



WESTERN AIR EXPRESS

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*Beating The Odds
The First Sixty Years of Western Airlines*

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Western Airlines was born out of the same pioneering spirit that settled the American West.

In 1926, the early venture capitalists that formed Western Air Express were doing more than just investing in a corporation—they were launching a new way of life. So when that first Western Air Express plane left Los Angeles on April 17, 1926, bound for Salt Lake City, it carried aloft the aspirations of a new generation of Americans along with 256 pounds of mail. No one expected this small airline in the West to survive, let alone be a financial success. Navigating over deserts, canyons and mountain peaks in all kinds of weather was just too great a task for the technology at hand. But, within one year, Western had established an astonishing safety and on-time record—completing all 518 of its scheduled flights with no accidents, a better than 99 percent performance rating, and netting a profit of \$28,000.

Western began a long string of industry firsts. Adversity and practical business needs spawned innovations in radio communication, weather tracking, marketing and in-flight services. Some are still in use today.

Unlike many of the other pioneers, Western survived the early crises of the industry and learned to prosper. It grew by assimilating people, ideas and technology. Yet, through the years, Western has maintained its own identity steeped in company traditions.

“Beating The Odds” is a collection of remembrances from some of the employees who helped shape those traditions. In each of our six decades, Western employees were called upon to answer a unique set of challenges, and defined themselves and their company in the manner in which they took up that call. There are of course many more stories than can be included in this single volume. The people interviewed here represent only a small fraction of the effort that, multiplied thousands of times, creates the whole story of Western Airlines.

Throughout its six decades, Western has always kept alive the pioneering vision of its founders and the spirit of the “Model Airway.” The ensuing story tells how the people of Western Airlines have always used their resourcefulness in “Beating The Odds.”



*Jerry Grinstein
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer*



*Mt Baldy straight
 ahead it is 10800
 feet hi - we are
 going over the
 top.*

It was overcast for that first flight from Vail field on April 17, 1926, but that didn't dampen the spirits of the crowd (Left, top and center). Postmaster P.P. O'Brien presided over Western's first mail weigh-in (Above) while WAE president Harris M. Hanshue looked on. Pilot Maury Graham was ordered to fly at a top speed of 90 mph to minimize engine overhauls. Superior maintenance was part of Western from the start. Here mechanic George Stell performed a routine parts inspection (Opposite, bottom center). In 1926, Calavo Growers of California (Far right) began shipping avocados on Western, a tradition that continues to this day.



Los Angeles sent Gentleman Jimmy Walker a letter (Top). Western's first passenger in May 1926 (Below). Maude Campbell (Left), WAE's first female passenger. Below her, one of the many notes Al DeGarmo passed to her during that flight.

