

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV- Oral History #461

Interviewee: Dennis & Barbara Smith

Interviewer: Matt Simek

Date: June 29, 2008

Place: Felt Recording Room, Harney County Library, Burns, Oregon

Subject: Aviation

MATT SIMEK: This is an interview with Dennis and Barbara Smith, local historians for Canyon City, on Sunday June 29th, 2008. This interview is part of the Harney County Oral History Project, and was recorded at the Harney County Library. The interviewer is Matt Simek from Newberg.

Okay, technicalities are taken care of, let's go into the history of aviation in Oregon, and this will be Eastern Oregon. If you can, let's start off with just an overview of aviation that you know about, that took place in Eastern Oregon from anytime period. So tell me anything you know about in general, let's start with the generalities before we get into the specifics about how aviation began in the John Day, Canyon City, Grant County area, and then how it evolved.

DENNIS SMITH: I have done three things that I can recall on aviation. I think the first was a talk to the Genealogy Society, Grant County Women in Aviation. And in order to give them some type of background I had to do research. And at that point then I started

collecting everything that I could on the early years of aviation in Grant County, and just bring it forward. I think Barbara was one of the gals that was there at that presentation.

MATT: And I should interrupt here and say you are both pilots, and you both have experience with flying as well as history.

BARBARA SMITH: Well Dennis really is the historian, I've been the sounding board.

DENNIS: She is really the pilot. In fact she is the active, I'm the inactive. She's got about what, a thousand hours. I have a little under four hundred before I quit. Anyway we have had this plane for twenty some years now.

MATT: And it's a Cherokee 180.

BARBARA: It is.

MATT: And flies wonderfully.

BARBARA: It does.

DENNIS: I think the second thing I did was the story that was published in Oregon Aviation History Society on Willis Wood who had a little, I'm not sure if it was one of the early Pipers, possibly a J-2.

MATT: Uh huh.

DENNIS: Or a Taylorcraft, I'm not sure. Roger was, Star was I think corrected me, or didn't care for what I pronounced in that story, and wanted a --- the accuracy of it. Anyway it was right out at the, one of the very early airstrips in Burns, which is now part of the Burns High School Athletic Field. And that is a story of where we made a trip down here twice trying to locate this field. Finally found a brother who has a field at Hines, Davis, I think the man who had ---

MATT: Roe Davis.

DENNIS: Roe Davis.

BARBARA: That was it.

DENNIS: But his brother was Walt, I think. But anyway we walked the field he had, and he told us exactly where this strip was. And it was upslope, and a very hot day. And, you know --- what did I say ---

MATT: I want to put a marker in here too, because the Harney County Library has oral histories of Roe Davis. And I read those, and there is reference to that field on the high school. So yeah.

DENNIS: Well the interest started in Eugene, where a man had this plane, and had offered it for sale, and it was partially restored, maybe 90%, 95%, and he had it for \$25,000.

MATT: And when was that?

DENNIS: Six years ago, eight years ago, something like that.

MATT: Oh, and he was offering it to you for ---

DENNIS: No, no, anybody who wanted to purchase it.

MATT: Okay.

DENNIS: So he had given some of the history in which it had gone from Burns here as a wreck to Eugene Community College, which was named something else at the time. He then bought it from --- it was stored and in terrible shape in a barn for some two decades or something like that. And he took it and he started repairing it again.

MATT: Lane Community College?

DENNIS: And all that was said in this original article, yeah, it was a Mount Vernon man. Oh, I've got to find out who. So I finally put pieces together and tracked down Willis Wood, still alive there in John Day. And his wife, they were both flabbergasted that this old plane that he walked, literally walked away from at Burns back in the '40's, and was being resurrected and restored. And she brought me out these documents, that she had saved, all of his stuff, and that has all been shown in this, was published in this newsletter some ---

MATT: The OAHS Newsletter?

DENNIS: Yes.

MATT: The Aviation Historical Society.

DENNIS: Yes. Roger published it for me.

MATT: Okay.

DENNIS: And so the story was as much about the airplane as it was of Willis. And then I ---

MATT: Where is the earliest Grant County aviation that you had heard of?

DENNIS: Okay, that goes back to that original presentation in which I started collecting, back to the time of the barnstormers. I think 1915. And what I did for that presentation with the Genealogy Society, that first one, was in 1915. And a lot of this came out of the newspapers. Then in 1917, 1919, 1920, and it's amusing to the editor's description of pilots and airplanes, what they called them. And some of the crazy things ---

MATT: Do you have all of these stories still?

DENNIS: Yeah, they are all here. And you can have this to mark through and make copies.

MATT: Okay, thank you. Copies, yeah.

