

May 16, 2014

Joe Moss

It was fourteen years after WW 11 ended. It seemed like a long time then. It's amazing how short it seems now. I was a junior "bird man" on Delta Air Lines. I wasn't senior enough to fly with the pre WW11 types, so the average Captain I worked for had lots of "experience". Some had survived twenty-five missions over Germany in B-17's, or flew the hump between Burma, India and China in airplanes that were barely able to reach the safe altitude to clear the Himalayas. They couldn't maintain that high altitude with an engine out or a load of ice. There were those fighter pilots who had tangled with Zeros or Messerschmitts. They truly were the "greatest generation".

As a general rule, they didn't talk much about the war, and I took them for granted - as I did most other things - when I was flying with them. We had a few captains in those days that were hard to fly with; mostly but not all for personality reasons. The WW 11 guys were generally easy to fly with. They were competent, and they treated their crews like peers.

Hardly a day goes by that we don't lose another of the "greatest generation". We lost one of the Delta's greatest this week. Joe Moss "flew west" on May 14. I first met Joe in DC-8 ground school fifty years ago. The ground schools lasted a month in those days, and I got to know Joe over lunches and coffee breaks. He was based in Atlanta, and I was in New Orleans. Later, he was TDY in New Orleans, and I was privileged to be his co-pilot on several trips. To say that he was not the average airline pilot would be an understatement. He was a gentleman in every sense of the word. He could discuss many subjects in depth, and he was a very successful investor.

To say he was a successful investor is another understatement. I confess I felt pride in 2008 when a top executive at Emory Healthcare asked me if I knew Joe Moss, and when I said I did, he told me Joe had just given \$25 million dollars to Children's Healthcare. That's twenty-five with six zeros following. It was in the Atlanta Journal Constitution the next day. It was the biggest gift ever given to Children's Healthcare by an individual.

When Joe was separated from the Marine Corps in 1945, he had saved \$3,000. He bought a car with \$1,000 and invested \$2,000 in the stock market. He came on the airline in 1946, and retired in 1982. Joe gave to a lot of causes other than Children's Healthcare.

Joe lived a long and successful life. He was special. I was disappointed when I learned that Joe had requested that no funeral or memorial service be held in his honor.