

OH-3094, Paul Griffin, 9-23-2014, Riverton, WY In Flight

BARBARA: OK, today is December 23, 2014, this is Barbara Bogart. I am interviewing Mr. Paul Griffin, who is -- right? OK -- who is the airport manager at the Riverton Airport in Wyoming, and we're going to be talking about what he does, and -- the first thing I wanted to ask you, though, is how did you get into aviation to begin with?

PAUL: Well, it started as a child. My father, we were actually building our own experimental aircraft, when I was just a kid, and I spent nine years with it, in our garage, or our yard, so I learned a lot.

BARBARA: Where was this?

PAUL: In Lander. I grew up in Lander. And then, I started taking up flying lessons in high school back in the late '70s, I graduated in '79. And then I joined the Army. I was a helicopter mechanic. A few years later, I became a helicopter pilot.

BARBARA: [00:01:00] Oh, OK. Turning it back on. So, you became a helicopter pilot in the Army?

PAUL: Yes, I -- so, I made a career out of flying [Hueys?]. It was right after the Vietnam era, and then I got out after the Desert Storm era.

BARBARA: Oh, OK. And then what?

PAUL: And then, I was looking for something to do, and this aviation/airport management job came up, so I started out basically as an airport operator. I've been with the airport 19 years.

BARBARA: In Riverton?

PAUL: In Riverton. And I worked my way up from airport operator to the airport division manager.

BARBARA: OK, so what does an airport operator do?

PAUL: The airport operator right now, I have four of them that work for me at the airport. And, since we're a Part 139 commercial airport, we have to have the fire station airport, so we're all airport firefighters. [00:02:00] We have to have the security. We do the -- maintain things, upkeep the Part 139 FAA requirements, which is, which is a [plow in?] maintenance on the runway, and the firefighting, the security, so it kind of -- small airport kind of does everything. The big airports, they have the individual, specialized guy, one guy is just a fireman, and one guy is just a operator. We kind of wear multiple hats at a small airport.

BARBARA: OK. And then, the manager's position, how does that do?

PAUL: The city owns the airport, so it's kind of different than some of the rest of the airports, they're county-owned, or board-run. Ours is owned by the city, so I have -- the mayor is my ultimate boss, and then we have a, a couple of works directors, my next boss, a city administrator between her and them. Public works director, and he has four divisions, one of them is the airport, so he's technically the airport [00:03:00] manager.

F: (knocking) Anybody in here? Hello?

PAUL: But I'm at the airport, and I'm (inaudible) [stipulation?], that's why it's the airport division, and -
-

BARBARA: OK. So, you've been there 19 years --

PAUL: 19 years.

BARBARA: Now, let me back up a little bit. You said you and your dad worked on building this experimental aircraft.

PAUL: Yes.

BARBARA: What happened?

PAUL: We -- we had about -- it was always aluminum, so we had to resolve plans to get the measure of every part, cut the aluminum, drill the holes, gotta pop the rivets. We had it 90% complete, we actually even started it up in our yard. (laughter) Just testing the engines out. And my dad

worked for U.S. Steel, and about that time, they closed down U.S. Steel, and he sold it to pay off the house, and there was an airplane at the house, so, it was hard times for them. I joined the service shortly after, so they went to Oregon somewhere, and someone else finished it, so -- but it was a good learning experience for me. I learned a lot of just about -- [00:04:00] hands-on, working with tools, and making my own (inaudible), stuff like that.

BARBARA: Sure. Oh, yeah, that's always good. So, you didn't ever have your own plane, then?

PAUL: Never had my own plane. I took flying lessons in, like I said, in high school, before I joined the service. But once I got in the service, I was around them, so I stopped taking lessons. When I got out of the service, I started taking lessons again. Had our first child, so I stopped taking lessons. And then I was thinking about getting into it, but the second child came along, and I just had never finished. I had my helicopter license, but not my airplane [at all?].

BARBARA: So, you're afraid that if you take another lesson, you'll have another kid?

PAUL: Have another kid! (laughter)

BARBARA: I see a pattern there. (laughter) OK, so, people -- before we started, you said something about you wished that some of the earlier history had been recorded. Are you talking -- what are you talking about?

