

From: Roger Lewis <dfwbumgroup@hotmail.com>
Subject: **FW: Memories of a Delta career**
Date: October 2, 2009 11:48:11 PM CDT
To: Roger Lewis <splitwindow@mac.com>

Memories

by retired pilot, Gene Hall

HISTORY 2

If I had to choose my most unforgettable character from the DAL golden years, I would be stumped. There would be at least twenty five to choose from, maybe more.

Jimmy Reynolds would rank right up there. I think his IQ was a little on the high side for airline flying. **Stewart Hopkins** fell into the same category. Stewart was a Navy Admiral who flew off the Hornet in the mid 1930's. He was the father of April, who finished first or very close to first in her class at Westminster in Atlanta. She was an honor student at Stanford, and then Emory Law School. April was Frank Rox's second wife. Stewart was in MSY for a short time, and he was incredible to fly with. He was an outstanding man who could and would converse on just about any subject that you were interested in, but you had to be careful to not forget that the main order of business was to get that big four engine jet to its destination. Hoppy was a very competent pilot, but he was not great at hand flying low minimum ILS approaches. **Herlong Averett** was ATL chief pilot, and H. said that it almost seemed that very high IQ people operated at a disadvantage when hand flying the ILS. H. did mention that he was not worried about me being handicapped in that area.

Jimmy either divorced his wife, or more likely she divorced him, and he replaced Jeter as my roommate. That \$125 rent had been a real strain after Bill moved out. Bill was my banker. I wouldn't say Bill was tight, but he was a much better money manager than I was. He would have given me the shirt off his back. I always seemed to spend about ten or fifteen percent more than I made. One time, I told Bill that I was poor, and he said: "Hall, you may be broke, but you will never be poor. How much do you need?" I wonder if I would still be borrowing money from him if he were still alive. Jimmy coined the phrase: "My month seems to last longer than my money." That was certainly applicable to me. Bill was my version of the pay day loan company, and he didn't charge interest.

Jimmy and I started running a weekly poker game from which we took a one dollar cut out of every pot. I read "The Education of a Poker Player" by Herbert Yardley to hone my poker skills. Yardley was called the father of cryptography. He broke the Japanese diplomatic code in 1921. His main premise was that if you were willing to be bored by folding most hands, you should win in 75% of your poker sessions. Capital Airlines had not yet merged into United, and they had a MSY base. Several of their pilots along with some civilians were regulars in our games. It was not unusual for a poker game to go uninterrupted for 36 hours with different players moving in and out. The house normally finished in the black.

J.W. was in his sixties. He was from Hot Springs, Arkansas and owned a couple of mediocre race horses which he alternated between Hot Springs and the New Orleans Fairgrounds. J.W. moved into the building for the race season and quickly became part of our gambling group. He loved to play gin for a dime a point. It doesn't sound like much, but gin players know that several hundred dollars can change hands. Jimmy had showed me that it was possible to take a deck of fifty two cards, turn them up slowly, one at a time and memorize the cards. That is, you could turn them down and call the cards, with few or no errors as they were turned back up. I first thought it was impossible, but when I tried, I found that it was much easier than memorizing those thirteen pages of emergency procedures in the UAL DC-6/DC-7 pilot's manual. That is an enormous advantage for those willing to work that hard. J.W. cheated by looking at the bottom card of the deck after he dealt. The bottom card in gin is effectively out of play, and it is an advantage for the player who knows the card that is out of play. We never called his hand for cheating, we just dropped one card from the deck every time we played with J.W. and he never caught on to the fact that he was playing with a fifty one card deck when he played with Jimmy or me. He knew the card that was out of play when he dealt, but we knew the card that was out every hand. Our relationship with J.W. was profitable.

Carita's maiden name was Young. Her father was the Y in the TG&Y ten cent store chain. She had recently divorced a New Orleans doctor and she became Mrs. Reynolds in 1961 about the time that I tried the HOU base for six months.

