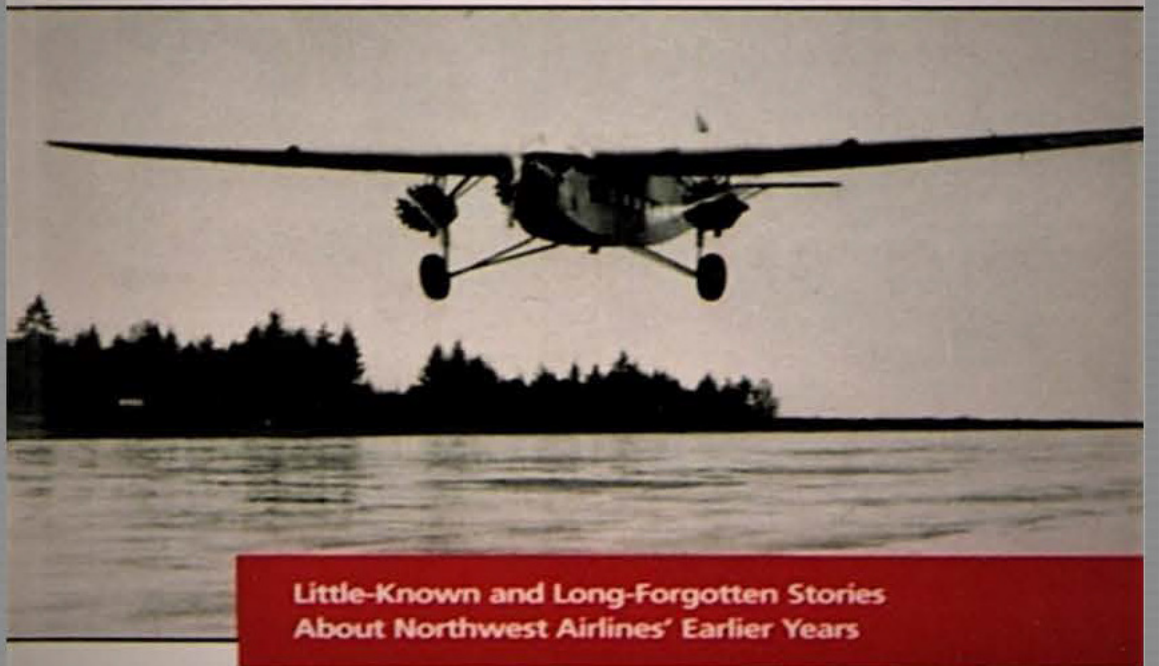
CONTRAILS

ISSUE 209 SEPTEMBER 2019

VOICES FROM THE SKY

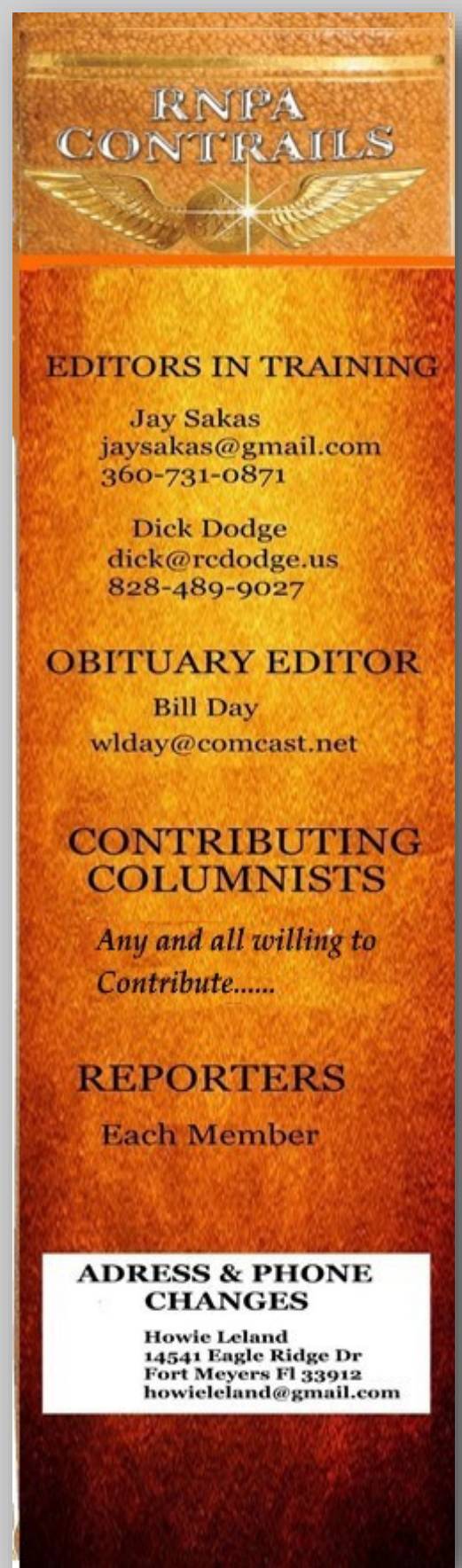


Little-Known and Long-Forgotten Stories
About Northwest Airlines' Earlier Years

Published By
NWA History Center

RETIRED NORTHWEST AIRLINES PILOTS' ASSOCIATION

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:



NOTAMS

From here on out the most critical thing is *NOT to*

FLY THE AIRPLANE.

Instead, you *MUST*

KEEP YOUR EMAIL UP TO DATE.

The only way we will have to communicate directly with you as a group is through emails.

Change yours here ONLY:

RNPAnews@gmail.com

If you use and depend on the

RNPA Directory

you must keep your mailing address(es) up to date. The ONLY place that can be done is to send it to:

The Keeper Of The Data Base:

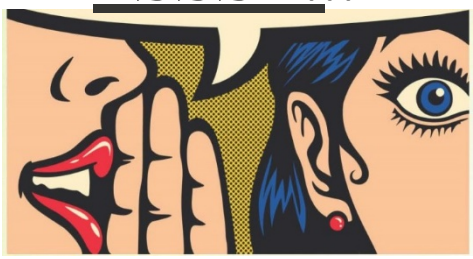
Howie Leland

howieleland@gmail.com

(239) 839-6198

Howie Leland
14541 Eagle Ridge Drive,
Ft. Myers, FL 33912

PSSST...!

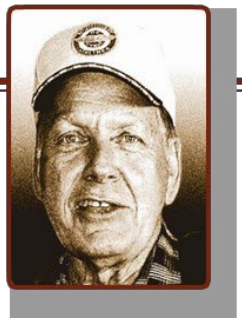


"Heard about the RNPA FORUM?"

Click the **"NEWS"** drop down menu, then click **"RNPA** Forum:

Posted comments will go out to over 840 RNPA members the same day.

President Reports



Gary Pisel

E-CONTRAILS Sept 2019

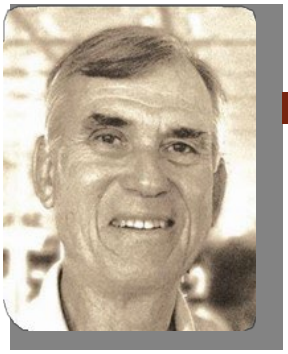
Greetings Fellow Pilots and Members of RNPA

It is TIME to make your reservations for the Louisville Reunion. KC had a fantastic agenda for all to take part in. The Brown Hotel is one of the best in the state. They are famous for the HOT BROWN sandwich. You must at least get one to share. Wagers on the race will be exciting as will the ceremony of placing the roses on the winner of the race sponsored by RNPA.

We are back in Phoenix for the rest of the summer. Problems arose with the hot water system in the coach and we had to return to the heat of Phoenix. In Sept we will be departing JFK for a Swiss Air flight to Zurich and a bus tour of Switzerland ending in Munich for Octoberfest and the tapping of the keg.

Remember to encourage other pilots to attend the functions of RNPA. This is our only way of keeping in touch.

Gary Pisel



Trea$urer'$ Report: *Howie* ***LELAND***

RNPA TREASURER REPORT January 1 - December 31 2018

Income

Dues	$290
Interest	$146
	$436

Expenses

New web site "E-Contrails"	$ 2,009
New web site -1 yr. Maint.	$ 1,929
Postage	$ 126
747-400 Reception	$ 800
Editor software & subscpt.	$ 1,367
	$ 6,231

Actual 2018

Membership Directory	$ 4,081
Postage	$ 2,028
	$ 6,109

Budget 2019

Web site maintenance	$ 2,100
Editor Expemses	$ 1,000
Editor software subscpt.	$ 500
Postage	$ 2,640
	$ 6,240

Balances

Checking Account	$ 20,080	includes	$19,500	New Orleans Reunion income
Savings Account	$ 16,853			
12 Mo. Saving Certificate	$ 25,078			

Budgets are known expected expenses - There will be other misc. expenses

Total Membership 5/31/18	1248
New Members Since 1/1/18	12
Since 1/1/19	3
Removed Since 1/1/18	20

Our reserve funds remain adequate to met our 2019 and 2020 budgeted expenses. So the Board voted at our annual meeting in May at New Orleans not to charge dues for 2020. Included is the financial report from the annual meeting.

We are always looking for new members. Applications are available at "RNPA.ORG" under the News heading. When completed, send the application along with a check payable to RNPA to: RNPA Howie Leland 14541 Eagle Ridge Drive, Ft. Myers, FL 33912 New member dues are $25 for regular members or $20 for affiliate members.

If you have a change of address or phone number, please notify me at the above address, or call my phone, 239-768-3789 or cell phone 239-839-6198 or by email at: howieleland@gmail.com We want to stay in touch with everyone.

I hope to see many of you at the next RNPA Reunion on May 7, 8 and 9, 2020 at Louisville, KY.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to RNPA.

Editor Jay Sakas

Suggestion are Welcome

Voices from the Sky

The Cover for this issue of eContrails was borrowed from a book published by the Northwest History Center. Stories as told by those that went before us. Fortunately, Gary Pisel sent me a copy of the book. I have picked out several stories of those early years as told by those who were present in the making of Northwest Airlines. More stories will follow in future edition of eContrails. Fascinating reading…..

For a long time, I have asked for stories from you, the makers of NWA history. As luck would have it, upon my return from NOLA, a package awaited me from Gary Ferguson. It was his stash of stories sent in by pilots and friends. Majority of them dealt with the old days. Upon reading them, I decided that this issue would be devoted to the days past and the people who made Northwest a great airline.

Before Contrails, there was “Lite Off” and before that there was “the Beam”. In this edition of eContrails you will find the complete edition of the March 1972 “Lite Off”. It is a big file, which takes a while to download……it is worth the wait. Remarkable reading.

This issue contains a lot of stories. Download the pdf file, load up the printer if you want a paper copy or sit back and enjoy the good old days……..J--

Where do we find men like these.....

A Touch of Class . . .

By: Bob Craig, President, Sunbird Aviation, Bozeman, Montana

Bozeman, Montana, is one of those delightful places left to live. One of the many things that Bozeman has an abundance of is air transportation.

One thing that Bozeman does not have is a control tower. We have managed to sort of keep everything pointed the same direction by doing a lot of coordination between pilots on the local radio frequency. This often doesn't sit really well with the airline pilots.

As a matter. of fact, there are only two airports on Northwest Orient's entire route structure world- wide that don't have control towers and they are both in Montana - Bozeman and Butte.

The local FBO, Sunbird Aviation, Inc. had recently acquired an older, no-radio Super Cub as a tow plane for its glider school. On this particular day in November, Henry Bahn, a middle-aged college professor, decided that since the weather was clear - even though there was fresh snow and it was cold it would be a nice day to improve his proficiency in the Cub.

Since it was cold, the battery in the Cub was a Little anemic and it required some assistance and a jumper cable to get started. Once started, however, everything was fine; and Henry taxied to the run-up area at the end of the runway. Remember, this is a no-radio aircraft so a lot of looking out the windows is going on. Let's face it there is not a lot else to do in a Super Cub.

Henry observed that the ground crew at the terminal was in the closing process on a Northwest Airlines 727, but he would be long gone before the trimotor was ready to roll. He taxied into the run-up position and completed his take off check list and noted the 727 coming up the taxi behind him. He was ready, so he taxied onto the runway and lined up on the center stripe. Since it was very cold and the air was very dense, he thought that it might be a good idea to lean it out a little, so he started to pull out on the mixture control just a little - and the engine quit.

Northwest was now hanging its nose over the end of the runway not far behind Henry' s right shoulder ; and when your engine has stopped, a big jet in close proximity can be very loud. It can be particularly annoying if you are a slightly built, gray headed, bespectacled college professor and your aircraft has a very weak battery .

Try as he might, the prop would not turn over, and Henry was beginning to panic. Let us imagine that the conversation in the Northwest cockpit at that moment was probably not too charitable to Bozeman and Super Cubs, this one in particular. The cockpit crew was Captain Burt Novak, 1st Officer W. L. Ball, and Flight Engineer N. H. Duncan. They all knew that unless that Cub got out of the way, they could not start their take off and a long delay might result. That meant inconvenience to a lot of passengers and, not least of all, the consumption of a lot of very expensive jet fuel. The Northwest crew was trying to communicate with the Cub and at the same time talk to the FSS to make everyone aware of the problem. Henry, not having a radio, was not party to the communication. He was, however, aware of the problem. .

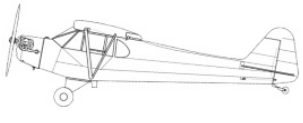
Henry decided that he had to get the airplane off the runway, and since a Cub is quite light, he would just pull it out of the way. He got out and picked up the tail and moved it to the edge of the runway. Alas,

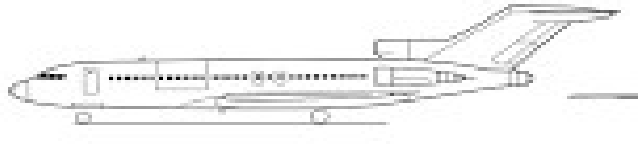
the airport snow plows had managed to create a two -foot berm that he could not get over. He was stopped and still in the way. He turned the airplane again toward the take-off direction, got in and tried the starter again. The prop would just start to move and stop, the battery was almost useless. The 727 was still howling behind him, the engine wouldn't start, and he couldn't tell anyone about his problem. Henry was near a collapse.

All of a sudden, he heard some- one knocking on his right window. He turned to see the uniform of a Northwest flight officer (we never learned which one, although we suspect that it must have been the Captain, Mr. Novak). He obviously knew something of super Cubs. He instructed Henry to turn on the mags, richen the mixture, crack the throttle, and calmly walked around to the propeller to hand prop the airplane. The third time through, the engine came to life and Henry was back in business.

