Chrome yellow. It was all painted like that, and it had an eight inch black stripe all the way around the border. So -- and this arrow pointed -- if this was Medicine Bow, this arrow pointed to Rock River. Rock River pointed to the one at [Bosler?], Bosler pointed to Laramie, Laramie to German Hill, blah, blah, blah, all the way across.

So, anyway, back to the [00:44:00] Medicine Bow airport.

BOGART: Take it by the airport. OK, yeah.

WOLFF: The day I went up there, we're talking Easter, 2006, I'm kind of a nosey person and I look around a lot. There's one remaining building, and like I mentioned, it was the

powerhouse. They had a small generator in there, two big gasoline tanks outside, between the powerhouse and the tower, there was these 550 gallon tanks, OK. So, that was all there. They changed it -- they moved the powerhouse down to this area, when the airport got to be expanded, OK, in 1929 when they moved. So anyway, I'm in the -- now -- communications house, and people [00:45:00] have been living in it and there's beer cans and stuff all around and there's -- you know what celotex is?

BOGART: No.

WOLFF: It's a fiber board made from --

BOGART: I do.

WOLFF: From sugar cane debris, and it's got glue and it's pressed like that. You can stick your finger right through it, and when it's wet it dissolves. So -- so it's all punched out and stuff like that. And I'm looking around and there's this little tiny piece of paper on the floor, and I picked it up and it said, "Ed, if the beacon doesn't work, why are these two capacitors in parallel like this, and that will fix it." And, I forget -- somebody's name was down at the bottom. So, I took this piece of paper and -- they made a movie up there in 1995. The History Channel -- no. [00:46:00] The Learning -- let's see. What is it? It's called "Flights of Courage: Stories of the U.S.

Airmail Service." The Learning Channel. Anyway, if you're interested, I could give you all the details.

So, I mean, there's been all kinds of people up there. I mean, a lot. Vandals, everything. But I found this piece of paper, so I take it down to the Medicine Bow town council's office. You know, they have a little administration building there, and the lady there, whose name was Carol Cook -- who I didn't even know at the time, but we got to know a lot after this, I said, "Can you tell me who this Ed is?" And she said, "Well that's Ed [Cruickshank?]. He was one of the former airway keepers that lived up there." So, at the time I was married. I come home -- or, I came home, and you know, everything is serendipity. All this stuff I found out by accident. It's just crazy. [00:47:00] So, the -- now teenager, was eight years old at the time, and I said -- his nickname was Future. I said, "Future, I want you to look in the phone book for this name, Cruickshank, and look in the Laramie phone book, OK?" So, he doesn't do that. He looks in the Cheyenne phone book, and finds the name. Because it's not in the Laramie phone book. And, I call the number and it's been disconnected. So, I thought well, I'll write a letter. Hopefully it's been just recently disconnected,

and maybe the people have left a forwarding address. Well, as it turns out, the people live right here in Laramie. [00:48:00] Her name was [Gwynn?] Cruickshank, and the reason why the phone was disconnected, because they had a cell phone. So, she said, oh yeah. The Cruickshank family up here, they dismissed all this as just, you know, falling out of bed or something. Just a normal occurrence. So she said, they live back in Hudsonville, Michigan. So, they gave me the address, the phone number, and I called back there. In the meantime, I'm working on Africa, you know, communicating by email back and forth, and things are just taking forever to get done.

So, anyway, Betty Cruickshank, who was in her early '80s at the time, in 1980 -- excuse me, 2006, grew up here as a child, and her brother Robert lived up in Basin. So, as soon as I found that out, I drove up and interviewed Robert. And, in the meantime, Eddy says, [00:49:00] "Hey, we've got all these pictures, would you like them?"

BOGART: Was Ed their father? Was Ed their father?

WOLFF: Ed Cruickshank was their father, yeah.

BOGART: OK. OK.

WOLFF: Yeah. Of course, there was other people who lived up there, too. One guy was named [Bruner?], another was named

-- I can't remember. It starts with an S. The way things worked out, you would be stationed here for a while and then get moved like to Bitter Creek, or to McCook, Nebraska, or Kansas City or whatever, because it was all federalized. I mean, things are really sophisticated. It still amazes me how well things, you know, went at that time.

So, anyway, she says, "OK, I'll put this all together for me." And, she made a real nice spiral bound book for me, of -- for everybody, for the family and myself, put all the pictures in it. She digitized all the photos, you know, and put them on a disk for me, and all that.

BOGART: That's great.