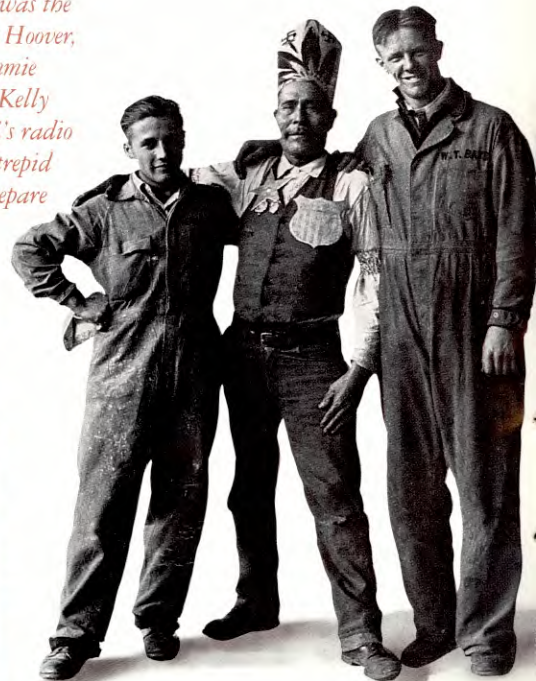


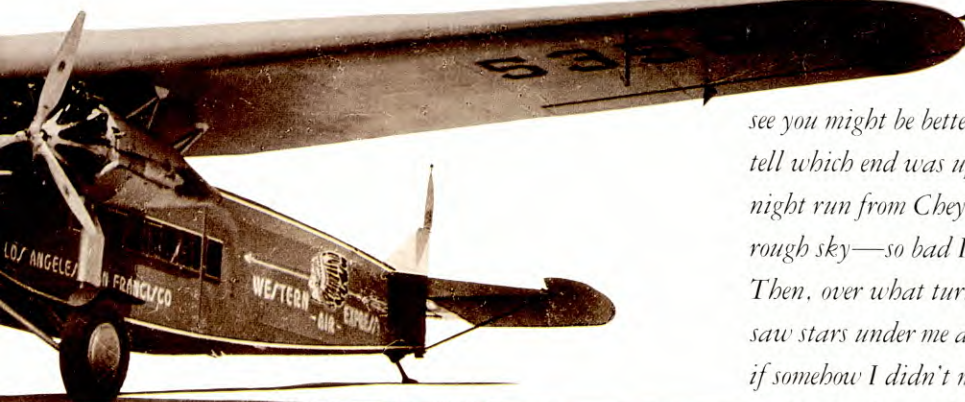
Al DeGarmo (Left) on his friend Will Rogers: "He was a big, muscular polo player who always stopped by after his matches to watch the planes come in. So one day we got to talking and became good friends. Will Rogers was some character. Once Bill was told there was only room for mail on one of my flights, so he purchased his weight in stamps and mailed himself. He was the first newspaper columnist to support passenger flight. He believed air travel was key to this country's growth. Air travel was something everyone would be doing one day, he said, and it would help break down the differences that divided nations. Bill loved flying everywhere, especially Las Vegas. We'd take detours to see the Boulder Dam project and then order up some steak and beans in Vegas. He had a point to make on everything. After a fight we saw, he gave the loser \$5. 'What do I get,' the winner asked. 'Nothing,' added Bill. 'You didn't have to whip'em that good.' In 1935, Bill died in a plane crash. At times, I still miss him."





Within four years, WAE expanded its route system from 653 to 4,765 miles. It was the largest airline in the U.S., reaching to Dallas and Kansas City. The opening of WAE's \$1 million terminal at Alhambra (Top) symbolized the young company's vigor. An interior view of the terminal (Upper, left) showed it was the tops in luxury. Herbert Hoover, Jr. (Middle), with Jimmie James (Left) and Fred Kelly (Right), directed WAE's radio research. A group of intrepid businessmen (Below) prepare for a trip on an F-10.





The queen of the 1928 Model Airway (Above), the Fokker F-10 seated 12 people. At this time, WAE was also developing the basis for today's air-to-ground communication, weather forecasting and passenger services. Western set up 37 weather stations between Los Angeles and San Francisco to make the Model Airway as safe and efficient an operation as possible—it achieved a 99 percent on-time performance. Western pioneered research in two-way radio use, radio marker beacons and radio compasses. Mechanics (Left and Below) were the unsung heroes of a crack ground crew.



called ourselves the Four Horsemen because we figured that we would make WAE famous the way that back-field made the Notre Dame football team the year before.

Still, I always saw flying as something you had to respect and go about business-like. It was dangerous. During the six years that the Post Office operated the air mail, more than two-thirds of their pilots were killed. Western had to prove that flying could be a safe and organized thing. The biggest obstacle to that was the fickle weather. Those M-2s couldn't get any higher than 15,000 feet so we were right in the thick of everything. Sometimes you could get up over it, but ol' Fred, he was always skimming the fog with his plane.

A pilot had to make a lot of judgement calls. You had to figure if the weather was good enough to see the airport maybe it was good enough to go on. At the same time, if it was too miserable to

see you might be better off staying in the air. Hard to tell which end was up, literally. Once I was making a night run from Cheyenne, Wyoming, in some pretty rough sky—so bad I couldn't see the ground for miles. Then, over what turned out to be Rawlins, Wyoming, I saw stars under me and ground lights over me. Damned, if somehow I didn't make half that trip upside down.

Getting lost, asking strangers to help deliver the mail in bad weather, was all the fun of flying. It was noisy and colder than a well-digger's bottom up there, but I'd just stuff cotton in my ears, dig my feet into those mail bags to keep warm, and head over the top. That was the best feeling you could get. You'd spiral up a mountain and finally get high enough to sail right over the peak. That was something. Only eagles flew that high.