The Northwest flight officer walked back across the runway, under the screaming giant of an aircraft, up the rear stairs that had been lowered, raised the stairs, walked up the aisle *to* the cockpit, and resumed his normal position of authority. Henry added the throttle, took off, quickly made a left tum to get out of the way, and watched the 727 roll down the runway and gracefully lift into the air. Henry returned to the runway, landed, taxied into Sunbird and allowed that he didn't really think he wanted to fly any more that day.

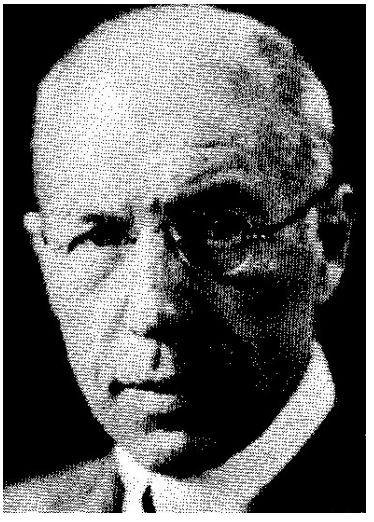
Captain Novak and his crew experienced a small delay, but their compassion, understanding, and skill contributed to a happy ending of a situation that will be an amusing memory for all of us. Our hats off to the Northwest crew!





COLONEL LEWIS H. BRITTIN

Northwest's Founder Was a Talented and Dedicated Man



THE FACT THAT COL. LEWIS HOTCHKISS BRITTIN founded Northwest Airlines is known to most aviation historians. Details of his accomplishments are scattered throughout books about Northwest's history. Here we've tried to put some of the known facts together (they sometimes differ a bit) for a quick look at this remarkable man.

CoL. Brittin was a lanky man, more than six feet. Several early pictures reveal a middle-aged immaculately-dressed professional in a well-tailored dark suit with the standard white shirt, necktie and lapel handkerchief. He views the world through rimless granny glasses with a neatly-creased brim-up grey Homburg clamped evenly on his head. A close look at his neutral expression reveals intelligence and determination. This rather austere appearance belies the fact he worked extremely well with people and that he was a very persuasive man.

An engineer by profession, Col. Brittin was born in Connecticut and orphaned at an early age. Then boarding schools. Later, he passed entrance exams at both Yale and Harvard and chose the Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard. It's said he dropped out in his second year because of lack of funds.

The Spanish-American war erupted in 1898 when he was 21. He has been variously described as taking part in it as a volunteer artilleryman, as an Army captain and "as a colonel on the general staff." In World War I it's said he was in the air service (a subsequent reference says he had no formal aviation experience), got his title of colonel in the Engineers, or that he worked his way to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Quartermaster Corps. One book says he was a West Point graduate. He did not attend West Point.

Early-on, Col. Brittin got a job with a construction contractor and spent several years in Mexico, continuing his education as best he could. Sometime around 1920 a job with General Electric brought him to Minneapolis to oversee construction of a GE facility in the Mill City. From then on he was a Twin Citian and soon became Industrial Director of the St. Paul Association, later the city's Chamber of Commerce.

Two of his first Twin Cities projects involved overseeing construction of the Northwest Terminal, a multi-million-dollar transportation and industrial development, and the refurbishment of an unused government power dam across the Mississippi River between south Minneapolis and the base of what became the Highland Park district of St. Paul.

Through the St. Paul Association, and with the help of Ford Motor Co. Chief Engineer William Mayo, Brittin is credited with convincing Henry Ford to build an assembly plant on the St. Paul side of the river to take advantage of the dam's inexpensive production of electricity. It's said it was the first automotive plant Ford built outside the Detroit area. Somewhere along the line aviation became a major interest for Col.Brittin.

Its first flower was his successful effort to get an airport for St. Paul. Minneapolis had an airport and he was convinced St. Paul needed one, too.

Working through the St. Paul Aviation Club and the Association, he convinced City fathers to float a $295,000 bond issue to acquire land and build an airport on "Riverview Flats," across the Mississippi River a couple of miles from downtown. During this time Col. Brittin and St. Paul aviation entrepreneur William Kidder became fast friends. Kidder owned and operated the Curtiss-Northwest airport and flying operation "out in the sticks" on the southeast corner of Snelling and Larpenteur avenues, St. Paul.

To digress for a moment, it is now early 1926. St. Paul and Minneapolis had been without airmail service since June, 1921 when the Postoffice gave up its ill-fated, nine-month attempt to fly the mail between the Twin Cities and Chicago in World War I military aircraft. (The first mail had arrived August 10, 1920 in a Martin bomber). Eight planes crashed and four pilots were lost during that period.

Northing happened for awhile. Then Congressional approval of the Contract Air Mail Act of 1925 and the Air Commerce Act of 1926 opened the way for private operators to bid for government airmail contracts. (There were 20 contract airmail carriers aloft in 1928).

In 1926, the successful bidder for a Chicago-Twin Cities mail route was Charles "Pop" Dickinson, a well-known Chicago aviation enthusiast and benefactor.

Dickinson started flying June 7, 1926, with the full support of Col. Brittin and Bill Kidder, his St. Paul Manager. However, he encountered an insurmountable series of problems and in August, activating the 45- day escape clause in his contract, announced he was quitting Oct.1.

When Dickinson told Col. Brittin he was through the Colonel went into action. He approached the managements of National Air Transport and Stout Air Services (later part of United) and Robertson Aircraft Corp. (later part of Eastern) about funding and operating a Twin Cities- Chicago airmail route. They turned him down flat.

More determined than ever, Col. Brittin turned to his Ford Motor Company friends. Through them a meeting was arranged at the Detroit

Athletic Club with a group of aviation-minded Michigan businessmen. Col. Brittin gave the sales pitch and Kidder answered technical questions.

They carried the day. Despite one failed attempt (Dickinson) and no interest from three other airlines, the Brittin-Kidder presentation was so convincing that their audience (along with a few St. Paulites) put up $300,000 to start a new airline.

Thus Northwest Airways (Northwest Airlines since 1934) was born and incorporated as a Michigan entity in August, 1926. It began flying Oct. 1. The officers were Michigan-based except for Col. Brittin who had operating responsibility as vice president and general manager. Today, Northwest remains the oldest airline in the Western Hemisphere with a continuous name.

Brittin rented two open-cockpit bi-planes from Kidder to get Northwest off the ground. He also convinced Eddie Stinson to sell him, for later 1926 delivery, the first three Stinson "Detroiter" airplanes Stinson had designed and built. The closed-cabin, 85-mile-an-hour Detroiters carried three passengers and the mail. Thus Northwest became the first airline to operate a closed-cabin airplane in commercial service.

I n 1929, St. Paul banker Richard C. Lilly and Col. Brittin approached Twin Cities businessmen with a deal. They wanted money to buy out Detroit investors and bring Northwest Airlines 'home" to the Twin Cities. Their efforts were successful. Lilly was named the airline's first "home-grown" president. St. Paul's Frank B. Kellogg, former U. S. Secretary of State and Nobel Peace Prize recipient, was a member of the new Board of Directors. Brittin's old friend, Ford Chief Engineer William Mayo, served on the new Board until 1933.

Under Col. Brittin's leadership Northwest consolidated and expanded its route system, particularly towards the west. He was always looking west and there can be no doubt his goal was Seattle. In 1933, the Board of Directors named him executive vice president since he was spending more and more time in Washington, D. C. protecting and advancing Northwest's

interests. Former traffic manager Croil Hunter was named vice president and general manager to look after Northwest's day-to-day operations and closer-to-home matters.

However, there was turbulence on the horizon for Col. Brittin. Enter the Senate Committee to Investigate Air Mail Contracts chaired by Alabama Democrat Hugo Black.

In 1933 American, United and a third entity consisting of TWA, Eastern and Western Air Transport were the Big Boys of commercial aviation. The three of them were receiving more than a million dollars annually in airmail payments. (Northwest's take then was about $58,000). The Post Office was unhappy. It felt it was paying the Big Boys too much and there were other problems. The Black Committee was formed to figure things out.

Northwest played pretty much of a loan hand in Washington. Earlier the big airlines had spearheaded the forming of an "Airline Chamber of Commerce" to represent their interests in Washington. Brittin recommended to Northwest's Board of Directors that Northwest stay out of it. Since Northwest was a small airline, Brittin felt it would be bound by policies adopted by the group that might not be in Northwest's best interests. The Board agreed.

Originally Northwest was not involved in the Black Committee's investigation but it became involved in a rather bizarre way. The Committee subpoenaed records of Washington attorney William McCracken Jr. who represented several airlines including Northwest. Col. Brittin kept all of Northwest's files, and his personal files, in McCracken's office.

Upon hearing of the subpoena, Col Brittin was said to have rushed over to McCracken's office to remove his "personal papers." He was known as a meticulous note-taker on just about everything and some of his jottings included comments about the idiosyncrasies of many of the politicans and bureaucrats with whom he had to deal. He wanted to remove these papers before the Feds moved in.

The Black Committee got wind of his actions, however, and had some Federal clerks go through 300 bags of trash in McCracken's building to seek out Col Brittin's papers. They found them. The torn pages were painstakingly pasted back together and given to the Committee. There was nothing in them involving Northwest wrongdoing of any sort. (And the Committee would certainly keep any of the Colonel's "personal comments" to itself).

By this time the Committ e's hearings had become front page news. Brittin freely admitted he had torn up some personal papers. This act was enough, however, for him to be tried for "contempt of the Senate" (along with McCracken and two others) and the Colonel was sentenced to 10 days in jail.

He served his time sleeping on a cot "between a bootlegger and a bandit." One evening was highlighted by a turkey dinner prepared at Washington's Mayflower hotel brought to him by Hunter and fellow Northwest executive Julian Baird.

In February, 1934 Col. Brittin, now 57, walked out of jail without a job. He had resigned earlier in the investigation to save Northwest further embarrassment. Northwest's Board accepted his resignation with "extreme reluctance." One Minnesota Senator called Col. Brittin's treatment by the Black Committee "a damn shame."

The man who had nurtured Northwest Airways throughout its turbulent infancy and who set it on course for bigger things was gone. Col. Brittin was named to the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame in 1989. Part of his commendation reads " . . . Col. Brittin's astute leadership was responsible for the firm base upon which the airline of today stands ... "

Col. Brittin was a talented man and an aviation visionary. He also was possibly the best promoter the city of St. Paul has ever had.

POST OFFICE ADOPTS NORTHWEST EMBLEM

Airmail "Wings" Designed by Col. Brittin

Col. Lewis H. Brittin, Northwest's founder, was a man of many talents, including those as a designer.

He personally created an air mail uniform emblem for Northwest pilots that caught the eye of the United States Postal Service-the words "U. S. Air Mail" imposed on a world globe in the center of outstretched wings.

The Postal Service "borrowed" the design and directed that pilots of all U. S. airlines flying the mail should wear it. It also placed Col. Brittin's creation on air mail stamps and produced Post Office flags with the emblem on it.

Northwest's founder, Col. Lewis H. Brittin and Charles "Speed" Holman, Northwest's first pilot and operations manager, with Charles A. Lindbergh. For a brief time Lindbergh, also a Minnesotan, served Northwest in an advisory capacity.

The World according to Gar……

Contributor Gaar Bensen

One of my favorite WW2 flying stories, from the wonderful book *Song of The Sky* by Guy Murchie (1954)

— — — — — — — — — -

An excellent example of the influence of mysterious and spiritual things on navigation occurred about ten years ago to a navigator friend of mine named Willie Leveen. Willie was inadvertently cast in the leading role in a living nightmare over the British Isles one stormy night near the end of World War II. His was a true- life adventure which may well take its proper place in history as a modern navigation classic.

Darekee…..

Willie had been my radio instructor in the last months of 1943 and he had served American Airlines as a crack radio operator during most of the war. He had learned navigation only in the early months of 1944. The occasion of his great adventure was his fifth transoceanic trip as a navigator, under the Air Transport Command, when he was flying a cargo of "eighteen American generals" from the Azores to Prestwick. The Battle of the Bulge was less than a month away and this heavy helping of high brass was just returning from a final conference with General Marshall at the Pentagon.

Willie's weather folder showed a severe cold front approaching Britain from the west, but it was not due to hit Scotland for at least an hour after the plane's arrival there, so he was not particularly concerned. The long afternoon dragged on uneventfully until the sun, seen wither shins from the airplane, swiftly settled into the western ocean. Then

suddenly night closed down like an eyelid upon the seeing earth, Ireland was still three hours away and, as the first stars appeared, Willie could see a dense cloud bank far ahead — the rear of the cold front.

Knowing that he had little time left in which to get a celestial position, he quickly picked out several well-dispersed stars and shot himself a good four-star fix. The position showed the airplane practically on course and substantiated his 105 a.m. ETA on Prestwick.

By the time Willie had worked out the fix it was nearly ten o'clock and the airplane had entered the cloud bank. There was

now nothing left to navigate with but the radio and dead reckoning. The flight was still going according to plan, however, and neither Willie nor his pilot, Captain Daniel L. Boone, had any apprehension of serious trouble. One of the generals sitting in the passengers' cabin was amusing himself by keeping track of the headings of the airplane, aided by his own pocket compass and watch. The airplane was a Douglas C-54 and her code name was Great Joy Queen.

After about an hour Willie got a radio bearing from the range station at Valley, in northern Wales. It gave him a line of position that plotted at right angles to his course, an indication of ground- speed. But Willie didn't rate it of much value because radio could not be relied on at two hundred miles out, and besides, the line, if correct, showed that Great Joy Queen must have slowed down to an almost absurd degree.

As the next hour passed, Willie kept expecting better radio reception, but neither he nor his radioman could raise a thing. They couldn't even get Valley anymore. "Mighty strange," thought Willie. "Could the radio be on the blink?" Not likely, as all three radios on board acted the same. An eerie loneliness came over Willie as he looked out into the black nothingness beyond the windows and heard only the sound of sizzling fat in his earphones.

He leaned over Captain Boone's shoulder: "We still can't get a thing on the radio, Dan. All I've got is dead reckoning. Do you think we could climb out of this soup and get a star shot?"

"Not a chance, Willie/' said Boone. "This cumulus stuff goes way up. Better stick to D.R. and keep trying the radio."

So, Willie kept to his original flight plan, using dead reckoning, guessing the wind from the weather folder carried all the way from the Azores. He also kept at the radio. He worked the com- mand set while the radio man worked the liaison set. Between them they tried the automatic radio compasses too, even the loop. They tried everything. But, as Willie said afterward, "no dice."

Landfall had been estimated for about 12:00 p.m., so after midnight Willie assumed Ireland was below. What else could he do? And when the time came, according to flight plan and dead reckoning, he made the turnover the range station at Nutts Corner, heading northeast for Prestwick. Of course, he had no check as to whether he really was anywhere near Nutts Corner, but when you don't know something in such a case you have to assume something. It's at least a hypothesis until proven or dis- proven — for you can't stop and ponder when you're moving at 180 knots.

