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### The Nonskeds - The People of the West

Lee Ganger. I first heard about Lee Ganger from Walter S. "Buzz" Scott, a Canadian enterpriser from Montreal who was business manager of New England Air Express, a small company operating five Curtiss C-46's across the American continent like they were TWA with 75 aircraft. Buzz was a wheeler dealer, promoter, con man par excellence and deep down a real softy. He is covered elsewhere in this history.

At Burbank's Lockheed Air Terminal, the center of the world for most west coast aviation and Hollywood aviation aficionados, there were two bars. The Pre Flight at the entry to the terminal building and the Sky Room Restaurant and Bar located on the second floor and overlooking the runways and hanger areas of the airport proper. The airport's concessions were operated by the Fred Prophet Company which granted rather liberal bar credits to airport operators. Here Buzz Scott, Clint Moen, Terry Grant and numerous other ticket agents and promoters gathered almost daily to talk, discuss and scheme about screwing the various nonsked airline operators and other wheeler dealers associated with the industry. Clint Moen was called the Mayor of San Diego and he along with Terry Grant and others would charter boats to take them out to the navy ships just arriving from overseas assignments to sell nonsked airline coach seat tickets to freshly returned US servicemen eager to return home as fast as possible. They could fly for less than railroad coach fares from San Diego to Chicago (69\$ vs \$99 rail) and be there in 7 hours rather than 3.5 days.

It was here that Buzz Scott first introduced me to Lee Ganger, an expatriate from Hackensack, New Jersey via New Guinea, Guam, Siapan, the battle of the Philippine Sea and Okinawa. Lee was one of those many military non entities carefully kept by military brass from public view. He was a Chief AP - better known as an enlisted aviation pilot. The military, Navy and Marine Corps in particular, have seldom publicized the large quantity of "enlisted" aviation pilots who fought and died in World War 2 and Korea as enlisted personnel flying combat operations along side their brassier counter parts. While Lee Ganger obtained numerous decorations and was up and recommended for the Navy Cross, the real iron he was given was a steel plate in his head as the result of a Japanese shell shredding his SB2C's cockpit canopy. This left Lee Ganger a little odd in some respects. He knew aircraft and was an excellent aircraft mechanic but few would trust him to fly their precious aircraft. So Lee would bootleg time here and there in anything that he could use that the owner might allow ( and sometimes didn't allow but also didn't have the foggiest idea about how or why his machine was low on gas or had some dirt and grass hanging in the under carriage)

Lee Ganger was at the very least an very loyal albeit, not very efficient employee. One day at Burbank, Buzz Scott complained about a couple of telephone poles which obscured his vision ( of checking out the stews getting out of their cars in the parking lot) in Lee's hearing. The next morning telephone and power company crews were busily resetting the poles away from the line of vision of Buzz's office. He commented and Lee announced that he had called and arranged for the poles to be moved. We all laughed. Buzz laughed last and loudest when he received a \$200

plus bill for the service of moving the poles about a month later. By then Lee had left for other parts.

Buzz had first hired Lee as a defensive method at Teterboro, NJ, the eastern terminus of the Nonsked Airlines. They weren't permitted by either CAA (FAA's predecessor at the time) or the major airlines to use Newark or La Guardia Airports. There were no terminal buildings at Teterboro's airport in Hasbrook Heights, NJ and passengers had to wander through cargo areas and auto parking lots to find their flights or aircraft. Buzz hired Lee Ganger to help the passengers and as a bouncer. To describe Ganger is to describe a short 5'6" dark haired rather round but hardly fat individual with a Mohawk injun style hair cut. Though Lee Ganger was solidly built with the strength of a bull and always doing something for one or other of the nonsked operators he was also always flat broke and out of "coffee" money. People instinctively seeing Lee went the other way when they saw him heading in their direction with a dedicated purpose. Nonsked operators used him when necessary as a stand in co-pilot on C-46's for which he was rated, mostly to ferry the aircraft to a waiting crew somewhere. Lee was payed the minimum they could get away, was always available and he did it for less. In this period of early nonsked development our Captains made better than \$ 1,200 to \$1, 400 per month while contemporary senior captains at major airlines such as American and United barely eked out \$450 a month. In those years Lee had never scratched an aircraft he was flying. However on the ground while involved in maintenance operations it was a different story (if not at times disaster). Lee had numerous incidents with parked aircraft, forklifts, tow tractors, pickup trucks and his personal autos, though none were truly serious at the time.

