

**Transcription:** Grand Canyon Historical Society Oral History

**Interviewer:** Tom Martin (TM)

**Interviewee:** Edwin Montgomery, Jr. (EM)

**Subject:** Edwin Montgomery, Jr. remembers his father operating helicopters in the late 1940s

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**TM:** Today is December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018, it's Thursday. This is a Grand Canyon Oral History phone interview with Edwin Montgomery, Jr. My name is Tom Martin. Good Morning, Ed! How are You?

**EM:** I'm fine, thank you.

**TM:** May we have your permission to record this interview over the phone?

**EM:** Yes, you certainly may.

**TM:** Thank you so much. Ed, what year were you born?

**EM:** 1937

**TM:** And where were you born?

**EM:** In Tucson, Arizona!

**TM:** What were your parents doing in Tucson back in 1937?

**EM:** My dad was about to go to into the army. He was a graduate of the University of Arizona and was commissioned through ROTC at the U of A and was about to go on active duty. He went into the army in the Calvary, but then the Calvary was soon dismissed and so he went into the field artillery that time. When I was born, he was in Tucson but helping to teach school, I don't know whether he was teaching at the U of A as he did sometimes or at various high schools in the area. But, in any event, he was about to go on active duty.

**TM:** Okay, and he had graduated by that time? By 1937?

**EM:** Yeah, he did. As a matter of fact, he had two degrees from the U of A at that time...

**TM:** What were...

**EM:** One in Education and one in Engineering.

**TM:** Thank you. How did he get interested in aircraft?

**EM:** I think he just had always been fascinated by it and he...when in... during WWII, he actually worked as an aeronautical engineer, and we moved to the west coast and he worked for sometimes for Douglas in Santa Monica and then also for Hughes for Hughes Aircraft during WWII, and that sort of help to sharpen, to hone his interest in Aviation. And at the end of the war, he decided to go back to his home state of Arizona and begin a small airline there and the helicopter service that he had gotten into, the small airline was never able to generate much but he was a subsidiary to it he established called the Arizona Helicopter Service, and that was begun. We started with one pilot and he had went back and also got checked out as a helicopter pilot and I think at the time he was the first person to be having a commercial license to operate helicopters without having a commercial fixed wing ticket. He had a private license, but he was not a commercial fixed wing pilot.

**TM:** Okay. what was the name of the aircraft company that your dad started?

**EM:** Southern Arizona Airlines

**TM:** Okay

**EM:** And, as I say, he sort of changed directions as that got started and they thought that he would...he was really interested in helicopters and, as I say, what he began the service, the service started as Arizona Helicopter Service.

**TM:** So, when was your first helicopter flight?

**EM:** Probably thinking, 1948 sometime?

**TM:** Okay, you would've been eleven?

**EM:** Yes, uh huh!

**TM:** Okay, and do you remember the name of the helicopter pilot that was working for your father?

**EM:** Yes, his name was Chuck Marthens.

**TM:** Thank you. What do you remember about Chuck?

**EM:** Listen, as a kid, he was a very respected pilot, or at least my dad had a lot of respect for him and he was a nice guy, he was friendly to youngsters like I was, he did a lot of firsts flying the helicopter. He was the first person to fly a helicopter south of the Tropic of Cancer and north of the Arctic Circle, flying for Arizona Helicopter Service.

**TM:** Did he--Did he fly that helicopter from Tucson all the way south and all the way north or was it shipped overland in any way?

**EM:** He flew the helicopter south. What dad had gotten was a contract from the Mexican government to develop a railroad from Mazatlan on their west coast into Durango, which was into the interior and, as I recall, at that time, there wasn't even a road that made that trip. But what they needed were ... the helicopter for it was to carry surveyors along that route, and, yes, they did fly that helicopter down to that point. Then, when they went to Alaska a few years later, I think that was 1949 but I have to check that out, they contracted for the government, they were mapping Alaska and they went up to and operated out of Gnome on the west coast of Alaska happily in the summertime (slight chuckle) which you might imagine, but that was when they went above the Arctic Circle.

**TM:** Okay, Alright. And then, in 1946, the Southern Arizona Airlines, was that started in '45 or '46?

**EM:** I think it was '46 but the video I gave you would have the exact date on it.

**TM:** Okay. And then—and then, there was a flight to Salt Lake City in 1946. Can you talk about that?

**EM:** The only thing I know is that the, again, dad had a ... he was looking for anything that the helicopter can do that we could put some money on the table. And flying Santa, bringing Santa Claus to various places in Arizona was a popular thing that people wanted and the helicopters knew and created, and crowds wherever they went. But they got an interest from Salt Lake City to go up and fly Santa into Salt Lake City. I think at that time, dad was back getting his pilot... his helicopter commercial license back in Buffalo, but, again, I'm not sure about that. But, while he was gone, they took the helicopter up to and flew it to Salt Lake City. Now, for going to Alaska, they—I think they did take it apart and fly it in an Air Force aircraft up there. It was pretty small, and they couldn't take, get the rotor blades off of it and put it inside an airplane. On the way back, again, I think Chuck and the mechanic we had flew it down toward to the northwest and dad went up in a, dad and mom together, went up in a trailer that big enough to take up --- pick up the helicopter and they picked it up gave the pilot and his mechanic a well-deserved vacation. And they drove it back from the Pacific Northwest.

