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Memories

by retired pilot, Gene Hall

History 5

Working with **M.E. (Bud) Watson** on the MEC resulted in the formation of a regular golf foursome that had **Jim Morton** and his partner **Brown Plummer** opposing Bud and me on a regular basis in extremely serious golf matches. Not only was a large amount of money at stake (sometimes as much as two or three dollars), but there was also pride and ego involved. Once at Covington Country Club, Jim chilly dipped the ball twice in the fairway on number one. Smoke was coming out of his ears, and he turned ninety degrees away from the green, and knocked the ball off the world. Of course we were too gentlemanly to be over competitive. We would go over to deepest, darkest Mississippi to play at Edgewater Beach (now a housing development) or the Broadwater Beach (now a weed field). We were playing Broadwater one day, and the match was tied as we stood on the eighteenth tee. A sudden heavy rain storm came up, and Bud and I wanted to call the match a draw, and go home. Not Morton and Plummer, the two dollar bet was way too important to let a monsoon stop the game. Being the gentlemen that both Bud and I were, we acquiesced. Of course, we lost the hole, and the match. I have never seen two thieves so happy. They insisted that we have a beer with them in the Broadwater Bar. We were soaking wet, we didn't feel very friendly to them right then, and we declined.

As I walked into my apartment back in New Orleans, the phone rang. It was Brown's wife looking for him. I told her I hadn't seen him for at least a week. She said that he told her he was playing golf with me, and I confessed that I was teasing and we had played in Biloxi. She then thought I was covering for him, and I couldn't convince her otherwise. I am not sure that he ever did either.

We weren't competitive.... we were super competitive.... ultra competitive? I can't come up with the words, but there was a lot of testosterone, mixed with big egos, inferiority complexes and weak golf games. Watson and I were playing golf as Swan Ward's guests at Timberlane Country Club once (I can't remember him ever inviting us back), and Bud and I were in a slight disagreement over some obscure rule that I was expert on and that Bud knew absolutely nothing about. Bud may not have understood the rule, because I had made it up so recently. We may have had a few beers, but only because beers were very helpful in smoothing out a golf swing. If you have read the history of WW I, you know that major conflicts often start almost by accident over small disagreements. Ours escalated quickly with a little pushing and shoving and, the next thing you know, we are rolling around on the ground in a wrestling match. In the middle of a golf course, **Captain M.E. (Bud) Watson**, role model and idol for us younger impressionable pilots had, without any provocation on my part precipitated this terrible embarrassment to our host, the ever gentlemanly and reserved **Dr. Swan Ward**. We were mad for at least two or three minutes, then we got on with the golf game. I can't tell you what year this was in, but I think Bud was about 38 years old, going on 12 and I was about 28 going on 10. I don't remember how old Swan was, but irregardless of his age, he was sufficiently immature to not let the whole fiasco bother him

If you were a pilot or stewardess/flight attendant based in MSY, you knew Dr. Swan Ward. He was the long time "Stew Doc", and later FAA Flight Examiner. Swan is about 5 feet 8 and I am about 5 feet 17. People called us the odd couple, Mutt and Jeff, etc. For some unknown, strange reason, he was very popular with the ladies. We nicknamed him "the pocket sized **Cary Grant**". He qualifies as one of my twenty five most unforgettable characters from that era. .

Speaking of nice guys and Cary Grant, I was the S/O on a charter about this time that carried the cast and crew of the movie Father Goose to Montego Bay. Cary Grant and **Leslie Caron** were the stars. Cary came to the cockpit before we departed to chat with us. He was very charming and, after talking for a few minutes, I explained that I was a real fan of his and we were really pleased to meet him, but his co star, Leslie, was the one that we really wanted to meet. To our disappointment, he informed us that she had alternate transportation. The last he had heard was that she was in Miami cavorting with her then boy friend, **Warren Beatty**. Cavorting is a code word that will not be in the family version for my grandchildren.

Bud and Jim were two of the most popular pilots in MSY. Bud had a moustache like that of Clark Gable and women seemed to think he was as handsome. He smoked long crooked cigars and he had a permanent smile. He was always fun to fly with. Bud was a very effective MEC Chairman. When Pre Ball promoted him to Assistant Chief Pilot MSY, someone questioned him for bringing such a strong union man into management. Pre's answer was that he wanted him to represent the company with the same vigor with which he represented the pilots.