As the Queen flew northeastward toward a hypothetical Prestwick, and still no radio, Willie wondered what to do next. He had long since passed his point of no return, so there was

no chance of going back to the Azores. His alternate destination of Valley was still a possibility but without radio would be no easier to find than Prestwick.

Should he try to descend under the clouds and find Prestwick visually? No. With only a vague idea of where he was and no knowledge of whether there was any room between clouds and earth, descending blindly down into mountainous Scotland would be almost as sensible as diving out an office window in New York City in hopes of landing in a haystack.

Then what about going up? It offered small hope and would use a lot of gasoline, but men in dire straits must grasp for any- thing. Willie again put it to Boone.

"No/' said the captain. "There must be something you can get on the radio. Radio's our best bet for getting down, Willie. Even a three-star fix can't show us the way down through this soup — but radio can."

So, Willie and his radioman twirled the knobs some more. Was there any station at all on the air? Evidently not one . . . No.- Nothing. No — yes, there was one. But it was hard to tell whether it was a voice or dots and dashes. Then it was gone. The static sounded like a crackling fire. For millions of miles outward toward the sun the unseen sky was filled with hydrogen ions whipping downward upon the earth, playing hob with magnetic stability around both temperate zones. Scotland was almost in the band of maximum disturbance.

Willie switched on the radio compass again, tuned to Prestwick. The dead needle started breathing, twitched, and moved. Then it reversed itself, wavered and spun around three times . . .

Willie wished he had radar aboard. Radar might just have worked in a time like this. What a help it would have been to get a radar reflection back from the ground, to feel out those craggy Scottish hills a little. But the lesson of Job, "Speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee," had not yet been learned by this flying boxcar.

Nor was there yet any loran on this four-engine sky horse — loran, the new visual radio that since World War II has widely simplified long-range navigation, permitting quick fixes of position by electronic measurements of micro-second intervals between pairs of synchronized stations.

Willie wasted no thought yearning for this fluoroscopic magic that was already enabling other navigators to home in on special loran charts of hyperbolas in many colors — this ballet of the pine needles, of shimmering sky waves, subsea grass and green fire, of storms and snakes and music and lightning standing still.

He knew that he couldn't have gotten a fix on the best loran set in the world under the magnetic pandemonium now enveloping his world. Loran was too new, too delicate, too tricky still — and anyhow he didn't have it.

So, "What about it, Dan?" asked Willie once more. "Want to go up? Not a prayer on the radio."

"Let's try the Irish Sea," said Captain Boone. "That's right here somewhere to the west of us. It would be pretty safe to let down there to a couple of thousand feet and maybe we can get on contact and see our way into Prestwick."

"All right," said Willie. "Better fly two-seventy. I don't like this much."

Boone adjusted the throttle knobs and started letting down, turning to a course of 270°. Willie watched anxiously.

Down and down — . . . 8000 feet . . . 5000 feet . . . 3000 feet . . . 2000 ... 1500 …. Finally, Boone leveled off, but still there was no bottom to the clouds

"You win, Willie," he said. "I guess we have no choice now." He set the throttles for a long climb. Presently all the men adjusted their oxygen masks and opened the valves for higher altitude. Willie and the radio man kept their earphones on, kept trying everything in the book — but heard only the wail of the unknown void around them, the unearthly howl of outraged electrons flying from the sun. And the altimeter needle moved slowly upwards: 15,000 feet . . . 16,000 . . . 17,000 . . .

After a long half hour Great Joy Queen was getting close to her ceiling, and still in the clouds which seemed to have no end. The needle read 25,200 feet and the big plane was beginning to mush. There was hardly enough air to hold her up, but somehow, she managed to claw her way among the molecules of nitrogen still a little higher — 25,400 — and a little higher — 25,500 . . . 25,550 . . .

Willie was beside himself with anxiety, and consciously appealed to what divine powers there might be in the great unknown vastness above and all around. Could he have a peek at a star? Just a few seconds of a star? Just one little star. Any star would do. Anything would do, please God.

As Dan Boone labored toward the last inch of ceiling, Willie's gray eyes scanned the dark nothingness out of the astrodome wistfully, pleadingly, desperately. Was there a light anywhere? A whisper of a star? Now was the crucial time. Now, God.

What was that over there to the east? The frost on the dome? Willie rubbed the frozen breath with his sleeve. And there was still something light up there: the moon!

Ah! Willie thanked God in his heart as he reached for his octant and swung it toward the hazy glow of light. It was the full moon. It was dim and vague but strangely big — as big as a parson's barn — almost too big. The sky was still deep in clouds but now and then Willie could see its roundness clear enough to shoot. He quickly removed his oxygen mask to clear his face for the eyepiece.

"Hold her steady, Dan," he called as he balanced the silver bubble and pressed his trigger on the moon. It was the most difficult shot Willie had ever made — and the most fraught with consequence.

The angle twisted his neck and he was cold. Besides, he could hardly make out the moon's limb and he had to keep rubbing the frost off the Plexiglas every fifteen seconds, the while dancing on his little stool. He didn't have the traditional electric hair dryer for cooking the frost off the dome. He just rubbed with one hand, desperately. Without oxygen, his breath came in short gasps.

Somehow, he managed it, and as Boone started descending again Willie figured and plotted a moon line. But as his fingers drew the line Willie's eyes widened with amazement. The line was mostly off the map. It ran north and south and put the plane somewhere just off the coast of Norway!

"Dan, do a one-eighty turn and let down," gasped Willie. He half expected Boone to question his wild request, but Boone promptly banked the plane into a complete reversal of direction and the Queen was headed southwest, presumably back across the North Sea toward Britain again. "We must be in one hell of a west wind," muttered Willie.

When he was asked later by investigators why he accepted that single implausible moon shot as accurate, Willie replied, "It was all I had had to go by in more than four hours. What else could I believe?"

Fortunate it was for the war and at least two dozen lives that Willie had that much confidence in himself, and that Boone trusted him too — for fate was figuring close that night, and there were only a couple hours of gasoline left.

As the plane descended steadily toward what Willie presumed was the North Sea, Boone throttled down his engines to save every possible drop of fuel. He put her on maximum range. That is the slow overdrive prop and throttle setting of lean mixture (more air and less gas) originated by Pan American, with Lindbergh as advisor, for just such an emergency. It means flying just slow enough to squeeze as many miles out of each gallon as you can without mushing.

The plan was to try to get below the clouds and the strong winds while over the sea where it would be reasonably safe to descend that low. To do this Willie had to bet the lives of all on board on his moon shot. The war in France might also feel the consequences. He had to wager everything on coming down to the sea rather than into rugged Norway, Scotland, or the Orkney Isles.

Down, down they went. When the altimeter showed 500 feet, anxiety became intense. If over land, this altitude could easily be disastrous — and Willie could not even judge the accuracy of the altimeters because he had received no barometric correction since the Azores.

At "400 feet" a grayness appeared in the black below. The sea! Willie relaxed a little. Boone leveled off at 200 feet where he could avoid the full force of the evident headwinds of higher levels. Willie gazed anxiously at the water. He thought he could see huge white caps: a gale blowing from the west.

Consulting with Boone, Willie had determined to fly west until the British coast appeared, then fly along the coast in an attempt to recognize some locality and, if possible, find a landing field.

Meanwhile the flight clerk and engineer were making preparation for possible landing in the sea. Life rafts were dragged forth and Mae West jackets handed to all the generals. It is interesting to think of the comments that must have come from the brass as they were being assigned individually to rafts. Of that, alas, I have no record.

After a half hour Boone suddenly cried, "Land!" He banked to the right and headed up the coast. All the crew looked eagerly at the dim outline of the shore and Willie tried to match it with some part of his map. It was tantalizing. He could not recognize anything, nor tell whether the coast was England, Scotland, the Shetlands, or even something else. Willie felt cold shivers in his bones.

Soon realizing the unlikelihood of identifying the blacked-out coast in time to do any good, Willie decided it would be better to go inland in search of airfields and possible radio contact. So, he got Boone to turn west, and they agreed to fly inland for thirty minutes. If they could not discover anything useful in that time they would return to the coast. By then, they figured, the fuel tanks would be about empty. They planned in the end to ditch in the ocean as close to land as possible in hopes of being able to make the shore in their rubber rafts against the gale blowing out to sea.

As they flew west Willie and the radio man continued trying everything in the book on their radios, desperately seeking even the faintest recognizable response. And Willie peered ahead at the same time over Boone's shoulder watching the murky landscape below for a light or a city, a railroad line, a highway, a lake — any clue.

At one point, Willie suddenly saw a high hill approaching dead ahead. It was so close he was sure they would crash. He braced himself frantically as Boone zoomed upward and the "hill" burst all around them! It was a black cloud — and in four seconds they were out again on the other side. Hard on the nerves, this.

Every now and then Willie would look at the radio compass — just in case it should settle down and come to the point. It was still spinning now and wavering except when passing through clouds, he noticed. Sometimes large cumulus clouds have enough current in them to activate the radio compass and thunderstorms have been known to masquerade as range stations. So, he watched and checked and waited for identification — and listened — and looked some more.

What was that whine in the headphones? Was it Scotland or Norway or Russia? Willie could not decide whether the radio sounded more like bagpipes or Tchaikovsky's Chinese dance. It would have been funny if only it had not been so serious.

When the allotted thirty minutes were nearly gone, the radio- man suddenly shouted, "Prestwick! I've got Prestwick!" It was now 4:30 a.m. and this was the first radio contact made in five and a half hours. The sputtering code sang forth as in the Psalm: "He spake to them in the cloudy pillar." Willie prayed it would not prove too late.

The radioman tapped out a request for position. A couple of minutes passed while Prestwick control and other coordinated stations took simultaneous bearings on the airplane; then the position was given in exact latitude and longitude.

Willie scribbled it down frantically: "3° 35' W., 53° 20' N."

"Dan/' he shouted, "do a one-eighty. We're headed for Ireland. We're over the Irish Sea near Liverpool." Willie had to think hard. He knew where he was at last, but there was so little gas left that it seemed out of the question to try to reach Prestwick. Some nearer field would have to be found. But the radio was still scarcely usable and very uncertain.

As the Queen approached land again Willie racked his brains for ideas. He remembered vaguely having heard of an emergency radio system the R.A.F. used for helping disabled bombers find their way home. It was known by the code name of "Darkee."

It was the emergency Darkee System, but how could Willie find it? What was the frequency?

Willie found himself praying again. "Dear God, we need You still." There was not a minute to lose. And to Willie's amazement an answer popped into his head at once: 4220 kilocycles. "It came straight from the Lord," he told me afterward.

Willie's fingers twirled the knobs to 4220 and held down the microphone button: "Darkee, Darkee, Darkee — "

He got an answer: "This is Darkee! Circle. Circle. We are tracking you . . . Now we have you. Fly one-twenty degrees. We will give you further instructions. Altimeter setting is 29.31. Highest obstruction four hundred feet."

Willie leaned over Boone's shoulder as Boone flew the course of 120°. He corrected the altimeters to 29.31 for existing barometric

pressure, and Boone kept the Queen at 600 feet. It was so dark that scarcely anything of the landscape below could be seen and often it was obscured by fog or low clouds. Time went by . . . fifteen minutes . . . twenty minutes . . .

Just when Willie was beginning to expect splutters from the engines as the fuel tanks went dry, Darkee said: "Make a three-sixty turn. You are over the field. Let down to five hundred feet."

Boone did as he was told but could see nothing of the ground. "Darkee, we are still in solid clouds," he reported.

"Then go down to four hundred," said Darkee.

When even that failed to reveal the ground, Darkee urged, “Three hundred feet, but very carefully."

Again, Boone crept downward, feeling his way with eyes now on the altimeter, now on the blackness beyond the windshield. When the needle read 300, the clouds remained as impenetrable as ever.

"Still can't see you, Darkee."

"I can hear you plainly/' said Darkee. "You are south of the tower now, about two miles. Fly thirty degrees. That will bring you over the tower."

Boone banked quickly until his compass showed 30°. In less than a minute Darkee said, "Now you are exactly above me. Circle to the right and let down to two hundred feet."

Boone nosed downward again and at 200 feet saw what seemed to be an opening in the murk. Venturing to 150 feet he could dimly make out the ground at times, but no sign of an airport.

"Where is the runway, Darkee? Will you shoot off a flare for us?"

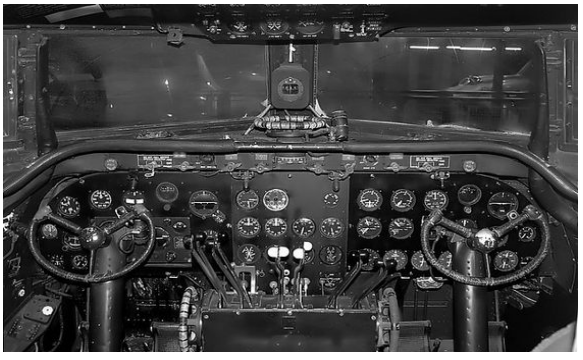
A beautiful green flame rocketed into the sky from almost directly below.

"We are right over you, Darkee, but can't see any runway."

"The runway is below you now. Circle and land! You will see it. Circle and land!

As Boone circled desperately once more, Willie noticed that the fuel gauges read zero. Still no runway in sight. Long afterward Boone was to write me: "When I think about it, I get a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach."

"We are going to land anyway," cried Boone. "Give us all the lights you've got, Darkee. We are out of gas. We have no choice."



Just then there was a sputter from number four engine and it quickly died. Boone circled to the left — descending apprehensively searching. Suddenly two lines of lights appeared below. The runway!

By some strange quirk of mind, Darkee had forgotten in his excitement to turn on the lights until now. Skillfully swinging around to line up with the runway, Daniel Boone put her gear down and brought the Queen in on three engines, easing her steeply into the little field, an R.A.F. fighter base. The wheels touched, bounced. She was rolling fast, and the runway was short. The brakes squealed and smoked, and Boone pulled his emergency bottle, a hydraulic device that locks the brakes — something to be used only under desperate circumstances.

When the big plane finally screeched to rest at the very end of the runway, Boone swung her around to taxi to the ramp. It was only then that Willie noticed that number three engine was also dead. And by the ramp the other two engines had started to sputter. The tanks were dry. They had landed in the little town of Downham Market, eighty miles north of London.

When I last saw Willie a few months ago, he was just out of the hospital after a nearly fatal accident in which his car was hit by a big grocery truck. He had broken a leg and an arm, several ribs, fractured his skull badly and, as in the adventure over Britain, had escaped only with the skin of his soul. As we walked across Union Square in New York City to lunch, I noticed Willie would not venture a foot from the curb until the lights were

indubitably in our favor. "I'm not taking any chances," said Willie reverently. "God has always pulled me through the pinches, and I'm not gonna put undue strain on our relations."

