

# Robert E. Stroud

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Conducted by Katherine Markee on May 25, 2010

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The following interview was conducted with Robert E. Stroud [RS], Director Emeritus Purdue University Airport for the Purdue University Oral History Program. It took place on Tuesday, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Schlemann Instruction Room in the Archives and Special Collections. The interviewer was Katherine Markee [KM], the Oral History Librarian.

**KM:** Welcome, Mr. Stroud, and thank you very much.

**RS:** You're more than welcome. I'm happy to do this.

**KM:** Okay. Let's start with tell us where and when you were born and about your early years.

**RS:** I was born, November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1935, right in the middle of the depression.

**KM:** Where were you born, what city?

**RS:** I was born in Elkhart, Indiana, which at that time was the band instrument capital of the world. Everybody in my family ended up in the instrument business, except me. I was the black sheep. My dad worked for Ludwig, Leedy, Bishers and Conns, and actually worked at the drum factory when the Purdue drum was built.

**KM:** Super.

**RS:** It was...he would tell about how long it took them to raise the steer down in Argentina, all by itself in an area that had no barbed wire so that they could get big enough drum head. My mother worked in the concertnada\* division which was the electronic organ division. My sister worked at the Hartley flutes. Of

course being the black sheep, I came to Purdue and got into aviation and entered Purdue in 1953.

**KM:** Let's back up and tell about grade school and high school and things, and any activities in high school.

**RS:** Oh, in high school.

**KM:** And teachers.

**RS:** Well, some fantastic teachers in the college prep area. Rex Harvey was the math teacher. He did such a good job that when we got here, we were able to skip first semester mathematics. Galen Wiener\* who was speech. We had our own little radio program that the high school did for the local radio station, and I worked on that. Then I was a student manager for the football team, much too small then as I am now to play football. I didn't get over five feet until I was a freshman at Purdue. So I was the manager and one of my chief claims to fame was wrapping the ankles of Everich Barnes\* who was a halfback here at Purdue and went on to the Cleveland Browns. Everich had two brothers. They were just a year apart, so those three were interesting to watch as they developed.

**KM:** Sure.

**RS:** We had the radio station program we worked on. I was of course in the National Forensic League and the Honor Society.

**KM:** How large of a school? Was it boys and girls, co-ed?

**RS:** Oh yes it was co-ed.

**KM:** About how large was your class?

**RS:** Our class as I recall was about four hundred. There was only one high school in Elkhart at the time.

**KM:** Would this have been nine through twelve?

**RS:** This would have been 19...

**KM:** No, the grades would have been nine through twelve.

**RS:** Nine through twelve. Yes. There was only the one high school. There are two now. So from the three junior highs, it melded into the one high school. The high school was nine through twelve. So when we went into the ninth grade, we were just one big melting pot. It was interesting. The facilities and that at Elkhart High were, I think, quite exceptional for that time. We had an excellent faculty. We had classes we could take in the morning before school started. I had a chemistry class. It was Chemistry 13. You know the classes were named by the grade you were in, and that started at seven o'clock in the morning. It was an analytical chemistry class. Consequently when I got here again I was given the option of going into an advanced chemistry, in essence taking freshmen chemistry in one semester. So we got an excellent education at Elkhart.

5:00

**KM:** Sounds like you did. Right.

**RS:** I've always been proud of what they provided up there. Our football teams weren't the greatest, basketball teams were competitive.

**KM:** (Laughs.) Basketball has always been strong in this state.

**RS:** That's true. It was a good time in high school, and I think out of my graduating class, there were about fifteen of us that came down here to Purdue.

**KM:** Did you come down here beforehand, and how had you selected Purdue?

**RS:** Well, it wasn't so much that we were selecting as the high school assigned us. It was a given fact that if you were in the science, mathematics area, you were going to go to Purdue. If you were in the humanities area, you were going to go to IU. If you wanted to teach you went to Ball State. So it wasn't so much that we chose where we were going. These were the places we heard about.

**KM:** (Laughing) I hear you. But did you come down in advance thought, like maybe the summer before? Did they have any...had you seen the school before you came?

