

**EL PASO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**  
**50th Anniversary Section**  
EPT 9/9/78

**TAKING OFF . . .**



—(Times Staff Photo)

On Into The Blue Yonder, A Jet Takes Off  
From El Paso International Airport

**HIGHWAY OF PAST;  
PATH FOR GROWTH**  
*Dirt Strip To A Giant*

Had County Attorney D.E. Mulcahy, back in 1928, not declared a proposed municipal airfield a public highway, El Paso would not be celebrating the 50th anniversary of its international airport this week.

Mulcahy's unusual action freed \$25,000 in city and county funds necessary to clear, level and grade the field, on the site of the old city waterworks, and build a single hangar. The facility was dedicated Sept. 8, 1928.

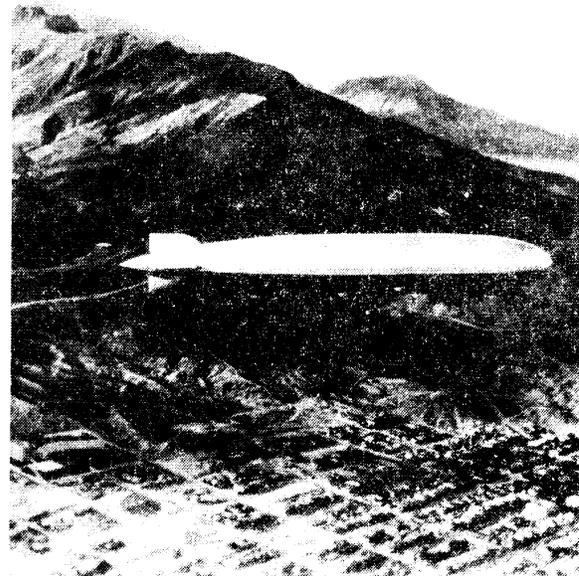
"Today, we drive another stake in the progress of El Paso," declared Mayor R.E. Thomason. "This city today becomes one of the country's future air centers."

Aviation had come to El Paso as early as 1910, in the form of such barnstormers as Charles K. "Bird Man" Hamilton, and in 1919 the Army Air Service opened a field at

Fort Bliss for the Border Air Patrol after Pancho Villa's last raid on Juarez.

But it wasn't until September 1927, when Charles A. Lindbergh came here on a triumphant tour following his historic solo crossing of the Atlantic the previous May, that aviation fever really caught on in El Paso.

Stung by a U.S. Post Office Department statement that all cities without airports were "jerkwater towns," a group of former World War I aviators—headed by Stacy Hinkle and Fred Wilson formed the El Paso Aero Club and drew up plans for the first municipal field.



**GERMAN GRAF ZEPPELIN PASSES  
OVER EL PASO IN 1929**

Hinkle, still active at 83, prophesized at the time: "El Paso will be the hub of a huge wheel, with airways extending west to the Pacific, northwest to the Grand Canyon and Salt Lake territory, north to Denver, northeast to Kansas City and St. Louis, east to Dallas, San Antonio and New Orleans, and south to Old Mexico."

The day following its dedication, the new airfield played host to no less a celebrity

than Amelia Earhart, en route from the East Coast to Los Angeles. In the years to follow, many other notables would pass through El Paso:

The German dirigible Graf Zeppelin flew over on Aug. 28, 1929, on the last lap of its round-the-world journey; the pioneer French balloonist Count de la Valux, who visited in 1930, predicted that "El Paso is to be the air crossroads of the Western Hemisphere;" Will Rogers, Douglas "Wrong Way" Corrigan and aviatrix Terri Smith all called here.



#### **1961 HIJACKING WAS 'DEFLATED'**

The airport's first commercial tenant was Scenic Airways of Chicago, which in November 1928 built a hangar, maintenance shop and office and offered maintenance

facilities for transient aircraft, charter services and flying instruction.

On Feb. 4, 1929, a company called Standard Airlines introduced the first regularly scheduled passenger airline service from El Paso to anywhere. In cooperation with Texas & Pacific Railroad, Standard provided the final link in the country's first coast-to-coast rail-plane service.

Arriving by train, westbound travelers transferred to one of Standard's Fokker monoplanes for the last leg to Los Angeles, with stops in Douglas, Tucson and Phoenix. That first day, only three passengers boarded the Standard flight; today, an average of more than 2,500 travelers are enplaned every day on about 40 departures from El Paso.

In October 1929, Standard officials felt they had outgrown the municipal airfield, and were concerned as well that it was dangerously near the Franklin Mountains, so they purchased 640 acres of desert land off the Carlsbad highway and built their own airport.

Originally known as Standard Airfield, it is now the site of El Paso International Airport, having been transferred back to city ownership in 1941 after a five-year series of complicated negotiations between the city and American Airlines, which had absorbed Standard in 1930.

By the end of 1929, four scheduled airlines were serving El Paso: Standard, Scenic, Mid-Continent Air Express and Texas Air Transport. During that year, about 3,600 passengers moved through the municipal airport, compared with 1.4 million in 1977.

Airmail service arrived here Oct. 15, 1930, when the new airport became a link in a southern transcontinental route; Having been

christened by Miss El Paso, Lila Kirkpatrick, who broke a bottle of Rio Grande water on its nose, a plane operated by Southern Air Fast Express took off with 17,000 letters and cards, many of them commemorative postcards provided by The Times.

On July 15, 1934, pilot Jesse Hart took off from El Paso in a single-engine, four-passenger Lockheed Vega, bound for Pueblo, Colo. That was the initial flight of Varney Speed Lines, which in 1937 became Continental Airlines.



**TOWER OF CONTROL: INSIDE WITH AIR CONTROLLERS**

During the transfer negotiations between the city and American Airlines, significant improvements were made in the field on the Carlsbad road. Two hangars were added and a concrete apron installed. With the completion of caliche and asphalt runways in 1939, El Paso Airport was ranked as one of the top 10 in the country.

By the time the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the city had assumed ownership of the old Standard Airfield and begun construction of a Spanish-style, rock-and-concrete administration building that was to remain an El Paso landmark until the late 1960s. It was completed and dedicated in August 1942.

The Army had been using the airport as a cross-country ferrying station for several months by then, routing its planes through El Paso for refueling and maintenance. By

the time the war ended, this was the largest plane-serving operation in the United States.

The facility underwent a series of name changes during the war years. Named originally for Mayor Ed Anderson, who had secured federal funding for improvements in 1941, it was rechristened Heroes' Airport in 1944, then became El Paso Municipal Airport again at war's end.

On July 1, 1950, it became El Paso International Airport, having been declared a port of entry in 1946, the same year the city gave up management of the field and created an airport board to undertake this role

In 1948, seeking to develop aviation to its fullest capacity and no longer needing large tracts of land it had appropriated during the war, the U.S. government deeded to the city 1,281 acres of land adjacent to the airport.

More than 900 acres were designated for such airport-related facilities 'as runways, maintenance hangars and parking areas, while the remainder was developed into what was to become, in 1961, the Airport Industrial Park.

With the completion of a crash fire station in September 1950, the El Paso airport was ranked the nation's third best in overall facilities, surpassed only by the principal airfields in Washington and New York.

It also showed a profit that year—principally from a government refueling contract that remains at \$2 million a year, one of the largest in the country—and continues to be one of the few U.S. airports that operates in the black year after year.

The Airport Industrial Park and other airport-owned enterprises contribute significantly to the facility's economic good health.

Today the airport also owns and manages the new Butterfield Trail Industrial Park, a 575-acre tract opened late last year after closure of the north-south runways, and the Cielo Vista Municipal Golf Course.

Sale of excess airport land has proven an important source of revenue as well. The mammoth Farah Manufacturing Co. plant is on property once owned by the airport, and the developers of Cielo Vista Mall paid more than \$3 million for their land.

The arrival of the jet age presented the airport with a new challenge. To accommodate the big planes, it was necessary to lengthen runways, expand ground service, and improve control tower facilities.

The first pure jet to pass through El Paso was a Boeing 707, which landed here in September 1960, serving both Continental and American airlines on an interchange between Houston and Los Angeles.

Between 1961 and 1964, the airport spent nearly \$3 million on improvements, including runway extensions, lights, drainage, garages and hangars, as well as enlargement of the facilities of two fixed-base air service firms. In 1965, El Paso International was ranked fifth in the country in overall general aviation activities.

Meanwhile, the lucrative government refueling contract was growing by leaps and bounds, from 315,000 gallons a year in 1961 to more than a million in 1969—the largest contract of its kind in the United States.

In 1968, another \$1.2 million was spent on a 130-foot control tower, the first among 180 of its kind to be built across the country from a design by renowned architect I.M. Pei. It gave El Paso International control of

its own radar operations, which until then had been handled from Biggs Field.

By 1971, the airport had taken on a new look altogether, most dramatically in its administration building, which was built literally around the old Spanish-style structure and incorporated many of its interior features.

Today, five scheduled airlines—Continental, American, Frontier, Southwest and Airways of New Mexico—provide daily service to and from El Paso. In the first seven months of 1978 they took off and landed 19,204 times, boarding and deplaning a total of 1,020,050 passengers—an increase of 34.3 percent over the same period in 1977.

In addition, there were 101,801 civilian operations, involving privately owned, charter and taxi aircraft, and 15,723 operations by military planes, for a total of 136,728 take-offs and landings between Jan. 1 and July 31.

The future appears even brighter. With direct commercial service between El Paso and several points in Mexico expected to begin this fall, accompanied by reciprocal service by the Mexican national airline, passenger traffic can only increase.

As the airport approaches its projected maximum capacity of 100 operations per hour, plans already are on the drawing board to build a “reliever” facility for general aviation on the east side of the field.

And so the face of El Paso International Airport, which in 50 years has grown from a \$25,000 dirt strip and single-plane hangar into a \$42 million conglomerate giant, continues to change.

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### **IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT MAINTAIN TRAFFIC BUZZ**

There's far more to operations at El Paso International Airport than the glamorous arrivals and departures of big commercial jets.

In fact, commercial takeoffs and landings represent only a small percentage of overall airport traffic. It's the little Pipers and Cessnas that keep El Paso's skies buzzing with activity, taking off or landing once every 150 seconds.

During the first seven months of 1978, according to airport records, there were 19,204 operations involving planes belonging to the five commercial carriers serving El Paso—Continental, American, Frontier, Southwest and Airways of New Mexico.

But this was less than 20 percent of the total so-called general aviation activity generated by private aircraft and air-taxi services, who took off or landed 101,801 times through July 31.

Military arrivals and departures—El Paso is a major Transcontinental stopover and refueling base—totaled 15,723 during the same period in 1978.

There are about 225 privately owned planes hangared or tied down at the airport's two fixed-base operators, which are firms providing refueling, maintenance and other services for local and transient aircraft, as well as instruction for aspiring local flyers.

The El Paso-based aircraft accounted for 46,595 operations during the January-through-July period, while transient small planes—those based elsewhere and simply

passing through - landed or took off 55,206 times.

As the only major airport between Dallas and Los Angeles, EPIA has long been recognized as one of the finest in the nation in terms of services available to the private flyer.

Max Karant of Washington, president of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, regards El Paso as "the ideal situation where the city and the operators work together to make general aviation outstanding."

"One reason," says Bill Mueller, president and co-founder of Southwest Air Rangers, "is that the City of El Paso has provided us with modern, up-to-date facilities."

Rangers is the senior fixed-based operator in El Paso, having been established here in 1940. With 55 employees, half of them in aircraft maintenance, Rangers provides a variety of services for private aircraft, including parts, refueling, installation of electronic equipment and repairs.

Rangers also is home base for 100 aircraft that are tied down on the runway apron and another 15 in hangars. The firm has a staff of flying instructors and is one of the top Piper Aircraft dealers in the country.

International Airmotive Inc., which has been in business for eight years, provides basically the same services as Rangers, including major and minor overhaul for piston aircraft, refueling, 24-hour maintenance and flying instruction for a current register of 17 student pilots.

The firm also is a franchised dealer in aircraft. Sales manager John Connor says International has a current inventory of 22 Cessna planes.

So heavy has general aviation traffic become at EPIA that the city's Airport and Mass Transit Board is already planning a "reliever" field east of the airport to take some of the load off the existing facility.

Meanwhile, general aviation activity at EPIA shows signs of reaching record proportions this year. The previous record year was 1967, with a total of 187,763 operations, and at the current rate of activity, 1978 could surpass that.

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### **INTENSE CONCENTRATION KEEPS FLIGHTS IN CONTROL**

The darkened room has an air of quiet intensity as men talk quietly into microphones while eyes follow the flashing green lights moving across the radar screens.

"Cessna 129, decrease to 150 knots, maintain present altitude, turn left to runway 22."

"Ground control Roger."

Fourteen stories above the scene is similar except the men wear sunglasses to shield their eyes from the bright sunlight as they scan the horizon for airplanes through expansive windows.

At the El Paso International Airport control tower about 13 Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) members guide planes carrying hundreds of passengers to safe landings and takeoffs each day.

Working in eight-hour shifts these men are on duty 24 hours daily ensuring passenger and crew safety during flight maneuvers.

By using headphones, watching lights and pushing buttons they communicate with each other and with the pilots in the planes under their guidance as small green X's appear on the radar screen indicating aircraft is within a 60-mile radius.

"It can get pretty hectic in the control rooms," says Tom Kimbrough, in charge of training new personnel. "One man is in charge of five or six planes when it's slow and up to 12 when it's busy."

Kimbrough says busiest air traffic periods in El Paso are about 9:30 a.m., noon and between 3 and 4 p.m.

Even when it's not a peak air traffic time, controllers must be able to concentrate on their task. Everything else is excess mental baggage.

"Air traffic controllers really have to thrive on high pressure situations to be in this kind of work," says Bill Stewart, deputy chief.

To learn how to handle this kind of pressure applicants attend a 17-week course at the FAA academy in Oklahoma City, learning basic FAA rules, regulations and flight patterns.

After completing and passing academic training, the trainees return to the facility where they applied. There they undergo a maximum of three years more training before they can become certified.

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## **EL PASO INTERNATIONAL OUTRANKS PARIS, TOKYO**

Sooner or later they all stop at El Paso International Airport.

From the nostalgic Bi-wing Pusher to the Space Shuttle Trainer, the huge Air Force Galaxie C-5A to the tiny Skymaster, the variety of planes form part of the more than 212,500 annual aircraft operations at El Paso International.

Ranked 96 out of 426 Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) operated airports, EPIA reports more aircraft activity than such world airports as Paris, Tokyo or Heathrow Airport in London.

However, the FAA statistics do not yet reflect the tremendous growth of passenger traffic experienced in El Paso during the period from June 1977

Pete Melton, chief of Flight Service Station, says El Paso has one of 44 Enroute Flight Advisory Service on the nation. This is a computer reference data center to all pilots of military and civilian advanced aircraft.

"This is the most advanced air-traffic control system in the world," Melton said.

El Paso ranks 62 in passenger enplanements within the 50 states, according to Airport Activity Statistics released by the U.S. Department of Transportation, FAA and Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) for the 12-month period ending in June 1977.

Classified as a medium hub by the FAA, the airport accounts for 0.27 percent of national enplanements. Air traffic hubs are community areas requiring aviation services. A medium hub handles between 553,000 to more than 2 million enplaned passengers in one

year. El Paso reported 610,534 enplanements from July 1976 to June 1977.

However, the FAA statistics do not yet reflect the tremendous growth of passenger traffic experienced in El Paso during the period from June 1977 to now. There were 422,598 enplanements reported during the first six months of 1978 in comparison to 307,348 for the same period last year. This was an increase of 37.5 percent, which is cited as outstanding for any airport by FAA representatives.

In one month alone, June, there was a 48.3 percent increase in passenger service, or 85,326 enplanements to 57,541 in June 1977.

More traffic increases are expected. Flight service into Mexico is to begin Nov. 3.

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## **MANAGER DREAMS WHILE JUGGLING DUTIES**

Walter Jones knows he can't pass up a challenge and that he tries to do everything himself.

As El Paso International Airport manager and director of transit, he finds the job involves more than taking care of regular airport business such as airline and rent-a-car counters and passenger services.