**TM:** Okay. There is some video that you've kindly shared with me. It looked like there were thousands and thousands of people on the street there in Salt Lake City in 1946, this was December, when they came in and landed downtown!

**EM:** It was a very large crowd and they landed right in the city, (slight laugh) like in the street right in the middle of the city. They did a lot of things that probably wouldn't happen today. But it was, as they say, the helicopter was brand new to everybody and there were people that were very interested in seeing it.

**TM:** And that was a Bell 47-A, is that correct?

**EM:** It was a 47. Now, whether it was an A or a C, I don't know. It was a little confusing because that was—that the original NC2H had a bubble canopy and we then got --- later got a --- replaced it with another Bell which was a different more, it looked more like a helicopter does today and it was, I think, called a Bell 47-B which, to me, as looking through and researching this, didn't seem to make any sense that it would have a designation looking newer than the one, the original aircraft had. But that was a mystery I have not been able to solve.

**TM:** Okay. Yeah, I did spend some time too, looking into the Bells. Looks like the A was the first one going and then the B, the red...

**EM:** The red one?

**TM:** The red one.

**EM:** Yeah.

**TM:** Yeah, was a B. So, on the way back from that flight to Salt Lake City, it looks like there was a flight into the west end of Grand Canyon.

**EM:** Yes, they did. They went and looked at the Canyon as they were flying over and got some good pictures of the Canyon. I don't know whether the idea came to my dad that he might go there and operate, possibly he had. But, in any event, the helicopter did go and... take a look at the Canyon.

**TM:** Okay

**EM:** The west end of it.

**TM:** So-- so your first helicopter flight in 1948, what do you remember about that?

**EM:** Well, actually, it may have been, now that I think about it, it might have been as early as 1947. I...

**TM:** Okay

**EM:** They're in the-- in the video that I sent you, there is a picture of my sister being taken to her school outside of Tucson, since she went to a Catholic girls' School, and did that have a date on it, by any chance?

**TM:** It didn't, but it would've been in that '47,'48,'49 time period.

**EM:** Well, it's somewhere in there I got a ride in the helicopter. I got more rides in it though, as when we went to the Grand Canyon in 1950.

**TM:** Okay, and can you talk about your dad's work with the governor?

**EM:** Well, he...with the governor of Arizona?

**TM:** Yeah

**EM:** Well, he was able somehow to convince, I don't know whether he convinced the governor or the governor's media relations guy, to, on the first day of our operation, to actually pick the governor up at his home, in the helicopter, when he landed on his street outside of his home, picked him up and flew him to the capital. And, later that day, they then flew several other people from their homes to the capital and it was basically just to, as a first day of operations, to get some publicity for the company.

**TM:** And that would've been in 1946, then?

**EM:** Yes

**TM:** Nice, okay. And then, '47, '48... do you have any other interesting recollections of that '47, '48, '49 time before y'all moved up to the Grand Canyon?

**EM:** Yeah, a couple of them. One of the big things in Arizona at that time was a lost gold mine called "The Lost Dutchman". That was in the Superstition Mountains east of Phoenix there, and it was a, when I say popular, it was among people looking for gold. It was well known, and there were lots of stories about and books written about "The Lost Dutchman" and it... the Dutchman who found it protected its identity very carefully, as you might imagine, and it was lost. A number of prospectors had gone in there before, and a number of them were killed, and that added to the mystery of the mine, and a prospector came to dad and said that he had found, somehow, a map to "The Lost Dutchman" and he wanted to take a helicopter in because it was in a pretty rough territory, and so we did, dad took the gentleman in and they dropped him off at one place and eventually he said he got his bearings and then he left them where he was making a base camp and the idea was that he was going to make his way out himself. But then he didn't show, he disappeared. And the...his family or his partners or whatever came to dad and said hey, we...he hasn't appeared and so dad actually went back and looked for him with Chuck Marthens. And they found the base camp with a few days' worth of food and so forth gone from the base camp and they could find nothing else. And, interestingly enough, about a

year later, the prospector's body was found well south of the Superstitions and his head had been cut off.

**TM:** Huh!

**EM:** And it of course added to the lore of the mine.

**TM:** Yeah, my gosh!

**EM:** Trying to think, he also made a couple of movies where the helicopters are first being used by the hero to go do whatever heroic things he had to do!

**TM:** Oh, Okay

**EM:** And we just...we were the...the bus drivers if you will. And I'm trying to think of the names of some of them, but I possibly could come up with a name if I'd been looking through his records.

