

Larry Brantley Thompson Oral History Interview
March 9, 2020, Cobb County International Airport
Conducted by James Newberry, Department of Museums, Archives and Rare Books, Kennesaw State University
Larry Brantley Thompson Collection, Kennesaw State University Archives

Complete Transcript

Interviewer: All right. So, this is James Newberry and I'm here with Mr. Thompson on March 9th, 2020 at his hangar at the Cobb County International Airport. I want to thank you for sitting down with me, Mr. Thompson. Do you agree to this interview?

Thompson: Yeah. I do. It's my pleasure.

Interviewer: Thank you so much. So could you just tell me your full name?

Thompson: Larry Brantley Thompson.

Interviewer: And what's your birthdate?

Thompson: December 11, 1942.

Interviewer: Where were you born?

Thompson: I was born in Jasper, Georgia and moved to Cobb County with my family when I was two years old.

Interviewer: What part of Cobb County did you live in?

Thompson: I lived in the west part in the Fair Oaks district.

Interviewer: Okay. And you mentioned that that was close to Dobbins.

Thompson: Yeah, it's right at the western end of Dobbins Runway.

Interviewer: Okay, and tell me a little bit about how that proximity influenced you.

Thompson: Well, as a young boy we were all ... it was an aviation community and all of us young boys were just enthralled with airplanes because they were flying over us all the time. Back then it was World War II airplanes predominantly, P-51 Mustangs, PBX Catalinas or banana boats they called them back then. B-25s, B-17s, B-24 Liberators, a few jets, the B-47 they were putting together over at Lockheed, assembling it. So we saw quite a bit of that back then. But as young boys we'd all name them and we'd get into arguments. "That's a P-51." "No, that's a P-40." "No, it's a P-51." And almost get in a fight over it, as young boys.

Then we started building model airplanes when I was in the first grade and just an airplane enthusiast. It's been a passion my whole life and so that's how I got started at it and I started taking flying lessons when I was 12 years old and soloed my 16th birthday, got my private license my 17th birthday and my commercial on my 18th birthday and my flight instructor's rating then.

I flew professionally for years and then I was going to school down at Georgia Tech and if it hadn't been for this airport I wouldn't have been able to go to college but I made enough money to pay for tuition back then. It was \$150 a quarter. Tech was on a quarter system back then. And I could always get the money up for school but aeronautical engineering books were expensive. I can remember one book, Principles of Aerodynamics, was \$250 and that was a lot of money back then but you could use it for several years because you're involved in it all the way through.

Well, here at the airport they had a jug over on the counter where I worked that said ... they called me Tiger and it said, "Tiger's tuition and book fund." And all the guys would put their change in there and every quarter the pilots that flew around here would come to me and say, "Have you got the money for your books this quarter?" And if didn't they'd all pony it up. So I couldn't have gone to college had it not been for this airport. Simply, purely, without equivocation I'd say that. I couldn't have gone.

Interviewer: Wow.

Thompson: And then two, there was a fox den off the end of the runway and George Montgomery that owned the Coca Cola Bottling plant had a little small airplane here and he had what was called [Rockridge 00:03:10] Rod and Gun Club. It was a place where you could pay and go hunt pheasants or whatever you wanted to.

Well, they would have a fox hunt on Sunday afternoon and I would trap a fox down here, there was a den down here and I would put ... I'd use leg traps but I'd wrap it with foam rubber and tape so it wouldn't hurt the fox and then I would take it over there. They'd give \$50 for the fox for the hunt on Sunday afternoon and it was really hilarious.

People would be all dressed in their fox hunting paraphernalia, on horses and they have all these dogs out there. Well, I would turn the fox loose, the dogs would go nuts, buck all the people off the horses and then they'd just go drink the rest of the afternoon. And by the time I'd get back to the airport the old fox was back over here.

Interviewer: Unharmd.

Thompson: Unharmd. And it got to where we had a partnership going. It got to where I could pet it and everything and I'd put a cage down there with a piece of chicken in it, with no trap or anything. I'd come over here and he'd be sitting in

the cage and I'd pick him up and take him over there and turn him loose. But they paid me \$50 and back then it was a lot of money. Keep me in school.

And then I started flying when I got my license and back then it was a lot different than it is now. The fellow I worked for had a shuttle service back and forth to Hartfield and I'd fly down there sometimes three or four times a day, taking people down there to catch airlines and back then I could just taxi right up in the gate area and they knew what gate they was leaving out of so I'd just taxi in there and let them out and they'd go up the steps to the gate and get on the airplane, wherever they were going.

And a lot of times I'd take two or three people down there and pick up two or three people and bring them back. Well, my boss paid me \$5.00 for every trip I took and so sometimes I'd make three or four trips a day and a lot of money back then, back then doing that. And then this time of year in the springtime the peach orchards down in south Georgia, a lot of times you'll get a late freeze and it damages that peach crop.

Well, to keep that frost from settling on those peaches if you keep the air stirred up around those peach orchards it won't kill that peach crop. And so they would pay \$200 an hour for somebody to fly real low all over those peach orchards at night and they would put smudge pots all the way around them. It was very dangerous, that's why they paid so much but I made a lot of money doing that back then.

But all that was so I could stay in school. But what happened to me, I got a job flying for United Airlines, first quarter of my senior year and so I dropped out of school to take that job and I'd signed up for school and I had a class date with United down in Denver and I had everything timed to where I could get my class date and go through their program and get a route assignment before the draft board caught up with me.

An airline pilot was a draft deferred occupation at that time because it was a critical occupation and if you were an airline pilot you were exempt from the draft but you had to be a line pilot. You couldn't be a pilot in training. So I get to Denver, after I dropped out of school. I figured the draft board would take that long to catch up with me.

So I got to Denver and they delayed my class date by two weeks and I liked two weeks having a route assignment with United when I got my draft notice. And then I was drafted into the military-

Interviewer: What year was that?

Thompson: That was 1965.

Interviewer: Okay.

Thompson:

And when I got to basic training they give you all kind of tests. First one, I went in the military they gave me a test purely about flying and after I'd taken the test the guy called me in and he said, "What do you do in civilian life?" I said, "Well, I was a flight instructor and I was going to school." He said, "Well, nobody's ever maxed this test, ever." He said, "We're needing flight instructors." So they wanted to give me a warrant officer commission and send me down to Fort Rucker to flight instruct for four years.

But I'd had enough of that. I'd had about 4000 hours of flight instruction at that time. So I turned it down and I said, "I just want to serve my two years and get out and go to United." So when I got to basic training down in Fort Benning this drill instructor called my name out one morning. And they're meaner than hell. I mean, those drill instructors are as mean as they can be. But he called my name out one morning, told me to report to the mess hall.

So I went over there and this colonel was sitting there and they had ... I'll never forget it, they had orange juice, ice cream and cookies. You don't get that in basic training. Meat and potatoes is all you get to eat in basic training. So anyhow, this colonel said, "You qualified for officer's candidate school and I've got the paperwork here for you to sign." I said, "Well, what do I have to do?" He said, "Well, you've got to serve four years and all this kind of stuff, once you get your commission." And I said, "Well, I don't want to do that." He said, "Well, it's strictly voluntary. You don't have to."

I said, "Well, I'd rather just serve my two years and get out". So he turned around to this sergeant and he said, "Sergeant Vernon, will you take over?" And so this sergeant gets on a bicycle and said, "Come with me, Private." They ran me out to the rifle range, 12 miles away, ran me back. As soon as I got back I went to the mess hall and started peeling potatoes and then after the morning meal I washed pots and pans, then it was back out to the rifle range and back.

But then I started peeling potatoes for lunch and after lunch I washed pots and pans. Then it was back out to the rifle range and back. Then I went for the evening meal, went back to peel potatoes and wash pots and pans. I lasted two days doing that and I finally told that sergeant, I said, "You know I've decided that officer candidate school is a pretty good deal. I think I might want to take it." So the next morning they brought cookies and ice cream and all this stuff down and I told them I'd agree to it.

So I signed the paperwork. Then I went to the formation the next morning. Now this drilling sergeant gets up and he said, "Now I want you privates to know that one day Private Thompson's going to be my boss but today his ass is mine." I mean, I got out of the frying pan into the fire. But I took a commission and I had orders for flight school but I didn't want to take it because helicopters and I don't like to fly them.

I was offered an interservice transfer into the Marine Corps. I could have went to Marine Corps flight training because you only had to have two years of

college at the time and I didn't finish my degree when I dropped out. But I decided not to do that and go ahead and go to officer's candidate school. I graduated top in my class and was assigned to an 85th warhead detachment where my only function was to maintain warheads. I was trained as a nuclear weapons tactics and deployment expert and then I was trained in the arming devices for all nuclear warheads and stuff.

I was frozen in country and frozen MOS and then when my time was up I was a first lieutenant at the time but I was offered a promotion straight to field grade, straight to major, with a \$60,000 reenlistment bonus. That was a lot of money in 1969 but I knew that weapon system inside out, upside down, backwards and forwards. In fact, it was manufactured by the Martin Orlando Corporation at the time and some of their tech reps would come to me with problems they had with the system because I knew it inside and out and it was kind of like flying.

I mean, when you count a missile down it's like doing a pre-flight inspection on an airplane. You're checking all the circuitry and all that kind of stuff. So I really enjoyed it. I almost stayed and if I'd know what they were doing at the time I would have stayed because I'd have wound up with at least one star and maybe two but I'd have been frozen in nuclear weapons and I just didn't want to push a button at some point in my life knowing I killed a million people.

So I decided I didn't want any part of that so I got out. But back to flying, I got off on a tangent then. But back to flying, it started when I was just a very young boy, first, second grade and I would do anything to get in the air. I'll tell you some things I shouldn't be telling but it's okay now I guess.

There was a guy down at that little old airport on Austell Road, a guy named B.T. Smith, who worked at Lockheed and he owned an airplane and he couldn't get a medical certificate but he loved airplanes. And so I got to where I would sneak and fly his airplane. You'd go to jail for that now but it was a different time then. So anyhow, B.T. walks up one day and he said, "Larry, I really don't mind you flying my airplane but quit putting that car gas in there. It's burning the valves up."

I got to where, I knew him very well and on Sundays he would want to go someplace, every Sunday. So we'd go to fly in breakfast or whatever and he loved to do and unfortunately he passed away when I was in the military but I've often thought about that.

Interviewer: You mentioned his airplane, where was he keeping it at that time?

Thompson: Down at that little dirt airfield on Austell Road.

Interviewer: So, when you snuck in there to fly it, I mean, how did that go?