**RS:** I had seen it once because I was down here for a speech contest. But there were no high school introduction programs at that time. The first time I saw the campus was in the fall when I came down.

**KM:** Where'd you live when you came down?

**RS:** Hall X which is now Meredith which surprises some people because that was built as a women's hall. But when it was opened in '54, '53 there were not enough women to fill a hall.

**KM:** Was it the same size it is now? That's why they called it the X, didn't they?

**RS:** The X, yes, and interestingly I found out when I got in the Air Force that the X was used by SAC as a practice bomb sight. (Both laugh.) By SAC, but

the...yeah, we got here in the fall of '53. It had opened midyear in I think in '52. So the hall organization club, Excalibur, was already established. We melded right in. We opened the radio station down in the basement. What had been assigned as the women's hair washing room was the record library. The radio station was the only place where women could be in the hall other than the main entrance.

**KM:** Not even in the entranceway?

**RS:** Well, the main entrance, so they could be there.

**KM:** Oh, I see.

10:00 **RS:** But we had an exemption because we also fed our programs to the women's halls. Later on we connected up with WCCR, Cary Hall, and became the Purdue Residence Network sharing time between the two stations. So that was fun and that was kind of a carry on from my radio work in high school. Excalibur, I served on the legislature two years, junior year I was secretary of the club, and fourth year I was public relations director for the club. I became a member of Tomahawk and all that sort of thing that followed.

**KM:** What was the campus like in those days? What was the campus like? Tell us a little about campus life, and of course any of your campus studies.

**RS:** Campus life, there were about 14,000 of us on campus.

**KM:** Okay.

**RS:** Of course we walked from, all the way from the X down to the campus, which doesn't seem very far now. Behind X were the married students barracks, the veterans, and those barracks also lined what is now Airport Road. So we freshman, when I came in I was just seventeen. We were in classes with twenty something veterans.

**KM:** Sounds a little bit like after World War II when they came back and were students.

**RS:** That's right. That's right. These men and women were very serious students. Those of us who came from high school which is like we were in a canoe flowing down the river. They were here for a purpose, and they were great competition in the classes.

**KM:** I heard similar things for those who experience the post-World War II, the young ones and the ones that came back. They were very intense because they had lost a lot of time. They needed to get done and on.

**RS:** That's right, but they were so great to work with. Of course in my field, I was in the Air Transportation Program, which was part of the Aeronautical School. So quite frequently I would see a student named Neil Armstrong walking up and down the hallways. Never, never ran into that electrical engineer, Cernan, but Roger was in my class, but I believe he was a mechanical engineer. So I saw him on campus and knew him, but Armstrong I'd pass in the hallways all the time. So when they announced the astronauts and they said Armstrong, I could look at the picture and say, "There he is." Of course Armstrong and Cernan and I

15:00

met several other times after they were in the astronaut corps when they were out at the airport. The campus, when we came, was a different world than it is now. The only students allowed to wear denims were the Ag's if they were going on the Ag School campus. The women all wore skirts which was the same in Amelia's time. She was quite different. The only time they didn't wear skirts was when they were going to their gym class in the women's gym which is right there at the beginning of the campus by Elliot Hall. They were allowed to wear their blue tank suits.

**KM:** Their gym outfits.

**RS:** Shorts and blue shirts. Other than that, they were to wear skirts.

**KM:** Did you have to wear a tie? You didn't have to wear a tie to class, did you? Shirt and tie to class?

**RS:** We had to wear a tie in the residence hall for evening meal.

**KM:** Was that served or a buffet?

**RS:** No, it was a cafeteria line. No, we had to wear a jacket for Sunday lunch along with a tie. But you never wore shorts to anything. The attitude was quite different on the campus, but we were comfortable with it. I mean there was no problem.

**KM:** A lot of the social activities revolved around the Union. That where most of those were held, or...?

**RS:** The Union had a lot of social activities. But within the residence halls, there were organizations like Excalibur. I would say most of our activities were related to the



residence hall. X, for example, had its' own band. We had connections in one of the dining rooms, so if the band wanted to do a show, we could have them broadcast from that dining room through WRX and WCCR into the women's dorm.

