

Northern Consolidated One of Alaska's Pioneer Air Carriers

One of Alaska's farthest reaching air carriers is Northern Consolidated Airlines, the product of the merger of four bush airlines which had earned their "Grandfather Certificates", issued by the Civil Aeronautics Board, as the result of pioneering in aerial transportation in the vast reaches of Alaska.

The scope of Northern Consolidated's far-flung operations cover an area roughly the size of the state of Texas, with no railroad or highway system, completely dependent upon air service for its year-round transportation needs.

Northern Consolidated's humble beginning may be traced back to Harold Gillam's flying exploits of the late 20's and early 30's. Gillam operated the Gillam Airways, whose Fairbanks-Bethel route subsequently became a part of the Northern Consolidated system, out of Cordova into the Copper river area as far back as 1930 and 1931.

First Service

It was not until 1935 that the first service was rendered by Bert Ruoff of the Bristol Bay Air Service and the Ray Petersen Flying Service into the area now served by Northern Consolidated Airlines. Ruoff operated from Anchorage to the Bristol Bay area. Petersen operated from Bethel and the Goodnews Bay area into Anchorage.

In 1927, Harold Gillam was the successful bidder for the Star Route Mail Contract between Fairbanks and Bethel, serving intermediate points, including McGrath, along the Kuskokwim river.

The Fairbanks-McGrath portion of this route was pioneered by Carl Ben Eielson under an experimental airmail contract let by the post office department in 1924. These historic flights are a treasured tradition of the post office department in its pioneering of the airmail service in America.

In 1936 James D. Dodson organized the Jim Dodson Flying Service operating from Fairbanks westward to McGrath, the gold mining camp of Flat in the Iditarod district, and Nolato on the Yukon.

Airlines Established

By the time World War II came to Alaska, the four small airlines had firmly established themselves in the areas they served and, rare in the annals of aviation, were operating profitably without subsidy. The only mail carrier in the group was Gillam Airways, operating under service rates negotiated directly with the post office department. World War II brought little

change in the basic pattern of service offered, although Harold Gillam and Bert Ruoff, were retained by the contractor charged with the responsibility of quickly building up an airport network for the defense of Alaska. These two men aided in this project, pushing airports through from the tip of the Aleutians through Western Alaska as far north as Nome. Gillam was killed near Ketchikan in 1943 in the service of this company during an instrument operation, which he had pioneered in Alaska.

The Gillam mail service continued under the able direction of Tom Appleton, an early-day affiliate of Harold Gillam. Jim Dodson and Ray Petersen continued their services, maintaining the basic lifeline between the areas they served and the railbelt during the war years. All of the airlines operated under AA-1 priority ratings, serving both the civilian and military needs. During this period 75% of the service given by the Ray Petersen Flying Service, alone, was for the military.

Radio In Use

Prior to 1939 all aircraft were of single engine types of various vintage operating without radio or the niceties enjoyed today. By 1939 all of the operators had managed to install two-way radio in their airplanes, with which they maintained contact with their ground stations, scattered at strategic villages throughout their areas.

By 1945 it became apparent that as a result of the advent of radio aids to navigation and the availability of instrument type aircraft, that the economy of air service in Alaska was due to change.

As a result, six years before the Civil Aeronautics Board recognized the need for mergers, the four carriers involved including Northern Airways, who had purchased the mail certificate from the Gillam estate; two local non-scheduled services, Walatka Air Service, operating in the Bristol Bay area, and Northern Air Service, a contractor for the Coast and Geodetic Survey, planned the consolidation in its present form—bringing a total of six lines into the merger.

Ray Petersen, who had spark-plugged the entire deal was elected general manager of the airlines.

Today a total of 23 aircraft, which includes DC-3's, a Consolidated PBV, and twin and single-engine bush aircraft are included in the fleet of aircraft operated by NCA.

Mail is carried on all routes except Anchorage-Bristol Bay. The

Church Notes

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THE SALVATION ARMY

412 Fifth Avenue

Lieut. Arthur Smith, Commanding Officer

SUNDAY

10:00 a.m.—Sunday School.
11:00 a.m.—Holiness Meeting.
5:00 p.m.—Coffee hour.
5:30 p.m.—Vesper service.

WEDNESDAY

8:00 p.m.—Prayer meeting and Bible Study.

SATURDAY

10:00 p.m.—Street Service.
Red Shield Service Center open daily from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.

ST. MATTHEW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Rev. Gordon T. Charlton, Rector
1035 First Ave.

SUNDAY

8:00 a.m.—Holy Communion.
11:00 a.m.—Holy Communion and sermon on the first Sunday of the month. Morning prayer and sermon on other Sundays.
11:00 a.m.—Church school.
7:00 p.m.—Evening prayer.

UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

College, Alaska

(At the foot of University Hill)

THE REV. THOMAS J. TWEEDIE, Minister

SUNDAY

9:45 a.m.—Sunday School for all ages.
10 a.m.—Adult class in chapel.
11:00 a.m.—Morning worship.
(Nursery provided for small tots in Ed. unit during morning worship.)
REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY and it will keep you holy. Come and worship God this day.

airline carried 190,971 ton miles of all classes in 1952. Although the area served embraces a population of less than 8,000 people, almost 20,000 passengers were carried in 1952, as well as 361,296 ton miles of excess baggage, express and freight. Compare with this the 1948 figures of 9,500 passengers, 52,570 ton miles of mail and 127,633 ton miles of express and baggage. The NCA routes total 3,022 miles, distributed among 57 mail stops and about 50 other points serviced in western Alaska.

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