

EXCERPTED FROM "THE GOLDEN YEARS OF FLYING" By Old Frontier Airlines Captain Tex Searle with his kind permission and his publisher's, Aviation Supplies & Academics (copyright 2009). His grand memoir is for sale at Amazon.com and ASA2fly.com.

DID WE DO THAT?

ONE INCIDENT THAT STILL BRINGS LAUGHTER.

Flying over New Mexico in the summertime was not a piece of cake. On many of the short legs it was impractical to climb the DC-3 high enough over the tortured desert areas, that were hotter than Mexican chili, to avoid the super heated air. It was continuous turbulence for the entire flight and many of the passengers got air sick.

Back then, there was an empty malted milk carton placed in each seatback for the passenger's use. We called them burp cups. On this particular day Mother Nature had the furnace turned up with heat waves bouncing off the desert floor and mirages beckoning on the horizon. The turbulence was strutting its expertise, making the Grand 'Ole Lady pay for treading through its domain.

Our stewardess, Helen Etzel, was on the run, handing out airsick pills and getting rid of the overflowing burp cups. After we arrived in Albuquerque and the passengers had all deplaned, the cleaning agents came aboard and rolled up the soiled carpets and carried them off the aircraft in preparation for newly laundered and deodorized carpets to be brought aboard.

As I made my way to the rear exit, I observed Helen standing at the commissary pouring you know what from one burp cup to another. I inquired, "Helen! What are you doing?" "Shhhh, see that sweet little old lady standing out there with the gray hair? She lost her teeth in one of these burp cups, I'm trying to locate them." I didn't stick around.

Helen has been retired for more years than we like to remember. She resides in Toledo, Ohio, and remembers this episode as though it were only yesterday.