I flew the CV-440 often with Jim. I was dating a girl in Shreveport and had become friendly with her mom and dad. Jim and I were invited to their home for dinner on a SHV layover. I volunteered to bring several pounds of fresh shrimp. It was on ice in a two or three gallon tin can. The 440 had a carry-on luggage and cargo area that was about ten feet long between the cockpit and passenger cabin. The passengers boarded at the front and walked through this area as they made their way to their seats. It was a hot day, and even though the shrimp was on ice in that carryon luggage area, it started to smell like shrimp is supposed to smell when it's been out of the water for a little while. The passengers got a good whiff of it as the stewardess welcomed them on board. She said it was a very easy flight, hardly anyone ordered anything from her.

Jim loved the good life, one of his favorite expressions was; "It only costs 100% more to go first class." It was generally said about the time we got the bill in a restaurant that we really couldn't afford. Who can ever forget that one of them was giving the other a line check in the DC-9 and they weren't familiar with Washington National. They flew over that big White House on Pennsylvania Avenue. That was a no no even then!

It was the beginning of the jet age and most pilots didn't have trouble making the transition, but some did and a few couldn't make it. There were things that even the best pilots didn't understand about the aerodynamic characteristics of swept wing jets. For example; United learned the hard way that you couldn't routinely cut the power on the final approach in a 727 and glide to a landing like you could in a DC-6. They destroyed at least one airplane before working this out. Northwest discovered the "coffin corner" by stalling a 720 at high altitude, high speed and losing the airplane. We discovered the difference between two engines out on the same side in piston airplanes and jets in the CV-880 training crash in ATL in 1960 and the DC-8 training crash in MSY in March of 67.

I checked out as a CV-440 Captain in August 1965. I will never forget going into MSY Ops with my shiny new four stripes for the first time. Some guys would just add the fourth stripe to the other tarnished three, but not me. I took my jacket to a tailor in Kenner, and had him remove the tarnished three, and put four new ones on. I walked into Operations and the first person I ran into was a little skinny stewardess whose name escapes me. She was the one who had been credited with having her bare feet put in a can of black paint in Caracas, and then having the pilots hold her up to walk up a wall and across the ceiling in the hotel. It apparently created quite a sensation among the hotel help. They were convinced that ghosts were about. As I recall, the crew paid to repaint the room. She didn't say hello, she just said; "Kid, what are you doing with four stripes?" She was a few years senior to me, and she was not impressed by my new status. Just one of the times that I have found that things were not what I thought they would be.

Now, I was a four stripe copilot. That meant that there was a new hat with gold on the bill, and shiny new wings with a wreath around the star on the chest of drawers in my bedroom. I was not senior enough to hold 440 captain, and not nearly senior enough to hold international DC-8 copilot. I was flying good DC-8 domestic rotations, mostly the Pan

An interchange. Pan American operated the daily flight between Washington and London and Delta crews handled the MSY-ATL-IAD portion.

Pan Am had interesting airplanes. They billed themselves as; "The World's Most Experienced Airline." We often joked that the pilots had to be experienced to operate their fleet. We had maintenance carry over items (MCO) that were minor problems that were not threats to the safety of flight, and a sticker could be put in the log book for repair later at a layover, scheduled maintenance check, etc. We started running the check list one day in New Orleans, and the Pan Am DC-8-33 had 33 MCO items. That day was memorable because the Delta jet fleet was completely void of MCOs. Granted, we normally had a few, but 33 on one airplane was pretty impressive.

On one trip, an EPR (engine pressure ratio) gauge failed between MSY and ATL, and we tried a Delta spare gauge, but we had different engines, and it wouldn't work. We borrowed one from Eastern, and maintenance told us that there was no hurry because the LHR-IAD airplane that we were picking up had a fuel gauge problem. None of the fuel gauges were reading properly, and the flight would be extensively delayed, if not cancelled. To our surprise, the outbound was loaded and ready to go when we arrived. We were curious about how maintenance fixed the airplane so quickly. They explained that they didn't fix it. After scratching their heads, and going through system manuals for awhile, they decided to defuel the airplane, and start all over. They discovered that the gauges were fine, but the airplane had so little fuel on board that they would have run out of fuel if they had missed one approach.

The Pan Am airplanes didn't seem to stop as well on the runway as our DC-8s. We were landing in ATL in the rain. We had two parallel east/west runways. The one on the south side of the field was the shorter of the two. It was the captain's leg, and we were being vectored to the shorter runway. I suggested that we request the longer runway, and the captain turned down my request. After landing, we skipped, on the anti skid down the runway, the engines compressor stalls sounded like cannons being fired rapidly as we stopped. We were so near the end that we could see no concrete, only grass in front of us from our pilot seats. A few months later, I had moved to Atlanta, and I was commuting to Chicago in order to fly captain, and I ran into that captain. He asked me why I had moved when I could fly such nice DC-8 trips in New Orleans. I told the truth, and confessed it was so I would never have to fly with him again. He thought I was kidding.

