

OH-3095, George Twitchell, 5-19-2015, Laramie, WY In Flight

BARBARA: [00:00:00] The Wyoming state archive several years ago got a bequest from the Kurt Kaiser Foundation to preserve the history of aviation in the state. And so one of the projects that they have undertaken in connection with that funding is a series of oral history interviews about aviation. So they hired an interviewer who is based in Cheyenne and they hired me -- I've been doing oral history for a long time -- to go around the state and interview people about aviation, and that's all the direction that we had. So I have talked to a lot of different people. I tried to get around most of the state, Park County, Fremont County, I forget where all I've done. Anyway, but the project is winding down and I've got -- [00:01:00] I'm talking to you and then I have one more than I have to do before the end of June. But anyway the interviews will go into the Wyoming state archives where they'll be available for researchers, just so you'll know what's happening with them. OK now we're going to be really official here. This is Barbara Bogart. Today is May 18th, 2015. I'm in the Albany County library and talking with Mr. Bob -- no, not Bob. George Twitchell. I'm so sorry. So you said you're a Wyoming native.

GEORGE: I am.

BARBARA: (inaudible) native.

GEORGE: I am.

BARBARA: How did you get interested in aviation?

GEORGE: I think my first ride was when I was about six years old with my father in an airplane out of Green River, Wyoming. And at that point I think I was hooked. I didn't do anything about it until after I was out of college and then I had children [00:02:00] to raise and didn't have the money to learn to fly. My college roommates had learned to fly and I thought it would be great, but I managed to come up with enough money in the late '70s to learn to fly. And I was able to learn to fly right here in Laramie and I flew with some great instructors, to include Sam Evans. Probably one of the finer instructors I ever had here in Laramie and there are countless reams of information about Sam Evans. Sam Evans' pilots license originally, and I've seen it, has one of the Wright Brothers' signature on it.

BARBARA: How did that happen?

GEORGE: Well, after the [00:03:00] early 1900s escapades of the Wright Brothers and Kill Devil Hill and Kittyhawk one of the Wright Brothers, Orville I believe it was, was appointed, and I could be wrong, but he was appointed to the Civil Aviation Agency which was the precursor of the

FAA as we know it today. And his signature appeared on pilots' licensees. And John Evans, Sam's son, has that and it's framed. And so that's kind of ties my aviation, I like to think, all the way back.

BARBARA: Sure.

GEORGE: But --

BARBARA: Now, where was he instructing [00:04:00] at that time?

GEORGE: At Evans Field here in Laramie which is down on Howell Road about just a little south of town. And it's gone now. After Sam died his children turned it into a -- the real estate was worth more than just having an old grass airport on it. And so it's now called -- anyway it's an equestrian -- it's called The Paddocks. And that's where Evans Field used to be. If you find an aviation sectional chart, a map, of this area 15, 20 years older, back in the '90s or '80s even, Evans Field is on [00:05:00] it. And so and it's listed and it was -- it had an official identifier in the system. Literally thousands of pilots were trained by Sam Evans in Laramie from the early '50s until he passed away in the 2000s.

BARBARA: So he established it in the early '50s then?

GEORGE: He came here from Minnesota or Wisc-- Minnesota, I believe. And this is where he taught so many people to fly. Sam was a unique person. He was blind in one eye and he

could fly an airplane better than anybody I ever saw and you'd never know that he only had sight in one eye. But interesting person. And then [00:06:00] the actual flight instructor that I learned to fly from, that finished me up, was Sam Kotby who had Kotby Motors here in Laramie and he's still around. He's younger than I am. I'm 72 now and the only thing I can say about flying is I wished I learned to fly 25 years younger in my life.

BARBARA: What kind of plane did you learn to fly in when you were learning with Sam Evans?

GEORGE: He had a Piper PA12 which is called a Piper Cruiser. It was probably 35 or 45 years old and it flew wonderful and he could make it do anything he wanted to do with it. [00:07:00] And it really made me appreciate his skills and the lack of skills that I had. But yeah, it was some fun times.

BARBARA: How long would it take, or how long did it take I should say, from the time you first started until you got your solo?

GEORGE: I started flying on my birthday in November of -- oh, I don't even know what year it was. It was '80, I guess. And I finished up -- because of bad weather I couldn't deal with flying that winter so I finished up in June the next spring. And actually that was '82. [00:08:00] November

of '82 and I finished up in June of '83 because we were going to Alaska and I wanted to fly in Alaska and we went up -- we left August first of '83 to go to Alaska. So that was a rewarding way to see some of Alaska.

BARBARA: Did you have your own plane at that time?