The Fates are huntresses, seekers of one's destiny, who surreptitiously infuse into it, inexplicable events, ever changing that destiny, one or more challenges at a time; all the while cackling, like the witches in Macbeth, at our folly."

Walt Kollath, Deke DeLong, Joe Kimm, Coral Yahr

A Conversation with Joe Kimm

The following is a transcript , only slightly edited, of a VCR tape made at the Air Line Pilots Association outing at Victoria, British Columbia , Canada, September 5, 1985. Retired Northwest pilot Brooks Johnston conducted the interview.

Captain Joseph E. Kimm joined Northwest Airlines in 1929 as a Steward aboard the airline's MSP-CHI Ford TriMotor flights. He checked out as a co-pilot in 1930 and before his retirement in August 1971 he Captained about every type of flight equipment Northwest ever owned He is a former System Chief Pilot and he was a pilot with the Special Missions Group, better known as the "Brass Hat Squadron" during World War IL

I joined Northwest in June 1929, when I was 17 years old, about two months before my 18th birthday, as a steward. We had Ford TriMotors , then, for passengers and Hamiltons and Wacos for mail work. The TriMotor had 450-horsepower Pratt & Whitney engines, three of them, and the Hamiltons each had one 650-horsepower Pratt & Whitney Hornet. I don ' t know about the Wacos.

Back then Northwest was in the flying school business as well as being an airline. It had just closed down its flying school before I was hired. Northwest still had some of the Wacos around from its flying school. I learned to fly in a Waco.

I was hired as a steward to replace Bobby Johnston, who was injured in the Ford TriMotor crash on the St. Paul bluffs justacross the river from the St. Paul airport in June 1929. I was interested in airplanes since I was nine or ten years old and had built a lot of models. In 1928 I won an award in a model airplane contest and we enthusiasts formed a club. One of our members knew a Northwest pilot named Walter Bullock. So, Walter became our advisor. That's how I met him. Walter had built a Ford TriMotor model airplane. He had written a story and it was published in "Popular Mechanics". He was also building model airplane kits and he needed some help and support in his kit building and he hired me on. It was the best situation in the world for a 17-year-old kid who was nuts about planes. Walter was very good to me. He sort of took me under his wing. He was sort of like a father to me. Of course, I didn't really know anything about airline pilots, airline pilots were sort of nebulous characters, most of the pilots you heard about were barnstorming pilots, you heard very little about airlines.

I had told Walter about my interest in getting a job; I kept bugging him, "Are there any jobs out there flying?" One night he told me that if l could get my parents' permission, I could go with him to Chicago tomorrow on the TriMotor. I went home and said, " Mom, can I fly to Chicago tomorrow with Walter Bullock?"She said ask your Father. So, I went to dad. Dad said to go ask your ma. So, I knew I had them.So, I went to the hospital that evening and got Bobby Johnston 's uniform. I cleaned it up a little and wore it on my very first flight. I became a steward overnight. It was that simple. But I wasn't much help to Walter that first day.

The job was rather interesting and from the standpoint of my observation the Steward did all the work. If a passenger showed up without a ticket, we sold them one. We signed for the registered mail and loaded it. We refueled the plane. We loaded the baggage in the baggage bins located in the wing section. We' d carry the luggage through the door, up the cabin aisle and hoist itoverhead. After all this was done, we were ready to leave. The Captain, who was generally sitting around, would say something like, "Well let's go, come on people we are on our way!"

I did this for a few months and then I thought I just might have the wrong job. It seemed to me the pilots were getting all the money and were having all the fun. He was sitting around or in the cockpit while I was doing all these things. I didn' t really object but that's the guy I' d really want to be. In spite of all this I hadn' t really decided if I wanted to make a career out of flying. My main objective was to earn enough money to go to college and learn to be an aeronautical engineer. I was making $78 a month. I flew about 15 days a month. A Chicago round trip is the TriMotor usually took between 7 hours and 45 minutes to 8 hours. I averaged about 125 hours flying time a month. Contrast this to the 80 to 85 hours today.

This flying was done with no radio communications and without the benefit of instrumentation outside of a tum-and-bank indicator and a very inefficient artificial horizon that tumbled if you went over 45 degrees. Nobody knew anything about instrument flying. Everything was done contact.

As a reward for all your work you were permitted to sit up front in what became the co-pilot's seat, after you had the passengers settled down. There were dual controls and the pilots were very nice about it. They 'd sort of let us get our hands on it a little bit when we were in the air. This would whet your appetite quite a bit. Being 17 and flying for the first time was exciting but I had a little difficulty in relating to where I was. For a couple or three months I was in a state of euphoria, but I managed to come down to earth and get on with it. It was pretty heady stuff considering how little experience and knowledge I had about it.

But there were still the cabin duties. Flying as low as we did, and we always flew quite low because of winds and the fact that we couldn't fly above the weather, it was pretty rough. The average trip was usually about 500 feet above the ground. Passengers generally got sick. We had nothing at this time to handle that situation, the other Stewards, Bobby Hohag, Bobby Johnston, who came back to work after he recovered from his injuries, and me. Three of us. We talked about the problem and it really was a problem with the passengers urping all over the sidewalls and onto the floor. Something had to be done about it so we devised a method to handle this. We made trips to the local grocery stores to get supplies of brown bags. This was really the beginning of the burp bag era. But brown paper bags were only efficient for a very few seconds. We learned this because we had the job of cleaning up if we missed. We learned very quickly that if we stood

there with a bunch of brown bags looking over our passengers, and if we saw someone in trouble, we' d whip one out, you know, like the used to do in grocery stores, snap it open and put it in the passenger's face. As soon as they used it we'd whip another one out and madly run with the first one to the back door, and we'd kick it open and throw the bag out. If we were fast enough the bottom wouldn't 't come open before we got there. This sounds like a bunch of malarkey but it's true.

Then we devised other methods. We got the Company to put linoleum on the sidewalls and on the floor. Then we got these little rubber squeegees about six or eight inches long, and dustpans. We got so we could squeegee everything down off the walls onto the floor and into the dustpan. There were quite a few innovations by the three of us because of the problems. There was no such thing as a waterproof burp bag as they have today. I really don't want to dwell on the subject, but I think it's interesting, primitive as it was.

The main point in my mind is that anything we didn't that on that airplane - we threw it out the door, I think this is rather interesting because we gave the passengers Cokes to drink and when the bottles were empty we opened the door and threw them out. Everybody had the idea that traveling at these tremendous speeds everything was blown to bits long before it got to earth. This was a misconception of that day. I like to think we never beanballed anybody, but I really don't know. Nothing ever came out about it.

So it was the following spring, 1930, that I decided I better learn how to fly. I already had airtime on the Ford TriMotor because the pilots were nice enough to let me fly it when we were in the air. Chad Smith, he was the other brother of Lee and Les Smith, the twin brothers who flew for Northwest for so many years, volunteered to give me flying lessons if I could get the Company to lend me an airplane. So Northwest lent me a Waco IO with a Hisso engine, all I had to do was pay for the gas and oil. Making $78 a month I was able to handle that. Flying lessons in those days cost $25 per hour. People might say that's about what they cost today, $25 or $30 an hour. But $25 in 1929 must be the equivalent of $250 today. At that time ,you can realize what a tough thing it would be to learn how to fly. If you didn't get the breaks I got you could never have done it.

Waco "Ten" with Curtiss OX-5 Engine (Photo 1929 Aircraft Year Book)

Anyway, I did learn to fly. I soloed after four-and-a-half hours and that was due to the fact I'd received time in the TriMotor from pilots on scheduled flights. I got my license on November 30, 1930 and that turned out to be very fortuitous because within a month the old Department of Commerce decided they had to have two pilots on aircraft that weighed 12,500 pounds or more. The law went into effect just about 30 days after I got my license, so I was qualified and became a co-pilot overnight. Of course, my duties remained the same and the same pay, $78 a month. But it didn't make too much difference because I was in love with the job. I had a limited commercial license; I was permitted under the regulations to log 15 minutes for every hour I

actually handled the controls. Later on they amended the law so co-pilots could log 30 minutes for each hour at the controls. Today, the co-pilot logs equal time with the Captain, as you know. So because of the law in those days, my flight time filled up rather slowly.

Back to the type of flying, we flew VFR, which meant we had to be in contact with the ground and yet, weather didn't stop us until it got down to about 200 feet and a quarter of a mile. If you can imagine flying from Minneapolis to Chicago, for almost four hours and at 200 feet, having to know where the high-tension wires were so we could get up and over them, and knowing enough about your ground points so you could navigate without radio, without any help except what you could see for almost four hours, this gives you a pretty good idea of how strenuous these flights could be. It continued that way until they developed better instrumentation and the techniques of instrument flying.

One thing I should mention, during this time when we were flying at night we had light beacons every ten miles along most of the major routes in the U.S. Those rotating beacon lights, similar to the beacons at airports, rotated and flashed in your eyes . Each beacon had a red light on the front and back of its tower oriented to the airways. They flashed a code in Morse so if you caught a beacon and could get the code you could look on your chart and find that beacon and it would give you an idea of where you were.

Obviously, there were many flights that never got to Chicago, when we were forced down, when the weather got so bad, we couldn’t ' t even fly in it. We'd pick out a good pasture or hayfield and we would land. The first thing we would do is shut the aircraft down and get it tied down. The farmers would all come gathering around the aircraft, naturally, so we would get some of them to bring their cars over. The

passengers, we' d take them to town and put them on a train and it was my job to take the airmail down and put it on the train, too. Then we' d find a hotel someplace. Of course, the first thing we'd do when we got to the railroad station was to send a Western Union to the home office to let them know where we were. We would be out of contact for maybe two or three hours, they didn't have any idea where we were, whether we were flying or anything, until we either arrived in Chicago or they got a Western Union telling them we had arrived Tomah, Wisconsin, or some such place. Many is the night I spent in a small town like that when we were forced down because of weather, or once-in-awhile when we had a mechanical , lose an engine or blew a cylinder.

So in 1931, I think it was about that time, we got our first radio installed in an aircraft. This was really a breakthrough because not only could you pick up a microphone and could call Minneapolis out of the airplane but hear from them as well - Can you imagine anything, anything as marvelous as that? What will they think of next? The interesting thing was the Captains were so set on doing things the way they'd always done them, they weren't really too interested in thus new-fangled device. They didn't think it was here to stay. But the co-pilot had nothing to do most of the time so he loved to have something to play with. We could take up the microphone and talk to somebody outside the airplane. So gradually radio microphones were accepted and they became a big part of the business.

Some Minneapolis-Chicago flights were non-stop. A lot stopped at Rochester, Eau Claire, Madison and Milwaukee. Might be non-stop all the way down and make the stops coming back, or vice versa. I think we had two flights a day. We also had a Hamilton operating from Green Bay, Wisconsin down to Milwaukee that connected with the

main line. We were in competition, of course, with the Empire Builder which was a 12-hour train ride from Minneapolis to Chicago. As time went on we got more and more hardy souls who were willing to take a chance on this new-fangled method of transportation. As I recall, we were getting $75 round trip for passengers between Minneapolis and Chicago and again, those were hard dollars if you related that to what they charge today.

Everything was going along very smoothly - everything was fine - until President Roosevelt was elected in 1932 and took office in 1933. There was a lot of unrest in the airline business; there was a lot of competition. As I remember, E.L. Cord, who built the Cord automobile, took over a company called Century Airlines, which was, I think, the predecessor of American Airlines. I think I mentioned that I was making $78 a month but the pilots were being paid about $1,000 a month. Again, these were hard dollars so that was a pretty good wage, particularly in the 30's during the depression.

The interesting part of this is that E.L. Cord came along and decided that he could revolutionize the whole industry, so he offered to the Post Office to carry the mail for nothing. As I recall, they were paying the airlines about $7 a pound for airmail. You got that whether you had a pound or not. You know, the Company would airmail letters to officers, maybe send them to Milwaukee or LaCrosse, someplace. A letter to anybody and it would go into a mail pouch and the mail pouch, by the time they got a lock on it, and everything else, would weight four or five pounds. I'm not sure the figures I'm using are accurate but this, basically, was the way it was done.

So when E.L. Cord offered to haul the airmail for nothing he was really making a tremendous offer to the government. But soon the government smelled a rat here, and didn't accept his offer, because if

they had, they realized he would get a monopoly and he could charge them anything he wanted to. So Cord had to give up on this airmail deal, but he decided that airline pilots were nothing more than glorified truck drivers and he locked his pilots out one night and said anybody who wants to work tomorrow for $250 a month, we'd be glad to see you. That, I think, was the thing that really decided the airline pilots that they had to get organized.

They began meeting and trying to decide what they could do. The ultimate result was the forming of the Air Line Pilots Association. Dave Behncke was its first President. He quit Northwest before I went to work for them. He only worked for Northwest as I recall for about a year and a half. He was one of the first pilots Northwest hired in 1926. He went with United, I think, but it wasn't United in those days.

Well, after Roosevelt got into office he decided the United States Air Corps could fly the airmail. There was quite a flap about the airline company's giving the government a bad deal, so he arbitrarily cancelled all the airmail contracts along about January, 1934, and he sent the Army Air Corps up to fly. They flew the airmail for three months, January, February and March. Keep in mind that instrument flying had just been born a couple of years before and the Corps had never been taught to fly instruments, or did they fly at night. The Army Air Corp flew from 9 to 5. After 5 the whole thing shut down and everybody went to the officer's club. That was the way things were when all the airmail contracts were cancelled.

The net result was that in the three months the Army Air Corps pilots were trying to fly transcontinental runs across the country without any training in instrument flying or night flying. They were crashing airplanes all over the countryside. It got so bad that the government finally had to cry uncle and call off the Army Air Corps - put them back

on their bases and get the airlines back in operation. They'd already said how bad everybody was, they'd said so many things they couldn't take back, the only thing they could do was force the airlines to reorganize.

So Northwest Airways became Northwest Airlines, and there's a little history in there that I'm not going to get into because it's written up in books; about Northwest Airways organizer Col. Brittin and his hassle with the U.S Interesting enough, it was probably a blessing in disguise for the country, because finding out that the Air Corps wasn't properly trained to do even this, they instituted training procedures.

They stopped being a 9 to 5 Air Corps and learned instrument and night flying and *as* you know this was just about six and-a-half years or seven years before we entered World War II. Just think, if we hadn't had that head start through the fiasco of the airmail cancellations, we would have been in very serious trouble going into World War II. So that is probably the turning point of the early era and the beginning the airlines' progress into being what they are today.