PAUL: I was [00:05:00] [brought to the?] airport by my dad, would always bring us up to Lander or Riverton, probably over to Riverton. There was a gentleman there named Floyd Johnson, and he was a mechanic, and we used to hang around his shop, you know, I'd crawl in and out of the aircraft that were in these hangars working on at the time. I could name what airplane, what kind it was. So, I just hung around a lot. And Floyd was up at the Riverton airport, probably since the '50s, I think my dad said one time he was an airplane dealer, sold airplanes, and he worked on them. And Floyd was still delivering some of the mail up there when I started working up there, before he passed away, so --

BARBARA: [So what do we know about Fleming?]

PAUL: Just, he would bring stuff up from downtown to catch the commercial flights. And, back then, they did the film developing, so he would bring in big things of film that they'd fly up into [militant?]. [00:06:00]

BARBARA: Right. Yeah, things have changed. Well, how long has the airport been there?

PAUL: That's a good question. I think it's in the '40s, and I know they -- I have an old picture where they put a lot of runways and a grass strip, and I was told that it was back in the day, right after World War II, [that was some air?], and they brought a lot of the DC-3s into that area, they took off from there.

BARBARA: And how long has Riverton had commercial service, do you know?

PAUL: I don't know the exact timeframe, but I remember back in the '60s, I would say, definitely early '70s, there was Frontier Airlines, and they had the [Conger?] 580s. And there was a little bit different, you know, we'd go straight to Denver, and back now, and I think back in those days, I remember getting on one that stopped in Casper, and Laramie, before they were routed to Denver, so, [00:07:00] there was a lot of little in-between stops.

BARBARA: Now, I know that commercial service is difficult in Wyoming, I've talked to enough people to figure that out. Of course, I've lived in Wyoming since the early '90s, so I understand that part. Have you had trouble in Riverton, too, keeping continuous service?

PAUL: We have, you know, we've had Frontier Airlines in here, Continental was in here at one time, Mesa Airlines was here when I started working, and Great Lakes took over when our tremor was built, and Mesa left, and so Great Lakes has been here about 18 years, and they've been good service, they've actually been up from 19 seats up to 30 seats for a while in [resilient?] aircraft, and the aircraft are getting old and aging, and they've had to retire the 30-seaters, and move down to 19 seats.

[00:08:00] There's this legislation that was passed about a year ago that -- about pilots, more hours and [fewer?] rest, and that has killed the airline business in Wyoming in general.

BARBARA: That's what I understand.

PAUL: So we're fighting that right now.

BARBARA: So, you came to Riverton, first as the airport operator --

PAUL: Yes.

BARBARA: And that was when, what year was that?

PAUL: Let's see, 19 years ago, so back in, yeah --

BARBARA: '95, maybe?

PAUL: Yes.

BARBARA: Alright, tell me what the airport was like then.

PAUL: When I got there, we had the old terminal, original terminal, that had been there probably since the '40s or '50s. And, it was added on a couple times, I think if they would add it on, and they expanded the general area, and then they had -- when security started coming about, getting more increased, actually added a second area onto the terminal, so that we could [00:09:00] screen people, and that was the security. The roof really started leaking bad on -- it was a flat roof building, and the maintenance was getting so high, that we built a new terminal. And the airport kind of flip-flopped. We had, kind of over on the western side, used to be the general, GA, general aviation side. And the east side was the commercial side, with a little bit of general aviation. And when we put our new terminal over on the west side, we took all the G -- General Aviation, put them on the east. So, it's kind of, over the years, it's done a 180, it's flipped. And now, all the commercial, except for one hangar, is over on the west side, kind of separating the airport. Actually, that's for the biggest change that I've seen. The terminal, I was trying to remember exactly when it was built. It was -- seemed like it was only there [00:10:00]

about two, three years at most when it was done, so about 16, 17 years ago.

BARBARA: OK, late '90s, '98, OK.

PAUL: Yes.

BARBARA: What about -- what kind of runways or runway did the airport have when you started?

PAUL: I found an old picture up there, an aerial, and it almost -- it has about six different runways crisscrossing, they all meet right in the middle, that's just grass. And you can still kind of see some of that -- when we're not around, but today, we have two main runways that make a -- almost a perfect cross. And they're based on the compass headings, so they're -- I mean runway is almost a west and east. It's off just a couple degrees, 10 degrees. And then our smaller [crossman?] runway is [almost another?] south.

BARBARA: And how long is the main one there?

PAUL: The main runway is 5,864, I believe, [00:11:00] and, I'm sorry, 8,564 --

BARBARA: I was going to say, that's pretty short, compared to the others I've read about.

