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.

The walkway, terminal, and hangar in the 1950s. Other than the periodic name change, the hangar looked almost the same as the day it was build.

In cooperation with the *Arizona Republic* newspaper, the Winslow Chamber of Commerce cosponsored a contest to add a fourth line to a jingle about the Hopi Snake Dance. The prize was a flight to Winslow on Frontier, a stay at La Posada Hotel, and a visit to the Hopi village of Mishongnovi to view the Snake Dance. The 1951 contest was won by the Ellsons of Safford, standing to the left of Hopi Chief Joe Secakuku.

Left: A 1955 Frontier route map (Image courtesy of Björn Larsson) Right: Acting postmaster Mary G. Ferguson hands a bag of Frontier airmail to Mayor Floyd C. Whipple in the mid-1950s. Behind them are, from left to right, Carlton K. Foster, Joe Wetzel, an unidentified Frontier attendant, and Jim Lovitt.

Search-and-rescue aircraft like this Piasecki H-21 used Winslow's airport as their base during the Grand Canyon disaster. (Photo courtesy of Ted Miley)

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 to 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 passenger had transportation alternatives that included I-40, Amtrak, and the Flagstaff Airport. (A new incarnation of Frontier Airlines, also based in Denver, was incorporated in 1994.)

Founded in Tucson in 1971, Cochise Airlines briefly provided two commuter flights daily to Phoenix once Frontier stopped service. In 1979, the Winslow airport signed an agreement with Monument Valley Air charter service, which also sponsored Winslow Aviation's flight instruction and aircraft rental. Golden Pacific Airlines picked up the commuter service when Cochise went out of business around 1982. Golden Pacific stopped service in 1988, and the next year the U.S. Department of Transportation informed the Winslow airport that carriers interested in providing service would no longer be eligible for a federal Essential Air Service subsidy. Winslow's low passenger numbers and subsequent lack of potential subsidies sealed Winslow's fate with regard to commercial passenger service.

Frontier flew several aircraft over time, starting with Douglas DC-3s and including Convair 580s and Boeing 727s in the 1960s, and Boeing 737s in the 1970s. After the war, many Douglas C-47s were converted back to DC-3s like this one, circa 1959. It typically had a crew of 3 and carried up to 31 passengers. (Photo courtesy of Ted Miley)

AIRPORT SERVICES & ACTIVITIES

Winslow's airport has a long history of acting as a base for aircraft fighting fires in the Coconino and Apache-Sitgreaves 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.

Photos are left to right: 1-This plane, which had its mishap in 1958, is inside the small hangar that Lindbergh used whenever he came to Winslow. The building is no longer there. 2-That same year, Mayor F. Whipple and his dog came out to see the Sud SE-3130 Alouette II, an experimental French helicopter. 3-Many commercial airplanes were drafted into wartime service and then modified again after the war to return to civilian use. Seen here in Winslow in the late 1950s, this Boeing B-17 "Flying Fortress" was a strategic bomber before it was converted into a slurry bomber. 4-Seen here in 1961, two Consolidated PBY-5A Catalinas and a Grumman TBM 3 Avenger were also converted for fire fighting. Both planes saw service in World War II. (Photos 1, 2, & 4 courtesy of Ted Miley)