

Nevada Test Site Oral History Project
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Roadrunners Internationale
Banquet Presentations

October 6, 2005
Las Vegas, Nevada

Recorded By
Mary Palevsky

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Roadrunners Banquet Presentations

October 6, 2005

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Roadrunners Internationale Banquet Presentations

October 6, 2005 in Las Vegas, NV

Panel Participants: Roger Andersen, T.D. Barnes, Slip Slater, Pat Halloran, Hank Meierdierck, Lou Setter, Peter Merlin

[00:00:00] Begin Track 1, Disc 1.

[Applause]

Roger Andersen: Thank you, folks, and I'm sure you're enjoyed it as much as I did, and we just really appreciate that you stepped in and helped us this evening. And we want to make you an honorary Roadrunner. Here's your hat, sir.

[Applause]

Roger Andersen: Would the old board of directors all come up and meet me up here at the podium. Bring your wives, please. Thank you. All the board of directors that sat at the table today up in front. Bring your wives with you. Thank you.

Just come right up here behind me, please. All the board of directors and members, just come up right behind me here with your wives, please. Rebecca.

I've been working with these guys for quite some period of time, and I wish you would kind of hurry up, guys, we got to get going here.

Let me just tell you that these fellows worked hard and we had a lot of board meetings at my house. The last one lasted about three-and-a-half hours and I think we had one that went four hours one time. Now you may think that that's poor management on my part, but I'll tell you, there were a lot of interesting discussions and we really made some decisions that we think are going to help continue this program for a while.

I'm going to be giving these gentlemen some awards for helping me so much, and I really appreciate it.

[Applause]

These are special space pins because these guys are getting ready to move out to space here, I think. OK, here we go. Dick.

Fellows, I want you to give your ladies a rose. Grab one each for your ladies, please, because they let them come over to my house and spend a lot of hours working hard, so there you go.

[More movement and talk as roses are passed out]

Now there's a lady that's been supporting me for so many years, I really don't want to tell you how many, but we're coming up on our fiftieth [wedding anniversary] pretty soon. And let me tell you this. I've never, ever thanked her in public. You know, we've gone through a lot of these reunions before and I apologize for that. I should've done it a long time ago, but I've got some nice roses for her tonight. I'd like to hear a nice round for my wife Rebecca who has done a lot of work.

[Applause]

Great group of folks here, I'll tell you, both man and wife. I'll tell you, these folks, I get a little choked up when I start thinking about this because we spent a lot of time together. Not only did we work together but we played together as well.

[00:05:00] Now I'd like to have the new, current board stay with me for a minute and the rest of you can go and have a seat and relax and enjoy the rest of the evening. Thank you so much.

[Applause]

We had an election today and you're going to have a group of people working for you for the next two years, till our next reunion; about this time of the year, a good year in Las Vegas, I'm sure.

TD Barnes: Excuse me, Roger. We got something here for you. Roger, you are preempted.

Roger Andersen has created some footsteps that are going to be very, very hard for anyone to follow. Since I've known Roger, he has made Roadrunners, taken it from a social organization to one that really has a mission now; preserving the history and the legacy of all of us. Mr. [Slip] Slater is going to present Mr. Roger with a token of our appreciation.

Slip Slater: Roger who? Andersen! Andersen, spelled with an "E." I'll tell you, I've known Roger for a long time. And Becky; I know Becky is kind of the power behind the throne. If they want to get the work done, she's the one that pushes Roger. But Roger has been president of this organization for so many years, I can't even remember, but he has done a magnificent job. I think you can see from the results of this reunion here tonight, how well it turned out; there's been one two years before that, one two years before that, and one two years before that. And Roger stays up till midnight, he calls me on the telephone at three in the morning and says, hey, I left the checkbook to pay for the golf game. This morning he called: I think I left it there at the golf course. You know, that's outstanding service when a guy wakes up at three in the morning and is calling you and telling you.