Inbued with the idea that there was money in the ground Lee entered the wild world of Uranium Mining by air using a magnetometer while flying low over terrain in search of an elusive quarry and the path to instant riches. Flying airplanes and using expensive search equipment is an expensive hobby to begin with and shortly Lee was back with us at Burbank looking for some work for his keep. I assigned him to a maintenance crew engaged in rehabing a Douglas C-47 under modification into a civil passenger airliner. Lee was coincidentally Jewish. He could not work on the Sabbath - Saturdays - any Saturday - just wasn't permitted orthodox Jews. He said it was forbidden and he had to obey the dictates of his religion. Of course most orthodox Jews go to Temple on the Sabbath. Lee Ganger couldn't find a Jewish Temple in the San Fernando Valley if he stood under one. Being also half christian (his mothers side) the idea of working on Sundays was also against his religious beliefs and a serious and greivous sin against god, even on double time work days Lee Ganger remained true to his religious principals, unless he had an urgent need of money for one of his exploits..

On Monday mornings Lee arrive with our maintenance crew between 7 and 7:15 AM ready for work. Lee immediately arranged to get coffee for everyone, myself included. Our work area, a former fighter revetment at Lockheed Air Terminal built in WW2 , was made of reinforced solid concrete walls standing about 18 feet high. It was later covered with a corrugated tin roof and used as a maintenance work areas for larger aircraft. On the side of the revetment stood a short row of Navy Quonset Huts where we maintained our shops, stored parts and materials and lierally remanufactured aircraft to original design specifications. On the airport at the time Flying Tigers, Slick Airways, Lockheed Aircraft Service, Intercontinental Aviation and International

Airports and Pacific Airmotive Corporation were all engaged in aircraft modification or conversion work of civil and military. The aircraft types included C-54's (DC-4), C-118A (DC-6), -C-46's, C-47's (DC-3's), Lockheed Constellations, Lockheed F-80 jet fighters, Martin 202's and Convair 240 airliners. Some companies were creating civil versions of the Douglas B-26 attack bomber, Douglas B-23 Bomber, Lockheed Ventura PV-1 Patrol Bombers, Lockheed L-18 Lodestars, Catalina Flying Boats. The independents airlines had financed a company, the Engineering Foundation, that was engaged in a program to modify the C-46 to meet CAA transport category standards using the old battered airframe of a P-47 fighter to accomplish the test work. Many other types were converted for civil use but proven uneconomical in a competitive environment, were quickly discarded. A fleet of Budd Conastoga transports, virtually factory new when acquired by Flying Tiger Line, were quickly disposed of at give away prices. Slick Airways, an all cargo operator purchased the manufacturing rights for most component parts of the Curtiss C-46 aircraft from the Curtiss Wright Corporation and for years provided parts worldwide for this renowned aircraft.

In 1955 Slick Airways, who originated the development of the all cargo DC-6A at Douglas Aircraft was the first airline to overhaul one. Hank Huff was Director of and VP operations at the time Lee was hired by Doc Lambeth, Slick's senior maintenance foreman. He was assigned as one of the tear down crew and would be observed by CAA staff as they developed maintenance safety standards for the DC-6 that would apply to operator of the aircraft by other airlines. Doc Lambeth knowing Lee cautioned him that he would not cut him any slack. Lee agreed to work Saturdays and Sundays when required and to show up every day for work. A few weeks later Lee was across the field asking me for work. I mentioned his returning to Cal Air to Doc Lambeth and he laughed, asking me to stop by his office when I had time. When I did Doc pulled out a work sheet from his desk with Lee's name at top. It was filled with checks and squares to represent days attending and days absent. The checks and squares alternated down the column. Doc laughed, noting Lee cost time keeping more to track him and said they probably paid for days he show up to didn't work. Ordinarily Doc said they would have varied his jobs and sent him to work in some other areas but with all the CAA people around he had to get rid of him.

We had completed a DC-3 for passenger service and were getting ready to take it out on its post overhaul check flight since engines, propellers, control surfaces and numerous hydraulic systems components had been changed or modified. Lee came up and stood in the cockpit doorway watching as we ran the check lists and checked instruments and gauges. The right engines fired and started immediately with a couple of belches and a puff of white smoke. The left engine after several turns showed no inclination to fire at all. After allowing a couple of minutes for the starter motor to cool, I engaged the starter and this time opened the mixture control to feed fuel to the engine. Glancing down I saw our wing mechanic. It was Lee Ganger, who minutes before had been standing in the cockpit doorway. Several of the mechanics also scrambled to get aboard for the check flight but not Lee. His excuse was God told me not to if the engine balked. Two days later on another test hop Lee sat in the cabin while we put the aircraft through its paces. Sitting amidships next an escape exit, it flew open as we entered a steep bank, leaving a very white blood drained expression on his face as he looked down six thousand feet. Upon subsequent check of the inspection sheet it was found Lee Ganger had signed off the exit handles as having been safety wired by him.