GEORGE: No, I did not. I was renting. I learned to fly actually -- I didn't learn with Sam. I learned with Sam Kotby and using the University Flying Club's airplane. And that was a Cessna 182 or, excuse me, a Cessna 172. And so I flew that airplane off and on for about four or five years -- four years until I was able to go partners with a friend of mine [00:09:00] and we bought a Cessna 182.

BARBARA: Were you still flying in and out of Evans Field at that time?

GEORGE: No, we were flying out of Bree Field. We flew on Sam's field whenever we needed to and felt like it was a thing to do. Several times they closed the airport out here at Bree Field to do maintenance or do runway overlay or something and so we'd take the airplane and take it over on Sam's field and tie it down. People who had to use their airplane, that's what they'd do.

BARBARA: You learned to fly in the University plane, did you say?

GEORGE: University Club plane.

BARBARA: Tell me about that, the club and the --

GEORGE: The club is still going today. I believe it started in the early [00:10:00] '50s, the flying club at the university. It could have been even in the late '40s and it was an interesting group of people and it -- as all clubs go it would grow and then it would wane, but we kept it going. I was associated with the club, I still am, and they have tried to keep one or two airplanes in the club. Most of the time they only have one airplane and they train a lot of students. It's been a very good resource. Originally it was called the University of Wyoming Flying Club and it was a sanctioned approved club of the University of Wyoming. And then [00:11:00] because of some legal trepidation, let's put it that way, on the university's part they felt that they could no longer sponsor the club or let the club have a sponsored name on campus. And so consequentially now it's just called the University Flying Club. And it isn't associated with the University of Wyoming at all.

BARBARA: So it's a private organization?

GEORGE: Yeah, and I think having said that, and I probably shouldn't say it, but this is like a lot of clubs and organizations that are losing associated positions with various organizations, [00:12:00] but the legal system that

we have in this country has pointed itself towards not letting any kind of risk activity be associated with, as they would call it, our financial assets. So consequentially most of the clubs now are all off on their own and they've been forced to incorporate just from legal issues.

BARBARA: Now, when you joined the University Flying Club about how many members did they have and did they have --

GEORGE: We had between 20 and 30 at that time. And of that 20 and 30 a third of them, 10 maybe, were student pilots learning to fly and the other 20 [00:13:00] were members that already had their licenses, continued to fly the university air -- or the club aircraft. And then there were five or so instructors at that time.

BARBARA: That sounds pretty good sized.

GEORGE: It was. And like I say, the size of the club and the activity involved was -- it kind of -- it's cyclical. It would go up and it would come down. And that's about the most number of people I ever saw in the club.

BARBARA: So 20 to 30 some people are sharing one plane?

GEORGE: Yes.

BARBARA: How'd that work?

GEORGE: It's all scheduling. You call out there and say, "Is the club plane scheduled for 2:00 this afternoon? I need

it for two hours." You're on the book. And it was -- and then [00:14:00] there was another instructor with another plane on the field, Jerry Bowser was here at that time, and he was teaching flying also and he had a couple of instructors. And so it was a busy time for student pilots.

BARBARA: So you're talking now in the 1970s?

GEORGE: Late '70s, yeah, '75 to '83. It was very busy and then it kind of took a dive off and I think about '86 or so we went through the oil embargo and all of that. So flying really took a dive in '87, '86 to '92, '88 to '92. Our club just kind of went down to maybe seven or eight members at that time. [00:15:00]

BARBARA: Was it people leaving town or they just couldn't afford to fly?

GEORGE: I think the cost of gasoline was what really -- I mean [clear?] gas of course went up way over \$2.50 a gallon and aviation gas was almost always a dollar and a half more. So consequentially that's what was happening. And as all financial crisis takes care of itself, it kind of all balanced out. And I think we're paying pretty close to \$5.50 or \$6 a gallon for av gas today. And that's changing. That's not going to get any less, but aviation is changing, general aviation is changing [00:16:00] in the world. It's

not getting any less popular, but people are doing it now with more money.

BARBARA: Yes, I've heard that over and over again. Let me go back to the club for a minute. You paid dues to belong?

GEORGE: We paid -- at that time we paid \$10 a month dues and then the airplane -- and this was in 1980 -- the airplane rented for, I believe it was \$12 an hour and then you had to put fuel in it. And in perspective that airplane cost the club about \$10,000 in -- it was used and nine or \$10,000 was what he paid for that airplane. And today -- and gasoline [00:17:00] in 1980 was \$1.25 a gallon and today that same used airplane would cost \$75,000 and gas is \$6 a gallon. And everything associated with aviation, just like driving, is the same way. The insurance is the same. I mean insurance is costly. And parts, maintenance, everything that you do to your car, has to be done to an airplane. It has to be inspected every year, it has to be -- so in the '80s we had it pretty good and I don't even -- I could have -- in 1970 I could have bought an airplane [00:18:00] from an instructor and he would have taught me to fly it for \$6,000. So there's some contrasts all the way through there to today.