DENNIS: In 1929, Ted Barber, this fantastic barnstormer of which the book is all about.

MATT: The name of the book is?

BARBARA: Something barnstorming.

MATT: “Barnstorming Mustanger”.

BARBARA: Yeah, “Barnstorming Mustanger”.

MATT: And it is by Ted Barber. Okay, go ahead.

DENNIS: Yeah. They sold rides for \$2.50. He never did say what length of time, he would take people up. It was probably fifteen minutes.

BARBARA: But it was to buy fuel because they were flying cross country, and they landed for fuel.

DENNIS: Well they were broke. Well that was later. That was his story, they had twenty-six cents between them.

MATT: And that was in the Walk... you were talking about?

DENNIS: I think that was what he was flying then. Anyway, what they did, they would fly over town and throw out while they were flying these ---

MATT: Leaflets, yeah.

DENNIS: --- leaflets. And people, it was such a curiosity, and they would land in the closest landable field that they could find. And all the town turned out to look at the

airplane. And some of them ... a few bucks would go up for a ride. Interesting too, was two elderly women that went up, and loved it. One was from Dayville.

MATT: And became a pilot?

DENNIS: No, no just loved to fly.

MATT: (Laughter)

BARBARA: It wasn't just children and men, it was two elderly women ---

DENNIS: Three elderly women. Well, let's see, then it was Barber who tried to start the first school in John Day, with a partner. But it was, while he was there in John Day, and I showed you pictures from this Lyons ... photo of the two men that were flying with him. And Barber claimed that the OX-5 was a fantastic engine for it's time. And it was all the crap that they hung on the engine that was the problem. Also carburetor icing which they didn't understand. By the time they tore apart the engine it all melted. (Laughter) so this flight is well documented, both in my book here, and in his book. And I took it right out of their story to the newspaper. And he was ---

MATT: And this was ---

DENNIS: --- he was over, trying to get over Dooley Mountain, and they apparently started late in the day, or dark, and something that he could jerry-rig off, on the outside of the airplane to keep it going. But it had quit. I don't think he had enough engine to get over the mountain, as warm as it was. This was in August, I think, when it happened. I think it was 1931. He was hauling two fellows and himself.

MATT: From where to where?

DENNIS: From John Day to Baker. And they were going to some kind of a Elks function over there. Well it grew dark and the engine failed on them. So he set, one of them had a few hours of instruction in an airplane. You fly this, try to keep it straight and level, and I'll get out on the wing and see if I can't get this thing going again. And he messed around with the carburetor or whatever that was some leakage or something.

BARBARA: Some leakage of some kind.

DENNIS: That was fouling everything up they did. The farmer down below this, I think, was in the Hereford Valley, which is the south side of Dooley Mountain, heard them, and went out and turned on his lights with the automobile. And they landed safely. But talk about a hairy flight, you've just got to read that. That is one thing I would like to see is his story and also like to have you find out where that old airfield was in the southeast portion of Bend. Probably a subdivision now. But there was a landing field in Bend. And that is where he would come from is Bend. One time he even ran out of gas, I think, and landed on a street in a residential section. But he had some hairy crashes in these planes too, that he was flying. He went on to chasing wild mustangs around southern Oregon, northern Nevada, down in that country.

BARBARA: Tell him a few of these things ... the types of things that were early that came into Grant County. What was ---

DENNIS: Well one of them came in from Pendleton and barely cleared the ridge south of Long Creek. And when you read the service ceiling on this particular airplane you wonder how he got up to 5,500 feet to clear it. (Laughter)

MATT: What was it?

DENNIS: Oh, I've got it here somewhere. Oh, let's see, it was in 1919, they flew a Cessna --- or a Curtis ---

MATT: Jennings?

DENNIS: J-3, J and 4-D Jenny. And let's see, they were going to sell rides for \$15 for fifteen minutes. They had a terrible time, cross country flight from Pendleton because the smoke --- well the unknown country, and flying in an airplane, wasn't service ceiling of fifty-five, it was sixty-five. But the ridge is about 5,000 feet, so he didn't have much room.

MATT: Fifteen dollars for fifteen minutes would have been pretty steep in those days, wouldn't it?

DENNIS: Yeah.

BARBARA: It would be a lot. When you look at some of the earlier ones, and some of the things that were offered it ---

DENNIS: Of course this was 1919, and when Barber was doing it in 1931, you had depression times.

MATT: Oh yeah.

DENNIS: So --- Grandma Trospen, she is one of the old ladies that --- at 90 years old, would get up in these old crates.

MATT: This was in 1922.

DENNIS: Yeah. And Emeline Hazeltine was the other one. And I've got a picture of her standing beside an old bi-plane. But I could never pin down the year for the plane, or exactly where she did --- probably from there in Canyon City.