Jimmy's financial situation improved, and he also lost his physical shortly after his marriage. We never knew whether it was a ruse to collect his loss of license insurance or not. He moved to New Smyrna Beach, Florida. He bought a golf driving range, and decided he was the teaching pro. I had played a fair amount of golf with him, and I don't remember him breaking 90 very often. He may not have been a scratch golfer, but he was definitely a scratch talker. I will give you an example: He and Carita went to Montego Bay on vacation, and he played a round of golf at Tryall. Tryall is a two thousand acre golf development that is upscale in the extreme. It was owned by a group of Texans led by Pollard Simons.

When Jimmy returned to the states, he called **Pollard Simons** and told him he was a golf professional from Florida, who had just played Tryall. Pollard was interested in his professional opinion about his golf course. Jimmy told him it was fantastic, but it was not being properly cared for. It needed the tender loving care of a professional such as himself. He later told me that Pollard Simons told him that he had never had such an insulting call from such an arrogant, aggressive individual, but he invited him to Dallas for an interview, and hired him as the head pro at Tryall.

In 1967, **Frank Rox, Tom Miller, Joe Cooper**, and I spent several days in Montego Bay. Tom was Senior Vice President Marketing, and a Director. We played golf at Tryall and when we checked in at the pro shop, we were told that Jimmy was giving a lesson on the practice range. I found him there giving a golf lesson to **Billy Graham. Adam Gimble** of department store fame was waiting for the next lesson. Jimmy introduced me to both of them, and we chatted for a couple of minutes.

1968 was a most eventful year. We had moved from New Orleans to Atlanta in August 67. I had gone to New Orleans intending to stay for two weeks in 59, and stayed for 8 years. I was in DC-9 initial ground school on April 4, 68 when **Martin Luther King, Jr.** was assassinated. **Robert Kennedy** was shot in June, and the Vietnam War protests were raging. I was commuting to ORD to fly captain on the DC-9. On Sunday, August 25, I was flying ATL-ORD with a stop at SDF. On letdown to SDF, our horizontal stabilizer motor failed. Louisville didn't have jet ways, and we parked between a concourse and a house trailer that was being used as the temporary passenger lounge for the fixed base operator while construction was going on in the private airplane hangar. The gate agent came on board to tell the flight attendants that we had a celebrity passenger getting on. He told us it was Billy Graham who was going to Chicago to give the invocation at the opening of the Democratic National Convention the next day. I informed the agent that we would probably have a significant delay. It was unlikely that the stabilizer motor could be repaired, and we probably would need to get a new one on the next flight from Atlanta. He told me that Billy was standing in the concourse wearing a straw hat and sun glasses, and he had not been recognized. I went in and introduced myself and, with no hesitation, he informed me that we had met the year before on the golf course in Jamaica. He and I had a two and one half hour conversation before he retired to the FBO lounge, about one hundred yards from where we were parked.

Breakfast was being served, and there was plenty for the crew. One of the flight attendants came up (I think they were not called stewardesses anymore) about the time I was being served, and told me about a standby military half fare passenger who was going to be bumped. He had a new baby that he had never seen, and he had already spent two days traveling from Panama. She was distressed about his situation, and asked if I couldn't do something to help him. I told her that of course I could, I was the captain, I would take care of it just as soon as I finished my breakfast.

Dr. Graham had called for a Lear Jet from Executive Jet Aviation in Columbus. That is the company now known as Net Jets. His associate, Grady Wilson was the only person with him, so I knew there was room on the Lear. I walked over to the lounge and asked Billy if there was extra room on the plane, and he said yes, and jokingly offered me a seat. I explained the situation, and he was happy to help. I don't remember the soldier's name; I will call him **Corporal Smith**. I told Corporal Smith that I had alternate transportation for him, but I didn't tell him who it was with or what kind of plane. He walked across the ramp with me and I introduced him to Billy and Grady, and asked him if he would mind riding

to Chicago with them in their Lear Jet. To say he was speechless is an understatement. Billy asked him where he lived, and Corporal Smith said he lived about half way between Chicago and Milwaukee and would take a bus to the train station from ORD. Billy explained that the Yippies were demonstrating in Chicago, and the local buses and taxis were on strike, but that was not a problem because a local businessman was meeting their flight with a large limousine, and they would drop him off at the train station. Corporal Smith's duffle bag was already at ORD, and Delta ops took it over to Butler Aviation for him. I would love to have been a fly on the wall when that soldier told his family how he got home. Dr. Graham asked for the address to write a good letter about the incident, and I told him I had dozens of good letters in my file, and rather than a letter, how about one of his autographed books. He sent a book and a nice letter to me.