[Applause]

But we've got this for Roger, and I know you folks feel the same way. He's done a wonderful job. We hate to see him leave, but it's time he has a rest. And here you go, Roger.

[Applause]

Roger Andersen: Thank you so much. It's kind of hard to respond to that right now. You know sometimes you just step back and let somebody else take over because you've been around long enough and there are better ideas out there and you just need to get out of the way and let that happen. I'll be working with TD and his board, so we got the new guys up here right now, have we not? Yes. Is this your group? OK. So you guys will be moving forward and we look forward to working with you, and thank you so much. I really don't deserve it. It was, to me, just something that I wanted to do and have wanted to do all along. I just hated the treasury thing something fierce. But I'll be working that out with John Byrnes and we'll get everything squared away and have a good audit trail, won't we, John? *Yes*, he says. That's good. So thanks again, folks. I really appreciate that.

[Applause]

[00:10:00] Slip Slater: Roger, and we all appreciate you.

Roger Andersen: Thank you, sir, I appreciate it. That's great.

Slip Slater: We're not going to let Roger completely loose. Did you hear that, Roger?

Roger Andersen: What was that again?

Slip Slater: You're not completely loose.

Roger Andersen: No, I think TD has tasked me with a couple of things. And one of the things that happened at our meeting this morning—and you know this has been such a great group, and as was mentioned before, we started out as a social group and we'd like to sip a few and then we'd embellish our stories a bit. That's what happens. But as we kind of grew up through our haircuts and so forth, we kind of said, maybe there's some more things that we should be doing, a little bit of a legacy. That's what I hope we're going to be able to do.

And there are a couple of people here tonight, Mary Palevsky and Miss [Leisl] Carr from the university [University of Nevada, Las Vegas, UNLV]. Would you please stand up? I'm not sure where you're located. There you go. That's Leisl Carr and this Mary Palevsky. Is Leisl still with us? She's not. She's gone. [Applause] OK, well, Leisl is one of her students that's working in the graduate program, and Mary's a Ph.D. We've been doing some oral histories with her. I did, what, three-and-a-half hours the other day. I never thought I could go on that long. Well, anyway, I think we're making progress here, and hopefully we will be able to work with the library at UNLV and we'll see how that all works out. But maybe we'll have a display over there, maybe that'll be the beginning of something great for all Roadrunners.

So I think we need to talk about what happened here a lot of years ago, which was so significant. And unfortunately, you know we don't have an aviation hall of fame, we don't have a museum, but maybe we will in the future. I know it's a pipe dream for me, but that's what I'm going to help TD with. And we'll be looking for your input, we talked about it this morning, and so a lot of you folks out there will be helping us, and we look forward to that because we think we can do it. We got to find some folks with deep pockets, maybe we got to grab a senator or two, maybe from your state, to help us all get this job done. And that's what I feel is so important for us to do, because if we don't do it, it'll never get done. Thank you so much.

[Applause]

TD Barnes: At the last reunion, I happened to have the media seated at my table. They looked around at this crowd and one of them commented, I have never in my life seen so much intelligence, talent, and diversity. I absolutely have to agree with that. We have the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], of course, the Customer as we referred to them back in those days; the [U.S.] Air Force; we got numerous contractors here. They even had some back in those

days that had a little bit of fictitious names. In fact, the people had fictitious names. But to be elected to lead all you people is a great, great honor. Thank you.

[Applause]

Roger Andersen: We're going to light the cake now. This is our fiftieth celebration. Do me a favor, Chad, would you please, take that seating chart and burn it?

[Applause]

Then turn it around for me. Thank you. Yeah, that's good.

TD Barnes: We want to introduce Tom Bodish. He handled the seating tonight.

Roger Andersen: OK, Mr. President and Mr. Executive Vice-President, would you step down here in front and cut the cake for us, please? Photographers, this is a photo opportunity, so hop to it. Art's got you all lit up there, boys. TD, you need to come over here and blow this out before the cake burns up. That would be the next thing that would happen.

