

DON LYMBERY

Interview 210a

August 26, 2010, at The History Center, Diboll, Texas

Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Jonathan Gerland, pilot and Air Force Veteran Don Lymbery discusses his involvement with the Experimental Air Craft Association and the Angelina County Airport. Topics discussed include the Fajita Fly-In, the Young Eagles, and the annual convention in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. He also talks about improvements to the airport, building and flying an experimental aircraft, and the group's community involvement.

Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG): Today's date is August 26, 2010. My name is Jonathan Gerland. I'm at the History Center with Mr. Don Lymbery who I believe was the immediate past president.

Don Lymbery (hereafter DL): No, I am the president now.

JG: Oh you are the president now, I'm sorry.

DL: I am the president now.

JG: He is the president of the Experimental Air Craft Association Chapter 1219.

DL: Right, based in Lufkin.

JG: Based in Lufkin, okay. Let's...what I'd like to do is talk about the chapter and your activities and the history of that and then also if we could in how that is connected with the airport and the relationship you have. So, we may jump around a little bit between history itself, but also your own personal experiences. So, maybe if we can just begin just tell us when and how did you get involved in the EAA Chapter?

DL: The EAA, the Experimental Aircraft Association actually started back in 1953 way before my interest started in air craft.

JG: Now that is nationwide right, 1953?

DL: That is nationwide, yes. Their headquarters is in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. They have a wonderful show every year that I go to up in Oshkosh, Wisconsin that has between ten and eleven thousand aircraft and about 850,000 people visit there during that week's time. My interest in aviation started when I was still in college and I was taking flying lessons back, a number of years back.

JG: What college did you go to?

DL: I went to Tyler Junior College up in Tyler. My first, my first aircraft lessons were at Pounds Field. Of course, it was totally different from what it is now. But, anyway I ran out of money like most youngsters do and all my money went to college and work and buying cars and girlfriends, you know. So, I ran out of money and actually never did finish my flying lessons back then, but I always had an intense interest in aviation. Soon after that I joined the Air Force, traveled all over the world working on aircraft. Here about ten or twelve years ago, it must have been back in the late eighties or early nineties, I started getting interested. I was in the Air Force reserves and started getting interested in building an experimental aircraft, and I started with building an experimental helicopter. Finished it, got it built, was flying it and taking flying lessons, got it inspected by the FAA and...

JG: Where were you living then?

DL: Here in Lufkin. I got started out where I'm living now on the north side of town, out in the Moffett community. Anyway, so I went from there and went back to fixed wing and finished all my licensing and got fully licensed and that is what got me to the point today. I've had three different aircraft that I've been involved in either building or restoring and have a wonderful aircraft now that is an experimental aircraft that I fly the youngsters, the Young Eagles in. It's a program that the EAA has for introducing young people to aviation for their first flight. My aircraft is an experimental RB9 built by Vans Aircraft Corporation and it's a kit. It was built, finished and maintained primarily here locally now.

JG: So, is the kit just something...how do you find the kit?

DL: It's a...there is a huge community out there that most people don't know about. Most everybody thinks that all aircraft come from Cessna or Piper and is built in a factory, but there is a tremendous community out there of people that build their own aircraft and are experimented or called experimental aircraft because they are classified in an experimental class because they are not built in a factory and inspected by the FAA. They are finally at the end stage inspected and maintained to FAA standards but, as they are being built they are built in people's garages or barns or whatever. But, that is where the experimental class comes from. My aircraft as a tremendous number of aircrafts here that operate out at Angelina County Airport are experimental class airplanes.

JG: You don't have to be...you don't have to have an experimental aircraft to be a member of the EAA do you?

DL: Oh no, no, no. Gosh no, we've got about even number of people that fly factory built airplanes that built the experimental and ultra-lights. Some of the little light weight aircraft with fabric wings that go out and fly on a Sunday afternoon that does about 35 to 40 miles an hour and you don't want to be in a real heavy wind then. Those people are

more than happy, or more than welcome to be in our organization too, anything that has to do with flight, if you want to build or just enjoy watching.

JG: So, you don't have to have an airplane to be in it?

DL: You don't have to have an airplane to be in our organization. It's just, we're actually an organization of aircraft enthusiasts.

JG: I think on the national website the term they use over and over is recreational aviation. Would you say that is a fair assessment?

DL: Yes, oh yes, but we also have a tremendous number of people in the organization that fly 757's, you know, for the different airline companies and fly passenger service everyday and then go home on the weekend and get in their experimental aircraft and take their family across country. So, you know, it's for anybody that loves to fly. They can be professional or non-professional pilots.

JG: So, you were already interested in experimental aviation before you joined the group and in fact that may have predated the groups' formation as I understand.

DL: It did, it predated the groups formation. My interest in aviation has been as a young person. I get tickled today because I'm around kids all the time and of course I've got grandkids now, but the kids anytime they hear that noise passing overhead they are always going to look up. They are always going to look up and young people, well people of all ages are fascinated by flight. I was at an early age, so I've always been interested in flying.