In 1958 Lee drifted away from Burbank and the airport group to work with Uranium hunters around the Moab, Utah region. One of his associates was a gentleman named Troxell who was associated with other airport veterans of the Nonsked era. While large deposits of Uranium ore were found none seem to have been the product of Lee Ganger's prospecting or discoveries. In fairness to Lee Ganger and many like him, who served in WW2 and suffered similar medical histories, few people cared or were concerned about his ultimate fate or the problems associated with his steel plate or voices he heard at times or the descriptive visions he saw at times .

As a pilot or mechanic Lee had his many idiosyncracies or trade marks of the trade. He flew the Bamboo Bombers (Cessna UC-78's) with a verve and skill equally as well as he flew a mitchell B-25 bomber or a C-46. He went to school with and knew and remained close to actress Susan Hayward who flabbergasted some of us when she showed up at the airport to see him. Ditto with some other notable actors who looked him. One day he showed up in wonderful old Dusenbergs Roadster which he was to deliver across the field to Howard Hughes at his hanger at Burbank. Lee always came with surprises. His gruff personality and 20 mule skinner vocabulary belied his ability to talk with and relate to young children as well as senior business officials.

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Walter S. Buzz Scott, Richard Olivera and New England Air Express. I first met Buzz Scott just after New England Air Express closed down its operations. Under intense fire and pressure brought by the Civil Aeronautics Board, NEAX closed down operations in 1953. The Company operated 5 Curtiss C-46 aircraft, one of the largest twin engine transports at the time. Designed by Curtiss Wright originally as a tricycle nose wheel landing gear and with a pressurized cabin, such refinements were given way to the essentials of war time aviation. The C-46 could lift 15,000 pounds of freight across 1600 miles. Comparatively the C-47 could lift 7500 pounds across 800 miles. The C-46 performed admirably in the Pacific with the Marines and over the China Burma India (CBI) hump services.

In Europe it proved a disaster against heavily concentrated German ground fire directed against a C-46 fleet carrying para troopers into France after Normandy. Almost 20 were immediately shot down in flames with high casualties and ending its role in European operations. The C-46 suffered a serious material deficiency which resulted in the loss of a large number as a result of engine fires. The C-46 engine had a stainless steel dishpan placed around the exhaust collector ring but no stainless steel bulkhead separating the engine compartment from the accessory compartment as was and is the usual standard on other aircraft. Additionally, the landing gear folded forward into the lower engine nacelle cradled between two large landing gear doors. The main gear strut arced forward seating into a casting on the lower wing spar and upper aft compartment wall of the nacelle. An engine spawned could and did fire quickly burn through the insufficient collector ring and dishpan of the accessory sections and with the forced draft of the slip stream would proceed to burn through the front (main) spar of the C-46 in about 1.5 to 2.1 minutes.

In civil use the C-46 was converted to carry up to 60 passengers with double rows of three seats abreast in the mid section, two abreast at fore and aft sections and down to single seats at the narrow fuselage sections. Similar to the C-47 in appearance with a tail wheel, passengers had to climb uphill to get to their seat. The lavatory, usually located in the aft section on the cargo step was usually comprised of a larger stainless steel unit containing a conventional toilet seat. Below this was a standard stainless container to hold the necessary slop. Seviing consisted of waiting till the aircraft arrived and passengers left by lifting out the opail containing the slop and carrying it to the door and gingerly stepping down the ladder to the slop truck or to a disposal lav at the airport. Refill consisted of adding a shallow depth of water liberally sprinkled with deoderant and bleach.

NEAX operated from Boston via Teterboro to Miami, San Juan, PR, Chicago, St. Louis, Burbank, San Diego, Dallas, San Francisco/Oakland, Seattle and Anchorage. Cargo was mixed and usually consisted of passengers and freight. In the winter Seattle to Alaska flights were filled with produce, eggs and meat and south bound the bodies of deceased Alaskans being sent south to Seattle for burial. (Story on stew, gun and bloated body about here.