**KM:** Oh wonderful.

**RS:** So, yeah, we had our own dance band, so when we wanted to have a dance, it was there. Other than that, I would say, we were involved with activities at the Union very little. We did have one, we had Miss Hillsborough, I don't know if you've ever heard of her. She would go around to the residence hall units and teach us dining etiquette.

**KM:** I've heard of her. Was it Mary Louise or Mary Rose or something like that, Hillsborough? She was affiliated with the Union. Isn't that right?

**RS:** Yes, so that was the way life was on the campus then.

**KM:** What was your...what school were you enrolled in? What was your major?

**RS:** I was in aeronautical engineering, the air transportation.

**KM:** Where were your classes held primarily?

**RS:** About fifty-fifty, campus and airport, because our first two years in our program were essentially aeronautical engineering. But in our option, our last two years were more business oriented. We still had aviation classes like air cargo and airline operations, but all of a sudden, I found myself with a major in economics as well as aero engineering.

**KM:** Because of the courses that you took?

**RS:** Because of the courses. We had a lot of economics courses. We had two years of law and investments and I don't know what all, a lot of economics courses.

**KM:** Sure.

**RS:** Labor econ.

**KM:** I want to stop for a second? For the researchers, these business courses he's talking about, Krannert was not built.

**RS:** That's correct.

**KM:** So they were held elsewhere on campus in other buildings.

**RS:** That's right our courses were, some in Heavilon Hall, some in the Recitation Building. They keep renaming these buildings.

**KM:** I know. Right. What about ROTC?

20:00 **RS:** ROTC was required. However I was exempted because when I was about seven, I developed rheumatic fever and had a heart murmur. So I was exempted from ROTC which gave me the ability to take an extra course every semester.

**KM:** Sure.

**RS:** So I had a few more electives. But ROTC at the time was a big program on the campus. It was unusual not to walk across campus and see a dozen guys in uniform. We didn't see any women in uniform. I had a good friend of mine in the

hall that lived next to me who was in Navy ROTC and became commander of the local ROTC brigade. Subsequently he went into regular duty after graduation, was flying in Korea and ran into a mountain. So we lost him. Trail was a soloist in the Glee Club, and if you are ever able to find an old recording that has Cool Water, you will hear this tenor singing this refrain, and that was Trail.

**KM:** Oh wow.

**RS:** His name was Ray Traylor.\* We called him Trail or Old Bulldog Tray, whatever worked. He was quite a guy. At the time his roommate went into the Marine officer corps. He was a big, strapping guy. It was funny. He'd come back from training every summer, and he'd say, "I'm a Marine. I'm trained to kill." "They really got to you this summer, Bruce."

**KM:** (Laughing) I'm ready to face the enemy.

**RS:** That's right.

**KM:** Did you serve in the military at all, then?

**RS:** Yes.

**KM:** Oh, you did. After graduation?

**RS:** After graduation. We had a choice, go find someplace to enlist or wait for the draft. Well, I told them I never looked good in brown or green. I looked okay in blue, so I would go for the Air Force. So I took the exams and went over to the air base over in Illinois and took exams, took physicals, passed through on the written, passed three physicals. I told each of them, I said, "I had a heart murmur

when I was a kid.” They said, “You don’t have a heart murmur. Your heart works very well.” I understood that sometimes as you got older, it would go away. So then I was in the Air Force. I was down at Lackland for training, went through another physical and the doctor said, “You’ve got a heart murmur.” I said, “That’s what I was telling them.” He said, “Well, you have.” At that time all officer candidates had to meet the same physical requirements as pilots. You could not be a pilot with a heart murmur. So I was already in the Air Force, and they say, “You’re going over to the other side of the base.” So I was already in basic training. I had taken the qualification test and the NCO in charge said, “Well, you scored high enough, you could have any career field you want.” He says, “We have to let you have a career field associated with your degree if possible.” He said, “That would be a cargo loader.” I said, “What else is available?”