Thompson: It was-

Interviewer: Just imagine from somebody who would never be able to do such a thing.

Thompson: Well, back then you didn't have keys in airplanes, turn the switch on and start it. They didn't have starters, you prop them with your hands and there's no fencing around that airport. It's a little old dirt strip. It's only 1600 feet long and it had a drainage wash across the middle of the runway and on take off you had to get going fast enough to pull your airplane up off the ground to get over that little ditch, then finish your take off run and then on landing you had to land and get stopped before you got to the ditch because it'd flip your airplane over if you didn't. And that's what ... the first airplane I bought, that's what happened to it. The guy that landed there didn't know about the ditch, then tried to stop it and ground looped the airplane and tore it up.

Interviewer: Tell me about that plane.

Thompson: It was a Luscombe, a little single-engine two passenger airplane. When he wrecked it I walked up to him and I said ... I wasn't but 14, 15 years old and I said, "I'll give you \$500 for it." He looked at the airplane and looked at me and said, "Son, you just bought yourself an airplane." And I said, "Well, I need 90 days to get the money up." So I sold my horse and my bicycle, everything I owned in the world. I go down the road picking up Coca Cola bottles to go sell them, anything I could do to get money. Finally, got the money up to buy it and a couple of guys that worked at Lockheed helped me rebuild it.

So I flew that all over the country. The summer between my junior and senior year my parents let me take it and I flew all over the south and I'd work for a couple of weeks to get money to keep going and all that kind of stuff. But when I started back I ran out of money. So I started selling instruments out of it to get the money to get home on and when I got home all I had left was a compass and an oil pressure gauge and I figured I had to have those two.

And so I got home that way. But back then it was a different world. I could land that airplane in the road at night and I'd just sleep under the wing and I'd have a lot of ... police would come by and say, "Are you okay? Are you hurt?" I'd say, "No, I'm just spending the night here." And they would say, "Well, that's okay. We'll check on you." And then I've had some of them take me down to a local service station to buy five gallons of gas to put in that airplane in a patrol car.

Interviewer: Is there a radio in a plane like that? I mean, are you just flying completely on your own?

Thompson: No. You're just flying. You're just flying. There's no radio in them. In fact, I have landed at Hartsfield with no radio back in the day and they had light signals. You'd just go in on the traffic pattern and you look at the tower and they give you a green lights, well it's okay to land or they'd give you a white light. I can't remember now what they meant but a white light meant to circle until you got

the green light. A red light meant go away. But I've landed down there many times without a radio.

Interviewer: That's incredible. Before we go on there were a couple more questions [crosstalk 00:13:58]

Thompson: Oh I'm sorry. I got off on a tangent.

Interviewer: No, please. I love it. I just want to make sure I get a couple basics out of the way. So tell me your parents' names.

Thompson: It was, my mother's name was Virginia Lee Thompson and my dad's name was Levy B. Thompson.

Interviewer: And how do you spell Levy?

Thompson: L-E-V-Y.

Interviewer: Okay. And what did they do for a living?

Thompson: My mother was just a housewife. She didn't work. My dad was a salesman for R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company.

Interviewer: Okay.

Thompson: Now back in the day every kid's parents worked for Lockheed and the question wasn't, "Where does your dad work?". The question was, "Which department does your dad work in?" because everybody worked for Lockheed. Lockheed employed 35,000 people back then. My dad was one of the few who did not work for Lockheed and I'll tell you a funny story about that.

When I was 12 or 13 years old I started building an airplane, built my first airplane. I built three in my lifetime but I started building that one and I ran out of money. I had the wing built and the tail section built and I ran out of money so I used, for the fuselage, just a 4X4 post and I cut a hole in the wing so I could stand up in the wing and had the controls out here. The first hang glider I guess.

And my buddy, his father had a pickup truck. So we snuck the pickup truck out one day and went up to Kennesaw Mountain and I stood in the back of that truck while he came down the road and there's one place up there, it's a sheer cliff. Well, the airplane was developing lift. I could tell, so when we got going toward that curve where that cliff is I told him to speed up and I just jumped out of the truck over that cliff.

Well, when I'd put that 4X4 in there I didn't recalculate the center of gravity on that airplane and the 4X4 changed all of the calculations I'd done, so it was tail heavy and it'd go down, it'd climb and it'd stall. It'd climb and it'd stall going

down that hill. And I finally went into a bunch of little small pine trees and when I did they broke off, little limbs stuck all in me. So my buddy took me to the hospital and my dad came in there and he took one look at me and my mother was there and he said, "Ginny, you have raised a fool." And he turned around and walked out.

Interviewer: Yeah, I have to ask, what your parents thought of you as this ... I mean, little engineering kid? I mean ...

Thompson: Well, I started working in a grocery store to get the money to take flying lessons when I was young. I worked for Matthews Supermarket and I'd work 60 hours a week for 40 cents an hour and got \$24.00. And flying lessons back then were \$12.00 an hour so I'd go down on Sunday afternoon and spend all \$24.00 taking flying lessons. And my dad thought it was just some kind of a carnival ride. He thought I was just wasting all my money doing that. But my mother could see the importance of it and so ... see she was right. It was one of the greatest things that ever happened to me is learning to fly.

But she would always back me up. But he wouldn't take me. By then, I'd started taking flying lessons down at Fulton County Airport and I'd ride my bicycle down there. I lived on Austell Road. It'd take me two and a half hours to ride the bicycle down there to take flying lessons. It'd take all day Sunday afternoon to get all of that done. I'd spend all my money down there. But it's just been a passion. I mean, it wasn't a love, it was a true passion. But I've always enjoyed it but Dad thought I was wasting my money on a carnival ride. That's the way he looked at it.

Interviewer: Did you have any siblings?

Thompson: I had a brother and a sister.

Interviewer: Did they have any interest in it like you did?

Thompson: No, they didn't have any interest in it at all. They came along later on. I was the first child and they came along later on.

Interviewer: Well, tell me about the house you grew up in.

Thompson: It was on Austell Road. It was just a brick house, located off the end of the runway at Dobbins on the western side out there. 612 Austell Road's where it was.

Interviewer: Was it on its own or a part of a neighborhood or a subdivision?

Thompson: No, it was on its own on Austell Road there.

Interviewer: Okay.

Thompson: And probably had about an acre of land with it.

Interviewer: Where did you start school?

Thompson: I started in the city schools. I went to Keith Elementary School, the first and second grade and during the second grade my parents moved out to the county, out to Austell Road. Then I went to Robert L. Osborne grammar school and high school.

Interviewer: Okay, and then you said you started at Georgia Tech?

Thompson: Yeah.

Interviewer: And, I mean, it makes sense that you would have gone to Tech but was that just something you assumed you would do or had you looked at other colleges?

Thompson: No, that was the only place I wanted to go. I wanted to be an airline pilot. That's what my lifelong dream was, always. Well, let me back up. I first wanted to go to Notre Dame College and I had gotten accepted and my dad called me in one day and he said, "Son, there's no way that we can afford to send you to Notre Dame College. In fact, we can't afford to send to any college. But you're an enterprising young man and I'm sure you can figure it out and by the way, I've got you a job."

He got me a job working for a pulp wood company, cutting pulp wood. I didn't weigh much back then, about 140 pounds. Well, after about three weeks I was down to 128 and I told my dad, I said, "You know, I think I can figure out a better way to get to college than this." So that's when I got my job working here at the airport.

Interviewer: I see.

Thompson: They just had opened the airport.

Interviewer: And tell me your age again when you came here for the first time?

Thompson: Let's see, I was probably 16, 17 years old. I graduated early from high school. I think I was 16.

Interviewer: So as I understand it the groundbreaking was 1960?

Thompson: Yeah, I believe that's right. Yeah, it was either '59 or '60, right in-

Interviewer: So you were coming in right as it was being constructed-

Thompson: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: ... or what preceded the airport? What was here prior to that?

Thompson: Well, this was just a cornfield prior to that. And at that time you had a little 1600 foot airstrip out off Austell Road, that's the one I was telling you about where I flew out of a lot and then George Montgomery had a little airstrip associated with his farm over here, off the eastern end of the airport. Then you had Dobbins Air Force base and then you had a little airport out in the east part of the county called Park Air Airport. And that was owned by a guy by name of Walter Nix. He and his wife, Walter and Kitty Nix owned that airport.

Interviewer: Okay.

Thompson: I hung around as a young boy at that airport down off Austell Road and there was a guy down there teaching me to skywrite and teaching me to tow a banner right after I got my commercial license. Well, they had just built Lake Allatoona and I was flying over the lake one time on a Sunday afternoon.

There was a lot of cars down there so I turned the smoke unit on on that airplane and put it in a spin and spun it right to the ground and then recovered and I caused an automobile accident. Not a serious one but somebody got the number off the airplane. When I got back to the airport I had a call from the FAA telling me to report to the GADO office down at Fulton County Airport, general aviation district office, down at Fulton County airport.

But I'll never forget as long as I live, I was shaking in my boots. I walked in there and I met this guy, his name's Mr. Smith, same as the other guy. He took one look at me and he said, "Son, how old are you?" I said, "I'm 18." He said, "Do you plan on making a career out of aviation?" I said, "Yes, sir." And he said, "I'm going to do something I've never done. I'm going to let you off the hook on this but if you ever do anything like that again I'll see you never step another foot in an airplane." That was the last FAR I ever violated. That made a believer out of me.

But it was a different time then. Now, they'd bust you and take your license and everything else for that.

Interviewer: I was going to say.

Thompson: But not back then. It was a totally different world.

Interviewer: Well, tell me about the development of this airport, how that came to be and who was involved.

Thompson: Okay. A fellow by the name of Joe Sandmann, who actually became a second father to me. Joe was in the Air Force out here, based at Dobbins and he married a lady named Joanne ... let's see, her maiden name was ... it'll come to me in a minute. Her last name was Hames, Joanne Hames.

Her brother was Luther Hames who was the first full time sitting judge, superior court judge, in Cobb. Luther had toured the old northern district courts. He would go from city to city to city trying cases and then when Cobb got to be big enough to have its own judge he was the first sitting judge we had. Well, his sister was Joanne Hames and Joe, in the Air force out here, married Joanne.

And Joe, flying in the Air Force and all, he flew P-51s during the Korean War and he realized that this community needed an airport so he went to work on it and managed to get all of the money, not all, most of the funding for the airport out of the aviation trust fund and I've got the letters and all back and forth to Washington and what all they did to get it approved.

Interviewer: Okay.

