

## HISTORY 11

One Atlanta based pilot told me that; “The best thing about being based in Atlanta is that you don’t have to layover there.” We were laying over in Manhattan when he made that observation. I couldn’t have agreed more. Atlanta was a great place to live, but I never enjoyed visiting there. Atlanta was a good place to raise kids in the 60’s and 70’s. My favorite domestic layover cities were New York, New Orleans, Chicago, Boston, and all the West Coast cities. Bangor was a favorite for almost everyone. The Holiday Inn had a “crew car” for our use, and it was lobster at Cap Morrill’s almost every trip. The restaurant closed long ago, but Cap’s son, Phil is still shipping lobsters all over the USA daily. Their website is [capmorrills.com](http://capmorrills.com), and we order from them frequently.

About a year before our move to Atlanta, I was searching for something to supplement my income, and I settled on residential real estate. Bob Brenner was a senior MSY Captain, but his judgment must have been flawed because he let me list his home for sale. Eureka, I made the sale; It was my first real estate deal. In Atlanta, I signed on with a small commercial real estate brokerage, and quickly entered the development business. My first project was an apartment complex in Chapel Hill, NC called the Oaks. It is contiguous with the Chapel Hill Country Club, and was converted to condos many years ago. The Oaks was one hundred twenty five units, and was successful. My next project was in Carrboro, NC. It was planned to be more than four hundred units, and we started construction just in time to have about fifty completed when our Arab friends put the oil embargo on the US in October 73. I was flying high with an interest in a boat and airplane.

Dean Booth recently represented the retired pilots in the Delta bankruptcy, and he was a Delta in house lawyer in the mid 60’s. Dean has always been quick with very appropriate analogies and quips. After the embargo, and incompetence put us out of business he said; “Gene, you are the only real estate developer that I have ever know who started at the top and learned the business on the way down.”

I was fortunate to have a bank that had much bigger problems than mine. They allowed me to finish the second project, and turn it over to them. I started developing strip shopping centers in 75, and spent the next ten years building grocery and discount stores. I made one foray back to residential in the late 90’s when my partner Billy Ivey, and I developed The Winston on Peachtree Road in Atlanta. It is a block and a half northeast of Phipps Plaza in Buckhead. It is thirty six units in a building that was designed to look like a Central Park building of circa 1930.

That is enough about non Delta business. My business career has been up and down. I had a high end residential development ready to start in Ocean Springs when the 2008 crunch began. It might have been too upscale for South

Mississippi, even in good times. As I write this, our website is still up. Check out [lilyharbour.com](http://lilyharbour.com), and notice that harbour is the classy spelling.

John Moran was the Chief Pilot ATL in 73, and he called me one day to tell me that an unemployed corporate pilot had reported me to the FAA for flying someone's Turbo Commander. I confessed that I was guilty. John was distressed, and explained that it was illegal for me to be flying for hire for anyone except Delta. I told him I was aware of that rule, and he was perplexed that I would knowingly violate it. I was having a little fun with John. He asked who the owner of the airplane was, and he was relieved when I told him it was mine, and I was not paying myself to fly it.

Marketing had a deal with Augusta National Golf Club in those days. I think it was arranged by Whit Hawkins and/or Ernie Massey. The company co-operated with the club during the Masters, and in return Delta had the use of the Butler Cottage for a week for several years. I think Miller and Rox wanted to show how democratic they were, and they needed to invite one hourly employee. I had the privilege of being their guest there a number of times. We would play the par three in the morning and the big course in the afternoon.

I called Moran once when we were staying in the cottage, and asked if he could play golf the next day. I let him tell me how busy he was, and he didn't think it was possible, but he finally asked where I was playing, and I casually told him Augusta National. The pause was so long that I feared that he might have hyperventilated, but he caught his breath and accepted. We departed from PDK the following morning and landed at Daniel Field, the private airport next to the National. I never knew when I might need a few brownie points in the chief pilot's office, and I stored up a few with that trip.

I took playing golf at Augusta for granted just as I did most good things in my life in those days. My golf handicap has ranged between 8 and 15 for most of my life. It was down to 8 for one month a few years ago when I had 5 rounds in the 70's in a period of a couple of weeks, but that was atypical.