JG: Now, were you one of the founding members of the local chapter and if not, how did you come into the chapter?

DL: No, as a matter of fact I was...I knew that the chapter existed.

JG: It was formed actually in Nacogdoches, is that right?

DL: It was formed over in Nacogdoches and was actually organized. I was not one of the founding members, but the chapter was organized over in Nacogdoches I think in '89, I think.

JG: I remember reading something about it.

DL: I think something right there on the front page, in '98 right there.

JG: Is that right, 98?

DL: Yes, in '98 and the chapter was doing relatively well but, it hadn't grown a lot. And, I noticed...I got involved as they needed someone, they needed an organizer. They

needed someone who was willing to take on the checking account and do all the things that nobody wants to do. Keep track of the records and things like that and that is how I got involved. I started hanging around because I was in the process of building the helicopter at that time and so, I wanted to be around other people that I could bounce ideas off of as far as...that were also building other aircraft and being involved in aviation. So, that is really how I got started, but it was probably about '91 or '92 when I actually got involved. I had just come back from Dessert Storm. I had been in the war for a year so I had been in all the campaigns. Being in the Air Force reserve I was gone a lot so when I got back home I looked up the chapter and I started getting involved with these guys then at that time.

JG: Okay so, but I think on this here you had written that it formed in '98 and if you...you said you were getting involved with them in '91 or '92.

DL: About '91 or '92 so, it was probably about three years after...oh I'm sorry.

JG: Yes, I'm just making sure we had the dates correct.

DL: Two thousand...yes September of '98 is correct. Dessert Storm was '99?

JG: Dessert Storm was '90 or '91 'cause I was finishing up my graduate school in college.

DL: You know Jonathan I would have to look, but this date came off of the charter.

JG: Okay.

DL: So, I'm sure that is correct, but I got involved with them a year or so after that. It may have been '99 that I got involved with them.

JG: Okay, okay, I was just trying to reconcile it.

DL: No, that is good catch but, that is right, that was the charter date '98.

JG: September of '98, okay.

DL: But, I didn't get involved with them until like a year or so later.

JG: Now, did you get involved with them at Nacogdoches? I mean so, you would take your helicopter there or your plane or what would you do?

DL: I was still in the process of building it at that point so, yes I was going back and forth, but the actual construction was taking place at my home.

JG: Yes, I was going to ask you about that. If people build planes in drive-ways and garages how do you get it to the airport and when do you take it to the airport?

DL: Eventually well, a helicopter is no problem. You get it to where it will fly and luckily I had a pasture out at the farm so, I kept it out there and once I got it finished I would actually fly it out at the farm and everything to do all the testing and everything.

JG: So, you had a little runway there?

DL: Oh yes, yes.

JG: Now, there is no regulation on that, anybody can just build a plane and fly it, take off from their personal property?

DL: With safety concerns yes.

JG: Okay.

DL: My wife and I have a farm out in a river bottom and we have a 2800 foot runway out there now and I go to the airport just about every day. About half the time I drive to the airport and half the time I fly to the airport off of my private strip. But, with safety concerns as long as you do things safely there is no rules that prevent you from flying off your private property.

JG: Now, as far as landing at a public airstrip, say you took off at your private property and you wanted to land at the Angelina County Airport and it was order of the first flight of the plane, what happens there?

DL: In order to land at a private airstrip you have to have a registration number or an N number.

JG: That is number you see on the tail?

DL: Right, that is the number that shows you are in compliance. Number one with registration rules and number two that the aircraft should have been inspected and looked at and is safe to operate. Then of course if you have an electrical system you are required to have radios to where you can communicate with other pilots and let them know that you are landing an experimental aircraft on such and such runway and that sort of thing.

JG: Okay, I didn't mean to get sidetracked there but I was curious how that works.

DL: Completely legal, you bet.

JG: Okay, so who...was there anybody influential in getting you involved with the local chapter, or not necessarily?

DL: There was...there were several people but primarily it was just a great group of guys, you know. I enjoyed...they all had similar interest in aviation and here is this guy come in from the Air Force that has got all of this building experience, you know.

JG: What did you do for the Air Force?

DL: I worked on everything from all kind of electronics to radar systems.

JG: But, you didn't fly?

DL: No, I didn't fly. I was enlisted so I've done everything that has to do with working on airplanes. KC10's, B52's, A10's, you name it I've done pretty much all of it.

JG: Okay.

DL: But the...everything except jet engines. I never worked on jet engines. That was another career field. But, great group of guys in the chapter and we become friends and it didn't take long that I realized our membership was weighted. In other words there were more members on this side of the Angelina River than there were on the Nacogdoches side. And so I began to wonder, the chapter wasn't growing a lot. There was about 20 or 25 members and probably 15 members very active but, the chapter wasn't growing a lot. About that time there was a young manager that was actually an interim manager at the Angelina County Airport and contacted me because I had just been elected as president. This was about a year after I joined the EAA and almost immediately I moved into the president's slot and contacted me about the possibility of having some meetings at the Angelina County Airport. It seemed like an excellent idea because most of our members were on this side of the river.

