

A Pilot Remembers

by Harry Logsdon

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Today I felt a lot like the little old lady who watches her only son graduate from college at the head of his class. This spinetingling pride was precipitated by Chairman of the Board A. A. Bradford's announcement that Central Airlines has entered the jet age.

As I pondered (from a pilot's viewpoint) the many wonderful possibilities and capabilities of turbine-powered Convairs, I could not help but compare them to our equipment of fifteen years ago this month.

I remember that rainy day in September when our pre-inaugural flight only reached Dallas because of bad weather. We were flying single engine Beechcraft Bonanzas with no company communications and with no navigation aids except a manual loop and a small range receiver. With only these aids, we still flew lower minimums on a strict VFR basis into many airports than did the trunks with all their sophisticated equipment.

Our route of flight was conducted along railroads, highways and telephone lines. With no company communications, we tried to keep track of other Central flights on ground control frequency to avoid collision in the murky weather. We only had to worry about our own flights because other planes would be either high above us on an instrument clearance or would be waiting it out on the ground.

This was how it began.

Many changes have improved our airline over the years. To me, these changes were milestones; important steps up the ladder to our airline of today. Since it is obvious that many of our employees have not been here since the beginning, I will attempt to list for you what I think are some of the important milestones in our company's growth.

THE BIRTH OF AN AIRLINE

September 15, 1949 - Our first scheduled flight. This first flight was piloted by Captain Gordon Bourland from Fort Worth to Dallas, Gainesville, Ardmore, Ada, Shawnee and Oklahoma City. Although Captain Bourland made the first flight I made many of Central's Flights 1 and 2 before additional service was inaugurated.

THE ARRIVAL OF DC-3's

By late 1950, we were operating two round trips daily from Fort Worth to Tulsa and Amarillo with DC -3 equipment. It was a big step up for we were no longer a make-believe airline. We flew night and instrument schedules and proudly carried in the cabin of our airplane the forerunner of todays stewardess. There was a difference though; they were male. Many of our original pursers are still with us in responsible positions with the company. Some of them are: Emmett Spinks, David Dodd and Buddy Kopp, Captains; Pete Jones and Nelson Embleton, Flight Superintendents. Accounting's Charlie Kleinecke and district sales manager Hal Harbuck got their start with Central as pursers.

1951 - 1952—KOREAN WAR YEARS

In 1951 Central went to war. We assigned three leased C-46s and two DC-3's to the Air Force for the movement of troops. I was a member of that little group of pilots based in San Antonio who made Central Airlines planes a common sight on every airport in the United States. With double crews, we averaged two hundred hours per month in the air, and coast to coast shuttles were routine with our pilots.

DECEMBER 1952

The first stewardess class. Although we had used stewardesses on some of our military flights, it was late 1952 when they replaced our pursers on the line. How many of you remember the pillbox hats and the long green skirts so filled with pleats that it cost \$5 just to have them pressed?

EXPANSION

Every expansion has been a milestone. We extended our routes into Colorado and Missouri and continued to provide additional service in our original four-state area. Our fleet of DC-3's grew from 3 to 18, and the ranks of our employees continued to swell — Central Airlines was growing up.

PERMANENT CERTIFICATION

In 1954 Congress authorized permanent certification for the locals. This permanent certification was possibly the greatest single factor in the growth and expansion of not only Central but of all the other local carriers in the country. We now had status, permanency and the ability to obtain financing that had been so difficult before.

ACQUISITION OF CONVAIR EQUIPMENT

In late 1960 we signed a contract with American Airlines for six of their retiring Convair 240's. These airplanes began service in March of 1961. Our pilots began talking of things they hadn't thought of since they left the trunks to help start up a little airline. Radar, BMEP, pressurization and other half-forgotten items soon became the general subject of conversation. In July of this year DME was added and the airline became a little more sophisticated.

THE JET AGE

When Mr. Bradford announced the conversion of our Convair fleet to all turbine power, he opened up new frontiers for Central Airlines. I for one am grateful for management with the vision to plan for the future.

We are not a foundling airline any more. We are growing up.

As one who has been here since the beginning, I am mighty proud to have been a small part of its growth. I do not plan to write another article until the 25th birthday of Central. It is my earnest hope that at that time, i can write about the day we added our first pure jet. Until then, just let me say that I am very happy with the first fifteen years.

It's a good airline, let's all keep it that way.