FLYING THROUGH HISTORY: THE WINSLOW-LINDBERGH REGIONAL AIRPORT

EARLY OPERATIONS: TWA IN THE 1930S

AIRMAIL COMES TO WINSLOW

Image courtesy of Björn Larsson

US Postmaster General Walter F. Brown wanted the federal government to stop subsidizing airmail service and to encourage the growth of larger airlines that could provide safe and profitable passenger service. In early 1930, he requested an amendment to the Air Mail Act of 1925, and soon the McNary-Watres Bill reduced the rates for airmail service. Brown awarded new airmail contracts based on suggested mergers, one of which was TAT-Maddux Air Lines with its competitor, Western Air Express. Both companies were losing money, so in July 1930 they formed Transcontinental and Western Air. Brown awarded T&WA the central transcontinental airmail route in August 1930. Western Air Express moved its equipment from Holbrook to the TAT-Maddux airfield in Winslow.

Left: Winslow was T&WA's only airmail stop in Arizona. City officials sent invitations all over the region, and 3,000 people attended the inaugural stop at Winslow's airport on October 25, 1930. Right: A letter airmailed to Winslow's mayor commemorated the inaugural stop. T&WA began night airmail service once enough beacon lights were installed along the route. One thousand people were on hand to watch the inaugural Northrop monoplane land in Winslow on April 20, 1931.

THE AIR MAIL SCANDAL

Smaller operators charged Brown with illegal favoritism in awarding airmail contracts to larger airlines, and the ensuing Congressional investigation prompted President Franklin Roosevelt to cancel all contracts in February 1934. The *Winslow Mail* reported on February 16 that T&WA vice president Jack Frye had recently visited Winslow and spoke of the great damage to passenger air travel if the presidential decree was made permanent. The Army Air Corps took over airmail service, but the pilots were not trained for the type of flying required. The subsequent crashes and deaths forced Roosevelt to return the service to private contractors, but with certain restrictions. The big companies were indeed suffering, so they accepted the terms of the Air Mail Act of 1934: mail rates were cut even further and the aviation holding companies were required to break up, though TWA was allowed to continue with only a name change to TWA, Inc. Today Brown is seen as a visionary for believing that larger airlines needed government support for the passenger industry to advance technologically.

TWA'S WINSLOW SERVICE IN THE 1930S

In 1932, Transcontinental-Western Air, Winslow, saw the greatest increase in outbound passenger traffic of any western TWA airport, and by 1933, six transcontinental passenger and mail planes came through daily. As one of the Southwest's most advanced, the Winslow airport saw a steady stream of famous pilots and passengers. Joseph Kasulaitis worked at the airport from 1929 to 1948 as meteorologist and later as manager.

Kasulaitis met aviators Lindbergh, Amelia Earhart, Howard Hughes, and Pancho Barnes as well as many Hollywood actors: *". . . passengers would walk on a carpet to the plane, all dressed up in their best, because flying then was the most glamorous, adventuresome way to travel . . . movie actors were in and out of here constantly. Usually they were very friendly . . . I remember meeting the Barrymore brothers, Jimmy Stewart, Mary Pickford, John Wayne, Gary Cooper, and Clark Gable and his wife, Carole Lombard."* (Bob Thomas article for *Arizona Highways*, September 2000)

Navajo Airways offered scenic flights to the Grand Canyon, Painted Desert/Petrified Forest, and Meteor Crater from 1931 to 1933. The company was organized by local businessmen and railroaders and based at Winslow's airport. TWA provided access to its hangar and weather service and promoted the scenic tours to their customers. Navajo Airways' plane was available to TWA officials for charter flights, and it was also used for air ambulance service to regional hospitals.

Left: A DC-2 fuels up in Winslow in the mid-1930s. Right: A 1935 TWA brochure featuring the DC-2 (Image courtesy of Björn Larsson)

TWA'S DC-1 TEST

Transcontinental-Western Air, Winslow, was host to one of the most important events in aviation history: TWA's acceptance testing for the Douglas DC-1 prototype. In 1932, TWA's Jack Frye asked the Douglas Aircraft Company to design a safer, faster, and larger passenger aircraft to replace the Ford Tri-Motor. The plane needed to be able to take off, with one engine out, from "any TWA airport," which meant Winslow with its elevation of 4,800 feet. The successful engine-out test flight took place at the Winslow airport in September 1933, and TWA put the plane, redesigned as the DC-2, into service in May 1934. By 1936, the DC-2 evolved into the DC-3, which was the first aircraft that could make money just hauling passengers. TWA began its DC-3 service in 1937 and introduced overnight transcontinental trips in only 16 to 18 hours. By the late 1930s, ninety percent of domestic air passengers flew on DC-3s, making it one of the most successful commercial transport aircraft in aviation history.

Far left: Kasulaitis with friend Vida Norman in the 1930s. Left: Winslow's adobe terminal was western in design and materials and boasted a canopied walkway to mid-apron. Right: The comfortable terminal always had a fire going in winter. Far Right: The hangar was large enough to serve as a maintenance facility for the Ford Tri-Motor aircraft. (Kasulaitis photos courtesy of Gayle Kasulaitis)

Left: Local businessman Herman Sughrue and wife Gertrude stands in front of Navajo Airways' Kreutzer Tri-Motor NC-612, the only one still in existence. Right: Pilot Jack Irish (right) flew the company plane while Dr. Clyde Fisher (left), Curator of Astronomy at the American Museum of Natural History, conducted an aerial photo study of nearby Meteor Crater in January1933.

Left: A1940 TWA brochure featuring the Stratoliner (Image courtesy of Björn Larsson) Right: The Boeing Stratoliner, seen here in Winslow around 1940, offered additional range, more passenger room, and the first pressurized cabin in a commercial plane, allowing for flight above the weather.

HOWARD HUGHES BUYS TWA

Howard Hughes, the innovative owner of Hughes Aircraft, bought controlling interest of TWA in 1939. TWA invested in four-engine technology and replaced the DC-3 with the Boeing Stratoliner in 1940. But Hughes and TWA President Jack Frye wanted to do better and charged Lockheed with building their new Constellation, which was faster and more powerful than the competition of the day. Meanwhile, as the Second World War raged elsewhere, the federal government began to prepare the US airline industry for the country's potential entry into the war.