

**A COLLECTION OF STORIES ABOUT BOB BANTA.**  
**There is some overlapping and repetition but that is to be expected.**



Thanks Jake - great article on Bob albeit a very short snippet of his amazing life. It reminded me of a few classic Banta stories. I flew some with Bob, on the 580 and he flew with me some on a few of the war-bird flights that I performed for Allied Aircraft out of Tucson. In my bachelor days I flew anything and everything in my off-days as a Frontier co-pilot. You name it, I flew it. I was the chief pilot for Allied for a while and often signed up other FAL pilots for extra flights or ones where two pilots were needed. Bob Williams, Jack Gardner, Roy Williams, Elmer Burson, Tom Robertson and George Graham come to mind along with Banta who was always ready to go! Otto Nessler and I were going to fly some DC-6s/7s out of Amon Carter, but that deal fell thru.

One memorable flight with Banta was to take a former Braniff Convair 340/440 from Tucson to Daggett, California. In the late 60's the FAA would give a LOA(letter of authorization) allowing non-type-rated pilots to fly airplanes by claiming similar experience. After the Wichita State Football team's Martin 404 crash in 1970, all that abruptly stopped. I had received numerous LOA's before the FAA ended the practice. B-29, B-26, B-24, DC-6/7, DC-3, AJ "Savage," come to mind.

When we walked out to that decrepit ol' Convair we looked at each other wondering if it shouldn't be scrapped instead. The paint was terribly faded which added to the bizarre appearance of the aircraft. The "beaver tail" on the left side was missing (this is part of the upper aft section behind the exhaust augmenters. It had 340 augmenters on the left side and 440 augmenters on the right side. The engines consisted of a CB-16 on the left side and a CB-17 (100 more horse power) on the right side.

We clambered up the air-stairs and saw missing floor boards full of old oily rags and thought if it ever caught fire it'd be burning into the next decade! In a word the airplane looked terrible! Jack Kern had made numerous aircraft flyable that I would fly to far off places. He assured us that the aircraft was safe to fly notwithstanding.

Bob will tell you that this ol' airplane flew better than ANY Convair either of us had ever flown! It would trim up hands off and it purred along for the two hour - two minute flight to Daggett.

It was funny in a way. Normally I flew as Bob's co-pilot at Frontier, here he was flying co-pilot with me. At that time I didn't have a type rating in anything except a Douglas A-26. Bob was typed in both the piston and turbo-prop Convair 340/440.

The flight was uneventful. The story grew from there!

After securing the airplane at Daggett, we had to find a way to the Greyhound Bus depot. So, we shed out flying togs and put on our slacks, shirt, tie, and jacket set for what we'd wear catching the Frontier 727 from LAS to DEN. I had to get to DEN to catch another FAL 727 to SLC in order to be in position for my flight the next morning.

No sweat, we had it all worked out to catch the Bus from Daggett to Las Vegas which would arrive in time to easily catch the FAL flight to Denver.

Wrong!

Catching a ride from the airport to the bus station proved challenging. We ended up calling for a cab which took time. When we arrived at Greyhound we discovered the bus full and actually over sold! What!

I started to worry that I might have trouble getting back to SLC in time. Soon, Banta came back to tell me they had a 2nd bus coming and we'd be OK. Not long after that Banta said he had talked the driver into letting us on the 1st bus, standing! Soon after this he came back to tell me he finagled us two seats on the first bus. GREAT!

Off we went and all went well until just before crossing an extremely hot California desert a few miles from the state line. The bus slowed and pulled over on the side of the road. What now?

The driver was off the bus and soon after Banta was as well. A few minutes later Banta and the driver clambered back on the bus; their hands all grimy. "What the hell is going on?" I asked. Banta replied that he had to show the driver how to jury-rig the belts as one busted. We wouldn't have air conditioning, but the engine would get us into LAS OK. That didn't happen!

Turns out Bob had been a diesel mechanic and even owned his own bus line years earlier when he flew the DC-3 and Convair 340 out of Billings.

As we approached the casino at the California/Nevada state line, the bus again died! We were done! The jury rigged bus was now out of service. I looked around for Banta. Shoot, there he was flagging down the 2nd bus. He coaxed that driver into letting us on albeit we'd have to stand for the remainder of the ride to LAS.