The second hole at Augusta is a dog leg left, par 5. I was with Rox, Cooper, and Miller, and I pulled my tee shot into the woods, left of the fairway. I wouldn't have found my ball if a caddie had not been in the woods walking down a paved pedestrian path that is not normally used by golfers. It is there for Master's spectators. The path is wide, and my ball used a couple of favorable bounces to stop well over 300 yards from the tee. So far so good, but there were some big trees between my ball and the green. The other three are in the fairway, and playing up to the green with little notice of my situation. They do hear my second shot hit a tree and drop straight down, still in the woods. They hear my third shot hit another tree and drop almost, but not quiet out of the woods. At this point, they have heard my ball hit trees twice, they have not seen me since we left the tee, and they don't have any idea how many shots I have taken. They naturally

assume that it has been many. Well, I hit the next shot between trees onto the green, and even though I was about 50 feet from the hole, I sink the putt for a routine par 5. Rox was keeping score, and when I told him I had a 5, we almost had a riot. If the caddie had not confirmed that it was the truth, I would not have been able to make that sale.

Delta sponsored the Heritage Golf Tournament in Hilton Head for a few years. Doug Tewell was the winner in 1980, and Cooper was paired with him in the pro am on Wednesday before the Thursday start of the tournament in 1981. Being the Senior VP Marketing gave Joe the privilege of playing with the defending champion. As the defending champion, Tewell had a fairly large gallery following him. It would be an understatement to say that Joe's golf game was not ready for prime time. He could hit a long tee shot, but it might range from 45 degrees left to 45 degrees right, and it would frequently be hooking or slicing. Joe hit one of his rare straight tee shots on a long par 4 hole, and he had about 200 yards left to the green. He took a couple of practice swings with his 5 wood, addressed the ball, and whiffed it. Joe was blessed with strong ego strength. He backed away from the ball, took another practice swing, moved back to the ball, readdressed it, and whiffed it again. Now he has been credited (debited?) with three shots, and he has only touched the ball with his club once. He carefully addresses the ball, takes a mighty swing, and watches the ball disappear into the hole, 200 yards away, for a par 4.

I was flying a trip one Saturday, making money for the company so Miller, Rox, and Cooper could enjoy the good life. They were playing golf at the Atlanta Athletic Club. On the sixteenth hole, Joe had hit his tee shot close to a tree, but rather than take a one stroke penalty, he decided to hit it where it laid. That was an error in judgment. He hit the tree with the shaft of his club on his follow through. The shaft broke and the sharp end cut his arm. He was bleeding profusely. They tied a tourniquet around his arm, finished the round, and only then took him to the emergency room for several stitches. Miller and Rox thought he should be grateful because they helped him with the tourniquet, and they skipped the nineteenth hole to haul him to the hospital.

In the late 70's, we started playing our Saturday golf at the Capital City Club in Broohaven. Frank defected from the Saturday group by joining Cherokee Country Club, but Cooper, Miller, Vice Chairman Dick Maurer, CFO Bob Oppenlander, several insurance executives led by Walter Wattles, Charlie Stone, a Piedmont Hospital Internist, and a few others had a regular Saturday game for several years.

Golf is not generally thought of as a dangerous game, but for Cooper it was. Joe was in Seattle on Delta business with Dave Garrett shortly after joining Capital City Club, and he suffered an aortic aneurysm. He was very fortunate. The taxi took him to a hospital that didn't have an ER. He was having severe chest pains, and he walked to the hospital a few blocks away that did. A heart surgeon was in

the ER, and they had him in the OR in a few minutes. He was minutes from potential death, and he said he was thinking that he had only played one round of golf at Capital City. He was wishing that he hadn't joined; His initiation fee was expensive and if he died that was a high cost for one round of golf.

He recovered, but we always worried about him because his life style was not the best for heart patients, or anyone else. We were at Capital City on a Saturday, and Joe was off the fairway as usual hitting his shot through the woods. The ball rebounded off a tree, and hit Joe square in the mouth, and knocked him to the ground. We didn't see the ball hit him, and heart attack was the first thing that occurred to us. Dr. Stone was a hole behind, and we yelled that Cooper was down. He rushed to us, and Joe was sitting up, with his hand covering his bloody mouth. Charlie left with him to find dental help, and we were having lunch about three hours later when they came back with Joe's lip and gums stitched up. Joe was grateful that he didn't have to depend on Rox and Miller to finish their round of golf to find medical help.

I was on the putting green one Saturday when CFO Bob Oppenlander said: "Hall you are overpaid." It was one of those times when I was able to think fast. I replied; "That may be true Bob, but I am not overpaid enough." He said; "You are also incorrigible." It was not our pay that upset management, it was not working enough. I think they always thought that we should be more productive.