BARBARA: Now tell me about your plane, your own plane, when you bought it and how you chose what you did and what you did with it.

GEORGE: I was involved with another -- with a couple of other guys in a small business that we'd spun off and it required a fair amount of traveling. And both the other guys were already pilots and I had just gotten my pilot's license. That's what prompted me, another thing that prompted me, because I knew I'd be able to do some flying and do it safely with a couple of other good pilots. So we chose to buy a 182 Cessna and we paid, I don't know, 16 or \$17,000 for it when we bought it [00:19:00] and we just flew the wings off of it for about five or six years. I mean we were using it. And that's what makes an airplane pay, the time saved. And then you go back and you say OK, you've got time to spare, go buy air. Because we'd go to Milwaukee and turn around and come home and get as far east as Des Moines, Iowa and get weathered down for three days. Or rent a car and drive on home. So it wasn't -- it isn't as great -- general aviation, small single engine airplane is not really -- it can be a time saver, but I'll tell you what, you've got to be careful.

BARBARA: Not necessarily cost effective?

GEORGE: Not necessarily cost effective, [00:20:00] that's right.

BARBARA: But you were flying all over the country, it sounds like.

GEORGE: We had a couple of research projects going, one in Huntsville and one in St. Louis and one in Milwaukee and so we were kind of going three different ways as was necessary. And it was. It actually allowed us, all of us, to learn more about flying and all of us to use it to accomplish a task that we needed to do.

BARBARA: Did you use it for pleasure as well?

GEORGE: Yes. I took my family on a number of trips to the west coast and back east. And I still do that to this day and I don't own an airplane, but I have the use of some airplanes for [00:21:00] just fun flying and involved in experimental aviation. And then I'm continuously involved, and have been for 30 years, with Wyoming Wing of the civil air patrol.

BARBARA: I wanted to ask you about that specifically because (inaudible) mentioned that to me. So tell me about civil air patrol.

GEORGE: Civil air patrol was formed on a national level as an auxiliary of the United States Air Force in the early '40s and they did coastal watch. Interesting, there's some

history, civil air patrol history, about off the coast of New Jersey some civil air patrol aircraft were doing submarine patrol because [00:22:00] the Germans had gotten to our coastline in submarines. And as the story has it they actually were able to hand carry a bomb onto a small aircraft and throw it out and actually destroyed a German submarine.

BARBARA: Oh, my heavens.

GEORGE: Yeah. Now that's just -- and I've read the history and so I don't know any more than that except what I read. But anyway the civil air patrol was formed during wartime as somewhat of a civilian arm of general aviation sanctioned by the United States Air Force and sponsored in part by the United States Air Force, as it is today. And [00:23:00] at the time and through the '50s, '60s, '70s, '80s the civil air patrol has been tasked with a lot of different things, but search and rescue has been one of the things that they have been continuously tasked with from day one. A pilot gets lost, we go look for them. And of course there's many different ways nowadays that we know a pilot's in trouble. There's a beacon on their aircraft that sends a signal to the satellites and then that in turn goes to the Air Force rescue coordination center and that then comes back to the

local civil air patrol through the county sheriff. County sheriff's involved in all search and rescue efforts and he's actually in charge of the search and rescue effort even though he's not even associated with the civil air patrol. He [00:24:00] tasks us. And that's the way it should work because that brings it -- even though we're a national organization that brings us back to state and then back to the county.

BARBARA: How did you get involved in it?

GEORGE: The civil air patrol airplane was sitting on the airport out here and I got to talking with some of the guys and they said, "You need to get in our group. You're already a pilot, we could use you." And so that's how it happened. And civil air patrol is pseudo military so if you know anything about the military there's just continuous hoops to jump through and continuous regulations that you have to abide by and sometimes you say why and the answer to that is because the regulations say so. So once you've [00:25:00] learned that mindset it's not too awful hard to get along in civil air patrol. And they keep us very well equipped and we have good equipment and we have good training and we have good people and the regulations themselves weed out any cowboys, let's put it that way. We have lots of cowboys in Wyoming, but they're good cowboys.

BARBARA: Now, when did you join the civil air patrol?

GEORGE: 1980. No, excuse me, 1988.

BARBARA: And about how many people were in the group at that point here?

GEORGE: About the same as it is today. There's about 250 in Wyoming, in the state of Wyoming. And then it's kind of set down as -- it's set down as the Wyoming Wing under the Rocky Mountain region under national. [00:26:00] And there's nine regions and then there's seven or eight states in each region. And then in Wyoming Wing there's eight or nine squadrons, Gillette, Sheridan, Cody, Jackson, Sublette County. They're scattered all over the state.