Arriving in LAS we were stopped at a light when Banta asked the driver to let us off. We had our bags in hand, so he opened the door and we stepped off and then into a cab parked next to us. Banta then persuaded the cabby to hustle us to the airport. He actually talked the cab driver into entering the airport on the general aviation side, driving us right to the FAL 727 just as they were pulling back the mobile stairs.

Banta's next act, leaving me further amazed, was to talk the captain into letting us on the jump seats figuring to take care of the paper-work in Denver.

I made my flight. Bob Banta made it possible. He became the most amazing aviation personality I was to know in my 40 year aviation career. We would have other flights, but none that matched the trip to deliver that ol' rag of a Convair and Banta's adeptness. I would always ask him "Howz your black ass" whenever I heard his voice on the radio...

Below is a photo of the airplane before it landed in Des Moines with the right engine on fire. The engine actually fell off onto the runway. Someone ferried it to Tucson where it sat a long time before Jack Kern (Allied's maintenance director) made it flyable. I have always wondered where that airplane ended up.

*-Billy Walker*



BRANIFF'S FIRST CONVAIR 440-32 METROPOLITAN

I'll have to tell you my Braniff story! Tom Braniff and my father were buddies. Mr. Braniff used to come to my folks resort, The Saratoga Inn, in Saratoga, Wyoming. They were huntin' and fishin' pals. I was around thirteen when Mr. Braniff told me that I would be a Braniff pilot when I had my ratings and was at least twenty years old. Right then I had a goal!

Sadly, Mr. Braniff was killed in a tragic accident when the Grumman Mallard he was in hit some wires on Sunday, January 10, 1954. Thomas Elmer Braniff was killed in the Mallard crash in Louisiana.

Tom Braniff along with nine other noted businessmen sponsored by United Gas Company. The duck hunting trip was conducted near Grand Chernier, Louisiana. The group was traveling aboard a Grumman Mallard twin engine aircraft and encountered severe icing while the return trip home from Grand Chernier. The Pilot was, Bobby Huddleston, (you will remember his brother, R A Huddleston, a Frontier pilot).

Bobby was a pilot for United Gas. He tried desperately to save the aircraft but was unable to maintain altitude due to the fast accumulating ice on the wings and fuselage. Huddleston radioed that he was going to try to make it to Shreveport, Louisiana, just across the Texas border in Northern Louisiana. They didn't make it!

Of course that ended Tom Braniff's storied aviation career and my possible one with Braniff...

Flash ahead a few years when I was a co-pilot with good ol' Frontier Airlines. On my off-days I flew for Allied Aircraft, Inc. - Tucson, Arizona flying all kinds of war-weary airplanes. Mostly military airplanes out of storage in Davis-Monthan AFB and Navy Litchfield. A few were civilian aircraft.

One, a former Braniff 340/440 needed to be transferred from Tucson to Daggett, California. It was only a two hour-two minute flight, but Oh So Memorable!

Previously, a Braniff flight experienced an in-flight fire and emergency landing in Des Moines, Iowa. On landing the right engine literally fell off. However, there was no fire damage behind the firewall. So, they installed another engine and some unknown pilot(s) flew it to Tucson for storage.

Allied had a contract to make the airplane flyable and I was assigned to transfer the airplane from Tucson to Daggett. I wasn't rated in the airplane. Back then, no problem. The FAA would issue a LOA (letter of authorization) which allowed me to fly the airplane sans type-rating (with essential crew) from point A to point B avoiding populated areas. An A&P, of course, would have to sign a ferry permit (please don't call me a ferry pilot!). This was prior to the Martin 404 crash killing the Wichita State football team. No more LOAs after that!

My co-pilot ended up being Bob Banta. Yup, the "Stud - Hoss - Slick & Tiger" Banta who was actually rated in the Convair 240/340/440 and the Allison Convair too.

I had flown with Bob Banta several times at Frontier and he had no problem flying with me as co-pilot on this adventure and an adventure it was.

The airplane looked derelict! The paint was badly faded. The interior was in equally poor condition. In fact, the floor boards were removed and the bottom looked terrible with oily rags and such. If the airplane had caught fire it would still be burning!

Banta and I mulled it over and after speaking to Jack Kern, Allied's chief of maintenance, we decided to fly the airplane. It was a short flight from Tucson to Daggett. As I mentioned, just two hours & two minutes!

Banta and I were both surprised with this mangy lookin' airplane. We started thinking it might not even be flyable!