Let me tell you what just happened here. We were supposed to have some tall, lovely, beautiful, long-legged girl from the Strip jump out of this cake. That didn't happen either. What can I tell you? [00:15:00]

Roger Andersen: OK, now I'll turn it over to the experts. Let the folks there that are experts at that finish it up. Thanks, guys. Blow the candles out, please. Make a wish.

Yeah, blow the candles out. There you go. Thank you.

[Applause]

Roger Andersen: Would Hank [John H.] Meierdierck and Lou [Louis C.] Setter please come to the podium here?

And Pat Halloran. Pat Halloran, would you please come up, too?

The cake will be cut up and put in the buffet line, and I know a lot of you folks have fallen off your diet tonight, so go over and have a piece, would you please? You need to help us eat that cake.

Mr. Pat Halloran.

Pat Halloran: You know, Roger, I wanted to remind you, when I was at things like this where you're trying to get people to sit down and get things started, I discovered a technique. You say, will all the people whose parents were married, sit down. The place really gets cleaned up in a hurry if you kick them like that.

We've had some awards and ceremonies here this evening, we're going to have at least one more, and these are going to involve Hank Meierdierck and Louis Setter, the original two Air Force pilots to fly the U-2 out at Area 51. I was selected or asked to make a few introductory remarks about this, I think because I probably have known them longer than anybody else in this room, except for Millie.

But fifty-five years ago this month, I signed in to Turner Air Force Base in the 31st Fighter Wing, and these two gentlemen were both there. It was a wonderful opportunity for me to come in. And we had wing commanders like Dave [David C] Schilling and Jerry [Gerald W.] Johnson and some of the greatest World War II aces. So it was a real thrill for me to be able to come in and join all of these people. Lou Setter. Incidentally, we were flying Spades then. They were late-model Spades. But I met people like Lou Setter who is a superbly professional pilot and a very, very professional officer. He's a true genius when you compare him with the rest of the fighter pilots in that outfit.

And then there's Hank. I learned about Hank about thirty minutes after I got on the base, and his fame was pretty widespread. Part of it was because of his philosophy when he first

joined, which in that time was the [U.S.] Army Air Forces, and he passed this on to me, that the reason we become pilots is so that we can fly airplanes, drink whiskey, and chase girls. And figured two out of three wouldn't be bad. And that's kind of what did. Millie made sure that the girl-chasing didn't happen.

But these two guys were a great credit to the wing that we were involved in, and I know the leaders of those wings were delighted to have the diversity that these two gentlemen brought. Lou Setter being the intellect that he is would come up with some wonderful ideas and new techniques and new things, and then we'd go and let Hank try it out. It was exciting to [00:20:00] be around Hank, particularly if you're in the T-33 with him. Hank almost made ace in just the T-33, and I don't know how he did in the F-54s but Hank had a lot of experience. Hank was fun. And I came up with the idea that when I grow up, I want to be just like Hank. Then I discovered that isn't going to work because Hank isn't going to grow up.

But everybody knew both of these gentlemen. The wing commanders were delighted with them, division commanders were delighted with them, and General [Curtis] LeMay just knew their names, particularly Hank's.

But there came a point in time, as you all know, when the U-2 was first coming into being out at Area 51 [Nevada Test Site, NTS] that General LeMay had a plan that he was going to run the entire program, including all the overflight missions that eventually the CIA took. But he did persevere and say, Well, I'm going to man the entire program, both the Agency and the Air Force program, [music starts] and I'll be dancing here in just a minute [laughter]. And so—I think we also cut off the microphone. [Laughter] That's our new president, TD. [Laughter] [Music starts again] You got one or the other. OK.

Anyway, General LeMay, of course, was going to man the entire program. He had seven fighter wings in SAC [Strategic Air Command]. A lot of people didn't know that, that SAC had fighter wings. And he was getting pretty tired of all the accidents we were having, and besides, his mission was missiles and bombers, so he was about ready to disband all those fighter wings anyway. So he had a great pool of fighter experts that could fill this requirement to fly the U-2.