"El Paso has a unique situation because the airport is involved in real estate holdings and industrial parks," the Atlanta native explains. "I came here 10 years ago because I thought it would be interesting and different." He found it so.

Besides his regular duties as airport manager, Jones has helped develop two airport industrial parks, La Placita shopping center and the airport golf course. One extra duty he says he enjoys is speaking 40-odd times a year to business and civic groups.



**Walter Jones**

“When I have the time to do it, I really enjoy it,” the tall, sun-tanned manager says. He learns what information is needed by people through question-and-answer periods, he says.

Finding time for these activities keeps the 40-year-old businessman busy but he indicates every effort to handle all of it as he waves a hand over his partially covered desk stacked with papers, pamphlets and books.

“I have a philosophy that the successful businessman’s desk is always clean,” he says, laughing. “As you can see I’m kind of behind right now.”

One man who formerly worked with Jones as public relations manager describes him as a dreamer but a realist too.

“Jones is always dreaming up new ideas for public relations and expansion. A lot of

times I thought ‘it’ll never work!’” Sam Sarmiento says. “At the same time he could be very hard-nosed when it came to business negotiations.”

Jones emphasizes successful management means a competent, informative staff to keep the airport moving.

An outdoorsman at heart, Jones confesses he would rather hike in the woods instead of work an 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. job. He rationalizes that with the salary he earns, his weekends count.

“I like to hunt, fish and camp and I’ve just been certified to teach scuba diving,” he says proudly.

Sarmiento also recognizes Jones unpretentiousness.

“Although he is probably one of the highest paid city officials, he isn’t a flashy dresser. I think he has one three-piece suit, and he’s worn it two or three times.”

The outdoorsman, however, says he could not go back to being a regular airport manager no matter how high the pay.

“I enjoy the challenges I’ve encountered here and I think I would be bored doing the same old things,” he says, smiling.

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### **Airport, Transit Board COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES**

Major operation responsibilities at El Paso International Airport fall on the airport manager and director of transit and the seven-member Airport and Mass Transit Board.

On July 1, 1954, the Airport and Mass Transit Board was created by City Council to advise the mayor and city council on the airport and its operations. Board members are appointed by the mayor and approved by city council to serve two-year staggered terms.

Walter T. Jones, airport manager; for the past 10 years and director of transit, works with the board and alderman for airport affairs. They meet bi-monthly. These meetings produce recommendations made to city council for final approval and implementation.



**Richard Najera**

This cooperation had resulted in the entry of Southwest Airlines into the El Paso market, forthcoming flights to Mexico by Frontier and Continental Airlines, La Placita Shopping Center, Cielo Vista Municipal Golf Course, the new Butterfield Industrial Park and SCAT, the city's mass transit system.

Among the persons that have contributed to the 50 years of progressive growth of the airport are former managers, James Gagnon and James R. Mettler, and other aviation pioneers.

Present board members are Jack Cardwell, chairman, and Joe K. Foster, vice chairman, lawyers Miguel A. Alvarez, William A. Eli-

as and George W. Finger. Maynard Haddad is the most recent appointee replacing Tom Diamond. Mrs. Enriqueta Fierro, a member of Rep. Richard White's office is and has been the board's only woman member.



**Miguel Alvarez**



**Enriqueta Fierro**



**Joe Foster**



**Jack Cardwell**



**George Finger**



**Maynard Haddad**



**William Elias**

In the past, the board has included such members as Mayor Ray Salazar, Robert C. Heasley, H.L. McCune, Ben L. Ivey and more.

But the lifeblood of the airport has been the employees who have sometimes made the impossible work. Many of these employees have given the airport more than 20 years of their lives.

Bill Thompson, who retired last month, began as a refueler in 1955 and rose from the ranks to Assistant Manager of Administration. Louis Shupps, Transient Terminal (Ramp) supervisor has been refueling military and civilian aircraft for more than 25 ye3rs. He and most of the other refuelers have seen El Paso International grow into one of the most important military refueling centers in the country.

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## LINDBERGH SAW SKIES, VISUALIZED NEEDS

September 1927 was a big news month.

On the 14th, dance pioneer Isadora Duncan strangled when her shawl tangled in the spokes of the wheel of s her car in Nice, France.

On the 22nd, Gene Tunney defeated a Jack Dempsey in one of the most controversial heavyweight boxing matches.

But probably one of the most memorable events in El Paso's news occurred Sept. 24, when aviator Charles A. Lindbergh visited the city.

Though "Lindy Day" wasn't a declared holiday, most El Paso businesses and schools closed to greet the hero who had made the first Trans-Atlantic flight in May.

Two days El Paso's newspapers were full of hardly anything else but reports of Lindy's visit.

Thousands of El Pasoans decorated houses and businesses and stood along the parade route from Fort Bliss flying field, where he landed (north of what is now Fred Wilson and Railroad), to downtown at the Hotel Paso del Norte where he was to stay.

One imaginative youngster stood on stilts to make sure she got a good view of Lindy as he was driven past in an open air car with Mayor R.E. Thomason and the "Lindy of Mexico," Capt. Emilio Carranza.

Another group of "flappers" wrote their names and phone numbers on pieces of paper and threw them inside the car as it passed them. Lindbergh ignored them.

But Lindy showed a compassionate side too. When he was told veterans at William Beaumont Hospital were disappointed that he didn't stop to say hi, Lindbergh, cut short his speech at the High School (El Paso was then the only high school) stadium to drive back to visit them, ward by ward.



**CHARLES LINDBERGH BEFORE  
LEAVING FOR PARIS. 1927**

The stories also described a shy and reserved Lindy who blushed when El Pasoans at a dinner in his honor at the old Hotel Hussman (now Cortez) encouraged him to put on the red sombrero and zarape the mayor had presented him. He reluctantly obliged to the delight of his audience.

But most of all, the news was what Lindy wanted to talk about—the reason he was touring 75 cities in all 48 states—the for-

mation of commercial airlines and the necessity of building modern airports.

During his talk at the stadium, Lindbergh said, "The purpose of making this tour is to acquaint citizens of the various places at which we stop with the present and future of commercial aviation. Every important city will be connected with these lines.

"It is therefore necessary for these towns to have airports. We believe the most important step a city could take would be the construction of an airport in a suitable location. The second important step is the need of the cooperation of the public in patronage which airports will bring." These things he got.

At his banquet, Lindy also echoed statements still being used by airlines today.

"Commercial air service with responsible firms is today as safe as any other form of transportation.

"Pioneering in air service and the commercial air service must be kept separate," he added. "By pioneering I mean experimental flying and test flying, which is as different from tried and proven aviation as auto racing from ordinary motoring."

Lindy also saw far into the future. But he thought of it as the near future of commercial aviation. Some is only just becoming true for El Paso and the country more than 50 years later.

"There will eventually be three main transcontinental air routes, and El Paso should be in the southern one." El Paso only now is about to get routes into Mexico.

And he said, "Women aviators? There are a number of women in this business and I

don't know of any reason why women can't be as successful in it as men."

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### **OUT OF CHARACTER, OF SORTS: THIS AIRPORT IS PROFITABLE**

Not many business entities are so profitable that they may make about \$300,000 more than projected for the fiscal year.

El Paso International Airport expects to gross that much over its budgeted \$7.4 million in 1978.

With a history of making money, the airport uses no tax dollars to "support its far-flung operations, says John Hartmann, airport accountant. Profits go into an operating surplus to be used for future expansion or operations.

The airport, which began a new fiscal year Sept. 1, employs 145 persons with an annual payroll of \$1.7 million. Revenues are derived from landing fees, space rentals in the terminal building, concession fees and a government contract to provide fuel to military and NASA aircraft using the airport.

Cielo Vista Golf Course, La Placita shopping center and the Airport Industrial Park also are sources of income.

Landing fees assessed commercial airlines are one of the lowest in the country, Hartmann says, costing about 27 cents per 1,000 pounds of aircraft. Translated for a 727 jet weighing 150,000 pounds, or 750 tons, the total cost for landing and take-off is \$41. Private aircraft and military planes land free.

Airport balance sheets also have benefited from the dramatic increase in passenger traffic, up 50 percent this June over last year, attributed to the widespread acceptance of the new cheaper flights.

Net income from the airport, including its ancillary interests, has been positive in each of the years from 1963 to 1976.

The airport has sold general obligation revenue bonds to finance construction in the past, but not since 1968, for a total of \$7.6 million. While there are no plans to float additional bonds, Hartmann says a very large increase in passenger traffic could necessitate a bond issue.

The airport expects to sell about \$3 million in fuel to the military this year, netting about \$200,000 profit. Fuel pumped to private aircraft by fixed based operators is assessed 4 cents a gallon for the airport's operations, but it does not sell fuel to them. Commercial airline companies provide their own fuel.

With a budget of \$7.4 million expected in revenues (although Hartmann thinks the figure will be surpassed), and expenditures tabulated at \$6.5 million, the airport is looking at a healthy profit of \$850,000 during 1978-79 fiscal year.

To get an idea how much the airport has grown, during fiscal 1963-64, the airport had revenues slightly in excess of \$1 million and had a net income of \$44,169. It was fiscal year 1969-70 before the airport had revenues of \$2 million and 1971-72 when \$3 million in revenues was realized.

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## **THE AIRLINES:**

### **American**

Air service in El Paso began with American Airlines, with the city's first scheduled flight taking off on Feb. 4, 1929, establishing a coast to coast train-plane link between Dallas and cities on the West Coast.

El Paso also had the distinction of being part of the final American DC-3 flight on Feb. 28, 1949. The plane flew from El Paso to Fort Worth, where it was decommissioned.

Today, American has an all-jet fleet of 232 planes, operating about 1,000 flights carrying more than 55,000 passengers to cities in the United States, Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean.

From El Paso, American offers daily flights to nearly every major center of trade on both East and West coasts.

### **Continental**

When a single-engine plane owned by the Southwest Division of Varney Lines lifted off the runway in El Paso, in 1934 carrying 100 letters and no passengers, it marked the inaugural flight of what was to become Continental Airlines.

Today, the early staff of eight has grown to 11,000, the plane has become a fleet of 57 jets, and about seven million passengers fly Continental.

Robert F. Six, who joined the company in 1936, is still chief executive officer, and El Paso is still a main stop on Continental's route, which covers the western two-thirds of the U.S. mainland, and islands such as Fiji, American Samoa, New Zealand, Australia, Micronesia, Guam and Japan.

The company is also in the hotel business, with inns on Saipan, Guam, Truk and Palau as well as a resort in Northern California;

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**DUBIOUS NOTE:  
EP Capture Of Two Hijackers Triggered  
Serious Security Moves**

El Paso International Airport has the dubious distinction of being the birthplace of that modern American form of piracy—skyjacking.

The day of infamy was Aug. 3, 1961.

An Arizona used-car salesman, Leon Bearden, and his son, Cody, (ages 38 and 16) at the time) seized control of a Continental Airlines Boeing 707 early that morning, demanded the pilot fly to Mexico and from there to Cuba.

The Beardens, who then lived in Coolidge, Ariz. boarded Continental Flight 54 from Phoenix to New Orleans under the names Karl and Bob Schmidt.

Armed with a .38 caliber revolver and a .45 caliber automatic pistol, the father-son team commandeered the jet carrying 67 passengers at 1:55 a.m., moments before it was to land at El Paso International Airport. Their method of takeover was simple—they walked into the pilot's cabin, pointed their guns at Capt. B.D. Rickards and first officer Ralph Wagner and started giving orders.

The Beardens allowed the jet to land in El Paso; they had been convinced that a refueling stop was necessary.

Once the plane was on the runway, the passengers were informed of the hijacking. "The pilot told us we were landing to refuel at El Paso," Nancy Craddock of Houston told reporters after the ordeal, "then he told us the plane had been hijacked."

Rickards then negotiated with the Beardens for the release of the passengers. The hijackers agreed to release them if four would volunteer as hostages.

Reportedly all the men aboard the plane volunteered, and after four were selected, the remaining passengers were released about 40 minutes after the jet landed.



—(Times file photo)

**STEWARDESS PREPARES TO JUMP  
FROM HIJACKED AIRLINER  
Beardens Were Releasing Hostages And  
Soon Were Arrested**

Then the serious business of negotiations and stalling began, and it involved officials from local police to the Federal Bureau of Investigation to President John F. Kennedy.

"President Kennedy himself gave two general orders not to let the airplane get away and not to make any deals with criminals," Times Washington Correspondent Sarah

McClendon reported two days after the hijacking.

Most of the initial stalling was in the form of refueling delays, blockage of the aircraft by baggage trailers and air traffic control delays in clearance.

But at 6 a.m. clearance was given for take-off. The jet taxied down the runway, but before it could pick up enough speed for lift off, police officers opened machine gun fire, flattening the tires and disabling one of the jet's engines.

Earlier, the Beardens had been offered a DC-7 in exchange for the \$5.4 million Boeing 707. They refused the offer by Continental officials, thinking it was a ploy for their capture.

After the 707 was disabled, Francis Crosby, FBI agent in charge, told the hijackers by radio that "there would be no DC-7 and they had better give up," reported Lew Finch, Continental's director of passenger service and a passenger on the hijacked jet.

When the Beardens refused to surrender, Crosby asked to board the plane to talk to them in person. They consented.

While stairs were being rolled up to the front entrance of the plane to admit Crosby and Border Patrol Commissioner Leonard W. Gilman, three of the passenger hostages and the jet's two stewardesses escaped by jumping from the rear entrance into the arms of waiting police officials.

Negotiations between the officials and the hijackers continued for nearly six hours until finally the elder Bearden reportedly became hysterical.

"That's when I made my move," Gilman said. "I caught him behind the ear and threw a full nelson on him to keep him from getting to the two guns in his hip pockets."

At the same time, Crosby jumped the younger Bearden.

The hijacking was over.

While the Beardens' hijack attempt was not the first in America (planes have been hijacked from time to time since the 1930s), it probably was the most significant.

What made it important was the Beardens' request to be flown to Cuba at a time when U.S. relations with the communist island nation were at their worst.

At first, newspaper reports of the time indicate, there was widespread speculation that the skyjacking was part of a Cuban government conspiracy. Ironically, the 707 which the Beardens attempted to hijack was originally constructed for the Cuban government during the regime of dictator Fulgencio Batista, but never delivered because Batista failed to pay for it.

The Beardens' skyjack attempt triggered a flurry of House and Senate committee hearings, proposals for arming pilots and the first serious attempts at airport security in the United States.

An attempted hijack of a Pan Am DC-8 jetliner over Mexico exactly one week later kept the skyjacking issue on the front pages and increased demands for stricter air travel security. In that attempt, by a 27-year-old Frenchman, the jet was flown to Cuba. The jet and its 82 passengers were detained in Havana for three days and then released. The hijacker, Albert Charles Cardon, was

held by Cuban authorities as an example to prevent future skyjackings.

Litigation against the Beardens began days after the hijacking and continued for seven years. At one point in the testimony offered at his first trial, the elder Bearden claimed he was coerced by U.S. government officials to hijack the 707, apparently as a way of forcing a confrontation between the United States and Cuba.

U.S. District Judge R.E. Thomason sentenced Leon Bearden to life in prison and placed his son, Cody, under government observation until his 21st birthday on Oct. 31, 1961.

That ruling was appealed to the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals, and Bearden was awarded a new trial.

Thomason was again the judge, and this time, in July 1964, he convicted the elder Bearden to 20 years in federal prison on charges of kidnapping and interstate transportation of a stolen aircraft.

While serving his sentence in Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary, Bearden made another attempt at freedom by petitioning the courts for a new trial, claiming that excessive news and television coverage prevented him from receiving a fair hearing. Bearden based his request on the Supreme Court ruling in the Dr. Sam Shepherd case, which involved the murder of his wife in Ohio.

Bearden's request was refused Jan. 3, 1968 by U.S. District Judge D.W. Suttle.

Bearden is reportedly now free from Leavenworth and under the supervision of the California Department of Corrections in Sacramento.