MATT: Her name sounds familiar to me. I wonder if I have seen that picture before.

DENNIS: Old pioneer photographer.

MATT: Uh huh.

DENNIS: Lots of their photographs --- he and his brother were old time pioneer photographers. And I think the Oregon Historical Society has got most of the collection. Let's see, in 1924 there was a Spokane pilot that offered rides, \$5 straight flight, \$7 for stunt flying. But I think the very earliest was in 1915, it wasn't fixed wing, it was a balloon. And they would get up to 2,000 feet according to the story, night performance at the fairgrounds. Parachute drop, and pyrotechnic displays. That was the first that I picked up on in 1915.

MATT: And that was by whom?

DENNIS: I haven't got that.

MATT: Okay.

BARBARA: An aviation company.

DENNIS: Yeah.

BARBARA: A dare-devil dive from 2,000 feet. (Laughter)

DENNIS: One of the most ridiculous things I picked up on was from 1917, it was reported in the newspaper, it was seen by many, that it had to be taken as fact. There were all kinds of rumors current, and some went so far as to think that the German army was coming, and that the air ship was the first scout of the invaders. There is said to be four local machines near Pendleton, and it is likely that this was merely one of those aerial planes out for a little exercise. (Laughter)

MATT: I did an oral history of Charlie Hayward for the Pierson Air Museum. And Charlie was one of the oldest veterans and marched in the parade, he was 104. And he was a World War I balloon observer. And he talked about going up in these balloons to look at the German lines, and artillery positions. And if they saw German planes coming at the balloon, which of course was filled with hydrogen, and would blow up, they would parachute to the ground from 3,000 feet, which in itself must have been hair raising. But of course if you didn't then your bursting balloon would fall on top of you.

DENNIS: I picked up nothing from 1932 to 1944. But it was in the '40's that they started the first flying club, and ---

MATT: Now was aviation banned during the war here as it was on the coast?

DENNIS: I don't think so.

MATT: Private aviation over there was prohibited.

DENNIS: You know, it may have been. By the way, I collected a postage, a two cent postage stamp, this was authentic air mail.

MATT: Saves time.

DENNIS: And there was a billboard, I've got a photo of that in here somewhere. In downtown Canyon City, showing one of these airmail, one of the very early planes doing airmail. It looked --- they must have made a toy. I can remember a toy airplane looking exactly like the airplane in that billboard.

MATT: Did you find any evidence of World War II training bases around here? I had heard that there was, that the Burns Airport was a P-38 training base. Then they say no, so I don't know which way it was. I know Redmond was of course.

BARBARA: Redmond.

MATT: Pendleton.

DENNIS: Madras.

MATT: Madras, yeah. But was there anything over here that you knew about?

DENNIS: Only these occasional military flights, like the one I mentioned. And I think that was an AT-6, although there is all kinds of witnesses claim it was something else, you know, Wildcat or a Hellcat.

BARBARA: But they weren't really authorized flights for training.

MATT: So there was no CPT program over here that you are familiar with? Okay.

DENNIS: Some of them didn't give rides, some of them performed stunt flying. And this one here in 1928, a bush flying service out of Portland, stayed at one of the local hotels downtown John Day. And he had four pilots, and they came with three planes.

MATT: Does it give their names?

DENNIS: Just W. C. Bush.

MATT: Okay. Not the names of the pilots or the airplanes?

DENNIS: He undoubtedly was one of them. But they were here two days --- oh they did take up a number of passengers, but they also did stunt flying. That seemed to be, stunt flying seemed to be part of it.

MATT: Yeah.

DENNIS: If there wasn't any of that, people probably thought they were cheated.

MATT: Could be.

DENNIS: You know in today ---

MATT: What was the date on that?

DENNIS: 1928. Today, and BME is Blue Mountain Eagle.

MATT: Oh, okay.

DENNIS: A local newspaper.

MATT: Alright.

DENNIS: But it is very structured. And boy you better have the liability insurance to put those shows on.

BARBARA: But it was common place then.

MATT: Uh huh,

DENNIS: Here is that billboard I mentioned.

MATT: Oh yes.

DENNIS: This was a single-wing, bi-wing.

MATT: Yeah, there were a number of those designed around the Ryan, the Ryan mail plane. Can't think of the designation. But it was the one that Claude Ryan came up here to sell. And he sold two Pacific Air Transport, which ran the first airmail up and down the coast from Sand Point in Seattle, up to, or down to Los Angeles, or maybe San Diego, I'm not sure which. Some very interesting stories about that.

DENNIS: Well ---

BARBARA: ...charts back in 1940, 1939.