JG: Can you give that person's name?

DL: Sure, Randy Carswell was interim manager and he was a younger guy and it just so happened that Randy was ex-Air Force. He had spent a lot of time working the flight line around the aircraft too. The fact that I was Air Force, at the time I was still in the Air Force Reserve, we had a lot in common to talk about. So, we started talking and became friends immediately. The Angelina County Airport had an old hangar that was in terrible repair. It was a general population hangar that they would put aircraft in there that didn't have anywhere else to go 'cause it was in really bad shape. And, asked us if we would be interested if we would move the operation to Angelina County, would we be interested in moving if they gave us this hangar to base our operations in and would we fix it up because the county had no money to work on this hangar. So, I got together with the other members and we decided that it was an excellent idea. Except for the guys that were actually housed at Nacogdoches everybody was behind it, but the guys at Nacogdoches weren't too wild about seeing us leave Nacogdoches. But, we still maintained a lot of contact over there, but we did, we moved our base of operation to Angelina County and today we jumped from the 20 to 25 members that we had back then up to over 70 members that we have right now. Very active chapter and we've done a

tremendous number of construction projects out at the Angelina County Airport all tax free. It has not cost anybody anything it's all been from donations and we've done a lot of the work ourselves to improve the airport. The hangar, the first hangar we took on we completely rewired it, painted it and sealed the roof, fixed all the damaged metal on the outside and we've been housing our members aircraft in there for years now. So, it's worked out through a very close and good association between the Angelina County Airport and the EAA Chapter 1219.

JG: What would be of your membership...and I eventually want to get into the Fajita Fly In's and the Young Eagles program, but besides that are there any other special interest that the members might have, special aviation interest beyond their own airplane or types of?

DL: A lot of people assume incorrectly that everybody that is in the Experimental Aircraft Association, the EAA, is a pilot. They are not. We have got a tremendous amount of people that just have an interest. We've got young people who are going to college to become airport managers, going to college to become air traffic controllers, going to school to become aircraft mechanics. A lot of the membership in the EAA has no interest in flying, they just love aviation and so we've got air show promoters in our organization. We've got people interested in announcing air shows.

JG: Now, is that what you're interested in?

DL: No, no, no that is not one of my interest.

JG: I saw you move your hand. (laughter)

DL: But, they have all kind of interest. Anything that has to do with aviation is welcome in the EAA. But we've got a sizeable number of our membership, local membership, is pilots but, a lot of people are builders. It's amazed me over the years that there is builders and then there's pilot builders. There are builders that build an aircraft for themselves to fly and like myself and a number of our members, but then there are builders in there that could care less about flying they just love the nuts and bolts part of actually manufacturing or building something.

JG: Now, do y'all draw lots to see who flies those? (laughter)

DL: Oh no, no, no, you can inspect...that is a good point...you can inspect an aircraft and tell....

JG: Somebody would build a plane but not fly it. (laughter)

DL: Oh yes, but those of us that have looked at a lot of aircraft and inspectors we have them all inspected before we fly them. But, those of us that have looked, you can tell if an aircraft is going to be safe. (laughter)

JG: Probably more than just kicking the tires.

DL: Oh yes, kick the tires and light the fires, you know.

JG: Okay, well good, good. Okay, like I said I know those are a couple of your big projects. Maybe let's start with the Fajita Fly In and then whatever background you want to give to that as well.

DL: The Fajita Fly In started with Judge Joe Berry when he was still the county judge here and at that time it started almost at the same time that we started our association with Angelina County Airport. They wanted to increase the business. They had a restaurant at Angelina County but didn't have much traffic. And, they came to me because I'd been in the retail business and I'd been in business for many years besides being in Air Force Reserve and wanted to know what it would take to increase the business. I explained to them about fly-ins and told them that the airports that have the fly-ins increase their business and not just for that one day of the fly-in but, it also brings people in during the week also because they are used to flying in and out of a particular airport. So, we put together the normal thing was either for fly-ins in Texas was either pancake breakfasts or hamburger lunches. People would throw hamburgers on the grill and they would have people coming to it. Being in Texas and being somewhat of a little bit of promoter that I am I wanted something different than what everybody else had. I wanted something that Angelina County could say "this is ours, nobody else is doing this, this is ours." And, so I came up with the idea of the Fajita Fly In. Texas fajitas is something that Texas has that no other states have. So, we had the Fajita Fly In.

JG: You have the alliteration too.

DL: Yes, and so we had the...so we decided to come up with the Fajita Fly In and, from the get go it has been a tremendous success. We've averaged monthly we're the only monthly fly-in that has been going on this long. We've by today's date we've been doing this about six and a half years and we've had as many as 135 airplanes on the field at one time there at Angelina County. We've filled up every available parking space when we do that.

JG: I've been to a couple of those Saturday fly-ins.

DL: When we have the big ones.

JG: Yes, and there's always planes coming and going and there is always something to...

