

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

ALBERT MACEY LOVELL

INTERVIEW 1508

This is an interview made for the Memories of New Bern Committee. It is interview number 1508 and is an interview with Albert Macey Lovell taken in the New Bern Airport in New Bern on February 3, 1993. The interview was conducted by Bill Edwards, interviewer number 1500.

MR. LOVELL: My name is Albert M. Lovell. Everybody calls me "Dusty." I've been here at the airport from the day I got out of service practically, and that was March 15, 1952. I was born in Memphis, Tennessee. I went to school in Texarkana, Arkansas. I came here in the military in 1948 and married a local girl. I had been discharged February, 1952 prior to my coming to work at the airport. In 1952, on March 15th, I was employed by National Airlines. They had fourteen flights a day and they were Lockheed Lodestars. Now the way I remember fourteen flights, cause they were fourteen passenger airplanes. Piedmont was operating DC-3's in here at this time. Piedmont was concentrating mainly on the mail route which was from Wilmington to New Bern all the way to Cincinnati and return. They had two flights going out a day and two flights coming in a day. National operated their Lodestars between Jacksonville, Florida, south of us, which was from Jacksonville to Savannah to Charleston to Wilmington to here. From here they went either to Norfolk or to Richmond and terminated in Washington, D.C., connecting at Washington, D.C. to Philadelphia and New York.

BE: What was your actual job at that time?

MR. LOVELL: Back then an agent was an operations agent. An operation agent, we made our own reservations instead of going through

a centralized office. We did our own weight and balance. We did our own ticket sales. We swept the floors and we kept the restrooms clean, as well as working on the ramp, refueling, or baggage handling, or whatever was necessary. We did it all. I mean, an operation agent was from a janitor right on to a supervisor.

BE: You were an agent for National or Piedmont or what?

MR. LOVELL: I was National Airlines. I stayed with them right on up until the time they left. There was a break in my time. I'd actually left National. I had gone with Hertz and I was in other forms of business at that time. But Buck Williams, in order for him to transfer, I had to come back to work, cause the station was gonna be closed and what was gonna be available when the station closed. But they maintained the station for another year before they closed.

BE: Tell me about some of the people that you remember working with. Fred Turner for instance and some of those people.

MR. LOVELL: Fred Turner was the man that hired me. It might be of some interest to some of the local people that remember Billy Bevill. Billy had worked out here. I took Billy's place and Billy went back to playing baseball. Of course he was in the minor leagues, but his heart was in baseball. Then later Billy did come back to New Bern and worked for the post office for a number of years and retired and he's now living down in Georgia. But that was the man that I took the place of. Of course most of the boys that worked here were either by virtue of marriage or born here. I know Troy Lee Laughinghouse from Vanceboro, his brother-in-law is C. J. Williams, or everybody

called him "Buck" Williams, and everybody new "Pop" Williams in town, and at that time had worked in employment security. Bob Shave was married to Buck Williams sister. Buck Williams was married to Troy Lee's sister. Charlie Dupree which was from Vanceboro, his tie-in with the Vanceboro crowd. Well, Beau Bremer, he later came in and worked with us, and Grover Gaskins. Fred was the one that hired me, and then he was replaced by a man from out of Jacksonville, Florida, Leonard Cottrell. And there was Fred Martis. I went through several managers, needless to say, before National Airlines pulled out.

BE: Did you have anything to do with the private air facility, maybe the forest service, or anything like that?

MR. LOVELL: No, I didn't. But you know at one time everybody here at the airport were so close. They worked practically in each others backyard and of course we knew everybody that was here at the airport. I mean, we were a very close knit group of people that worked, whether they were with the FAA or whether they were with the forestry or with a general aviation facility or just run of the mill pilots that had airplanes out here. A lot of those people, like Bennie Baxter and old Sam Clark. Rhonda Story was in the crop dusting business.

Our first airport manager was Jack Armstrong. He's still living over in Cary, North Carolina now. He was our first fixed base operator as far as I know.

BE: Some of the pilots that came in here, do you remember any of those pretty clearly?