DENNIS: Yeah, July of 1940. And so it could have been suspended by 1942. But really the country just sucked up every able bodied man, and so on, for some kind of service or war industry.

MATT: And a certain number of the women too.

DENNIS: Oh a lot of the women. I've got the names of a lot of the individuals involved in that early flying service. I don't know if you have heard of Boyer, Phil Boyer, since has passed away.

MATT: Uh huh.

DENNIS: He was the first FBO at John Day, and then he moved over I think it was to Baker.

MATT: Oh, when you said since passed away, I would say not.

BARBARA: Just in the last year of two I think.

MATT: Not the AOPA chief. His father ---

DENNIS: No, it's a different family.

MATT: Oh, different family.

DENNIS: I think it was a different family.

BARBARA: John Boyer --- no it was Phil Boyer.

DENNIS: Phil Boyer. There is a kind of a neat thing, friends of ours got a antique wagon business.

BARBARA: Horse-drawn vehicles.

DENNIS: Horse-drawn vehicles. And this big, big --- it was a community hall there in Canyon City, and they had celebrations there. In 1941 they painted this and what is fantastic is that yellow paint that they painted on the ceiling, or on the roof, this corrugated metal is still visible. That paint has lasted all these years.

MATT: Let's back up a little bit, and describe for the microphone what this is. So on the hall roof they painted a diagram which shows a circle and an arrow pointed in the direction of three. Is that the ---

DENNIS: Three miles to the ---

MATT: To the Canyon City airport.

DENNIS: Uh huh.

MATT: And it also gives the latitude and longitude, painted on the roof. And also the name Canyon City. And this was what hall? The meeting hall, city meeting ---

DENNIS: Well it was at the time. They had the sixty-two day celebration in that for years and years.

MATT: And that was painted in when?

DENNIS: 1941.

MATT: 1941. And it still exists today, you can still see it, still visible.

DENNIS: I don't think it has ever been touched up. Probably full of lead. (Laughter)

Okay, this is about the plane that came in and it got different statements from different people about, this was in 1945. They got stuck in the mud.

MATT: Uh huh.

DENNIS: Everybody in town had to go up and look at. And there is all kinds of stories about it. They posted a guard up there, and he went to sleep on the wings, and they came up and he was still sleeping away on the wings.

MATT: And that was someone who landed to show off, and he got stuck in the mud and couldn't take off.

DENNIS: That's one story.

MATT: Oh.

DENNIS: I know he was stuck there for quite awhile. Seemed to me like a month. You know they were really big planes, compared to the little J-3's.

MATT: Yeah. Now this is, all of these you have gleaned from the newspapers.

DENNIS: And from wherever else.

MATT: Oh, okay.

BARBARA: Some of them are interviews with people. But mostly they are newspapers.

DENNIS: Yeah. The John Day Valley Ranger was a newspaper there at the time, but it was absorbed by the Blue Mountain Eagle in the '40's. I don't know if you remember Elmo Smith, but ---

MATT: No.

DENNIS: But he became governor of Oregon. I think this is a photo of ---

MATT: No, I'm a newcomer.

DENNIS: Oh.

MATT: I didn't come until 1969.

DENNIS: That's when we came back to Grant County.

MATT: Was that a Taylorcraft?

DENNIS: Yep. Apparently they would buy these things in crates, and have to assemble.

BARBARA: Some actually by a certified mechanic. (Laughter)

MATT: Now Taylor is the one who also designed the J-1. And then that evolved and he was a partner with Piper and then ---

DENNIS: With Piper. Piper was a marketer, and Taylor was a designer as I understand it.

MATT: Yeah, yeah, he was the engineer.

DENNIS: And they parted company.

MATT: And Piper took the J-3, and then Taylor went back and designed the Taylorcraft.

DENNIS: In fact there was a Taylorcraft on the ramp not long ago, we looked at. Just the last few days.

BARBARA: Uh huh.

MATT: Wonderful airplane.

DENNIS: Okay, then we get into the '40's.

BARBARA: Late 40's, mid to late.

DENNIS: The Jim Lyons story, and Cookie Lyons. And they were the ones that --- have you been to John Day?

MATT: Yes.

DENNIS: The Thriftway Market, the Chester's Market ---

MATT: I don't remember much about where things were located.

DENNIS: Go down below the main --- go around across the creek.

MATT: By Kam Wah Chung?

DENNIS: Passed it.

BARBARA: To the west.

MATT: Alright, alright.

DENNIS: Big parking lot. Out back was the landing strip, now a site for a mobile home trailer park.

MATT: Okay.

