FLYING THROUGH HISTORY: 
THE WINSLOW–LINDBERGH REGIONAL AIRPORT

CIVIL AVIATION COMES OF AGE

Even though military aviation was the focus for the duration, World War II propelled commercial air travel into the modern age. Thousands of military-trained men and women were available as pilots, mechanics, and crew members to the growing post-war middle class that took to the airways. Aircraft technology also took giant strides during the war. Afterward, major airlines began to purchase larger four-engine aircraft like the Lockheed Constellation and the Douglas DC-6s and DC-7s, which became the transcontinental workhorses of the 1940s and 1950s. In 1959, domestic airlines introduced jet service with aircraft such as the Douglas DC-8 and Boeing 707. Jetliners, further shortening travel times and lowering fares, transformed air travel into a mode of transportation accessible to most Americans.

TRANS WORLD AIRLINES

During the war, TWA emerged as an airline with both domestic and overseas routes, a first for an American carrier. Hughes registered the new name of Trans World Airlines in 1945 and officially changed it in 1950. For a short time, Winslow continued to be a stop on TWA transcontinental flights as well as to go back and forth to Phoenix, but it was not economically feasible to operate the new, larger aircraft over short hauls. Over the objections of city officials, TWA service to Winslow ended in 1953. That same year, the city council created the Winslow Airport Authority to operate the Winslow Municipal Airport, which returned to city control on June 1. TWA’s lease was cancelled and their equipment sold to the city for $35,000, payable over a 20-year period out of airport income. The facility had a staff of one manager and two mechanics that lived at the airport, as well as a Civil Aeronautics Administration Airways Communications facility that became operational in 1951. The control tower, known to pilots as “Winslow Radio,” housed the equipment and offices for the staff of seven. The station provided flight assistance to 4,000 pilots per month.

THE GRAND CANYON DISASTER

During the mid-1950s, experts warned that the growth of civil and military air traffic had outpaced the existing control system. Then on June 30, 1956, a TWA Super Constellation and a United Airlines DC-7 collided over the Grand Canyon, killing all 128 passengers in the deadliest domestic aviation disaster thus far. The crash spurred improvements to the air traffic control and radar systems and led to the creation of the Federal Aviation Administration in 1958, which regulated American air space under a common system. On July 8, 2014, over 200 people gathered for a plaque dedication at Grand Canyon National Park marking the crash site as a National Historic Landmark.

FRONTIER AIRLINES

Frontier Airlines began in 1950 as a merger of Arizona Airways, Challenger Airlines, and Monarch Airlines. Headquartered in Denver, Frontier flew passengers and mail around the Rocky Mountain region, including daily flights between Phoenix and Winslow. At the time, Frontier was the nation’s largest “feeder” airline, successfully representing a policy nurtured by the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB). Frontier flew over 170 airports over its 36 years, and when it shut down in 1986, many of the smaller cities never regained passenger airline service. Frontier had already ended service to Winslow in 1974, which the CAB approved based on a report that said Winslow’s limited number of passengers had transportation alternatives that included I-40, Amtrak, and the Flagstaff Airport.

AIRPORT SERVICES & ACTIVITIES

Winslow’s airport has a long history of acting as a base for aircraft fighting fires in the Coconino and Apache-Stiggevres National Forests. The US Forest Service has been able to utilize the airport because the runways are long and sturdy enough to support huge tankers and the altitude is acceptable for taking off with heavy loads of retardant. Over the years, the airport has served Winslow in other ways: the contract to put in a café was approved in 1954, and Santa Claus used to arrive at the airport for the Annual Christmas Parade, where he would give out treat bags to children on the tarmac. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Renegades Car Club regularly held drag racing events on the runways.