**KM:** What are my options?

25:00

**RS:** He said, “You could go to language school at Syracuse University.” I said, “That’s where I’m going.” So then I spent a year at Syracuse University learning Russian and served as a Russian interpreter while I was in the Air Force. Almost two years in Turkey. While it was a disappointment not being able to get a commission and fly, it was an interesting time.

**KM:** I’m sure it was.

**RS:** My flight happened to be on duty. This is all unclassified now. We intercepted Russian radar transmissions. We used their radar to follow the U-2’s. We were following the U-2 coming out of Pakistan one night, and all of a sudden it

disappeared from the track. They always put in a three digit code along with the bearing distance. They had just changed the code. We had a choice, we've lost the track or the aircraft is down. Immediately the balloons went up. We had the capability of getting the message on the desk of the President within fifteen minutes. So consequently, we sent a message to Ike and said, "Sorry, Ike, but it looks like we lost an airplane." and the Russians confirmed that of course with a great deal of pride. Unfortunately we couldn't tell Ike whether the pilot survived or not. All we knew was the airplane was down. Well the pilot survived and the rest of that is history. But that was one exciting time. I say exciting, but it was frantic.

**KM:** (Laughing) Probably.

**RS:** Another time I was working as an analyst, and one of the men from the Morse Code division called me over. He said, "Sarge, I've got some plain text." Because most of it came in the three digit code. He did and it was plain text Russian. What it said was, and I think my memory's pretty close to accurate on this, "The capsule has landed. Lica and the others are okay. It will go to Moscow tomorrow." Well, Lica was the dog. So this was the first recovery of a live subject from space. Of course, we shot that out directly. I had a little problem with the brass at that point because something like this, the captain gets on his phone and says, "Colonel, you got to come out here." All of a sudden, I got two bird colonels, a lieutenant colonel and a couple captains, and I'm standing there with the message in my hand, and with my four stripes wondering why did I say anything. They said, "This is fantastic, we're a bunch of heroes." I called the colonel the deputy commander of the group. He was a flying type. The

30:00

commander of the group was an ex-teacher. I felt this was the time to talk to a flying type and not a teacher. I said, "Colonel, this was a deliberate feed to us." He said, "Well, what do you mean?" I said, "It was on a frequency that they usually use just to transmit the comings and goings of aircraft, a very non-discreet frequency. It was sent in plain language Russian Morse Code, and the operator tells me that the transmitter was a little stronger than normal, and the keying was very deliberate." I said, "This does not make sense if you've got a big event, and you want to let your people know and nobody else, you would do just like the Japanese did in Hawaii and use code words like Tora, Tora, Tora, instead of 'We just bombed Pearl Harbor.'" And I said, "I had one of my operators get on Radio Moscow immediately." I said, "Ten minutes later, Radio Moscow made the announcement in English." And he said, "Well, what makes this suspicious?" I said, "Well, we never believe anything the Russians tell us. They tell us they invented the radio which they call "ra-dio." They tell us they invented television which they call televideon. They tell us that they invented the airplane that they call "aeroplan." They tell us they invented the airline which is "Aeroflot." They know that if they just send it out in their own normal use, we're not going to believe it. So they fed it to us for us to intercept." The colonel said, "Well, I think you've got a point." So he called over the group commander and talked to him. The final decision was, "No, it wasn't fed to us. We were a bunch of heroes." So at that point I said, "Yes, sir." So that's the way it went. But it was a very interesting time over in Turkey, and especially when they decided to change governments not quite the way we do. The army headquarters was across the

Bosporus from Istanbul. So they just came across, and they made an announcement that all roads were closed, railroads would not run, aircraft would not fly. Any vehicles caught on the railroad or on the roadways would be shot by the air force. They in fact did get at one deputy minister that way. The way the things were structured in Turkey, we were on a Turkish base. The US had no bases in Turkey. All the bases we were on were Turkish bases. Consequently we had a detachment of Turkish infantry on the base. One of them would be on base along with one of the Air Force air policemen. So the poor lieutenant in charge of his Turkish infantry, they've just had a change of government. Are we still on their side or not? So he does the safe thing, and he has his infantry surround the operations building. We're coming and going to work, and we're walking between them. "Hey, how are ya?" and they wave at us and everything. But he had us surrounded just in case.