By the early sixties all the airlines had switched or were in the process of switching from mechanic to pilot flight engineers. It took two or three months and considerable expense to train a pilot initially. One sign that an airline was feeling some financial strain was when they tried to poach pilot engineers from other airlines. Continental was still aggressively trying to hire **Bill Jeter** and me three months after we were on the line. Pan Am offered a job to my brother Don and several of his AAL classmates the very day they finished engineer training. Most likely just a coincidence.

Don was almost three years younger than me. He was hired by American in 1964 with the condition that he report to Fort Worth for a Link Trainer check. He was from the enlisted ranks of the Air Force, and had learned to fly in a SAC (Strategic Air Command) Aero Club. He had no jet or heavy time, and American wanted to see if his instrument time was pencil or real. He was working on Eastern's ticket counter in Atlanta, and he called me in a little bit of panic, because his instrument time was limited as was his time in the Link. His appointment was about a week later, and I told him that we would find some Link instruction for him before he went to Texas.

All the old MSY pilots remember our Link very well. I am not going to describe it in detail, but they were black boxes with a simulated cockpit inside, that were large enough for one pilot to sit in. They were strapped on a table top and, when they were being "flown", the straps were loosed so they could slightly change attitude. The airlines were changing over to simulators during this time, and though the Link was still part of our FAA approved training syllabus, there was no evidence that any maintenance had been done on ours since Mr. Woolman was in high school. **Clancy**, our Link Operator, felt that if he took the straps loose, the whole contraption might fall off the table. He thought it would be hard to explain a serious pilot injury in a Link crash. Ours was located next door to the employee cafeteria, which was very convenient because we always showed up (at least those of us who lived on the south side of the lake) to have our training time signed off while we had the best red beans and rice or gumbo in town.

I called Clancy about getting Don some Link time, so he could prove to AAL what an experienced instrument pilot he was. Clancy said that he needed one that had been maintained and that Southern Airways was not yet into the simulator age and that would be our best bet. **Jere Cooper** had been one of my running buddies and, since the Southern Pilots were walking the picket line, I called him. One of Southern's training captains, whose name I can't remember, met Don a couple of days later in Atlanta and kept him in the Link for eight hours in one hour increments. I wish I could remember his name, because he did for my brother what **Ted Johnson** did for me.

The AAL Instructor was very thorough. He even gave a time and distance problem to find out where you were when you were lost. Don said that when they finished the check the instructor told him he obviously had lots of instrument time. American doubled their seniority list in two years, and Don was a captain by 1967.

One of the primary reasons that the 60s and 70s were so "golden" to us was because Delta was so profitable. Even so, I remember running into **Dave Garrett** the first year that we made one hundred million dollars and, he said, we needed to make at least five times that much to be able to keep the fleet updated. The airline industry cranked up in the late 20s and early 30s and, if you total up all the profits and losses for all those 80 plus years, the numbers are very red. We were an exception, we were expanding rapidly into the jet age and we had great leadership and phenomenal people (employees). I don't want to give the impression that most of our pilots were not pleasant people. The great ones probably outnumbered the bad by at least ten to one. I have a 1965 seniority list, given to me by the widow of **Joe Bourn**. I look at that list and there are dozens of men of substance on it. Men that I never worked for, but I knew well like **Floyd Addison, Norman Topsy, Mac Long, Dana Jones, Joe Kelly, Bill Temm, Andy Gibson,** and **Joe Moss**, just to name a few from bases other than MSY. If you don't have access to the Atlanta newspaper, you may not be aware that Joe Moss gave \$25,000,000 (that's right, twenty five with a dollar sign in front, and six zeros behind) to Children's Healthcare of Atlanta in 2008. It was the largest individual gift ever given to them. You can Google "**Joe Moss gift Children's Healthcare Atlanta**" and find out a lot about the success and generosity of Joe.

We tend to spend more time talking about the MSY "eccentrics" than we do the great guys like **Gene Croft, Bob Granberry, Bob Brenner, Bud Carmichael, Oley Olson, Allan Olson** and we could go on and on. Rather than trying to mention all the good guys, it would be easier to take a seniority list and mark off the very few bad ones. But the bad ones are fun to talk about, because some of the things they did that made you mad or scared, almost a half century ago, make you laugh now.

Two of my favorites will always be **V.O. Johnson** and **Henry Horstmann**. Henry was not a member of ALPA, which was resented by some. I don't believe I ever heard a negative thing said about Dick, and I never heard him say anything negative about anyone else until he and Henry visited me in October 1966 and maybe saved my career. It was a visit that most certainly changed my life.