

PROFILE OF TWA PILOT

LEE FLANAGIN

(COMPILED FROM PUBLISHED SOURCES)



LEE FLANAGIN lights up a 40-cent cigar as a token of his 40 years with TWA and the honor of being the first TWA employee to reach that milestone. At his service are Vin Stott (left), Western region vice president of transportation, and Tom Poole, system director of flight dispatch. Displayed on the pillow is the new 40 year pin, set with a diamond and eight sapphires. (caption 1)

Company Milestone

Lee Flanagin is Honored For 40 Years of Service.

Los Angeles--TWA's most senior employee, Western region manager of flight dispatch Lee Flanagin, was feted at a dinner in his honor Feb 22 reflecting the company's pride and appreciation for his 40 years of service.

Most of his friends from Los Angeles and elsewhere in the system were present to honor the "Little Chief" who started his career as a pilot in 1926.

First employed in February 1926 by Aero Corporation and Standard Airlines, one of TWA's parent companies, he piloted single engine Fokker Universals when Standard began operations between Los Angeles, Tucson and Phoenix in early 1927.

His early flight instruction with Aero Corporation was arranged on the basis of one hour of air time per week in return for working without direct pay.²

The 34-year veteran of TWA and its earlier founding companies soloed in 1926 after only 12 hours flight instruction. "In those days , if you didn't get the knack of flying after 12 hours in

*the air your flight instructor would recommend a career closer to the earth ...like farming."*¹

*The most senior member of the TWA family has flown them all: the early Fokker series, the Ford Tri-Motor, the DC-2, and the DC-3. **He was on hand for introduction of the Boeing Stratoliner** in 1939--aviation's first pressurized and first four-engine transport.*¹

Lee later was promoted to chief flying instructor for Aero and was well-launched on a flying career the led to co-piloting the old "Tin Goose" Ford Tri-Motors. Standard, Western Air Express, Maddux, and Transcontinental Air Transport merged in 1930 to become Transcontinental and Western Air Inc.²

The 1928 National Air Races were held in September at Los Angeles' Mines Field (site of LAX today). Aero Corp had their team competing. Flying an Eaglerock, Frye placed 3rd in the Class A race from SFO to LAX. Also flying Eaglerocks in the Class B event from Oakland to LAX, Flanagin was 7th and Richter 8th. Flanagin was 2nd in the Dead Stick Landing contest.

In the team relay event around a 40 mile closed course, Aero Corp's team won (Frye, Richter, Flanagin J. C. Charles and Harvey Bolton).

Other entertainment was orchestrated by Lee Flanagin and Burrell Smith as they performed a variety of air show maneuvers for the excited audience.⁵

*In early 1928 Richter was promoted to VP and Treasurer. Lee Willey changed jobs and flew the airline; **Flanagin became Chief Instructor for the school***⁶

*Once Flanagin flew a Tri-Motor with three passengers between New Mexico and California at unbelievable speeds for those times. "We climbed to 16,000 feet and picked up a tail wind of 180 miles per hour... When we landed... we computed our airspeed. It was 225 miles per hour."*¹

*Early in 1930, WAE bought the Aero Corporation of California to gain its subsidiary, Standard Air Lines, in hopes of snaring the southern transcontinental mail route. With the purchase of the carrier came pilots like Jack Frye, who would in time become head of TWA, and other notable flyers such as Paul Richter, Walt Hamilton, and Lee Flanagin.*⁴

In 1932 Lee Flanagin became TWA chief flight dispatcher in Kansas City. **He remained there until the beginning of World War II when he became chief of TWA's Army cargo contract operation.**

"Flanagin went to Kansas City to establish for TWA the industry's first system of flight dispatch. Six years later, Civil Air Regulations were passed requiring all airlines to have such flight dispatch systems."

During World War II, Flanagin headed the Domestic Air Transport Command for TWA

*channeling planes needed to haul cargoes and men in the country.*¹

*During the war Lee had the distinction of operating an airline within an airline when he headed up (as assistant operations manager) TWA's air cargo contract with the army*³

*. "You might look back and call what we had then the Golden Days," said Lee. We never were sure that aviation would be around long enough to get into the 'years' category. We just flew 'em day to day."*²

One of Flanagan's acquaintances in the early days was Charles A. Lindbergh, who came to California to get advice on his proposed trans-Atlantic flight. "A lot of us thought the idea sounded pretty silly at the time," Flanagan recalled. "He was a young man who had made up his mind that he was going to fly the Atlantic and he did."

During the course of his career, Flanagan also came to know many of the greats in aviation, including Wiley Post and Amelia Earhart.³



TWA Constellation passenger plane at La Guardia Field in New York Feb 3, 1946 after a record-breaking transcontinental flight from Burbank in seven hours 27 minutes 48 seconds. Pilot Jack Frye, president of TWA and Co-Pilot Lee Flanagan sit at controls of the plane.⁵



.Shown left to right, Capt. Paul Frederickson, Paul Henry, Capt Lee Flanagan, Mr. and Mrs. Jack Frye, and Joseph E. Casey. On stairs, left to right, TWA flight hostesses, Rita P. Crooks and Dorraine Strole.⁵

¹TWA Skyliner, July 1960.

²TWA Skyliner, March 14, 1966

³Torrance Herald March 7 1957

⁴*Air Line Pilot* Sept 2001

⁵sedonalegendhelenfrye.com/1929.html

⁶paulrichtertwalegend.com