Side Note: The birth of the "barf bag"

When he was a steward, he invented the burp bag. It seems he got tired of cleaning up the old airplanes and passengers. One day, unwrapping his lunch, he looked at his paper lunch bag in a different way. He bought some extras and took them along on his next flight. When passengers felt the urge, he offered them a lunch bag.He disposed of them out the window. Joyce Rudquist Norvold relates a story she heard. "It seems a passenger who had availed himself of Joe Kimm's burp bag later grabbed Joe's arm and asked for his teeth back. Sadly, it was too late."

ODDS AND ENDS

The Seattle base has added so many new captains to the roster in recent months, we felt it would be timely to print some pictures of these steely eyed, daring, heroic, virile, dynamic men of the wild blue yonder. (If anyone has any objections or comments on this section of the News Letter, please contact Bill Huff, who is responsible.)

Figure 1Do you suppose if I brought my own cup, the stewardess would give us some coffee once in a while?

Figure 2Really? I'm going on vacation!

Figure 3 So, is this going to be our ground transportation?

Figure 4 If its crew scheds on the phone...tell them.....I'm busy....

Figure 5 Boy, it's asking too much for us to do our own maintenance.....

Figure 6 I'm really not liking these new uniforms.....

Would you believe..... #l.Harry Detwiler,..... #2 Don Robertson·, ·#3 Chet Swenson, #4 Chet Gordon ,#5. Ray Whitcomb and #6 Earl Perry.

19 JOE KOSKOVICH REMEMBERS

Veteran Northwest Airlines Captain Recalls Some Highlights, and a Few "Lowlights," From A Storied 38-Year, 30,000-Hour·Flying Career

CAPTAIN JOE KOSKOVICH started moving people and freight at an early age. When he was nine he often drove his mother from their farm to McGregor, Minn., in their Model *T* Ford with cream and eggs to sell to the townspeople. At 14, during the dry depression years, he helped his dad drive their 1929 Chevrolet semi-truck from McGregor to South St. Paul with five-ton loads of badly needed grass hay. He got a commercial drivers license when he was 16 although 18 was the minimum age. "I was a big kid," he says.

Soon, he went into the trucking business with his two older brothers, Art and Albert. They had three Chev trucks, a ·29, a '35, and a '36. (Joe still drives Chevrolets). They hauled grain, sugar beets and corn. About every cent they made went into flying.

In 1935, when Joe was 15, his father scraped together $5 so Joe could have his first airplane ride at a fair in Albert Lea, Minn. This, and the memory of Charles Lindbergh's 1927 trans-Atlantic flight, set Joe on his life's course. He, too, had to fly. The Koskovich trucking endeavors paid off with a brand-new red-and-white Taylorcraft airplane with a 65-horsepower Lycoming engine. In 1940, Joe soloed off an alfalfa field near Elmore, Minn. after four-and-a-half hours of informal instruction. He earned instrument and commercial ratings in 1942. Then Northwest Airlines at the bottom of the pilot seniority list, number 151.

Now, let Joe tell his story.

COTTONHEAD

Walter Mondale, one of Minnesota's most worthy politicians, was vice president of the United States during the Carter administration.

I knew Walter when he was 12 years old. He lived in the Elmore area like I did. He used to ride his bike out when he knew I was in the pasture with my Taylorcraft. He'd help me wash down the plane and polish it and I'd give him rides. Later, when he commuted between Minnesota and Washington he'd always ask who's flying this thing? If it was me he'd be up front in no time.

During his vice presidency the St. Paul newspaper asked him who his childhood hero was. Walter replied that it was me. That was really nice of him. I think he wanted to learn to fly but I don't think he ever did. He did all right for himself.

We had a nickname for him back then. Because of his whitish- blond hair, we called him "Cottonhead."

EDMONTON OR BUST

My first flight as a co-pilot on June 2, 1942, was in a DC-3 with Captain Walter Bullock who even then was something of a legend in the fledgling airline industry. The flight was Minneapolis to Edmonton with a load of mechanics on their way to Northwest's wartime Northern Region operation. We left about 10 p.m. Pretty soon the passengers decided to eat the box lunches that were provided for them. We hit some thunderstorms with a

fair bit of turbulence. The box lunches didn't sit so well with the mechanics and by our first stop at Grand Forks, N. D., the airplane was a mess. After we refueled and departed Capt. Bullock switched on the autopilot, pushed his seat back and went to sleep. I sat there deciphering messages that were all in wartime code, working the radios and switching gas tanks. Eventually we reached Edmonton and I contacted approach control and started a slow descent. Walt's ears must have popped and he woke up and wondered where we were. Edmonton, I said. Walt admitted he must have dozed off. Truth is he'd slept all night with a green co-pilot at the helm on his first flight!

The return flight was even better. Refueling at Edmonton wedeparted for the long haul back to Fargo, and after that fuel stop toMinneapolis. Climbing to cruise, Walter again switched on the autopilot. This time the airplane was empty so he headed back and relaxed in a passenger seat and promptly went to sleep. I switched tanks, worked the radios and flew the airways for hours. As we closed in on Fargo I began to let down. Walt woke up and showed up to finish the approach and landing. He stayed awake for the Fargo-Minneapolis leg. Years later I was sitting in the lobby of a Seattle hotel and Walt was there. I told him Walt, you've got more guts than anybody I've ever known. Why is that? He asked. I said because on my very first trip you let me fly that DC-3 all the way to Edmonton and practically all the way back. Walt said I knew you could do it.

ERSATZ OIL

Early in the war the Military was doing some experimenting with synthetic lubricants. We were flying C-46s and C-4 7s. They would put the stuff in only one engine, thank goodness. This was the situation when we departed Fargo, one day, in a heavily-loaded C-46 full of Gls and mail. We were bound for

Edmonton. Not far west of Fargo one of the Gls showed up in the cockpit and told us our right engine was on fire. It was, so we turned back towards Fargo and shut it down.

The engine would not feather and this created a tremendous drag with the windmilling prop. I decided to slow down to a near stall inhopes the prop would stop. It did. On recovering it became apparent we could not hold our altitude on one engine with all that weight.

I spotted a railroad water tower and flew right over the tracks approaching it. When we reached the tower the Gls pitched several hundred pounds of U. S. mail and company mail out the door. With less weight we held our altitude and proceeded back to Fargo on one engine. We got a truck and with a few volunteers drove west until we reached the water tower. We picked up all the jettisoned mail, about 25 heavy bags. They checked the failed engine and found that the synthetic oil had congealed into what looked like little rubber balls. That program was discontinued.

BIRTHPLACE OF THE WINDS (AND ICE)

Many flying stories have come out of the Aleutians, most of which have had to do with brutal winds and incredibly bad weather. The airfields are still there at Cold Bay, Umnak, Adak, Shemya, Attu and other places. Not much activity these days but if you look real close you'll find airplane parts- from those who were not so skilled or not so lucky. Flying the Aleutians during and right after the war brought many adventures. Coming out of Shemya, once, we lost an engine on our C-47. I turned around and went right back in. We were there a week waiting for an engine change. The distance between our Quonset hut and the hangar was about a quarter of a mile. We'd go over there from time to time to check on things. We had to crawl across the ramp. It was so slippery, and the wind blew so hard, there was no way you

could stand and walk.

Once we left Attu for Adak. We got a call asking if we could stop at Shemya to pick up a couple of Gls. I said sure, that's what we're here for. The winds were 75 to 85 miles an hour f rom the northeast. Jerry Brower was my co-pilot. It was rougher than a cob when we came across those 35 miles and went to land. Crosswind blowing the way it was on the final approach I corrected into the wind and pulled the power back on the downwind engine and went in on one engine. 1 taxied with the tail up and when 1 got to operations I let her down, set the brakes and shut her down.

We still were indicating 80 to 90 mile-an-hour winds. To refuel, the guys fastened a rope around a landing gear and threw it over the front of the wing so the guy with the hose had something to hang onto.

Another wartime story worth mentioning has to do with Jimmy Doolittle's early 1942 B-25 raid over Tokyo. Those B-25 Mitchell bombers were modified for the mission at the DePonti hangar at Wold Chamberlain field in Minneapolis. Stripped of a1mor and guns they were outfitted with long-range fuel tanks and associated pumps and plumbing required for the mission.

When everything was done there was flight testing. No1ihwest pilots were called to action. I was one of many who flew these airplanes prior to their being turned over to Gen. Doolittle. When somebody asked me how I checked them out I just said we figured out how to start 'em up and away we went.

SPECIAL DELIVERY

During the war years Northwest suspended service from the Twin Cities to Duluth. Our equipment was dedicated to the Northern Region war effort and otherwise kept pretty busy. We did keep the mail moving there with a Stinson Reliant and a Stinson Gull Wing. Both were high- wing cabin monoplanes with single radial engines.

I flew both of these planes on the mail run, often taking one of the office girls along for the ride. It was a seven-hour trip with four of them on the ground in Duluth. We had some nice times in Duluth with the mail guy driving us around town. Then back to Minneapolis usually about 5 p.m. With homemade parachutes, I'd often drop boxes of chocolates to cousins who lived near Forest Lake.

NORTH TO THE ORIJENT

In 194 7 Northwest began flying our new northern "Great Circle Route" to the Orient in DC-4s. Minneapolis to Tokyo was a long trip in those days with layovers at Anchorage and Shemya. A round trip could take more than two weeks. There was an Army dump on Shemya we used to scrounge and you also could find rocks on the island that had been worked by hand into some sort of tools-remnants of an old Aleut culture. Some of our Shemya-Tokyo trips left about five in the afternoon. I'd tell everybody as we climbed out over Attu when the sun comes up behind us we'll be in Tokyo.

The DC-4s were unpressurized and therefore obligated to lower altitudes. Lower altitudes, of course, mean more clouds and weather and potentially deadly in-flight icing. The 4s had inflatable rubber boots on their wings and tail and alcohol stingers on their props. I always remember the ice breaking off and making loud cracking noises against the fuselage. They

were powered by four Pratt and Whitney R-2000 engines. They were great engines, I don't ever remember having to shut one down. You didn't go very fast but they sure got you there.

I'll never forget the Tokyo taxicabs right after the war. They were all 1936 Chevs that were powered by charcoal. They had a charcoal burner in the trunk with a stack sticking out of it. They had to shift into low gear to get up any little hill. And they drove with their horns!

While I think about it, speaking of ice, a putty knife was a standard item in our DC-3 tool bags. They came in handy because you sometimes had to open the cockpit side window and reach around and scrape ice off the windscreen to see where you were going. And don't forget to wear your gloves. The DC-3s had no defrosting systems on their windshields. No windshield de-icing.

ST. ELMO FIRES UP

St. Elmo is the Patron Saint of sailors. St. Elmo's fire is a flaming phenomenon sometimes seen in stormy weather on prominent points of ships and airplanes.

After World War ll larger, faster airplanes that still operated at relatively low altitudes presented some interesting problems. St. Elmo's fire, first observed on the masts of tall sailing ships, can be a spectacular and unnerving event in an airplane.

One night on a DC-6B climbing out of Minneapolis we started picking up a lot of precipitation and had all the de-icers on. You'd look out at the props and they were lit up like big neon lights from the hub on out. Usually it would start at the tips and work down. I asked the co-pilot if we were getting much ice. He said it looked normal. Just about then the static electricity let go. Just like a flash bulb in your face and a bang you couldn't

believe, like a shotgun going off in your ear. I couldn't see anything. l was blinded for a couple of minutes.

Another time on a DC-4, we were on a holding pattern on the way to Chicago. We encountered severe icing with associated static buildup. I couldn't go up or down and the radio was out. We were icing like crazy and I just kept flying two minute legs in the hold. Finally we heard a clearance on the VHF radio and as I descended the whole sky lit up with a bang. I looked out and my co-pilot looked out and we still had two wings and four engines. There was a time when some DC-4s had gas heaters in their wings and a few had been known to explode That's what I thought had happened. On the ground I asked the mechanics to look the plane over. It had pinholes in all the fabric control surfaces and it was grounded.

WING WALKING NANCY

It was the late l 950s, a DC-68 to ew York from the old Minneapolis terminal. It was a night trip, I suppose about 9 o'clock. We had a new stewardess on board, I think it was her first trip. There were three on board and I don't know why the other two didn't override her. Anyway, we went to fire up the engines and I started three and four. They used to backfire sometimes, they'd belch flame out the exhaust. Occasionally you'd get what's called a tack fire, too much fuel in the exhaust system. It would burn off and there'd be a big flame coming out the back.

Well, this stewardess thought the airplane was on fire. I had three and four going and I'm looking down at the guy on the ground and as I started number two he gave me the chop sign. About this time one of the stewardesses comes up and says we've got a problem. I told my co- pilot to ee what's going on. He says look out the window. I turned around and there's three or four people standing out on the wing with their shoes off. If they'd

fallen off, eight feet at least. She'd opened the left ide emergency door and sent them out there. She thought the airplane was on fire.

She came up front to apologize when we were aloft. I guess she thought she was going to get chewed out. I smiled and said what were you trying to do, tip over my airplane?

TRAGEDY- I

John Pfaffinger started flying with my brothers and me in the Blue Earth, Minnesota, area in the summer of 1940. He went to work for Northwest in 1942 just after I did. In 1952 Northwest was transporting military personnel across the Pacific Ocean in what was known as the Korean Airlift.

Johnny departed Anchorage for Seattle in his DC-4 on one such flight. Somewhere southeast of Ketchikan he lost an engine. I've always thought the prudent thing to do would have been to press on to Seattle on three engines, which a DC-4 could do ju t fine. There wasn't a good airport in the area with good approach facilities. However, the book said that under the circumstances you must land at the nearest suitable airport. Perhaps Johnny was feeling some pressure from the military brass on the airplane, so he elected to take it into Sandspit, B. C. Without a good precision approach and hampered by lousy weather, he missed. Something went wrong on the go-around and he wound up in the water. Seven people survived out of maybe 50. Johnny was okay initially but going back into the water after another crew member, he never came up again. This was a very sad loss of a good friend. I wish he'd gone on to Seattle.

TRAGEDY II

In 1953 Captains Don King and Charlie Ryan and their wives were returning from a Northern Minnesota outing in their Seabee. They ran out of gas and crashed just short of their destination, Prior Lake, near Shakopee. Both men were loved, admired and respected for their abilities and personalities. King headed Northwest's Northern Region operation during World War II and was Northwest's first Orient Region vice president.

You know where they went down, don't you? Near Shakopee practically on my farm. I was in Seattle that night and if I'd been home we would have found those people. They crashed about two miles east of my farm. I would have found them with my high-wheeled hunting buggy. Fellow NWA pilot Ed Smith was in his barn pitching silage only a quarter of a mile away when he heard the crash. He said the engine stopped and he heard a crash but nobody believed him. He and the sheriff went out there. They couldn't see anything, it was dark. I think the women would have survived if somebody had gotten out there fast. If l had been home I would have been out there and those women might be alive today. Parts of the aircraft were in a tree about a quarter of a mile f rom where the auto racing track, Raceway Park, is today. They found them the next morning. King had crawled away but he had fatal back injuries. The whole thing still haunts me, if I'd only been home.

