

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MAC MYHRE

Clarence Albert “Mac” Myhre was born March 29, 1911, on a farm near Ambrose, located in the extreme northwestern part of North Dakota. Mac’s parents, John and Marie (Risser) Myhre, were both immigrants, John from Norway and Marie from Germany. They owned a small, 160-acre homestead in southern Twin Butte Township, adjacent to a homestead owned by Marie’s older sister, Anna (Risser) Shatswell.

Northwestern North Dakota was one of the last regions of the state to be settled by European immigrants, and when John and Marie first arrived in 1906, near Ambrose, this area was part of Williams County. Settlers began pouring in after the Soo Railroad arrived in 1906, and in November 1910, Williams County was cut in half, with the northern half becoming Divide County.

Since Ambrose was the largest town in the new county, with a population of 320, it was named the county seat. “In a highly contested election between Ambrose, Crosby, and Noonan, held on November 6, 1912, Crosby became the permanent county seat.”

Clarence Myhre graduated from Ambrose High School in 1929, and then began attending classes at the University of Denver. However, as the Great Depression began to grow worse, Myhre took some time off from college to work. With this money and some financial assistance from his aunt, Anna Shatswell, he was able to complete his education, earning a bachelor’s degree in commerce in 1936.

Following graduation, Myhre became assistant auditor at the historic 779 room Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs. He worked there for three years and then went to work for the national accounting firm of Haskins and Sells, which had a branch office in Wheatridge, a western suburb of Denver.

In 1941, Myhre joined Ray Wilson Incorporated as treasurer and auditor for Ray Wilson’s flight school, which operated in conjunction with the University of Colorado. Wilson was the primary flight instructor, and he taught civilians the basic fundamentals of flying.

With America’s entrance into World War II, Wilson teamed up with Maj. Frederick Bonfils, a retired Army pilot from World War I, who was also the business manager of the Denver Post. The two came up with the plan to train air cadets for the war effort, and Wilson brought Myhre into this operation to continue his work as treasurer and auditor.

Wilson and Bonfils received approval from the U.S. Army Air Force to conduct their flight school, and they opened it in October 1941 in Chickasha, Okla. The school “continued during the entire war until the Air Corps terminated the contract in 1945,” and in March 1946, Myhre and Wilson returned to Denver.

Ray Wilson Inc. “received permission from the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) to fly air mail routes” in the U.S., and three months later, the name of the company was changed to Monarch Air Lines. On Nov. 26, the new airline company began passenger service with the use of four war surplus DC-3 airplanes that they had purchased.

Starting a new passenger airline is a very difficult, expensive and risky endeavor. It requires identifying destination routes, with logical stops along the way; getting authorization from the CAB to carry commercial passengers; creating a new infrastructure with the purchase of land and airplanes, along with construction of buildings, and sometimes terminals and runways; and hiring qualified pilots and other support staff.

Also, during the entire process, you don't want to be losing money. Unfortunately, Monarch was losing about \$15,000 a month, despite the fact that "they were carrying more freight than any other airline" in the Rocky Mountains area. In desperation, Wilson negotiated with Hal S. Darr, a banker and radio station owner in Chicago, to finance Monarch. Darr assumed 51% of the ownership of the company, becoming president of Monarch, and he soon began firing much of the management, but he retained Myhre.

Over the next two years, the company added daily flights from Denver "to Albuquerque, New Mexico; Salt Lake City, Utah; Billings, Montana; Casper, Wyoming; and Grand Junction, Colorado."

In 1948, Monarch began sharing some of the functions of Challenger Airlines, based out of Salt Lake City, and in December 1949, Monarch bought controlling interest in Challenger. On April 10, 1950, the CAB approved of Monarch merging with Arizona Airways, of Phoenix, and when the merger went into effect on June 1, the combined company adopted the name Frontier Airlines, with Myhre becoming executive vice president.

On April 14, 1953, Myhre replaced Darr as president of Frontier, and in 1954, he expanded the route of the airline to include western North Dakota, with stops at Bismarck, Dickinson and Williston. The expanded route also included Miles City, Glendive, Wolf Point, Sydney and Billings in Montana. "Frontier now provided air service in seven states, near or along the Rocky Mountains."

This now opened up a convenient and more affordable way for people living in western North Dakota who wanted to travel to California, because they could now take a direct flight to Denver and change airplanes for another direct flight to their California destination.

In 1959, Lewis "Bud" Maytag Jr., of the Maytag washing machine family, bought controlling interest of Frontier, and replaced Myhre. During the six years that Myhre was president of Frontier, the company expanded 79%.

Myhre was then appointed as general manager and vice president of finance for Pacific Airlines in San Francisco, a company that "was largely funded by Hollywood motion picture executives." In 1968, Pacific merged with Bonanza Airlines and West Coast Airlines to form Air West, and the next year, Howard Hughes, the former owner of Trans World Airlines, purchased the company and named it Hughes Airwest, retaining Myhre as vice president of administrative services.

Hughes died in 1975, and Myhre retired two years later. Clarence "Mac" Myhre died on Dec. 23, 1982.

(Excerpted and edited from an article at <https://www.inforum.com/lifestyle/eriksmoen-this-man-was-most-responsible-for-bringing-commercial-air-travel-to-western-north-dakota>)