Thompson: He's the one who really put it together and then when I started working here he and I became lifelong friends. I mean, just forever, vacationed together, the families and all that kind of stuff. He was like a second father to me, he really was. But he was the one who'd keep me on the study path while I was in school. You hadn't done this and you hadn't done that. You need to work on this, work on that. That's what I mean, I couldn't have gone to college without this airport and the people that were here.

But anyhow, he got it started and got it built. You've seen pictures of the opening ceremonies. It was a big deal when this airport opened and I've always been ... had tremendous pride in the county. I mean, I always, I'm talking about just a little old guy. When I was young I'd introduce myself sometimes, I'd say, "My name's Thompson. I'm from Cobb County, we just got a new traffic light," or, "We just got a new water tank." Just a sense of pride. Well, when this airport was built that was really something to brag about. We just got a new airport. I've always been that way.

Except for the time I was in the military, I don't believe I missed a single day coming to this airport for something or the other, except when I'm traveling or something like that. But it's always been a huge part of my life and I think that's why they gave me the records because I-

Interviewer: Because you were so connected with it from such a young age.

Thompson: Yeah, from the very get-to.

Interviewer: And you said you were about 16, so really that's what 58?

Thompson: It was, no I was born in '42. I came here. I was probably 18 when I started here because it opened in '60 if my memory serves me correct. They started building it I think in latter part of '58 or '59, somewhere along in there.

Interviewer: And for the original construction, what was here?

Thompson: There was a cornfield. It was just a big cornfield here.

Interviewer: Oh- Action, What was here?

Thompson: There was a cornfield. It was just a big corn field here.

Interviewer: Okay.

Thompson: The reason they put it here, they had enough land to get the runway in. And it's oriented East and West, and most of the prevailing winds here are easterly or westerly. We get some out of the North and Northeast, Northwest, but very seldom, mostly East and West winds here. So that's why it's oriented this way.

Interviewer: And how long was the landing strip originally?

Thompson: Originally it was 4,000 feet with no overruns.

Interviewer: But it's now at 63?

Thompson: Yeah, 6,300 including overruns. It's the largest runway now, the longest runway in the region, except for Hartsville and Dobbins. It's longer than Fulton County, longer than Pastry to Cub. So it's, longest runway in the region.

Interviewer: And how many aircraft can it accommodate. What's the biggest aircraft?

Thompson: We get 737s in here, and I know FedEx was talking about opening operation here, an air operation here at night, which I wish they would to utilize, because it would bring a lot of money to the County, and to the airport. I know... I've heard they offered the County \$30 million to rebuild the road system around it so they can start using it at night. And I think they're just going to put conveyors over this road to get their packages into their distribution center over here. So I don't know what became of that. When I had the fifth FBO here, I was working with him to get that done because I wanted to get fuel contract with them while I had the fixed-base operations here.

Interviewer: What's the FBO?

Thompson: Fixed-based operation. It's just a... It's like a service station for airplanes. You provide hangar space, fuel maintenance facilities, all that kind of things.

Interviewer: Today, what is the predominant traffic through here?

Thompson: I would say the predominant traffic is there's a couple of flight schools located here, so we have a good deal of flight training. But the vast majority of it is corporate and the reason it's such a great location for corporate, the surface transportation, somebody landing here typically is going against traffic, to go to

areas down closer to Atlanta, and what have you typically they're going against traffic.

And to the air out system, the arrival routes coming into Hartsville, they have gates, not the kind of gate should have at the airport, but they have arrival gates that they send most airplanes through that's going to Hartsville or wherever. You got one up here [inaudible 00:26:21] to the Northwest. You got one up at Tacoma to the Northeast. There's one down at Dublin to the Southeast. And there's one down around Columbus down in there to the Southwest.

All airplanes coming to this area from across country are fed through on those arrival routes that go through those aerial gates. Well, when you look at this airport, it's so well located relative to those arrival gates, so you have very few delays? I've left Peachtree-DeKalb airport sometimes at particularly around 11 o'clock in the morning or four o'clock in the afternoon, and you might get on the ground over there for 30, 40 minutes waiting for departure to pick you up.

Because they have so much traffic during those time periods, but here, about the longest hold I've ever had it's been like two minutes, you just don't get it here. So a corporate airplane can get in and out of here real quick. And now then we've got customs down here and you get people leaving here, going to all over the world. I mean, literally all over the world from... So it's turned into quite a facility.

Interviewer: How many planes a day?

Thompson: I'm not sure, you can get that from the airport manager. I'm not sure how many operations per day they have.

Interviewer: Okay.

Thompson: But they keep track of it from the tower over there. So you can get that from him.

Interviewer: And that tower is a recent build, right?

Thompson: Yeah, we didn't have a tower for a long time and we didn't have an instrument approach procedure. Back in the day when the weather was low to get in here, you would fly what they call the GCA approach into Dobbins, a ground-controlled approach. Then once you got below the ceiling, you would follow the four-lane highway up here. We call it the four-lane you all call it car parkway was always been a four-lane to us.

You follow the four-lane highway up here, you got through the airport and you would land. That is how you get in here when the weather was bad. And I am not sure all that was really that legal, but that's how everybody would do it back in the day. Then we finally got the instrument approaches and there used to be

an intersection out here on the approach called birdy B-I-R-D-Y which came from a dog and hung around here all the time. The dog's name was birdy. Hung around here for years and just to pay it up the airport, so they named that intersection out there birdy intersection.

Interviewer: Well, so when it was originally built in 1960, what was here after the opening day, what buildings?

Thompson: Okay. There was only one building here. It was the administration building over there. And Joe found an old house somewhere and moved the house in here. And that became the administration building. It was the only building in here. The first hangar had not been built at the time. There were no hangars at the time. And that's another interesting story.

The County never got the money to build that hangar over there. And so when they finally got it, I was working on the line, the guy that started running the maintenance section over there was a guy named John Gross. And I ran around with his son, John jr. Well, he and I had built a little porch jet engine. We had it on a bicycle and we are trying to close the back of it up and get more thrust out of it. And we are in a corner that hangar that the county built, and it blew up.

It just popped in, I think, blue sky high when it blew the whole corner of that hangar out over there. And so I had to go see Herbert McCullough county. He was the last long commissioner and he wanted to know what had happened, and how it had happened. And the whole time I was telling him about what was going on. He would lean back in his chair, with his eyes rolled back and I could just see him.

I am sending this kid down to the County farm. I can see it in his eyes, and then finally, he said, "Man, why in the hell did you blow my hangar up? We never got the money for it." So finally, he said, "Well, you got one or two choices, you go spend some time out to county farm, or you going to rebuild that hangar back." And so I built hangar back and I will tell you about kind of how it got in the construction business because it was not just that damn hard, and the pay was good. So that's how I wind up in the construction business. But when I was 10 and I could see his eyes rolled back in his head, thinking what an idiot.

Interviewer: Well, I know the field is named for him, right? And how did that come about? What was his connection?

Thompson: He was the last single commission chairman we had and they named it after him.

Interviewer: Did he have any involvement beyond being the long commissioner?

Thompson: Yeah. He helped Joe get it all done and get it approved through the county and all that kind of stuff. Some of those pictures I've got to the groundbreaking

ceremony of him doing the groundbreaking ceremony. And he looked just like Lyndon Johnson, who was president and everybody thought he was Lyndon Johnson. He looked just like him.

Herbert was... And I will tell you, I won't mention any names. But Herbert was an expert poker player, one of the best poker players in the Southeast. And when they went to build Southern tech, he got to be a big... Every community in Georgia wanted that college. And so it came down to three counties. And so Georgia had an old research boat, they call it a research boat down at Brunswick or down at Savannah. So they got all three of them out on that boat.

And they were going to negotiate, decide who was going to get the college. So finally they decided to just cut a deck of cards. So Herbert cut the ACE of spades out of that card. And everybody knew it was a good poker player. So they all got mad, almost got in a fight and claimed he had somehow stacked the deck back. Also, he didn't touch the deck and they threw the cards out in the water, all that kind of stuff. So the boat captain got another deck of cards and he said, "I will shuffle the cards. Nobody touches them." And so they cut the cards again. And Herbert cut the ACE of diamonds out the second time. That's how Southern Tech got here. And a lot of people don't know that story. Maybe I shouldn't tell all that, but I used to have lunch with Herbert, Luther Hames and Superior Court Judge Joe Salmon.

And I would have lunch at Los Reyes, Mexican restaurant every Wednesday. And they would tell some of the dog owners stories about Cub. And I told them, I said, "I want to record these stories because I'm going to write a book. I'm going to call it politics and grids." And Herbert and all of them said, "No, when we're dead and gone, you write what you want to, but as long as we're alive, it stays at this table." But some of it one day, I'm going to write that book because it's hilarious. Some of the things they would tell you that went on in the old days were just absolutely hilarious.

Interviewer: I know. To get it just based on a soccer game.

Thompson: That's what it was based on debit cards

Interviewer: Well, so in the early days, the county built it and owned it.

Thompson: Yeah, they did.

Interviewer: But how long did that last?

Thompson: Well, the County still owns it, but they lease it to fixed-based operators. Like Hawthorne Aviation pays the county a rent fee and they operate the airport.

Interviewer: Okay.

Thompson: But the County owns the airport. It's like this hangar here. I pay them a ground lease per month, but I actually own the buildings, but I pay them a ground lease per month.

Interviewer: I see.

Thompson: And that's the way that goes.

Interviewer: And in the early days, how did they... Was it successful from the start financially?

Thompson: No, it was struggling. And I think that is why the county decided to lease it out to individual. So the county didn't have to... Because, taking care of fuel and fuel receipts and all that kind of stuff, it was pretty awesome for a county government to be involved in a private enterprise like that. So they leased it to a guy named Cliff Pope and the name of his company of air activities incorporated.

And that is who I went to work for as the first line boy here pumping gas and washing and waxing airplanes. And then later on became the first full-time flight instructor here. There was a part-time flight instructor here when I was there, a guy named Pete Everhart and Pete and Mr. Pope had flown B-17s in World War II. And they had photographed every mission with an eight millimeter camera.

And when the weather was bad, I would sit and watch those films of those missions. And it is unbelievable. You'd see a formation of B-17s, hundreds of them. And you see German airplanes going in and out of that formation with P-51 Mustangs right behind them, just a big ball of airplanes and every now and then they'd hit each other. Just a big ball of flame and all that kind of stuff is amazing to sit and watch that. It really was.

