

1985 - 1989

FAA - Watertown

- See Appendix II for stories and anecdotes from Watertown FSS -

I was selected for the supervisor position in Watertown about September 1985 but, because of staffing, I couldn't leave Huron so I "supervised" by traveling to Watertown one day a week throughout the fall. We didn't move until after Christmas so the kid's schooling wasn't disrupted too badly and the long delay had given us plenty of time to find a house.

The FAA was in the process of modernizing and new facilities were to be constructed. All of the existing Flight Service Stations were scheduled to be closed and consolidated into Automated Flight Service Stations (AFSS). Huron had been selected as the future location of the South Dakota AFSS so we thought we'd only be in Watertown for, at most, two years. Consequently, we decided to rent, and found a pretty nice house that was owned by our realtors. .



Home 1986-1989: 805 4th Ave NE, Watertown, SD

There was a large vacant lot adjacent to our house that belonged to the people we rented from and Kevin got the job of keeping it mowed. He did his best to wear out our lawn mower keeping it mowed and he told us that he figured that was something he'd like to do for a career.



Watertown Flight Service Station

Watertown Flight Service operated part-time from 6:00 AM to 10:00 PM and during other hours services were provided by Huron. We were responsible for airports through the northeast corner of South Dakota and a few just across the state line in west-central Minnesota. I had 4-5 specialists working for me and since they mostly did their jobs well there weren't many problems.

The pending closure of Flight Service

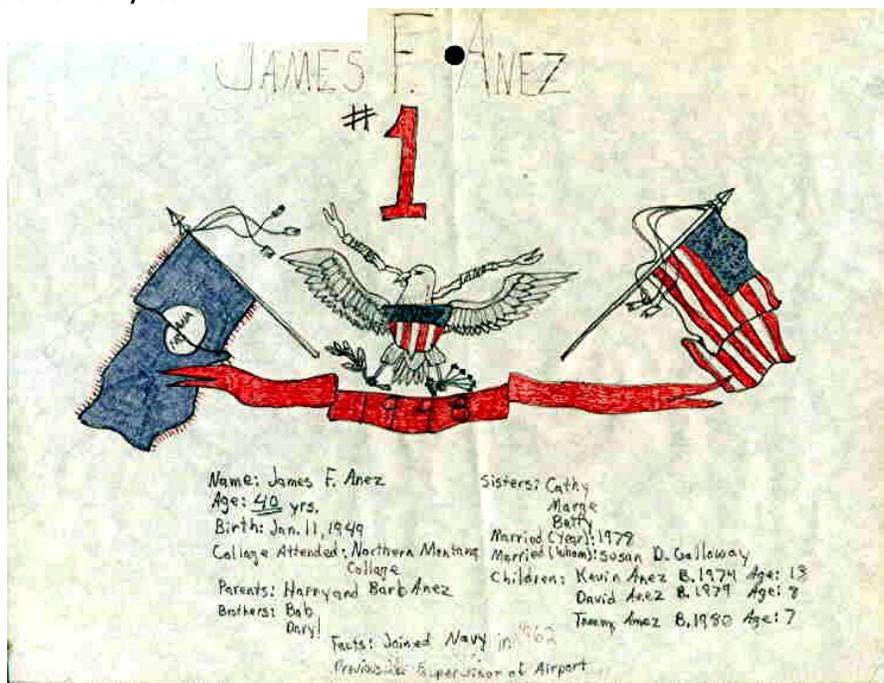
facilities (there were five in South Dakota) had major political ramifications and was hotly debated. I, personally, liked the idea feeling it was the only way we could catch up with technology. While in Huron I'd seen a letter written by Tom Daschel, one of the Senators from South Dakota, in which he stated that the existing system had to be maintained so pilots could visit their local facility for face to face service. However just a week before publication of this letter Tom, who was a pilot, had been in Huron and rather than walk 50 yards to visit the facility had called on the phone. This prompted me to write to him - something I'd never done before or since, to point out his hypocrisy. A couple of weeks later, on a Saturday morning, I got a phone call from him. We talked for about 20 minutes and while he didn't change his mind I may have had an impact based on my next encounter with him in 1992.



Kevin, Dave & Tom - July 1987

These political delays led to a situation by the 1987 because there was still no indication of when we might move. We liked Watertown and I liked the position and the facility so staying there was OK with us.

The problem was that the owners of our house decided they wanted to sell it, so after considerable debate we purchased it. We did however reach an agreement that they would guarantee that if the value didn't appreciate we'd



Father's Day Certificate drawn by Kevin - June 1987

at least get our original investment back.