A final twist: the 707 the Beardens' attempted to hijack crashed nine months later in Centerville, Iowa, during a severe storm. None of the 45 persons on board survived.

\* \* \*

### **PACT ALLOWS USE OF MEXICO SKIES**

There is a friendly but formal agreement on the use of air space between Mexico and the United States.

Airlines from both nations have used air space along the 1,900-mile border since July 1, 1974 when the director of the Southwest Region for the Federal Aviation Administration and the director of Civil Aeronautics for Mexico agreed to reciprocate use of Mexican air space.

According to the Airport Public Affairs Office, the agreement allows United States airlines to fly further into Mexican air space when the situation merit. it, such as bad weather. Those breaks in the pattern are coordinated with Mexican controllers. Such a variation provides a 30-mile corridor.

\* \* \*

### **HOW TIME FLIES Happy Birthday, El Paso International**

We really move our tail for you  
CONTINENTAL AIRLINES  
The Proud Bird with the Golden Tail

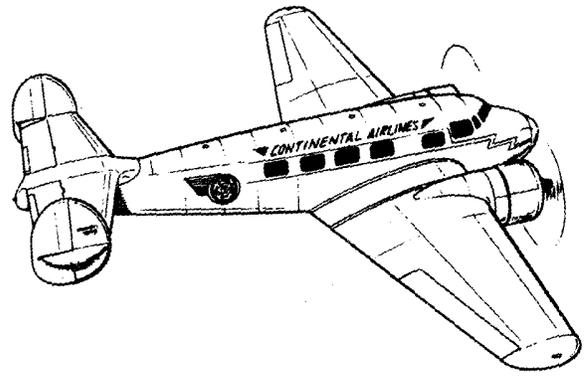
El Paso Airport was only one day old, when Amelia Earhart landed there. A few short years later, Continental was born on the same runway.

Back then Continental Airlines was three single-engine planes called Varney Speed Lines. And El Paso Airport had only one single-plane hangar built on the site of the old water works.

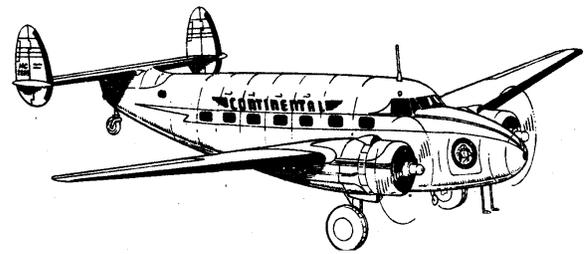
Now more than a million passengers a year takeoff and land at El Paso International's \$42 million airport complex. And Continental's 58 jets fly half way around the world daily, in and out of dozens and dozens of different airports.

But El Paso isn't just another airport to Continental. It's our birthplace—where we began. And that makes coming home to El Paso the best part of any trip.

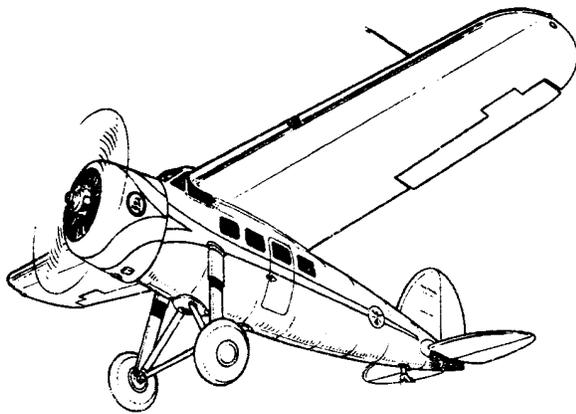
Thanks El Paso International. And Happy Birthday. It's been fun growing up with you.



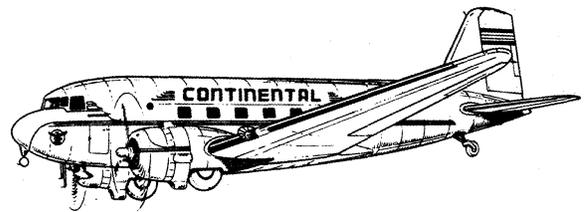
**LOCKHEED ELECTRA 1939**



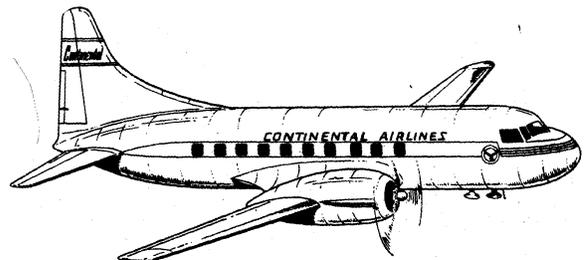
**LOCKHEED LODESTAR 1940**



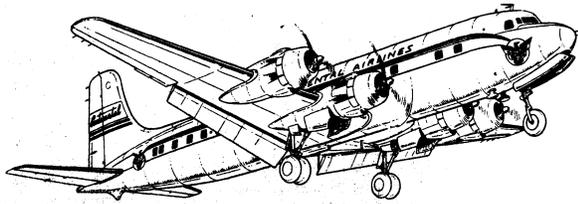
**LOCKHEED VEGA 1934**



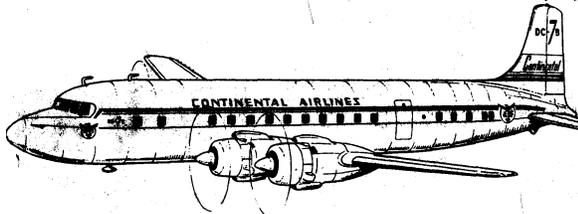
**DOUGLAS DC-3 1944**



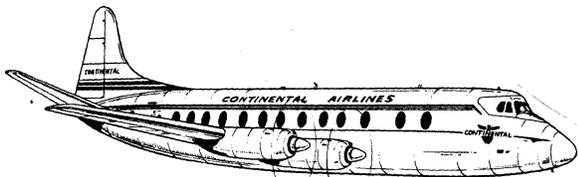
**CONVAIR 249 1949**



**DOUGLAS DC-6B 1953**



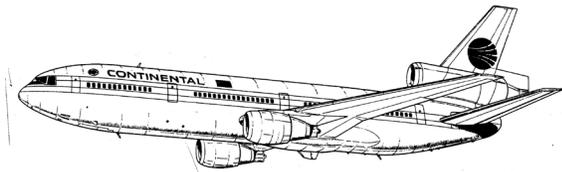
**DOUGLAS DC-78 1957**



**VISCOUNT PROP JET 1958**



**BOEING 737-200 1967**



**McDONNELL DOUGLAS DC-10 1972**

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**EL PASO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT  
50 YEARS OF AVIATION  
EL PASO HERALD-POST  
September 9, 1978**

**AIRPORT MARKS 50TH BIRTHDAY  
WITH OPEN HOUSE**

El Paso International Airport will celebrate its 50th birthday and observe National Aviation Day with a gala two day open house today and tomorrow.

Airport and city officials are hoping for a big public turnout to visit the airport, the city's most important transportation facility an airport that has become well known worldwide.

"We want the people of the city to come out and see their airport. It is a big, wonderful place, and it's all paid for. Their tax dollars don't go to support it. It is the public's and we want them to understand how it works," Walter Jones, airport manager said.

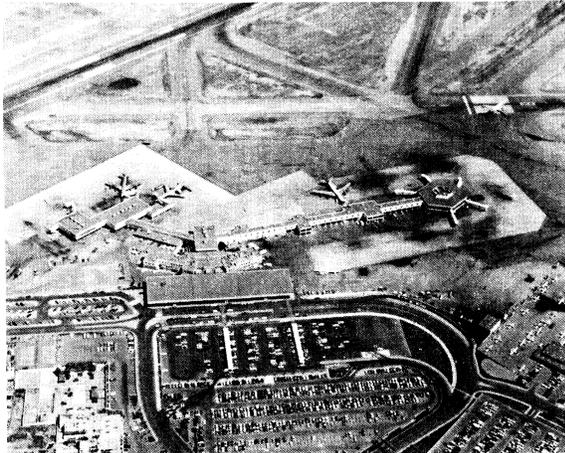
Jones said "you don't have to be an air traveler to visit the airport. There are a lot of other attractions out here, including La Placita, the airport's nationally famous shopping mall, restaurants in and around the airport and just watching the hundreds of different kinds of airplanes, airliners, general aviation airplanes, both large and small and the sleek military jets," he said.

The open house will be from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday with dozens of exciting events and exhibits designed to please persons of all ages.

Military aircraft on display will include: sophisticated multi-million dollar National Aeronautics and Space Administration Grumman Gulfstream that Earth Orbiter Shuttle pilots are undergoing flight training

in, Air Force jet aircraft, U.S. Army attack and rescue helicopters, antique airplanes and dozens of types of single and twin engine general aviation airplanes.

Tours of the flight lines and ramps, one of the most popular events of past open houses will be held again, this year. "Those of us who work at the airport don't put much emphasis on being out on the airfield but people sure do get a kick out of actually going out there where the airplanes are and seeing the fire equipment and other things," Jones said.



**Bird's eye view shows present terminal and area at airport**

The bus tours will feature UT-El Paso Golddigger guides, musical entertainment will range from mariachis, western and country bands, to jazz ensembles and bagpipers and the Xitlali Folklore dancers from Juarez.

Southwest Air Rangers will feature \$10 introductory flight lessons Saturday and four cents a pound airplane-rides on Sunday while International Airmotive will hold open house to show off their line of light airplanes.

Expected to be present during the two days are Miss Texas, Miss El Paso, Miss El Paso

County and Miss Horizon City to lend beauty to the proceedings.

Events inside the airline terminal building will include dozens of airline and government agency exhibits, musical entertainment and an aviation day amateur photography contest.

For those persons unfamiliar with the area around International Airport the airport suggests the easiest way to get to free parking on the grounds is to drive to the intersection of Montana and Airway, turn North on Airway to Boeing, turn right on Boeing, once on Boeing turn left immediately on American and continue north on American to the free parking facility.

\* \* \*

### **LINDBERGH VISIT HELPED AVIATION**

Col. Charles Lindbergh landed in El Paso before the first city airport was formed and his visit here spurred El Paso citizens to form an airport committee. He landed in El Paso on Sept. 24; 1927 to a big welcoming parade and celebration.

\* \* \*

### **REFUELERS, CELEBRITIES RUB SHOULDERS**

How many people in El Paso talk daily and are on a first name basis with the nation's astronauts? Not many, but the men who run El Paso International's Transient Terminal not only talk to the astronauts but are highly respected by the men who walk on the moon.

The select group of men who man the transient terminal are expert aircraft refuelers who double as air crash firefighters and rescue men.

When the president of the United States visits El Paso it is those men who refuel Air Force 1. Daily they refuel the fastest and biggest of the armed services jet fighters, transports and helicopters.

Dozens of plaques on the walls of the terminal from people like the astronauts, the Navy Blue Angels and the Air Force Thunderbirds as well as countless other squadrons and military air groups attest to their speed and efficiency in refueling and taking care of the crews of military aircraft.

International Airport, situated as it is on the Southern border is a major stopping and refueling point for air traffic across the southern part of the U.S. The airport and city enjoy a lucrative federal refueling contract with the government which works well to the satisfaction of both parties.

Currently, NASA astronauts training to pilot the earth orbiter shuttle craft maintain their local headquarters at the transient terminal where they fly and maintain two highly modified Grumman Gulfstream jet airplanes which the pilots practice in over White Sands.

Carter Porter, assistant airport manager for operations carries out a comprehensive training program in which the refuelers attend firefighting and crash rescue courses and are certified for those duties. The airport owns several large crash and fire rescue trucks at the terminal which are ready to go on an instant's notice if they are ever needed.

\* \* \*



**Stad Starnes will model Saturday for Aviation Day photographers**

**During open house  
AIRPORT PHOTO CONTEST SET**

Amateur photographers attending the Open House at El Paso International Airport Saturday and Sunday will have an opportunity to win a grand prize round trip flight for two via Frontier Airlines to Mazatlan, Mex., if they can come up with the winning photo in black and white or color.

The trip is scheduled with Frontier when it begins service Nov. 3 to Mazatlan and Guadalajara. The flight marks the re-opening of flights into Mexico from El Paso . . . something that had ceased in the 1940's.

THE PHOTO CONTEST will also offer a \$50 gift certificate from Reed's Camera Centers and a \$25 gift certificate from Art's Photographic Supplies. Other places will all receive Honorable Mention certificates. The best 101 prints will be held for a photo show to be staged at the airport at a later date.

Rules are as follows:

- Only amateurs may enter.
- Each photographer may submit up to three black and white and three color prints.
- Prints must be 8x10 glossies and must be mounted on plain 11x14 white or black cardboards.
- No writing on front of the board or photo.
- Name, address, and phone must be written on the back.
- All photos must be submitted in good boxes so as to protect prints and contest sponsors cannot be liable for any damages.
- Each contestant must submit own box with return postage included.

Photos must be delivered by Sept. 20 to either Airport Public Relations office, Andow Studio, McBryde Studio, Reed's Camera Centers, or Art's PhotoGraphic.

Judging -by professional photographers will be final and all prints not chosen will be returned as soon as possible.

"BECAUSE WE'RE expecting 30,000 people during the two-day Open House, we felt that photographers would like to submit prints in three categories," said Luis Perez, airport public relations director. He indicated that the broad divisions would be "Pretty Girls And Airplanes," "Fun Day At The Airport," and "Aviation Day In El Paso." Contestants were urged to classify their prints and to shoot the photos with specific category ideas in mind.

On hand to assist photographers in the beauty department will be glamorous Anne Hinant, Miss Texas, and several local beauties.

They will be available most of the day Sunday around the aircraft displays and photo models will also be available for photographers on Saturday.

\* \* \*

#### **LARGE AIRLINES SERVE CITY**

Air transportation is the lifeblood of any large community especially a landlocked city like El Paso which is fortunate in having several large airlines to serve it.

American Airlines, one of the nation's largest trunk carriers is 52 years old. The company and its ancestor companies have served El Paso since the beginning of air travel here. It was American that spurred the building of what is now International Airport when operations outgrew the first little airport on Airport road.

Standard Airlines, American's forerunner, purchased 640 acres of what is presently the main airport and built their own hangar and shops. Eventually the present airport evolved from that nucleus.

Continental Airlines got its start here in El Paso about 44 years ago .as Varney Speed Lines which grew into Continental. Although the company, under president Robert Six, eventually moved its corporate headquarters to Denver and later to Los Angeles, Continental maintains a large pilot base and flight attendant headquarters here. In addition to providing good airline service, Continental payrolls contribute greatly to the city's economy.

Supplementing the big carriers are Frontier Airlines, serving Las Vegas, New Mexico, and Northwestern states; and Southwest Airlines, operating in Texas.

Southwest spurred the growth of local air travel lower fares when it started operations here a little over a year ago with the other airlines then dropping their fares to the same destinations Southwest serves.

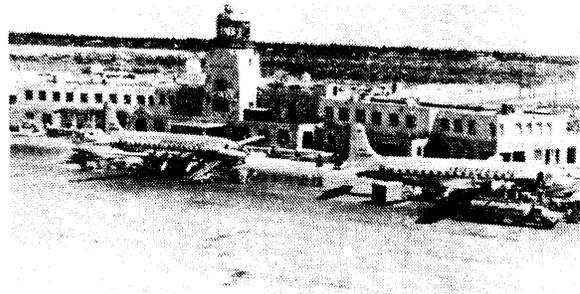
Today, El Paso International boasts a large, attractive airline terminal with excellent airline passenger handling facilities, a vital integral part of the city.

\* \* \*

### **GRAF ZEPPELIN FLEW OVER CITY**

The Graf Zeppelin, the first dirigible to go around the world, commanded by Dr. Hugo Eckener flew over El Paso on one of the last legs of its monumental journey Aug. 28, 1929.

\* \* \*



**Southwest look at the airport in the 50's**

### **GENERAL AVIATION ROLE GROWS IN IMPORTANCE**

“General Aviation,” is that segment of aviation that is not airline or military but which plays an increasingly important role in American transportation and business.

