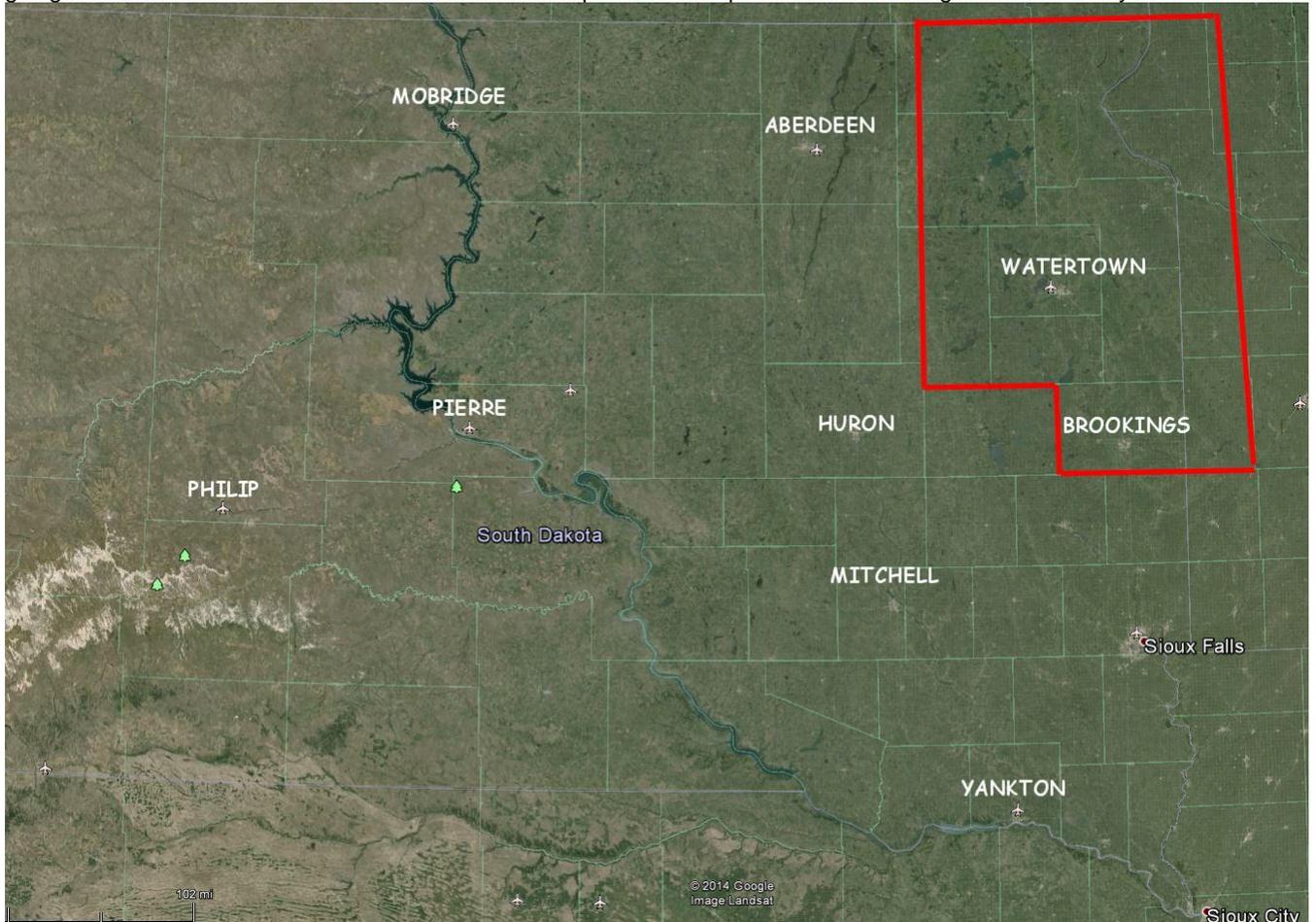


Watertown, South Dakota (ATY FSS) 1985-1989

I was selected as the Area Supervisor at Watertown FSS in the fall of 1985 but because of staffing couldn't leave Huron immediately. I travelled to Watertown one day each week during the last 3 months of the year and we didn't actually move from Huron until after Christmas in 1985. The Huron Facility Manager was also the manager of the Aberdeen and Watertown so in many respects I had the autonomy of a manager without the title. I had 5 to 7 specialists during the time in Watertown but worked some shifts to cover leave and illness. I and a couple specialists from Watertown took turns for almost a year going to Aberdeen on weekends to cover shifts to the supervisor and specialist there could get one or two days off.



The Watertown flight plan area was the northeast corner of South Dakota and a few airports in western Minnesota.