**TM:** No worries! So, can you speak to the uniqueness of the helicopter at the time?

**EM:** Well, it was unique in the fact that it was the only decent aviation vehicle that could go straight up, straight down, forward, backwards, and sideways. And that, of course, opened up its ability to do a number of different things. One of dad's disappointments was that he hoped to be able to get a contract from the government to carry mail into some of the mining communities in the remote sections of Arizona that didn't get regular mail deliveries. But he was never able to get that... get that done.

**TM:** Alright, then there was a contract in 1948 to make a delivery deep into Grand Canyon?

**EM:** Oh yes, uh-huh!

**TM:** Can you talk about that?

**EM:** Well, what had happened was that the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Arizona had been able to make contact with a small tribe of Indians called the Havasupias and they had a small village at the bottom of the tributary canyon to the Grand Canyon called Havasu Canyon and they had a village called Supai. And the church wanted to fly in at Quonset hut to be a mission church for these Indians, and dad got the contract for that and in the winter, was that the winter of '49, I'm trying to think, it may well have been...

**TM:** So, it would've been in the Spring of 1948.

**EM:** Well, then it was early in spring '48 then because, then we made it, made the delivery actually in good—in better weather but the trip for dad to go in and talk to the elders of the

community was cold. I remember it well because as a little boy I went with my dad and we took a Jeep up as far as we could, and then descended into the Canyon and got to the village, we rode horseback.

**TM:** Okay

**EM:** And so, dad went in with, obviously, some people of the church and they talked to the elders of the tribe and set up the delivery of the Quonset Hut for later when the weather was better

**TM:** What do you remember about that horseback ride into Supai and about the village itself and the ride back out, besides being very cold?

**EM:** It was cold. Might as well, you know, had a coat on and everything else. It was a slow ride, it was not something you quickly did, we were descending canyon walls and that kind of thing. But, as it was, all I remember as a little boy, I did not get to go with dad when he spoke with the elders when they were discussing things. And I stood outside and tried to talk to a little Indian boy, a little bit older than I was, but he didn't speak English, and, of course, I didn't speak Havasupai. But it--that's how I spent my time while I was waiting for dad to do his business.

**TM:** Nice, and you would've been eleven?

**EM:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**TM:** Yeah, yeah. And then there was an accident or some sort of trouble with the Bell 47-B there in, I guess it was March '48?

**EM:** There you go. It was in the, spring but the weather was still cold. Up in northern Arizona at that elevation our pilot, Chuck Marthens, had a hard forced landing because he wasn't---he didn't de-ice the engine and the engine froze up. Hard, frozen ice and so dad had to, because we had a contracted delivery with the church, dad had to rent a helicopter from the west coast to come out and do it

**TM:** Okay, okay

**EM:** But it was---and it was also a Bell of a similar model.

**TM:** And then fix the 47-B back up?

**EM:** Yes, the helicopter that had the forced landing...?

**TM:** Yes

**EM:** We had some minor repairs to it, but it flew again.

**TM:** Okay, the helicopter rotor blades were made of wood at that time, is that correct?

**EM:** Yes, I believe so.

**TM:** Okay. So this is a--multiple flights into Supai that happened I think in April of 1948 over twenty flights to carry the parts of this Quonset hut.

**EM:** I wasn't present for those, I just knew that it was going on

**TM:** Okay, which was a great success, and the building still stands down there

**EM:** I believe so

**TM:** So, in '49 then, what are your recollections about how your dad got in contact with William Randolph Hearst?

**EM:** (laughs) Well, dad, in looking for ways to try to make the helicopter company profitable, decided that a great way to see--for tourists to see the Grand Canyon would be in a helicopter. And especially it would be good if he might be able to land it in various places in the Canyon and let people walk around and explore, that kind of thing. And he went up to and talked to the park service at the Canyon and they would not permit the operations to be there. I remember dad talking to the gentleman who ran the Canyon at that time, his name was Dr. Bryant, and Dr. Bryant, one of the reasons that Dr. Bryant gave was they were worried about noise and he was concerned that the noise the helicopter would make would pregnant does in the park abort. And yeah, dad of course though that was a spacious argument and went looking around for other ways to do it. One of the things he had to do is, because they wouldn't let him operate in the Canyon, he had to find a place outside the Canyon to operate, which he did. He found a small tourist thing. It was a bar, a cafe, service stations and several cabins that---for tourists about a mile and a half, two miles south of the entrance---south entrance to the Grand Canyon. And he went and bought that. The guy was into selling and dad bought the upper part of the sight from him, and it had a--down below the hill with this park, cafe, service station where it was on, there was a meadow that was being used by a cattle ranch there, and dad negotiated with the cattle ranch to let us go in and use the meadow for take-offs and landings. But he wanted to be able to land up there. He did some exploring, and he found out that there was, in fact, one piece of land right in the middle of the Canyon, in the middle of the national park, that the national park had not bothered to buy up, and it was an asbestos mine and it was right on a, sort of--right on, just above the inner gorge of the river itself, well down into the Canyon, just maybe one hundred feet above the river. And, so he investigated and found out that people hadn't worked it for a long, long time and probably wouldn't be working it and the park service figured that because it was almost impossible to get to it unless you were going there by helicopter or you took a boat in and hiked up, but that was probably not a very effective way to work a mine. My dad found out that it was technically owned by William Randolph Hearst. And so, he contacted Hearst, and asked if he could lease permission to land his helicopter on his



property, and Hearst not only agreed, but was very interested in seeing how the operation worked and, as I recalled, he leased the land to dad for operation for one dollar a year. And we did go down and operate there at the bottom of the Canyon.