Another result of the delay in our return to Huron was that Sue had to find somewhere to attend college. She had been working as a Licensed Practical Nurse since our marriage. She wanted to become a Registered Nurse and started in the nursing program at Huron College prior to our move but put that on hold for the duration of our stay in Watertown. When we realized that the return to Huron was nowhere in sight she wanted to resume school, but there was nothing available in Watertown. The best deal we found was in Willmar, Minnesota and for a couple of semesters Sue attended school there coming home on the weekends. Unfortunately our next move, to Pierre, would interrupt even that training.



During the 3½ years in Watertown my manager rarely visited the facility. Aberdeen, SD was also part time, with a supervisor under the manager in Huron, same as me, and I knew that they were visited about every two weeks. This kind of bothered me until a supervisor in Huron pointed out that the reason I rarely saw my manager was that he trusted me and had no problems with the way I was running the facility.



LEARNING EXPERIENCE — Kyro Lantsberger, a sixth grader at Immaculate Conception Church, takes note as Jim Anez, of the Federal Aviation Administration in Watertown, talks about his work.

Kyro and his classmates each visited different professions last week to learn about various career choices. (Public Opinion photos by Christine Larson)

In fact Aberdeen was so short staffed that for about 7 months during 1987 myself or one of the specialists from Watertown would go to Aberdeen each weekend allowing each of the guys there to have a day off.

I've always been interested in history and "local" history is particularly intriguing to me. Watertown had a really nice airport for the size of the city and I was curious how that had come to be. I found a lot of old records in the files of the facility and this got me started with a major research project.

It turned out that the station had been established at the original airport about 1939. The army took the airfield and rebuilt it at the beginning of World War II for use as a B-17 training base and it was returned to the facility after the war.

After digesting the information available at the facility I began spending my free time at the library reading microfilm copies of old newspapers. From this I compiled my "History of Aviation in South Dakota" that ultimately found its way onto the internet at, among other

Newspaper Article April 28, 1987

places, the South Dakota State Aeronautic website.

I also solved one of the mysteries from the past when reading through records at Watertown: In August of 1977 or 1978 on a hot Saturday afternoon in Miles City a plane from Glasgow landed when I was working. I knew the aircraft belonged to 3 brothers who owned businesses (one was beer distributor) in Glasgow but we talked to them only occasionally. After the plane landed two guys came into the FSS to advise they would be leaving the plane for a few hours and we had a brief discussion about the forecast for the evening. They were carrying a case of beer when they came in and when they started to walk out it was left on the counter. I followed them out and told them they'd left the beer and was told that it wasn't theirs; it was "... for everything you do." I got the hint. We had a similar situation every year at Christmas when a case of Wild Turkey would turn up on the door step with just enough bottles for whatever the facility staffing was that year. The thing that puzzled me was that we talked with these guys so infrequently I couldn't imagine what they meant by "everything we do". Well 8 or 10 year later, when I was reading documents at Watertown, I discovered a report of a lost aircraft orientation. It was the same Cessna 310 and was from the same summer of 1977 or 1978. The aircraft was enroute from Minnesota to Montana. They'd been circumnavigating thunderstorms, became disoriented and a specialist at Watertown had determined the aircraft location and assisted them to a safe landing at Watertown airport.



I had the first and only union grievance while in Watertown. We had a gal, Leslie, who had bid on a job in Cleveland AFSS. She had no particular interest in aviation and while she could perform all individual tasks well, she was somewhat marginal as a FSS Specialist in a small facility because she didn't multi-task very well. I thought she would do well at a larger facility like Cleveland because job responsibilities were separated and specialists only had to do one thing at a time. Per the union contract bids were supposed to be open for 21 days and had to be received by the selection official by the closing date. Most facilities fudged a little on receipt and accepted bids that arrived up to a couple of days past the closing date. The problem in this case was that she'd waited until the last minute to mail her bid packaged so it was received after the closing date. The facility needed to make the selection immediately after the closing date so they returned her package. The problem was that because of the short deadline to make the selection the bid was only open for 14 days instead of the 21 days required by contract and that was the basis of her grievance. An even bigger problem was that the 14 days (vs. 21 day) bid period was unofficially authorized by the union in order to facilitate a selection. Consequently she was 100% in the right in filing her grievance but the union didn't want to deal with it because they'd bent the rules and everyone wanted to settle except Leslie. The only thing she'd take to settle the grievance was a promotion to Cleveland. The only thing the FAA couldn't legally do to settle the grievance was give her a promotion. So she won the grievance but got nothing and I lost what little respect, if any, that I'd had for the union. She did get what she wanted ultimately as Cleveland filed her bid package and the next time they had an opening they selected her for the position.