PAUL: Yeah. (laughter) And our crossing's 4,800.

BARBARA: Now, has it always been that length since you've been there, or has it been expanded?

PAUL: It's always been that length since I've been there, but I have seen pictures where the old highway, coming from the [river?] to the Dubois, would come up right by the airport, turn and head kind of towards [Kinnear?]. And they -- when they extended our runway, they had to actually move the highway. And, so, the new highway actually doesn't come up on the hill anymore, it goes around by the weather station. And the old road actually -- the new terminal starts right where the old road and the old highway used to be. And our taxiway, going to the west, is actually right on top of the old highway, so it's kind of, it's kinda neat. I don't know how long they expanded it, a couple thousand foot to the west, it went right up -- they've actually -- [00:12:00] Paradise Valley Road -- has been moved once or twice to accommodate that also.

BARBARA: Now, when you started, let's say, in '95 or so, was there quite a bit of general aviation, what kind of state was it in?

PAUL: We had the -- kind of what I've seen, that general aviation's been about the same at Riverton, but I remember as a kid, Riverton had a lot of general aviation going on,

and Lander didn't have as much. And Lander and Riverton have almost flip-flopped. There's a group over in Lander, they're elderly, that they call the Lander Air Force. And I count, there's like 40-some hangars over in Lander, but that's a smaller airport, they're the biggest [TA?] for hangars, and ours is about half that for [their routine?]. And we kind of master planned, we have it developed now to expand, if that [00:13:00] growth comes about, and we can - - we have places to put the hangars, but it's just, I think, a lot of it is, I blame it on the security. When I was a kid, I could ride my bicycle up, and I go and touch airplanes and look at them, and now, we've put a big fence around, and the kids can't come up, and it's almost, you know, it's -- and, so, one of the things I'm looking at, as far as Riverton goes, is to kind of promote that again, and get kids aware of that, bring it into the schools, and have open houses, and stuff, to get them inside the thing.

BARBARA: Sure, because so many people I've talked to have said "yeah, I was interested since I was a kid," had similar kinds of experiences, hadn't thought about that.

PAUL: Yep. We've fenced them out now, and made it where they can't even come in, because of all this threat.

BARBARA: Do you live in Lander, or do you still go there quite a bit, or? --

PAUL: My parents still live in Lander, my little brother lives over there, so I get over there a lot, and I help out. [00:14:00] I'm a member of the Experimental Aircraft Association. We have a chapter in Fremont County. And it's the strongest portion's in Lander, so I go over and help out with that quite a bit.

BARBARA: So, I'm interested in this general aviation, and the changes over the years, and you're saying there's more in Lander than Riverton. Did -- let me stick with Riverton for a minute. Who are the people who are involved in general aviation there?

PAUL: Just looking over like the leases and stuff, I've noticed that the people who can afford to fly (inaudible) in the costs, seem to be business owners. The plane is not registered to an individual, it's registered to some sort of business, so it's more a tax write-off. And, you know, the days, when I was a kid growing up, everybody had a plane, just like you -- [it's been?] like a second car, and you could go out and just have fun. And, you don't really see that. There's a new thing called sport aviation, [00:15:00] or a light sport pilot, that's coming about

that's kind of trying to bridge that gap back, and it doesn't require a pilot's license, it requires a driver's license.

BARBARA: Really?

PAUL: Yes.

BARBARA: And what kind of aircraft can they fly, then?

PAUL: Those -- there's, I don't know the criteria, but I think they have to be, like, slower than 90 miles -- two seats only, pilot, one passenger. They have to weigh less than certain amounts, but they're primarily just little two-seat [trainer wraparound?].

BARBARA: But they don't have to have --

PAUL: They figure it, you know, you're not really going to go into the Denver's instructors, just that individual that wants to go out on the weekend and fly around for an hour. So, if you can pass your medical for your driver's license, you're probably good to go for --

BARBARA: Now, is this an FAA category?

PAUL: Yes, it is. It's -- they have, so you have your general aviation, your private pilot's license. Then you can go higher and you're commercial, instrument, or you can go down to what's [00:16:00] known as sport pilot, and then they have one even smaller, it's been around for a while,

it's the ultralights, the little [weird lightly?]. So, this is kind of trying to bridge that gap of -- get people back up and interested in flying again. It's been out there for about, two or three years now.

BARBARA: How interesting. I hadn't heard about that before. Now, back to the businesses that own the planes at Riverton, are they local businesses?