DENNIS: They went in and bulldozed the landing strip from ... pile rubble, rock you know, and they graveled it over. And I keep looking at that from up above, and I can't imagine ever landing there. It was fairly short, and you had the creek. You had to clear the creek when you set down. The other end was a row of willows. And I know that there was one plane at least that piled into the willows, and another student pilot that landed well short, inverted, and everybody --- well the plane was upside down in Canyon Creek, and everybody in town had to come down and look at it. (Laughter) He didn't ever fly after that. It was Sid Cardwell. I think I've got the story ---

MATT: He survived it though?

DENNIS: Yeah. I think they tore down the last of the T-hangers not very long ago. And there is this little street in there still called Lyons Street, or Lyons Avenue or something like that. But they ran it until shortly after this cross country, that she was disqualified. And it just ---

BARBARA: Cookie Lyons.

DENNIS: Cookie Lyons from San Diego to North Carolina. And I've got all that in here. And I just get the sense that it just cut the heart out of them. That he was disappointed because he had screwed up the flight for her winning that national championship flight. She had done several regional air races, and done very well. I think placed second in one. But I know there was two regional prior to that. And they worked

all summer trying to determine what would be the best airplane to do this. Finally settled, I think, the Cessna 140. And how she would fly it, she fire-walled it. I don't --- he followed along behind, but I don't think he ever saw her from the information I got.

MATT: And he was flying in what?

BARBARA: ...

MATT: So he was flying in a separate airplane behind her?

BARBARA: Yes.

DENNIS: With another man.

MATT: But because he was related to her, she was disqualified from the race.

BARBARA: At the end.

MATT: At the end.

DENNIS: Yeah, after she ---

MATT: Even though it violated no rules. And this was the 99's race?

BARBARA: Yes.

DENNIS: Yeah.

MATT: And what year was that?

DENNIS: In the '40's. This is about her story --- I've got it all clipped here, about the race. Some of the women got lost.

BARBARA: Oh, it was a Cessna 120.

DENNIS: Was it a 120?

BARBARA: Uh huh, it's what it says.

DENNIS: Okay a 120 in number. Thirty-two miles an hour above cruising. You know the radios and the other instruments were non-existent, or very crude. Compass was it. And I think he would land maybe a half an hour after she had landed. You know, so they weren't even close. He couldn't have given her any in-air guidance or anything, you know. But shortly after that, within a year or two, it probably was also because the government was winding down the paying for people to learn how to fly.

MATT: This is the GI Bill?

DENNIS: GI Bill. And he had recruited practically everybody he possibly could to fly. And some of the stories, some of these guys would get up there and chase coyotes around. There was one, that they had a mishap out in Logan Valley, he had to walk 18 miles to get to town. Another one, (Norris) "Doc" Mosier I think was flying --- or no, it was an attorney, Orville Yokum got up there, was flying around --- "What in the hell am I doing?" His first solo! (Laughter) Yeah, I've had that feeling too. But anyway, it's a marvelous story about her ---

MATT: And that was the ...

DENNIS: ... Yeah. And so it was probably a combination of the business winding down, just not getting any new students, as well as her losing that --- being disqualified in, his part in it. They went to, they still had the flying business, but they went off, bought a boat and went to fishing in Alaska. And from there ---

MATT: Which Lyons was this?

DENNIS: Jim Lyons.

MATT: Jim Lyons. Okay.

DENNIS: And Cookie.

MATT: And Cookie was his wife.

DENNIS: And her part, yeah --- her name was Viola, but I'll bet you hardly anybody in town knew her as Viola. It was mentioned once in the Oregonian, and they used her real name. But she was Cookie. And she was, as I remember her, and she gave me my first airplane ride, the only stunt she ever did, she stalled the airplane, it dropped. You feel your stomach being left up there. But she didn't do any loops or ---

MATT: Was this in a 120 again, or ---

DENNIS: We were tandem, and oh, I can't remember exactly. Two passenger tandem, high wings. And I'm sure it would have been --- I remember it as being up on the hill, rather than down below.

MATT: Hmm.

DENNIS: By that time I was in high school.

MATT: When was the airport moved from the plains up to the plateau? This is in John Day.

DENNIS: Okay. The Lyons' built their strip down on the tailing pile in the '40's. And they were pretty much wrapping it up in the early '50's, and went to their yacht, or their boat, fishing boat. And from there they moved on from Alaska down to San Diego. That's where they stayed, and both passed away since. But the earliest was these barnstormers that would land up on the hill. It was just a natural spot. When we land up there, we can't imagine flying in the valley, and landing down below. You got so much air under you as you do your approach.

BARBARA: But the strip, actually it originated up on the plateau, it went down --- or it originated up on the ridge as it went downtown, and then it went back. And he wants to know when it went back.