But Pete gave me the instructions for my commercial pilots license. And for commercial, you had to demonstrate what's called lazy eight maneuvers and chandelles and all that kind of stuff. Well, Pete being a World War II flying instructor, he taught me to do lazy eights and chandelles the way that they did back then. And a lazy eight, you pick a point out on horizon and you start doing maneuvers like this, and you want to ride as you're going past vertical. You want the nose of the airplane goes through that point, then you start recovering going the other direction. And when the nose of the airplane goes through the point, right past vertical, you recover.

And then a chandelle is a 180 degree turn maneuver. You pull up straight up and as the airplane starts to go in verdict, you start rolling like this that head any other direction. Well, when I went to demonstrate it with the FAA, he said, "Let me see a lazy eight." So I'll use that for a point, picked a point out there. And I started and he said, "Stop right there. Let me see you do a chandelle."

So I picked a point and started at, he said, "Pete Everhart was your instructor. He's the one that signed you off landing." And I said, "Yeah." He said, "We don't do them this way anymore. That's when they did them in World War II. Here's how we do it. It's just a gentle climbing turn easy, but if you can do those, you can do what we want. So don't worry about it anymore. But I've told him a dozen times not to teach it that way."

Interviewer: Well, tell me about Cliff Pope what was he? I mean, how long was he involved with the airport? What was his background? That kind of thing.

Thompson: He was involved for a very long time. I started working for him straight out of high school. I mean, first job I had out of high school, relative to airplanes. And I started working for him then and I got married and had other jobs. And then finally went into the military and cliff passed away. No, I wasn't. I was out of the military when he passed away. Because I was leaving. I had a little bonanza and my wife and I were going to Florida.

And when I took off, he talked to me on the radio when I was leaving. And I thought it was odd. Because, he rarely ever did that at all. But he passed away that weekend while we were gone. And he was... And I don't know how many years that was, that was probably... He was probably here 20 years around 20 years, something like that. And then Bob Brown took over the FBO from him, and then we opened this one on the South side, because all that lower on the North side, nothing had been developed on the South side here. So we took over this FBO, somebody else started it and had it bankrupted and we bought it out of bankruptcy and put it all back together and got it going.

Interviewer: And may I ask, who is we?

Thompson: My ex son-in-law and myself, [inaudible 00:36:40] Mitch Miami put it together.

Interviewer: Okay.

Thompson: And I, and.

Interviewer: That's connected in with your work, your non-flying work?

Thompson: Yeah.

Interviewer: Which is?

Thompson: I don't know, a flight developer.

Interviewer: Okay. And can you talk a little bit about the developments you've worked on and, your general career outside of aviation?

Thompson: Okay. Well, when I got out of the military, as I told you I was offered a huge promotion. I was offered a promotion from first lieutenant straight to major with a promise to lieutenant colonel within a year if I didn't screw up. I would have been the youngest colonel in the United States army if I had stayed.

But I was afraid that one day I might have to push a button and kill a million people. And I didn't think I could do that. And in fact, I told my immediate commander at the time I was in a position where I had to do that. And I told him, I said, "If I get to write code, I'm not sure I can do this. You need to know that." And this I'll never forget this general grade officer general Brown. He said, "You're from the Atlanta area, aren't you?"

And I said, "Yes, sir." And he said, "Well, what if they dropped a nuclear weapon on Atlanta, and they killed your family?" And I said, "Well, no, come till they blow and shoot him in the dark." And he said, "You'll do." But anyhow, when I decided to get out, I decided that I didn't want to blow things up and kill people. I'd rather build things.

So I got out my first business, I started building furniture out of whiskey barrels and that lasted about a year. And that was business 101. At the end of the year, I had made \$32 that wasn't after I paid myself a salary that was a total of \$32. It's not excited. I need another line of work. So I started building houses and then I started developing real estate. I've developed about 10,000 lots in Cobb County and built about half that many houses.

I did the first condominium development in Naples. I mean in Destin, Florida. And I did the first public shopping center in Georgia. We still own it at the corner of Sandy Plains and Charlotte Ford road, I still own that one. And I've done a lot, I did the apartments over here, behind Costco, up on the hill, over there at Shallow Valley, I did those.

All ships so much. It'd be harder to remember it all. I don't know how many subdivisions I've done. But they tell me I've done about 10,000 lots, residential lots in the county. I started soon as I got out of the military, after I sold that barrel furniture company, I started in the building business development business.

Interviewer: And how did your flying support that and improve that? Talk about the relationship trinity.

Thompson: Okay. The best way to look at a land to buy is from the air. Or you can tell, you learn a lot about population migration issues, which way it's headed, where to buy land, where not to buy land. And then two, when I started developing shopping centers, you'll find that the people that negotiate leases for a company like Kmart or a company like Publix, they travel all over the country. They're traveling all the time negotiating these leases and to get an appointment with them, sometimes we'll take six months because they just that

busy. So what I would do, I would say, "Where are you headed?" And I'd say, "Let me pick you up and I'll take you there." And I want him to go shake the leaves while we're on the way. And that's what I do. I set to get another pilot and I'd sit in the back and negotiate the lease with the Publix and Kmart, all of them. And it made it a lot simpler and a lot faster.

Interviewer: Right.

Thompson: And then I got to know the people very well. I'll tell you a quick story about that. I go to simulator training every year I'm required to, by the FAA for recurrent training. And we do it in a simulator. I hadn't been matched up with a guy. I had a King Air 200 at the time, and I've been matched up with a guy named Charlie Jenkins several times. He just happened to show up at the same time I would show up and in simulators training, they put you in as a crew and you'll fly the left seat, while the other guys in the right seat. And then you'll switch. Well, I've been mashed up with this guy named Charlie Jenkins. I don't know, half a dozen times. And he and I never discussed what we did professionally.

We would fly to simulator together, study together, have dinner together, go out and get a drink together and all that kind of stuff. We just never discussed what we were doing. And when I was doing his first shopping center for Publix, I wanted to make some architectural changes in it that they didn't want to agree to, or their engineers and architects didn't want to agree to them. But it was their first center in Atlanta. And we were sitting at down in the middle of a residential area. So I wanted to tone down all the commercial look and make it look a little more residential. But according to our agreement, publix, just going to call folks about \$800,000, according to our agreement to make those changes. And they didn't want to do it. So I said, "Well, I'm going to go see the boss." And I was going to see a guy named Charlie Jenkins.

Never occurred to me. The same guy. I walked in his office and both our mouths hit the floor. And I said, "Charlie, I didn't know you had nothing to do with Publix." And he said that, "My dad started Publix." And I said, "You're kidding." He said, "I didn't know, you build shopping centers." And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "We're going to open a bunch in Atlanta. I want you to do them all." Dumbest thing I've ever said in my life. "Well, Charlie, I'm getting older and I don't work that hard." As dumb as you can be because I've done every last one of them, because we had that relationship going.

But aviation has done so much for me. It's been more valuable to me probably than any college degree, anything because I flew Margaret Thatcher. I've flown Newt Gingrich several times. I flew with Roy Barnes when he was campaigning all the way around. Let's see who else, I've flown Paul Newman, Scott Walker, the governor of Wisconsin, the governor of Texas. I can't call his name.

Interviewer: Abbott.

Thompson: No, it wasn't Abbott it's another one. He was going to run for president.

Interviewer: Rick Perry.

Thompson: Yeah. And let's see who else. But anyhow, I get to meet all those people and you interact with them. And it's like, Margaret Thatcher. I picked her up in Dallas and took her down to Houston to visit friends. And then we brought her back here for the prayer breakfast. Well, coming back here, I want to just sit in the back and talk to her. And that was one of the most interesting conversations I've ever had in my life. She was an educator. She was a chemist and she taught chemistry in school. So we talked about schools quite a bit. And she was talking about a school, a high school shouldn't get over a thousand students because she said, as a teacher, you can recognize everything in classes that size something's going the wrong way, you get it correct real quick and all that kind of stuff. And I asked her, I said, "How'd you get in politics?" And she said, "Well, my father ran a little country store and I would clerk in that store."

And she said, "All the men would come around and sit around a potbellied stove and in the wintertime and talk politics and I just got interested in it. I just got so interested in it. So I got into politics." And I said, "Well, how did you wind up being the Prime Minister of England?" And she said, "well, I just kept going up and up and up." And she talked about "when I took over 10 Downing Street." That's why she called it. "When I took over 10 Downing Street, our tax rate was like 80%." And she said, "When I left office, it was down around 20%." And she talked about socialism. She said, "The real problem with socialism is, sooner or later, you run out of everybody else's money." And I thought how true that is, but it was so interesting. And another thing about her, she drank Famous Grouse.

Maybe I'm talking out of school. I hope not. But she drank Famous Grouse scotch, but she wanted it in the little airline style bottles. And I could never find this stuff. So I finally had to buy a whole case of it to get it. And she'd drink that stuff like water. So, I still got most of that case around here somewhere, but anyhow, coming back, I had one of the other pilots up front and she said to me, "Well, Mr. Thompson, if your flight duties are over, would you have a drink lips?" And I said, "Well, I've got a Budweiser up here. I'd like to have that if you don't mind." And she said, "I don't mind long as you have more than one." And so I said, "My kind of woman." I got where I really liked her, but I asked her, I said, "During the Gulf War, how did our president Bush did?"

And I've never put this way. She said, "Oh, he really got wobbly on me." That's what she said. He really got wobbly on me, but it was neat to sit there and talk to somebody like that. And then I saw her down in The Bahamas later. I've got a boat and we were down at Nassau and I had the boat in Marina and I was walking up to the hotel there at the Atlantis resort. And she was there with a whole scard of people around her. And so I didn't want to interrupt. So I didn't say anything. She walked over and said, "Mr Thompson, you're not going to speak." And I said, "Well, lady Thatcher, you were so busy I didn't want to

interrupt." "Oh no, you come on over here." But what I loved about it while we were flying her, we would go in and all these dignitaries were just clawing at each other to get time with her and get pictures and all that kind of stuff.

Well, she was spending all of her quality time with the people that were helping her. The line boys that were helping with the airplane and helping her with her baggage and all that kind of stuff. And she had two briefcases, she wouldn't let anybody carry except her. One of them had her speeches in and the other had her jewelry and her makeup in. And when we landed, she said, "Mr. Thompson, can you get them to come close to the hangar when we get to the tarmac?" And I said, "Well, sure I can." And she said, "It's the hail, you know?"

Interviewer: Well, I guess my question is, how would you get lined up to do that? I know she was at this prayer breakfast, which was a part of... What was that connection to?

Thompson: It is called [Pianis 00:45:30] annual Prayer Breakfast.

Interviewer: How was she invited to that? And then how were you contracted to fly her?