By 1928, we'd made safety synonymous with flying, says Art Beggs, and that attracted the attention of the Guggenheims. They awarded us a \$180,000 grant to develop a 'Model Airway' for passenger service between Los Angeles and San Francisco. It was an extraordinary amount of money for that time. The goal was to prove an airline could make a profit from passenger revenue alone.

It was obvious to us that the future was in passenger transport. While mail routes were regulated by the government, we could take passengers anywhere. If we (continued on page 8)



could make money at this, it was something we wanted to get involved in. We didn't want to encourage curiosity seekers to fly, we wanted people who needed to travel faster and safer.

We knew once business people discovered the ease of air travel they'd use it all the time.

There was still a lot of opposition to flying. Many people laughed in our faces: mail was the only thing that should fly, they said. To combat that feeling we used the phrase, 'Travel by air.' Those days, you were still considered nuts to fly: only the Army did it.

Our traffic (today's marketing) department had to get before the public every conceivable way possible. In San Francisco, I taught a class at the University of California on air transportation and hosted a 15-minute radio show on KFRC about the exploits of Western Air. We also sponsored Sunday tours over Los Angeles for five dollars a shot to show people how safe air travel really was. Education was the key. People were afraid an airplane could suddenly drop out of the sky so we printed booklets that explained how planes were held aloft.

Over time, we got our message across, but it was our outstanding operating record, and the fact that we had community support, that made the 'Model Airway' a success. On that route, we flew three Fokker F-10s, seating 12 people. They were the ultimate in comfort. Before that people had to sit in makeshift, open air seats. On an F-10, they could travel with other folks and get a cup of coffee or sandwich.

The company was full of free spirits back then. Fred Kelly could be grumpy with passengers, but he was the biggest joker around. One time he had an F-10 on the runway ready to take off when he jumped out of the cabin and got a newspaper because everyone on board wanted to see that new Mickey Mouse cartoon. Ultimately, everyone had the best interests of Western Air Express at heart. We were like an enthusiastic ball club—the hours or jobs we had to do didn't matter.

The Model Airway proved that passenger service was viable for the airlines at a time when everyone expected us to fall on our faces. We gave the industry a method of operation that's still used today. □





The interior of the F-10 (Above). WAE's first steward, Miles Davis (Right). From Top to Bottom at Left: 1930 jet-setters, Art and Mary Beggs at F-32 test site. The huge plane's inaugural flight. In 1932, WAE received the first aerial T.V. broadcast, featuring an unknown named Loretta Young. The 747 of its day, the Fokker F-32 (Bottom) was the world's first four engine airliner. It carried 32 people and cost a whopping \$110,000. The F-32 was the last of the wooden giants.



From Top to Bottom at Right: French bells called a steward for another cup of tea. Smoking lounges were paneled (Center) and seats were covered with gray alligator skin. But the F-32 and that era at WAE never reached its potential.



In 1930, Postmaster Walter F. Brown forced WAE to partially merge with Transcontinental Air Transport (TAT) and form TWA. Western also had to sell its Los Angeles to Dallas route to American and its Kansas City line to TWA in the government's efforts to spur a coast-to-coast airway. By year's end, the company slashed its payroll from 410 to 133 people and sold many of its planes. Western stayed afloat and remained independent. WAE eventually ended its ties with TWA later that year. Western fought back and was one of the few airlines to make a profit during the early Depression years.

ern's plan for an inland passage to Alaska. Except we weren't transporting passengers in a DC-3. Instead, the Army converted it to a C-47 and we were carrying the military, road equipment and generators.

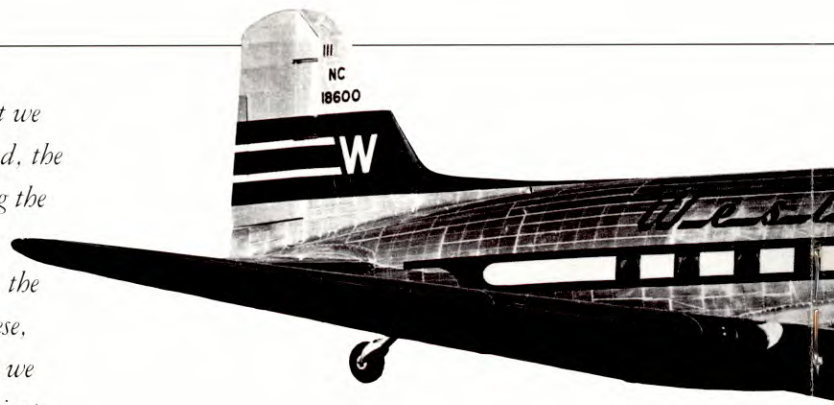
We were never in a combat zone though. Kiska, the last of the Aleutian Islands occupied by the Japanese, was cleared out just days before we arrived. What we didn't realize was our battles would be fought against an unseen aggressor. Cold was the real enemy.

