

MONARCH AIRLINES

Monarch Air Lines was formed by Major F. W. Bonfils of The Denver Post family and Ray M. Wilson, who operated a Denver flying school, in 1946. At the time of the Monarch-Challenger-Arizona Airways merger, Hal S. Darr was Monarch's president and became the first chief executive of Frontier Airlines.

Monarch's inaugural run from Denver to Monte Vista, Colorado, November 27, 1946, marks the premier flight of a Frontier predecessor airline . . . its first route.

The carrier's five DC-3s flew into Rocky Mountain West territory that heretofore was not served by scheduled airlines. The airline scheduled its flights into remote communities to include daily delivery of The Denver Post and fresh flowers. DC-3s were used by all three of Frontier Airlines' predecessor airlines, Arizona, Challenger and Monarch, when they started out in the late forties

The lack of airways navigational facilities worked against pioneering air carriers in the forties. Originally, there were no federal airways between most cities on route. Planes therefore could only operate "Day VFR" and not at night or when weather en route did not permit visual contact with the ground. To enable planes to operate after dark and during adverse weather conditions, Monarch's Clyde Longhart invented an electrical navigation system he called "H" markers (for homing) that were installed along the routes. Electricity in rural areas was then supplied by private firms.

Vern A. Carlson, Frontier's Vice President Public Affairs, and a 25-year man, was the steward on Monarch Air Lines' inaugural flight. He remembers how the prevailing conditions sometimes caused havoc. "We had installed one of our 'H' markers down at Chama, New Mexico, which worked fine, till one day when we had a plane flying over around 6 p.m., our homing device quit." tells Carlson. "This happened every evening for almost two weeks before we found out the man who operated the electrical company had been cutting us off so the farmers could have the electricity to run their milking machines," Carlson recalls with a chuckle.

A clipping from the Denver Post dated Wednesday, November 27, 1946, reads as follows:

"The 'go-ahead' for Monarch Airlines' Denver-Durango daily passenger and air freight service was received here from Washington, D.C., Tuesday and the first of the new line's Douglas transports will leave Stapleton airfield at 8:34 AM, Wednesday, according to F. W. Bonfils and Ray M. Wilson, founders of Monarch, who received Civil Aeronautics Administration approval for the feeder service which eventually will link major localities in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah."

The story went on to say the airline's Denver - Durango run included ten-minute stopovers at Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Canon City and Monte Vista-Alamosa along the route each way.

But, according to Frontier 25-year veterans Vern A. Carlson and Arthur Ashworth, who were aboard that inaugural flight, they never made it all the way to Durango that day.

"We couldn't land at Canon City or Durango that day because the runways were too muddy," remembers Ashworth. "A snowstorm that dumped about 40 inches was melting, and back then the runways were dirt. Other than that, the weather was beautiful, and the flight was rather uneventful."

The converted military DC-3 used for the first flight was hardly filled. "There was one lone passenger—a soldier, some training stewards, several FAA inspectors, myself and the crew, which consisted of Captain Art Ashworth and Co-Pilot Ray Harvey," recalls Carlson, who was the ship's steward that day.

-Excerpted from article "Frontier's 25-Year History" in the Nov 1971 Frontier News