MR. LOVELL: Most of the pilots that came in here while I was

still working for National Airlines, needless to say, are all retired and gone. Some of them passed away, needless to say, cause I was a young'un and those were all mature men at that time. But the pilots flying during that period of time, they were like the agents. They were all just one happy bunch. They weren't primadonnas or anything and they would help us. It was a different type of airline industry than what we see today, cause now there's no socializing with the pilot, flight attendants among the agents or ground crew or anything like that. They're in cloud nine I believe and live in another world from what we do.

BE: That's the case today, you're saying?

MR. LOVELL: No, I'm saying that most of the cases, there's very few of them that relax and feel comfortable around somebody that they consider as inferior to them. I've seen some people that were a lot more smarter than some of them pilots. But they're a different breed of pilots now.

BE: You gave a date when you came here, but I'm not certain whether that was before or after the war was over. Were there any Marine operations still here when you came?

MR. LOVELL: Well, when I came here, the Korean War was still going on. I don't remember when it ended, but I'm gonna say about a year it ended. I don't even remember. Cause when you start asking me dates, I can remember when I started out here and I know that I'm still here, but you can ask me dates about when did National pull out, I'd be guessing. I don't know. Unless it's something that's major

that would reflect on why I would remember it, I don't know. But, yes, I was here during part of the Korean War. I was here all during the Viet Nam War. We saw beaucoup servicemen going through because Piedmont and the rest of the airline industry initiated a stand-by fare, which that stand-by fare was just like bus fare. If there was space on the airplane they put them on. It was like half of the first class fare, so them boys took advantage of that. And it was good stimulus for the airlines and it was a good break for the servicemen.

BE: Do you remember an airplane that was dismantled and moved away from here by rail? I took part in the movement but I don't remember what the airplane was or why it was moved. Do you remember that?

MR. LOVELL: Well, I remember a C-46 that set over there on the other side, which is now the general aviation facility side of the airport. It sat there a long, long time. They had a crew that came in here and put engines on that and rewired it and what have you. It was just a shell. They flew that thing out of here to Florida. They had a buyer for it in South America. I remember that deal, but I don't remember one that was dismantled and then taken somewhere else. But I do remember that C-46 that they had over there.

BE: That may have been a C-46 that I'm thinking about. But they took the wings off naturally, because of the side clearance on the railroad, and we loaded it right over here on the railroad just beyond the airport. I'm not sure whether this road that comes into the airport was here then.

MR. LOVELL: It did not exist.

BE: Was not here then.

MR. LOVELL: It was either Clermont Boulevard or the Old Airport Road.

BE: So you don't remember that?

MR. LOVELL: I don't remember one they had dismantled. They may have had two of those C-46's here. It seemed like I remember vaguely somebody talking about they moved one and they left one here. It wasn't until I'd been here about six, seven years I believe, that they finally decided to rebuild this airplane that they had setting over there.

They had to rewire it and put engines in it. Whoever worked on it had to fly with the aircraft, that's how touchy it was, to get it down to Florida where they could completely rig it out from there. It seemed like I heard talk there was two of those C-46's. I don't know whether they were sold as scrap or what, but it seems to me like the original buyer didn't do anything and then somebody else bought it.

BE: Do you remember any emergency situations that arose here during your stay at this airport?

MR. LOVELL: Several of them. I was here when Piedmont lost one early one Sunday morning on the approach into Runway 4. It was a routine flight coming out of Wilmington coming here and then going on into Norfolk. He had already called in. There was just patches of fog, but the sun was shining and they didn't hear anymore. That was the one that plowed into the pine trees down about five miles off of the end of the runway. There were no passengers on it. There was just the captain and the co-pilot and the flight attendant, that's what

they call them now. We used to call them stewardesses, but it was just a flight attendant. Of course, needless to say, they were all killed in that crash.

BE: I remember that pretty clearly.

MR. LOVELL: And then of course we've had a lot of little things. I know one Sunday, had an airplane that after he landed, the pitch in the prop was stuck in reverse, and of course needless, to say, the parking lot out here on a Sunday afternoon, it was just full of people watching airplanes and what have you. We backed that airplane in reverse prop coming all the way down the taxiway. A lot of people didn't know that airplanes could back up like that, but I mean it did.

We backed it up and secured it to get it off the runway. They secured it until they had somebody with maintenance to get that thing out of the reverse pitch. Then we had two Marines that were buddies to a guy that had a small plane out here. This was also on a Sunday, parking lot full, at flight time. His buddies came out to fly his airplane cause he had gone home for the weekend. Each one thought the other one was a licensed pilot. They'd been in and knew a little bit about it, so when they got in, said, "Well, you take off." "No problem."