There were shortages of everything, says B.G. Smylie. Tools, manpower, spare parts. On some days you knew it was impossible to do your job yet work went on regardless. That first winter was the hardest—it reached 65 below quite a bit. To keep work moving, the mechanics created a kind of synchronized teamwork. One fellow would run out and thread a wire with his bare hands. He'd run back, and the next guy would go out and bolt down the holding plate. A 15-minute job took maybe an hour to finish.

Sometimes I think only spit and paint held those planes together. Yet Western didn't lose a single plane or pilot during the war. Safety was the foremost consideration for our air and ground crews. And if we needed something to remind us, we saw it on every trip from Edmonton to White Horse. Along the way, there's this place we called the 'Million Dollar Valley' where you could spot four abandoned planes sticking out of a snow bank. When bringing up a new guy, we always made a point to fly in low and get a good look at those planes. He'd get the idea without us saying anything.

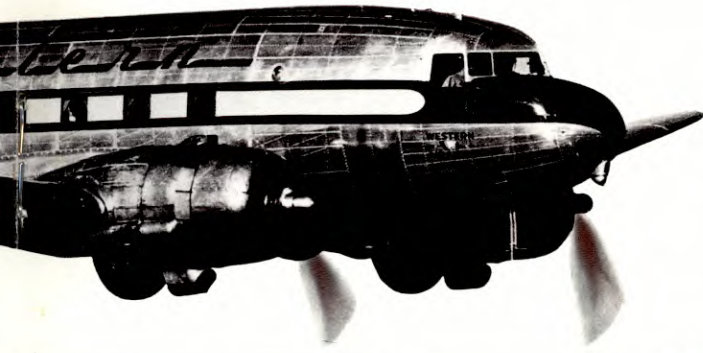
I couldn't prepare a pilot for this environment by talking to him about it, explains Pat. He had to experience it first hand. In the states, we were accustomed to flying 85 hours a month with emergency airfields 50 miles apart and rotary light beacons every 25 miles. Up there, flying time was increased to a 100-hour month and the airstrips were 200 miles apart with only a single beacon to note an airport.

There was a lighter side to things too, continues B.G. When the war began, all us mechanics rented a big house in west Edmonton we called 'The Mansion' because there was always some high-class carrying-on there. Once one of the crews 'borrowed' a couple of prime Canadian beef steaks on route to some Washington big-



The versatile DC-3 (Top, left) was converted to a transport plane, the C-47. Jimmie James (Center, left) and WAL take a deep breath for the U.S. war effort in 1941. A few of WAL's "Sourdough Boys" (Center, right) posed after arriving in Alaska. Despite many hardships, WAL had the best safety record during the war. Other photos from Pat Carlson's scrapbook show a panorama of the hardships confronted in Alaska.





wig and we threw a party. Well these two green Pentagon inspectors came snooping around just as we were serving those steaks. So one of the fellas told them a long story about a moose he'd just shot and invited them to try it. After dinner, one of them said, 'Boy, moose tastes better than beef, next time we're ordering this.' So we had our fun, but we kept at our jobs.

We'd also go hunting, fishing, and gold panning. I guess that's where the name 'sourdough' came from. The locals used to call the French prospectors sourdough on account of their diet. In a way, it was a compliment that meant you knew how to survive in the wilderness.

After the war ended, adds Pat, we kept flying for another month before the operation was shut down. By then we had carried about 22 million tons of goods over 67 million passenger miles without a hitch. Western had achieved the highest aircraft utilization rate in the ATC—15.9 hours a day. To me that was astounding considering the conditions we worked under. □





Mary Grace Mabey

After the war, faced with stiff competition from the larger carriers such as United and American, Western engaged in “constructive contraction.” In a controversial move, it sold the Los Angeles to Denver route while instituting other cost-saving measures. Realizing that it could not compete with the financial might of the industry giants, Western focused its attention on improving services. The result was a creative explosion that saw the innovation of many in-flight services that a little bird told us all about.