Even though Rox was no longer part of our Saturday golf gang, we still played lots of golf and traveled with him. Frank and I had spent a weekend out of Atlanta with our wives. I don't remember where, but we flew into ATL on a Sunday afternoon. It was illegal for restaurants to sell alcohol on Sundays, so we took a few miniature bottles of whiskey off the airplane to enjoy before dinner. We decided on Lick Skillet Farm, which was in Roswell, for dinner. We sat down with our wives and ordered. The wait person brought us glasses of water, and Frank and I opened two minis and poured them into the water glasses. I don't think we even had time to take a sip before an extremely angry chef was standing over us with a butcher knife about the size of a Samurai sword. He was screaming that we were trying to cheat him with free setups, and ordered us out of the restaurant. I have not been scared very many times in my life, but that was definitely one of the times. We exited quickly. I have been told that the food was excellent there, but I wouldn't know.

If you are old enough to remember Li'l Abner from the comics, you remember Joe Btfsplk. Joe was jinxed, and he walked around with a cloud over his head. We sometimes thought Frank was jinxed. We could have eight guys order steak cooked exactly the same way in a restaurant, and they would all be perfect, except the one put in front of Frank. It wouldn't be just slightly off, but more like inedible. Or all the chairs would be okay except Frank's, it would truly be rickety. On many occasions, Btfsplk was his nickname.

Frank was a Corsair pilot in the Navy in the later stages of WW 11. I was aware that he was flying off a carrier in the South Pacific when the war ended. He had finished his training too late to see any action, but they were still flying training missions. One of our pilots ran into one of his shipmates in a restaurant or bar in the late seventies in Atlanta. When he found out that our pilot was with Delta, he asked him if he knew Frank Rox. He said he had not seen him since they were discharged from the Navy after the war but he had been told that Frank had gone to law school, and was with Delta. Of course our pilot said he knew Frank very well, and his old ship mate asked if Frank had ever told the story of landing on the wrong carrier. Of course Frank hadn't, and his old buddy took great joy in telling the story. I am certain that he didn't have nearly as much fun as I had in asking Frank if it was true that he had landed on the wrong carrier.

His face turned redder than usual when I asked him, but he laughed as he told the story. It seems that he was flying a training mission, and when he landed on the carrier, a mechanic ran up to the airplane, and asked him what the emergency was. Frank told him there was no emergency, and the mechanic said that his tail hook was hanging out (the emergency signal) when he entered the landing pattern, and the whole fleet had been turned into the wind to take him aboard, and this was not his boat. He had landed on the wrong one. Frank said there was probably a thousand sailors cheering him as he went to the ready room to wait until they took all the right airplanes on board so that he could fly to the right carrier.

It seemed like hours to him when the loud speaker that was broadcast over the whole ship finally blared that Lt. Rox's airplane was ready for departure. They briefed him over the loud speaker for the benefit of the ship's crew. He said they broadcast the weather for all the stations between Tokyo and San Francisco, and then told him about his navigation. They gave him the ship number of his destination, and then told him his heading was 310 degrees and the distance to his ship was 6,000 yards. As he walked out on deck, several thousand sailors were cheering for him, and when he landed, several thousand more were cheering for him.

Frank's full name was Frank Fitzgerald Rox. My business partner, Billy Ivey always had a second home at Sea Island, and my family vacationed there frequently. One summer, Billy and I played several rounds of golf with the ex Governor of Georgia, Carl Sanders. The governor was from Frank's hometown, Augusta. I asked him if he knew Frank, and he said he grew up with him, but they didn't call him Frank, his name was Gerald Rox. When I called him on the phone and said; "hello Gerald", there was a long silence before he asked how I found out. He thought the carrier landing was funny, but I soon found it was better if I didn't call him Gerald.

Sometimes Frank appreciated my jokes, and sometimes he didn't. The melanoma on the top of my head that I have just recovered from gives testimony

that I have never liked wearing hats. I played golf all those years bareheaded, not concerned about UVA rays, and now I am really bare headed. I was one of those who carried his uniform cap more than I wore it. Now, I wear a hat every time I go out. I always kidded Frank about not everyone being able to be an air line captain. I always told him that some people had to be lawyers, and they even had some value to a company like Delta. I retired an old uniform hat that was at least fifteen years old. It had a fifty mission crush, and the gold was tarnished. It was grungy to say the least. I wrote a letter to Frank and presented the hat to him by leaving it in his mail box. I wish I had saved a copy of the letter, but I basically told him that I knew that I was his hero, and I wanted him to have the hat while it still had many years of service left. I suggested several uses for it. I told him he could put it in front of the back glass in his car, and when people would see it, they would think he was a Delta pilot. I told him that every one knew he was Senior Vice President Flight Operations, and when they said they didn't know he was a pilot, he could just say he was not flying anymore, but was actually in charge of all the pilots, they would assume he was actually a Delta Captain. He would not be lying, just not giving all the information. I gave him several other suggestions; one was having it bronzed because it would look great on the mantle in his living room.

