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by Ace Avakian

Another interesting stop on our route pattern was Flagstaff, Arizona. Frontier had an "H" marker there and our instrument approach minimums were 400 feet and one mile. The reason for this being that FLG was situated just south of Humphrey's Peak (12761 Ft asl.) The field elevation being 7011 feet. There was just one runway; a northeast/southwest strip almost 7000 feet in length. The airport could be a little tricky during the summertime when temperatures would at times be in the mid 70s and sometimes in the 80s. (I've seen it at 90 degrees at one time.) Under these conditions along with tricky mountain winds during summer months could make it a little 'sporty.' Adding to this was the fact that FLG was one of our heaviest revenue airports with practically full loads night and day.

Maximum allowable gross weight of the DC-3 was 25,200 pounds without deicer boots. All our DC-3s had deicer boots weighing 146 pounds and therefore our maximum allowable gross weight was 25,346 lbs. At maximum gross weight and high density altitude, plus windy-thermal turbulence made for 'sporty' conditions even with both engines operative.

Being the Engineering and Air Safety Chairman of our airline, I started an attempt at configuring a loss of an engine immediately after V2 and attempting to configure what the performance of the DC-3 would be like under these conditions. There were no performance figures anywhere on our planet with regard to a DC-3 under these conditions!

One must remember the DC-3 was not and is not a T-Category aircraft therefore performance figures for certain conditions could not be found. I personally checked with the Australian Airline Pilots Association as well as the Arabian American Oil Company that were using DC-3s and answers could not be found.

I then approached the company and requested permission to reduce our allowable gross weight out of FLG a reduction of 160 pounds off our allowable gross weight for each degree in temperature exceeding 80 degrees. In other words, decreasing a passenger for every degree above 80 degrees Fahrenheit. I explained this was in the interest of safety, etc.

The company scoffed at this and wanted me to show how and where these figures were computed. This was just a wild guess of mine with no actual figures and computations available - anywhere. BUT...Ed O'Neil studied this very carefully and backed me up on it and it came to be - for a short while, anyway.!

So - wouldn't you know that one fine summer day I'm taxiing out of FLG with a full load of passengers, mail and express. Temperature on landing was 79 degrees and as I was taxiing out, I heard the station on the radio state that we would have to return because, "...of temperature accountability."

I looked at the copilot and told him not to answer the radio. The station kept calling - I kept taxiing - made a run-up and gave it the needle for the take-off run. Once airborne, I got on the radio and asked, "... did you call?" The station then told me the temperature on our take off was 82 degrees and we were, "...over grossed according to the latest clearance citing the restrictions from Denver Dispatch...", etc. ('Releases' were called "Clearances" at that time.)

I truly felt like a complete fool because of all the 'noise' I made regarding all this with the company, etc. But, here we were on our way to PRC and the ole DC-3 was just grinding away and jouncing along in the thermal turbulence with the familiar odor of burp-cup puke! (Our flights were truly, "Vomit Comets.")

Upon landing at PHX and once back in the crew room, Elmer Burson (Chief Pilot) called me to his office. He then ranted and raved about how I begged and pleaded with the company on temperature accountability at FLG and in spite of it all, "...refused to carry through all the malarky" etc., etc., etc! And, ". . . it would have been very simple because a couple of non-revs would have had to deplane and that's all that there would have been to it!". He continued to make me feel like a complete idiot for all the meetings and pleading I had done re the Flagstaff airport, etc. And, all the trouble I had with the company and finally, ". . .tricking O'Neil into accepting the procedure", etc., etc, etc.

Then in came Pansy and Larry - Elmer's wife and son. They thanked me over and over for they had tried getting out of FLG, "...last night and again this morning and just barely made it on this flight." They were traveling non rev (non revenue - on pass) and, "...who knows when we would have gotten out of there."

Elmer looked at me. I looked at him. He said a few things to his family - went out of the room for a few minutes.

He returned, looked at me and said, "Ace. . .Get outta here!"