**TM:** What do you remember about flying down there?

**EM:** Well, it was exciting. We—there was one time—I made a trip down there—by this time, Chuck Marthens had left the company, had gone to another helicopter service, and there was a fella named Red Carson, who was our pilot there in the Grand Canyon. And he had a young son. And Red and one of the mechanics, and the mechanic, I'm having a senior moment, I don't remember his name, flew this boy, I think his name was Jimmy, flew Jimmy and me down to the bottom of the Canyon just to show us that they were—they were sort of testing it, how well this whole thing could work out. And what we discovered is that if the winds were coming up over, out of the south, over the top of the south rim, they would then blow down on there and the helicopters of those days were not powerful enough to be able to get high enough to get out of the Canyon. And we, in fact, had to spend the night down there. I remember it because, that day Red Carson and the mechanic had to bury the wheels, they actually found an old pickaxe in the mine, and they actually buried the wheels of the helicopter so that it wouldn't blow off from the cliff into the water. And I remember sleeping with Jimmy in a rock crevice, and we took turns sleeping on top of each other because if you were on the bottom of the crevice, it was uncomfortable, but you were warm and if you were on top, you were more comfortable but cold...

**TM:** Pretty cold \*laughs\*

**EM:** We swapped turns, I think I was about twelve or eleven or so, maybe twelve by that time, maybe I was thirteen by that time and he was 'bout, ten or so. But the next day, dad was able to come down with the Bell. We were in the Hiller we had at the time, and dad was able to come down with the Bell and see the mine, and they tried—we tried to get out, and couldn't, and so—we now, we—so dad had to be fly down and let all the gas out, let all the remaining gas out of the Hiller and into the Bell--- Now wait a second, we were--did we—did we load it into the Hiller, it was a lighter helicopter, I'm trying to remember now how we flew out--- but Red then flew himself and the two of us, we were the lightest load possible, out once we waited for the winds to subside. And then he got a full load of gas and went back down and, I think he was in the Hiller as a matter of fact, he went down and was able to put enough gas in both of the helicopters to get out

**TM:** Okay. So, it sounds like you guys were maybe right on the margin of weight.

**EM:** Oh, we—the north edge of the Canyon was, I think above the service ceiling of the helicopters in those days. And the south end was just below it. So, it was a—this was a challenge

**TM:** So, it sounds like, maybe in 1948, your dad got involved with the Hiller Helicopter Company?

**EM:** Yes, uh-huh! It was a new company and they were building helicopters out on the west coast, I remember going out with him on a trip he made, because he was interested in buying a Hiller, if he could. And I remember one of our test flights in the Hiller, they had an engine failure and we did what they called an autorotational landing, which is something familiar to any helicopter pilot, and it—you basically glide--glide down and flare just like you were in a parachute, and happily everything worked out. They did the autorotation the way they should and nothing was hurt in the helicopter.

**TM:** So, wait a minute, let me make sure I understand this, you guys went to look at a Hiller?

**EM:** Yes!

**TM:** And it—its engine failed while you guys were testing it?

**EM:** That's right!

**TM:** Oh my gosh! What is an autorotation like? Does the--I assume it's fairly loud with the engine going and suddenly the engine's gonna stop. Does it get kinda quiet or is there still a lot of noise from the autorotating...?

**EM:** Well, in this case, I believe, in autorotation, the engine's quit.

**TM:** Okay.

**EM:** And what you're doing, you are descending with enough speed to have the rotor blades turned.

**TM:** Okay

**EM:** And it is still generating some lift, and it's—as you come down close to the ground, you have to—you then use all of the energy of the rotor blades to halt and make a safe landing. And then, of course, by that time the energy's gone and you're gonna be touching the ground somewhere, let's just hope that there's enough energy to make it a soft landing

**TM:** And that there's some space down there, you can land on something wide open and, yeah!

**EM:** That's very true. You had to be concerned about that kind of thing. Obviously, in the Canyon, there are places where you sure can't land. And there—so you'd always have to be on the lookout. I remember, just as a young boy, nine or so, my dad was teaching me how to fly a light plane. And we would—he helped me fly along, I could fly it and hold a heading and he then

suddenly, at one point of time, he would close the throttle and say “Okay, where are you gonna put the airplane?”