DL: And, we've never had an accident. It's just as safe as can be. Pilots for the most part are very safe people. You hear about crashes and things happen, but mostly flying is very safe. It's a very safe past time. You just gotta understand that you've got certain restraints and you just don't go past those. You don't take chances.

JG: Kind of like you need to always be thinking of safety or you won't be thinking at all.

DL: That is right, that is exactly right. But, the Fajita Fly In has averaged to date about 53 aircrafts. So, we've had fly-ins that's had bad weather and we might not have had but one or two aircraft there, but those are averaged right in with the 130 weekends so, overall in six and a half years we've averaged over 50 aircrafts. About 53 airplanes a month and we always have it on the second Saturday and if the weather is good Angelina County Airport will be busy on the second Saturday. It has been for the last six years.

JG: It's the second Saturday of the month?

DL: Of every month, yes.

JG: Have you ever had any...I don't know where this question is coming from but, I'm just curious, any celebrities that fly in?

DL: Oh yes, yes.

JG: I mean celebrity pilots or anything?

DL: Oh yes, gosh yes. I don't know who Kid Rock is, but Kid Rock is a famous singer. He's been to Angelina County Airport several times.

JG: Is he a pilot or he just, his plane has come?

DL: No, he comes through in his private aircraft.

JG: Oh, okay.

DL: We've had...

JG: So, he's come for the Fajita Fly Ins or just to land?

DL: No, actually just come through.

JG: Like refuel or something?

DL: Just come through and just happen to hit on the time that we were having the Fajita Fly In and says, "Hey what's all the activity about" you know. We've had national EAA directors coming cross country that just happen to come in during the time that we were having the Fajita Fly In and we happened to be flying kids and they were Young Eagle pilots themselves come in in a big jet. We've had astronauts come through. We've had a lot of famous air show performers just come down because they heard so much about our fajita fly-in and just come visit us on that weekend. We've had a lot of politicians come

through because that gives them an opportunity to see a lot of people on that day, you know.

JG: A whole other group of constituents huh?

DL: Gosh yes, we've had all kind of activities during the Fajita Fly Ins.

JG: Well good, glad I asked that. Any...well you mentioned the Young Eagles, let's go ahead and talk about that. How did that come about?

DL: The Young Eagles program is a program that started about 15 years ago with the EAA and we realized or at the time the leaders at EAA realized that most people in aviation were getting older and there wasn't a lot of new people coming into aviation. Part of the problem was the cost. It was expensive to take flying lessons and that sort of thing. So, there wasn't as many new people coming in and we felt like or, the leaders at that time felt like that a lot of that reason was because young people weren't being introduced to aviation maybe the right way. They didn't have an opportunity to go fly, you know, and actually learn what it was all about so, the Experimental Aircraft Association started the Young Eagles program. It's a totally volunteer program and to date we've flown over a million and a half youngsters.

JG: Now, that is nationwide?

DL: Nationwide.

JG: Nationwide okay.

DL: Our chapter is just shy of 1500 kids that we've flown here locally. I was looking at the numbers the other day and we had flown 1480 some odd kids. Just shy of 1500 local youngsters that we have flown. Some of them have been for their very first airplane ride. Some of them have been up seven or eight times. After their first ride they just can't get enough. Those are the ones that are going to be joining the Air Force or joining the Navy or this sort of thing. They're the ones that just love it.

JG: How much does it cost?

DL: The Fajita Fly In, you know, the Young Eagles program the Fajita Fly In of course we ask for donations to come to it, but the Young Eagles program is free to the youngsters. Those of us that fly the kids, fly the youngsters, foot that bill ourselves. It cost us between 70 and 75 dollars a flight modestly, but we are more than happy to spend that to give that youngster the opportunity to get in the air for the first time.

JG: Just anybody can come or what, do you get parental consent?

DL: You have to sign parental consent. You have to sign, because a lot of things even though we've...in the...shy of two million Young Eagles that have been flown

nationwide, to my knowledge we've only lost two. We had two young ladies that were flying with a man up in Washington State and had some kind of incident happen and the plane went down and it killed the two youngsters and the pilot. That is the only ones that I know of that has ever had an accident with a Young Eagle flight. We are usually so very, very safe we are overly cautious to make sure that the youngsters, we don't fly in heavy winds. We don't fly with any kind of weather conditions and we fly only when the youngsters can have the best overall experience. In other words if the air is rough or turbulent we don't fly. We only fly when they can have the very best experience in the air. The youngsters have to be between the age of eight and seventeen years of age and they have to have an interest in flying. That is it. That is the only requirements.

JG: Let's see here.

DL: I personally have flown a little over two hundred kids myself and I've never had the first one that has gotten sick or had a bad experience. They've all hit the ground when we get out of the airplane and say, "Man that was great, can I go again today" you know.

JG: Do it again, do it again!

DL: Well they can't go again that day but they can come back next month and we will take them again.

JG: How far away do kids come to participate in that? Do you know?