When they got up there, said, "Well, I'm gonna have to let you land because I can't land." (laughter) So they did a few bounces around out here. I mean nobody really got hurt or anything like that but it was very amusing and alarming to see this airplane trying to land and bounce four or five times and take off again. I think they had made up their mind if they didn't make it this next time that they

were gonna ditch it in the river. But they did come in. They landed on the short runway, and by the time it quit bouncing it hit the intersection up here, or got near the intersection, and the airplane went down the other way but it did stop.

BE: What kind of airplane was that?

MR. LOVELL: It was a single engine aircraft. The make of it, I can't remember. Something like an Apache. Not an Apache, but a Piper, single engine.

BE: Do you remember when we used to fly, the Civil Air Patrol used to fly the river patrol out here?

MR. LOVELL: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. And some of them boys would tell me some amusing stuff. There was one, he was active in the Civil Air, but he was also in the Marine Corps, he was a staff sergeant, and he had an old Howard, I believe he'd call that thing. It was an open cockpit airplane and they were on river patrol looking in. They had taken a pint bottle of orange juice with them. They finished the orange juice and they decided they'd drop this bottle out. There was a small boat out in the middle of the river and they dropped the bottle out, and of course the air hitting that empty bottle was making one heck of a noise like a bomb coming down. They said the guy in that fishing boat was pulling that dern motor like he was about to go crazy. (laughter) I think it was reported to the Civil Air Patrol about late that evening, you know, of what happened but nobody would admit they had done that. But they did, they were very, very active in here. You know, for lost boaters and that sort of thing, they were very

active. I don't know whether they're that active now or not but they used to be real active.

BE: I used to fly with the river patrol. I was with the Civil Defense Agency then and I flew on the river patrol two or three times.

Bobby Davis and I started to take off one day in that clip wing Cub, if you remember that one, and the tail wheel stuck and he couldn't steer the thing, so we headed out into the bushes. Finally, he-what did he do-he pushed his stick forward and lifted the tail. That way we were able to get back on the runway and then we came back in here and stopped.

MR. LOVELL: Well, you know, some of these old pilots, and the one that comes in the mind that flew quite a bit out here was Rhonda Story, which was a remarkable man anyway. He was well liked by most of the people, the farmers of Craven and Pamlico County. Rhonda would always take off and land. He'd just pull that tail wheel up and he would taxi with that tail wheel up until he got in behind his quonset hut over there where he kept his aircraft. Of course he worked out of that quonset hut for his chemicals. But he never set that tail wheel down. I mean, once he got started he'd lift that tail wheel and did all of his taxiing and everything. He never dropped that tail wheel. He'd land that thing on the front wheels and then keep them on the front wheels and come right on it. You don't see people that can fly like that anymore.

BE: Was Mike Holton flying then?

MR. LOVELL: Oh yes. They refer to him as "Blue Eyes" or "Captain

Iron Mike." Mike was a local boy. His father, I believe, owned a garage, if I'm not mistaken. He flew captain and he made chief pilot. I believe at one time he was a check pilot. He finally retired from Piedmont Airlines a long time ago, and I believe he settled right back in New Bern again. Then there was another boy after Mike, he's still flying, Charlie K. Carter. They hired Charlie to go to school in Atlanta. While they were waiting on the next class, they put him to work here on the ground. Well, Charlie started out really, basically, doing nothing but washing airplanes over at General Aviation for Jack Armstrong, gassing up airplanes and what have you. He took his pay, most of his pay-he was in high school-in flying time. So when they hired Charlie, the first officer and first base that they based him was in Wilmington and he stayed there for three or four years and then they transferred him. The last time I heard of Charlie he was flying what we refer to as the Stovepipe or he's flying captain on a jet for Piedmont. Of course now Piedmont sold out to US Air and I don't know where Charlie is. But I think his parents still live here in New Bern.

A lot of people would know his father at the hospital cause he worked at the desk at the hospital. I see Mr. Carter from time to time. I don't know where he's based at now.

BE: Do you remember Mr. Carter's name, his father?