DENNIS: Well it never ceased to exist up on the hill, it just was a private strip down below, and the Lyons were the big guns of the aviation at that time, and it seemed like all the flying was done down there. But the Forest Service was still operating up on the hill as well. So for a time you had both going. And then about 1955, the Chamber started talking about doing a permanent asphalt strip up on the hill where it is now.

MATT: In one fifty-five?

DENNIS: In '55. But it wasn't built for another five or six years.

MATT: Oh.

DENNIS: I think it was about 1960 or '61 that the north-south strip was built. And then twenty years later maybe the east-west was added. And they've done improvements since then. And now another big improvement, lengthening and so on. So you could say that actually it was always up on the hill. But you had this short, fairly short period of time in the middle '40's to the early '50's in which it was down below.

BARBARA: It sounds like the majority of activity was down below for those years.

DENNIS: Yeah. But this down below was also added on, they put a huge big culvert in Canyon Creek, and extended it out and leveled out some more tailing piles. These are all the big gold dredges. Are you familiar with the gold dredges like at Sumpter?

MATT: Yeah.

DENNIS: Okay.

MATT: The gold dredge.

DENNIS: The big gold dredge, operated between, in 1916, '17, between John Day and Canyon. It went all the way up to Canyon City.

BARBARA: It ... created just piles of rock, and that's what they milled it from.

DENNIS: You know they were wind rows of this tailing.

MATT: I remember flying over the one at Sumpter, and just seeing the incredible patterns of back and forth, back and forth.

DENNIS: Still there.

MATT: Yeah, yeah.

DENNIS: They haven't done much with the ---

MATT: No. And essentially what they did was just turn the valley over, didn't they?

They put the top soil ---

BARBARA: They did.

MATT: --- on the bottom, and the rock on the top.

BARBARA: Yeah.

MATT: Later on was a little bit of trying to strip off the top soil and pile it up and save it rather than let it get washed down stream.

MATT: Did they ever restore it, or just leave it there?

DENNIS: Yeah, a lot of it has been leveled and is commercial. Or in some cases earth has been placed on top of it.

MATT: So now we're up to about the '60's?

DENNIS: Yeah. I think in my talk about women in aviation there was, oh, kind of a lull after Cookie Lyons. There were a few pilots flying, but it seemed to start, or gain momentum in the '70's. And I tried to document all the women pilots there in John Day, and there was --- up until about ten years ago there was an instructor there, a mechanic. Taught quite a number of people, including Barbara here. How many hours have you got?

BARBARA: I don't know.

DENNIS: I know it is over a thousand.

BARBARA: No, no, it is just under.

DENNIS: What can I say.

MATT: Do you have any knowledge of Lee and Eva Harris operating the first air ambulance out of John Day?

BARBARA: Yes.

MATT: Okay, Barbara you're on.

BARBARA: When Lee and Eva moved to John Day, it was, it had to be around '74, '75 I think if I'm remembering correctly.

MATT: From Eugene.

BARBARA: Yes, from Eugene. And Lee and Eva were both pilots and they bought a twin engine aircraft, it was a Cessna ---

DENNIS: Pusher.

BARBARA: Pusher ---

DENNIS: Pull pusher.

BARBARA: Yeah.

DENNIS: Mix-master.

BARBARA: Mix-master.

MATT: 337.

BARBARA: Yes, a 337. Anyway, they would, because there was no air ambulance available to transport patients out of John Day.

MATT: And just as a note, Lee was an M.D. and Eva was a nurse.

BARBARA: No, Lee was an M.D., Eva was, she always assisted him. She was not a nurse. But she was a pilot, and they would pilot together often times, and take people out. But we had ground ambulance, but we did not have air ambulance, so they would often times take people that were in need of immediate transport in the aircraft to other areas. And generally it was Bend. But a lot of it went to Portland at that time. We also had a mortician at that time, Wally Williams, who would fly people also occasionally. But as I recall the majority of the air traffic was for Lee and Eva. And Eva was able to of course pilot the airplane, and Lee could attend to the passenger or the patient. So, yeah, that was pre-dated Air Life of Oregon

DENNIS: I think it was Cookie that, in the '40's, Byron Haberly, as a little kid got shot in the eye with an arrow. And they flew him to Baker. And he is still with us.

BARBARA: Yeah, I think there have been people all along that have done medical transports. But I would say Eva and Lee, to my knowledge, was the first one that actually did more than just an occasional transport.

MATT: Do you have any knowledge of the Forest Service aviation for fire suppression, or scouting, or --- and when that began, and how it developed?

DENNIS: You probably know more about that than I do.

BARBARA: You know I don't really know ---

DENNIS: It's practically helicopter now.

MATT: Yeah.

BARBARA: Well they do a lot of recon flights. In fact Ruel Teague from here in Baker.