Once again, this was still during my wild youth, but after Jimmy was diagnosed with a fatal brain tumor, I had the joy of sharing the gospel with him, and it took.

The Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) controlled all the business of the industry in the sixties. Ticket pricing and route approvals were at their discretion. Delta didn't fly west of Dallas until we were awarded the southern transcontinental route authority in 1961. United, American, and TWA were the big three trans con carriers. Eastern was number four in size, and we were number five. The grouping was often referred to as "the big five". Pan Am was the international flag carrier, but they had no domestic route authority. TWA had a large footprint internationally as well as domestically. That one route award changed the game permanently. Braniff, National, Northeast, Western, TWA, and Pan Am are just some of the names that are no longer in use.

Some of the feeder carriers were Southern, Piedmont, Allegheny, Lake Central, Mohawk, Trans Texas, North Central, West Coast, Bonanza, and Pacific. Southern suffered a protracted pilot strike that started in mid 1960, and didn't end till 1962. Southern morphed into North Central: North Central into Northwest.....My old Southern buddies now have the same airline pass as I have.

We started San Diego layovers after we were awarded the West Coast routes, but the plum in MSY was flying to San Juan and Caracas, especially Caracas. Venezuela had very high inflation in the late fifties and early sixties, so high that the crews signed for meals in the hotel, and our agent paid the bills. His name was **Kluskie**, maybe not the correct spelling of the name. He apparently was not employed by the company, but represented us in the country. He had a very aristocratic bearing, and it was said that he was a Polish Count. We were flying a DC-7 with a stop in Havana where we always picked up a couple of bottles of Matusalem Rum. It was generally agreed by the crews that Matusalem was the finest rum. The Caracas Airport is located on the coast at Maiquetia, and it would frequently be ninety degrees plus when we landed. The city is inland, about three thousand feet above sea level, and is blessed with a very temperate climate. The Tamanaco Inter Continental hotel is in the city, about forty five minutes from the airport. Lupe was our regular limo driver. His Cadillac had seen better days, and the crews brought parts to keep it running on a regular basis.

The "goody bag" consisted of ice cubes, coca colas, limes, and cups. The senior stewardess was responsible for assembling that, and the first or second officer would have the rum for the trip to the Tamanaco. The whole crew was generally in a very good mood by the time of check in. After check in, the hard decisions started. The first one was do we want to have dinner in the Naquata Room or order room service in the captain's room? The Naquata (most assuredly not the right spelling) was the hotel's old fashioned supper club. They had live music, and very good food. Now the really hard choices. Get the picture, you are the young guy on the crew, you have recently learned that there are better reds than Lancers, and better whites than Blue Nun. Your self image is one of super sophistication, and you really would rather **Peggy Yancey** and **Betty Coats** and **Mary Tellasonic** and **Nita Singletary** and **Joyce Acuna**, et al. not realize that you don't know the difference between chicken livers and foie gras. It was like a mini luxury vacation, and we signed for everything, and didn't pay for any of it. It was how I envisioned airline flying when I was pumping gas into the wings of airliners in Columbus.

I probably flew no more than a half dozen trips to Caracas. I never was senior enough to hold a regular line. The captains were legend. **Uncle Ben Catlin**, **Pat Gosset**, **Jimmy Benedict**, **Gene Croft**, **Tommy Bridges**, **V.O. Johnson**, and **Elmer Bennett** just to name a few. Some of them had been barnstormers, and airmail pilots. A couple of the more senior ones may have been a little older than their records showed. The FAA had replaced the CAA as the ruling aviation bureaucracy at the end of the Eisenhower administration, and the age 60 rule for airline pilots had gone into effect. We lost a few of the older ones.

It was generally agreed that **Uncle Ben** was the oldest, and he was very proud of being an airline captain. He was also proud of the diamond ring on his left hand. In those days, we frequently invited passengers to the cockpit, and even routinely flew with the cockpit door open. In earlier days, the DC-4 was the aircraft on the Caracas run. It was not pressurized, and Ben enjoyed showing passengers what a 200 MPH wind was like by opening the cockpit window, and putting his hand out into the slipstream. He enjoyed it once too often. There is a very nice diamond on the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico.