BARBARA: So what squadron is Laramie?

GEORGE: We're in the Laramie Valley composite squadron. And the composite squadrons have associated with them a cadet group. And you can be a cadet from age 12 to 18. And the cadet endeavor is -- I respect it a lot because it takes kids who have interest in aviation, [00:27:00] prior interest in military let's say, and it gives them regimented training. And it's fun to watch these kids progress through it. I'm only associated with the cadet group loosely because my choice in civil air patrol has been first search and rescue and then second I've been associated with the Wing administrative staff and

operations. So I haven't had a lot of time to work with the cadets, but I work with them often enough to watch their progress and I admire the people, the adults, the parents, who have chosen to work with their kids in civil air patrol because it's not [00:28:00] like a lot of organizations that parents put their kids in as a babysitting endeavor. If you're going to have your kids in civil air patrol you're going to be involved and I think it's great because it brings the mothers and the fathers and the brothers and the sisters out to see what's going on.

BARBARA: So the cadet program, does it provide flying instruction?

GEORGE: It does. That's the only place that a young person can receive flight instruction in civil air patrol. Adults can only receive continuing training. As an adult I could not get my pilot's license in civil air patrol. It's not available to adults, but it is available to the cadets.

BARBARA: That's a way of getting young kids interested in general aviation then, isn't it?

GEORGE: Absolutely. And every year [00:29:00] they have a glider encampment where they bring two or three or four gliders up from Colorado and they take all the cadets and they take them -- they usually do it in Wheatland or Lander. And they take them and give them all rides and let them fly

the gliders and then we have a program where I do cadet -- all the pilots if they're qualified can go out and do cadet orientation rides and we give the cadets all the flying time that the Air Force will pay for.

BARBARA: What a great program.

GEORGE: It is. It is a great program. And the education involved, aerospace education is part of their segmented education requirements and then they have a rocketry program, an amateur rocketry program. They have -- along with [00:30:00] just learning the basic military stuff. Go march today or go do calisthenics today, physical training and that kind of stuff. But it's a wonderful opportunity for young people and a lot of -- I mean our cadet wing is only about 20 here in Laramie, 20, maybe 24, but they're active, they meet every week and my hat goes off to the adults that do that program. Because it's worth a lot to these kids. The interesting part of that, there is at least every two or three years we'll have a cadet from the Wyoming Wing who gets accepted to the Air Academy. Just because [00:31:00] they were encouraged to take it upon themselves to get excellent grades and go on beyond what the average high school kid does. And then that in itself, the civil air patrol nationally, I believe, has the opportunity to recommend one cadet every year, one

excellent cadet every year from every wing in the United States to our military academies. And so --

BARBARA: Kind of like the senator's --

GEORGE: That's where it goes through. It goes through the senators. And so it's interesting, about every two or three years [00:32:00] we get an excellent cadet from the state of Wyoming and they get accepted to the Air Academy.

BARBARA: That's very cool. Now, do the cadets, are they able to go on the search and rescue missions?

GEORGE: No, not until they're -- let's back up. They are allowed to participate in search and rescue actual events only on the ground. So they get ground training as well as get to fly in the airplane. But at age 18 they have the option to stay as a cadet or sign on as a senior member in civil air patrol. If they choose to sign on as a senior member it takes them [00:33:00] about less than six months -- because of their prior training it takes them less than six months to become qualified crew on aircraft. So because they're already right there just ready to step over the threshold at 18. Some of them choose to stay until they're 21 as a cadet and it's their choice. All of them -- I've never seen a cadet yet that decided which way they wanted to go at age 18 decide to get away from the cadet program. They've always wanted to stay and work with their

counterparts in the cadet program. So it's interesting, they really -- I've watched our cadets come and go on beyond that [00:34:00] and become national officials, officers in civil air patrol at national level, or go on through the military, go through the academy or go through ROTC and go into the military, do a career in the military and get out and come right back and be a civil air patrol.

BARBARA: Let's move for moment into the functions of the civil air patrol, one of which is search and rescue, correct?