DENNIS: Burns.

BARBARA: I mean Burns, excuse me, used to do a lot of the reconnaissance flights after the thunder storms, and spot fires, and take spotters up. But for a number of years now they have had single engine tractors ---

DENNIS: You have to have a 182 or better I think, to get a contract. And Bill Kraye was in the 90's, 80's --- who would fly for the Forest Service.

BARBARA: He also, he was a resident in John Day. But now as far as fire suppression we have, the helicopters they have buckets, and they also have repel teams that they drop. And we have the single, single engine air tractors, and they have the big belly dumps. And they will dump retardants.

DENNIS: Big engines too.

BARBARA: Big engines too, yeah. And that's been really active out of the airport. I can't remember what year they started building the heli-base, but it's probably been fifteen years at least.

DENNIS: Yeah.

MATT: And this is out of where?

BARBARA: Out of the John Day airport.

DENNIS: Well they got a grant apparently for new buildings in which would be a combination Grant County-Forest Service. Probably would never have happened were it not for the Forest Service.

MATT: So anything else come to mind in terms of aviation?

DENNIS: Oh, a lot of things. But ---

BARBARA: I can remember my first, I think it was my first flight in a small airplane. And I look back at the history that Dennis has documented here, and it talks about, you know, Fair Time, and Sixty-Two Days, which is the celebration of the 1862 gold rush around Canyon City. And one of the first flights that I had, if not the very first, was in an antique aircraft at the John Day State Airport, and it was during Sixty-Two Days. And I went ---

DENNIS: And I've got a picture of that.

BARBARA: Yeah, I went with a man, and Lorene Allen who was also a local female pilot and aircraft owner. She and I went with this gentleman, the pilot.

DENNIS: Didn't Todd go with you, or was that picture just where you were looking around?

BARBARA: No. A later airplane flight was with Todd and me and Bill Krayner. Todd is my son, he was a little kid then.

DENNIS: I should bring up the annual fly-in, so called fly-in, mostly it has evolved into just a community affair now. We don't draw hardly any from outside. They have a breakfast. But the big thing is giving rides to children, no charge. I don't know any air

show anywhere that does that. I think we are unique that way. Mostly you will see them charge by the pound.

BARBARA: Well we used to give rides to adults and children. But because of the limited resources we've pretty much targeted just children now. They can take along a parent if they are young enough. But there is a group of us that are volunteer, that are pilots that volunteer our aircraft. And a number of hours during the day, on a Saturday, when we have this fly-in on Sunday we call it. And we take children flying over Grant County.

DENNIS: Lost my train of thought. (Laughter)

MATT: I saw in your notes somewhere that there was a flight to Cuba.

DENNIS: Done by Cookie Lyons. They would go out of the country, it wasn't unusual for them to do that. Or they might take, ... a Dr. Van der Vlugt and his wife ---

BARBARA: Van der Vlugt.

DENNIS: Van der Vlugt, whatever. Anyway, he had quite a nice airplane, new one I think. I've got the make of it here somewhere. They flew that plane with the doctor and his wife. The doctors, she was a doctor as well --- out of the country, Florida, Cuba. Wasn't anything for them --- she had over 3,000 hours.

MATT: She was Martha and he was ---

DENNIS: Jerry, Dr. Jerry they called him.

MATT: Dr. Jerry and Dr. Martha.

BARBARA: Van der Vlugt, uh huh.

DENNIS: Yeah, and it was this couple which Dr. Merrill had his ---

MATT: Now there was a, also the Oregon air tours were flown. And one, at least one year that I know of they went to Cuba as well.

BARBARA: Oh.

MATT: And it was a long distance flight. And I read something about there was an agricultural flight to Cuba where a bunch of Oregonians flew to Cuba to see --- I don't know, that's as far as I know about it. I'd like to know more. So you weren't familiar with that?

DENNIS: That would have had to be an earlier phase before Castro.

MATT: Yeah, yeah. It was definitely, it was somewhere in the '30's or '40's.

DENNIS: Oh.

MATT: Or very, let's see very early '50's. When did Castro take over, was the late '50's wasn't it?

DENNIS: Been quite a long time ago.

MATT: Yeah.

DENNIS: He was young.

MATT: Uh huh. And he is what, 78 now.

DENNIS: The other thing, the airport would buy the gas for these children's flights, fun day. And the pilots and aircraft owners would furnish everything else, you know, the expense of six hours of flying, or whatever.

MATT: Are there earth shows now?

DENNIS: Baker has a nice one.

BARBARA: Baker has an exceptionally nice fly-in every year. It's the latter part of July.

DENNIS: It's fairly new, the last three years.

BARBARA: Well it's been a little more than that, but it's relatively new.