As a flight attendant, Mary Grace (Jafraty) Mahey was one of those who brought this new era to full bloom at Western.

When I started, most of our flights were in the unpressurized DC-3s that handled 21 passengers, says Mary Grace Maybey. In-flight services were very crude. We had to spoon food into serving dishes from big boxes on the floor and kept coffee in a two-foot-high thermos. Scrambled eggs and sweet rolls made up breakfast, with hot roast beef for lunch.

The big change at Western began with the introduction of the pressurized DC-6B in the early 1950s. Above all, it was a sociable airplane. Everything was first class. It had a lounge area with six seats in a semicircle and held 60 passengers. Movement was a lot less restricted and that helped people relax more. It seemed like overnight we became the industry innovator. We were always known as a friendly airline, but now we were breaking new ground.

The Champagne Flights generated a tremendous amount of enthusiasm in the company because they gave us an opportunity to do something no one else was doing in the U.S. Every one of those trips was sold out and our reputation soared. Western opened a new training school for the attendants and started graduating 30 women at a time instead of one or two. One success built on another. It was exciting to come to work because you never knew what new idea was going into place that day. People listened to each other. You paid attention to the little details of your job and were always looking for a better way to do things. That attitude more than any single innovation made Western go. We started to pull even with United on its main Los Angeles to Seattle (continued on page 16)



By 1946, WAL covered 4,000 miles and had 2,600 employees. However, severe declines in traffic, along with post-war personnel turnovers, sent shock waves through the industry. In 1947, WAL sold its Los Angeles-Denver route to United for \$3.7 million and then sold spare tires to meet the payroll. In 1950, a much leaner WAL led every carrier in the nation in traffic gains. The Marilyn America dreamed about (Above) flew Western while a flight crew prepared for a trip (Top, center).



From Top to Bottom at Right: The pressurized Convair 240 opened the door for innovative in-flight services. Young Mary Grace Jafraty joined WAL in 1943 and became the first flight attendant to serve 20 years. Shipments of fruit and other cargo. WAL organized the industry's first female sales force, the "Counselaries." From maintenance (Bottom, corner) to special holiday meal service (Center), WAL made every day Christmas for passengers.



route which was amazing because we were offering fewer flights.

In the public's mind that little bird, Wally, or VIB for very important bird, embodied this whole new era at Western. We were the 'Only Way To Fly.' Passengers identified with his relaxed manner and the good life he represented. Our flights were all first class then, there was no coach section. But if we catered to any one group it was business travelers. Our flight schedules were arranged so they could get in a full work day and still get to their destination early enough to enjoy the evening.

By the mid-1950s, Western was the model of efficiency and quality service. It was the height of our success; without question we were the best airline in America. What we were doing in passenger service was unheard of in those days. When passengers came on board we hung up hats and coats and personally greeted them. We typically served seafood, salad, filet mignon, potatoes, a vegetable and dessert. Champagne was served with the meals and special items made for Western such as cigars, perfume and orchids were given out during flights. Even the menu could be turned into a post card that we would mail for people.

We did other things too like the Hunt breakfasts. The flight attendants actually put on red waistcoats and derbys to serve an English fox hunt meal. And if anyone had doubts as to what we were doing, the sound of hounds barking and bugles blowing from a tape recorder in the serving cart let them know. The FAA outlawed the recorders and that ended those breakfasts.

The most important thing we did during those years was build a rapport with the passengers. We took a personal interest in everyone who flew Western and treated them as though they were coming to be guests in our home. I remember people actually standing up and applauding after a flight as if we'd given a performance. People appreciated the extra effort we put in and Western developed a base of regular customers and friends. Even today, I exchange Christmas cards with some of the businessmen I met on those flights. And it feels good to know that after all these years, the special treatment they received from me and Western Airlines is still remembered. □

Dessert (Below) tops off a delicious flight. Champagne service was first called the "Californian" (Middle) and was promoted by WAL's Very Important Bird.