Pat and Jimmy had flown airmail together. One of them had rescued the other after a forced landing in Lake Michigan, but my favorite story about the two of them took place during WW 11. They were flying a rotation that laid over in Chicago. The company rented the hotel crew rooms by the month, and they stayed in the same pilot's room each trip. Scotch whiskey was very hard to come by because of war shortages. One of those two best friends, I think it was Pat, came up with a bottle of Scotch. It was to sip and savor slowly over the entire month. Rather than cart it back and forth every trip, he decided to leave it in the room, and just enjoy a little on each layover. He was a trusting fellow, and he was sure that his fellow pilots would leave his bottle alone. But as added insurance, he wrote: "I peed in this bottle, **Pat Gossett**". As a Scotch lover, I can only imagine how he was looking forward to sipping that Scotch as he entered the hotel room, and lovingly removed his precious bottle from the closet, and the horror when he found written on the bottle: "I peed in it too, **Jimmy Benedict**".

I had the pleasure recently of visiting **Elmer Bennett**. He is ninety one, and lives in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. Joan and I still have a condo in Atlanta, but our six grandchildren live in Ocean Springs, and that is where we vote. Elmer was the Captain on the first ATL-GTW flight, and there are many great stories about him. Elmer told self deprecating jokes about himself. He said he told his then wife at her fortieth birthday party that he was going to trade her in for two twenties. She announced to the whole party that she was not concerned because Elmer was not wired for 220.

I don't think Elmer was afraid, but he was very careful. We think he carried a revolver in his flight kit, and he wanted the cockpit door locked at all times. I was flying engineer with him on jets, and I couldn't remember to keep the door locked, and every time a stewardess came in without knocking, Elmer knew that I had forgotten again, and would be on my case. I solved the problem by telling the girls to knock before opening the door, and Elmer would never be the wiser when I forgot. I thought I had him fooled till **Bill Jeter** told me that he had been having trouble remembering to lock the door, and Elmer said: "Bill just do what **Gene Hall** does, he can't remember either, and he has instructed the stewardesses to knock before opening the door. That way, I think it's locked, and as long as I think it's locked, it's okay.

In the mid seventies, Elmer was commuting to ATL to fly to London. It was before I became a Christian, and I was still hanging out in Saconi's Bar and Grill in Buckhead frequently. I was sitting at a table in the bar having a beer one late afternoon with my regular crowd, and Elmer walks in the door with a lady friend. They took a table on the other side of the bar, and my mean streak bubbled to the surface. Elmer had not seen me so I sneaked out to the telephone booth in the lobby. It was only a few feet from the hostess stand, and I could see the hostess as well as Elmer from the booth. I telephoned the bar, and the hostess answered. Without identifying myself, I told her that I needed to speak with Elmer Bennett who was in the bar. I described him, and she walked directly to his table, and told him there was a telephone call for him. He had a look of stunned surprise on his face. Who could possibly know he was in this bar, far from his crash pad on the south side of Atlanta? When he picked up the phone, he was no more than fifteen feet from me. I said to him; "Elmer, you no good, worthless, _ _ _ , I told you that I would shoot you if I ever caught you with my woman again." With panic in his voice, he practically screamed; "Who is this?" I told him to turn around very slowly, and look over his left shoulder. When he did, I waved at him. I don't think I have ever had anyone seem so glad to see me. He did have some mixed emotions however.

Several years later Saconi's had closed, and Panos and Pauls, a very upscale restaurant had opened in the location. **Frank Rox** was Senior Vice President Flight Ops, and **Bob Martin** was passing through the Director of Flight Ops revolving door. They called me from there, and invited me to dinner as Frank's guest. Since I had moved off Blue Nun and Lancer's, Frank gave me the wine list to order a bottle of wine. I ordered a bottle of Chateau Palmer which was forty dollars. That would probably be one hundred fifty dollars today. I was

always glad Frank didn't know how much he had spent till after dinner. I was still hearing about it ten years later. Like Jeter, Rox was a good money manager.
More to bore you later!