DL: Mostly it's local kids but, we've had kids from as far north as Ohio and Iowa that have been down visiting their grandparents for the summer and bring them out to the Fajita Fly In to fly just simply because they haven't had the experience or haven't had the opportunity at their home airport. Now, once they've experienced it with us here at Angelina County they will go home and they are going to look up an EAA chapter up there so they can keep flying. But, we routinely have people out of Houston, Beaumont, Conroe, and all of East Texas will drive in. Boy Scout troops, Girl Scout troops, will come in and contact us with "hey we have a bunch of kids that are working on their aviation badge. Do you think we can come and fly them as Young Eagles?" And, we do that a lot.

JG: Regionally where are the nearest other chapters, the other EAA chapters in Texas?

DL: The closest EAA Chapter to us right now is Longview, Gladewater, Tyler has an active/ inactive chapter. Sometimes they are active and sometimes they are not.

JG: What about Beaumont?

DL: Beaumont has one. I'm not sure that it's active right now, but they've had one in the past. Houston has one of the oldest, matter of fact, when the chapter program was starting back in about 1955-56 Chapter 12 in Houston was one of the oldest chapters. Chapter 12

in Houston and Chapter 19 in Lubbock were two of the founding chapters when the chapter program first started with the Experimental Aircraft Association.

JG: Now, did they give them sequential numbers so, chronologically if they came in.

DL: Yes, Chapter 1 in California, at Riverside California and then from there it started.

JG: So this group was the 1,219th?

DL: The 1,219th and since then there has been over 1500 chapters worldwide.

JG: Worldwide.

DL: Chartered, and of the 1500 chapters worldwide there is actually about an active 1000 chapters right now that are active. So, there is roughly 500 that have been chartered and then failed or you know, not active anymore.

JG: So these chapters, I think you just had your annual meeting.

DL: Yes.

JG: Tell a little bit about that, when you go to Oshkosh.

DL: The Oshkosh experience, AirVenture, is the largest most prolific air convention or air show in the world. We have people that come from Europe. People think of the air show as being the biggest that there is, but anything that happens in aviation, any innovations come out of Oshkosh because they come out of the Experimental Aircraft Association. When you think about it that is why so many of the astronauts and so many test pilots are actually members of the EAA because when you think about it the most well known experimental class of aircraft in the world is the space shuttle. It's an experimental class aircraft because it's one of a kind, you know. And, anything that has to do with space, anything that has to do with aviation whether it be balloons or helicopters or rocket ships or anything comes out of EAA. Well when you go to AirVenture once a year of the ten to eleven thousand aircraft that actually land up there and of the 750 to 850,000 people that visit Oshkosh in that weeks' time, anything new, electric aircraft, diesel aircraft, any type of flying wings, anything that is different in aviation is seen at Oshkosh. It's always seen there first. Flying cars, this year there were three new innovations of flying cars or what they call roadable aircraft or something like that. Anything that is new or experimental or new ideas come out of this organization. That is the kind of innovation they have up there.

JG: How many members of your local chapter generally make the trip to Oshkosh?

DL: For a long time there was just a couple of us. I've gone...

JG: Is it generally like the officers that go or?

DL: The officers have standing invitations there because we go to find out more, it's a convention for us. We go and learn about how to make our chapters grow. We learn membership retention. We learn things about new programs and things that the chapters have. But, no we've got a lot of builders here in this area that are building aircraft that go to learn new techniques because they have all the workshops up there, and stitching fabric on fabric aircraft, the older model aircraft or restoring aircraft. They have all kind of classes up there that just teach you how to stitch fabric. Working with fiberglass, the engine repair, electronics, anything that is new that has to do with navigation is at Oshkosh. All the vendors are there. Oh, and to answer your question to begin with we had two or three that went regularly, but now we are up to probably between ten and fifteen members of our local chapter that are up there every year. We have a blast. You go and look at airplanes, watch the air shows, you look at new products that are coming out, new aircraft that are coming out. It's just a week long party. (laughter)

JG: I guess most everybody flies their own plane in?

DL: A lot of us fly in. I do and most of us that go up there will fly in because it's a five and a half to six hour trip verses two days of driving because Wisconsin is a long way off. It's a thousand miles, so it's a much faster trip when you fly up on a Sunday afternoon and you come in and camp right there by your airplane than driving two days and having to stop mid way in St. Louis or something.

JG: I want to ask you a little bit about your personal airplane.

DL: Sure.

JG: Five and half, six hours are you able to do that without refueling, just straight shot?

DL: I have to refuel one time on the way up. I'll stop usually midway, usually once I leave east Texas I will stop somewhere in northern part of...anywhere from the northern part or mid part of Missouri and right before we cross the Missouri River that usually leaves about three and a half...hold on just a second. (cell phone ringing)

JG: Do I need to pause this? Okay.

DL: Anyway, Air Force theme song, that is another retired Air Force guy, but he's building an RV10 out here so, he's one of our chapter members. Usually we are going to refuel in about three, three and a half hours and then we've got two hours left to go into Oshkosh and that leaves us with plenty of fuel because with that many airplanes landing up there. And, I show films all the time to people that are just amazed because there will be 25 aircraft in the pattern trying to land. They are all controlled and they all come in usually safely.