SLIPPING AROUND

Landing my DC-6B in Minneapolis one winter night I found mybraking action was nil. It was like a skating rink. I reversed props three times and just barely got stopped. The interesting part, though, was yet to come.

Fellow Northwest Captain George Montgomery was inbound on the same runway in a DC-4. They closed the field as he approached the outer marker but George had a hot date that night so he pretended not to hear. Knowing that some spectacle of airmanship was about to occur my co-pilot opened the cockpit windows so we could watch.

Here came George sailing down the runway with all wheels on the ground. My co-pilot says whoops, there he goes off the runway. Once he got out in the snow he got a little traction so he stood on the brakes, brought two engines up on one side and made a big sweeping turn out of the snowfield onto safe territory.

When I met him in Flight Dispatch I said, "a little slippery out there, isn't it George?" All he did was raise one leg and shake it.

CAPTAIN KOSKOVICH HOSTS A PARTY

Sometime during the winter of 1969 we were scheduled for a mid- afternoon New York departure non-stop to Seattle, a Boeing 707. A serious snow and ice storm was moving in, it had already started to arrive and we were de-iced on the ramp. We taxied to the end of the runway, there was a delay and the storm intensified. We went back for another de-icing, this time inside the hangar, when the storm really hit. They shut the hangar door. It was so wild you could hardly believe it. They shut down the airport.

J told our 50 passengers we were going to be there awhile. I told them to look out the door if they didn't believe me. It was dinnertime so the cabin crew brought out the food. Everybody ate and slept on the airplane. It was one of the worst storms they'd had in New York for a long while.

We had a pair of honeymooners aboard. I scrounged around in the hangar and in the ladies' lounge there was a daven-bed. We fixed things up and after dinner we showed them to the lounge. We gave them a padlock and we all said Happy Honeymoon. I told them I'd call them in time for the flight in the morning. But we didn't go anyplace the next morning. We were in that hangar for two days and two nights. We played music and we played cards and the caterers kept us in food. Everybody had a good time. I understand that 5,000 people slept in the terminal for quite sometime.

One of our passengers was on his way to attend a Tokyo meeting. He said he had missed his meeting so he might as well go back downtown. His building had a helicopter pad so he had one come and pick him up. When he got to his office he called back to the hangar and said there's nobody here, can I come back out with you guys? He was all by himself downtown but when he was with us he was having food and wine and having a good time.

We got a nice bunch of letters from those passengers and actually, several gifts. An Asian man sent my wife, Muriel, a basket that she still uses today. Nobody complained.

PASSENGERS TO REMEMBER

I had to remove people from my planes about three times, I guess. Once it was at Milwaukee on a Stratocruiser flight from New York City back to Minneapolis. The stewardess came up in tears and said three people were raising the devil. I went back and found out the ringleader was the president of a well-known Minneapolis company. I told him if he and his partners didn't behave I'd have them deplaned. You can't put me off, he said. Want to make a little bet? I asked. The gendarmes escorted them away. I wrote the Company a letter telling them what happened and I got a nice letter back.

Another time it was a night 707 flight in Chicago. We'd just gotten into the lineup and were about number 15, you know how that goes. The stewardess came up front and said we gotta go back, there's a lad back there just raising the dickens. We couldn't turn around, of course, we had to keep moving until we were number one. We got half way along and the flight attendant came up and said Joe, we just have to get this woman off the airplane.

Johnny Johnson was my co-pilot o I aid Johnny, go back there and ee what you can do. Johnny wa a really good-natured, burley- ized guy. He puts on his hat and disappears. When he came back he was laughing o hard he could hardly tell me about it. The woman was sitting in the rear row of the first-class section. She was yelling and had both feet pushing against the seat in front of her. The poor guy in front was all slumped over. Her skirt was around her neck, Johnny told me amid guffaws.

Johnny said to her we'd sure like to take you people to Cleveland with us, that's where she was going and she was with some guy, but if you don't straighten up we're going to have to go back to the ramp and put you off. Johnny's standing there wearing his best mile and she yells some words at him that I don't want to repeat here. Johnny was laughing so hard he could hardly tell me about it.

When we finally got to number one I swung around and went back to the ramp. I left three and four running, we had called the gendarmes, they came aboard and took them off. She walked off just as nonchalant as ever. She walked up to the counter, I heard her ask for the next flight to Cleveland. We'd warned the counter and the agent said sorry, not on Northwest, you'll have to find some other way. That was that. We went back out to the end of the lineup.

A MEMORABLE FIRST FLIGHT

Let my son, Mike, tell a story:

One of my vivid memories from the '50s and '60 was Northwest's ticket policy that when a pilot's children reached the age of seven they could go on a trip with dad. Being the oldest of six of us, I was the first. In the spring of 1956 I went to Washington, D. C., on a DC-6. I spent much of the trip in the cockpit and I remember watching the country slip by as we droned to the southeast. Dad pointed out prominent landmarks as the cloud cover permitted. One of the highlights was a view of our capital city as we maneuvered into position for our landing.

Even more of a thrill however, was the fact that at one point, with the careful supervision of my father, I actually had a grip on the plane's control yoke and rolled it into a big, weeping turn. I was profoundly impressed that this enormous machine actually responded to my control!

DEALER'S CHOICE

I flew all the two- and four-engine planes Northwest operated except the Lockheed Constellation and the Douglas DC-8 and I skipped the three-engine 727s and DC-10s, too. I already was checked out in the big Boeing's when the 727 and the 10s showed up and I opted to stay with them. There are, of course, stories that go with each type of airplane, some humorous, some hair-raising. Each type of airplane has a personality. The Boeing Stratocruisers were always spoken of fondly. Between the big radial-engine transports and the jets was the Lockheed Electra. It was a fast, powerful airplane with superb maneuvering capability and highly effective prop reversers. No brakes required!

Son Mike writes:

By the late 1960s jumbo jets were becoming a reality and Vietnam was getting ugly. Dad went to 747 school and I went to war. Somewhere I have a photo I received while in Vietnam. It was taken on the ramp at Salina, Kansas, with dad posted in front of a Northwest 747. The photo was taken on the completion of his type rating check ride. That launched the final phase of his Northwest career. His last ten years were spent with the B-74 7.

SUMMING UP

l flew with Northwest for 38 years, from 1942 until 1980, all but a year-and-a-half as a Captain. If anybody had a better job than I did I don't know who it was. I wouldn't trade my career for anything. Would I do it all over again? You bet I would.

The moving of people and freight by air continues within the Koskovich family. My oldest son, Michael, flies the Alaskan bush and treks around the world as an Atlas Air 747-400 captain. Sons Dick and Tom also fly.

From a 1940 red-and-white Taylorcraft to today's mammoth 747s, from gross weights of 1,200 pounds to an incredible 875,000 pounds, spanning 66 years, our Koskovich family legend continues. As our family friend and erstwhile Twin Cities media celebrity and aviation buff Sherm Booen says: "This wonderful world of aviation!"

WHERE DO WE FIND MEN LIKE THESE?

PILOT IS FORCED DOWN NEAR CITY CONTOLS SEVERED BY FLYING TIP OF PROPELLER

1935 Billings, Montana

Tail controls severed by a propeller tip that ripped its way through the nose of a trim Lockheed Electra transport plane, a Northwest Airlines pilot brought his ship to a safe landing in a field near the Polytechnic drive Monday afternoon after one of the twin motors hurtled to the ground.

The 14-inch propeller tip shot precariously through the ship's nose, missing the brave pilot's feet by 3-inches, and into the side of the other motor. No persons were hurt in the incident.

The pilot was Hugh B. Rueschenberg, a veteran member of Northwest's flying staff, who duplicated his heroic feat of about a month ago when he brought his ship to a safe landing in Helena, Montana after crashing into three Whistler swans in mid-air. Copilot Fred West was with Rueschenberg for the Helena incident as well.

Scores of people gathered at the scene of the forced landing a few minutes after the ship hurtled an irrigation ditch, a road and two fences before coming to a stop a short distance west of A. J. Rehberg's dairy.

Pilot Hugh B. Rueschenberg, above, brought the Northwest Airlines plane to a safe landing in a field near the Polytechnic drive Monday afternoon after a propeller tip tore through the ship's nose and sent one of the twin motors hurtling earthward. Tail controls were severed.

Pilot Rueschenberg's account follows:

"We were about five miles west of the Billings airport, at 5300 feet above sea level, slowly descending, when all of a sudden it seemed like an explosion. Immediately the ship started vibrating terribly. I knew right away that a propeller blade had broken. I noticed the left engine was partly torn loose and looked like it might drop any minute.

"The first thing I tried to do was to pull the nose up, thereby slowing the speed of the ship to decrease the vibrations and found I had no elevator control. After cutting the switch of the damaged motor, Mr. West, Copilot, immediately radioed the Billings airport on an emergency call. He then hastened to the two passengers and fastened their safety belts. He started back to the pilot's cabin and realized he did not have time to make it

back before landing so he sat in the rear of the plane to help maintain nose up attitude.

"In the meantime I radioed Billings to make sure they knew of our position and rolled the elevator trim tabs completely forward which aided in offsetting the forces due to the lack of elevator control. As soon as I received landing okay, I cut the master electrical switch which disconnects the battery from all the electrical circuits thereby eliminating any possible dangers of fire.

"I gunned the right engine at about 300 feet altitude above a field to decrease the rate of descent. I saw that I couldn't land at the field I had selected as I had hoped. About 200 yards ahead of was a drainage ditch sided by a three-foot embankment. I cut the gunned engine causing the ship to strike the ground and bounce over the ditch. The impact bounced the ship about 15 feet in the air and 300 feet forward. The second impact bounced us over two fences and a road. After clearing the road the ship at last arrived at the field I had earlier selected.

"The left engine fell to the ground at the moment of the impact. The ship slid to a stop before the end of the field"

"When the propeller tip shot through the nose of the ship, a piece of the bracing about six inches long was imbedded into a traveling bag owned by on of the passengers. The passenger asked me if he could keep the piece for a souvenir and I told him surely."

Re-reported and condensed by James Lindley From the
Billings Gazette 1935

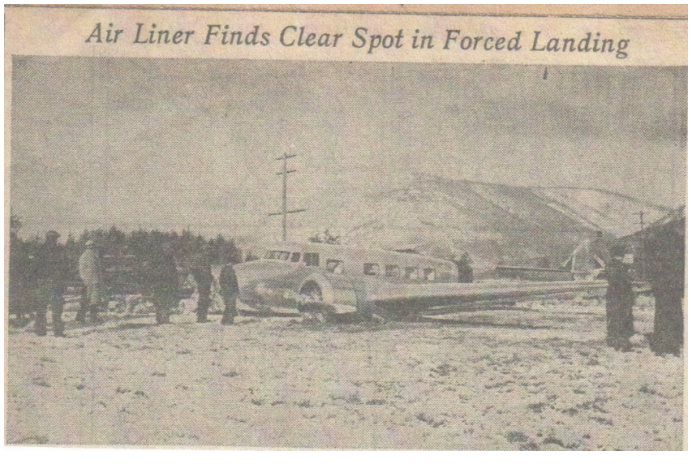
WHERE DO WE FIND MEN LIKE THESE?

PASSENGERS ESCAPE DEATH WHEN PILOT DROPS PLANE ON A NELSON CANADA FARM FIELD IN PITCH DARKNESS

FRANK JUDD, HERO PILOT SUGGESTS NELSON PROVIDE AN AIRPORT AND LIGHT OR SIGN ON A ROOF TO AID LOST PILOTS

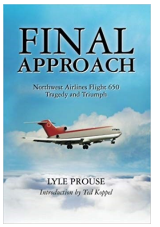
Captain Judd used the headlights of cars on the roads near Nelson to find a landing site. When the big American airliner, Northwest Airlines number 68, was circling Nelson Wednesday night, 100 miles north of course, the proper course being 100 miles south of the line, and, on its last gallon of gas was hunting with landing lights for a place to land with safety to seven souls and to a $70,000 machine, citizens in all parts of Nelson were watching, many of them in the open, and wishing that something could be done to help the stranger find its objective.

In an interview afforded The Daily News, Pilot Frank C. Judd, whose hand guided the lost and strayed silver bird to a happy landing for the human cargo was concerned, involving only minimum damage to the big aircraft, Thursday morning before leaving for Spokane, discussed this phase, and mentioned some of the expedients that could be made use of to assist strange fliers needing emergency direction. fie did this in response to the suggestion that this aircraft was the first aircraft lost this far north near Nelson.



Submitted by James Lindley compiled from articles in the Nelson Daily News 1935 From the scrapbook of Cecil DuRose VP Western Region NWA

Disclaimer: The following articles are excerpted from: {Permission was requested by the editor and received from Lyle Prouse. Only stipulation; the excerpts be as written, and no editing allowed. Lyle did not initiate this article, your editor did and made the selection of the excerpts.)



COMING HOME.....

The Return to Northwest Airlines - 1993

Upon my return from Minnesota, I needed to study for and take the FAA ATP (Airline Transport Pilot) exam. I scored in the nineties on the exam but still had the flight requirements to complete. Those would come later. I also needed to regain my passport. Which had been surrendered before prison, and I did that. Each of those events was a significant and meaningful accomplishment on the path back. I spent the thirteen days following my return to Atlanta involved in those pursuits. Piece by piece, I was putting it back together. I returned to work at Private Jet on July 20, 1993.

Captain O.C Miller was head of the Air Line Pilot Association at Northwest. I met O.C. years earlier in Narita, Japan, when a number of us had breakfast together. That was the extent of my relationship with him. O.C. became heavily involved in my situation and an ardent supporter. He was a gifted individual, extremely intelligent, exceptionally charismatic, with clear vison, and with an ability to view problems from everyone's perspective. But

years of management - labor confrontation created a deep chasm of distrust and dislike between the pilots.

O.C. Miller was able to bridge that chasm with the president and CEO of Northwest, John Dasburg. Dasburg held O.C. in high regard, and over time the two of them developed a close and unique relationship based on mutual respect and trust. No other pilot in the Northwest organization ever earned or enjoyed a position to the degree O.C. had.

O.C. kept in contact with me during the years I was gone. I knew he was dedicated to bringing me back to Northwest, but I also knew it was a Herculean task. I doubted it could be done. Yet I was aware that O.C. and Dasburg discussed it on a number of occasions. There were times when O.C. expressed guarded optimism and other times when things looked very bleak. I tried to stay grounded in the reality that no airline would take back a pilot who had so horribly embarrassed them. Added to that was my convicted felon status, and the fact that I was an openly diagnosed alcoholic who captured the public's attention. My chance of winning the lottery seemed more realistic.