PAUL: Yes. I'd say probably 90, 95% of the airplanes are owned by some sort of business. They use them -- one, for example, is [Trevington?] Peters. He uses his plane to go to different stores, and that kind of thing, so --

BARBARA: It makes sense.

PAUL: So, they're using them for business. Like, the [Ebouts?] have one, he does a lot of traveling back and forth to Cheyenne, so, and just a little business like that. Jiffy Rental has one [00:17:00] that he can go to different businesses. There's probably just a handful, very few, that it's strictly like the light sport pilot, or just -- we have a couple, a handful of guys that just come up and fly for an hour or two.

BARBARA: Do you have a lot of the corporate, I don't know what you call, jet sharing, or, you choose to?

PAUL: Yes. NextGen, or, NextJet, or, they call it, corporate jets. We're seeing an increase on those coming in. The -- kind of like, I call them timeshare crafts, where you can buy so many hours in a jet. And we're seeing a lot more of those with the business, especially the ones in the oil fields, the [step two?], they're buying up all the time to fly their employees places, and no longer have to has-- that need the hassle, you know, with the airlines, delayed flights, so, we've seen a lot of doctors flying in [00:18:00] on certain days that -- there's specialty doctors that come, I think, every Wednesday, and they have a car there, and they'll bring them in by plane, they take the car down, see the patients on Wednesday or Thursday, and then they'll go back to their regular hospitals.

BARBARA: Now, I know that the orthopedic practice in Laramie does that. Are there other medical practices that do it too?

PAUL: Yeah, the orthopedics is one of the big ones I'm thinking of. There is a couple others, but I'm not exactly sure who they are. And then we have Smith's grocery store, they seem to come in quite a bit. One or two of the banks, we see the state jet, because we have the [honor farm?] out there, so we see that quite a bit. And we're really seeing

an increase in light flights, just passing through, going coast-to-coast or wherever, stopping to get gas, not even -
- but we do have a [00:19:00] lot of them stop in just for patients in our community.

BARBARA: That's interesting. I always thought of light flight as being very local, and maybe regional, but it extends beyond that?

PAUL: [Not least?]. We get some that are maybe going from Atlanta to somewhere out in California to see a specialist, and they'll land and get fuel, and go on. So it's quite a -- it's a change, yeah.

BARBARA: Yeah, I don't remember who was telling me this, it might have been Rick Patton up in Cody, was -- or --

PAUL: Bob?

BARBARA: Charles Wilkey, maybe, I talked to him too, talking about how a lot of the usage of local airports is light flight and [mediflight kind of?] (inaudible). Is that the same t-- is that your (inaudible)?

PAUL: Yes. We find that when we go up to like, say, plow the snow the runway, even though we don't have a flight that night, we get out and plow it right away, because it seems like nine out of 10 times, when the weather is bad, it's when a light flight needs to get in. And so,

[00:20:00] we have a policy of when we get a half inch on the runway, we start plowing, and we're -- I bet we're averaging about maybe five or six light flights a day at that airport.

BARBARA: Mostly coming in, or going out?

PAUL: I'd say it's probably a -- probably more going out than coming in. And a lot of times, you never know, the ambulance used to come up and deliver the patient. Now that we have two helicopters stationed there, they actually have a pad down at the hospital, so we don't really see as many that go straight, like, to Casper. So we're seeing the airplanes -- they'll be a plane coming in, the ambulance will come and get them, they go down and prep the patient, bring them back up, and then they'll go into Montana, Utah, Colorado, primarily.

BARBARA: Yeah, it makes sense. Now, let's jump over the hill to Lander for a minute, because you were saying that there are more hangars over there, and --

PAUL: More hangars, and pilots. [00:21:00] And I'd say the average age of the Lander Air Force is real -- it's what I call [up there?]. (laughter) The average age over there is probably close to 65, 60? And so, what I see is, it's a strong, kind of what Lan-- Riverton was a strong one like

that too, and then as they age, there's no new generation coming in, get a pilot's license, [filling up?], and I see Lander the same way right now, they're really strong. But, as they get older, and have to sell off their planes, can't fly anymore, I don't see the new generation moving in, and that's what kind of scares me about (inaudible).

BARBARA: And now, are they mostly the leisure pilots, I don't know what you call them, [recreational?]