When you set out on a program like that, one of the first things you have to do is build a schoolhouse; very similar to what Dallas does here in a lot of areas. And to get that schoolhouse started, he picked two of the most highly qualified instructors that we had in the Strategic Air Command and sent them out to Area 51 to, first of all, check out in the airplane. Now these two gentlemen were the first two Air Force blue-suiters to fly the airplane. And once they learned how to fly the airplane, then to set up a curriculum and a program and develop a training system that we could bring the rest of the pilots in and get everybody going. Of course they trained three classes of Agency pilots first, all of whom were former F-84 SAC pilots, followed by the training of a cadre of Air Force blue-suiters who then went out to Del Rio, Texas to form the Air Force unit.

But these two guys, they were the first, and they were probably the best. So I'd like to have Hank and Lou Setter come up here. We're going to have a little ceremony. And we'll give Hank a head start there at the stand.

[Applause]

Now I'm not sure what this ceremony is going to entail because they kept this a mystery even from me, so I'm going back and sit down and let Hank and Louis do their thing.

[Applause]

Hank Meierdierck: Be careful, Lou, you don't know what's in there.

Lou Setter: I just wanted to say that Hank and I have known each other since roughly 1949. I was a second lieutenant just out of Army-Air Corps flying cadet training, and Hank was still one of the old guys. He was a World War II pilot. So we gave him great respect, at least for a while. Hank was in the Army-Air Corps about seven years, and among other airplanes flew the F-6. How many of you know what an F-6 is? It's a P-51 with a camera in it, which I think is pretty amazing. Of course we flew F-84s together for years later and our paths kept crossing.

I want to read the citation here from the Central Intelligence Agency: "John H. Meierdierck, Lieutenant Colonel, United States Air Force, Retired, is hereby awarded the [00:25:00] Agency's seal medallion in recognition of his contribution to the Agency's intelligence effort during the early testing phases of a new aircraft program. In 1955, Lieutenant Colonel Meierdierck was one of the many U.S. Air Force officers detailed to the Agency to experimentally test a new aircraft. He was further tasked to determine the operational flight parameters of the aircraft, devise a way to navigate over denied territory, operate cameras and other equipment, and train, support, and deploy three units to operational bases worldwide. Lieutenant Colonel Meierdierck was also one of the first instructor pilots to support this program."

Hank, you're a very dedicated man.

[Applause]

Hank Meierdierck: Thank you very much.

Roger Andersen: Is there anything else, Lou?

Hank Meierdierck: Yes. Oh, I forgot. I'm supposed to say something now. Thank you, Chris. Thank you. I had a bunch of notes here someplace, but they're all blank. Oh, well.

Lou and I of course have been buddies for a long, long time, not close buddies. We had diverging careers but spent the first few years together. We actually worked not in the squadron but in wing headquarters. Lou and I were in the Plans Department. And Lou was so smart – actually I was a captain [and] he was a new lieutenant – he was so intelligent, I never told him what to do. And I learned he was very intelligent. He’s done several things that you probably don’t know about. One of them, he devised and invented a how-goes-it, which is a piece of plastic about this big with a chart on it, and when you went to fly an airplane you would put the amount of fuel and oxygen you had, and then as you devised it—you need me on here? Can you hear me?

Audience: No.

Hank Meierdierck: Oh, excuse me. I thought I could shout loud enough. I’ll start over again. Lou and I have been friends for years. Can you hear me now? I’m sorry, excuse me.

But one of the things Lou did was invent a how-goes-it chart, where you put the number of pounds of fuel that you have in the aircraft, and as you go along you check your fuel versus the distance, and if you got the fuel line below where you thought you could go, you ain’t going to go. You better get down someplace.

Well, Lou invented many other things. Our careers changed after the U-2 program where we devised the tactics for the U-2, how to navigate it, how to fly it, actually all the things, how they used to take the whole bit [kit] and caboodle. Then we left and we diverged and went on our way, and I don’t know where Lou went but I know that he ended up being a colonel and retired, and then he worked for the Air Force. He worked for three different contractors. I’m not sure what they are. I don’t think it makes much difference. But he retired three times. He flunked every time. And he’s back to work again. He’s a little bit younger than I am, of course.