WOLFF: So, I used a lot of [00:50:00] that information for the National Historic Register. I mean, they love that kind of stuff. So, basically, that's the Medicine Bow story.

BOGART: That is so cool.

WOLFF: Yeah.

BOGART: Is there a plaque?

WOLFF: No, well OK. Here's the problem. The problem is it's -- it's divided up into two pieces, and I've talked to the state a lot, OK, about this part down here. The state does not like this because it's a liability, OK. And, the whole

thing is deteriorating, and the state is not going to spend money for their upkeep here because the town of Medicine Bow doesn't have any money. Many, many times when I was doing all of this I kept them appraised of all the progress, OK. And, I was -- you know, I have to drive up there and I [00:51:00] get up at four in the morning to go to work over here at the university, so I was always last on the agenda. Which means, I had to sit through all their crappy business, you know, and they didn't even have enough money to mow the cemetery.

BOGART: Oh, my gosh.

WOLFF: I mean, that's how broke they are, OK? So -- but -- you hear of this thing called DKRW? They have this coal, gasification thing where they're going to cook coal and they're going to make it into hydrogen gas and shoot rockets to the moon and that type of stuff?

BOGART: Yeah, I have.

WOLFF: Well, 20 miles southwest of Medicine Bow in Carbon County, is where their proposal is. Well, this -- I have all of the records. Carol Cook, who was the girl that worked in the office, she -- for some reason, Medicine Bow kept all that stuff, and I got a whole box [00:52:00] full of all -- she let me Xerox everything.

So anyway, these people up there in Medicine Bow are in a big lather now about their airport because DKRW is going to fly in, in corporate G4 jets from Houston, Texas. Well, I can tell you right now, the air -- first of all, calling it an airport is a misnomer. What it is, is a sage field with a fence around it, and that's what it was originally designed for and that's what it is today. And there's -- it's just -- OK. Then I've gone over to the Wyoming State Aeronautical Office, OK, and I forget her name now, but she's been real nice. And she says, it would cost millions to develop this airport.

BOGART: Of course.

WOLFF: First of all, she says, there has to be a compelling reason. That's the top thing [00:53:00] right there; a compelling reason. There is none.

BOGART: Right.

WOLFF: And the town of Medicine Bow went through the same thing in the '40s and '50s when uranium was discovered up there at [Caramel Bluff?], tried to get all -- at the time, it was Monarch Airlines out of Denver that used to service, that they wanted Monarch Airlines to come down here. They're not -- for 256 people, it's just not going to happen. But you can't convince the town of Medicine Bow of that, all right. So, our proposal for -- to reconstruct

the airport back the way it was in the 1920s, is to raise money -- I know a lot of -- a lot of companies contribute to this when it was made that are still in business. Like Crouse-Hinds, they made the beacon. The beacon is still there, although it's [00:54:00] shot up. Lindy Corporation made gas beacons. They're really cool looking. They're about this tall, 52 inches high. They're called blinkers because they went like this, and you could see them from any direction. They had like a strobe effect, OK, and it was a cabinet. You can -- they're still some laying out in the fields here. They're just about this wide. They're porcelain, like a refrigerator. They've got big cast iron sides coming down like this that make the corners, and they've got a real nice, ornate base, and it's heavy so it don't get knocked over.

BOGART: Right.

WOLFF: And then on top there's a six foot pylon that comes up like this, OK, and then there's just clear gas, and it was powered by acetylene gas, in the -- in the bottom [00:55:00] it had two acetylene tanks. And it had a real cool thing. In the beginning they ran all the time, and they could go six months unattended.

BOGART: Wow.

WOLFF: Yeah, but it was expensive to run these. So, they put a thing on them called a sun valve, and it was invented by a guy over in Demark, and it consisted of five carbon rods, like your pen there, gold plated, OK, and below that was a diaphragm, and these rods were super-sensitive to sunlight. So, the little beacon, call the little blinker, would blink all night, which would connect Medicine Bow to the one over at Hannah. Dana -- there's one in between. I can't think of it right now.

Anyway, it would just curve [00:56:00] around like this. But anyway, these gold rods were really, really sensitive to sunlight. So, in the morning when the sun came up, these rods would heat up and expand just enough on this diaphragm to shut the gas off.

BOGART: Wow.

WOLFF: Then in the evening when it cooled, they would contract, the gas would turn back on, and the pilot light, poof, and it would start blinking again.

BOGART: How cool is that?

WOLFF: Yeah, really fascinating.

BOGART: So, these were in operation?