**KM:** To be on the safe side, yeah.

**RS:** It took him twenty-four hours to get orders that said, "The US is still our friend." Then everybody went back to barracks. So, you know, there were interesting times.

**KM:** Okay, let's talk about...what was your career path before you came to Purdue. After you got out of the military, is that when you came to the airport?

**RS:** Yes, I got out of the Air Force in the middle of a recession. I was fortunate I read about the change in management at the airport. It was changing from the Purdue Aeronautics Corporation handling the management to Bill Fletemeyer\* who was

35:00

director of Service Enterprises. It was mentioned somewhere that he really had no aviation experience or background. So I sent him a letter, and fortunately for me, I told him about my experience at Purdue and everything. He went over and talked to Bill Burner\* who was, when I was on campus, was manager of Hall X, later became in a higher position at residence halls.

**KM:** I recognize his name.

**RS:** Yeah, terrific guy. Bill, fortunately for me, said, "Don't question it. Hire him." So I was asked down for an interview. So he gave me a job as an assistant two, the director, with the intention that I would be here maybe two or three years and then move on to a larger airport. It would be used sort of as an intern training program. So that's when I came. At that time, a good friend down at the Indianapolis airport said that, "When you're through with your training at Purdue, you got a shot down here." In the meantime, Bill Fletemeyer, he never would admit what it was, but I think it was a little stroke or a heart attack. So I was left there with an airport on my hands and relying on Lytle Freehafer\* who was the VP at that time, and we struggled through. When we got done, at Lytle's suggestion, my title was changed to assistant director. They asked me to stay, not just as intern. So, you know, that's the beginning of a nineteen plus year career.

**KM:** Okay. Yeah. One of the quotes is, "Most of my time is dedicated to meeting the needs of the community, and it's the second busiest airport in Indiana." You



became the director, airport manager, in 1980. Let's talk a little bit about that, some of the things...

**RS:** About becoming the director?

**KM:** The responsibilities and your challenges, the community airport's role, liaison to the community, both the Purdue and the business community.

**RS:** Yeah, when Bill Fletemeyer took over the airport, it began a transition of the airport from the university's airport to the community's airport. At that time there were two other airports, Aretz just off of 25 northeast of town, and Halsmer in the general area of SIA, neither of which had the facilities that we did. The big emphasis of the change of the airport came with the development of MPATI which was the Midwest Program on Airborne Television Instruction.

**KM:** Right.

**RS:** A pioneering program, but those DC-6AB aircraft required a longer runway than what we had. So the first thing they did was build the longer runway which was 1028. Before that we had the short one, 523, and a grass strip which you can still see because it had French drains in it. Now French drains are simply ditches filled with gravel so the water runs in and runs through the gravel and drains into the soil. The Lake Central DC-3's could handle a turf runway with no problem, so we had the one paved runway and the grass runway. So then the long runway, 5200 feet long to handle the DC-6, and it was tight even for a DC-6. MPATI was a unique program broadcasting televised classes to five states, part of Michigan, part of Illinois, part of Wisconsin, part of Kentucky, part of Ohio as well as all of

40:00

Indiana. They flew over Montpelier at about 14,000 feet, flew a figure 8 pattern. The antenna was retractable and came up under the belly of the airplane. When they were in flight, it was put down and it was vertical. It was on gimbals so that as the airplane would bank to turn, the antenna would stay straight down, so it didn't interrupt them. That operation was very similar to a military operation. They had two aircraft. They had duplicate tapes on both airplanes. When the one took off no matter what the weather was Monday through Thursday at about seven o'clock. They got up into their broadcast position, and they started their tapes. The tapes were started on the one in the hanger at the same time. So if the one broadcasting had a problem, the one in the ground could take off, and they would go up. They would synchronize their tapes, and I've been told by teachers who were on the ground, that there would be just a little flicker on the screen, and they would continue broadcasting. Each aircraft carried two days tapes, so in case they couldn't get back to Lafayette because of the weather, they still had the tapes for the next day, and they would fly that next day. If they were flying the next day, and it looked like the weather was going to be bad the third day, a station wagon was loaded with the day's tapes and off they went sometimes almost as far as Atlanta to get the tapes down there. It was a very much like a combat operation. I mean, it was serious business.