In El Paso, general aviation runs from the small homebuilt airplane that someone built and flies for fun to multi-million dollar corporate jets that shuttle their owners all over the world.

GENERAL AVIATION is the pilot who flies pipeline patrol, the businessman pilot who flies a small single or light twin engine plane for business and pleasure, the air taxi and charter flying operations, Border Patrol and U.S. Customs Patrol airplanes and pilots.

More and more Americans are flying today. No longer identified by shiny boots and jodphurs, goggles and the white scarf, the typical pilot of today may be a doctor or dentist or farmer or rancher or just a blue suited businessman who has found that flying his own aircraft enables him to do more business over a larger area quickly.

Taking care of the needs of this diverse group at International Airport are two major fixed base operators, Southwest Air Rangers and International Airmotive, Piper and Cessna dealers respectively.

ALTHOUGH BOTH companies grew from tiny beginnings, and both are recognized nationally, Southwest Air Rangers probably most typifies the classical aviation success story.

Organized in 1938 by Albert, Bill, Dan and Joe Mueller and their parents, SWAR has become known and recognized throughout the Southern and Western U.S. and Mexico. It still operates under basically the same management with which it started.

“We were just kids who wanted to fly when we started out,” Bill Mueller, the boss man of SWAR, says today. As he looked at the crowded ramp of his operation, he recalled that in those days “there were only one or two airplanes sitting out there.”

THE BROTHERS worked hard, saved their money and were just getting started good in the business when World War II came along.

“Our parents kept it going for us while we were away and after the war we all came back and started flying and selling a few airplanes again,” Albert Mueller said.

They got hooked up with Piper Aircraft Manufacturing Company back in the Piper Cub days and are still with them.

SWAR moved into one end of an old steel, Quonset type building that housed shops, hangared airplanes and held flight instruction rooms, bookkeeping and everything else.

WAYNE CHAMPNEY, a young former, Fort Bliss GI formed Champs Aviation and moved into the other end of the building and started selling Cessnas.

Throughout the late 40s and the 50s the two businesses grew side by side, both providing charter or air taxi service, selling airplanes, gas and flight instruction:

In the early sixties, the airport management and fixed base operators built new facilities and tore down the old hangar which many El Paso pilots still remember fondly as typifying a time when flying was a little more relaxed and personal thing, when pilots used to sit in the sun in front of the old hangar on Sunday morning and tell tall tales.

THE FAA BUILT a modern flight service station and U.S. Weather building in between the two FBOs and a new control tower.

Champney retired after making great contributions to general aviation in the Southwest and his operation was sold and renamed International Airmotive.

“When we moved into this building we just sort of rattled around but now we are looking ahead to the time—soon—when we must have more space, Al Mueller said recently.

GENERAL AVIATION in the 70s has grown tremendously, where formerly only a few fabric-covered airplanes stood on the ramps and hangars, SWAR and International Airmotive now hangar and service Lear jets and Beech and Piper and Cessna and Mitsubishi jet prop airplanes worth millions.

Aviation always exacts its toll and one of the Muellers, Joe, died in a West Texas plane crash in 1964 and Dan dropped out to go into another aviation related business in Albuquerque.

Bill and Al still work long hours each day at SWAR and now their sons and daughters work with them, carrying on the tradition.

El Paso supports general aviation. The El Paso Aviation Association holds monthly meetings and is running out of space in their present meeting rooms, The Ninety-Nines, an organization of women pilots, is quite active. There is a chapter of the Experimental Airplane Builders in the city.

\* \* \*

### **AVIATION GOT BOOST FROM VILLA**

Pancho Villa must get some credit for getting aviation started in El Paso. After his last raid on Juarez in 1919, the U.S. Army built a small military flying field in El Paso. Army air patrols supported General Pershing's punitive expedition into Mexico to capture Villa after his raid on Columbus, N.M.

\* \* \*

### **AVIATION ACTIVITY UP**

In just 50 years, International Airport has grown from a \$25,000 single plane hangar to the \$42 million complex it is today.

That progress was more evident in 1977 when the airport experienced record increases in all aviation-related activities.

ALSO LAST YEAR, the airport acquired the added responsibilities of the development of a new 575-acre Industrial Park, the Butterfield Trail construction and management of the Cielo Vista Municipal Golf Course and the unification and administra-

tion of the city's newly acquired mass transit system, SCAT.

Air passenger traffic set a record in 1977 for a 23 per cent increase in enplanements and deplanements. 1,442,056 passengers compared to 1,171,258 in 1976. General aviation traffic increased in all categories with an aircraft taking off or landing every two and one half minutes. There was a total of 233,866 general aircraft flights in 1977 compared to 192,966 in 1976.

Part of the increase in airline travel can be attributed to the lower air fares to other Texas cities established by Southwest Airlines, Continental and American Airlines.

THE BUTTERFIELD Trail Industrial Park was established when the Federal Aviation Administration approved closing on the north-south runway because of prevailing east-west winds. The first tenant in the park is American Hospital Supply which employs 400 people and adds thousands of dollars of tax revenues plus needed funds for future airport development.

Other revenue adding airport tenants are El Paso Natural Gas Company Air Transportation Division, which shares a large hangar with the U.S. Army on Airport Road.

The gas company maintains and operates a fleet of jet and conventional engine corporate airplanes, and the army maintains a flying operation there.

TWO RELATIVELY new tenants are the U.S. Customs Air Patrol unit which operates a large anti-smuggling operation from the airport and Flight Systems, which operates a quasi-military operation in support of White Sands. Flying former military aircraft that are now under civilian ownership, the com-

pany performs specified missions for the army and civilian contractors.

No longer just a place where airplanes land and take off, International Airport is a many-faceted city industry. In addition to routine aviation operations, the talented and diverse airport staff of managers must oversee and manage two industrial parks, a golf course and a city mass transit system.

\* \* \*

#### **FRONTIER COVERS WIDE AREA**

One of the largest of the nine U.S. regional air carriers, Frontier has airlifted more than 35 million passengers since its inception in 1946 and now boards over 3.5 million a year.

Its present routes link 100-plus communities in 16 Western states and Manitoba, Canada—about one-third the geographic area of the U.S., bounded by El Paso on the south, Winnipeg on the north, Las Vegas on the west and St. Louis and Memphis on the east.

THE AIRLINE'S fleet of 50 aircraft includes 19 97-passenger Boeing 737-200 jetliners, 28 50-passenger Convair 580s and 3 19-passenger deHavilland Twin Otters.

Frontier has approximately 3,700 employees, more than 2,000 of whom work at the company's general offices and main operations center in Denver. The carrier's 550 pilots and 350 flight attendants are based in Denver, Salt Lake City, Kansas City, Dallas/Fort Worth and Billings, Mont.

Operating some 500 daily flight segments, Frontier is an airline industry leader in both safety and on-time performance.

APPLICATIONS are on file at the Civil Aeronautics Board to extend Frontier's routes to San Diego, San Francisco, Sacramento, Spokane, Milwaukee, Des Moines, Louisville, Atlanta, Regina and Saskatoon in Canada and several major resort cities in Mexico.

The airline's president and chief executive officer is A.L. Feldman, who came to Frontier in 1971 from the presidency of Aerojet Nuclear Systems Co. Under his management team Frontier has had profitable years since 1972, and is an industry leader in return on investment.

\* \* \*

#### **GROWTH IN AIRPORT SEEN**

When the late R.E. Thomason, former mayor of El Paso told 10,000 people gathered for the dedication of the city's first airport 50 years ago that El Paso was destined "to become one of the country's future air centers," he probably did not dream it would grow as large as it has.

Mayor Ray Salazar said last month that the airport is a "monster," and in a sense it is but a benign creature that nurtures and shuttles thousands of air travelers through its gates every day in safety and comfort.

Ever expanding, El Paso International started out pretty much as a "cow pasture airport," when a group of dedicated airmen, mostly World War I flyers formed "The Aero Club."

Pioneer airmen Stacy Hinkle and Fred Wilson drew up plans for the little airport, which, although it was to be lighted at night and have a powerful beacon light, was un-

paved with pilots landing into the wind on the graded off desert.

Charles Lindbergh had just flown the Atlantic and cities like El Paso had a fever to attract air commerce so the city and county scraped up enough money to grade off some land the city owned near what is now Fred Wilson road, build a hangar and the city had an airport.



**Passengers line up for tickets inside terminal building**

Flying was more glamorous in those days and most of the city's population turned out for dedication day ceremonies which featured aerobatics by Army pilots and landings here of planes on their way across country in the National Air Derby, a race between New York City and Los Angeles.

A few days after the airport was dedicated, Amelia Earhart landed here.

“We had a hard time getting the lines to come here,” Hinkle, who still lives in El Paso said.

He said the aero club and airport committee members finally got air freight and air mail routes into the city and the airlines came in later.

American Airlines started up operations at a new terminal building on the present day airport site and were later joined by Continental Airlines, Frontier and Southwest which all serve the city today.



**Beautiful lobby is a favorite with airport visitors**

Now, 50 years later the airport is a goliath of air transport. Its runways are capable of handling the largest airplanes built, hundreds of private aviation airplanes, from Piper Cubs to multi-million dollar corporate jets use its hangars and runways, air freight and air express companies fly in everything from fresh seafood to the latest women's fashions.

Literally thousands of people make their living from the airport. Airport staff workers who maintain the buildings including the gleaming, modern terminal, maintain the runways, police the airport, fuel the planes, airline workers who fly the airliners, stewardesses, cooks, airplane cleaners, ticket agents, air freight workers, car rental com-

pany clerks and mechanics, private aviation pilots, mechanics and line boys, Federal Aviation Administration people who man the towers and radar rooms and maintain the sophisticated communication and lighting equipment.

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**AIRFIELD AREA DESCRIBED**

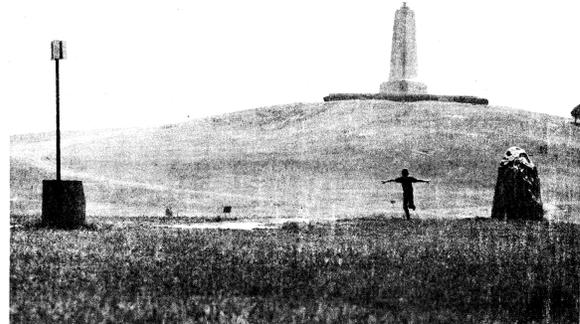
The airfield portion of International Airport consists of 6,670 acres. The airport, which is owned by the city, is in a FAA control zone, and operates 24 hours a day. The airfield facility features a U.S. Customs port of entry. There are 258 single engine and 99 multi engine airplanes based in the airfield facility.



**Original airport**

El Paso's first city airport is shown in this old print with the first hangar visible past the white circle landing marker. The photographer was facing Southwest. At right are the Southern Pacific railroad tracks and at left is the old city waterworks, part of which is still there just North of Fred Wilson road. The airplane used to take the aerial picture was a Bellanca Pacemaker and was piloted by Curtis Quick. The photo is from the collection of Col. (Ret.) O. Paul Lance.

\* \* \*



*A young tourist tries his wings on the very spot where Orville Wright brought mankind into the air age at Kitty Hawk, N.C., Dec. 17, 1903. The rock marks the takeoff point for the 120-foot flight, which terminated at the marker, left. The Wright Memorial, background, rises above Kill Devil Hill, where the brothers conducted many of their gliding experiments. —(AP Laserphoto)*

**CONTROL GAVE MAN  
MIRACLE OF FLIGHT**

**Man Travels From Kitty Hawk To Jet  
'To Fly Like A Bird'  
EPT 12/10/78**

KITTY HAWK, N.C (AP)—To fly like a bird; to soar among the clouds. It was a centuries-old dream.

Many tried and failed. Their attempts ranged from the bizarre to the foolhardy.

They hitched wings to themselves and kites to carriages. They leaped from heights to their deaths, vainly flapping their homemade wings.

Their machines wheezed and coughed and bounced and jerked and blew to bits.

Until that cold blustery day on a North Carolina coast 75 years ago next week when two

obscure bicycle makers from Dayton, Ohio, challenged that dream and the mysteries of flight.

For three years Orville and Wilbur Wright had flown gliders over the rolling sand hills of Kitty Hawk, testing theories of flight in the winds. Now, for the first time, they attached a 12-horsepower engine to a glider-like vehicle. It was Dec. 17, 1903, and they were ready.

Their homemade craft was a frail, double-winged contraption of spruce, muslin and wire. It had an elevator in front and a double rudder in the rear and had a wingspan of 40 feet 4 inches. The engine, with a chain transmission like a bicycle's, drove two propellers in opposite directions.

They named it the Wright Flyer after one of their bicycle models.

Ice coated the rain pools and a bitter wind whipped the sand dune named Kill Devil Hill. The brothers knew there was risk in testing the untried craft in such conditions, but were anxious to get back to Dayton for Christmas, and had faith in their calculations and skill.

Wilbur won a coin toss to attempt the first flight. That effort was made Dec. 14, but the Flyer plunged into the sand three seconds after takeoff because of an overcorrection of the elevator. Two days were required to repair the damage.

So it was Orville's turn on Dec. 17. He lay down on the lower wing, grasping a lever. The motor coughed, then roared. The propellers turned. The Flyer moved slowly into a 27-mile-an-hour wind. Wilbur ran alongside, steadying a wing until the craft rose into the air.

The momentous flight lasted only 12 seconds, lifted only 10 feet off the ground covered only 120 feet. But it was man's first successful powered flight in a craft heavier than air.

The Wrights flew the Flyer three more times that day. On the fourth trip; Wilbur kept it aloft for 59 seconds and traveled 852 feet

That afternoon, while the brothers assessed the flights, a sudden gust flipped the plane over, damaging it badly. It couldn't be repaired for more trips that day; indeed, it was never flown again.

Only five persons witnessed the flights. One, John T. Daniels of the Kill Devil Hills Life Saving Station, took historic photographs.

The achievement generally went unheralded. Most newspapers ignored it. They had been stung too often by reports of cranks and sensation-seekers who had claimed successful flights. It was years before the world gave the Wrights the credit due them. But in 1903, no one, including the Wrights themselves, grasped the full meaning of the first flight, or realized it was one of history's true milestones.

It took more than a week to cross the Atlantic by ship in 1903; today it takes 3½ hours by supersonic Concorde. That first 120-foot flight could be made walking the fuselage of some large jets.

Airliners have changed the habits and living standards of the world. There are nearly 200,000 airplanes in the United States alone. Last year 620 million passengers flew on scheduled airlines. And the warplane plays a major role in the fate of nations.

All in 75 years. “No other achievement of our century has made such a profound impact on the lives of peoples everywhere as aviation,” says Yves Lambert, secretary-general of the International Civil Aviation Organization.

Why did the Wrights succeed where so many others failed?

“The Wright brothers were truly unique in their very scientific, very realistic approach to the problems of flight,” says Walter Boyne, executive officer and curator of aviation at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Air and Space Museum in Washington. “They did not approach it as someone who hoped to be able to fly. They approached it systematically to make sure they could fly.”

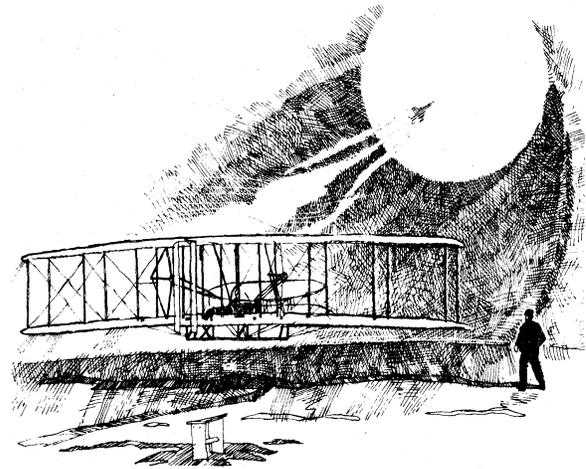
Boyne says the Wrights didn't want just to sit in a stable vessel and steer it through the air. So they created a glider they could control on all three axes, using a homemade wind tunnel in their Dayton bicycle shop to test their ideas.

