



I knew Captain Bob Banta for fifty two years and a bit more. I thought I knew a lot about ol' Bob. We flew together many many times at good ol' Frontier Airlines where he was a captain. Other times, when he was my co-pilot flying old war-weary airplanes out of Davis-Monthan AFB and Navy Litchfield. Both were Arizona military bases of which only D-M remains active. You know, if you share the cockpit (Bob preferred that term over "flight deck"), you'd learn much about each other.

Bob was an extraordinarily good pilot. So much so, he was an aviator. He was one of just a few among so many mere pilots. He had to be good to have survived his 93 years. I was sure he'd make it to 100. A stroke got in the way of his otherwise seemingly assured longevity. He was having breakfast with his friend and caregiver, Mike, when he flamed-out on March 13th. Less than two days later he lined up on Runway Two-Seven and headed Westbound. No doubt he n'joyed smooth air and warm-soft tailwinds with a bright star to steer-by.

A fella like Bob would require two full volumes to tell his story. So, I'll give you the abridged version. Bob married well. Twice! Phyllis was first, then Alice. Alice left early at age 78 in 2012. She was great support to Bob's fascinating endeavors. If he wasn't telling tall tales he'd be helping someone tie a bunch of balloons to a lawn chair. He'd do about anything for you if you just hinted you'd like his help.

I'm sitting here writing this per a request from a fellow QB ostensibly 'cause I'm old 'nuff to have some goods on "Stud - Hoss - Slick & Tiger!" Bob could not remember anyones name. If he remembered yours you knew you were 'in!' He couldn't even remember girls names so they'd be "Suga - Sweetie or Punkin."

He loved telling the story about the time he was Frontier's Chief Pilot in Great Falls. The pilots got Bob a HUGE bright red birthday card with black lettering. On the front it said "50,000 FLIES CAN'T BE WRONG!" Then he opened it up and it read "EAT SHIT!" And, you guessed it, signed: "Stud - Hoss - Slick & Tiger!"

One dark & stormy night Bob was on approach into Great Falls Montana when an altimeter glitched. He and his co-pilot, Lee Bavender, hit the ground short of the runway. He poured the coals to that 580 as the nose gear hit a ditch's dirt berm before flying up through high tension cables and towing around 50 feet of those cables to Billings where the weather was a tad better. A safe landing no injuries 'cept to the 580 which was soon back flying. That was an amazing airplane. We called it "The Mountain Master!" And, it was!

Another dark and stormy night I was flying a Frontier Convair 580 when I heard Bob's very recognizable voice checkin' in with ATC. I could not help myself. I picked up the mike and announced, "Hey Banta, how's your black ass?" Silence. Then his very distinctive chuckle. Back then Bob and Barney were a team! Barney was Bob's "black ass" a big black Missouri mule. Bob kept Barney at his place west of Denver near the old mining town of Idaho Springs. Bob loved ridin' that smooth gaited mule.

Another flight I recall was his flight carrying a load of thoroughbred horses in a C-97. The 'Stratocruiser' crashed in Mexico killing some very expensive horses and their handlers in the back. Bob was the co-pilot. The Mexican police threw the crew in jail, but it didn't take Bob long to talk his way out of it. He had a way with words! And, ol' Bob had a million stories!

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1987_Belize_Air_International_C-97_Mexico_City_crash

Bob lived in a lot of places and was based out of, I believe, all the bases Frontier had. Billings, Great Falls, Phoenix, Omaha, and Denver. He even TDY'd at Salt Lake City. Banta stories abounded at each place. He was one of the best and he was truly a colorful character. When you get some time check out the website links below. The stories are a bit long to burden the Beam editor with, but are guaranteed to thwart insomnia. So, if you are having trouble gettin' to sleep:

<https://captainbillywalker.com/aviation-history-people/stud-hoss-slick-tiger/>

<https://captainbillywalker.com/war-stories/allied-aircraft/>