**KM:** It's nice. I'm glad you shared that because there are not many people...Dave Moses of course was involved, the audio-visual center, and I knew Dave. He told me a little bit about it, but a lot of people today...You know, it doesn't exist, and you had to be around that time. I remember reading about it originally in the

newspaper. This is before I even came to Purdue, so I knew about it even before I came.

**RS:** Each one of the aircraft had two UHF stations on it, and they were broadcasting two stations at the same time.

**KM:** Just a breakthrough. It's amazing that they were able to pull it off.

**RS:** The electronic texts were provided by Westinghouse. The maintenance men on the 6's, since Purdue Airlines people at that time were really DC-3 men still, were provided by an independent company, All American Aviation. Pilots were Purdue Airlines pilots. Jerry Goldman served as chief pilot. Each pilot had his own idiosyncrasies. For example, there was one of the captains...they said, "Everything is ready to take off." He would reach in his pocket for his toothpick. The airplane didn't go until he had his toothpick.

45:00

**KM:** Did it run during the school year only, and not during the summer?

**RS:** I'm sorry?

**KM:** Did it run just during the school year?

**RS:** During school year. Correct, correct.

**KM:** Then there wouldn't be any broadcasting during vacations, just during when classes would be.

**RS:** Well, you see, they would be broadcasting because when you're dealing with that many states, their vacations are at different times.

**KM:** Good point. I understand. That clarifies that.

**RS:** So vacations didn't make any difference except for Christmas Day, maybe Thanksgiving Day.

**KM:** Summers were pretty much standard, you know.

**RS:** Yeah. Well, even within our county, the vacation's different. But that was a fascinating program. Those at the airport learned quite a bit from it. We learned we had to change the asphalt mix on the runways because at that time, there were no parallel taxi ways. They had to come down and make a turn on the runway. Now we're talking about a 106,000 pound airplane pivoting on a wheel. So after every landing, especially in summer, we would go out with the shovels and scoop up that ridge of asphalt that got shoved up. We learned from it. Our gophers at the airport learned to time the flights pretty well. We call them gophers. They're thirteen stripe ground squirrels of which we had a tremendous population because the airport was an ideal environment. At that time our runway lights had a yellow cone over them presumably so they'd be easier to see in the daytime. Somebody in Washington finally woke up and figured out if a pilot could see that yellow cone, he could probably see the runway and didn't need the yellow cone. We were able to get rid of those things. While we had them, it made an ideal environment for the ground squirrels because they could have their hole come up right under the light. They had this big rain cover, so their holes never got wet. The unfortunate part was that we had underground cable, and there was a certain amount of electrical leakage out through the conduit and salt would

form on that cable. Ground squirrels loved that salt and sometimes they would get carried away and eat through the insulation. We'd flip on the lights, and only half of them would come on. So then the campus electricians would be out there using various techniques to try to find the one that was causing the problem out of a 110 lights. So when we redid the runways, a 1972 project. The runway used to end right here, and it was extended. It was widened from a 100 to a 150 feet. We extended the short runway another 800 feet, put in the parallel taxiway so they no longer had to make a turn. Of course by the time we made all of these improvements which would help the MPATI aircraft, they were gone and the program was gone. At that time Purdue Airlines was using DC-6's as transporters as part of their certificate as a non-skid carrier, so they were able to take advantage of that. When we did this, we put all the runway light cable inside metal tubing to make things a little more difficult for the ground squirrels.

**KM:** Good point. Yeah.

50:00 **RS:** The ground squirrels however were a source of enjoyment for our hawks. We had four red tail hawks who considered the airport to be their home. One would always be positioned out here by the T hangers one out here at the southeast corner, one about half way down the runway and one at the end of the runway. They each had their own territory. These hawks were very well behaved. They stayed away from the flight patterns, and they worked the ground squirrel population. We only had one bird impact, and that was a young hawk who hadn't quite learned the procedure yet.