It was a full two years before Frank acknowledged that he had received the hat. I wondered why, and I came to the conclusion that he was just overwhelmed with the token of my friendship, and he was too emotional to talk about it for a long time. I don't think there was any possibility that he didn't want me to have the pleasure of him thanking me for the gift.

The company golf tournament was a high light for the quartet. We made it several years running until there were so many entries that six hour rounds of golf became the norm. We were at Doral one year, and Rox, Miller, DFW Captain B.B. Barclay, Pre Ball, and I were having dinner together. Pre had been retired for several years and I told Pre that I wanted to tell him something. I said; "Pre, I would like to have told you this a long time ago, but you might have thought I was brownosing. Now that you are retired, I want you to know in what high esteem I hold you. I guess the BMW gift from the pilots pretty much is an indication of what we all think of you, but I just want you to know how much we miss you, and I am not alone in thinking that you are the best leader that any airline ever had in ops." Pre said; "Gene I can't tell you how much your saying that means to me. Thank you."

Rox called me one day to tell me that Dave had directed that senior officers would no longer play poker with other employees. He said that I should call Dave and make sure that I was not included in the ban. I telephoned Dave, and told him I had just heard about the gambling ban, and I had the senior officers in my budget for twelve hundred dollars a month. I didn't mind not playing with them, but I would need a raise if the ban included me. Dave laughed, but he told me it was serious. It seems he was walking down the concourse in Dallas with

one of our Senior VP's, and an employee greeted them warmly, and said the last time he had seen Dave's companion was at the golf tournament the year before when he lost several hundred dollars to him at the poker table. Dave said it was great that the troops had a good relationship with management, but it was not appropriate for management to win money from them. He never told me if I was excluded from the ban, so we assumed I wasn't.

After the Arab oil embargo, we sold the jet, but Dean Booth and I decided to syndicate the boat. We put a group of about eight guys together including my brother Don, Rox, B.B. Barclay, and a couple of Atlanta doctors. Dean wrote a page of rules, and the main one was that any partner could use the boat anytime, but everyone was responsible for his own damage. There was damage almost every trip. None of us were distinguished mariners, and a little training is normally required to run a forty foot, twin diesel boat. Every mishap we ever had was not our fault. It was the elements, or some other boat, etc. I think the best excuse was the complaint that some nut had strung a fishing net all the way across the inter coastal waterway, and fouled both props. One guy came in one Sunday, and said his trip was fantastic; he had only done five hundred dollars damage that whole weekend. Barclay was a 747 captain, and it always seemed to me that he should have had an easier time than the others in understanding that you couldn't drive the boat up to the dock at even slow speeds, and stop quickly by reversing the engines, but he didn't. He got it after banging into docks several times.

We kept the boat in Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina in the summer, and Miami in the winter. Pre took it down the Inter Coastal to Miami once. He had a couple of his old retired cronies with him, and they made the trip with very little damage. The swim platform was banged up a little. Hank Morrison was the MIA Chief Pilot, and he was living in a home on the water that Al Capone had owned. We docked the boat behind Hank's house, and he had the swim platform repaired.

Tom Miller, Joe Cooper, and Frank Rox are a major part of my Delta memories. We had incredibly good times together. They were loyal friends. After Tom retired, I asked him how we got away with some of the things we did like playing poker across the aisle in first class sections all those years, particularly before Mr. Woolman retired. He said; "Gene, C.E. was not as straight laced as most people thought. I had been in New York on company business, and I returned to Atlanta on a late afternoon flight. A Red Coat Agent came on the airplane to tell me that Mr. Woolman had a visitor that he wanted me to meet. They had a car to take me over to the GO. I had a couple of drinks on the airplane because I intended to go home from the airport. I went into Woolman's office, and he introduced me to an Englishmen who may have been a lord or baron or something. I sat down to talk with them, and the next thing I remember was waking up, and I was alone in the office. I had dozed off while talking to them."