JG: You might have to circle around a little bit huh?

DL: You might have to circle a little bit to get into the pattern to land.

JG: I bet that is interesting. Okay, tell us a little, if you don't mind, tell us a little bit about your aircraft.

DL: The aircraft that I have now is all metal. Two place aircraft with about seventy pounds of luggage, storage capacity. It's got four hour maximum capability as far as flight so I usually fly about three and a half hours maximum. Usually around 700 miles on the first leg and then gives some safety factor with fuel on the last part of the leg. But, I'll cruise usually around a hundred and eighty five to a hundred and ninety miles per hour across the ground. It's designed to get up real high. I have oxygen in it if I go above the safe altitudes where I can get up real high and cruise safely.

JG: What altitude is that?

DL: Above twelve thousand feet. So, I routinely will fly at twelve, thirteen thousand feet and my aircraft is actually designed for that. So, I have oxygen and I know we were coming back from Oshkosh last year and had real good tail winds at fourteen and fifteen thousand feet so, we went all the way up to fourteen five and I had to be on oxygen, you know, for about three and a half hours of that flight because of that. But, that is routine. It's just a pilot thing, it's no big deal but, it's a great cross country airplane. My wife and I will go for a weekend and we are liable to go to North Arkansas, there is a trout fishing resort up there in North Arkansas called Gaston's that I love to go to up there. They have their own landing strip and it's right there on the river. It's just a great place to visit.

JG: How long does it take you to get there?

DL: Oh, about an hour and forty minutes or so. (laughter) Instead of the all day drive.

JG: It takes that long to drive to Houston or longer.

DL: I understand.

JG: Yes, wow! Now how long did it take you to build it? You said it was a kit so...

DL: The first aircraft that I built I worked on about six to seven months. The second aircraft was a rebuild that I did. It was also experimental. When I built the helicopter from parts it took quite awhile. This particular aircraft that I have right now was a rebuild. The aircraft engine was in bad shape when I bought the aircraft because I wanted the air frame. So, what I did is I took the aircraft and completely rebuilt it, all new instrument panel, rebuilt the engine and did the navigation equipment that I felt like was important to be able to go all the places that I go in an airplane. So, it was a total rebuild so it took us about probably six to seven months to completely rebuild everything and get it like it is today.

JG: Is it a twin bladed prop?

DL: Uh-huh, a two bladed prop which is standard metal prop.

JG: I'm looking at Mr. Lymbery's business card and he has a small picture of his plane on the card here and it's painted in Air Force colors.

DL: Oh yes, my wife insisted on that. I'm retired Air Force reserve so it had to look like Air Force.

JG: Now, you said it was all metal, what type of metals?

DL: Aluminum.

JG: All aluminum?

DL: Oh yes, aircraft are built with aluminum alloys because they are lighter and stronger.

JG: Okay, are there any other type alloys that are being used besides aluminum, like some of the newer types of metals?

DL: Well a lot of your military aircraft are going to have everything from titanium which is extremely expensive but extremely strong, but most everything is aluminum.

JG: Okay.

DL: Most everything is aluminum now, the newest aircraft designs are composite which is what fiberglass has evolved into. Composite construction is super light weight and is strong as steel and a lot of the aircraft even airlines right now are being built with composite materials which is actually fiberglass layers that are sandwiched together to make them extremely strong. A lot of, and then again that came out of the experimental world. We've been building composite aircraft for fifteen years and finally it's finally proven itself to be that good, so a lot of the airline industries, a lot of the big aircraft manufacturers now are starting to build with composite techniques. But, that innovation came out of the experimental world.

JG: Where are the fuel tanks or is it one tank or two tanks?

DL: I've got two tanks, one in each wing.

JG: They're in the wings, okay.

DL: Everything on an aircraft – it's very critical that everything is balanced so you want balancing from forward and aft, or front to rear, and side to side. So, if you have a fuel tank in one wing you've got to have one in the other wing.

JG: Are there any external tanks or anything?

DL: Nope.

JG: Okay, how many people will it seat?

DL: Mine is two-person.

JG: Two-person okay, and you said about 70 pounds of luggage or stuff?

DL: Yes.

JG: Your fly rods and stuff like that. (laughter)

DL: Yes, yes, and that sort of thing, yes.

JG: I got a tackle...I bass fish and I got tackle boxes that weigh more than 70 pounds.

DL: More than that, I hear you, I hear you.

JG: Well, I don't know if you don't want to talk about it that is okay but, I would like to if we could maybe talk a little bit more about the airport itself, the Angelina County Airport and maybe the relationship the EAA has had. You mentioned kind of the formation or not actually the formation, but the reformation or the reinvigoration of the chapter moving from Nacogdoches to the Angelina County Airport.