The DC-6B (Top) was known as a “social” airplane because of its many conveniences, such as a lounge area, that helped passengers relax (Bottom, left). A man who didn’t easily scare, Alfred Hitchcock (Top, right). Great food and T.V. ads (Middle, right) kept people coming back. Flying over the high Sierras (Right, corner) kept Bogart at his peak.





Carolyn Bekker

Times were changing. Western expanded its route system, adding Mexico City and Calgary in the late 1950s. The airline continued its string of strong financial years with record profits in 1957 and again in 1963 and 1964. While business carried on as usual, Western was preparing for the dawn of a new age. It arrived in June 1959 when the first Western jet flew from Los Angeles to Seattle. Within three years, the airline drew 2 million passengers for the first time.

Carolyn Bekker joined Western's Los Angeles reservations office during this period and works there today.

You know, when I look back on those days, I don't know how we ever put anyone on a plane without computers, says Carolyn Bekker.

People coming into the industry today can't relate to the way reservations operated in the mid-1950s. When I started, we used a room-length board to track a 31-day flight schedule. Three girls stood on a platform and moved big red, green, yellow and blue pegs so we could tell the flight status. We wrote the res (reservation) up on an index card and it went to the file room on a conveyor belt where it was kept in horizontal trays. Every change had to be recorded manually.

Keeping people on the right flight took a kind of Rube Goldberg magic that required each individual to push a piece of the paperwork puzzle a little further.

Dealing with weather delays, fare changes and cancellations bred a real feeling of family togetherness that's hard to describe. We didn't just work for WAL, we lived for it. Everyone felt that they were contributing something important to Western's success.

Part of that included learning about new route destinations. In 1957, when Western began to serve Mexico City, we practiced converting dollars to pesos weeks before the inaugural flight.

The work ethic was very strong then, and the job was much more structured. I had to study fare rules, routes and schedules and was quizzed on them. We had to memorize that information because there was no other way to do it.

But that began to change in 1959 when reservations received its first computer. Resetron was actually an electronic aid that tracked perforated punch cards, but it changed the business. The big board went the





The Boeing 707 (Top, center) became WAL's first jet in 1959. WAL's route system in 1961, which now included Mexico (Center). Around the world in 80 days, Elizabeth Taylor and Mike Todd (Left) board a WAL plane in the late 1950s. Champagne service (Left, middle) reached full bloom in this decade. That extra bit of care (Below, left) made WAL shine and reflected well on the employees.



way of the propeller planes and bobby socks.

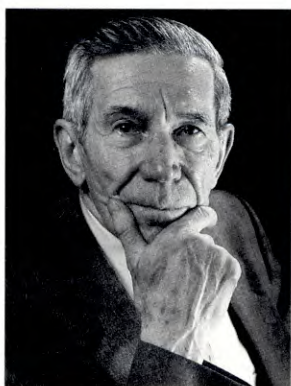
I could feel the public excitement about jet travel. It became symbolic of the new generation President Kennedy spoke about: There was no limit to where we could go or what we could accomplish. People were in awe of the airlines, even our cars looked like jets.

As more and more people were drawn to air travel, the tools of the trade became more efficient to handle the load. Computer terminals replaced the bulky punch card machines, and the paper maze soon disappeared.

Learning to operate those first computers was stressful for a lot of us until we realized our jobs were going to be easier, not eliminated. Technology was moving so fast that everyone was afraid view phones would be the next innovation and no one wanted the public to see their faces.

You know people around here got a kick out of Gemini 7 astronaut Jim Lovell using our slogan 'The only way to fly' in orbit. But in a way, that marked the end of the excitement over the jet age. Flying became ordinary, space travel was the new frontier. That's a necessary part of progress, I guess, but for awhile I felt a part of something special. And in a way I still am. □





George Zurian

In 1966 Western posted a record \$16 million in profits. The following year, it acquired Pacific Northern Airlines (PNA). The merger gave Western routes into Alaska and Hawaii.

George Zurian came to Western from PNA and remained until his retirement in 1981.

The Western–PNA merger took everyone by surprise, says George Zurian, who began with PNA in 1948. Both companies were coming off their best years ever and had solid route systems. I was probably the first to learn about it when I saw the news come over PNA’s teletype system. I thought, ‘My God, we’re already history.’