GEORGE: And then disaster relief has always been a primary focus because, as you can imagine what's going to happen here in the next week or 10 days is we're going to have some pretty high water. And so [00:35:00] the last two or three governors -- two governors that we've had in the state have been very proactive about that and with the advent of national homeland security, office of homeland security, there have been some emphasis on obviously -- from Rita and Katrina, the hurricanes where there was so much damage and then the massive flooding, the massive fires that we've had in the last 10 years or so, the civil air patrol has been very, very functional in disaster relief in that we may get called to do a pre-flood photo analysis of let's say the Encampment River and the Laramie River drainages. And then when the water comes up, OK,

it's a follow-up. [00:36:00] Get out there and take the same pictures of the same stuff that you took pictures of before and those pictures go to the Wyoming office of homeland security and then ultimately to national homeland security, but the governor's office and the military in the state of Wyoming, they get those pictures and then they can say -- the National Guard, for example, can say, "There's a significant rise in flood water and it looks like it's going to be a real issue in the Saratoga Valley. Let's get our people, the military, the National Guard, get them." So we're broadly involved in that aspect of disaster relief. We have a minor, not so much in Wyoming, but we have a whole effort based on drug interdiction, first starting with of course [00:37:00] here's the bad things about drugs that you cadets should know. And then but we do some stuff with the drug -- with DEA from time to time or with law enforcement to -- we cannot go out and look and hunt for any illicit activities, but our efforts would be in support of their people. If their people need to go to a meeting or if they need to transport let's say some drug dogs that they need in Jackson or Bozeman or some place, that's where our efforts come in to help government agencies.

BARBARA: So it's a support function?

GEORGE: Support function. And we support [00:38:00] -- occasionally we support the forestry. We support the DEA, drug enforcement. We support just any of the Department of Agriculture people if the support is needed. Department of Homeland Security. If they need photographs, if they need to look at -- say they've got forest or [rain?] fires going and they need to take a look at that, they might ask for our support. And at this point in time Wyoming is the only one of two wings in the country, us and North Dakota, have thermal imaging systems on two of our aircrafts. [00:39:00] Infrared cameras, in other words. And so we can go up at night or we can go up over fire areas, we can pick out hot spots. Our people are trained, we're getting more of our people trained in it. I anticipate we'll get one more unit. We have six aircraft in the state and two of them are equipped with thermal imaging. You see the law enforcement on TV using this stuff from a helicopter and the guys running around. Well, of course we don't do any of that, but if need be we might be able to use that -- we're surely able to use it to do search and rescue with too.

BARBARA: Tell me about some of the, for lack of a better word, missions that you've been on with the civil air patrol.

GEORGE: [00:40:00] One example is about four years ago we had -- and we get several of these during winter all over the

state, but we had a group of snowmobilers up here that went out on Friday, just two guys, two machines, and they didn't come home Friday night. They didn't come home Saturday night and so obviously their friends from Colorado were a little bit worried and their wives and stuff and they didn't know -- and so Sunday morning -- Saturday evening I got called and I said OK, since it's in the Laramie area we'll have to get an incident commander someplace else. There's four incident commanders in the state, I'm one of them, and I can't fly if I'm the incident commander. So I was going to fly on that one. So another pilot and myself qualified in Cheyenne and he came, [00:41:00] brought the airplane over here, picked me up and we went up early on Sunday morning and we weren't up, oh, an hour until I spotted them. Spotted the two guys and they were waving their black coat and we were in contact with the search and rescue folks on the ground, the sheriff's people, and I talked to the sheriff's deputy and told him where I spotted them and I gave them a coordinate, a lat/long coordinate for them. And he said, "We're just south of that coordinate about a half, three quarters of a mile." I said, "Yeah, I saw you over there. If you'll come north on that trail" and I gave him specific directions and we stayed overhead until they found them. And then so my group, the

guy that was with me dropped me back off in Laramie, I got in the car and went up to Albany and met them as they brought them in. And they were certainly happy to see our aircraft and they were [00:42:00] very, very, you know, for lack of a better word the guy grabbed me and gave me a big hug. And his wife and two kids were there and they were elated. Because they were fixing to spend their third night out and it was probably in the teens down to the single digits and we could have lost them.

BARBARA: Absolutely.

GEORGE: And then we had one a couple of years ago up in the Big Horns that I was the incident command on and I ran it from Laramie, but my crews, I had two air crews on that, one of them was working radio communications. We call this [high bird?] where they were assisting all the search and rescue people on the ground [00:43:00] with radio communication. And then I had air crew in there and this guy and the gal had walked 11 miles to climb a peak up there in the middle of the Big Horns and he was supposed to propose to this young lady on the top of the peak. Well, they never made it. It was this time of year and they got literally snowed down and had we not gotten to them and brought the Air Force helicopter in, had we not gotten that done I think we would have lost at least one, if not both