MR. LOVELL: If you hadn't asked me that I probably could have told you. (laughter) He lives out there, it's not on Newton, but he lives there right off of Simmons Street in New Bern in a small house. He and his wife both retired. I think she was a nurse if I'm not

mistaken. They're still around. I'd like to see old Charlie. I don't know where he is now but he is a good friend of mine. You know, people have a tendency to forget. When National had decided to pull out of this market, they had decided to pull not only out of New Bern but Fayetteville, Wilmington, and Savannah, Georgia, and they were permitted all of these places but Savannah. They had to operate into Savannah at that time. They supported Piedmont Airlines on what they call their segment 8, which was the Atlanta to Washington route and Piedmont would have been the primary carrier to come in here. But Piedmont had filed, thinking that National was still gonna be operating in New Bern, had filed to go into Jacksonville with the thought in mind that they would be operating at the New River Air Facility. They never changed that after National had supported Piedmont on segment 8. Piedmont never changed their request in going into Jacksonville because they did not want to compete with National Airlines in New Bern cause there was not enough market here on the north/south route. By National supporting Piedmont, Piedmont still went into Jacksonville, and they could not go into Jacksonville cause they did not have an airport. New River was strictly a helicopter base and they didn't want that to conflict with their operation with a fixed wing aircraft. They didn't want that.

BE: They were military too, weren't they?

MR. LOVELL: Military. It was a military airport. Anyway, the politicians in the Jacksonville area decided they wanted to build an airport and they did in Catherine Lake swamp. That's what basically

it was. There's no telling how many tons of gravel that came from Belgrade that went in there to make an airport. So now Piedmont had an operation in this market of Jacksonville, New Bern, and Kinston.

Then the politicians decided that it would be better if we had one airport. Well, they tried to get the three communities together but Kinston wasn't gonna have any part of it, of considering the old Oak Grove Airport which is down on the other side of Pollocksville. That was a military airport which they could have probably obtained, usually for a dollar. Jacksonville sent a delegation; New Bern sent a delegation; Morehead City sent a delegation; Kinston would not. But they got their pink elephant as far as I'm concerned in Kinston, North Carolina, and it was called the Eastern Regional Jetport at Stallings Field Kinston, North Carolina. Well, that made all the politicians happy because they got all this big money out of Washington to build a million and a half dollar terminal building over there, which if anybody who has been into that airport, they'd know it cost a fortune to heat and air condition the thing cause it looks like it's about three stories high in the front part of it. Now the politicians also figured, and the airlines figured, that okay, now we're gonna make these people; Pamlico, Jones, Craven, wherever in eastern North Carolina, Carteret County, go to Kinston Airport. Well, what they had to offer at Kinston was jet service, which was fine, except you had to change. Somewhere you're gonna have to change to go where you wanted to go. The people decided they could drive to Raleigh, either get a through flight or a non-stop flight out of Raleigh to go where

they wanted to go without having to change airplanes. Nobody likes to change a flight. And if they gotta go to Kinston and still change their flight, they might as well drive a few more miles and be in Raleigh. Well, Piedmont still fought this. I had discussed it, when they decided to move, discussed it with the state. The state wasn't gonna put up anymore money toward this airport if this airport still pursued commercial traffic.

BE: You mean this airport right here?

MR. LOVELL: Right here, New Bern. The politician said no more money from state funds would go to Simmons-Nott Airport, which is what it was called then, if they decided to continue to pursue commercial flight service. Now if they want to turn it into a general aviation airport... Well, the business has always been here, always been at New Bern. They started out with commuter service. They used a little old seven passenger airplane to come in here to fly into Raleigh or fly in this one and that one. A few of them tried it and the equipment wasn't big enough. They had their problems. But finally when Henson came into New Bern, they brought a thirty-six passenger airplane in here with a flight attendant and a crew of three all together, and wham, guess what happened! Aviation took off again in New Bern, North Carolina. They had something like maybe three flights a day. Now they got five flights a day, six flights a day. Henson was bought out by Piedmont. They own fifty-one percent of Henson, and later on, they absorbed it completely. Now Henson operated out of Salisbury, Maryland at an airport there. Then Piedmont continued to run this