**TM:** Wow!

**EM:** And the lesson that he was getting across was that you had to—that just had to be part of your mental calculus, especially when you’re flying a single engineer craft. Helicopter or a fixed wing, you had to have a backup plan just in case there was an engine failure

**TM:** So, with an engine failure, would you lose the small rotor in the back on the tail there?

**EM:** Not... I believe as long as the front rotor was turning, the back rotor did also

**TM:** Okay, so there was a little ability...

**EM:** There was a connection to it

**TM:** Great, what a wonderful—it was a wonderful idea, whoever invented that

**EM:** Mm-hmm!

**TM:** So, then you guys had a Bell and a Hiller. How would you compare those two craft at the time?

**EM:** Well, they were—I think they were fairly similar in capability. The Hiller, as I recall, was lighter and it had a more, a different sort of modern, almost an open cockpit type of thing. It had a bubble and again, what you could do is...the video I showed you and the pictures you had, there’s one picture you sent me that shows both helicopters in the meadow down below the park, the cafe, the service station called Tusayan. Of course, today, Tusayan is a thriving village and there are a couple of helicopter companies that operate out of there. To go over the Canyon.

**TM:** Yeah, and I do want to go back and ask about your recollection of Tusayan at the time back in ’49 and ’50. The question, though, about the helicopters. Did they both have doors?

**EM:** Yes, they did.

**TM:** Okay, so, in the winter, you could...?

**EM:** You could take them off...

**TM:** Oh, okay. So, but in the theory, in the winter, you could put the doors on and turn the heater on in some form, I would assume, to try to keep the cabin sorta warm?

**EM:** Yes, Mm-hmm.

**TM:** And the Hiller was lighter than the Bell? okay

**EM:** I might feel you are interested, but one of the, because this was the first company, dad did a few firts things. We—he believes he was probably the first person to fly—to operate the helicopter at night. And he got a light put on the NC9H, and they actually flew it at night, tested it, and got it approved by the FAA. And he went back to—he thought he was the first in that. He went back in—there’s a monthly magazine about helicopters put out—and he went back to the magazine and gave the date of his first flight and asked if he had—if anybody else had been operating at night before that. As if I recall—I don’t recall—He ever got a reply to it. But there’s a good chance he was the first person flying at night.

**TM:** Okay

**EM:** He also—they—had crop dusters that they had put on the helicopter. But I think they wanted to get a crop sprayer, so he had one developed and we were the first ones to actually spray crops from the helicopter

**TM:** Okay, and that would’ve been ’48, ’49 time?

**EM:** Somewhere in there, yeah.

**TM:** Okay

**EM:** More like ’47, somewhere.

**TM:** Okay, and what do you remember about-- and sounds like your dad bought a gas station, and a little restaurant, and a couple of cabins. What do you remember about that?

**EM:** Well, it was several cabins, but that it’s. We didn’t rent those out, we lived in those. My—I had two sisters—and we, of course, we had a dad and mom and the helicopter company. And the mechanic and the other pilot and his wife and child. And so, that’s what we lived in. We had to generate our own electricity and we had two big diesel generators that we used, and I can remember one of my passages of manhood was when I got big enough to be able to start the bigger of the two diesel engines. And so, we’d shut them off at night and in the morning, we’d start them up again and generate electricity. And water, we had no water, but in order to have running water for the restaurant and that kind of thing, and for us, dad had to drive a tank truck down to Williams, which was fifteen or something miles south. And every weekend, and fill the tank with water and bring it back for us. And so, it was a rough, interesting existence. Certainly, exciting one for a kid. I ran the service station in which I pumped the gas and the—we had to lay our own telephone wire up for miles up to Grand Canyon because it wasn’t going to be done for us, so we went and laid our own telephone line, and it was the old-fashioned type where

you had to go in and ring a handle on the side of the apparatus, and alert the operator and she would come on and then she would place the call for you

**TM:** And connect you into the parting line?

**EM:** And it was a party line.

**TM:** Was there a lot of traffic going up the road?

**EM:** Oh, sure. It was the main road from Williams to approach the Canyon. You can only get to the Canyon in two ways, one from the south and one from the east. To the south rim we're talking about. This was the main road from Route 66 up to the canyon. So, it was well traveled.

**TM:** How did your dad advertise the fact that there was a helicopter there to take tours?

**EM:** Well, he took that big trailer, he could tow that helicopter one at a time, and he put a big sign on the side of it that is easily seen when people drove out and, I think he probably had other signs along the road, but we didn't have the money to do heavy advertising. I'm not—he might have put an advertisement in that helicopter journal I was talking about, but I don't know that. I'm not sure that he did.

**TM:** Okay. Alright. And then, what else do you remember about flights into the Canyon?

**EM:** Well, the—let's see, we—people could go in and ride in and take a good look at the Canyon or they could pay a little more and actually go down and land in that asbestos mine to walk around.