of those people. And you know, those are the good ones. We've had some where people didn't survive. We've had plane crashes on Laramie Peak where [00:44:00] three of them perished. I mean they flew out of Garden City, Kansas to Casper and there's one big rock in the way and they hit it. And so those are the ones that -- and that took us three days to find that one because it was just totally destroyed. There was only pieces of it. So those are the kind of issues we get into and, you know, there's all kinds of things that go along with that that you'd never think of. How do I deal with family members? So we have a chaplain corps in our midst. We have the chaplain for the state of Wyoming and then we encourage the squadrons to have chaplains. They don't all, but [00:45:00] those are the people that work with the families of these distraught people obviously, not knowing where their loved ones are, not admitting to what might be the end result, that their loved ones are perished and those kind of things. And if we happen to find them alive, which we have, then that's the good ending. We have people that are crisis management trained. Crisis incident situation management, CISM. And then our chaplain corps. Our chaplain to the state of Wyoming lives in Denver. He drives up here to all of our exercises, [00:46:00] great guy. And so when I got in

civil air patrol I kind of wasn't aware of why need it. I thought it was just kind of something extraneous, but the longer I've been in there the more I see how overall we try and cover all the bases. And I think it's important because you do have to deal with family members, you do have to deal with every aspect of family life when you've got an emergency going. We have a good group of people in our state of Wyoming.

BARBARA: You mentioned weather related incidents. Do you get involved at all with fires, wildfires?

GEORGE: We do, but [00:47:00] Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service have their own, quote, air resources. And so if we get called it's usually not by either one of those federal agencies. Every once in a while they're overwhelmed with their resources and we'll get a tasking to go either take some photographs or take one of their people and take them in and have a look at them. But you kind of have to realize what goes on in a major incident like that is they're very, very well organized and they -- for them to fold us into their operation is another level. Yes, they can do it, yes, they have done it, but they try and use their [00:48:00] own resources first. And a lot of that depends on the state. Now, the state forestry in Wyoming, and there's a lot of state forest land in Wyoming,

Wyoming is big forest land, and so the state forestry uses us. And we do anywhere from 40 to 50 hours of flying for the state forestry every year. Most of that is on the state forest health survey. They have trained people that we take and they can look at the forest from 1,000 or 1,500 feet up, tell what kind of trees they are, what kind of disease might be going, what beetles are bothering them, if they're in peril from previous spring flood or if they're in peril from drought and that kind of thing. But they keep [00:49:00] a real tab on -- at least Wyoming does, keeps a real tab on their own lands.

BARBARA: So you provide transportation service for that piece?

GEORGE: That's true. And the Air Force is our guiding umbrella, let's say. We fly under the Air Force umbrella, but if the state requests something like that the state has to pay. The Air Force won't pay for that, where the Air Force pays for all search and rescue and most of the disaster relief efforts. But if it's a state entity the state has to pay and then what happens is we get approval from the Air Force to do it and then the state is just billed back the expenses. [00:50:00] And the pilots, we all fly volunteer so there's never any pay. I think I can honestly count one night in 30 years that somebody else has paid my motel room, whether it was an actually search and

rescue or whether it was training. One time Sweetwater County paid for a motel room. That was on search and rescue, but other than that we volunteer and we pay our own way. And occasionally Red Cross steps up and feeds us, Salvation Army steps up and feeds us, county steps up and feeds us lunches or something like that, but the rest of it we pay for ourselves. And we jokingly say CAP means come and pay. [00:51:00]

BARBARA: That's great. It's so good to hear all of this, especially the way it's organized, the kinds of things you do, because I remember as a kid growing hearing about the civil air patrol and then it's like it went away as I haven't ever heard of it since. So I'm really glad to know that it's alive and well. I have one more thing I want to ask you about. You mentioned briefly something about being involved with experimental aircraft.

GEORGE: Yeah.

BARBARA: Tell me about that.

GEORGE: Since day one I guess the Wright Brothers started out in experimental aircraft, right? And then as aviation, both commercial and general aviation, progressed the government got into the fact that OK, if we're going to have airplanes they need to be certified and they need to be -- in order to certify -- in order for them to be safe

they need to be certified. And so there's a certification [00:52:00] process starting the first nut and bolt that goes together on an airplane and it's all the way up through the completed. It's certificated by the FAA. Well --

BARBARA: (inaudible)

GEORGE: Was ends up happening is there's always the experimentalist that says, "I've got a better idea. I can do something with an engine that's never been done." So (inaudible) the experimental aviation path. And much of the technology that's come back into certificated aircraft has evolved out of experimental aviation.

BARBARA: Sure, makes sense.

GEORGE: And so the government just kind of let the experimentalists go, let's them go play on their own, [00:53:00] invent on their own, build on their own. There are some guidelines that have to be met before you can take your experimental aircraft and put it in the air. It has to pass some certifications in that one guy has to look at the aircraft and he has to look at the documentation that's there and that documentation has to be in order and it has to be approved by a voluntary designated experimental examiner. So my friend and I worked on this airplane and it's his airplane and we work on it, but the designated

examiner comes up and looks at the aircraft and looks at the paper work and puts his name on there and then [00:54:00] the guy from the FAA comes and says, "I need to see all your paper work" and he looks over the airplane at one time and that's the last that the FAA is involved. So that airplane now is flyable and we fly it and the builder himself maintains that aircraft. It doesn't have to go to a certified mechanic to be repaired or inspected. And so it's a relatively inexpensive way to stay in aviation, stay in general aviation. And we can take that airplane anywhere in the -- I've had that airplane to New York, the one we fly, and it's every bit as good as any airplane I've ever flown and more fun than the law should allow.