operation with their commuter service. And then of course Piedmont sold out to US Air and US Air is operating with the same type of equipment. Well, that type of equipment is ideal for New Bern with this market. Where we right now I think have I think sixteen, seventeen flights a day, and by putting one jet in here that eliminates three flights. So it gets to the point that you don't pick the time of day that you want to go somewhere, the airlines want tell you when you're gotta catch your flight. In other words, they can say, well, you gotta catch a two o'clock flight to get there. Well, what if you don't make that? Well, you got to fly at two o'clock tomorrow afternoon. Well, by having a choice, you can leave early in the morning, mid-morning, mid-afternoon, right on up until, I think the last flight is at 7:05. You got the choice of the time of the day that you want to go. We feed into two hubs, which is Raleigh and Charlotte. From there you can go just about anywhere you want to in the world.

BE: Do we have direct flights out of here for Charlotte?

MR. LOVELL: Yes sir. Our flights, as I say, all of them right now either go into Raleigh or go into Charlotte. There's no stop. It's very simple. People have gotten used to commercial. Because it did not only happen to this market, it happened to towns like New Bern all over the country. They have commuter service to feed into some hub. Usually the commuter service is owned by one of the other major airlines, or indirectly are owned by them by stock and all this sort of thing. But they cater to that commuter, set their other flights up to gear to that and that's going to commuter flight. We've probably

got one of the best airline service for any size city, or New Bern size city, in the country today. But the business has always been here. You know, a few years ago we had a recession but it didn't effect New Bern because they were building Fairfield Harbor, at that time it was Treasure Cove. The beach was taken off. We still had the military activity. Hatteras had built a plant here and Stanly Tools had a plant here. We had so much going on, not one particular thing, but just so much going on, that we didn't feel this crunch around here.

BE: What about Camp Sea Gull and Seafarer? Did you get close to that?

MR. LOVELL: Well, yeah. A lot of them children are flown in here and then met by the buses. They'll book up a whole flight in Washington, D.C or Atlanta or somewhere you know and they would bring them kids in here. We don't have direct flights from Washington anymore, so now they come in by way of Charlotte. There's probably no community the size of New Bern that has the facilities that we do here for airline service. I can't think of one that generates as much.

From the time that Henson walked into this place with their commuter service, they made money. They made money. If a big trucking company came through New Bern and says, hey, you know, there's not enough freight business in New Bern to merit this big truck going through.

Somebody with a pick-up truck can make money. He don't have that big heavy, bulky equipment. A jet, I don't care what kind it is, unless it's an executive jet that's designed to go the minimum 500 miles, and after that they begin to make money. What market could New Bern

possibly serve 500 miles? We're talking about either New York or Chicago. How many people are going to go to New York? But now with a commuter service, you're gonna fly them less than 250 miles from here to Charlotte and less than 100 air miles going to Raleigh, and there you can go anywhere you want to, either out of Raleigh or out of Charlotte. So that makes our situation here a little unique. We have an awful lot of business. Not real major business, but enough business to generate this type of traffic. The people of New Bern are benefitted from it cause the commercial business people that are flying in here or the tourist which go down to Morehead City, Carteret County, or wherever, come into New Bern. The people from New Bern benefit this service by the commercial business that created the business.

BE: We're hearing that a few years ago that a sheik, possibly from Saudi Arabia, had his own private plane to fly him in here to check out a Hatteras yacht. Do you remember that?

MR. LOVELL: I remember he was a sheik and he was out of Kuwait. He was into the banking end of it. He ordered a seventy footer, flew in here, not on his private plane at this time, and the sales people met him. He had his wife and she was in veils. He was in a business suit,. Of course she was a little tiny thing. She didn't look like she was over fifteen years old. He told Mr. Smith the sales manager, that he was very, very upset, his brother-in-law, very upset with him because he had bought this boat. Mr. Smith apologized and said, "Well, you know, why would you be upset because of your brother-in-law?"

He said, well, he wanted another delivered at the same time. And of course they told him it would be a good nine months because of what they had on the other line. He said that didn't bother him, put on another crew to build the boat. That's when Hatteras put on the nightshift to build this other seventy footer, and it was delivered at the same time. They hired something like three hundred more employees to accommodate him. The second boat cost about four times more than the first boat. But money was no object.

BE: Thanks. I've enjoyed it.

END OF INTERVIEW