WEATHER ISSUES

This gal did good

I was working a Saturday day shift. It was an unseasonably warm and sunny but windy spring day with winds gusting into the mid 30 knot range. A lady called from a Cherokee asking for an airport advisory and advised that she's on a student cross-country. There was no traffic, but I remember being mildly surprised that a student would be doing a cross-country with the kind of winds we were getting.

She landed uneventfully and taxied to the FSS ramp. When she came in she was in tears and was trying to tell me that she had gotten lost, was overdue on her flight plan and just didn't know what she was going to do.

She wasn't on a flight plan to Watertown so I presumed she must really be lost, but when I asked for details it turned out that Watertown was the first leg of three and her flight plan destination was the next location where she planned to land. So, she really wasn't overdue... she was running late and all we needed to do was adjust her ETA at the flight plan destination. That made her feel a little better.

The next issue was that she said she'd gotten lost. When I asked her about this I learned that when she realized she didn't know where she was she'd spotted a small town, descended enough so she could read the name on the town water tower. Then she climbed back to altitude, got her chart and plotted a new course for Watertown. I told her I could not think of any better way to do it than that and she should be proud.

So she left, much happier than she arrived.

But as I watched her on her takeoff roll she just didn't seem to be able to accelerate and she aborted the takeoff. She taxied back to the end of the runway and tried again with no better results. This time taxied back to the ramp and when she came into the Flight Service she said the plane just wouldn't develop any power and she called her flight instructor.

A couple of hours later her flight instructor and husband flew into Watertown in another aircraft. She flew home with the instructor and her husband flew their plane home.

A couple of weeks later, on a much nicer day she flew in again. I asked her what had happened and she said they weren't exactly sure, but thought it had something to do with the fuel. They were burning auto gas and thought it was a cold temperature blend and because it was such a warm day the fuel wasn't burning properly. She said her husband got the plane home, but it hadn't run well all until he got closer to home and temperatures dropped into the 50s.

PEOPLE AND THINGS

The Vice President

For some reason Watertown got a lot of attention during the primary races leading up to the elections in 1988. We had 3 different presidential candidates visit, but the one I remember was George Bush. He was vice president at that time so had Secret Service protection. About 10 days before the visit the Secret Service came out and did a facility study. Then a few days before the visit a team came in and installed all kinds of radio and telephone equipment. Because the manager was in Huron I worked in the main facility office and we had another office that really wasn't used for anything (I think it technically belonged to Airway Facilities). The phone company installed a bank of phones in the spare office for the press and my office was designated as the "safe room" in case they needed to get the vice president inside.

The morning of the visit they brought in a bomb sniffing dog and went through the entire facility. They also physically looked through every drawer and filing cabinet in my office and kicked me out. At one point some law enforcement guy asked the dog handler if he could pet the dog. The dog handler, an Air Force sergeant, said, "Sure if you don't mind losing the hand"

After Bush got back from wherever he'd gone while in Watertown he made a little speech out on the ramp to a group of 50 or so people right outside our operations room window. It was cold, probably between 0 and 10 above with a stiff breeze, and the thing that impressed me, more than anything else, was the secret service detail standing in front of the group in their light weight overcoats totally motionless except for their heads turning as they scanned the crowd. It could have been 72° and sunny out there for all the discomfort they showed.

After Bush's plane took off all the extra equipment was gone in about 2 hours!

Money means different things to different people

Watertown FSS was a "temporary" part-time facility operating from 0600-2200 (in this case "temporary" had gone on for about 12 years). One evening I was working when the commuter airline agent came to our end of the building and told me that there were a couple of guys in the terminal waiting room. They were there to pick up a passenger from the last flight of the evening but the passenger had missed his flight and was going to charter a plane to fly him to Watertown. She was ready to close the terminal and wondered if they could come to the FSS area to wait. No problem.

While visiting with the guys waiting for the aircraft I learned that the reason the passenger missed his airline connection was because he was in the bar drinking and missed hearing the flight call! About 10 minutes before closing time the charter flight called in. I gave him an airport advisory and told him that although I'd be discontinuing FSS operations before he arrived I'd wait for his arrival since his passenger's friends were waiting in the FSS and it was cold outside.

The aircraft arrived and the passenger was a loud boisterous "big city" type of guy. He thanked me profusely for waiting. He wanted to give me a "tip" for my trouble and tried to hand me a \$5.00 bill. I told him I

couldn't take it but thanked him. He insisted I take it and I insisted that I couldn't. His friends finally told him they should just go as I'd been nice enough stick around and they were holding me up. As they were gathering his stuff I noted that he'd just left the five dollar bill lying on the counter. I went over and picked it up to give it back to him and realized that it was a \$50.00 bill!!!!!!!

I gave it back to him and after he left I asked the pilot if he'd seen that the guy wanted to give me a \$50... he said "Yeah, he gave me \$100.00 when we got out of the plane."