On September 20, 1993 , my FAA licenses arrived in the mail. I just came in from a 10 - hour workday at PJE and was tired as I opened the mail to find them. Moments later, at 6 : 00 P.M . the phone rang. It was O.C. Miller . He asked me to sit down and began to tell me that, when he took the helm of ALPA two years earlier , he had certain aspirations . He talked of his disappointment at being unable to affect most of the changes he sought, and how disillusioned he became .

I knew he was about to tell me my situation was one more such event and how sorry he was.

A voice began to rise inside me, saying, " This is the end and you must accept it. " I continued to hear O.C.'s words on the phone, but they were fading as the voice inside me grew louder and louder, repeating itself each time and demanding acceptance. Suddenly in the distance I heard him say, " But every now and then something happens that makes all the rest worthwhile. And this is one of them. This is the best phone call I've ever made because three hours ago you became a Northwest pilot again. John Dasburg has personally reinstated you to full flight status.

" Incredulous, I had to ask O.C. to stop for a moment. I paused and tried to put the brakes on an emotional train going the other direction. I asked him to repeat what he just said, and as he did so I broke down and wept. Tears streamed down my cheeks and I struggled to speak. It was a moment that never fails to bring tears each time I recall it. As I went through this whole experience, I experienced a depth of negative emotions I never knew existed; I struggled to climb out of places beyond my imagination. In the face of all perceived impossibility, learning of my return to pilot status at Northwest was an emotional high I never before experienced.

I concluded my conversation with O.C. and walked inside where Barbara was sitting. She knew I was speaking with him and when she saw the tears streaming down my face, she assumed the worst. I walked to her and she stood. I put my arms around her, drew her close, with my face and my

tears against her neck . Unable to speak, all I could do was chokingly say , " We're going back . . . we're going back . "

The following day I looked for Greer Parramore when I arrived for work. When Greer hired me, I told him, as an aside, " I have a dream that I might someday return to Northwest and I need to tell you that. I consider it a near impossibility and most likely a fantasy, but I still need to be honest and let you know. " Greer looked at me and said, " If that opportunity came and you didn't take it, I wouldn't want you flying as a Captain for me . Your judgment would be faulty. "

I walked into Greer's office and sat down. I looked at Greer and said, " It's nearly impossible for me to believe, but last night I was called and told that Northwest wanted me back." Greer beamed, leaned across the desk , shook hands with me, and offered his heartfelt congratulations .

Northwest offered to provide an airline ticket so we might return to sign our back to work agreement, but I declined. I wanted to make the long drive again, retracing the same exact path we took for the trial. I wanted to stay at the same cheap places, but this time I wanted to see how it felt going back to celebrate our return. And that's what we did. Every mile brought us closer to a victory I could never have dreamed, when once it was our blackest disaster looming in the miles ahead. I would look over at Barbara, who rode through all this with me, and was so glad she was beside me now.

Approaching Chattanooga, I picked a random exit and turned off I - 75. I found a phone booth and looked up " Holder's Family Restaurant. " George Holder was an elderly inmate in his seventies who had been sent to prison, along with his minister, because they were involved in a church bingo game. Neither had thought it was a crime to play bingo and raise money for the church, but it was gambling so they were sent to prison. It was one more example of how overzealous prosecutors can select whom they will incarcerate. George Holder was a kind, gentle soul anyone would want as a grandfather.

Amazingly, I looked up from the phone book and saw Holder's Family Restaurant across the street, directly in front of me, so Barbara and I drove in and parked. I hoped to see George, but his son told me he no longer came to the restaurant. He said prison destroyed him and he was simply waiting to die, with no will to live and nothing to look forward to. Barbara and I always saw George's wife in the visiting room as she faithfully visited him each weekend, and we liked them very much. The son gave us a complimentary lunch; I gave him my name and address and asked that he pass my best wishes on to George. It was one more prison story ending in tragedy. I never heard from George.

We stopped at an EconoLodge and a Knight's Inn on the way to Minneapolis. Our spirits were so high that they seemed like five - star motels. Barbara was radiant as we made our way north. She pointed out beautiful horse farms and meadows as we made our way through the Kentucky landscape into Indiana. Years seemed to have fallen away

from us and we both recognized how fortunate we were to have come through this experience intact. The brief visit at Holder's Family Restaurant added stark emphasis to that fact.

We arrived in Minneapolis at 3:30 P.M. on Thursday, October 28, 1993. We checked into room 105 at the Holiday Inn Express, and the following day I reported to the Airport Medical Clinic for my return to work physical. The evening we arrived, we drove out to the Northwest Training Center and I just sat and looked. I never expected to see it again.

My return would normally have been an administrative matter, handled by correspondence. O.C. said this event was of such magnitude that they wanted to have an official gathering at the ALPA office, and I should notify any friends. I did, and there was a large gathering on Monday morning, November 1st, as I officially signed my back to work agreement and returned to Northwest Airlines as a pilot. The morning was rich with emotion as so many who supported us were there to share in my return. There was a time when it took courage for someone to say they were my friend in the face of my shame and disgrace. Now, they gathered with us to celebrate an occasion once considered impossible.

I was to work in the training department for a year, in the 727 simulator program, and then transition back to line flying as a 747 copilot. My boss would be 727 Fleet Captain Ken Redeske who warmly and kindly welcomed me back. I couldn't have had a better boss. According to the agreement, I would never be a Captain again, but I was fine with that . I

had been a Captain and had no unanswered questions. I was so overwhelmed with gratitude that I didn't care. I was restored, given back my worth as a human being, and I was going to fly again. I was going to receive the retirement I lost, which was one of the knives in my heart, knowing my misconduct brought Barbara to a dead end. I would have less than five years remaining before retiring at the mandatory pilot retirement age of sixty.

Northwest intended to remain silent about bringing me back and said so as we signed the agreement. I knew that would be a grave error as the media seemed to pick up the slightest whisper in the wind. But Northwest was bringing me back to fly airplanes, not run their PR department, and I did whatever they asked. After the back to work ceremony concluded, they must have brainstormed that decision all day; because they called me late at night and woke me up. They asked how I felt about reporters. I replied that I disliked them but did not fear them.

They asked if I would meet with two reporters the next morning and I agreed to. Barbara and I arrived at Peter Wold's office the next morning to find Jon Austin waiting for us. Jon was the official Northwest spokesman. We never met him before. Also waiting was Laura Baenen, from the Associated Press, and another reporter, David Carr, standing by for a second interview .

I sensed an adversarial interview immediately as Laura began. I remained calm, however, as I responded politely to her questions. As we moved through the interview, I watched a shift in her attitude. An hour and a half later she

seemed to almost be on my side, and her demeanor had changed. As the interview drew to an end she turned to Jon Austin, " Was there any opposition to Lyle's return? " she asked. Jon replied confidently, " Mr . Dasburg manages through an Executive Management Team comprised of senior vice presidents. The consensus was that this was the right thing to do. After sitting and listening, I can assure you it was the right thing to do. "

Barbara told me later that she sensed a coldness from Jon when we first met him; I did not. However, I was focused on the reporters and failed to pay much attention to him. Nonetheless, Jon and I became good friends on that day and remained so until my retirement.

We then did the second interview and it was a touch of deja vu since David Carr was the only Minnesota journalist I spoke with after my trial three years earlier. At that point the future could not have been bleaker. Sitting with him this time, we were celebrating a moment no one could have contemplated.

Northwest anticipated a large negative media reaction to my reinstatement, but it never came. In my view, their willingness to take me back, in light of what they anticipated, only added to the level of courage required. People from all over the country sent me editorials and other pieces addressing my return. If there were any negative reactions, I never saw them. The sole exception was Jay Leno. I boosted his career for a long while as he never seemed to run out of material on me for his monologue.

A few years later, I reacted to a Sunday newspaper piece where he allegedly said a joke needed to be demeaning to be funny, which he later denied as a misquote. Reacting to the piece, I wrote him a three - page letter detailing the effect his humor had on me as I was in the deepest valley of my life. It was a calm and measured letter, devoid of anger, merely describing how I was affected. I expected no answer from him; in fact, I never expected him to see it . I simply wrote it for closure on my part and forgot it once mailed.

Two weeks later, in June 1996, he phoned and apologized to me. I thanked him and accepted his apology.

I went to work at NATCO (the Northwest training center) and I could not have been happier. I was overwhelmed with gratitude. Most of the instructors were assigned sixteen simulator events a month but I was to work twenty - two and happily accepted them. I flew simulator support, in either cockpit seat, for Boeing 727 trainees. I hadn't flown in a long while, but I quickly became more proficient than ever since I was often spending eight hours a day flying. Emergencies became easy and routine; I felt as though I could fly with one hand as I performed the required procedures. It was a wonderful way to transition back into the actual flying that would come later.

We were coming from ground zero financially and I was going to be spending a lot of days in Minnesota. Captain Jim Hystad and his wife, Joyce, offered me the use of their beautiful home, located thirty minutes away in Wisconsin . They were wintering in Florida. They gave me the keys and

insisted I stay there free. I balked so they reluctantly let me pay a small amount for utilities.

I thought about John Dasburg's courage. There were simply no words to describe it. If I failed, if I drank again, or if I had another flying incident, John Dasburg's reputation as a CEO would have been destroyed. The media would have massacred him. He had 50,000 employees working for him worldwide, yet he took the time to care about one. He took an unbelievable chance. He had nothing to gain by bringing me back and virtually everything to lose. It was unbelievable.

I knew that O.C. Miller was the lynchpin in my return; I was certain no other pilot could have persuaded John Dasburg to take such a chance. He risked his reputation by believing in me, and that strongly influenced John Dasburg, because he believed in O.C. Miller.

In the years remaining, I dedicated myself to vindicating both and everyone else who stayed the course with Barbara and me. I owed so much to so many, and I knew I could never repay them.

Although I received overwhelming support, I knew there was a faction who opposed my return. My friends told me it was small, but I had no idea if it was two, five, or ten percent of the pilots. During my first week back, Clay Foushee, Vice President of Flight Operations , asked if I would address the entire flight - training department at NATCO . I agreed to do so. On a Thursday afternoon I walked into the large conference room to find standing room only, with pilots ,

instructors , and staff lining the walls around the entire room. There were probably three hundred or more people in the room and I found it daunting.

Chris Clouser, a senior VP and the right - hand man to John Dasburg, approached me and pinned a small microphone on my lapel . He informed me my talk would be videotaped and shown to the board of directors.

I never tried to script what I was going to say. It came spontaneously and from the heart. I knew there were opponents to my return in the room. I acknowledged that and said I accepted it, adding I would probably feel the same way if I had not found myself in such a position.

I spoke of my experiences candidly, asked for no sympathy, and I said I respected everyone's feelings and opinions about my return. Over the course of the next two weeks, many came up to me and said they had changed their mind and were glad I was back. Each time was a surprise; I did not expect anything after I spoke that day.

My year in the training department came and went. Northwest asked for an extension on my return to line flying and I granted it. I spent five more months in the training department, and then I began my recurrent training period in April of 1995 for re - qualification as a 747 first officer.

As the date neared for me to move back into the cockpit Chris Clouser called a meeting. A large number of high - ranking company officials gathered in their boardroom and I sat in their midst. Chris read a document stating that I was

to return to the cockpit and begin flying again. He ended his statement saying, " You will conclude your service at Northwest Airlines as a First Officer . " I signed the back to work agreement knowing I would never be a captain again and I was okay with that.

The following day I ran into Sarge Martin, Director of Flying, and the man who had to fire me several years earlier. Sarge became a strong supporter and said to me, " I didn't like the part about your concluding your career as a First Officer. " I smiled and replied, " I've been a captain, Sarge. I have no unanswered questions. While I would love to end my career back in the left seat, I'm okay with things as they are. One thing I've learned is that no one really knows how this will end. " I continued, " Any time I wonder about the future or what it holds, I simply turn around, look at all that's behind me , the miracles I've experienced , and I have no fear of what's ahead . " He smiled and said, " I wish I had your attitude.

" Touching the Sky Once Again

I flew my first 747 copilot trip on May 27 , 1995 , taking Northwest Flight 44 to London , England , and Barbara went with me . We laid over in Brighton and had a magnificent time with the crew . The flight attendants all fell in love with Barbara and made sure she rode in first class both ways . Laughingly , they told me I was not allowed to fly unless I brought her on every trip .

I offered to buy a new three - stripe copilot uniform , but Captain Sarge Martin told me to keep my four - stripes . He felt I earned the four stripes and was entitled to wear them . I just didn't wear a Captain's hat .

Twice I flew with captains who had strong negative feelings about my return . I sensed their feelings immediately , but I remained pleasant , did my job professionally , and granted them the right to feel however they felt without ever saying a word to them about it . Both times they called my hotel room midway through the trip and asked if I would have breakfast with them . Both times they apologized and said they were glad we had flown together . Because I had learned to accept things , even if I didn't like them , I could conduct myself in a way that drew them to me instead of away from me . It was one more thing I owed my sobriety and the lessons learned in treatment .

Each year John Dasburg would spontaneously summon me to his office . I never had any idea when it would be or what we would discuss . I lived a life free of fear , so there was nothing he could ask that I was reluctant to talk about . I enjoyed each of our visits and we communicated easily and openly . I felt a genuine fondness for him and looked forward to the visits .

Eventually , I found myself dreaming about being a Captain again and felt guilty about it . I had been given back so much , so I tried not to want more . Still , I thought , it would be the final vindication . I thought

of the circle , so sacred to Native people with all its significant meanings , and I thought a return to the left seat would complete the circle . But I vowed to remain silent . I just needed to be grateful for what I had .

In early 1997 , I received another annual summons to John Dasburg's office . Chris Clouser was present , as he always was , and I walked into the office . With barely a word of greeting , John Dasburg looked at me and said , " What can we do for you , Lyle ? " I was momentarily startled but my instant thought was I'd like to be a captain again . Instead , I responded , " Nothing . You've already done it , " and I smiled .

Almost immediately , I regretted it . I thought , Dammit , they were asking to see if you wanted to be a captain . Now they think you're content to stay where you are , that you don't want to face another captain checkout . A few minutes later , Chris Clouser said something indicating he thought I was flying as a 747 - 400 first officer . The 400 was a two - man 747 , and since I never flew that position before a move to that slot would have frozen me there for the two years remaining in my career . So I deliberately passed it up .

I corrected Chris and said , " I'm flying the generic 747 . A move to the 400 would have frozen me and eliminated any chance I might someday be a captain . " Then I immediately changed the subject and segued into something else . I thought , Good . Now they know what I'm thinking and I didn't have to put them on the spot by asking .