**TM:** Okay.

**EM:** And I would say that we were sort of marginally successful with the helicopters. We'd knew some people would be interested in it, other people were thinking "hmmm", they were reluctant to fly in this operation. And, but we—I think we were surviving, I'll put it that way. What the park service sort of reluctantly had to admit is that when they had people that were injured on the trail or injured in navigating the waters of the Canyon, the only way you can get to it was by helicopter. And so, we would go down on occasion and rescue people. We had one other interesting operation, and that was when the wife of the chief of the Havasupai tribe was pregnant and started having complications in her pregnancy. And we actually took the helicopter and went in and flew her out of Supai, the village, at the bottom of that little tributary canyon, flew her out there back up to the—I wouldn't call it a hospital—but it was a clinic there in Grand Canyon village. And Dr.—I think his name was Leo Schnur—was the, a friend of ours, and was able to successfully work with the chief, the wife of the chief, and both mother and child did well.

**TM:** Nice. Very good. And that would've been 1950?

**EM:** Yes, uh-huh.

**TM:** Okay. Alright. I'm guessing so then Otis Marston and Ed Hudson and, would've been mid-June, roughly of 1950. They had arranged a photo shoot there at Hance Rapid with Arizona Helicopter Service. And then went on downstream where Ed Hudson abandoned his boat. Margaret Marston then thought something was wrong, she was watching from the rim. She hired your father to help go look for them and found them. And then, you guys, your father and Ed...

**EM:** Red Carson

**TM:** Red, I'm sorry. Elmer, that's right

**EM:** His first name's Elmer, but you can understand why he went by "Red".

**TM:** Yes, sir. And so, Red then--they flew in the Bell and the Hiller, and on the way out, the Hiller, it sounds like it had the same thing happen to it that happened to you guys when you and your dad were testing the helicopter out.

**EM:** Well, it would've been, dad was flying, I think, the son out of the two that were down there, and Red Carson and the Hiller was flying--What was his first name?

**TM:** His actual name was Egbert... But he didn't go by Egbert. He went by Ed.

**EM:** Yeah, Ed. And Red was flying him out, and yes, the engine failed. And Red made an autorotational landing to the best site he could find, but it was—destroyed the helicopter. So, dad had to go up and—what they did, as I recall, was they took a sleeping bag and they brought the son out, but they had to leave the father down there--Ed, Egbert. And went back and--dad then went back down the next day in the Bell and picked him up and brought him out.

**TM:** Okay. So, was this the—wasn't there another...

**EM:** I'm losing you—your volume is going down. Maybe I'm—Are you moving away from your Mic at all?

**TM:** I could be, I'll—Thank you, I'll speak louder. Wasn't there another crash with the Hiller in Southern Arizona earlier?

**EM:** Other, the, there was a---the NC2H had crashed very, very early in the operation, that's why we got the NC9H

**TM:** Okay

**EM:** It was out doing survey work, I wonder if it was some oil company or what it was, but it failed and there it was, it crashed.

**TM:** Okay. So, that was--that was the Bell?

**EM:** Yes, that was—that was the early Bell.

**TM:** Got it!

**EM:** Not the NC9H.

**TM:** Okay

**EM:** And, there was a second heli--Hiller crash, though, that actually was right at the end of our operation in 1950 up at the Canyon. And, in this case, the engine failed, and they did a successful autorotation, landed on a sandbar in the river. And the airplane was flyable once he went down and fixed it. But as dad took off—off the sandbar, it failed again, and this time it went into the water and so, that was, we were now down to one helicopter. The other problems were that dad was having a great deal of trouble getting spare parts for our helicopters because, in 1950, the Korean war come along, and the helicopter then become, for the first time, an important part of the air effort in Korea. And we couldn't get parts because the military had priority. And so, he finally decided that well he—we'd given it a try—but it was important for him to go back and put bread on the table, so he went back to work as an aeronautical engineer.

**TM:** And then, did you guys go ahead and sell out the Tusayan operation?

**EM:** Yes, we did.

**TM:** Okay

**EM:** And moved back east to—dad got a job with Sikorsky Helicopters, back on the east coast, and we moved east to Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia.

**TM:** Alright, let's hang on a little bit more with 1950 here, in the fall. So, people were taking rides in the helicopter, but maybe not as much as you'd might've liked. I mean, it was a very new thing, and getting people into that was understandably difficult.

**EM:** Well, what you just said is correct. It was not succeeding as much as we had hoped. But on the other hand, it was--I think the operation would've continued had we'd been able to get the parts needed to keep the airplanes flying.

**TM:** Okay, and then there was—yeah, there was a crash in late October down near Phantom Ranch...

**EM:** Okay, well that's the one—that was the second one in the Hiller I was talking about.

**TM:** Okay, and so they—yeah, and so, they went in and fixed that

**EM:** Yes. But it wasn't a crash, it was a successful autorotation.

**TM:** Okay. Oh, alright. So, the ship went down under engine failure autorotation?

**EM:** Yeah, and then, on a sandbar. But then, they fixed it, they thought. When dad took off to bring it back up out of the Canyon, it failed again, and this time it crashed. And it didn't have any—again, all survived--he was able to do the autorotation landing, but he didn't have a good landing place at all.