“By 1903 they had prepared all the essential elements,” he said. “They knew they had an airplane they could fly; they knew they had an engine that was sufficient to power it, and they knew they could control it in the air.

“Other inventors missed on one or more of these accounts,” Boyne says. “Most didn’t perceive the problem of control.”

After Kitty Hawk, the Wrights gave up bicycles and worked for several years developing the airplane for practical transportation. They built improved planes and made hundreds of experimental flights in a cow pasture near Dayton, mastering banks, turns, circles and figure eights. In 1905, Wilbur flew 24 miles nonstop.

They also foresaw the airplane’s a military potential. In 1907, after first rejecting the idea, the Army agreed to buy a plane for \$25,000 if it could fly for an hour at an average speed of 40 mph, carry two men and enough fuel for 125 miles, and be transportable by wagon.



—(AP Graphic)

About the same time, the Wrights signed a contract with a French company to demonstrate an airplane in France.

A skeptical audience gathered at the race-track of Hunaudieres on Aug. 8, 1908, to watch Wilbur test the Wright A biplane. He took off, made two circles over the course and landed perfectly. The audience cheered wildly. Wilbur became a hero and word of his flight spread.

Orville began Army tests the next month at Fort Myer, Va. But after 10 successful tests a broken propeller sent the craft plunging to the ground from 125 feet. His passenger, Lt. Thomas E. Selfridge, died of a fractured skull, first person to lose his life in an airplane. Orville escaped with a broken leg and cracked ribs.

“It wasn’t catastrophic,” Boyne says. “It was disappointing. But the demonstrations up to that point had been so successful that it just

remained for them to meet the terms of the contract, which they did in 1909.”

Commercial firms formed in France and Germany to manufacture Wright planes, and the Wright Company was formed in Dayton with Wilbur as president and Orville vice president. They grew wealthy and famous.

Wilbur died of typhoid fever in 1912 at 45. Orville seemed to lose his zest and three years later sold the company. He lived until 1948 and witnessed the dawn of the jet age and the nuclear era—the latter a byproduct of long-range aviation.

The first scheduled airline passenger service began in the United States in 1914 with a flying boat shuttling handfuls of passengers between Tampa and St. Petersburg, Fla. It was unprofitable and short-lived, as were several undertakings that followed. But they served as yardsticks for future operations.

Aviation got a major boost during World War I, when its combat usefulness was discovered and warring nations improved design.

After the war, pilots vied for records. In 1919, a U.S. Navy N-4 with crew of six made the first trans-Atlantic crossing with one stop. Two Britons flew from London to Australia in 28 days. A pair of U.S. Navy pilots flew non-stop across the United States in 1923, and a year later, two U.S. Army planes flew around the world in 175 days. American Richard Byrd flew over the North Pole in 1926 and two years later Bennett and Bernt Belchen flew over the South Pole.

America's Amelia Earhart was the first woman to fly the Atlantic, both as a passenger in 1928 and solo in 1932. In one of aviation's greatest mysteries, she and her navigator, Fred Noonan, disappeared in the Pa-

cific Ocean in 1937 in an around-the-world attempt.

But the event that really transfixed the imagination was Charles A. Lindbergh's solo challenge of the Atlantic Ocean. America's "Lone Eagle" took off from Long Island on May 20, 1927, in a single-engine Ryan monoplane called the "Spirit of St. Louis." Thirty-three hours later he landed outside Paris and was mobbed by thousands. Seldom had the world displayed such torrents of emotion,

By 1928, pioneer transport services operated around the world. With expanding routes came larger, faster planes, like the Ford Trimotor, which carried 14 passengers and cruised at 120 miles per hour.

The Douglas DC-3, an all-metal, low-wing, twin-engine transport, revolutionized commercial air flight when it was introduced in 1935. It carried 21 passengers, cruised at 180 mph and could cross the United States in 15 hours with three or four stops. More than 13,000 DC-3s were built, including the military version, the C47 Gooney Bird.

World War II wedded the airplane and large-scale production-line techniques. Between 1903 and 1940, about 40,000 planes were built in the U.S. During the 44 months this nation was at war, 275,000 aircraft rolled out of American factories.

So it's an aerospace world. Defense relies on ballistic missiles, satellites circle the globe and man has visited the moon. The U.S. space shuttle, maneuverable in space, will make its maiden flight next year and return to earth like an airliner. It could lead to small orbiting space colonies before the end of the year—thence manned flights to the planets.

So, on 75th anniversary of Kitty Hawk, men still dream dreams—now to travel beyond—the realm of birds, beyond where the eye can see.

\* \* \*



**Continental Airlines Jet Takes Off Over Construction Equipment**

### **TRAFFIC LEADING TO AIRPORT EXPANSION**

By Tom Butler  
Times Staff Writer  
EPT 3/4/79

With \$10 million in surplus funds at its disposal, El Paso International Airport is about to embark on a program of expansion to keep pace with traffic that makes it one of the 20 busiest airfields in the United States.

But while plans for a new \$3.5 million, 6,000-foot full-service runway already have been approved, enlargement of terminal units remains in limbo, pending a decision by the Civil Aeronautics Board that will affect the level of commercial traffic here.

“We’re in something of a quandary because of deregulation,” says Airport Director Walter C. Jones, referring to a lifting of tight government controls on air route schedules which went into effect late last year.

“There are six or eight airlines that could come through here with service to Las Vegas.” Jones explains. “They all have applications before the CAB in what is called the Texas Points to Las Vegas Case.”

Jones says he has no idea when the CAB ruling on the route case may be handed down—“You never know; it could come any day or it could be months”—but airport expansion plans will have to wait until the board acts.



**Walter Jones**

Clearly, Jones emphasizes, El Paso cannot support six or eight more airlines serving Las Vegas, a route already covered by Continental and Frontier airlines, but he notes that any or all of the interested carriers could, with CAB approval, choose to test the market on a short-term basis.

“They’ll probably come in here on a trial-and-error basis,” the airport director says. “The CAB position so far has been to let all applicants try a route and whoever survives deserves it.”

The dilemma facing Jones and his Airport and Mass Transit Authority involves commercial aircraft parking ramps and terminal boarding facilities. There are now 14 passenger loading gates, plus two that could be

added at the American Airlines satellite building.

Of these 16 gates, all but five are leased to the airport's major tenant carriers: American, Continental, Frontier and Southwest. The others are available for irregular rental to such intermittent customers as charter airlines and the Luftwaffe, which ferries German air force personnel and their families to and from the Army Air Defense Center at Fort Bliss.

The decision to be made by architects and planners now working on expansion projections is how many additional boarding gates will be required to accommodate increased, if temporary, traffic to Las Vegas and possible new service between El Paso and destinations in Mexico.

Commercial air traffic in El Paso already has increased as a result of deregulation and a bilateral agreement between the United States and Mexico. Continental now provides direct service to San Diego and San Francisco, while Frontier flies between here and the Mexican points of Guadalajara and Mazatlan.

Frontier inaugurated its Mexico service last November, ending a 23-year-old Mexican government policy of protecting its own border airports by denying international service through Texas, and California cities along the boundary.

There are 10 other Mexican cities under consideration for service from El Paso by either Continental or Frontier, although Mexico City is not one of them, apparently because the government wants to safeguard its own subsidized airlines' international service to the capital.

A decision on expanded service to Mexico from El Paso must be made by Oct., 15 under the international agreement, but Jones says, "We're optimistic it will be by late this summer or before."

In addition to the additional flights by U.S. carriers, the Mexican airlines (Aeronaves de Mexico and Aeromexico) also are entitled to provide parallel service to El Paso and Albuquerque. They have not yet done so, Jones says, because of a current shortage of aircraft and other equipment.

Whatever decisions are reached, expansion of the El Paso terminal will be necessary, but Jones disagrees with some predictions that the facility will have outgrown its capacity within two years.

"There is no danger of exceeding terminal or airfield facilities in the near future," he emphasizes, although he concedes that the 1,112-space public parking lot alongside the terminal is no longer sufficient to meet the needs of visitors to the airport.

Jones says a plan already has been formulated to provide an additional 1,242 public parking spaces—including 392 currently allotted to airport personnel—across Terminal Drive from the main airport building. These spaces, which would be used only after the terminal lot is filled, would be available at no charge because of their distance from the terminal, Jones says.

There is plenty of room for the airport to grow. With a total area of 8,000 acres, it is one of the 10 or 20 largest airfields in the world.

Approval was given in early February for construction of a new 6,000-foot runway to serve as a full-service strip for commercial airliners. It will be almost parallel to the ex-

isting east-west main runway, which ultimately will be converted to a general, or private, aviation facility.

Jones stresses that placement of this new runway was the key to overall airport expansion, because it must be situated in such a way as not to impede enlargement of the present terminal, or construction of a new one, and the addition of parking spots.

General aviation represents far and away the largest share of activity at El Paso International Airport, which with 250,000 takeoffs and landings in 1978 ranked among the top 20 all-purpose airfields in the country.

Of those operations, totaling 671 per day, only 15 percent involved commercial aircraft, which carried 1,816,713 passengers into and out of El Paso during the year, a 26 percent increase over 1977. Fully 75 percent of the operations were accounted for by general aviation aircraft, the other 10 percent by military planes.

Because it is one of the very few (U.S. airports to operate at a profit (net in 1978: \$1,391,000), and because of its \$10 million cash surplus. El Paso international is able to respond immediately to needs for expansion, rather than having to resort to time-consuming and controversial bond issues and/or tax increases that are the norm in other cities.

The airport occupies property originally given to El Paso by the federal government, which stipulated in the transfer agreement that all revenues generated there be used exclusively for airport improvement.

“The El Paso taxpayer does not have one red cent out here that hasn’t been paid back with interest,” Jones says. “We haven’t been in the taxpayer’s pocket for about 15 years, and

we have absolutely no intention of going back.”

The economic structure of the El Paso airport complex makes it not only profitable but unique in the United States:

- It has more land (900 acres) devoted to industrial development than any other U.S. airport with which Jones is familiar. The Airport and Butterfield Trail industrial parks are responsible, through rentals, for the \$10 million airport surplus.
- It is one of the few U.S. airports that operate their own parking facilities rather than leasing them out to franchise holders. Estimated gross income for 1979 is \$600,000, against personnel costs of \$50,000. Furthermore, Jones says, El Paso's is the cheapest airport parking lot in the country.
- It is the only U.S. airport that operates its own municipal golf course and shopping center. The La Placita mall in the terminal building is a proven money maker, returning substantial annual lease revenues, and while the Cielo Vista golf course lost about \$200,000 in its first year of operation Jones feels “eventually it should payoff.”

\* \* \*

## **AIR CARGO WINGS TO NEW HEIGHTS**

By Nancy Rivera  
Times Staff Writer  
EPT 9/16/79

On Sept. 8, 1928, El Paso escaped the category of “jerkwater towns.”

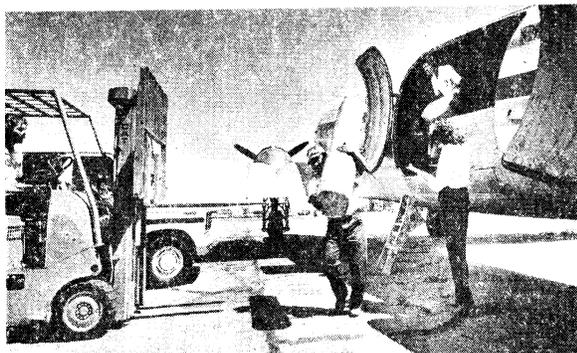
That was the day El Paso’s first municipal airport was dedicated, and “jerkwater” was

how the U.S. Post Office then described all cities without airfields.

Fifty-one years later, El Paso International Airport ranks among the 50 busiest in the nation. One aspect of that business—air cargo—has been growing dramatically over the last few years.

In the first seven months of this year, more than 10,000 tons of air freight traveled in and out of El Paso, a 7 percent increase compared to the same period last year. In 1978, air tonnage increased 11.6 percent over 1977 figures.

“I was accused of going into retirement when I came into this market” six years ago. said Harvey Hiigel, manager of cargo sales and service for Continental Airlines, which handles slightly more than 80 percent of El Paso’s air freight. At that time, El Paso ranked 15th among Continental's air freight markets. Now the Sun City occupies the seventh spot.



**Sun City Delivery Employees  
Unload Cargo**

Continental has experienced a nearly 45 percent increase in freight shipments so far this year, Hiigel said. American Airlines (which handles much less cargo than Continental) reports a 15 percent increase.

“It’s been a growing market,” Hiigel said. “We are a very viable market.”

Another sign of the market’s growth: enough air cargo moves locally to support seven air freight forwarders where only two existed as recently as 1974.

An air freight forwarder is a company which, once hired, decides the best way to route air cargo either using its own planes or those of the major airlines. Some forwarders handle only small packages some deal in heavy freight and some accept both kinds of freight.

**“Commercial carriers are geared to passenger traffic in El Paso. Freight has definitely taken a back seat.”**

Four air freight forwarders have opened offices in El Paso in the last year. Several more freight forwarders have agents but no offices.

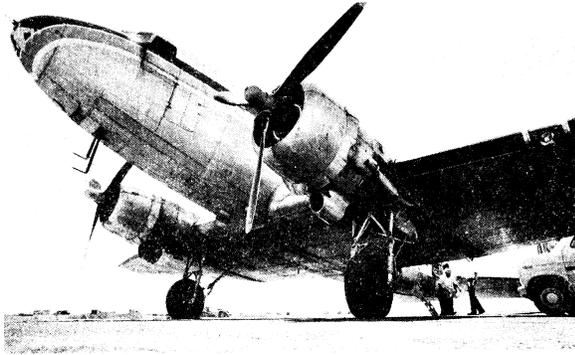
By all accounts, the air freight business is booming because of El Paso’s rapid industrial growth particularly among the twin plant companies.

“I attribute it to the additional manufacturing industries that are relocating into El Paso . . . and the new industry that seems to be sprouting up,” said Richard McCullough, American Airlines’ manager of freight sales and service.

“Every year you’ve got some major company coming in here,” said Mike Schofner, district manager for Burlington Northern Air Freight Inc., El Paso’s newest air freight forwarder. “Let’s face it, the Sun Belt is where it’s happening.”

“We go where the business is and we’ve been wanting to open in El Paso for quite some time,” he said.

Although the air freight market is “growing every year,” one air freight forwarder said El Paso is still considered “conservative” when it comes to shipping by air.



(Times photo by David Kennedy)

### **DC-3 Cargo Plane Readied For Next Load**

“People here don’t use air freight unless it is an extreme emergency,” said Dennis Johnson, district manager for Airborne Freight Corp., which has maintained offices in El Paso for six years, longer than any other air freight forwarder.

“There’s a lot of potential for the air freight business in this town,” Johnson said. “It is growing but not as much as it might.”

Shipping by air is generally more expensive but faster than moving freight by rail or truck. Airlines do give rate breaks on certain categories of freight, such as small shipments or large container shipments.

“Air freight is more expensive, but not as much as some people think,” said Dave Roth, El Paso-based supervisor of sales for Emery Air Freight Corp., the world’s largest air freight forwarder. “You have to think that time is worth something.”

Only about 1 percent of all freight shipped in the United States moves by air.

El Paso's growing air cargo business is not without its problems.

The El Paso International Airport's air freight building, constructed three years ago, “probably is in need of expansion,” according to airport manager Walter Jones.

And most air freight forwarders complain that air cargo is the “stepchild” of the air industry, especially locally, where they say air lift (the cargo space in airplanes) doesn’t adequately meet their needs.

“The commercial carriers just can’t handle it,” Roth said. “Commercial carriers are geared to passenger traffic in El Paso. Freight has definitely taken a back seat.”

The major air carriers say they’ve been able to handle all the freight they receive, though Continental's Hiigel acknowledged the El Paso-Dallas route does suffer from a lack of air lift.

Continental discontinued its service to Dallas, a major hub for some air freight forwarders, after Southwest Airlines introduced flights between the two cities.