PAUL: Lander seems to be more the leisure/recreation, the light sport guys that just have a plane with their driver's license, or they do have a prior pilot's license and keep it current, but they, they [00:22:00] fly usually, five or six of them will come over to Lan-- over to Riverton on the weekends, and go over, and have a cup of coffee, or the -- they call it the hundred dollar hamburger. (laughter) About the same if you figure out the gas and the airplane. And then they fly back over to Lander, so, it's funny, because they just fly a loose formation with each other, fly to Riverton, talking to them on the radio, and that's like, that's, kind of grassroots aviation, hearing that.

BARBARA: Who was the -- I'm assuming you know some of these people, who would be somebody that they talk to?

PAUL: Let's see, probably Dick Rogers. He's the president of the EAA chapter. He'll probably be one of the main ones to talk to. [He's very lovely?], they're over in Lander, they should be in the phone book, Dick, and Karen, I think is her name, Karen Rogers.

BARBARA: It's usually not too hard to find people [00:23:00] in Wyoming.

PAUL: No. (laughter) But I'd say they're probably the main ones that -- and then it'd probably be a good idea, maybe during one of their little EAA meetings, they meet once a month, up there at the -- to get with him, and then maybe come up and just pick their brains too, because --

BARBARA: Yeah, I'm sorry to say I don't know what EAA stands for.

PAUL: Experimental Aircraft Association, yeah.

BARBARA: Oh yeah, I've seen the things (inaudible), OK.

PAUL: And so those -- there are a couple that are building their own airplanes too, or he's [throwing them out there?], so --

BARBARA: Oh, OK, that would be fun. OK, back to Riverton, and for the time being, what other kinds of changes, either in usage, or facilities have you seen over the past decade?

PAUL: For one, when I was a kid, they had a beached [T-18?] sent over, and it hauled the mail out every day. And that's kind of gone away. But I remember [00:24:00] as a kid, that thing was always there, and it flew every day of the mail, primarily.

BARBARA: Is the mail all trucked now?

PAUL: It's pretty much all trucked. When I first started working up there, I -- there was a gal that would bring the mail up, and throw it on the commercial flight going to Denver. But I don't -- I haven't been around now, don't even know if they're still doing that, or if it's all trucked. Some of the other changes I've seen as -- just the layout of our airport. We developed a -- on the outside of the fence, coming up the airport, is an airport industrial park. And that's something kind of new around, I mean, these were the airport -- it's hard to always operate in the green, and so, by having an industrial park, they can at least sell off some land out in front to help offset the airport losses. So, [I was talking to the original guy?]. [00:25:00] Other than that, that's -- that's about all the changes [up in there?].

BARBARA: Is there an FBO at that --

PAUL: There is an FBO. Jim and Wanda [Steinhopf?], it's a mom-and-pop thing, and they brought their kids up [with them?]. They have the car rental, they sell fuel, Jim's an AMP and a AI, so he's a airframe [mounter?], planning work on the engines, and the -- and then the AI is an inspector, so he can sign off on work too. So, he's a little bit of higher-level -- and he primarily has his hangar where he does the annuals once a year on everybody's airplanes. The -- every now and then, somebody will fly in that's having trouble, he'll work on that. His wife Wanda stays over in the office, and she's primarily all the fuel sales and billing, and on that, her kids assist her.

BARBARA: Now, [00:26:00] the FB-- does the airport itself sell fuel too?

PAUL: No, the -- we lease, we own the fuel farm with the fuel tanks, and we lease that to Jim and Wanda, and we get a six percent, I think it is, off of each gallon sold, and so, they maintain all that. We inspect them as part of my department, it's -- once a quarter, we inspect their trucks, and their fuel [pumpiture?], and it's safe and operated, that -- some of the issues we ran into is, we don't have any hangars for leaks, and it's -- it's almost a -- our airport board looks at it as you're competing with

private enterprise. So if we step in, and started selling fuel, we'd almost run him out of business. Same with hangars, we got guys that want to go build five or six hangars, and then lease them or sell them. If we build them currently, something, [00:27:00] we're kind of competing with that private enterprise, so, there's a fine line there with how we can make money.

BARBARA: But if someone is building a hangar, are they leasing the land from the airport?

PAUL: They lease the land. Nobody can buy the land on the airport, it's all the FAA's, so we do lease the square footage of the building. And that's one thing that's changed from the past. We used to have blocks. We'd rent the whole lot that you're building on. We'd take a small portion, and now it's by the square footprint. We get more hangars in one spot.