After the shock wore off, we saw the logic behind the move. Both companies had resources the other lacked: Western was a large carrier with fiscal muscle while PNA had the routes Western needed to expand.

The apprehension among PNA employees equaled the enchantment. Western had a reputation as a bold, free-wheeling airline, not afraid to try anything. It was coming of age; looking to exotic places like Hawaii and Florida for growth. At the same time, mergers can be cruel to those being absorbed. There was tremendous fear that Western wanted PNA’s equipment and routes, but not its people. That was never the case.

From the start, Western went out of its way to make us feel comfortable. What impressed me was that Western felt it could learn something from our experience at PNA. Many of us had to relocate to other positions, including myself, but we went with a sense of purpose. We were treated as valuable assets, not liabilities. When I arrived in Los Angeles, I understood why. Western was really an amalgam of other airways, a melting pot for airline knowledge. I met people who came from Standard, National Parks and Inland Airways. Each brought a unique perspective to their work that made Western a better airline because people weren’t afraid to innovate.

I’ll never forget when Western was finally awarded its Hawaiian route, the company had a gathering in Los Angeles and invited all the former PNA people who could attend. Senator Inouye of Hawaii was the guest of honor and he introduced and congratulated us for doing a good job for Western. That meant a lot to the PNA folks. After the ceremony, I turned to a friend and said, ‘I guess this really means we’re part of WAL now.’



Flying from hot to cold, the Bird (Top, left) goes to Hawaii and Alaska as Western expands its route system. In 1967, Arthur G. Woodley sold PNA (Center, left) to Western, giving WAL access to Alaska for the first time since WW II. First class service (Top, right) put people in the vacationing mood while passengers enjoyed lei-overs in Hawaii (Center). Ticketing agents (Left) book seats for tea service (Right) which became popular during flights to Vancouver, Canada. The Boeing 737 (Below) became an important factor during the “energy crisis.”





Being accepted in the company had a responsibility, too. We wanted to uphold and build on Western's 43-year reputation. All my years in avionics, we only purchased the best available parts. If a low-bid item didn't meet Western standards, it didn't get on our planes.

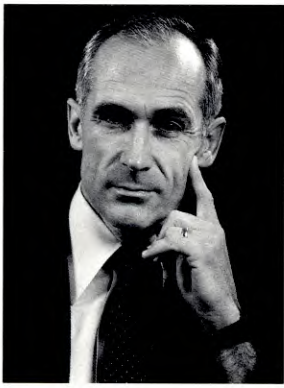
It was tough to think in those terms when the 1973 oil embargo hit. Seemed like the whole airline industry slammed into a brick wall. Every one-cent increase in fuel prices cost Western \$1 million. The whole country had to adjust to a restricted lifestyle. Big cars and big aircraft were out. The airlines were selling planes just to maintain a bare bones operation.

Under these circumstances, my prior experience proved quite an asset. At PNA, we were used to working with small budgets and equipment shortages. We had to be efficient to survive and in the long run it wasn't such a bad experience for Western. It was like going on a diet. Western trimmed down and was in better shape to meet the new demands of the market.

Mergers are public acts committed for business reasons, but when PNA became part of Western it was a very personal thing that affected all of us. Without it, PNA people would never have had a chance to mature in their chosen field. Coming to Western expanded our personal horizons and helped the airline grow too. □



In 1968, WAL was the official airline of the U.S. Olympic team. The games were hosted by Mexico City. The U.S. cycling team (Above) paused for this shot before letting WAL do the legwork. WAL's route system (Left) grew as it expanded into exotic environments. The map shows the popularity of Hawaii along with Western's new corporate logo.



Art Cornelius



Teri Carroll

Deregulation became the buzz word of the early 1980s. Already weakened by high fuel costs, the airline industry was ill-prepared to deal with the new competitive markets. After almost 50 years of government regulation, the airlines had forgotten how to compete. Now, the industry had come full circle back to the freewheeling 1920s when WAE ran the model airway. In early 1984, Western was losing \$1 million a day and its future looked bleak. But, by 1985, the airline made nearly a \$100 million turnaround.

Pilot Art Cornelius and flight attendant Teri Carroll take a look at how business changed at WAL.