Thompson: The committee that put it together decided one year, they're going to try to get her as a keynote speaker and she agreed to do it. But part of the agreement was they had to provide transportation for her. She was coming to this country anyway to visit people. And at the time would only fly in BSO Falcon made airplanes, mainly because their systems on them are so redundant. They got quadruple redundancy on everything in that airplane. And so they're very safe airplanes. And so her, security people only wanted her flying private airplanes, flying those Falcon airplanes. And I happened to have one. Well, Bob Hightower, a friend of mine was on the committee and he called me and he said, "Lady Thatcher has agreed to be our keynote speaker, but we have to provide transportation for her. She wants to only fly on a Falcon. Would you consider taking her?" And I said, "You, Doug on ride, I will." That's one of the most enjoyable trips I've ever had in my life.

Interviewer: And tell me where you picked her up originally.

Thompson: I picked her up at Dallas Love Field.

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

Thompson: And then I took her down to Houston. Houston Hobby Airport. She was visiting a friend who was in a Methodist hospital down there and she wanted to visit with him before we came here. And then we came here that night and she wanted a Newt Gingrich to introduce her. And so Newt was in Chicago. So after we dropped her off, we went to Chicago to pick Newt up. I didn't go on that trip. The other pilots went and my son went, but it was on the worst weather you

ever saw in your life. There was a line of thunderstorms. They were held in Chicago.

Chicago's midway, I believe is where they were. And they held them for departures because of that thunderstorm. And there was a line, it went all the way down across the country. And my son was telling me they were flying down that line, trying to find a place to get through it. And they flew all the way down to Jackson, Mississippi, before they could get around the Southern end of it to come to Atlanta. And at one point they called a controller and asked them if they could get a block altitude because the weather was so rough, it just up and down. And the controller said, "You're the only ones out there. You can have any options that you want." So they had to land at Jackson, Mississippi to refuel to get back here to Atlanta. And I didn't go on a trip. And my son said it was a hell in a trip. But Newt, I had flown him quite a bit.

Interviewer: This was 99?

Thompson: I can't remember the year.

Interviewer: He would have not been the speaker.

Thompson: He was speaker of the house.

Interviewer: He was speaker, okay.

Thompson: He was Speaker of the house at that time. And I also served on the West point committee with interview prospective applicants to the military academies and I chaired the Westborn committee. So, I really enjoyed that. That renewed my faith in young people. I interviewed a young guy named Gib... I'll never forget him as long.

Thompson: My faith in young people that I interviewed a young guy named... I'll never forget him as long as I live named [Graham White 00:00:04]. Graduated high school with a four O average, captain of the football team, the baseball team, the basketball team, his school did not have an ROTC organization in his high school so he formed it, found his Colonel to command it, set the whole thing up. He set up a repelling team that would demonstrate repelling procedures to military people in the Southeast. And when I interviewed him, I asked him, I said, "Well, most young people have some hero or some mentor that they'd like to be like," and I said, "Do you have one of those? And if so, who is it?" And he named off on Napoleon's generals and I recognized the name and I just couldn't remember it and I said, "Well, why him?"

And he said, "Well, he is the one who kept advising the Napoleon not to continue into Russia, which beat Napoleon. And he said, "I've studied his strategy and everything and that's who I wanted to model myself." And so then I asked him, I said, "Well, if you go to West point and you get your commission,

you have to branch, you either got to be infantry, artillery, signal or whatever, have you thought about that?" He said, "Oh yeah, I'm going to command the 82nd airborne division." And by God he did, he went up commanding it, neatest guy I ever saw.

And Newt didn't have that many appointments that year, in fact, he was already full, they have only so many they can appoint. And I told him, I said, "Somehow some way we've got to get this kid in, he is a bolt of lightning for the military."

And I happen to know the guy that chaired the West point committee in a district South of us and Inter city was involved in that, they didn't get a lot of qualified applicants and his name was Pete, oh, I can't call his last name, he's an attorney. And I call him and I said, "Pete, I've got a kid we really got to get in this year, do you have an extra opening with that Congressman down there so we can get him in?" He said, "Yeah, I got two." And so I told him about Graham and I said, "We need to get this kid in." So that's how we got him in.

Interviewer: I see.

Thompson: I've always been well-pleased with that.

Interviewer: Cool. Tell me about Dr. King and flying him.

Thompson: Okay, the man I worked for Mr. Pope, you're in a civil rights movement, made his airplanes available to people involved in the civil rights movement when they had to have emergency transportation. Normally they travel by bus or train or whatever, or to drive but when they had to get some place fast, he would make the airplanes available and I would volunteer for those trips. And so I flew Dr. King on three different occasions, I took him to Memphis once, Birmingham once, and Washington once. And he was the most remarkable man I've ever met in my life. He'd sit up in front of the airplane with me and I talked to him about things. Some of the things he said to me, it just shook me to the core, I asked him one time, I said, "Dr. King aren't you afraid all the crazy stuff that's going on, don't you fear for your life, aren't you afraid?" He looked at me like I'd insulted him and he said, "Larry, a man is afraid to die for what he truly believes in is not fit to live," and I've always remembered that.

Like I said, he wasn't afraid of dying, he went on to say, "Besides when I'm done I know where I'm going, do you?" And that really started me down my road to salvation, but I was a stubborn sinner, took me a long time. And I told him, I'd flown some people when they're getting ready for that March in Selma over there, we're supposed to go over in the morning, come back late that afternoon but we had spent a night and I went to pre-flight the airplane, the next morning for our return trip to Atlanta and somebody had drained all the fuel out of it and fill the tanks up with water and I caught it on the preflight.

And so I got after that, when I was flying one of those I wouldn't leave the airplane, I would sleep in it if we're overnight and I'd put a piece of string around the fuel caps, a little gym clip around the engine [cells 00:51:44] so I know if somebody had tampered with it or messed with it or anything like that. And I related to Dr. King when I asked him, and I said, "Well, Dr. King, I'm a little bit scared because things that are going on," he said, "Larry you don't have to worry about that, I know how to get you to heaven," he said, "If something happens, I can guarantee I can get you into heaven, I know how to do it." And I said, "Well, that's reassuring, but I'm not quite ready to go yet because I'm still kind of like that sinning.

Interviewer: Were there other people that would fly along with you or was it generally the two of you? How did that work?

Thompson: Generally just the two of us.

Interviewer: Really?

Thompson: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, so would he then disembark and meets somebody, a car would be waiting?

Thompson: Yeah a car would be waiting on him. When I'm took him to Washington... We went into Washington National, what you could do back then, now you can't, you got to have a TSA person with you to go into Washington National, but Washington National is located right downtown and that's where I took him. And he was going to see president Johnson about trying to get the votes together for the civil rights movement to get that legislation passed, and he asked me if I wanted to go with him and I regretted a million times I didn't go because I would've got to meet president Johnson and all that kind of stuff. I regretted a million times, but I was afraid to leave that airplane unattended, I really was after that episode over there in Alabama.

Interviewer: Well, I got to ask you, what do you think it was about cliff, Pope and yourself at the time? Because I know a lot of people would not have been open to providing that kind of transportation.

Thompson: Cliff was just a very fine man, a genuinely good man, there was no evil in him at all, just a genuinely good man. And he had had some harrowing experiences in world war II and he knew some of the pilots that were part of what they call it Red Tail Squadron?

Interviewer: Tuskegee.

Thompson: Tuskegee Airmen, he knew some of them and I suspect that's where he came from. But at the time, like I said, I was not involved in the civil rights movement,

I was raised in a very prejudicial environment, but you couldn't be around Dr. King without getting involved in it, you just couldn't. I've given several speeches about that, and I tell everybody I was blind before I met Dr. King and he gave me vision but more importantly, I learned from him how to see through the eyes of my soul.

And I was deaf before I met him and I learned from him how to listen with my heart, to the agony that my fellow man was suffering at that time. So it changed my outlook on a lot of things, a lot of things being around him, he was the most remarkable man I've ever met in my life and the most courageous man I ever met. I met some very courageous people in the military, but their courage was usually an instantaneous reaction to some sort of life threatening situation, they didn't have time to think about it, but Dr. King was different, his courage was a lot different.

John Wayne once describe courage as being scared to death, but saddling up anyway, and I tell everybody Dr. King saddled up every day of his adult life and I could say, he wasn't afraid of dying I think he was a little bit afraid of the way he might die, but he wasn't afraid of dying. And then when he was killed in Memphis, I was in the military and I have always felt that that was a conspiracy, I don't think it was just James Earl Ray because James Earl Ray had escaped from a prison if I'm not mistaken up in Missouri and was living in a boarding house here in Atlanta, and how would he know where Dr. King was going to be?

Anyhow, he went to Memphis and rented a room in a boarding house there that had a communal restroom that overlooked the Lorraine motel, and how would he know, escaped prisoner how would he know where Dr. King was going to be? How would he know where to go? How would he know there'd be a bathroom overlooking the Lorraine motel.

Then he was picked up in Europe, when they picked him up, how could a escaped prisoner get a passport, get the money to go to Europe, all that kind of stuff? It was more involved. I've always felt that there's a lot more involved than what everybody said. And when I served on the Atlanta regional commission, Andy Young was mayor of Atlanta so I got to know him fairly well. And I didn't ask him this, I didn't want to at the time, but Roy Barnes had asked him what really happened the day Dr. King was killed and Roy related this to me, third person.

But Dr. King... It was in early April, it was still cold, they had a function they were going to that night, but they're going to have dinner with another minister there in Memphis and Andy Young had gone ahead to get the car when it was cold and so Andy had hollered back for Dr. King to bring his jacket. Where Dr. King was standing on the balcony talking to some people, he was on the second floor balcony talking to some people in the parking lot, I believe they were from SCLC, I believe that's who they were from.

And Andy was going to get the car and about that time, the shot rang out and Andy ran back as hard as he could go, he said, "I ran up the steps," and he said, "I knew Dr. King was gone as soon as I saw him, the bullet struck him in the neck and kind of in the face and severed his spinal column." He said he was still alive at the time, but he had died shortly thereafter. But I've always felt that there was more to that than just a simple assassination I really did.

But like I say, Dr. King of the bravest man I've met in my life, really, he was unbelievable and had a true sense of humor. One time I was at a gathering, he was giving a speech and he'd gone to Birmingham, they had a strike ongoing with sanitation workers over there and he had gone over to help with that strike, where they had a guy that headed up the public services over there, his name was Bull Connor, I think it was Eugene Connor might've been his name I don't remember, but they call him Bull Connor.