**KM:** The new kid on the block.

**RS:** Yeah. We also had a considerable amount of other wildlife. One muskrat we had who loved the drainage ditches and the culverts under the taxiways, misbehaved and came up around the building and would not move out. So we had to shoot him. We had fox who got along with us very well. Everything south of the primary runway was fox territory. The culverts were ideal places for them to have their young. They were protected from the weather. Only one occasion did we have a problem with a fox. He came up around Hangar 4. The tower called me and said, "We've got a fox out here by the hangar. So I got out in the truck and went over their direction. He came over and got on this taxiway, ran down the taxiway ahead of me, stopped at the runway, looked both ways, crossed the runway, came over into this area which was their territory. He sat down. I drove the truck in a circle around him, and he just sat there and watched me like, "I'm on my side of the runway." (KM laughs.) And our line crew who had the assignment every morning to run the runways to check for any debris or anything and also to check all the runway and taxiway lights. Well, one of the male foxes decided this looked like fun, and they would come out and meet him here, and they would run in the grass alongside the truck as he made that inspection. When they got back and went to the ramp, he went back over to his side of the airport. But he would be there every morning just like clockwork.

**KM:** That's interesting.

**RS:** Finally the activity on the airport reached such a level that it was uncomfortable for them to raise their young there. So then they moved on into the gravel pit. The deer, before we extended the runway here, this was farmland. There's a creek over here that was part of their transit path. They would come down the creek, cross the farmland and go down into the gravel pit. We extended the runway right across their walkway. So we had some issues with the deer. We would get a call from the tower, "We got deer on the runway." We'd go out and chase them, just stay behind them, keep them moving and they got over the fence. We finally had to raise the fence to a ten foot fence. Recently it was elevated to fourteen feet. But we pretty much directed their path around the end of the runway. But that was the only issue we had with them. By and large our wildlife problems were interesting. We had a wildlife expert on the campus who could advise us. We had this particular hanger, Hanger 4, had big eaves extending over it. We had quite a colony of sparrow hawks that had their nests up there, but they were never a problem. Generally speaking the birds were not a problem, the deer were not a problem and the fox of course were too smart to be a problem to anybody. The wildlife issue was interesting.

55:00

**KM:** Yeah, I think so. Right. What are some of the things that you did, made changes you when you first took over? Talk a little about that.

**RS:** Yeah, we took over in 1961 when I came in. First of all we took over all refueling activities. We took over the bulk farms, the trucks for fueling aircraft, hired a crew, trained them in fueling aircraft, trained them in the issues regarding the safety of the fuel, keeping it clean and all this. The real change came when we

got into the jet area with the jet fuel which is essentially kerosene, but very pure. Aviation gasolines were colored. The 80-87 was red, the 91-96 was brown and the 100-115 was purple. You could get a glass of gasoline and tell which grade it was. Jet fuel was clear as water. It had to be. The nozzles on the jet aircraft were very small. Jet fuel itself, we could have a bowl of it here, and I could take a match, drop it on the jet fuel, and it would not burn. The jet fuel had to be vaporized. It was kind of discouraging when we had to clean the filters on the jet fuel farm every morning to make sure there's no sediment or anything. The fuel we drained out into a white bucket, went into a fifty-five gallon drum which the fire department would pick up when they wanted to run a practice fire. They would put it out in their fire pit, and the first few times it was funny to watch them. They'd take a railroad flare, and they'd go and they'd touch it. Nothing happened. They'd touch it again and nothing happened. They'd drag it through the jet fuel and nothing would happen. Well those of us who knew were being very entertained by this, but finally we took a five gallon tank of gasoline and poured it on top of the jet fuel and they lit that. Now once the heat from the gasoline fire started vaporizing the jet fuel, it would slowly spread over the pile.