**TM:** Got it. Yeah, sure. That's a difficult deal. So, at this time, this would've been the fall of 1950. Were you going to school at the Grand Canyon School then?

**EM:** Yes, the—they had a school, grades one through eight, and I was at the eighth grade. And I've thought--to go to high school at that time, you had to go down to Williams, south to Williams, that was the nearest school. But I didn't do that, I went to ninth grade back in Pennsylvania after we've moved.

**TM:** Okay. What do you remember about what would've been--I guess, just that one fall that you were there of 1950 and going to school?

**EM:** It was interesting. The—we had enough for a junior high baseball team. And we would actually go around and, of course, we had to go over great distances to play somebody, but we did. We went to Williams and Flagstaff and Holbrook and Winslow.

**TM:** Wow!

**EM:** That's a long way.

**TM:** That's a long ways!

**EM:** Yeah. I remember, one night coming home, however, with one of our teachers who was our baseball coach, and we were in his pick-up. We have been in several cars, but I've happened to be in the one that he was driving, the pick-up. But as we were driving along the road at night, all of a sudden, we saw this very large, or at least it was sure large to me, mountain lion feeding at the side of the road.

**TM:** Wow.



**EM:** So, our teacher stopped and, everyone drove around armed at that time, and he reached back for his rifle that he would always carry in his pick up and-- because there was a bounty on the lions, and discovered he didn't have it—he didn't have the rifle with him. Then, we watched there, and the lion looked up from what he was eating and gave a us dirty look and loped off into the desert. But that was the first and only time I saw the mountain lion up close.

**TM:** Wow, huh. So, the roads back then, were--I would assume that the road was paved from the Canyon south to Williams?

**EM:** Oh, sure. And, of course, Route 66 went to the other places.

**TM:** Right, would've gone east to Flagstaff and onto Winslow and Holbrook. But that must have been just hours and hours and hours going at, you know, fifty miles an hour, whatever, I'm sure that was a great rate of speed at the time, but not some...

**EM:** It was a labor of love. We liked baseball. \*laughs\*

**TM:** Wow, nice. What else do you remember about school there?

**EM:** Well, in the—there were—like I said, grades one through eight. And in fact, we-- there were four of us in the eighth grade, and we were in the same room with the—I think, as I recall, the second graders. And, the same teacher taught both classes which was, I'm looking back on it, I'm sure it was a challenge for him, but it seemed to go well.

**TM:** Yeah, nice. What else do you remember about that year, 1950, that you wanna make sure gets recorded in this interview?

**EM:** Well, it—living there was quite an experience. I had a .22 rifle and I went out and hunted rabbits and my mom told me "You clean 'em, I'll cook 'em", so we would have a rabbit stew every now and then.

**TM:** Nice.

**EM:** And—but it was that kind of an environment, we were out away from an awful lot of things. We didn't have any close neighbors or anything like that. And we—it was sort of a rough situation. There was one time when—there was one movie in town, and we would go into to town to see what the movie was every weeknight or whatever it was, but the—occasionally the movie would come and we would drive into Grand Canyon Village, which was about seven and a half miles away, as I recall, something like that, and go to the movie. And they had a case where a waiter had gone berserk and shot and killed his girlfriend, and, up at the Grand Canyon Village and disappeared. And they had called out to us to alert us because they thought he might try to work his way south and maybe steal a vehicle from us or something like that to make his escape. And I remember, there was a movie that night, and so my dad had me take my .22 rifle, and mine had a clip of .22 ammo on it. And we went in and took my sisters to the

movie. And I was not the only person there that was unarmed, I mean, was armed at that time... Several people were. That was sort of the thing at the time. Everybody knew how to shoot a weapon, and interestingly enough, we didn't have any cases of that being used improperly in those days... It was just...part of your growing up was that you knew how to use firearms.

**TM:** Ed, where did you mother grow up?

**EM:** She was a Hoosier. And...

**TM:** Where..

**EM:** Well, she was born in, I think, a town called Fairmont, and then she...the family moved to Gary, right outside Chicago, right on the border between Illinois and Indiana. And my grandfather, Scott, ran a small printing company there. And I could tell you an interesting story about that...

**TM:** Please.

**EM:** If the name with the punchline of the whole story has to come to me... if it does, I'll remember it, write it down, and tell the story. My grandfather, Scott, had an illness of some sort and they thought he needed a dry climate. And so, they—the family then moved to Arizona, and she began to study at the University of Arizona, where dad was. That's where they met.

**TM:** That's where they met, was on the UofA campus, then?

**EM:** Yes, uh-huh.

**TM:** So the reason why I'm asking is because you've reminded me—living in the little Tusayan camp, miles from the village and, like you say, fifty or sixty miles from the nearest little town of Williams, must've been terribly remote for both your parents, who, you know, were used to—Tucson was a huge, well..