DL: It's been an extremely good relationship, extremely good relationship. It has been very good for the airport. It's been very good for our chapter. We have built quite a few things. We've built a pavilion out there for the airport in an area that wasn't being utilized. It was built totally tax free; tax payers had...Angelina County citizens didn't have to put any money into it. It was done totally by donations and through the EAA. We've got cook buildings out there where people can go out and have weekend barbeques that we've built for the airport so they can stay out there barbecue out of the direct sunlight and out of the heat and during the winter time to get in under something where they are not getting rained out and still watch the aircraft. So, we've done that. We've built a new storage shed for the airport and wired it for them and they use that every day now. That is something that we donated and built. Of course, we've completely rebuilt the hangar that they wanted us to take over and kept it painted and maintained properly. We use that, our members use that for their projects to build airplanes in which makes it a lot more convenient for them. Since then we've had one of our largest benefactors, a guy that really doesn't like to have his name mentioned all the time, but I feel terrible about not mentioning it because he's been so good to our chapter and he's meant so much to our chapter here locally and to the airport. Mr. Joe Denman donated a hangar to us that he had bought strictly with our chapter in mind because he knew how active we were with the young people in the community and he has actually donated it. So, now we've got a club house that is built onto a hangar and we use it to house our member's aircraft in. So, we've got a permanent location there at the Angelina County Airport, so we have two hangars now including the one that was donated to us. A beautiful facility, incredible facility and we use it to have our Christmas parties in and this sort of thing for our membership appreciation. The things that we have done at the

airport, we have done, it has not cost Angelina County a dime and we do that because our entire purpose of the chapter of the EAA is to sponsor or encourage aviation in our area. So we want that at no cost whatsoever. The improvements that we made out there have been improvements to the airport specifically where it wouldn't cost the taxpayers anything.

JG: How has the chapter benefited the airport? Like...I think you were talking earlier about fuel sales and things.

DL: Well, the Fajita Fly In. The airport when I first started going to the airport they had a restaurant and they would have some activity around the restaurant, but it was never that busy. The airport diner or restaurant has been expanded and at lunch you can't even get in it anymore, and it's that way every day. We encouraged them to start opening up on Saturday. They were usually open about four days a week, then it was five days a week. Now, they are open six days a week. They've added three new employees in the restaurant and all of the restaurant is busy six days a week now. They are closed on Sunday is the only time. That has come primarily from the fact of the Fajita Fly In. We've got people that fly in from the area, a matter of fact anywhere between Dallas and Houston and Louisiana and West Texas. People fly into this airport to eat at the restaurant. It's a great location to go to. The Fajita Fly In has introduced most of these people to the restaurant. The military, oh gosh, we have military. We are located about mid way between two huge army post so, the military all come to the airport now because they've been to several of our Fajita Fly Ins and they come in during the time that we've got all these aircraft coming. They all know Lufkin very well. They will come and refuel here and plus the fact that the Angelina County Airport sells fuel. At every one of these they have a reduced fuel rate to encourage people to come in to the Fajita Fly In. But they have the standard rate that makes them a lot more profit money during the week but these people that come to the Fajita Fly In come back on Tuesday's or Thursday's or Friday to eat at the restaurant.

JG: Is there one grade of aviation fuel that they sell or is there multiple grades?

DL: Well the only two grades is jet fuel and one hundred low lead.

JG: Okay.

DL: Those general aviation aircraft like mine that have regular gas burning engines burn 100 low lead. All the jet aircraft burn...

JG: That is the octane, 100 octane?

DL: Right, all the jet aircraft will burn jet fuel.

JG: You said low lead, is that different from unleaded?

DL: Yes.

JG: Okay.

DL: Because it does have lead in it and that is one of the problems that makes aviation fuel that much more expensive than car fuel. For instance we'll spend a dollar, dollar and a half more per gallon for aviation fuel because lead is actually added to it. It's low lead, but it's needed for the higher compression aviation engines than car engines.

JG: Okay, that day that you and I had lunch out at the airport and we had hamburgers.

DL: You bet.

JG: Or I did anyway.

DL: Yes, I had a salad.

JG: You had chicken salad. You were telling me something and I almost forgot, I wrote it down awhile ago while you were speaking and it was something I never really thought of but, you were talking that day, you and Steve Reads I think.

DL: Right.

JG: I don't remember all the specifics but it involved and what I learned is that y'all sometimes might carry medical supplies or needed supplies like on a volunteer basis if the hospitals need it or something.

DL: Oh yes, the day that we were there, there was two aircraft came in and they had ice chests and everything with them and actually what they were doing there had been an accident victim at a local hospital that had donated organs and those organs were being transferred to the children's hospital in Houston and another location in the Dallas area. And, that happens quite often. A lot of aviators donate their time to fly either sick patients or medical supplies into...between hospitals and everything.

JG: So, hospitals know who to call?

DL: Yes, they have a contact but now most of the hospitals, like the big hospitals like Galveston, the children's hospital at Galveston, have their own aircraft.

JG: But, like locally if one of the hospitals here who would they typically call, would they call you or would they call the airport?

DL: They usually...they never contact us because that has to be handled a certain way. They will contact the people who do the emergency Airvac and they will transfer it usually for them. But, a lot of times you'll see a helicopter or an airplane going overhead and it's actually an emergency medical flight.

