

A little over forty years ago Frontier Airlines (the original Frontier Airlines) ran an air service for some small towns in Montana and the Dakotas they called it the "High Line". The "High Line" was based in Great Falls, Montana. Every morning two airplanes took off from Great Falls and flew east. One made stops in Havre, Glasgow, Wolf Point, Williston, and Minot. The second airplane flew a more southern route from Great Falls to Lewistown, Billings, Miles City, Glendive, Sidney, and Williston. When the airplanes reached the eastern terminus they turned around and retraced their route back to Great Falls. It was full days flying by the time the planes were back in Great Falls. Frontier flew it for years with their dependable old DC-3s. This was the days of the CAB (Civil Aeronautics Board) who dictated where and how often an airline would fly serving large and small communities across the nation. As the loads dwindled and the DC-3 got more expensive to maintain and operate Frontier decided to replace them with a couple of De Havilland's new DHC-6 Twin Otters. Down in Southern California a small operator Golden West Airlines was just getting started. They were a recent amalgamation of four airlines Aero Commuter, Golden West Airlines, Cable Commuter, and Skymark Airlines operating under the name Golden West Airlines. Golden West was the biggest Twin Otter operator in the country at that time and not all the aircraft were needed to operate the Golden West schedules. In the fall of 1970 they contracted with Frontier Airlines to operate the "High Line" until Frontier could get their new aircraft on line and their crews trained.

So Thanksgiving day 1970 found my copilot and myself flying east in the morning headed eventually for Minot with several intervening stops. There was a great guy in Glasgow that managed the airport, operated a small fixed base, and was contracted by Frontier to handle the P-M-X. P-M-X being passengers, mail, and express (cargo). The fellows name was Vick; I don't know that I ever knew his last name. He had eked out a living in aviation up in that part of the country for many years. I'm talking biplanes on skis and radial engine Stinson's. I liked Vick and his family all of whom helped him operate the airport. I remember his son was there and he the son had a new baby. I always tried to manage my fuel so I could buy fuel from Vick.

As we departed Glasgow on the east bound leg Thanksgiving morning I jokingly said to Vick something like "we'll see you for dinner" and didn't give it another thought. In Minot at the end of the east bound run a passenger that owned a hotel insisted that we ride into town and have lunch at the hotel, which it turned out he bought.

West bound again the weather deteriorated and the wind was on the nose of the airplane about 40 knots. The Otter cruised about 150 knots true air speed so we were only making around 110 knots over the ground. By the time we made approaches at Williston and Wolf Point we were running late. By the time we pulled into Glasgow we were well behind schedule. It was dark and snowing pretty good. The ramp was sloppy with slush that was trying to freeze. We got the paperwork finished and quickly loaded the passengers and got the plane closed up. I was looking out into the dark in front of the airplane for Vick to give me the hand signal a that it was clear to start the engines. When there was a knock on the cockpit door, the twin Otter had an exterior door on either side of the cockpit for the crew to use to climb in and out of the airplane. When I looked out I could see Vick standing just below the door with what appeared to be a package in his hands. I opened up the door and Vick handed up a brown paper grocery bag and said something about Thanksgiving dinner. We, me and the copilot said thanks and set it on the floor between us. We got the engines started and took off for Great Falls by way of Havre. We climbed up high enough to be sure the ice wasn't sticking to the airplane and took the bag off the floor to get the sandwiches or whatever was in the bag Vick gave us.

I think of that Thanksgiving every year at this time and of Vick and his family his kids and grandkids. You see in that brown paper bag was two complete Thanksgiving turkey dinners. Not just a couple of slices of turkey but two complete dinners right down to china plates and silverware, dressing, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes with gravy, two slices of pumpkin pie, two cokes, and two drum sticks. We both sat there just a bit this side of nirvana munching on those two dinners in the quiet solitude of the De Havilland's cockpit having Thanksgiving dinner on the High Line.

Hope you all had a great Thanksgiving!

-Fred Austin

(11/27/14)

I flew those routes in both the 580 and the Twin Otter. It was a cold and lonesome place to fly in the winter. However, there were some GREAT folks, caring folks, like Vick. It made a HUGE difference. Your story tells it best! Thanks for sharing!

-Billy Walker

(11/28/14)

That's a great story and I will add it to Vic Wokal's memorial webpage at http://FAL-1.tripod.com/Vic_Wokal.html on the Old Frontier Airlines website.

-Jake Lamkins

(11/28/14)