As we finished our meeting , I walked to the door with John Dasburg . He again asked , " Lyle , what can we do for you ? " I replied , " I guess if I wanted something it would be to make it easier for the guys behind me , " meaning the returning alcoholic pilots now in recovery . John Dasburg put his hand on my shoulder and smiled , " You've already done that , " he said , as we shook hands . I began to walk out the door . Dasburg stopped me and looked directly into my face . " We love you , " he said in a soft manner . I paused , smiled , and said , " I love you , too . " And I walked away . I came to know the president and CEO of a huge ,

worldwide airline in a way no other pilot before me . I was completely humbled by that thought .

During the years I was free , I spoke all over the country at the invitation of various groups , some recovering and some not . There was never a charge for the speaking engagements . Occasionally , an honorarium would be offered by a non - recovering entity . Every penny was sent to an Indian treatment center , first in Wichita , then later to one in Shell Lake , Wisconsin . I have participated in many workshops around the country , spoken at virtually all the major airlines , and am willing to go anywhere to help those recovering .

I agreed to speak at the United Airlines three - day alcohol and drug seminar for their flight operations department on April 29 , 1997 . They flew Barbara in with me . Approximately 125 United employees attended from all over the country . Their entire Employee Assistance Program (EAP) department was there as well as all their chief pilots and many leading professionals in the field .

I was the keynote speaker as the workshop got under way . Concluding my talk , I said , " I'll never be a captain again , but that's okay . I've been given so much back that it doesn't matter , and I'm completely saturated with gratitude for the life I have today . " They responded warmly , as they always had before .

Barbara and I were asleep in our room late that night when the phone rang . It was O.C . Miller . He was no longer head of the pilot union but he remained a close friend and confidante of John Dasburg . I was surprised by his call and even more surprised when I heard O.C . say , " John Dasburg just told me he thought you ought to be a 747 captain when you return . " Stunned by the news , I relayed it to Barbara who was awake and listening to my conversation .

I lay awake in the dark for a long time afterwards , unable to sleep . I had experienced so many miracles and many times thought to myself , This is the ultimate ; nothing can eclipse this . And each time I was

wrong . In the darkness I had the strangest feeling that God was looking down and grinning as He said , " See , every time you think I've used up my miracles I can always show you one more . "

The next morning Barbara and I attended breakfast with all the United personnel . I sought out Poss Horton , the chief pilot from Dulles airport and the person in charge of the workshop . I told him about the phone call the previous night . Poss grinned as he excitedly asked , " Would you announce that at breakfast this morning ? " A short while later he called the group to order . I stood and told them about the phone call and the crowd erupted with a thunderous reaction . Barbara was not in the banquet room with me , but she knew I made the announcement because the noise in the hallway was deafening .

I returned to Northwest and put my card in for a captain position . When a slot became available a few weeks later I began the checkout and concluded it on August 28 , 1997 , receiving my final type rating as a captain in the Boeing 747 . Captain Terry Marsh , Fleet Captain of the 747 program , gave me the check ride . Two outstanding pilots asked to fly with me on that day , and Captain Ken Waldrip served as my copilot while former Captain Gene Schmidt handled the second officer duties . Terry worked me over thoroughly , laughing as he threw one thing after another at me and I scrambled to keep up . But I was sober and my mind was quick and clear ; I was well prepared , and relished the challenges with good humor and competency .

We taxied in and I shut the engines down . Terry grinned , reached over , shook my hand , and said , " Congratulations , Captain ! " Ken and Gene followed suit . I had completed my journey home and was taken by the power of the moment . I returned to the left seat as the sacred circle closed for the final time in my career .

A short while later , I was scheduled to deadhead home as a passenger from Narita , Japan . An FAA inspector was on board and he quietly came to me and said he was supposed to give me a final look - see on behalf of the FAA . I smiled and said I would be happy to do the flying .

I put my flight bag in the cockpit . As I stepped back to get something , he said he wanted to speak with me . I stopped to listen as he continued , " Lyle , I'm not here as an adversary . I have the highest regard for you and what you've done . I want you to know that . " I smiled and thanked him ; what he just said and did was very un - FAA - like and I appreciated it .

He wrote a glowing report on my performance and it made its way up to Chris Clouser , John Dasburg , and back to O.C . Miller , who sent me a copy .

I spent the last full year of my flying career as a 747 captain for Northwest Airlines . John Dasburg entrusted me with a mega - million dollar airplane , a crew of eighteen , and allowed me to fly all around the world . I was a recovering alcoholic , a convicted felon , and he placed these precious things in my hands . What more can be said . I am satisfied that I acquitted myself well and vindicated the faith that O.C . Miller and John Dasburg placed in me . I think I may have changed the minds of some of the nay - sayers and doubters . I wanted to be the best employee on the property ; I worked at it every moment .

From the time I first returned to Northwest until my final flight , I experienced the goodness of people . I never flew a twelve or thirteen day trip without six to ten people coming up to me in hallways , restaurants , airports , or hotels , to introduce themselves and say they were glad I was back . The small group of opponents never approached me so all my experiences were positive .

I was in my final year on March 6 , 1998 , and we were slated to fly from Los Angeles to Osaka , Japan . I was aware of the date , since it was within one day of my sobriety date and two days from my arrest in 1990 . Due to the length of the flight it would be an augmented crew , with two captains , two second officers , and one first officer . I was the senior captain and it was my practice to offer the choice of flight periods to the junior captain . The other captain opted to go first , which I expected , since the last half of the trip was the most fatiguing .

The captain I was with had never been particularly well liked , but I'd never flown with him before so I approached this trip with an open mind . Two hours over the Pacific , I was seated in the business cabin and heard the lead flight attendant page for a doctor on board . I asked what the problem was and she said a passenger was having chest pains . Strangely , there were no doctors , nurses , or other medical personnel on board – unusual for a 747 flight .

A passenger came up and said he was once a Red Cross volunteer , but it had been years ago . He was uneasy but said he would help if no one else was available . He and I went back and spoke with the distressed passenger . The passenger was a portly Caucasian male who appeared to be in his late fifties or early sixties . He stated there was no family history of heart disease , he was not on any type of medication , and had no pain in his left arm . In addition to his chest pains , his face was flushed and his breathing somewhat erratic . He was obviously very frightened . The Red Cross volunteer and I walked back to the front of the plane . He said he was unsure , but thought the man was probably experiencing a heart attack . I took his name and thanked him for helping .

I went to the cockpit and informed the other captain that we had a problem and should probably consider a diversion to the nearest airport . He was reluctant . We all knew a diversion would throw the flight into disarray , causing connection problems for passengers . Additionally , it would add hours to an already long day of flying once we got airborne again . He said he wanted to go back and speak with the passenger , which surprised me . If I was flying and the other captain said he thought we should consider a diversion , I would accept his judgment . I climbed into the vacant captain seat while he went back to the cabin .

I asked the other crewmembers what their thoughts were about the situation , starting with the junior man , the second officer . Both he and the copilot thought we could have a serious potential problem on our hands . I summarized my own thoughts and said , " As I see it , the best

scenario we can hope for is that the passenger doesn't die in the eleven hours of flight time remaining . But once he's in Osaka he will still require medical help and he'll be in a foreign land where he doesn't speak the language or have financial resources . If he dies before we get there and we knew about the situation two hours out , it's indefensibly poor and unacceptable judgment to have continued . " Both of them agreed . I concluded by saying , " I think the best course of action is to head for an airport and not gamble with this man's life . " They both concurred .

I had been downstairs in the cabin for two hours , so I asked the copilot what airport we were closest to and he indicated San Francisco . I told him to get us a clearance and declare a medical emergency . He did so and I was in the process of turning east for the airport when the other captain re - entered the cockpit . Nonchalantly , he said , " I talked with the man and he's willing to continue . " We had three hundred and three passengers on board and I felt sure he had discussed all the lost or missed connections and pressured the man into continuing . I said , " He's no longer part of the equation . " I almost said , " and neither are you " My counterpart noticed we were turning and said , " What are we doing ? " I said , " We're heading for San Francisco . “

Somewhat irritated , he asked , " Well , are you taking over ? " I responded , " Yes , pass my flight bag up to me , please . " Part of the recovery wisdom integrated into my life was separating the problem from the solution . At that moment , the other captain was part of the problem and I needed to deal with the solution .

I made an extensive PA announcement to the passengers and explained what we were doing and why . I asked the passengers to think of this man as their husband , father , or family member and consider what they would want us to do in that case . I acknowledged the connection difficulties and said we would deal with them once we were on the ground . The lead flight attendant came up and said the passengers

reacted well and were not complaining at all . That made it much easier on the flight attendants .

I asked the second officer to calculate how much fuel we needed to dump to arrive at our maximum landing weight . After a quick calculation he replied we had to reduce our weight by one hundred thousand pounds . I told him to start dumping fuel and a moment later he informed me one of the two dump valves wouldn't open . That meant we would most likely be unable to get our weight below the allowable maximum landing weight . The weather at San Francisco was rainy , with winds out of the east . There were no approaches from the west due to the high terrain , so we were now faced with a wet runway and a tailwind landing at high gross weight . Minutes later , the second officer managed to get the other dump valve open ensuring we would be able to get down to the maximum landing weight .

The other conditions still meant a dicey landing . I asked air traffic control for a lower altitude to increase our fuel burn . I pushed the power levers forward to a high power setting , and raised the speed brakes to give us more drag while still maintaining good forward speed . We would now burn fuel faster as we continued to dump . I shot the approach and the landing was smooth as we decelerated nicely on the runway . I taxied into the gate area and was informed over the radio that ambulance personnel would be boarding the airplane to take the distressed passenger off . I made a PA asking for all passengers to remain seated until this was accomplished . I immediately went down to the cabin and was standing there when the medical personnel brought the passenger past me in an aisle chair . The flight attendants had put him on oxygen , but he pulled the mask off as he approached . He looked up and said ; " Thank you . " I will never forget the look of relief and gratitude in his eyes . I told him he was welcome and wished him well . He was clearly glad to be back on U.S . soil where he could receive the care he needed .

We refueled , re - catered , and taxied back out . The flight attendants could have shut the flight down due to flight time duty limitations but they unanimously opted to continue the flight . I wrote each of them a glowing letter of commendation once the trip was over .

As I taxied out , we received a call over the company radio . The medics verified that our passenger was indeed having a heart attack and was on the way to a hospital . The other captain was listening on his headset and he looked at me . " It was a good call , " he said . I knew it was .

In the hours afterward , as we made our way across the Pacific , I gazed at the calm Pacific from the left seat . I sat quietly and reflected .

I was within one day of my sobriety anniversary eight years previous , and two days from the day I risked the lives of fifty - eight passengers . And now , eight years later , God gave me an opportunity to do something good . Perhaps He let me save a life as a result of my sobriety and the miracles that brought me to this moment . I said nothing to anyone as I sat in quiet , prayer - like , humble gratitude .

When I returned home I wrote a letter to John Dasburg . I thanked him for making me a captain , thus allowing me to be the one who made the decision on this flight . Had I been a copilot , I would have been unable to direct a course of action . Quite possibly , the outcome might have been tragically different .

I retired on my birthday , September 29 , 1998 , at the mandatory retirement age of sixty years . In a way , I left as I began because we suffered the first pilot strike in twenty years , stranding me in Bangkok , Thailand on my final trip . Three days later I made my way home to Atlanta . I would not have my final , celebratory retirement trip with Barbara accompanying me , but it was okay .

As I closed my career , I had regained all I lost except for the material goods . We were financially destroyed in the aftermath of my arrest and imprisonment . I would not have traded all those losses for my sobriety and the beauty of life that I've come to know . It was a difficult journey ,

and yet also one of miracles and beauty . In exchange for money and material losses , I was given dignity , self - worth , honor , humility , and a purpose for living . My children would escape the horror I witnessed as I watched my parents die from alcoholism . Instead , they had two laughing and healthy parents who loved them , and would to the end of their days . I learned to be grateful for everything that happened to me . Without those things I could never have experienced all the things that later happened for me .

I remembered that reading from a daily meditation book in the early days which said , " Adversity truly introduces us to ourselves . " I remembered the fear inside because I didn't know who was there . Nothing I accomplished was mine alone . I am neither unique nor special . I simply followed suggestions , tried to live according to the principles embodied in a program of recovery , and targeted the next right thing day in and day out . I stayed sober one day at a time , as I remained acutely aware of and grateful for my sobriety . I said " Thank You " a lot to a God of my understanding . I had a wife who steadfastly stayed the course with me and offered encouragement each time my spirits sagged . Finally , Barbara and I were blessed beyond words with friends who came from everywhere . Without them we could not have survived . Today , we measure our wealth in friends and are wealthy beyond dreams .

Two weeks before my retirement , Barbara and I appeared on an ABC Nightline Special with Ted Koppel . Also appearing was John Dasburg and Judge Rosenbaum . The program was entitled " To Fly Again " and was three years in the making because I did not trust media people . In those three years I got to know and trust the producer , Laura Palmer . She produced a powerful program . It triggered a second movie offer , which we declined .

As part of the filming , I accompanied the Nightline film crew to the federal prison , where they wanted to speak to some of the prison staff . At first , I declined to go . Then , knowing the patent disregard that

prison officials had for the truth , I decided I should be there . I refused , however , to talk to or shake hands with any of the prison personnel . Several staff members recognized me , including " Throw - The - Book " Cook . Mostly ignoring them , I sat inside my car and watched the Nightline crew put cameras and sound equipment out on the sidewalk directly in front of the main prison entrance . While I looked at the long steps going into the institution , Julie Cullen came out the door . She was wearing her blue guard's uniform and talking with another guard , when she noticed me sitting in my car .

There were many people moving about on the sidewalk but I just sat and watched her . She looked at me again as she walked past . I met her eyes but neither spoke nor acknowledged her . Watching my side rear mirror , I saw her stop , then turn around . She walked back to the car and asked , " Weren't you one of my inmates ? "

I looked at her and replied calmly , " No . I was here once , but I was never one of your inmates . " Not sure of what to say next , she looked at the film crew and the equipment , and asked , " What are you doing these days ? " It was a question I hoped she would ask . I said , " I'm a 747 captain for Northwest Airlines . " She looked surprised , nodded , murmured something , and walked away .

As I closed the chapter to my Northwest career , another miracle was born . I received a phone call from my former attorney , now my good friend , Peter Wold . He told me Judge Rosenbaum had called . The judge told Peter he'd never supported a petition for pardon in his sixteen years on the bench , but would support mine if I chose to make the attempt . I had never considered such a thing . The odds of obtaining a presidential pardon were almost unfathomable , but I faced long odds many times before . I requested the necessary paperwork from the Pardons Office in Washington , D.C . They sent me a stack of forms and documents I would need to prepare the petition .

The magazine is too large a file to include into eContrails. However, you may download the pdf file to your computer, pad or phone and read it at your leisure. **CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD (need a pdf reader to view)**