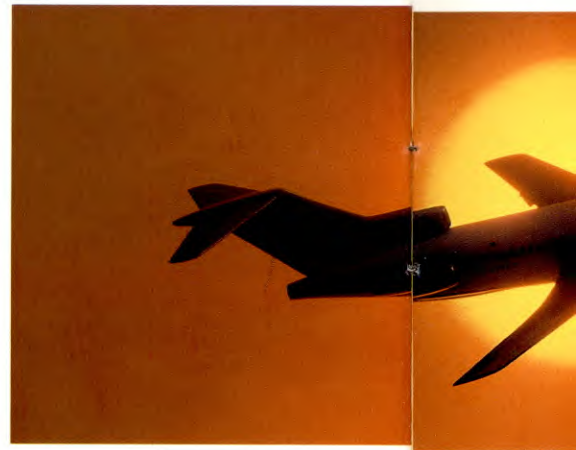
I was in flight training on Western's fiftieth anniversary and remember being overwhelmed with a great sense of pride in the company, says Art Cornelius. The hangars were spotless, we had the best maintenance in the industry and the future held so much promise. There was a move under way to deregulate the airlines, but no one knew what that meant or much cared.

A lot of apathy existed toward deregulation actually happening. Most people assumed that the airline business would go on as it had for the last 50 years. In the fall of 1978, the womb of protection disappeared: The airlines had to compete under deregulation.

Overnight the whole industry changed, adds Teri Carroll. To say we were in shock would be an understatement. It was like working with a blindfold on. The most noticeable difference was the type of passengers that were now flying. We were used to experienced business flyers. Deregulation seemed to create another group of travelers who didn't understand the nature of our business. We went from five flight attendants covering 120 passengers to four trying to serve 140 people—many of whom had never flown before. The public's expectations just weren't realistic. I had women actually get quite upset that I wouldn't baby-sit their children or serve lunch on a 35-minute flight.

By the end of 1981, everyone at Western felt the impact of deregulation when we were asked to take a one-year 10 percent pay cut. People were frustrated. We were flying at full capacity but losing money. The media had us in the grave and started to shovel dirt on us. It was hard to take because we knew how to do our jobs.

Two years ago I didn't think Western was going





The Boeing 727 (Above) reflected the emerging markets WAL was serving in the 1970s. Pilot Steve Walker (Center, left) and mechanic Geronimo Gil (Center, right) gave WAL the thumbs up in 1985. New passengers (Below, right) enjoyed a first class flight to Mexico (Below, left), but still look to Lou Reddin (Bottom, left) and Debbie James (Bottom, right) for the same quality service that has made Western a success for 60 years.



to survive, continues Art. The company was losing \$1 million a day. Some positive steps had already been taken. A hub was established in Salt Lake, changing our old linear routes, which dated back to when the M-2s used to deliver mail, to a feeder system. The choice of a Salt Lake hub over Denver had already grown in significance, but the threat of bankruptcy kept this from becoming clear. I kept thinking of the time our crew walked past the Braniff offices when they went bankrupt and the image of those people sobbing or just staring blankly out the window stuck with me. They just ran out of time. I wondered if we would too.

Western was only days away from extinction. If we didn't give those concessions in 1984 then this airline would have bought the farm. Everyone finally came to realize that Western started with people, not airplanes or ledgers. We're Western Airlines and we're the ones who will make it go. The key is to pull together and share in the company because we're investing in ourselves.

We climbed out of the grave, adds Teri. Our face was a little dirty, but we made it out. More than anything else the concessions instilled confidence in the financial community that Western knew how to run a deregulated airline. Attitudes began to change. Five years ago the attitude was, 'I could have a job here until I'm 60.' Today people realize their career growth is tied to the company. People work much harder than before, but feel better about their jobs. We're beating the odds and it's just a great feeling to see furloughed people coming back and new faces being added.

Deregulation caught us off guard. We weren't prepared for the problems it caused, but we'll be ready from now on. Despite the hardships, I wouldn't want to go back to a regulated industry. Flying isn't exclusive anymore and in the long run Western will do better. Someday we'll be able to look back on this decade and see the good it produced, even though it was at a cost to family, career and financial goals.

Our place in the history of the airline industry hasn't been written, says Art. I think that the jury is still out on the success of deregulation, but the possibilities for Western are as wide open as they were 60 years ago, and the challenge is still there: to operate America's best commercial airline. □

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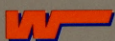
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