And Dr. King and him prevail when he got back, he was addressing some folks and he said, "We managed to win out over there in Birmingham and we converted old Bull Connor into a steer," and I always thought [inaudible 00:57:45] but he said he had a keen sense of humor about stuff like that. But I really grew to like him I really did.

Interviewer: That's incredible, wow.

Thompson: It was.

Interviewer: Well, I want to talk a little bit more about the airport here, if you don't mind and-

Thompson: Can I go to the restroom?

Interviewer: Of the course, please.

Thompson: Excuse me.

Interviewer: So there's some very basic questions about flying and the [inaudible 00:58:21] that kind of thing, at this airport in particular, what are the sort of permanent staff positions on a daily basis?

Thompson: Here?

Interviewer: Right.

Thompson: Well, with the County you've got an airport manager and an assistant airport manager, and they pretty much oversee the operations of the airport as it relates to the County, but then you've got tower personnel, it's a private tower and the County pays for it, it's not a federally operated tower. It's what's called a private operating tower, you see a lot of that. The county pays for it. And then

you've got Hawthorne aviation and I don't know how many people they employ. And we employed, I think like 20 or so people who we had to fix based operation here, but the employment goes way beyond that, the jobs that creates and all that sort of thing. So this is a corporation [one 00:59:13] locate here, this is our front door, this is the first thing they see when they come to Cobb County.

And I know in years past I was on the board of director of Chamber Commerce, the Rolls Royce corporation want to open a jet engine plant here in comm associated with Dobbins and I spent a couple of days with the CEO of Rolls Royce and his wife looking at housing. And they decided not to come here because housing was too expensive, then Mercedes-Benz assembly plant, it went to Alabama, they looked here as well and they didn't come here because of the same reason was housing for the employees.

But the first thing somebody sees of Cobb County, a corporation thinking about investing here, first thing they see is this airport right here. So that's why I'd always fuss the County manager and the airport manager about keeping the grass cut and making it look like something, and you can see all the landscape and stuff around it, it doesn't look like a typical airport, so you get a better feel about it when it looks like that. There's an airport out in California, prettiest airport ever seen called the Nutmeg airport, really a pretty little airport. They got flowers up, wildflowers really pretty, but airport don't have to look like airports.

Interviewer: Well, I guess my question is that, you mentioned taking the Rolls Royce executive around, how do you get looped into those?

Thompson: Well, I was on a board of Directors Chamber Commerce and they were coming and looking, and so they were-

Interviewer: You can fly, and so why not?

Thompson: Yeah, I was involved in aviation and also in construction development and all that kind of stuff, and they're all interested in housing costs for their employees and travel times and all that kind of stuff, transportation, schools, they get interested in all that. And Cobb has always been the best business County in Metro Atlanta up until just recently, I don't want to go and get into that, but up until just recently, it's been the very best business County in all of Metro Atlanta. We had a lowest taxes, highest level of services, just everything Cobb had going for it, and so a lot of people were interested in Cobb.

And then two, for a major corporation, your utility costs are relatively low here Cobb, don't get that cold in the winter don't get that hot in the summer and a lot of people disagree with that, but for a major corporation it's not like being up in New York or Chicago where it's snowing all the time and all that kind of

stuff, so it's a good place to put a company in particular manufacturing operations. And-

Interviewer: Go ahead.

Thompson: But anyhow, Hewlett Packard was here, and Hewlett Packard is one of the very best corporate partners a community can have but we had one commissioner back then whose name will remain anonymous, I didn't think too much of him, but he literally ran Hewlett Packard off and all on Hewlett Packard wanted to do was built a multi-level parking lot for the employees. And this guy was insisting that they carpool, and so Hewlett Packard said, "Hell with you." So they just moved across in the Fulton County which was terrible, it was awful.

And I'll never forget, well, I shouldn't get in all that, got to sort of mentioning some names, but I know that a big deal to try to keep them here and the guy that did that was hosting the deal to keep them here, he had everybody who is who in Cobb County and most of Georgia trying to keep them in Cobb and yet he was the one who caused them to leave, one of the key people that caused them to leave to begin with, so.

Interviewer: For the aircraft that you've piloted, you mentioned owning many planes-

Thompson: Yes.

Interviewer: Over the years, how many do you own at this time?

Thompson: We got two, well, I own one and my son own one.

Interviewer: Okay, and for flying into this airport... I know some of these questions may seem off the wall, but what's the biggest plane you brought in here?

Thompson: The biggest it'll probably be... Fastest or biggest, I fly-

Interviewer: However you measures it.

Thompson: I fly this old Falcon jet, it's eight passengers and two crew, and that's what I fly now, mostly all the time. I used that in my business and part pleasure part business.

Interviewer: How often are you flying?

Thompson: The past year I haven't been doing that much. We had a big inspection. The airplanes have to be inspected on certain intervals, we have six months inspection, yearly inspections. Well, there's one inspection that comes every 12 years and it's the big one, we literally take the airplane apart, check everything on it and so we had that one this year and it took eight or nine months to do it so we just hadn't flown that much this past year. Typically I will fly anywhere

from 150 to 200 hours a year and not so much as I used to because I'm not negotiating leases or anything like that anymore, kind of semi-retired, so I don't fly nearly as much as I used to.

Interviewer: Is that for vacation.

Thompson: Yeah, we use it to travel for personal travel, and then I do a lot of bono work if somebody is ill and got to get to a hospital or something like that we volunteer a lot of that so.

Interviewer: I see. Talk to me a little bit about aviation park, you know about the park?

Thompson: Yeah, I do.

Interviewer: And what was your involvement with that?

Thompson: Well, they asked me to speak at the opening thing and I think it's a great thing, here's why I think that, I've seen so many young people headed the wrong direction and they discover flying and flying is a narcotic, if you love it, it's passionate with you and you can't stop and you can't drink alcohol and you can't take narcotics and you can't do all of those things and maintain a pilot's license FAA will take it from you just in a second. And when you go for your medical certificate now your checked for all of that, and you have to sign an affidavit that you have not had a DUI within the past two years or whatever and you have to give them permission to check your traffic, your driver records and all that kind of stuff.

So when young people get interested in it, they wouldn't dare do anything that would mess that up. I know one guy that was headed the absolute wrong direction, I won't call his name, but he had dropped out of high school, was really headed the wrong way. He discovered flying, got his high school diploma, went to Auburn University, majored in aviation management, got on flying for Delta and now his Delta's lead simulator instructor, one of the best pilot ever saw in life, but flying completely turned him around and I've seen it a half a dozen times.

I have people come to me and say, "Boy, I'm having trouble with my son," or "My daughter's doing this, my son is doing this," I said, "Give him a couple of flying lessons, see what happens." And usually they'll take to it, it's a tremendous confidence builder and it teaches you success mechanisms, because you have to master one discipline before you can move to the next, you have to master those two before we can move to the third and so on. Well, those are success mechanisms, I use that stuff in my every day. You learn to use checklists in a business. You check everything off, make sure everything's done. It's the same thing, so I encourage people to use aviation and that park over there, we'll get young people interested in aviation or should I expect it to.

And I'll tell you, you never know how far reaching that's going to go you never know. But I can remember as a kid over [lader bell 00:18:13] park, they had an old beat 29 sitting out there we'd all play in that thing all the time, and imagine flying it like little kids and it really creates a direction a purpose and keeps you kind of down the straight and narrow. Will get you to study when you don't want to study but you've got an objective to reach. So I think the park is going to change a lot of young people's lives, yeah.

Interviewer: Are there any particular stories about this airport that you haven't shared, but you would want to see included or preserved in an exhibit there?

Thompson: I'd have to think about that one a little bit, I would really like to see Kennesaw college starting an aviation program, I really would. There's just an acute shortage of pilots now corporations are parking their jets because they don't have anybody to fly them. Delta has now recruiting people out of Auburn flight training school, and Delta has put up money for that school and they recruited directly out of that school. Well, Cobb County has an aviation community and it always has been, and you've got this airport sitting right next to that college, it's such a natural thing, I would love to see Kennesaw university start a flight school and flight program, aviation management, aeronautical engineering, the whole nine yards because Cobb's County is an aviation community, it really is.

Interviewer: Well, can you tell me about your family, your wife and children?

Thompson: I have two children and four grandchildren, my two children, Amy, she majored in Aerospace engineering at Auburn and she flies as well, however, she buys houses and fixing them up and sells them, she's in kind of development construction business for sale. And then my son, Josh, he works with me every day and his type certificate in the jet and then that other airplanes out there belongs to him, so all of us fly. And then my wife has taken what they call pinch hitter courses, if I'm flying by myself, if something happens to me, she trained enough to get the airplane back on the ground without killing herself, so we've all been involved in it.

Interviewer: May I ask her name?

Thompson: Mary and best thing I ever did was marry that woman, I'd make no mistake about it.

Interviewer: When did y'all marry?

Thompson: 1964.

Interviewer: Okay, so you married her just before you entered the military?

Thompson: Yeah. What happened to me, I wanted to go to the Air Force Academy, show you how powerful those politicians were back then. Joe took me down to see

her [inaudible 01:08:43] in the old courthouse building that old rickety court has been there for years, and I went to see Herbert and Joe took me in there and he said, "Herbert, Larry works up to airport, he wants to go to the Air Force Academy." Herbert picked the telephone and he called Eugene Talmadge Senator, I don't know if you've ever heard of Talmadge-

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

Thompson: Icon, so he was telling him, he said " [Hermon 00:21:01]," he said, "I got a boy works up here at my airport, wants to go to Air Force Academy," and in a few minutes he said, "No, we ain't going to take no damn tests, we just want get appointments." So the appointment came down, but I decided to get married instead and you couldn't go to the Air Force Academy if you're married. So that's kind of how that went down, I was already in college at the time, but I wanted to go to the Air Force Academy.

Interviewer: So you were in the military from 65 to 69?

Thompson: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you did not return to Tech after that?

Thompson: No, I didn't, I should've went back and finished but I got started in my business and it started being successful and so I just got all caught up in it and I should've studied civil engineering because that's what I use every day.

Interviewer: Well, just to clarify with the military, we had talked about a few things before we started the interview and I know that in your role it was one of those positions that there were only five or six in the country at the time.

Thompson: Yeah.