DENNIS: Really well attended. I hope they are able to maintain it.

BARBARA: Ontario has an air show. And I believe LaGrande ---

DENNIS: Does Madras?

BARBARA: Yes, Madras does, theirs is late, late August.

DENNIS: And Prineville or Bend may ---

BARBARA: Bend has kind of a community day. I don't know ---

MATT: Do you know Barbara Sidway?

BARBARA: Where is she ---

MATT: She has the Geysers Grand Hotel in Baker.

BARBARA: Oh no, I don't know her.

MATT: Oh, okay. She is quite a bit older.

DENNIS: We've been to the hotel, and gone up and site see. Heard about the ghost stories and eaten lunch there.

MATT: Yeah, you would enjoy meeting here. She is quite a promoter, and an aviation fan.

BARBARA: Oh.

MATT: And this year she is the president of the Oregon Sesqui-Centennial project, among other things. I mean she really gets around, she's an amazing person. So let's

see, what is the status of aviation in Central Oregon today, as you see it? Is it increasing, or decreasing, is it getting more interesting, or commercial more or less? Or, what are the trends?

DENNIS: She is on the board, the airport commission. I'm going to let her ---

BARBARA: I really can't speak for, too much for other airports, other than what I have observed. It seems like Bend-Redmond is really growing. And of course having manufacture of aircraft there, I think, has been a real boost. What I see is kind of stagnated. The price of fuel is a real factor.

DENNIS: Five bucks a gallon.

MATT: I was going to say, what is it today in John Day?

BARBARA: Well I didn't fill up today, but a few days ago it was \$5.23 a gallon, and that was relatively cheap. In Pendleton it was \$5.99 a gallon, and that was a couple weeks ago. So it is going to be interesting to see how it plays out with the fuel prices. But an area like John Day is just really marginal to have an instructor and a mechanic, or you know an authorized inspector, or inspector authorized. So that in itself makes it more difficult to raise pilots and keep them interested in aviation. We have a young man right now that is just in the process of getting his pilot's license. And he has to go to Baker City to fly. So, you know, it's three plus hours travel, that's both ways, and then flying so that complicates it. I don't really see that changing in the real immediate future in John Day. I think Baker City has struggled. They do have this, they do have flight instruction there, which is helpful. But it's just, it's very expensive.

MATT: Do you see the likelihood of an incentive to flying as ever occurring in such as it did for us with the GI bill.

BARBARA: I don't really. But then I'm not into some of the politics. I --- you know there --- it is just going to be interesting because typically people flew and then they went on to become airline pilots. And they say, you know, there is going to be a shortage of airline pilots, even though there are schools that do aviation training. But it is also my understanding that a lot of those are very expensive. So I'm not sure what is going to happen. It's hard training pilots. I don't know that there is going to be an incentive. How about the regulatory environment, also being suppression thing, especially the renewed efforts for user fees.

BARBARA: Yeah, I think that is going to hurt general aviation. And you know it's general aviation, that's where everybody starts. And I think that's, if the powers that be that want user fees are successful it's going to really harm raising our pilots or general aviation in general. You know there are a lot of businesses that at getting into the light jets, and the big aircraft, and it's reasonably economical for them to do that if the business is large enough. But if you start putting user fees on top of all of the other expenses, and I see that probably some of them will go back to other modes of transportation.

MATT: Anything to add.

DENNIS: I just thought of a couple comments to make on this fly in before we leave that. That we have had it, John Day, Barbara has probably, as a pilot has probably got more hours than anyone I can think of over the years. And there are several photographs

of her in here with these kids. One of which was taken from the back seat, where she turned the yoke over to this girl, young girl, to fly, give her the sensation of flying the airplane for a little while. The other thing is that, I don't know if you know D. R. Johnson, a big mill owner, Riddle, and Prairie City, and Joseph. And for a number of years he would have his helicopter here giving free rides as well.

BARBARA: His pilot and his helicopter.

DENNIS: And also the Forest Service come, always seems to come around and do this repelling.

BARBARA: They don't do flights, rides. But they do a repelling demonstration, and the retardant drop demonstration, and that's just another part of our ---

DENNIS: Yeah, we've tried different things. We brought a team in to parachute ... free fall a few years back. And we've had static displays of people around town doing models, you know.

MATT: Well, okay, let's ---

DENNIS: You want to move on to the medical?

MATT: Yes, let's close out on aviation for now. And I will just stop this disk. This is an interview with Dennis and Barbara Smith, local historians from Canyon City, on Sunday, June 29th, 2008. Part of the Harney County Oral History Project, and recorded at the Harney County Library. Interviewer was Matt Simek. And this is disk one of one. And we will stop at this point.

(End of DVD)

bl