After the missing CB-16 engine was replaced by a CB-17 (Pratt-Whitney 2800) it had a CV-440 augmenter on the right side; a CV-340 augmenter on the left side but the "Beaver-Tail" was missing on the left side as well.

The Beaver Tail, as you know was designed to give some pre-stall warning creating some vibration prior to the actual stall which, in any transport airplane, is not a good thing.

So, YUP, it was one ratty lookin' airplane. But, it did something no other Convair I've flown or Banta either. It trimmed up HANDS OFF! It flew GREAT! I purred along those two hours & two minutes to Daggett. Somehow I buttered it on the runway before taxiing in and shutting down.

Then the excitement began! We had to call for a cab to whisk us to the Greyhound terminal to catch a bus to Las Vegas. Our plan was to catch a Frontier 727 to Denver then I would catch another FAL flight to SLC as I had a flight scheduled the next day. ...I shoulda given myself more time!

Banta and I changed out of our flight togs into traveling attire and checked in at the Greyhound counter. "Sorry, but the bus is already full!" "WHAT!" "We are in Daggett no-where-California!" "How can the bus be full?"

This was followed by an incredulous look intimating that WE shoulda known. Then Stud-Hoss-Slick & Tiger started workin' his magic!

The next thing I knew we had seats on the next bus thru Daggett en-route to LAS. A few minutes later, Banta worked it our for us to trade with a couple and we were on the first bus! WHEW! No sweat, right?

Off we went down the worlds loneliest highway with two bushes and four rocks as the only things between Daggett and LAS!

Then, mid-way, the bus slows down and pulls over to the side of the road and stops! WHAT? ☺

The driver gets off. Then Banta, dressed in a suit and tie, gets off. I sat scratchin' my head.

A few minutes later Banta and the driver re-board and soon we are heading towards LAS again. I'm lookin' at Banta. His hands have the appearance that they have just re-built the dirtiest greasiest motor of all time. Close!

I ask, "Bob, what's the deal here?" Banta said, "I used to own a bus-line in Billings. So, I showed the driver how to jury-rig broken fan belts. We should be OK now." WRONG!

More miles ahead then we pull into the state-line casino. The driver announces that we can go no further and we will have to wait for Greyhound to send another bus.

I'm now gettin' behind on my worryin' when I look around to see where Banta was. I spied him out on the highway flagging down the second bus from Daggett!

Banta has talked us onto the bus standing in the isle for the rest of the drive into LAS! I'm impressed! Banta even found time to wash up.

The bus enters the Las Vegas street system and stops at a red light. Banta spies an empty cab next to us. The next Bantaism was for him to talk the driver into letting us off to catch the cab. Banta had already signaled the cabbie to wait.

Soon, we were in the cab roaring through LAS to Mccarran field. Next Banta talks the cab driver to enter on the general aviation side and actually drive us across the north-south runway right up to the Frontier 727 where the air-stairs are just being pulled away. Of course this was long before TSA came about...

Seeing the senior agent, who Bob obviously knew, I next observe the airstairs re-position to the entry door to the 727. I'm now in a state of disbelief! But, I am on-board the airplane and in a first-class seat as the door closes.

Banta comes back from his visit to the flight deck and sits beside me and says, "I spoke with the captain, Willy Hurt, and he says 'no sweat' we can make the paper-work agree when we get to Denver."

We did, and I made it to my SLC flight and to my scheduled flight in the 580 the next day. Here it is nearly a half-century later and I am still amazed at how Stud-Hoss-Slick & Tiger made things work out. To him it was "all in a days work!" Amazing!

***-Billy Walker***

I spoke with Big John Winter and then called Banta to essentially speak with his caregiver. I spoke with Bob for a lively 10-15 minutes. They had given him 2-4 months to live, but he said, "The hell with that! I'll prove those bastards wrong!" I believe he will.

He did fall and it was suspected that he'd broken his back. He's convinced that he just bruised the devil out of his tail bone. He gets around some using a walker. I did note some decline in his cognitive responses as he repeated everything he said to me the other day when I called. But, at 93 he's doing darn good and has a very positive attitude. That's an eight letter word y'know??

Bob recalled some of our more interesting flights in years past mostly in old war birds. And, a couple of unforgettable flights we didn't share and I'm real happy in that regard. One, he was flying co-pilot on a C-97G with a load of race horses when they crashed killing many. The nose of the airplane ended up just short of a wall.