Large or very heavy shipments also present difficulties, particularly since early this year when Continental pulled out El Paso’s only DC-10 to serve the airline's Taipei cargo route.

To deal with this, American Airlines is introducing semi-trailer service to Dallas where large shipments can then be placed on freighters and sent to other cities.

As with the rest of the air industry, rising fuel costs are of great concern to those involved with air freight.

“It’s absolutely killing us,” Schofner said. “Every time the airline rates go up, we have to increase our rates.”

Despite the obstacles, hopes for continued growth are soaring in the air freight business,

“The city is growing so much, especially on the East Side,” Johnson said, “and as more people move in with more industry to support them, there are going to be more people using air freight.”

New routes for existing air carriers and the possibility of new airlines serving El Paso could both mean an increase in air freight traffic.



**Jim Philpot Unties Cargo Net**

Continental is introducing cargo service to Hong Kong and Taipei and both routes will have direct ties to El Paso, Hiegel said. Electronics from the Far East have a definite tie-in with El Paso’s electronics-oriented twin plants. Routes to Mexico, which Continental will begin Oct. 1, will also boost the air freight business, he said.

Braniff, Delta and Eastern have expressed interest in serving El Paso, according to a report by the Chamber of Commerce’s transportation committee.

“The city administration, the airport board and the Chamber of Commerce at this point are actively encouraging another airline to enter the El Paso market,” said Marie Tarvin, chairman of the transportation committee. New air carriers translate into more regularly scheduled flights, increasing El Paso’s air lift.

Braniff was the most interested, she said, but the chamber hasn’t heard from the company in about six weeks.

If El Paso’s industrial development is the reason for the local air freight business boom, then air commerce is returning the favor by attracting more industry to El Paso.

“Air transportation in and out of El Paso is an important aspect of industrial development,” said Robert Head, executive director of El Paso Industrial Development Corp.

“When we have industrial clients in here, one thing they enjoy a bout it (El Paso) is the ease of access by air,” he said.

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Excerpt from  
EL PASO  
Growth Progress Development  
1957-1961  
El Paso Times 4/16/61

## **INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

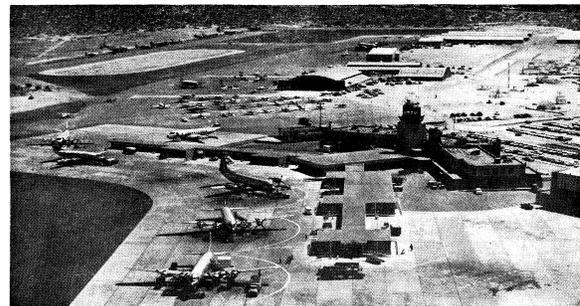
The period of 1957 to 1960 has been one of tremendous development and growth at the El Paso International Airport. We can take pride in the many significant new facilities which have been constructed and which have brought many benefits to people of El Paso as well as to airport users and patrons.

The most prominent single improvement in airport facilities was the terminal building expansion and remodeling completed in 1959. While the whole portion of the terminal building was remodeled and modernized, the real expansion value of the project was contained in the construction of additional lobby and waiting room space plus the new covered concourse additions. These new concourses with passenger holding rooms incorporated in them provide nine new gate positions.

The primary instrument runway was reconstructed to 11,000 feet. Also constructed were a large new concrete aircraft parking apron, a new perimeter taxiway and a new paved and lighted 900-car auto parking facility. In addition, the Airport entrance road was reconstructed and now provides a lighted and divided four-lane drive. This terminal area remodeling and expansion program was undertaken at a cost of approximately \$1 ½ million and has made the El Paso International Airport terminal facilities one of the most modern in the nation.

El Paso's International Airport has a landing area of 2000 acres at 3936 foot altitude. It has recorded 96.3% perfect flying weather

during the past 20 years. The Airport handles 1400 take-offs and landings each day, making it the 11th busiest in the country. It was rated the number one installation for Texas for landings and take-offs in 1959, with a total of 258,507 operations. In the year 1959, 441,581 airline passengers passed through the terminal. El Paso's International Airport is highly popular with transient military and private planes whose pilots appreciate the unusually fine and complete facilities. Its runways are geared to the jet age.



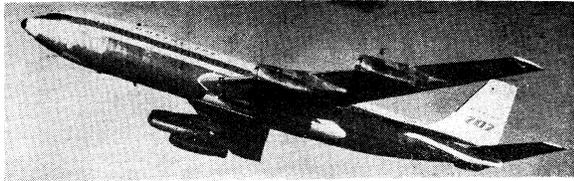
**Panoramic View Of Busy El Paso International Airport, Showing Recent Terminal Expansion And Other Major Improvements**

The quality of airline service has been significantly upgraded by Continental Air Lines replacing their older reciprocal engine equipment with new jet-powered Viscounts. Similarly, American inaugurated new jet-powered Electra service at El Paso. The City's complete entry into the jet age was accomplished in September 1960 when both airlines inaugurated pure jet service utilizing the Boeing 707 to give El Paso non-stop jet service to both Los Angeles and Houston.

Trans-Texas Airways inaugurated service early in 1960 on a new route segment from El Paso to Midland/Odessa serving Pecos as an intermediate stop.

A land-use study has been completed and a final master plan is being completed for the

area between the Montana Avenue and the Airport terminal. When started, this program will provide non-aeronautical income to the Airport through land leasing. This will enable the Airport to remain on a self-sustaining financial basis. The land lease was for a new \$1½ million Hilton Inn, opened in January, 1960.



An aeronautical-use area was planned and established on the west side of the Airport. The first installation completed in 1959 consists of a \$½ million hangar and office facility and has been leased to private corporations.

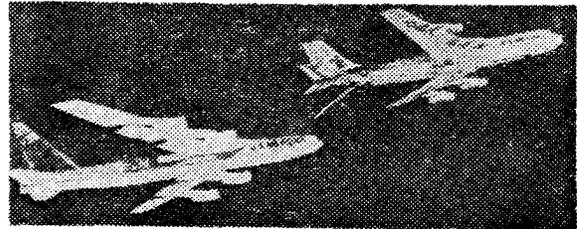
The Airport continues to be the front door to our City with the almost daily arrival of dignitaries and VIPs. Because of the military establishments in the area, many international visitors pass through our Terminal very week. Impressions of our City and our Airport are very often made in, or near our Terminal and carried over the world.

### **BIGGS AIR FORCE BASE**

From a lighter-than-air army unit known as Fort Bliss Aviation Field, to headquarters of the Border Air Patrol, to the present day multi-million dollar Strategic Air Command base—that is the history of Biggs Air Force Base.

In little more than a third of a century, Biggs, named in 1925 in honor of Lt. James B. “Buster” Biggs, a native El Pasoan killed in a plane crash in France during World War I, has had just about every type of aircraft touch down and take off on its runways—balloons, dirigibles, Jenneys, B-17s, B-24s,

B-36s, B-47s, C-124s, B-52s, KC-135s, fighters, tow target aircraft. National Guard observation planes—an impressive list of aircraft, representing practically the entire history of military aircraft development and progress.



Among the outstanding figures that have played a part in the colorful story of Biggs are General "Hap" Arnold, General Billy Mitchell and General Claire L. Chennault, to name a few.

Between World Wars I and II, the field was a refueling point for transient aircraft. Base personnel and aircraft complement in 1939 was one officer, 12 airmen and one plane. Facilities included one balloon hangar, two aircraft hangers and 208 acres of land.

The threat of war brought about the first real growth of Biggs. Runways were extended several times to accommodate larger planes, barracks were built, new hangars erected, and an 800 unit housing area was established.

In 1942, Biggs was taken over by the 2nd Air Force which directed all heavy bombardment training in the United States. It then became the headquarters of the 20th Bombardment Command, extending from California to Denver and the Gulf Coast. Hundreds of Bomber crews were trained on an around-the-clock schedule.

The 97th Bombardment Wing, equipped with B-29 and later B-50 aircraft, was assigned to Biggs in 1948. It converted to the

all-jet B-47 in July 1955 and flew its missions as a combat unit of the Strategic Air Command until January, 1959. At that time it was disbanded and its aircraft and crews were used to bolster the strength of other SAC units.

Reactivated in June, 1952, the 95th Bombardment Wing, currently under command of Col. Thomas G. Netcher, flew B-36s from Biggs until February 1959 when the last "Peacemaker" was retired from the SAC inventory. After a short period of runway construction, the 95th Bomb Wing resumed its mission under Emergency War Orders with B-52 and KC-135 aircraft. These all-jet bomber and refueling tanker aircraft form the principal tactical aircraft complement at the SAC base.

Biggs is the home of Col. E.E. Manzo's 810th Air Division, having command jurisdiction over the 95th Bomb Wing and 4128th Strategic Wing at Amarillo AFB, Texas.

At Biggs too is the 95th Combat Support Group, Commanded by Col. Howard F. Hugos and various tenant units of other Commands.

Base population is approximately 3800 officers and airmen. The 95th Bomb Wing is equipped with 19 B-52s and 10 KC-135s.

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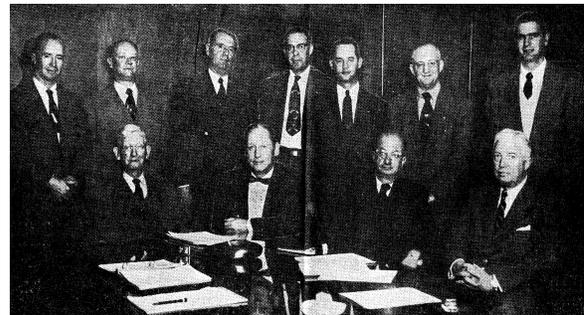
**FIRST PLANE CAME  
TO EL PASO IN 1911**

EPT 4/29/56

In the autumn of 1911, within two weeks of each other, two birdmen flew to El Paso.

One, named Cal P. Rodgers, flew on to national acclaim, aviation immortality and an early death. The other, named Robert G. Fowler, got stuck in the sand of New Mexico, set an aviation record believed to be still standing, crashed nearly every time he landed and was beloved by El Pasoans.

The late William Randolph Hearst launched these two men on their respective flights to fame and farce when he offered in 1911 a prize of \$50,000 to the first aviator, to fly from Coast to Coast.



**TIMES DIRECTORS**—*Directors of The El Paso Times, Inc., in this recent photo include (left to right, seated), the late T. E. Roderick, who died last year; Dorrance D. Roderick, president and publisher; Val Lawrence, vice president, and Sam D. Young. Standing (left to right) are Kelton B. Clark, secretary; Charles A. Guy, vice president; W. J. Hooten, vice president and editor, E.T. Lewis; Dorrance D. Roderick Jr., vice president and general manager; Mayo C. Seamon and Bruce Barnard. Mrs. Dorrance D. Roderick, also a director, not shown. The photo was taken during the December, 1953 meeting at the board. —(Times Staff Photo)*

Fowler determined to do the deed from the Pacific to the Atlantic and took off from San Francisco early in September, 1911.

Cal Rodgers took off from New York Sept. 17, headed for the Pacific.

Both flew Wright airplanes. Rodgers had a 30 feet, 8-inch wingspan Wright E.X., the first of its type built, which was designed" strictly for racing. He averaged better than 60 miles an hour flying time for the distance from New York to El Paso.

Fowler flew a larger, 40-footl wingspan Wright Model B. Both ships were two-winged "biplanes" equipped with skids for landing and numerous wooden or bamboo struts and yards of wire to hold their rickety frames together.

Fowler, hapless from the start, seldom took off without crashing.

Perhaps Rodgers did so just as often, but he crashed less hard and had better repair facilities. Certainly he was lucky to have survived so far west as El Paso.

Near Elmira, N.Y., Rodgers' plane developed difficulties and plummeted with its pilot 45 feet, s but he escaped with bruises.

By the time he reached St. Louis, Rodgers had become convinced he could never reach the West Coast by the designated time, Oct. 10, but determined to continue the trip anyway.

### **REACHES SANDERSON**

He secured as sponsor a then-popular soft drink, Vin Fiz, and hired a special train to follow him across the country. By Oct. 27, 40 days out of New York, he was in Sanderson, Texas, with his train.

L.W. Erwin, 1214 Circle Ave., a t retired Southern Pacific engineer, was fireman on the special out of Sanderson and recalls it in detail.

"This train was handled out of Sanderson by an Atlantic type locomotive (oil burner) with

Engineer P.A. Banes in charge and myself as fireman. It moved to Sierra Blanca from Sanderson, where it laid overnight."

The train consisted of about six cars, he said. Aboard it were Rodgers' wife, mother, photographers, sponsors and three "mechanicians" including the factory head of Wright Airplane Corp.

Erwin recalls the plane remained in Sanderson three or four days prior to leaving for the west because of "some mechanical trouble and high winds."

The mechanical trouble consisted mostly of damage done when Rodgers ploughed into a fence.

Besides Pullmans for the group, the train carried a "hangar car" which was equipped with three spare parts for each part of the plane.

While the special was in Sanderson, two men held up the SP at Baxter's Curve, west of Sanderson. According to Erwin, one of these was named Frank Hobec and he was killed by being struck in the head with an ice maul by the express messenger, Dave A. Trousdale.

The second robber, one Ben Kilpatrick, came up to the baggage car door in the dark and was shot to death by Trousdale with a rifle. The train pulled into Sanderson and the photographers with Rodgers' special talked the sheriff into permitting them to take pictures of the dead robbers, Erwin remembers. Trousdale was tried and acquitted.

Oct. 28, Rodgers took off from Sanderson at 11:41 a. m., his original starting time of 8:15 a. m. having been set back to repair damage caused when he collided with the aforementioned fence.

He arrived over Marathon at 12:38 p.m. and landed at Alpine at 1:21 p.m. An hour's delay was encountered in Alpine while the flier had lunch and waited for the special to catch up with his gasoline.

Leaving Alpine at 2:30 p.m., he arrived at Marfa at 3 p.m. but was delayed by the necessity of repairing his propeller chains and did not leave Marfa until 4 p.m. He passed Valentine at 4:38 p.m., Lobo Station at 5:05 p.m. and landed at Sierra Blanca at 5:35 p.m.

During the day he had followed the Southern Pacific tracks over the highest spot on his transcontinental itinerary, Paisano Pass, (5,082 feet) which he cleared by about 300 feet.

### **LONGEST LEG**

The Sanderson-Sierra Blanca leg was the longest of the flight to date, proudly announced The El Paso Morning Times for Oct. 29. The "flying man" had covered 231 miles in 229 minutes.

Rodgers departed Sierra Blanca at 9 a.m. and flew to Fort Hancock, which was the only stop between Sierra Blanca and El Paso. Here another occurrence was reported which shocks modern students of aviation, but apparently was of little moment at the time.

Refueled, Rodgers took off from Port Hancock but was not very high when he discovered his engine was not functioning properly and started to land. When he got within about five feet of the ground "the craft dropped like a shot, the auxiliary tank of the engine falling from its support and striking Rodgers on the head.

"Luckily," reported The Times, correspondent, "the birdman was only slightly bruised, but the skids of the aeroplane were smashed in such a manner that it was with difficulty that an ascension (take-off) was made after the engine had been repaired."

Undaunted and patched up, Rodgers left Fort Hancock again at 1:40 p.m. and The Morning Times for Oct. 30, 1911, said:

"Flying with great rapidity against a heavy wind, Aviator Cal P. Rodgers, the man who is now on his last long lap of his great transcontinental flight, yesterday afternoon at 3:07 o'clock circled the race track at Washington Park before an immense throng of spectators, hovered in the air for a moment and then made a successful landing near the GH&SA (Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio) railway tracks back of the cemetery."

Five minutes later the peerless aeronaut was in his private train dressing for a bullfight (it being Sunday). He had trouble, noted The Times with meticulous care, in locating his trousers, which his valet had mislaid. From Sierra Blanca he had flown 143 miles in 140 minutes.

He was 3,204 miles (following rail lines) and 42 days out of New York.

Describing him as "the biggest and heaviest of the birdmen," The Times said Rodgers was 6 feet, 4 inches tall and had "entered aviation" in June of that year. He had won \$11,000 in a Chicago air meet prior to starting his cross-country flight.