BARBARA: Tell me about that -- tell me specifically [00:55:00] about this experimental that you built.

GEORGE: It's a -- there are several kit builders around and then you can build a plane from a kit, you can build a plane from plans, you can build a plan from your own design if you choose, if you're capable of that. So this was a kit and we bought all the parts from a manufacturer, Van's Aircraft, and he's got a whole line of airplanes out there and this is a Van's RV6. And RV comes from the guy's name who builds all this stuff, Richard VanGrunsven. And so he's got this company that builds the kits and he'll sell

you the kit in various stages of completion and then you put it all together. There's 6,000 rivets and countless pieces of metal, [00:56:00] but when you get all done it's all riveted together, it's painted and you paint it and put an engine on it. We put an aircraft engine on it and aircraft propeller and away we go. And we built this airplane coming up on 20 years now, over 15 years ago, and it's just been a great airplane. And there's two more of them on the field being built right now, the Van's vintage aircraft, and they're every bit -- I mean it's kind of like building a sports car. It's fun. A lot of --

BARBARA: How long did it take to build it?

GEORGE: Oh, he was seven or eight years. We were seven or eight years on that. Now, you can buy the quick build kit now and probably put it together in, depending on how much you're willing to work on it and how much [00:57:00] time your wife will give you to work on it, to keep domestic tranquility, you're probably -- you can put that -- you could probably put that together in three or four months. And your pocketbook has a lot to do with that, how much you're capable of -- you know. An engine is \$26,000 so those are the kind of things that you just have to say hmm, have I saved enough money to get this next step.

BARBARA: So is that the only plane you have now?

GEORGE: Yeah, that's the only one. Well, that and the civil air patrol. But flying a civil air patrol is like a teenager being handed a Corvette and a credit card and say, "Here, go have some fun." But don't disobey or don't get outside the rules.

BARBARA: [00:58:00] What is it that you like about flying the most?

GEORGE: It's just one of those things that it's another form of freedom, I guess. You're just not -- you're in the air so now you have control of your vehicle in three dimensions instead of two. And along with that comes the knowledge that you have to have amassed about weather, about safety, about aeronautics, aeronautical -- just the theory of what makes aircraft fly. There's three forces that make an airplane fly, thrust -- three forces on an aircraft in flight, thrust, drag and gravity. The joke always goes, what makes an aircraft fly? Money. [00:59:00] But along with that is knowledge and basic physics because Da Vinci envisioned it. There's several of those old Italians back in that time. Bernoulli understood where the lift came from, the air flowing over an air foil creates pressure differences and that creates lift. So you learn all this stuff when you're studying to be a pilot, but I had learned it many, many years before that in physics classes and

science classes and just out of curiosity. So that was what brought it all to fruition for me [01:00:00] was to say oh, I learned about this or I learned about that, now I see what lift really is. Well, yeah. Why is it this airplane can't go faster? Now I understand that the drag force -- oh, yeah, I remember that formula. And so --

BARBARA: Putting theory into practice in a way?

GEORGE: Yeah, that's right. And it's amazing the number of people who find that very, very boring. OK, that's fine, I can understand that, I find some things that a lot of people find very interesting I find boring too, but science as it comes to aviation is really what keeps me involved in it.

BARBARA: [01:01:00] You sound like you've found your niche.

GEORGE: Yeah, essentially that's right. And it's been fun. I've had a good career of it and I've found a way to stay involved with it that not only helps me but it helps other people too. And that's my thought of it. And I can imagine what the 1930, 1927 airline -- or airmail pilot must have gone through when he was trying to fly from St. Louis to San Francisco or wherever. Because that airline, or the airmail route, went right over Laramie. And if you -- I've looked into this. There's a line of arrows that are still buried in the dirt [01:02:00] out in this country,

there's one up here on the hill, and there were some good stories. There's been some good stuff written about that.

BARBARA: And I do know a little bit about that. The formation called Pilot Peak, is that --

GEORGE: Pilot Peak.

BARBARA: Is the arrow near there?

GEORGE: The arrow's right there.

BARBARA: I've been on that road once a long time ago, but I didn't know to look for the arrow.

GEORGE: The easy way to find that arrow is there's about three or four towers on that one -- on Pilot Peak. And the shortest tower, the shortest radio tower, up there is on one end of that arrow.