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Thompson: Okay. When I went in the military, I would get known with United Airlines and at the time that was a critical occupation because the Vietnam war was going on. And critical occupation if you were an airline pilot, you were exempt from the draft, it was like being in college, you were exempt from draft while you're going to college and if you were an airline pilot, you were also exempt because it was critical. Well, I wanted to fly for the airlines and United Airlines started hiring when I was in the first quarter of my senior year, so I applied and basically was hired by United. And so I timed everything... Well, let me back up a little bit to be qualified for the draft deferred status you had to be a line pilot with an airline, you couldn't be a pilot in training you had to be a line pilot, have a route assignment and all that sort of thing.

So I've been hired by United and I signed up for school the first quarter of my senior year at Tech and I had everything timed by the time I dropped out of school I figured it takes three to four weeks for the catch up with me, and by then I'd be in training it should be close to having a route assignment with United. So I dropped out of school to go to Denver to start that one, when I got there, they had delayed my class date by two weeks and I like two weeks having a route assignment with United when I got my draft notice.

And I was miserable, I'll never forget, had basic training down here at Fort Benning and I was sitting on my bunk one morning, my head down at four o'clock in the morning just crying the blues, and this old drill Sergeant [inaudible 01:11:26] anyway, he walked up and he put his arm around me and he said very nicely, he said, "Son, what's wrong with you?" And I told him, and he said, "Well, son, around here you might as well be happy because nobody gives a damn if you're not, now get your ass up and go."

But then they give you all these tests when you go in there, first of all, they gave me a test purely about flying and I maxed that test, and so they call me in and they said, "What'd you do in civilian life?" And I said, "Well, I was a flight instructor," and they said, "Well, we're needing flight instructors, nobody's ever made a hundred on this test, so we're prepared to offer you a warrant officer commission and you'll go to Fort Rucker and flight instructor for four years and I said, "Well, I've been doing."

You shouldn't go. You go to Fort Rucker and flight instruct for four years. And I said, "Well, I've been doing that a long time. I got up close to 4,000 hours of flying instructor, and I don't want to do that anymore. I just want to serve my two years and go back to work for United." So he said, "Well, that's fine." So anyhow, a couple of days later, after all the other tests, they call my name out one morning and told me to report to the mess hall. Well, I went to the mess hall and this colonel was over there and they had orange juice, cookies, and ice cream. And you don't get that in basic training, you just don't get that. Meat and potatoes is what you get in basic training. So this colonel says, "Private, you've qualified for officer candidate school. We need an officer and I've got the paperwork here for you to sign."

And so he started explaining to me how much time it's going to take me to get to OCS and how long I'd have to serve after OCS and all that kind of stuff. And I said, "Well, sir, I just want to serve my time and go back to United. I got a good job waiting on me, so I just want to serve my time and go on back." And he said, "Well, it's voluntary. You don't have to." And he turned around to this guy, his name was Vernon, "Sergeant Vernon, take over." And so Sergeant Vernon gets on a bicycle and I run all the way out to the rifle range with 12 miles out there and 12 miles back. As soon as I get back, I go to the mess hall and start peeling potatoes for breakfast. When breakfast was over, I started scrubbing pots and pans.

It was back out to the rifle range and back. Back to the mess hall to peel potatoes for the lunch meal. After lunch, wash pots and pans, then back out to the rifle range and back. And the Sergeant riding a bicycle, me running. I lasted two days and I told him, I said, "Sergeant Vernon, I've changed my mind about that OCS. I think that's a pretty good deal." So the next morning I go to the mess hall again, got the cookies and ice cream and orange juice. So I sign up and I go to the morning formation and this drill instructor says, "I want all of you privates to know that one day Private Thompson's going to be my boss, but today his ass is mine." And I jumped out of the frying pan into the fire, but it was good for me.

So I went to OCS, graduated top in my class. I graduated from OCS one morning at 11 o'clock, at one o'clock that afternoon, I took my first command. I was commander of a nuclear warhead, 85th USA Warhead Detachment. I would detach the West German Air Force. I was trained then as a nuclear weapons tactics and deployment expert. My job would have been to advise an army or theater level commander if he had the authorization to release nuclear weapons, which weapon to use and how to use it. Where you have an air burst, a surface burst, what size weapon kiloton, what... I could launch three weapons at the time, 1560 and a 200 kiloton weapon. To put that into perspective, the weapons that were dropped on Hiroshima Nagasaki, one was 10 megatons, one was 15.

You've seen that destruction, can you imagine what a 200 kiloton weapon would do? Yeah, mankind should never have discovered all of that. But anyhow, I was put in charge of that and that unit was ultimately disbanded, so I wound up commanding a regular purging firing unit and ultimately wound up commanding the service battery over there. And the service battery, when I was in Garrison, I had like 600 people under my command. And when I go to the missile range, I pick up an infantry company, an ordnance company, a signal company, I pick up a medical detachment, several NASA civilians and about 30 warrant officers. So I'd have about 1200 people under my command when I was on the missile range, and I was the first lieutenant and I was holding on a full colonel slot. But when it came time for me to get out, I decided to get out because I wanted to go back to flying.

So General Brown, I met with him about it. He offered me a promotion from first lieutenant strike to major, with a promise to lieutenant colonel within a year if I didn't screw up. And I would have been the youngest colonel in the military. But I knew that weapon system inside and out, I'd been involved in some service testing on a new part of that system for acceptance in the military weapons inventory. And in fact I had run a good portion of that service testing. And I had written most of the operations manuals or had revised the operations manuals for that system. They had to be written so that a private zero launching, can read and write, understand the language, can read the manuals and fire that system and hit a target. So I'd written most of the ops manuals. I rewrote the ops manuals for that weapon system.

So I knew it inside out, upside down and backwards. Well, they offered me a promotion to major, promise to lieutenant colonel and a \$60,000 re-enlistment bonus. And so I told him, I said, "Well, I have to take a week off to think about this." So I took a week off, I had a lot of leave coming to me. So I took a week's leave, checked in a hotel out there in Oklahoma and tried to figure out what I was going to do with my life. And I ultimately decided I didn't want to push a button and kill a million people. And I was afraid I'd be faced with that at some point in my life. So my greatest joy I have is building things, I built airplanes, built houses, so I enjoy building. So I decided I'm just going to get out and go build something. Basically, I know that's a very simple way of looking at it, but I didn't want to do that anymore. Mankind should never have discovered that, it really shouldn't have.

Interviewer: Well, I know we're bouncing around a little bit and we're closing in on the finish. I just want to ask you a couple of more things. You mentioned when you were quite young and you went through those pine trees, have you been in other accidents?

Thompson: No. Well, I take that back. I was teaching a guy here, an old pilot, I won't call his name, but he had barnstorm when he was a young guy and I know Jenny. You know what barnstorming is?

Interviewer: Explain.

Thompson: He would fly around and find an open pasture someplace near a city and he would land... He'd fly over the city and then he would land and then he would start giving rides for \$2 or \$3 a piece, and they called it barnstorming. And he'd just land in a pasture somewhere. Well, he had done that as a young man in an old World War I airplane. He had a Globe Swift and he didn't know how to navigate. And the way he would navigate, he had a map of the Southern Railroad system and he would fly down here to Edmund switching yard down here and pick out the railroad.

It would go on to where he wanted to go and he'd follow that railroad. Well, I'd worked with him and worked with him and he left here one day... Well, first of all, back then they had what we call flight watch, and I told him, I said, "Bob, I want you to, whenever you fly, you ask for flight watch." What are you afraid of when you fly in your flight plan. The reason why I wanted him to do that, because he had to do flight planning or cross country planning. And with flight watch, you had to estimate your time of arrival within three minutes. And if you didn't, that meant you had to figure all the winds and all that kind of stuff and that's what I wanted him to do. So I ask him to do it.

Well, I heard him filing a flight plan one day. He said, "ETA, well, that'd be Thursday or Friday sometime" and I said, "Well, we need some more lessons. Come here, buddy." So anyhow, I finally got him tuned up on that and he left here one day going to the masters golf tournament, which is East, Southeast of here. He took off and flew due West as he could go and flew slam out of sight.

Everybody thought he went down someplace, looked for him for two weeks, and finally he showed back up and I damn near kissed him because I was really worried about, not only with my name on his ticket, I really liked the old gentleman, he was a nice guy.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Thompson: And so he showed back up, I just damn near hugged him. And I said, "Bob, where in the hell have you been? We've been looking for you." And he said, "It really doesn't matter which way I go, that compass points East." And I said, "Well Bob, they don't work that way. Has the fluid come out of it or something?" He said, "No, it just points East all the time." So I said, "Let me go look at it." So I went out there and the compass is on top of the instrument panel and he had hung his earphones over that compass. Well, earphones got two magnets in them and they had that compass locked in. You couldn't have moved it with a sledgehammer. And I took the earphones off and it swung back around. He said, "Golly."

Interviewer: Oh, that simple?

Thompson: Yeah, can you believe that? And so he'd be facing, "No matter which way I go, that compass points east." But anyhow, you asked me about an accident. I was teaching him one time and he had palsy, he was flying on a waiver and he'd sit there and shake when he's flying. It's kind of eerie, but he was a pretty good pilot. But I was with him one day in that Swift in the bridge up at red top mountain, he started heading for that bridge, screaming downhill at it. And I said, "Bob, what are you fixing to do?" He said, "I want to loop that bridge." And I said, "No, not with me in here, you're not going to loop that bridge."

So anyhow, we came back to land and he ground looped the airplane across with it and he ground looped it. And there were no brakes on the right side so I couldn't get it recovered. Well, he ran off the runway up here, out here and the dirt and dust flying up over the windshield and all this kind of stuff and wiped the gear out of it. He turned around to me, he was shaking, he said, "Well, I ground looped the shit out of that, didn't I?" I said, "Yeah, Bob, you ground looped it pretty good."

Interviewer: What does it mean? Ground loop?

Thompson: It's a tail wheel airplane and they spin around like that. You lose control of them, and they get going sideways, then spin around.

Interviewer: And for the bridge, what did he mean he was going to loop the bridge?

Thompson: He was going to fly under that bridge, do a loop over it and come back and fly right back under it again. I said, "No, not with me in here Bob, we're not going to do that. Those days for me have passed."

Interviewer: I forgot. I don't think we said this on the tape, but the Osborne High School story, can you tell that again?

Thompson: Yeah, that airplane I showed you, I bought it ripped. The guy ground looped it down at the old dirt airport down on Ofsted Road. And I walked up and I said, "I'll give you \$500 for it." He looked at the airplane, he looked at me and said, "Son, you just bought yourself an airplane." I think I was 14 or 15 years old when I did that. So anyhow, I told him, I said, "I'll need a little time to get the money up. I need at least 90 days." He said, "Oh, I'll give you that." So I sold my horse, I sold my bicycle, anything I'd sell to get money. I picked up Coca-Cola bottles on the side of the road, selling them, getting the money up, collecting newspapers and selling them. Finally got the money and paid him. A couple of guys over at Lockheed helped me rebuild that airplane.