**EM:** Comparatively, sure.

**TM:** Comparatively. You know, had movie theaters, and had newspaper and, you know, civic things to do, a university. So, did the remoteness...play into...you know, the...how did your parents handle the hardship?

**EM:** Well, frankly, they didn't run short of things to do! Mom ran the bar and restaurant, dad ran the helicopter service, and they were busy, probably, twenty-six hours a day, that type of thing, trying to keep us in water, make sure the generators can generate electricity and we had oil to run 'em and that kind of thing. And, they certainly...I'm sure they missed the theater and

musicals, that kind of thing, but they were fully occupied in trying to make the business succeed. And, I certainly don't remember ever feeling myself remote or bored or anything either. Like I say, "Hey, I was...I got up in the morning, and went to open up the service station. I pumped gas, and I was busy all day."

**TM:** Yeah, I would think it'd be a great adventure for..

**EM:** Oh, for me, yeah.

**TM:** For you, yep!

**EM:** It was pretty hard on my parents.

**TM:** Yeah, and of course, then, in the winter, certainly then, not quite so much now, but visitation really dropped. I mean, it was snow on the roads and...

**EM:** Oh yeah.

**TM:** So, it—it clearly would've been a financial hardship, with the loss of revenue, just from the number of people coming into the park.

**EM:** Very true, it did. Obviously, it dropped off in the wintertime.

**TM:** Okay. Alright. Just trying to put that together. So, with the loss of the Hiller there in early November, parts were difficult to get, then it sounds like you dad made the decision to go ahead and move on, if you will..

**EM:** Yup.

**TM:** What did he do after that?

**EM:** Well, like I say, he worked for Sikorsky back on the east coast, and he was a consulting engineer, he went where the work was.

**TM:** Okay

**EM:** After we've---we stayed in Grand Canyon for a while, and...

**TM:** Oh, did you? Okay.

**EM:** Well, until he could find steady work...

**TM:** Got it

**EM:** ...because we were getting revenue in from the bar, café, and service station.

**TM:** Okay

**EM:** And, there weren't all that many places that people could go and stop at in those days.

**TM:** Yeah

**EM:** And so, they did. Oh, I remember, another story, I think, I may have told you on the phone before, but I think it would work now, we had a big sign. We didn't put it up there, the previous owner put it up outside the restaurant as you approach the restaurant on the highway, and it said "Tusayan Café, not recommended by Duncan Hines!" And one day, Duncan Hines himself showed up at the restaurant. And all mom made really were hamburgers and chili...but he ate those, and he said "Well, that's good enough. I'm willing to recommend you." But there was a fee for that, and that was not in the ballpark. But it was just interesting that Duncan Hines himself would stop by.

**TM:** Oh, that's fun!

**EM:** Yeah, it was.

**TM:** Were there any other people like that that came to the Canyon that you remember?

**EM:** I can't... I don't recall offhand. The tourists came, and of course they all had stories. Let's see... Something just came to my mind, in one of the pictures you showed me that had the meadow with the two helicopters parked in the meadow, and going up the hill from that is where you see the bar, café, and service station, you can see the huge fireplace that would also form part of a wall to the bar, and you can actually see that in that picture that you showed me. And when my wife and I went back to northern Arizona a few years ago, I wanted to show her what had been Tusayan and all that sort of thing. That is the only thing left of those buildings. But it was that fireplace. Huge fireplace was still standing, and it was in the City Park in downtown Tusayan village, and people could go there and use it to grill their hamburgers and that kind of thing

**TM:** Nice

**EM:** But if you want to know what the fireplace looked like and how big it was, you can get an idea by looking at the background of the picture that you sent me.

**TM:** Yeah, that would be fun to match that up, things to do. Is there--I'm sort of running out of questions here on my list of things to ask. Is there anything else you would like to bring in that I haven't asked you about?

**EM:** Well, just some other things. The video shows this, but I think it was important to remember that after dad had retired and he and mom were living in Tucson again, the National Helicopter Organization had its annual get-together and they picked Tucson that year, and so they were there, and while they were there, they honored dad for having started the first helicopter company, and that, of course, helped make up for a lot of disappointments in his life, and we were all very proud of him for that. And, I say, he is now in the Arizona Aviation Hall of Fame museum display at the Pima Air Museum, just south of Davis-Monthan in Tucson.

**TM:** Nice. Very Nice. Excellent. And grandchildren, of course, I'm assuming?

**EM:** Oh yeah.

**TM:** And great-grandchildren?

**EM:** And one great-grandchild, and a second on the way.

**TM:** Okay, alright.

**EM:** I myself had four children, two boys and two girls, and, I think, we have eight grandchildren now and one great-grandchild.

**TM:** Nice. Lots of fun. Great. Well, Ed Montgomery, this has been just a wonderful interview here. Thank you so very much for recalling the early days of Arizona Helicopter Service in the 1940s and into 1950 with your father, Edwin Montgomery. And today is December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018. My name is Tom Martin, and this will conclude the Grand Canyon Oral History. Thank you so much, Ed.