BARBARA: Now, you said something -- the FAA owns the land? How does that work?

PAUL: Well, it's -- every Part 139, they give us a million dollars every year when we have 10,000 boardings, and then, basically, they tell us how to spend it, so, it's not really the city's, it's pretty much federally-owned or

operated, or whatever, so we have a [00:28:00] [private jet?]. (laughter)

BARBARA: Yeah, let's not go into that. (laughter) I don't know, let's talk about things more interesting, like, oh, there's certainly events, or incidents, or episodes that stand out to you during that 19 years, things that scared you to death, or that were funny, or involved celebrities, or anything like that?

PAUL: Yeah, the thing after 19 years, I mean our commercial airline was very safe. They've had, I think it was 19 years, we've had issues where maybe their light didn't come on, they didn't know if their landing gear was down all the way, or one's having trouble with a rough-running engine, and we've stood by with the fire truck, or one we've never had, you know, in a [couple different?] -- any type of incident like that, crashes. We've had small, small GA planes, we had one that his landing gear collapsed after he landed. We had a crop duster that [00:29:00] had engine trouble, and he had to shut his engine off, he landed short of the runway. But, very -- for 19 years, I've experienced, say, a very good record. The -- we've had a couple open house fly-ins, trying to promote the airport. But the -- we tried to do a big air show, bring in some

bigger aerobatic performances and stuff, but, it became a lot of work for just for airport employees, and what we're doing now is I'm actually looking for some public involvement, somebody who wants to get on this committee that -- to head it up, and, it's just a lot of work for me, trying to run the airport and sit on a -- it was, it's a little overkill for me.

BARBARA: Are there -- I was in medicine for a long time, and I know they have an airport day, where they have a fly-in. They've had it for several years, and my [friends?] (inaudible). What about at [00:30:00] other airports, is something I haven't thought to ask about?

PAUL: Yeah. Whiteout Aeronautics actually has, [for their pipe workers?], up to, I believe it's \$5,000 a year to promote your airport. And I know Landry uses it every year in September. That's probably what Evanston was doing with -- and we've used it a couple times. But there is money, I think Powell, Powell has an annual wings and wheels type of thing. I'm not sure, I know Lander does. I'm not sure about many of the other airports.

BARBARA: I'd like to think that on my list of questions, because -- that hadn't occurred to me.

PAUL: You talked about celebrities tha-- that we had a one celebrity get off the airline, and he was actually a little bit disappointed, because people in line were left alone, and he goes "he just came from California, every day." I said "[was your father an actor?]" He was a little bit upset, because people just left him alone. He -- I think he's a Anth-- Anthony or Ant-- McConaugh? -- [00:31:00] not McConaughy. He was in St. Elmo's Fire, Pretty in Pink, those types of Brat Pack movies, but I can't think of his -- I think of Weekend at Bernie's, but I can't think of the guy's name right now. And then we've had Harrison Ford, you know, being up in the Jackson area. He flew in one time in his own airplane, and just -- he's like "I'm coming." You know, just the FBO, so just kind of leave him alone. He came for a doctor's appointment, a doctor came and picked him up. And we just saw him from a distance. We've had, a couple years ago, when Hillary Clinton was campaigning, we had past President Clinton and Chelsea fly in on a jet, and they had a thing down at our central (inaudible). We had the Secret Service there and everything, so that was a pretty big event.

BARBARA: I'll bet.

PAUL: And, other than that, that's -- that's about it that I can think of for celebrities.

BARBARA: OK then, what about weather?

PAUL: Weather events, [00:32:00], or --

BARBARA: Weather events.

PAUL: Riverton, actually, for being in Wyoming, we sit up on that little plateau, and a lot of it will see the [strong current from Dubois?], then it will actually [sink with the splits, and it goes around?] (inaudible) [the wind rivers?], you know, hit the (inaudible), and then it tugs back together. You can see snow clear around the [same space?], like a lot of [that little mix does?]. The ones that really get us are the ones that come from the Casper direction, that kind of -- it's a low that sits there, and it just -- you come in from Casper, Shoney, and we plow, and we plow, and we plow, and it just hangs over us. But, when they come from the west, they kind of just skirt and go around us [east to west?]. [I mean?], kind of unique.