But anyhow I would like to read a citation that the Central Intelligence Agency gave me, but before I tell you that, see, I was with the Agency for eight years in Washington [D.C.] and things aren't always going perfect. It took a year for these two things to be brought here. It took an overnight express two days ago to get Lou's citation. That's how bad things are.

OK, let's see if I can read this now. Excuse me, I'll put my glasses on. You all bear with me a minute here. As I said, don't get old, you know how us fellows are. I've never been up here before.

“Citation. Louis C. Setter, Lieutenant (he's actually a colonel), United States Air Force, Retired, is hereby awarded the Agency seal medallion in recognition of his contribution to the Agency's intelligence effort during the early testing phases of a new aircraft program—that was the U-2. In mid-1955, Lieutenant Setter was one of the U.S. Air Force officers detailed to the Agency to experimentally test a new aircraft. He was further tasked to determine the operational [00:30:00] flight parameters of the aircraft, devise a way to navigate over denied territory, operate cameras and other equipment, and train, support, and deploy three units to operational bases worldwide. Lieutenant Setter was also one of the first instructor pilots to support this program.”

Lou, to me it's an honor to have known you all these years and know the things you've accomplished, and on behalf of the Agency, I would like to present you this CIA medallion.

Lou Setter: Thank you very much.

Hank Meierdierck: Thank you, sir.

[Applause]

Roger Andersen: Now Mr. Peter Merlin has a special award for Hank Meierdierck. Incidentally, as Peter is coming up here, when Security was sweeping the area earlier today

before this big function and before we lost the seating chart and other things, this actually glowed in the dark. Is there something wired in there, Hank?

Hank Meierdierck: Well, I don't know but for years the girls have been telling me what a beautiful stick I had.

Peter Merlin: Well, gee, Hank, I don't know if I can follow that act.

About a year and a half ago I started working on a unique project to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the U-2. At first I was just thinking about the first flight of the U-2, the original prototype, Article 341, which was flown by Tony LaVier in August of 1955. But I realized that it's also a celebration of fifty years of operational service. The U-2 has evolved since 1955 and it's still a versatile platform providing vital information to U.S. and allied intelligence analysts and war fighters around the globe.

So how to combine these two elements, the first flight and the fact that they're still flying? Unfortunately, Article 341 was lost in a fatal accident in 1957. And I found that crash site some years ago. I went out there and collected some pieces of metal and brought them back. And I talked to a friend of mine, Bill Simon, who works in the U-2 program, and I said, Hey, how about making Article 341 fly again? And he said, Yeah, I think we could do that. So we took these pieces, embedded them in Lucite blocks, and had them flown on a current U-2S during a regularly scheduled test flight on a noninterference basis. And this is a very unique commemorative item, and Hank, I'd like you to have this. We made these for people who were key to making the U-2 a success, and so the key organizations—in fact, there's one of these now in the CIA Museum in Langley [Virginia], and Hank, I'd like you to have this one.

Hank Meierdierck: Thank you very much, sir.

[Applause]

Hank Meierdierck: Thank you. Thank you, Peter. I don't know whether you folks know or not, but Peter is a renowned author of aviation articles, and he's one of the few people in the world who knows lots of things about different airplanes. Thank you, sir.

[Applause]

Roger Andersen: One of the amazing things that's happened to us even in the last six months is that we've had a great number of Roadrunners that were actually boots on the ground at Area 51 join our organization, and we were able to do that because some of our current members were able to find, to locate Roadrunners who were never really aware of the fact that we had an organization here. And I mean they live across the country, and we've brought about fifty new members on board, and a good share of those members had spent their time at Area 51. We have different types of memberships.