And then my senior year in high school, toward the end of my junior year I guess, I was 16. But anyhow, a buddy of mine said, "Let's go play hooky today and go get that airplane fly around or something." I said, "That's a great idea. Let's do it." So we skipped school and we got going. They'd just built a new gymnasium at Osborne High School, it had a flat roof on it. It only had three pipes sticking out of it, the vent pipe for the restroom and a pipe for the heater and it was on one side of the building. So Ray, my buddy, says, "Let's go bounce your thing off at gym over there." And I said, "That's a good idea." So we go over there and flew down, bounced it off the gym. Well, we did it three times, and the next morning I had to go see the principal.

Well, the principal read me the riot act. He was talking about, you could have killed yourself, we had to turn the whole school out. We thought the airplane was crashed and trying to get in the athletic field. And you could have tore the gym up, hurt yourself, killed other students. And he says, "I'm going to give you two weeks out of school to think about what you've done." And so I tell everybody. Little did I know, the man that was expelling me from Robertsdale High School at the time, would some five years later become my father-in-law. And then the rest of that story, Ray, my buddy Ray, was the original funsy. He was always in trouble. Motorcycles and fighting and all that kind of stuff. Ray got a Doctorate Degree in Molecular Biology with a full professorship at Wake Forest University and he did extremely good research work on the AIDS virus.

He called me one day and he said, "Larry, I figured AIDS out." He said, "The AIDS virus attaches itself to a cell through a protein bond and it takes over the operation of that cell." And he said, "I figured out how to break that bond. And now I'm working on how to kill that virus without killing everything else." And he came up, all kinds of stuff. And my wife got multiple myeloma. And when he found out about it, I don't know, several months later, he called me and he said, "Larry, has Mary ever had measles?" And I said, "I don't know. Why?" And he said, "Well, I have discovered that the myeloma virus, I can kill it. I can infect the person with the measles virus. The measles virus will kill the myeloma virus, then I can cure the measles virus. But it won't work if she's ever had measles or had a measles shot."

But now, for the guy that used to stay in so damn much trouble all the time, fighting all the time, doing this stuff to wind up, it's just astonishing. And I'll never forget, when he was at the science fair one year, he was always fooling around that kind of stuff. For the science fair, he had taken a cat and a dog, and he could go to jail for this kind of stuff now, but he was doing experimentation on tissue rejection drugs, in high school. And he had taken a cat and a dog, cut the tails off of both of them. So the dog tail on the cat and the cat tail on the dog, and he was giving them this concoction of stuff he had come up with and he wrote a big report of about two inches thick.

And then went to grade the science fair and he pulled the black cover off this cage where the dog was, to show them what he had done. Well, when he did that, the dog [inaudible 01:24:37] over dead as a nail. They expelled him from school and I don't believe anybody ever read his report. But he had a report about two inches thick and it was dead on, on some of that digital rejection stuff.

Interviewer: At what age?

Thompson: He was probably 17 years old when he was doing that. But he was always in there, we always thought he was weird, but he was always doing stuff like that.

Interviewer: Tell me just real quick, the principal's name, that was your father-in-law.

Thompson: It was Philip Adelsheimer, A-D-E-L-S-H-E-I-M-E-R.

Interviewer: Okay. All right.

Thompson: And he used to have a character. I didn't know him until I got married because he had to put the professional persona on, in high school. But actually he was quite a character. He really was. He really was.

Interviewer: That picture of you paragliding, tell me all about that.

Thompson: Well, myself and Cliff Pope's nephew, that I worked for, and a guy named Don cash, a friend of mine, we got a hold of some parachutes and we got looking at them and we thought, "Well, if we cut a couple of gores out of that thing and hook it to a power source, back of a pickup truck, it'd probably lift us up. So I won the toss to try it the first time and we just took a broomstick and cut it, stuck it through the shred lines and I just hold on the broomstick. And we had had it tied to the back of a pickup truck and they'd take off hard as they could go. About the point you start stumbling and getting drove that parachute would lift you up and we'd get 50, 60 feet off the ground.

And then when the truck stopped, you just float down.

Interviewer: There's a soft landing?

Thompson: Yeah, to a soft landing. The take off was bad, but the landing was soft. But the newspaper wanted to get a picture, but [inaudible 01:26:10] and took a picture. That's what that is back there. But at the time I was engaged to my wife, and the people she worked with, she showed them that picture and they said, "Are you going to marry this idiot?" So the best thing I ever did was marry her.

Interviewer: And when did you all marry?

Thompson: 1964.

Interviewer: Okay, I have two more questions. The next to last is, if you were going to explain to young people, the most important elements of flying, it's not the time management or the list, that kind of thing, it's more the aeronautics. What are the basics of flying? What do you need to master?

Thompson: Well, that's a hard question to answer. First, you got to like it. You see two kinds of people, some people like it; the ones that like it, love it. And they love it when it becomes a passion. And then some people just don't like it and it scares them and they just don't want to have anything to do with it. So first of all, you got to like it. And then once you get to like it, it's like a narcotic, you get addicted to it, you can't stop. And like I said earlier, I've seen it turn so many young people around. It's unbelievable when they discover flying, but all the disciplines you have to know, it teaches success mechanisms. You have to know a lot about designs, aerodynamics...

Speaker 1: Hey, Larry. [someone enters the room]

Thompson: Hey, George. How are you doing?

Speaker 1: Good.

Thompson: But you have to know a lot about design, aerodynamics, principles of flight, lift, drag, all that kind of stuff. What makes an airplane turn. Actually, the lift makes it turn. And just a lot of stuff, a lot of disciplines you have to learn. But in the process of learning all of that, that's where you learn the success mechanisms because you got to master one discipline before you move on to the next and so on. And you use that everywhere, you use it in business, I use it in business all the time. Checklist, you use all the time. But above all, you have to learn to be methodical.

You train a certain way, you fly the way you train and you go by checklist and you don't leave anything out even if you've done it a million times. You know it by heart, you still go with that checklist and you have to know what you're looking for. People have even known, with checking gas they open a gas cans... I mean gas cap. Looking at "Yeah, gas in check. Won't be any gas in there" because they've done it so much. So you have to know what you're looking for. So it's quite a process to learn to fly. It really is, but...

Interviewer: And you were doing some of this stuff so young, that's what is interesting to me, putting together the basics at that age. Were you referring to manuals or was it just something you had a feel for?

Thompson: I had both. I had a feel for it and then when I started building model airplanes, I learned a lot about aerodynamics. I started building a control line model that you hold with your hand. When I first started building, the things would come back over on me because you couldn't get up enough centrifugal force to keep the lines up. So I finally realized that wing is what's lifting it, so I would just make the inside wing longer than the outside wing and you get more lift, which would keep the cables tight, then I could fly. So I started doing that and that's when I began to learn about aerodynamics, about lift and lift coefficients and all the technical stuff. I'd read books about it. I didn't understand it all, but I'd understand enough at that age to where I could incorporate it into what I was doing.

And that little aeroplane I built when I was in my teens, I damn near killed myself in, I had calculated the center of gravity on the airplane. Most airplanes balance around what's called 25 center mark, to mean aerodynamic core. And about 25% of that core is where an airplane balances. And it's a center of lift. If you look at a wing, it's shape, like that, well, the center of that high point on that wing is about where the center of lift is. And the way they work, the air has to go over that wing and under the wing at the same amount of time. But it goes further over the top surface than it does the bottom surface.

So as a result, you're creating a low pressure area on top of the wing and a high pressure area on the bottom of the wing and that's where the lift come from, that what makes them fly. But I learned a lot about that from building model airplanes. And then, so when I got into real airplanes, it was just natural. I worked at what was called a dope and fabric shop for a little while, when they the old airplanes they covered them in fabric and Irish linen. And you put a paint on because he had a lacquer paint, but they called it aircraft dope. And it tightens that fabric up. Well, I've worked in a dope and fabric shop a lot, so I learned a lot about airplanes and I know I would always test fly. We recoded on a Ramco champion one time and the aileron cables on that airplane come together right above the pilot, two turnbuckles. And if you get them reversed when you put them together, the ailerons are reversed.

And so I took off and they were reversed. And the hardest thing in the world, if you want to turn left, you give it left stick and it goes right. So we had to sit there and think for a minute. If I hadn't worked on, I wouldn't have known what was wrong, I'd probably crash the thing. But it's really hard if I wanted to make a left turn, I'd put the stick to the right, it is hard.

Interviewer: To get used to it.

Thompson: Yeah, but I got it back down and we changed them around and it was fine. But I learned a lot from all of that. And then when I started studying air dynamics in

college, that's when it got really sophisticated. All the math that got involved in it, you weren't just wanting guesswork. You could determine the center lift and all kinds of stuff. And you have force vectors on certain parts and then you'd have to calculate, teach you how to calculate, how much force was on this and then you study strength and materials, get into the real technical aspect of it when I was in college. So it was a very difficult field to study, actually. It really is.

Interviewer: Yeah, it's completely greek for me.

Thompson: Yeah, it's a difficult field of study. To give you an example. I would go to Georgia State and I'm not running Georgia state, they are two different institutions. But I'd go to Georgia State sometimes in the summer or at night to take the courses I had to have to graduate from Tech, like Georgia history and US government. You had to have that stuff. Well Tech's an enormous school. It's enormous. And so I'd go over there to take those classes. Well, when I transferred over there, they will accept anything from Tech, but Tech won't accept very much from them.

But when I transferred over there, the girl says, as she looked at it all, she said, "Well, you can just take a semester or two. You can get a degree in physics, you can get a degree in math, all you've got to take is one quarter or one semester. And I said, "Well, I want to get it from Tech." So I never did do it. But Tech was a tough school for me, it really was. I thought I was stupid. I'd worked my can off and barely get by. It was hard, really hard.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well to finish up. Are there people that you would recommend me reaching out to for more history of the airport, people who would, like you, have that connection to the early days of the airport?

Thompson: Well, I can't think of anybody right now. We need to go through this paperwork.

Interviewer: All right.

Thompson: Robert [McCollum 01:33:07] gave a speech in here later on about the history of the airport and there's a lot of stuff that came clean from that. Also about the history of Dobbins, which is so interesting. You need...

Interviewer: Excellent.

Thompson: You need to look at Dobbins.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, I appreciate it, Mr. Thompson. And we'll conclude there.

Thompson: Okay.