The Wild West (South Dakota style)

When I got to Watertown there was a gal there in training. She'd had a pretty sheltered life – she'd grown up in a big city in Ohio and attended private girls' schools - high school and college. One Easter she brought hard boiled eggs to work and revealed that she'd never eaten an egg until she was in college. Apparently her folks never made her eat anything she didn't want and it wasn't until she was "dared" to eat one in college that she found out she liked them.

She'd worked in Washington, DC for a newspaper and then following the controller strike in 1981 was hired by the FAA and sent to Chicago Center. She washed out of the ARTCC option and was offered the FSS in Watertown, SD which she accepted. The first car she ever owned was the one she bought when she had to move to South Dakota. She lived in an apartment above a sewing shop in the main business district, which was about as urban as possible in Watertown, but this was the farthest west she'd ever been and it was definitely the least civilized place she could imagine.

So the irony of what happened to her is unbelievable. She always parked her car off the alley behind the L shaped building where she lived. One morning she heard a commotion in the alley and she casually glanced out her window to see what the noise was. In her alley there two cowboys on horseback with a buffalo trapped between her car and the building. The cowboys were trying to get the buffalo lassoed so they could pull it out of the space and in the meantime the buffalo process was crushing the side of her car.

It seems that the buffalo has escaped from a ranch a few miles from town and somehow found its way to a place where it could destroy the car of the one person who thought she lived in the Wild West.

Careful What You Ask For

There was a family of ground squirrels who had their burrow just outside the Flight Service and we could watch the babies playing in the grass right outside our window. It seemed like everyone thought they were pretty cute and enjoyed watching them.

One morning when I came to work I noticed one of the adults, obviously dead, right at one of the entrances to his burrow. A few minutes later the day shift specialist came in and, having seen what I'd seen, was very distraught. She was going to talk to the airport manager and since I figured they'd need to dispose of the dead rodent I thought that was a good idea.

Later that morning one of the airport workers came in and I learned the rest of the story. It seems the specialist who was so disturbed by the dead squirrel had actually precipitated the situation. Apparently she had complained to airport management about the squirrels and wanted the airport to get rid of them. As a result of her complaint airport management put out some poison and that did get rid of the squirrels.

I talked with the specialist later and asked her what she thought would happen when she asked that they "get rid" of the squirrels. She said she thought the airport would bring in animal control, trap the squirrels and have them relocated to a new home.

Deer in a Hole

The airport authority was building an underground power vault right outside the FSS and a large hole, probably 15 feet square and eight or ten feet deep, had been excavated

One day we saw a couple of deer trotting down the street. Deer were very common and even though the airport was entirely fenced with an 8 foot fence topped with barb wire they sometimes got onto the field. Some people thought there was a small band of deer that had been on the airport when the fence was built and still lived inside the fence.

On this particular day construction workers from one of the aircraft hangers saw the deer and started chasing them. One of the deer took off but the other came off the road, got between the FSS and the airport fence, and became panic stricken. He couldn't get over the fence and kept throwing himself into it trying to get through. The violence with which he threw himself against the fence was amazing. He broke off one of his antlers and was

bleeding from the head and one leg. There was only about four feet of space between the fence and the FSS plate glass windows so we had a great view but were concerned that if he started throwing himself into the windows we might have a wounded and terrified deer inside our office. We watched closely and cautiously as the deer gradually worked his way back the way he'd come.

When he finally cleared the corner of the building and could see an escape route he was off like a shot – for about four feet – then he hit the hole. Now he was really trapped. He tried frantically to jump or claw his way out of the hole but it was just too deep and he finally collapsed at the bottom of the hole. He would struggle to his feet periodically and weakly try to get out of the hole but it was apparent that he was too tired and the hole was too deep.

We called the State Game, Fish and Parks office and explained the situation. When a guy from GF&P showed up he walked around the hole and assessed the situation then came into the FSS and calmly sat down for a cup of coffee. He said he didn't think there would be any problem getting the deer out of the hole – we just needed to wait a bit.

After about 45 minutes the GF&P guy quietly walked around the hole to the “fence” side and then with a sharp clap of his hands and a shout he startled the deer into jumping straight up 10 feet. The deer was out of the hole that easy and took off at a hard run down the street where he'd originally come from.

His Heart Wasn't in It

One of the specialists was names Chuck who had worked at Watertown for a long time. He knew the job well and did a good job, but never did more than he absolutely had to and he was just waiting for retirement. Chuck's real love was music, poetry and cooking. He was planning on moving to Iowa when he retired and had married a woman there. He was gradually moving all his stuff to her house and pretty much just “camping out” at his home in Watertown. Then their house in Iowa burned down. Chuck lost virtually everything – but the only thing he was distraught about losing in the fire was his trumpet that he'd owned since he was in High School!