Meanwhile, don't forget Aviator Fowler, the world's hard luck king. By this date, Oct. 29, 1911, Fowler was about six weeks out of San Francisco and had reached Tucson, where he landed with a bang.

Landing on the University of Arizona football field in Tucson he landed partly in the grandstand, breaking both skids and one upright” but miraculously dealing out no more than bruises, not even to himself.

Even with this inglorious ending, Fowler had been accomplishing great feats including a whopping 167-mile non-stop flight (no doubt with the aid of a strong tail-wind) from Yuma, Ariz., to Maricopa, Ariz.

Meantime, El Paso was admiring the great Rodgers (although he seems to have been an unpersonable sort with a speech impediment) and, no doubt, was kicking in liberally toward his spare parts funds.

Later, in comparing him to Fowler, The Times indicated the tenacity with which Rodgers’ managers sought donations, was rather undesirable.

The first transcontinental flier took off from El Paso at 10:41 a.m. Oct. 31, 1910, after having seen a bullfight and otherwise enjoyed himself in El Paso.

He flew non-stop to Deming without incident and stopped at Lordsburg, N.M., the same day.

“I felt it a privilege to witness such an event,” wrote Claude C. Fuller, Box 725, Lordsburg” who was on hand for the landing. The Times of the period reported most of the town was watching a circus but deserted their seats to run to the edge of town and see the famous aviator land.

Fuller, like several El Pasoans, reported having heard that Rodgers’ special train carried a coffin for him as well as the spare plane parts. Rodgers continued on to Willcox, Ariz., arriving there at 4:45 p.m.

Meanwhile, the redoubtable Fowler had got his plane ship-shape again and it was planned for the two transcontinental fliers to meet and pass each other somewhere over Southeastern Arizona.

Nov. 3 Rodgers attempted to duplicate his fellow, birdman's feat by flying non-stop from Maricopa to Yuma, but was doomed to failure. Perhaps Rodgers’ gasoline tank was smaller, perhaps he dallied too long (circling Phoenix) on the way, or perhaps he had headwinds.

### **FOWLER ARRIVES**

The next day, as he neared the Pacific Coast, Rodgers suffered a further setback when his engine blew out a cylinder.

Nov. 5, 1911, Charles Fowler arrived in El Paso—by El Paso and Southwestern railroad train. Here began the Saga of Fowler’s Landing, or, The Ingenious Innovations of the Battered Birdman.

Fowler, who was not sponsored “by any near-drinks” did not have a special train. Three mechanics and his mother followed him on the next regular train to leave each station after he took off.

Near the siding of Mastadon, N.M., about 14 miles west of El Paso, the fearless aviator’s engine started acting up.

“I think maybe the sparker wasn’t working properly,” said Fowler later. At any rate, it became” imperative that he land the airship immediately, and he started at once to look for a suitable site.

In a gully about 1½ miles from the Southwestern mainline at Mastadon (still a siding on the SP), he set her down, cracking one skid and one upright.

The damage being irreparable that night, Fowler caught the next train into El Paso and met his mother at the Union Depot. She had preceded him here, intending to be on hand when he made his scheduled triumphal landing in Washington Park.

Bright and early the next morning Fowler, mechanics and onlookers boarded the EPSW for Mastadon and repaired the plane. It was then discovered it could not take off because of the sand, which hugged the plane to the ground as if it were magnetized.

On the following day the men attempted to pack the sand, but were unsuccessful in getting the biplane off the ground. El Paso was by this time enjoying the plight of the unfeathered birdman greatly.

#### **‘ALL ABOARD FOR FOWLER’S’**

“All aboard,” said The Times for Nov. 10, 1911; “All aboard! Train number Five for Hachita, Douglas, Bisbee and Fowler’s Landing!”

The Southwestern’s ticket agent was getting writer’s cramp from writing tickets to Mastadon, explained the paper. All printed tickets to the obscure siding had been used up by the unprecedented traffic during the last five days.

Determined, to say the least, Fowler took 1,000 board feet of lumber to Mastadon with which to build a runway. (He seems to have been financed by his mother.)

When the train stopped at Mastadon, reported The Times, not an automobile, nor wagon, nor even a burro was in sight to carry the lumber to “Fowler’s Landing,” 1½ miles distant. It was unloaded from the train and Fowler and his mechanics made four round-

trips each carrying the lumber through the sand.

It didn’t work.

Nov. 11, 1911, The Times announced Fowler’s new plan and promptly branded him with a nickname.

By the courtesy of the Southwestern, Fowler was offered the use of a flat-bed push-car of the type section gangs load up with equipment and push with a hand-car.

“Hand Car” Fowler, it was announced, would disassemble his aeroplane, carry it in pieces to the railroad, reassemble it on the handcar. Then the handcar would be pushed to a start, the motor would be gunned on the plane and, it was hoped, the plane would pull the car until it had attained sufficient speed to lift gently and gracefully into the air.

Said the paper Nov. 12:

“FOWLER WILL FLY  
HERE TODAY MAYBE.”

Fowler didn’t. The next day’s paper explained all was ready for “Hand Car” to take off from the railroad, but the EPSW had not yet supplied a push car.

In the same issue, Cal Rodgers had flown to Pasadena and was headed for Long Beach, Calif., after which he was to fly over the Pacific Ocean and actually bring his monumental flight to an end.

Instead he crashed between the two towns, falling with the plane 125 feet and suffering “a good shaking-up.”

Nov. 13, 1911, was a great day. Fowler was redeemed and back on page one after flirting

for a week among the classified ads in the deep, dark back of the paper.

Sure enough, Hand Car's plan of the push car was successful and he set a record, according to The Times, through his takeoff in this manner. (So far as The Times of 1956 knows, nobody has ever duplicated the feat.)

Fowler, furthermore, almost set another record by being the first to collide head-on in an airplane with a railroad locomotive.

Just as the plane lifted gently off the hand-car, a Southwestern freight puffed around a curve and directly at the startled birdman. For once, Fowler's engine did not fail and he barely cleared the top of the train.

The Times was so excited over his feat and his successful landing in El Paso's Washington Park that it failed to record whether the train hit Hand Car's hand car.

Nov. 16, 1911, Fowler was to: make an air exhibition in Washington Park, but after attaining the masterful height of 20 feet decided he could not clear the trees at the end of the ball field and crashed her just inside the fence, tearing the plane to pieces and bruising himself up somewhat, though not seriously.

His manager refunded 50 cents to all spectators.

About the same time Rodgers explained his fall. He had been overcome by "ethereal asphyxiation," he said, and this amounted to an overpowering desire to sleep while high in the air. He noticed a smell like chloroform, he said, and undoubtedly similar pockets of bad air had accounted for the deaths of many other aviators.

Nov. 17 Fowler was expected in Midland, where he was to perform on the circus grounds, but a dispatch from that city said his manager apologized for his failure to arrive on schedule because of "a minor accident" to his machine.

The reason he didn't make it to Midland was he still was trying to fly in, and out of El Paso.

### **FOWLER 'FLITS'**

Nov. 19, The Times announced:

"Fowler has flitted. He 'turned her over' as they say in aviation circles, and lifted out of the enclosure at Washington Park yesterday morning, circled down over the city, headed east and resumed his interrupted journey to the Atlantic coast."

Being peeved at the "dangerous down drafts" he did not give an exhibition.

(A Times correspondent in San Angelo reported Nov. 20 that a local man named Noah Smith woke up the morning of the 19th to find two brindle cows chewing up his brand new aeroplane. Fowler seems to have spread his luck as he progressed eastward.)

Rodgers apparently encountered another pocket of the mysterious chloroform-smelling gas which caused "ethereal asphyxiation" because he crashed to his death near Santa Barbara not long after completion of his flight.

The World Almanac for 1956 gives his coast-to-coast time as 49 days, including 82 hours, four minutes in the air. Unfortunately, it is not recorded how many skids, spars and other equipment had been demolished in the meantime.

Fowler continued up the Texas and Pacific tracks in the general direction of the Atlantic Ocean.

A.J. Sitton, who still runs a general merchandise store in Pyote, Ward County, Texas, recalls Fowler's struggling through that part of the country. (Sitton also had seen Rodgers, in Dallas, earlier.)

Fowler stopped in Pecos after leaving El Paso, Sitton said.

"After leaving Pecos he had engine trouble (!) and made a forced landing four miles northwest of Pyote near what is now the Lion Oil Pool," Sitton said.

"He made temporary repairs and mounted the air a short time after I reached him," Sitton remembers.

But not for long did Fowler stay up. He made another landing about 1½ miles west of Pyote. The mechanics arrived, temporarily repaired the engine and he took the air again.

"Engine trouble again developed and he landed on a clearing on the west side of town. He spent the night at Pyote . . . (and) left the next day for Midland. Monahans gave him \$35 to circle the town and Midland and Pecos gave him substantial sums for landing," Sitton said.

Let us hope those towns kicked in enough to pay for the skids and struts no doubt broken in landing there.

Hand Car Fowler continued up the T&P at least as far as Thurber, Texas, west of Fort Worth.

Tom Rigsby, now living in Ruidoso, N.M., was living in Mingus, Texas, three miles from Thurber, at the time.

And the story, as far as it goes, as a happy ending. Rigsby said in a letter to The Times that Hand Car "circled and landed and stayed about thirty minutes or an hour."

Apparently, in Thurber, he didn't even strain a strut.

\* \* \*

**AIRLINES, PLAQUE HONORS E.P.**  
EHPH 04/16/76

A plaque from the city of El Paso commemorating the 50th anniversary of American Airlines will be placed in the western concourse of the Airport.

Mayor Don Henderson yesterday, along with City Council member of the Airport Richard Najera, unveiled the plaque during a luncheon in the Airport.

**RECEIVING** the plaque was American's El Paso general manager Jack. P. Morris. Also attending the dedication were: County Judge Udell Moore, American Consul General in Juarez Goodwin Shapiro; Airport and Mass Transit Board chairman Robert Heasley; and Juarez Mayor Pro-Tem Jorge Gonzalez.

The history of American Airlines in El Paso began Feb. 4, 1929, when a single-engine Fokker Super Universal (a five-passenger plane) rumbled down a makeshift clay and gravel runway bound for Los Angeles, with stops in Douglas, Tucson, and Phoenix, Arizona.

Owner of the plane was Standard Air Lines, a small flying company whose mail routes, assets, and equipment were purchased in 1929 by Western Air Express, and then, later in the same year, resold to American.

\* \* \*

## AMERICAN AIRLINES MARKS 50TH BIRTHDAY

By Bill Thompson  
EHPH 4/12/76

A famous and respected name in El Paso history, American Airlines, will be 50 years old Thursday, April 15.

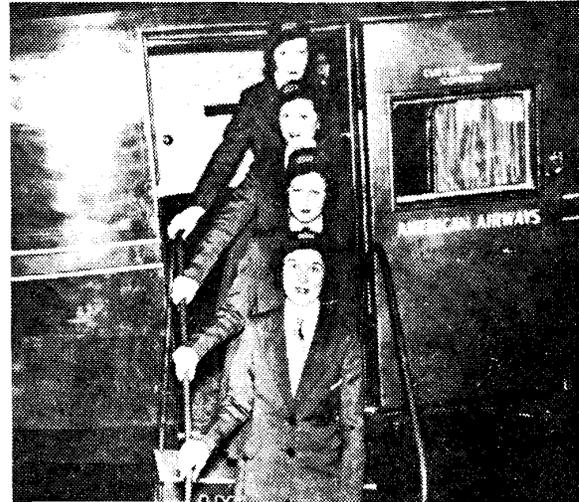
It was back on April 15, 1926, that a young aviator, Charles Lindbergh, flying for a company named Robertson Aircraft Corporation, took off from Chicago for St. Louis in an open cockpit De Havilland DH-4 with mail pouches. That company, along with many other small companies, was the nucleus of the giant air carrier.

A FEW YEARS later, in 1929, another single engine plane, a five passenger Fokker, rumbled down a makeshift clay and gravel runway at El Paso bound for Douglas, Tucson and Phoenix. El Paso had scheduled airline service.

This plane belonged to Standard Air Lines which later that year sold out, as Robertson had earlier, to a company called the Aviation Corp. and later became American Airways, Inc.

El Pasoans rarely glance up today as the big red, white and blue American Boeing 707 and 727's fly over the city. But back in the early thirties, when the big biplane, Curtis

Condors offered sleeper flights and the first stewardesses, or hostesses, flying was still something to get excited about.



**PIONEER HOSTESSES**—Properly dressed in long skirts and neckties, these pert young ladies were the predecessors of today's American Airlines cabin crew attendants. These girls, who were required to be registered nurses, flew on Curtis Condors in the early thirties.

A LITTLE later, the famous Ford Tri-motor came on the scene and Franklin D. Roosevelt flew in an American Ford to the 1932 Democratic convention.

Another famous airplane El Pasoans became accustomed to seeing was the Douglas DC-3 which American started in service in 1936 with the very last one making its final flight out of here in February 1949 to Ft. Worth where it was decommissioned, followed by the DC-6, American's last piston-engined plane which was phased out in October, 1966.

Then there were the people, C.R. Smith, the grand old man of the airlines, who, although not an El Pasoan, was known well here as one of the best airline men in the business and the El Paso people. Carl Gnauck, who started as an apprentice mechanic in 1932

and stayed around to work on the big jets, Ross Carpenter, probably the best known of all American managers here, Harley Hallock, former passenger salesman and Jack Morris, the present manager, all good airline people and great citizens and civic workers who helped make American a great name in El Paso and all over the nation and abroad.



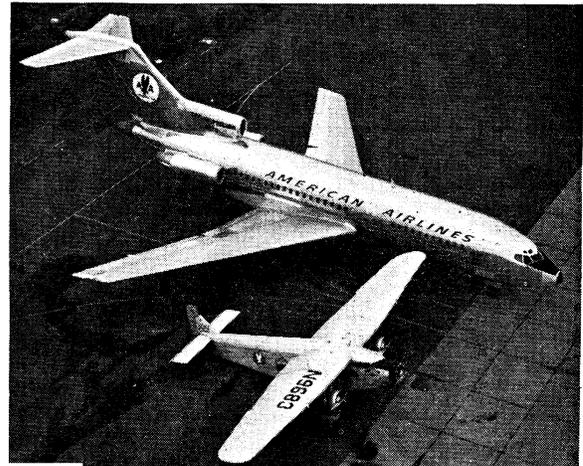
**TODAY'S CABIN CREW**—Young men as well as pretty young women -are cabin crew members on American Airlines jets today, still furnishing good will and comfort to airline passengers. From left: Susan Faulkenberry, of Hatch, N.M., La Donna Dansby, of Houston, Bill Abernathy, of Dallas and Diana Lyon, of El Paso, a graduate of Irvin High School.

BACK IN 1926, American's predecessor airlines routes totaled 470 miles. Today, the 232 all-jet fleet flies over a route system of 65,000 miles across the continental U.S., the Atlantic-Caribbean area, Canada, Mexico and Hawaii.

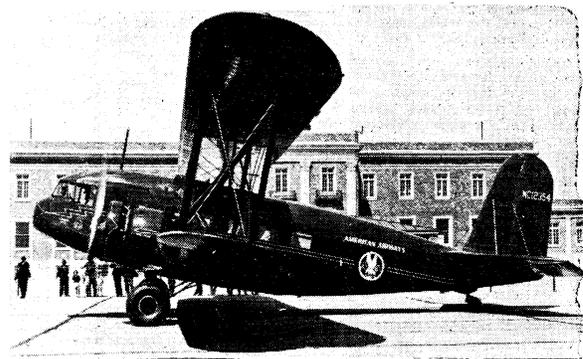
American plans no special activities Thursday except an awards ceremony and luncheon at the airport with Mayor Don Henderson, U.S. Rep. Dick White and newsmen in attendance.

The approximately 120 people who work for American here will be busy that day, as al-

ways, handling the ten American flights through El Paso but they will probably stand a little taller when they think of the dedication and vision of the thousands of people who have preceded them in 50 years on the building of a great airline.