WOLFF: Yeah, oh yeah, like -- you find them out here in the fields all knocked over. Unfortunately the pylons are

gone. That's because they had the sun valve, which was really valuable because of the gold thing. But -

BOGART: So I see where you're going with this. You would like to turn it into an historic site that people could visit and learn about all of this.

WOLFF: Well, that was the plan. OK. Here, all right. And the reason [00:57:00] I got on this gas thing was, Lindy -- used to be called American Gas Accumulator. Now they're L-I-N-D-E, Linde Corporation, OK, and they make acetylene, they make liquid oxygen, all kinds of -- argon gas, all kinds of that stuff and they're back there in New Jersey, OK.

Well anyway, people like that, that's the contact, OK. And then there's another company that made -- this was all lighted, you know, on and on and on like that. So, I -- since I know most about this, my friends all elected me to do all this, all right, but it's the only one left in the United States that contiguous, you know. Now, there's some that are paved, there's some that are bulldozed -- bulldozed over but still have -- but it's -- it's unfortunate.

So -- but the town [00:58:00] of Medicine Bow has got this crazy idea, again, that DKRW is going to come in there and everything is going to be happy, so they won't -- we've got them to the point now to -- possibly, to release the 17 acres to us, but they still want to keep it as an airport, OK. There's about seven of us that are involved in this, OK. My contention is, I don't want it an airport, period.

BOGART: No. It's an historic site.

WOLFF: First of all, somebody is going to have pay insurance for the liability. I don't want some Cessna 150 pilot flying in there and flipping upside down and everybody getting sued.

BOGART: Right.

WOLFF: The other thing is, along that same line, who's going to maintain it? I don't want to pay to have it bulldozed in the winter time, you know, to clear snow and all -- so, I don't know. It's just at a deadlock right now.

BOGART: Yeah. It is so, so interesting.

WOLFF: It's unfortunate because there's so [00:59:00] much resource there, that we can't -- and -- further down the road, I can see where there would be not enough money to maintain it, but there would be enough to get it built back the way it was, but I have -- what I want to do is turn it

over to the State Park Service. Let them have the headache.

So, anyway, that's -

BOGART: Wow. This is great. This is great. I -- I don't know if you're familiar with an organization called Tracks Across Wyoming.

WOLFF: Yeah.

BOGART: This is the kind of thing that Tracks would be really interested in.

WOLFF: Well, see -- I know about that, OK, and then -- I forget who I met with. It was over at the university, and I wanted to put, as a starter, [01:00:00] OK, this all superimposed on the State's highway map, and she says, "Well, you know, everybody comes in here. They want their farm on here and they want the next farm on here, you know, and they've got this little canal out there behind their house and they want that on there." Because of the Medicine Bow thing, I got kind of disappointed with all of this, and so -- I'm mapping this all the way from Salt Lake to Omaha, by the way, but I'm concentrating on Wyoming. And, last summer when I should have been doing this, I stayed home and built model airplanes, which is really what I like doing. So, I'm kind of behind the eight ball now, but Ross [Hillman?], who works over at the State Historical

Preservation Office, the archeology building upstairs, him and I and Steve [Sutter?], the three of us are really interested in [01:01:00] the state aspect, OK. Not this week, but next week for sure -- see, I know where all of these are, but you have to do your homework at the house before you drive out there, because they're very hard to find. I give people GPS coordinates and they still can't find them, because you can be in the middle of 130 acres and not know you're in it, until you know -- if you can find some resources and that type of stuff. So, they're very difficult to find.

BOGART: Well, the next time you go out, would you put me on your list? Because I would love to go out and see it.

WOLFF: Well prol-- I can -- I think the best one to show you is the McIntyre Ranch one. Yeah, because see, when I go out this summer it'll be for about two weeks, because I've got to go back over tonight -- well first, I've got to go to Coalville, Utah [01:02:00] and mark that one, and then there's several in between in Utah, and then -- the one at Night is marked, and then that's site 6, that's 60 miles from Salt Lake. Well, I mean, some -- sometimes it takes two years to find these things. There's one called Leroy. I've had -- I've actually got maps of these and still can't find them. Leroy is site 9, but now because of the

interest the state has, I've got to fill in that area. I've just sort of hit the high spots, but there's one over there called [Altamont?] which I've got to find yet, and then there's two over by Granger. There's one west and then there's one to the east called [Byron?].

BOGART: Those were -- they were like -- Byron at least was a (inaudible), and so was Leroy.

WOLFF: If you plot [01:03:00] them on a map, they kind of go up and down like this.

BOGART: Very cool. I'm going to shut this off.

END OF AUDIO FILE