BARBARA: Oh, cool, OK.

GEORGE: And the only reason I know that is because that belongs to the Ham Club and we built that building and we used the end of the arrow as the foundation for our building. Probably wouldn't get done today, but -- and I read, there's been some stuff written in the last [01:03:00] three or four years that I've read about that whole thing. People have researched that whole airmail route, but those pilots were far and above the average pilot of the day.

BARBARA: They would have to be to do that, follow the track, follow the railroad tracks through Wyoming or the rivers or

whatever the peak -- the bonfires or whatever it was they had going.

GEORGE: Yeah, and it was pretty amazing. There's one out at Medicine Bow, there's an arrow out there, and --

BARBARA: There's one near Superior, I know.

GEORGE: In Superior?

BARBARA: Yeah.

GEORGE: I know where that one's at. I was born and raised up there.

BARBARA: Oh, were you?

GEORGE: Yeah. I was born in Rock Springs, raised in Green River and Pinedale.

BARBARA: OK, I lived in Rock Springs for a while and it's one of my favorite places in Wyoming actually.

GEORGE: I left there to come to college [01:04:00] in 1960 and I got a chance to move back to Rock Springs working for the university. I got a chance to move back in Rock Springs in 1999 and so I moved up there for seven years and it was kind of like going home. My sister lives in Green River, my grandmother lived in Green River at that time. And so it was kind of like going home. And I grew up in the [Wind Rivers?]. My parents owned a dude ranch. My dad was a railroader, but my mother ran the dude ranch up at Big Sandy Openings.

BARBARA: Really?

GEORGE: We built --

BARBARA: I've been there of course.

GEORGE: We built the lodge in 1949 and '50 and '51 we built the lodge and the 10 cabins over there. So we bought it from [01:05:00] [Fliance Mitchell?] in '48. We bought the lodge and then my mother kept it until 1965 after my sister graduated from college and then she sold it. But it was -- that's where I grew up in the summertime. It was horrible. I couldn't be in town with my buddies getting in trouble. I had to do chores. What an opportunity.

BARBARA: That Big Sandy Opening trail is the very first trail I went on when I came to Wyoming and the Wind Rivers are my favorites in the whole state.

GEORGE: Oh, yeah, that's home. It's home for me. And so and I enjoy -- I still enjoy talking to people because I grew up at the end of the coal mining era. By '54 the coal mines were pretty well all shut down, '55. And [01:06:00] it was just part of my growing up, knowing the coal miners. Even though we were in Green River we were 20 miles away from all the miners, but they were all part of our lives.

BARBARA: I did some oral history for Sweetwater County Museum in the mid '90s talking with some of the people whose

ancestors had come through Ellis Island, documenting that immigration process of some of those people.

GEORGE: And coming to -- yeah.

BARBARA: Rock Springs. Some of those stories were great about taking the train from New York and it getting browner and browner and browner and winding up in Rock Springs.

GEORGE: Rock Springs, Wyoming, yeah. And my lineage comes from Wales. On my grandmother's side, my mother's mother, they came from Wales in 1846 or '7 or '8, somewhere along in there. They got as far as St. Joe, [01:07:00] Missouri and they wanted to get west and so they tied into one of the Mormon hand cart parties. And so my ancestors arrived at Fort Bridger via hand cart.

BARBARA: Very early on.

GEORGE: In the 1840s. In fact, I've found two of the brothers, one of which was my grandmother's father, I've found his signature on the rocks at Guernsey.

BARBARA: Oh, really? How cool is that? So you are a bona fide Wyomingian.

GEORGE: Yeah. She was born at Burnt Fork, Wyoming, near Burnt Fork, Wyoming, which is out from Fort Bridger and south and west there. Or south and east actually, Burnt Fork, Long Tree, McKinnon. And she was born on a ranch there [01:08:00] in 1900, the youngest of eight kids, and her

father came with the hand cart in the late '40s, or 1840s, and then he actually rode -- he came as a very young man and he rode as a teenager, 20-year-old, for the pony express for 18 months, all 18 months. From Granger to Carter.

BARBARA: I know where those are.

GEORGE: And so that was -- and because of that I got to rode the reenactment in 1960.

BARBARA: That's fun.

GEORGE: So there's a lot of history about that. I wished I'd have done this right here with my grandmother. And [01:09:00] she died 18 days short of her 102nd birthday in Green River.

BARBARA: Wow.

GEORGE: And I just -- I used to give her such a bad time. She'd tell me, "When I'm gone" -- I said, "Just where the heck do you think you're going?" I said, "The devil won't have you. The Lord sure don't want you. You've got to stay here."

BARBARA: Oh, that's great. You know what? I think --

END OF AUDIO FILE