**THEN AND NOW**—An American Airlines American's Boeing 727 jets which flies over Ford Tri-Motor is dwarfed by one of many of the same routes as the old Ford's.



**EARLY AMERICAN**—This Curtis Condor twin engine cabin biplane was the latest thing in airline transportation in the early thirties and offered sleeping facilities to American Airlines passengers.

\* \* \*

**PIONEERS RECALL EARLY  
E.P. AVIATION**  
EPHP 7/10/72

Recollections of El Paso's early years in aviation were recalled today, following a plaque dedication at El Paso International Airport.

The efforts of air-minded El Pasoans were outlined and challenges and prophecies realized, according to spokesmen.

Much of the early history was contained in a special report in the El Paso Evening Post on Sept. 7, 1928, and by members of the El Paso Aero Club, the pioneering proponents of the El Paso airport. The club was represented by three, surviving officers and directors, Stacy Binkle, Robert G. Polk, Dan Thompson and by the son of Paul Sergent, the club's treasurer at the plaque dedication.

**THE ORGANIZATION** was founded Sept. 1, 1927, by 23 World War I aviators "in order to secure a Municipal Airport serving commercial airlines and airmail service for the city of El Paso."

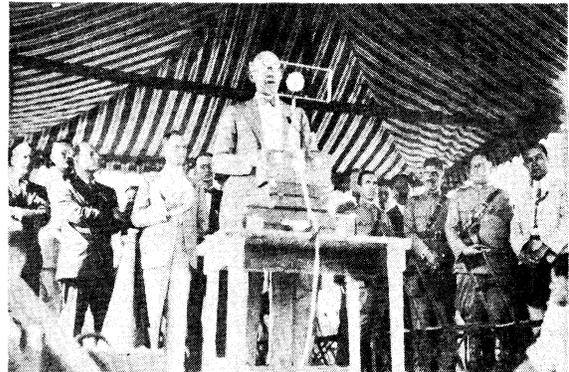
The Aero Club in turn was banking on the trail-blazing New York to Paris flight of Col. Charles A. Lindbergh and his subsequent flying visit to El Paso in generating public enthusiasm for a local airport.

As Hinkle wrote in the airport dedication in the Past: "Cities with good airports attract air commerce. Take New York, Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles . . . on the other hand, El Paso has no commercial airport, no commercial airlines, not even a privately owned plane in the city.

"**THE U.S.** post office has gone on record declaring that cities without airports are

'jerkwater' towns insofar as transportation is concerned . . . realizing this, a group of air-minded men, all ex-fliers of the army air service, agreed that El Paso., ideally situated, should make a bid for the greatest air terminus in the United States and thereby get a southern transcontinental airway established here . . . as the hub of a huge wheel with airways extending west to the Pacific, northwest to the Grand Canyon and Salt Lake City, northeast to Kansas City and St. Louis, east to Dallas, San Antonio and New Orleans and south to Mexico City."

Hinkle's words in 1928 smacked of more than fantasy; they were filled with prophecy; El Paso International Airport today serves four major airlines, plays host to a huge traffic in non-scheduled commercial, military and private aircraft and ranks as one of the busiest hub terminals in the nation.



**AIRPORT OPENING—Mayor R.E. Thomason opens the city's first airport in ceremonies on Sept. 8, 1928, 44 years ago. The opening of the airport and the beginning of El Paso's jet age link were noted in a dedication by Mayor Bert Williams and members of the El Paso Aero Club which was instrumental in the creation of the airport.**

**IN ADDITION,** the once-barren desert surrounding the city's first primeval airport is a bustling complex of diversified enterprises including industry, private business firms,

hotel-motel interests and plans for a golf course, tourist and recreation complex.

Following Col. Lindbergh's visit in the fall of 1927, an event attended by thousands of El Pasoans who converged on the old Fort Bliss Army airfield (Biggs Field), Aero Club members met with Mayor Thomason, now U.S. Judge, municipal airport.

Mayor Thomason, in turn, appointed the city's first airport committee: Alderman R.N. Mullin, Malcolm H. Carpenter, Walter Stockwell, city planning engineer, Charles Newman, Don Thompson and Earl Wesiger, the latter two described as "experienced aeronautics." Aero Club members in turn appointed two of their ex-army airmen, Stacy Hinkle, AS&R executive and County Engineer Fred Wilson as officers of the committee.

**BOTH THE MAYOR** and his committee were obviously cost-conscious; with a sharp eye on the municipal purse strings, they decided on a 200 acre plot of city-owned water department land north of the old Carlsbad Highway and east of the Southern Pacific's Golden State Route to Alamogordo and Tucumcari, and adjoining the Valdespino Municipal Golf Course.

By utilizing city-owned land, Hinkle noted that \$200,000 had been saved in land costs alone. But just how the airport committee was going to raise the formidable sum of \$25,000 to build the terminal building, a 60x100-foot steel shed, and grade the 3,000-foot runway area was a major problem yet to be solved.

**A SUITABLE** answer was arrived at through pulling a few political strings and through the connivance of sympathetic county officials.

Alderman Mullin, in charge of city finances, obtained a ruling from the county attorney that an airport can be classed as a highway; county commissioners then ruled that airport board member and also county engineer Fred Wilson could spend \$3,500 clearing the field and building the runways.

The city in turn passed time warrants to finance the remaining construction. City planning engineer Walter Stockwell laid out designs for the general airport configuration, including an "auto parking lot."

**WARE-RAMEY CO.** was low bidder on the steel hangar by quoting a figure of \$13,483 for the 6,000 square foot building and an enterprising contractor named R.E. McKee walked off with a \$7,085 contract for "night flying equipment," and turned the installation over to Reynolds Electric Co.

Sophisticated airport equipment of 1928 included a windsock to indicate which way the wind was blowing, boundary lights around the field and "six large Westinghouse 45-degree angle 1500-watt airport lights to illuminate the field for night landings."

Hinkle's article boasted of subsurface fuel and air lines to service as many as three aircraft simultaneously, fulsomely described the hangar's concrete floor and doorway apron, and while noting that the nearest cafeteria was one mile away at Fort Bliss, it was hoped that complete lodging and dining facilities would be installed in the near future.

**MAYOR THOMASON** and his council, county commissioners court and the Aero Club were on hand to dedicate the new municipal airport, Friday, Sept. 8, 1928, along with members of the airport board and the facility's newly-hired manager, Arthur Johnson, also a former army pilot.

On the day of the dedication, the new airport's future looked bright; Hinkle reported that "already, the Maddux lines of California have stated that they will begin operation of a line between here and Los Angeles by December of this year," and noted that the federal government had spent \$300 million on airways and airport facilities in 1972 and would very likely spend as much as a half billion dollars in 1928.

GROWTH of El Paso's multi-million dollar airport complex during the intervening 42 years and its effectiveness in making El Paso a major air terminal can be gauged in these figures: in 1928, El Paso Union Depot handled 16 passenger trains daily, most of them transcontinental limiteds of the Southern Pacific, Texas and Pacific, Santa Fe and National Railways of Mexico.

Today, Union Depot handles only two trains every other day, operated by the government's Amtrack passenger service, the lonely, almost ghostly survivor of the once-famous Sunset Limited.

As Hinkle summed things up in 1928, "Our airport was selected and designed with the idea of future development in mind. It is hoped that more army land can be obtained and that whole section thrown into a vast landing area two miles long and three-quarters of a mile wide. It does not take the dreaming of a Lindbergh or a going to need such a port in the very near future to care for our air transportation."

\* \* \*

## E.P. DEDICATED FIRST MUNICIPAL AIRPORT 40 YEARS AGO

By Marshall Hail

EPHP 9/11/68

It was a memorable day, 40 years ago, when El Paso dedicated its first Municipal Airport.

With one small hangar and no artificial runways, that first airport was primitive compared to the present International Airport. But among the 10,000 El Pasoans assembled for the dedication there were those who had envisioned a new age of aviation ahead.



**FIELD DEDICATED**—Mayor R.E. Thomason was main speaker at dedication of first city airport on Sept. 8, 1928. Standing near speaker, from left, are Nate Cordova, George W. Herlin, the Rev. Williams, and Postmaster U.S. Goen. At right are military officers from Juarez. (Photo courtesy Stacy Hinkle and El Paso Public Library.)

**ONE OF THESE** was Mayor R.E. Thomason, now a federal judge, who was the main speaker at the dedication on the afternoon of Sept. 8, 1928.

"Today we drive a not her stake in the progress of El Paso," Mayor Thomason said, speaking at a makeshift podium under a

striped tent. "This city today becomes one of the country's future air centers."

To take its first step into the dawning era of commercial aviation, El Paso chose for its airport the only City land available, a 260-acre tract inside the angle formed by Fred Wilson road and the Southern Pacific tracks. Across the tracks to the west was what is now the Ft. Bliss Golf Course. To the east lay the Cavalry and Artillery drill ground that had been established as a military flying field in 1919 because of the depredations of Pancho Villa. This later became Biggs Field.

**ONE OF THE PRIME** movers in efforts to create a civilian airport was pioneer aviator Stacy Hinkle of El Paso, who recalls that the original inspiration for the project came indirectly from Charles A. Lindberg.

Following his historic trans-Atlantic flight, Lindberg made a goodwill tour of various U.S. cities, including El Paso. In August of 1927, planning a big reception for the famous flier, Mayor Thomason asked 10 World War I aviators, including Mr. Hinkle, to drive official cars in a motorcade downtown.

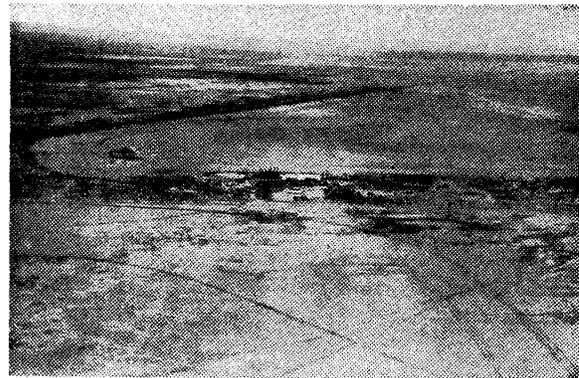
These flying men and others met on Sept. 16, 1927 to form an Aero Club. Its main objectives were to get a municipal airport, commercial airlines and air mail service for El Paso.

**THE CLUB** appointed Hinkle and Fred Wilson, also an ex-Army flier, to draw up plans for an airport. Their plans were approved by an airport committee named by Mayor Thomason and headed by Alderman Robert N. Mullin.

They recommended expenditure of \$25,000 for clearing and grading, a hangar 60 by 100 feet, boundary lights and a rotating search-

light to guide pilots. Unfortunately, no money was available.

Finally the County agreed to spend \$3500 for clearing the land, after Alderman Mullin got a ruling from County Atty. Dave Mulcahy that a municipal airport could be classed as a public highway. Then the City figured out a way to issue tax-pledged warrants to be redeemed in 1929 by a \$32,000 bond issue.



**FIRST AIRPORT**—Aerial photo taken by R. L. (Andy) Andrews shows first El Paso Municipal Airport day before it was dedicated in 1928. At left center is lone hangar. Field was bounded by Fred Wilson road and golf course, top left. Foreground was training ground for 82nd Field Artillery.

**MAYOR THOMASON** and the City councilmen, R.E. Sherman, W.S. Berkshire, R.E. McKee and A.B. Poe, okayed the plans and work proceeded. The Mayor appointed Arthur E. Johnson formerly of the 12th Aero Squadron at Ft. Bliss, airport manager.

The new airport got off to a flying start. On the day before the dedication, Rayma L. (Andy) Andrews, a World War I pilot, landed at the field and was greeted by Manager Johnson: "You are the first one to land, Andy. How many gallons of gas do you need?"

Mr. Andrews flew on to Tucson that afternoon to make preparations to receive fliers in a National Air Derby between New York and Los Angeles. Some of the racers landed the next day during dedication ceremonies. (Incidentally, a tool box holding up the microphone into which Mayor Thomason is speaking in the photo, is still in possession of Mr. Andrews, who now lives at 1605 Alabama street. Mr. Andrews supplied the public address system.)

IN HIS DEDICATION speech, Mayor Thomason paid tribute to three El Paso aviators who gave their lives for their country: Lt. James B. Biggs, for whom Biggs Field was named in 1925; Lt. Bruce Strothers and Lt. Ben Jenkins, all victims of air crashes.

Arthur M. Lockhart was master of ceremonies. Frank B. Fletcher of the Chamber of Commerce spoke on "Value of a Municipal Airport on a Transcontinental Airway."

Brig. Gen. George V. Moseley, Ft. Bliss commander, attended the ceremony. At his request the Army sent 21 airplanes from Kelly Field to thrill the large crowd with aerial acrobatics. Three days later Amelia Earhart, who had flown the Atlantic, landed at the new airport.

Over the years El Paso's municipal airport has grown from a \$25,000 investment into a \$30 million complex, fulfilling the needs of the jet age. It also bears out Mayor Thomason's prediction of 40 years ago that El Paso was to become a great air center.

\* \* \*

# AVIATION

**EL PASO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

**50th Anniversary Section**

EPT 9/9/78

**HIGHWAY OF PAST;**

**PATH FOR GROWTH**

*Dirt Strip To A Giant*

**INTENSE CONCENTRATION  
KEEPS FLIGHTS IN CONTROL**

**EL PASO INTERNATIONAL  
OUTRANKS PARIS, TOKYO**

**MANAGER DREAMS  
WHILE JUGGLING DUTIES**  
[Walter Jones]

**Airport, Transit Board  
COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES**

**LINDBERGH SAW SKIES,  
VISUALIZED NEEDS**

**OUT OF CHARACTER, OF SORTS:  
THIS AIRPORT IS PROFITABLE**

**THE AIRLINES:**

**American  
Continental**

**DUBIOUS NOTE:**

**EP Capture Of Two Hijackers Triggered  
Serious Security Moves**

**PACT ALLOWS USE  
OF MEXICO SKIES**

**EL PASO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT**

**50 YEARS OF AVIATION**

**EL PASO HERALD-POST**

September 9, 1978

**AIRPORT MARKS 50TH BIRTHDAY  
WITH OPEN HOUSE**

**LINDBERGH VISIT**

**HELPED AVIATION**

**REFUELERS, CELEBRITIES**

**RUB SHOULDERS**

**During open house  
AIRPORT PHOTO CONTEST SET**

**LARGE AIRLINES SERVE CITY**

**GRAF ZEPPELIN  
FLEW OVER CITY**

**GENERAL AVIATION ROLE  
GROWS IN IMPORTANCE**

**AVIATION GOT BOOST  
FROM VILLA**

**AVIATION ACTIVITY UP**

**FRONTIER COVERS WIDE AREA**

**GROWTH IN AIRPORT SEEN**

**AIRFIELD AREA DESCRIBED**

**CONTROL GAVE MAN  
MIRACLE OF FLIGHT**

**Man Travels From Kitty Hawk**

**To Jet Age in 75 Years**

*'To Fly Like A Bird'*

EPT 12/10/78

**TRAFFIC LEADING TO AIRPORT  
EXPANSION**

By Tom Butler

Times Staff Writer

EPT 3/4/79

**AIR CARGO WINGS  
TO NEW HEIGHTS**

By Nancy Rivera

Times Staff Writer

EPT 9/16/79

Excerpt from  
EL PASO  
Growth Progress Development  
1957-1961

El Paso Times 4/16/61  
**INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT  
BIGGS AIR FORCE BASE**

**FIRST PLANE CAME  
TO EL PASO IN 1911**  
EPT 4/29/56

**AIRLINES, PLAQUE HONORS E.P.**  
EPHP 04/16/76

**AMERICAN AIRLINES  
MARKS 50TH BIRTHDAY**  
By Bill Thompson  
EPHP 4/12/76

**PIONEERS RECALL EARLY  
E.P. AVIATION**  
EPHP 7/10/72

**E.P. DEDICATED FIRST MUNICIPAL  
AIRPORT 40 YEARS AGO**  
By Marshall Hail  
EPHP 9/11/68