BARBARA: What about -- do you have as much wind as other places in Wyoming? It doesn't seem to me you do, but --

PAUL: No, we don't. Wind in Riverton, it's not really a big issue. It doesn't cancel flights primarily. It's -- and if it does really blow, it's on our primary [00:33:00]

runway, where they're coming right in with almost a straight headwind. So, that's not a -- not a big issue. I've seen -- you know, we get up there in that part of the runway right away, and if we can get any sun -- even after a storm -- if then the sun comes out, and it'll melt it off pretty quick, so --

BARBARA: What's the altitude of the fields?

PAUL: Five thousand seven hundred, or just shy of 700, 5,694, something like that.

BARBARA: OK, so a little bit lower than some of the rest in the state.

PAUL: Yes, yes. I think, you're right here in [Lander?], you're even higher [now?].

BARBARA: Seventy-three, I think, something like that.

(laughter) Yeah, I talked to Jack Turner about -- Jack Turner, is that what --

PAUL: No, Jack --

BARBARA: (inaudible). Anyway, you know who I mean. The one who's in charge of this --

PAUL: Airport, yeah, out here.

BARBARA: Yeah, he was talking about the wind factor, and the -- and the fact that the mountains are just to the west, and

they did a map of that (inaudible). Every airport is different, [00:34:00] [I guess?].

PAUL: Yeah, ours is really not that bad. We're -- you see the snow over in Lander, and you see it in Casper, and you look at the [Mount?] (inaudible), and if we do, it's just a skip, or it -- it's all around us, [we're behind?].

BARBARA: OK, well, I'm trying to think -- that pretty much covers most of the subjects that I -- what I talk about with people, but, you were kind of lamenting that no one had interviewed Floyd Johnson and gotten his memories. What would you like people to know about the Riverton airport, or aviation in the area?

PAUL: I just -- you know, there were kind of real pioneers back then, just some of the stuff my dad's told me with Floyd, you know, right after World War II, people are getting out, and aviation was really kind of booming. Floyd, I think he sold -- he was a dealer for [Blanca?], [00:35:00] [it's a tiny type of aircraft?]. (inaudible), back in those days, [Blanca Champs?] had a pretty strong dealership there. I don't know how many years he had it, or whatever, but, when I was a kid, it was already -- he had already gotten rid of it, but, not sure why. His wife was [Birch Reynolds?], so, you know, family type of thing.

Each one of his boys took up flying. But, Floyd was just -
- you know, he was one of those guys that made
modifications to peoples' aircraft. He could do anything,
and just -- you know, everybody came, there's people --
when I started working up there, there was people coming
all the way down from Alaska, just to have him modify their
supercubs and [have it covered?]. He could do the welding,
the fabric covering, everything in modifications, and --
but that says a lot about -- [he must be like?] Floyd
[this?], and they'd come all the way from Alaska, just to
have him do [00:36:00] the work, and then they'd fly back
up to Alaska, so, I thought that was impressive.

BARBARA: Is any of this family still in the area?

PAUL: His wife's passed on. His oldest boy froze to death
walking out in the -- so they've lost -- he lost a lot of,
couple kids before Paul -- I remember Paul was a pharmacist
in Riverton. He picked up from his dad, and he built his
own biplane airplane from plans. It took him like three
and a half years. Beautiful airplane, and he was out doing
aerobatics over the runway, and crashed, and killed
himself. And his -- his dad was the first one out there,
just -- he was [in the buffet?] and watched it happen. So,
that family's had a lot of tragedy. We had a boy that

crashed a little two seat Cessna 140 over in Green River, I believe. And, I think he's passed away now. The youngest boy, Randy, I think, well, he's out in California.

[00:37:00] He started building his own homebuilt helicopter. (laughter) So, the generation --

BARBARA: It's in the blood, isn't it?

PAUL: Yeah, it was in the Johnsons family, every one of them. Richard Johnson, he just recently passed in the last two years, but he kind of took over his dad's business, and was working out of that shop for the longest time. And then his health got to the point where he couldn't do it anymore, so, [that's kind of why we're here, we're into that?].

BARBARA: Yeah, well it's been a while since it -- Johnson started that after World War II, [he must be getting up there?].

PAUL: Yes. And they -- I hated to see it, somebody bought the land, and tore down the old Johnson hangar. To me, that was just history, and, I wanted to buy it, just to kind of preserve it, memories, and stuff. But a new hangar sits there today, so -- so that's the kind of stuff that gets lost.

BARBARA: Anybody else, do you think, who would have known him, and could talk about him?