JG: How many aircraft does the local hospital have, just one?

DL: Just one, and they don't actually have one, these are different. These are actually Airvac companies that set up nationwide in different specific areas and they may have 15 or 20 helicopters and they'll put one in this area and another one in this area and another one in this area but, they are assigned to this hospital.

JG: I know my young nephew a few years ago had a pretty bad horseback riding accident, fell off a horse and took him to the hospital and then they were going to take him by helicopter to Dallas. By the time they got all the paperwork and got him ready to go I think a more important call, called the helicopter away to Louisiana or somewhere and anyways, everything worked out fine. They just took him by ambulance onto Dallas, but I got to thinking about that. If you've only got one helicopter there might be another need at some point.

DL: Everything has to be prioritized and the two...over the weekend, I noticed last weekend the gunshot victims out at Huntington were both airlifted.

JG: I saw that in the paper, yes.

DL: And, that requires two different helicopters and so they had to bring another helicopter in from another area to be with the one that we've got here locally.

JG: So, does that happen often that some of your members have transferred?

DL: Not our members.

JG: Oh, okay.

DL: We've got some members that do some of the medical flights, but we rarely...most of them have moved out of the area now. Most of them their primary...they are still members of ours but, they are not located right here right now.

JG: They are not doing it on behalf of the EAA.

DL: No, no.

JG: Okay, okay. Well, is there anything else that I've neglected to ask that you would like to share or is there anything that we haven't covered?

DL: Jonathan, I don't know of anything.

JG: We talked about the hangars and the Fajita Fly In and the pavilion, the Young Eagles program. I think Mr. Denman had written something here about the 2010 project. Do y'all regularly try to have an annual project?

DL: The 2010 Project is actually the Angelina County looking at improvements to the airport many years down the road, and that is always ongoing. There is a future plan for

the airport. We are not involved in that other than the fact of being aware of it. Anything that we can do to make the airport better, that is about it. Anybody that is involved with the airport is going to be involved with the airport's improvement, you know, you just can't get around it.

JG: I would assume they may have some type of plan in connection with that Angelina Vision 2020.

DL: Same thing, yes.

JG: That program that was a county-wide. Not the county as the government, but county-wide for everybody. I remember going to a lot of those meetings on behalf of like the cultural institutions, libraries, archives, museums and they try to involve everybody to make the whole county a better place.

DL: You bet.

JG: I bet they have something along those lines. Well, like I said I guess that is about all I had. I'm sure after we turn the tape off we'll think of a few things.

DL: It always happens. (laughter)

JG: But, we can always come back to that so, anyways let me just run through this list one more time and make sure I didn't neglect anything.

DL: We are hoping, we are going through some changes right now with our Fajita Fly In and we are hoping that we've been doing this for six and a half years, so we are hoping we will be able to continue doing this for many years in the future. But, we are going to be going through some changes where we are doing our own cooking and doing all of our own work now so I've got to rely more on the membership now where we've had support from the county before. We are doing a lot more of the work. We park all the airplanes and that sort of thing and so I've got to rely more on our membership.

JG: How many people do you need to park 130 airplanes?

DL: Believe it or not about five or six because you don't park them all at one time. But you've got to have one real good controller that is going to say you go here, you go here, you go here.

JG: I guess once you get on the ground and get to the big parking lot the air traffic controller is out of the picture. Then it's the ground man.

DL: Ground control, ground control. We have our own frequency that we go on to and then usually not always, but usually it will be me in the tower and we've got a little tower that we set up out there and I'll be telling them, "This individual aircraft is going to go

here and this one is going to go here, this one's going to go here." Then I'll have people out there that actually flag them in and park them in those locations.

JG: Have you ever had any occasion on these fly-ins that somebody comes in and for whatever reason is not able to get their plane restarted or anything? Does that happen?

DL: Sure, oh yes, that happens.

JG: How do they resolve that, does everybody pitch in and help?

DL: We help them, we help them. We are all aircraft mechanics and builders and pilots and we will all chip in. We've had people that has had flats. I've taken...put them in my truck after the fly in was over with and taken them down town and we've had flats and tubes replaced and things like that. Get it back on the airplane and they go home, but no we are not going to abandon anybody. If someone comes in we are going to help them.

JG: Okay, okay. Do y'all have regulars that come to the fly in?

DL: Oh yes, we've got regulars that come. As a matter of fact, I had a young man that came in here oh it's been several years back and I had to fly him all the way back to Ft. Worth. His airplane had broke and he had a landing gear problem and I took him back to his car in Ft. Worth, at an airport in Ft. Worth, so we are going to take care of anybody that comes.

JG: So, like in that case he needed a place to leave his plane. Did he leave it in y'all's hangar or just out in the open?

DL: That particular time it was put up and protected until he could get it fixed.

JG: Okay, well Mr. Lymbery I sure appreciate it.

DL: You bet.

JG: Thank you!

DL: You bet, thank you Jonathan.

END OF INTERVIEW