Another amazing thing that has happened in the last couple of years to present time is, this seems to run in cycles, we haven't lost a lot of Roadrunners. But we have lost some, and we're going to salute them right now. The arbitrary time that we use is from the beginning of 2003 to present. This is honoring all Roadrunners, and we'd just like to have you watch this presentation that TD has prepared, and they are Roadrunners who have taken their final flight.

[00:35:00] Roll it.

[At this point, TD rolls the film. Song: "Wind Beneath My Wings"]

It must have been cold there in my shadow,

to never have sunlight on your face.

You were content to let me shine, that's your way.

You always walked a step behind.

So I was the one with all the glory,

*while you were the one that lost your way,
beautiful face without a name for so long.*

beautiful smile to hide the pain.

*Did you ever know that you're my hero,
and everything I would like to be?*

*I can fly higher than an eagle,
but you are the wind beneath my wings.*

*It might have appeared to go unnoticed,
but I've got it all here in my heart.*

I want you to know I know the truth, of course I know it.

I would be nothing without you.

Did you ever know that you're my hero?

You're everything I wish I could be.

*I can fly higher than an eagle,
but you are the wind beneath my wings.*

Did you ever know that you're my hero?

You're everything, everything I wish I could be.

*Oh, and I, I can fly higher than an eagle,
but you are the wind beneath my wings.*

You are the wind beneath my wings.

Oh, the wind beneath my wings.

You are the wind beneath my wings.

Fly, fly, fly away.

You let me fly so high.

Oh, you, the wind beneath my wings.

Fly, fly, oh, fly away in the sky,

so high I almost touch the sky.

[00:40:00] *Thank you, thank you, thank God for you,*

the wind beneath my wings.

[Applause]

Roger Andersen: Let's all just have a moment of silent prayer for our brothers departed.

[Moment of silence]

Roger Andersen: Thank you. I just wanted to point out, you saw Billy Pryor in that salute, and the Pryors are big Roadrunners. We have a whole tableful. I think we have actually eleven people at one table. Would the Pryor family please stand?

[Applause]

Thank you very much. We appreciate you making the long trip out here to Las Vegas and we hope that you've enjoyed this evening.

You know, this is at my peril, I suppose, but when you start thanking people for being here, one of the things that, you know, you got to be very careful about is when you start thanking people for being here and for doing certain things, and I'm aware of that and I'll try to keep from doing very much more of that. But I did want to ask Lieutenant Colonel Breedon, Agent Breedon, would you please stand? Thank you, sir.

[Applause]

He was kind enough to host us. He's the commander of the 11th Reccy [Reconnaissance]

Squadron up at Creech Air Force Base. He did a fantastic job for us. He really made us feel at

home, even though we were a little bit late, and we left him with what was left of 135 box [00:45:00] lunches. I hope that didn't create too much of a problem. Thank you, Agent. We appreciate it very much.

[Applause]

TD, would you join me up here for just a moment? We're getting close to finishing up here, folks, and I know it's getting late. Yeah, we've got about five or six minutes here before we're supposed to finish, and we might just run a few minutes over, but we'll try to keep from doing that. TD, can you come up and join me, please?

I also failed to mention that we have some of our personal friends, Becky's and mine, with us this evening as special guests, and I wish that they would stand for us. It's Bill and Mary Goldfein, father and mother of General Goldfein who is out of town this evening.

[Applause]

Thank you, folks.

I've got a little bit of a problem here. We've got about a—you know it's coming up on ten o'clock and I don't want to overdo this thing, and yet I have mixed emotions about this because TD had a DVD that runs about twenty-five minutes. That's what you have a copy of. What we'll do is we'll start it out and then maybe we can kind of slip to the tail end of it. Could we do that? I'll let you determine what to do here, but if we could do like about ten or fifteen minutes of it.

TD Barnes: We'll do a little bit and then watch it at home.

Roger Andersen: OK, let's take a look at the beginning of it and we'll see how it rolls.

TD Barnes: Yes, sir.

[00:54:15] [End of Track 1, Disc 1] [End of Roadrunners Banquet Presentations]