PAUL: Yeah, [00:38:00] my dad could probably tell you quite a few stories about him. He's in Lander. His name is Gary. Also, there was a gentleman, last name of Coleman, that did a lot up in Riverton. And actually, Jim [Steinhopf?], the fixed-base operator up there, knows a lot about him.

BARBARA: Yeah, I was -- I had an appointment to talk with Jim and Wanda that day that I met you. And Wanda had taken off to Cheyenne, and their daughter said "oh, dad's elbow-deep in an engine," so I'm "OK, well"--

PAUL: (laughter) Yeah, they're hard to catch up with.

BARBARA: Yeah, that's OK. You know, if I do come up to Lander, it would be interesting to talk to your dad too about his experiences.

PAUL: Yeah, because he took flying lessons with, I think, Mr. Coleman, he took a ride with Floyd, you know, thought about Floyd. My -- on my dad's side, my [00:39:00] great uncle was [thrill killed?]. He had an airplane up there, and he was one of the oldest pilots to fly up there for the longest time, (inaudible) his eighties. So, there's a lot of history there, too.

BARBARA: That would be cool. So, if I -- I know the season is closing in on me for traveling around, and talking to folks, but, I have until the end of June next year to get this project done, so, maybe late next spring, I can give you a buzz, and --

PAUL: (inaudible)

PAUL: How's it going?

BARBARA: --put you in the (inaudible), you can put me in touch with your dad, (inaudible)--

PAUL: Yeah, it would be nice if maybe a -- I think they hold their meetings on Tuesday night, and --

BARBARA: Oh, OK. The EAA?

PAUL: --for that chapter, EA chapter, and you can talk to my dad, previous (inaudible), then yeah --

BARBARA: Yeah, well that would be great. And then talk to Dick Rogers too.

PAUL: Yes.

BARBARA: That would be good, because I haven't been to -- to Lander yet, and that's such a pretty spot. It's not easy to get to, but it's a beautiful place.

PAUL: No, no. And it has history, I know around here they have the Jackpot, [00:40:00] I think they call it a Jackpot, Nevada race, or -- they time the takeoff from

Lander, and fly to Jackpot, Nevada, and the best time for their p--

BARBARA: Really? Oh!

PAUL: Yeah, they do that for years, out of Lander. That was a big event.

BARBARA: Huh. I never heard about that.

PAUL: Jackpot, Nevada Air Race, I think it was called.

BARBARA: Oh, OK. I'll have to -- I'll make a note of that, so I'll remember to ask about it. That is cool. Seems like an odd --

PAUL: Go from Lander to Jackpot, Nevada. (laughter) I don't know what started all that, but --

BARBARA: That would be interesting to find out next story, wouldn't it?

PAUL: Yes, yeah.

BARBARA: Well, I still appreciate your time this afternoon.

PAUL: Yeah, not a problem.

BARBARA: This has still been great. Now we do paperwork, which you're familiar with, I know, because at least --

PAUL: Yep. There's always paperwork, yep.

BARBARA: OK, September 23rd, it's moving right along. I did talk to Jack --

PAUL: Skelton?

BARBARA: Skinner.

PAUL: Skinner, yep.

BARBARA: [00:41:00] OK. And he's going to let me put a little flyer on the registration table to tell other people about this project. And --

PAUL: Just tell him I just said hi to [Mr. Proulx?], the airport manager.

BARBARA: Oh, really? OK, when I was in Cody, I talked to Rick Patton, but I didn't get out to the airport, so, I can just use the mailing address of the airport for you?

PAUL: Yeah, 816 North Federal Blvd. And I'm city hub, and I go down and get a box [and a phone?].

BARBARA: That's fine. And what's the zip code there?

PAUL: 82501.

BARBARA: OK. I have a copy for you when I get -- when I get done with all this. I should fill in mine ahead of time, and I never think of it. Oh, well. [00:42:00] And this just gives permission -- both of us are giving permission to the archives to archive the material, to use it, as long it's -- and it's only used for research, not for commercial purposes, so, right there, and then, I will give you a copy. Beautif-- you say, is there a football game Saturday? Are you staying for it?

PAUL: No, I gotta get back Friday afternoon.

BARBARA: Too bad. They had a real cliffhanger last Saturday.

They won in like the last 30 seconds, and it was only by one point, it was j-- it was crazy.

PAUL: (inaudible), yep.

BARBARA: It was crazy.

PAUL: [Cycle?] at the airports, Casper airport --

END OF AUDIO FILE