**KM:** Sure. I see.

**RS:** That was always an interesting thing. People would say, "We've had a spill of jet fuel. Call the fire department." "Go get a bucket of water". (Both laugh.) "Throw a bucket of water on it." Those were some of the changes that occurred, the technology changes. The de-icing of aircraft changed drastically. A DC3 could sit out there and have snow on its wings and tails, no problem, fire up the engine



1:00:00

and go. We could have four inches of snow on the runway. The DC3'd go. The DC6 wasn't much different. We tried to keep it down to two inches of snow. With the jets, a Boeing 707 will never get off the ground if there's a half an inch of slush on our runway. That slush creates enough drag on the wheels, and being thrown back on the fuselage that it will never get off the ground no matter how long the runway. Consequently as we saw more and more corporate jet activity, our requirements on snow removal went up drastically. So then instead of using just plows, we had to use a runway sweeper, fourteen foot wide. So when the plows were done and they would leave a little bit on the runway, the sweeper had to sweep it off. Then when that 150 foot wide runway started developing, pretty soon that wind row you were developing got pretty high before you got to the edge of the runway, so now we're in the area of the snow blowers. The snow blowers could throw the snow a 150 feet. Our first one could move about 3000 tons an hour. The one we eventually had ran about 5000 tons an hour. We would form what was called a conga line-two snow plows, one plowing over and the other picking up his, and behind a sweeper sweeping over, and behind the sweeper, the blower going down the runway. It would still take us a good hour and a half to clear this runway for jet operations. Of course the technology just kept changing all the time. People say, "Why don't you just go out and put salt?" Well salt and aluminum don't mix. If your regular road salt got on an aircraft, eventually it would corrode the aluminum. I would tell people, "It doesn't look good, but it's embarrassing when a wing falls off." And that's what could happen. So while the highway crews could use a de-icer down to maybe twenty, twenty-

two degrees, we were forced to use urea which is a farm fertilizer. It had a high percentage of nitrogen in it. It was only good down to maybe twenty-nine, thirty degrees so its' use was marginal. The thing we had to do with that was when we had a forecast and it looked like snow clouds coming in, we had to lay the urea down right now and hope we weren't wasting it and it was going to snow to prevent that pavement ice bond. If that wasn't there to prevent that bond, you had to go out there and just pound that ice to get it off. So that was a whole different technology that developed over the years for airports. We had one snowfall, I think it was '78.

**KM:** '78. That locked down the city and locked down Indianapolis. It was something.

**RS:** Actually, the governor was up in his airplane flying from Indianapolis to Chicago. We were proud to announce, actually the governor announced that the only bare pavement he saw was a runway at Purdue University. We sat for thirty-six hours waiting to get out and do some work. I'd send one of the guys out in the truck, and he'd go out about two hundred feet, turn around, and he couldn't see his snow tracks. He'd find something to come back to the garage. So we just sat there. We had cots. We had the coffee pot going. We didn't have any food, but we had a path for the Union building. So the guys got on the snow blower, and we took the snow blower to the Union building to eat or to pick up sandwiches and bring them back.

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**KM:** Excuse me, was the restaurant closed by that time? Remember there used to be a restaurant at the airport. When I first came here, we used to go out there for lunch, but it has since closed.

**RS:** Yes, it was closed by then. We'd pick up sandwiches for the guys in the tower. I think people looked at us kind of funny going down State Street with a snow blower and not moving any snow. Actually Fred Ford called me and said, "We've got a basketball game, and State Street will probably be passable, but there's a huge drift in front of that fraternity down there on Northwestern." He said, "Can you get it?" I said, "Yes, Fred, we can. However you realize that anything that is in that snowdrift will be chewed up and thrown away." I said, "We can hope there are no students buried in the snowdrift. We can hope there are no cars in that snowdrift." I said, "We will throw that snow a 150 feet off to the side." He said, "Let me get back to you." Well, he got a hold of Fauber's and they had a huge front bucket. That took care of it. I explained to him, "You know, we've got good equipment out here but it's not civilized.

**KM:** It's not for that kind of job.

**RS:** I said, "I could go do down Third Street and knock out every window in the residence halls on the side" He said, "Yeah, I know."

**KM:** We're going to have to stop here for a minute.

### **End of Part 1**

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\*Proper names may be spelled incorrectly