1987 Belize Air International C-97 Mexico City crash

1987 Mexico City air disaster

**HB-ILY Boeing C-97G Stratofreighter (11001663943).jpg**

A Boeing C-97G Stratofreighter similar to the crashed aircraft

Accident

Date 30 July 1987

Summary Crashed onto highway due to cargo shift and gear malfunction which led to a low climb rate

Site Toluca - Mexico City highway, Cuajimalpa, Mexico City, Mexico

Aircraft

Aircraft type Boeing C-97G Stratofreighter

Operator Belize Air International

Registration HI-481

Flight origin Benito Juárez International Airport, Mexico City, Mexico

Destination Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport, Miami, Florida, United States of America

Passengers 8

Crew 4

Fatalities 49 (44 on the ground)

Injuries 20 - 30 (at least 17 serious)

Survivors 7

The 1987 Mexico City air disaster occurred on 30 July 1987, when a Belize Air International Boeing C-97G Stratofreighter, bound for Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport crashed onto the Mexico - Toluca highway during the late afternoon rush hour. A total of 49 people, including 44 on the ground, were killed in the crash. At least 20 people were injured, with reports that the number could be much higher. The accident was caused due to cargo shift in the compartment, causing a shift of the center of gravity. A short circuit also caused the landing gear to extend, leading to the aircraft's rapid increase in drag. The crash was the second deadliest aircraft accident involving a Boeing C-97G Stratofreighter.

The aircraft, a Boeing C-97G Stratofreighter, registered as HI-481, was operated as a cargo flight by Belize Air International. It was carrying 18 champion horses, for an equestrian competition in Miami, for Indianapolis for the 10th Annual Pan American Games. The aircraft took off from Mexico City International Airport at 5:01 p.m. Five minutes after takeoff, the aircraft suddenly had difficulty gaining altitude. The altimeter failed, and the crew tried to pull up the plane as it flew directly towards skyscrapers. The pilots managed to dodge several skyscrapers in the city, including the Mexicana Airlines Headquarters tower and the Hotel de Mexico. The crew then discussed about the suitable place for an emergency landing. Due to the lack of time and controls of the plane, both pilots decided to land the plane at Toluca - Mexico highway.

A problem developed on the plane's landing gear and caused a short circuit. The short circuit caused small fires on the aircraft, with smoke emitting from its engines. The aircraft then slammed onto the highway with its belly. The wings struck a high tension tower, causing a massive blackout in nearby neighborhood. The aircraft flew under a pedestrian bridge and smashed into vehicles, killing some motorists instantly and horribly injuring others. The four engined plane skidded down the highway and broke into two sections. The tail of the plane separated from its main body and smashed into a three-story building, while the rest of the aircraft skidded and impacted the crowded Tras Lomita restaurant. It then exploded in what onlookers described as "inferno". Parts of the aircraft then flew into a gas station and causing a massive fire.

Emergency services immediately arrived at the scene and pulled several survivors from the wreckage. At least 7 people inside the plane were found alive, including pilot Frederick Moore, an American; co-pilot Robert Banty, also an American and the load master. Dead horses could be seen after the crash. Two out of 18 horses had to be shot by police, as they were too badly injured. At least one horse survived with good condition and evacuated from the scene. 12 people were evacuated by helicopter to the Red Cross hospital with third-degree burns. Teresa Marquez of the federal Emergency Rescue Service said at least seven people on the ground were severely burned and taken to two hospitals. At least 25 vehicles were rammed and caught fire due to the crash, and a further 44 people on the ground were killed, bringing the death toll to nearly 50. Officials estimated the plane left a 450-to-600 foot path of destruction as it skidded along the highway.

Cause: In response to the crash, pilot Moore and co-pilot Banta were detained by Mexican authorities. The investigation found that during the climbout process, the horses inside the aircraft panicked and ran around inside the compartment, causing a shift on the aircraft's center of gravity. A short circuit later occurred and caused a gear malfunction, which caused small fires on the body of the aircraft and further panicked the horses. Banta soon had talked himself outta trouble!

I saw Banta in action one time when we'd flown a very rough looking Convair 340/440 from Tucson to Daggett, CA. That's a story on my website:

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

Also see

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1987\\_Belize\\_Air\\_International\\_C-97\\_Mexico\\_City\\_crash](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1987_Belize_Air_International_C-97_Mexico_City_crash)

-*Billy Walker*