



# Reflections

*Dedicated to preserving the history of a great airline.*

## Payday 1932: Modest, Indeed, by Today's Standards, Some Northwest Depression-Era Salaries Actually Weren't Too Bad

by Bob Johnson

Retired Northwest Captain Joe Kimm is 100 years old. (And he still drives his car). His distinguished Northwest Airlines career began in June, 1929 when he signed on as a steward aboard the airline's huge new Ford Tri-Motors.

Joe was a fast learner. He soon noticed he did all the work -- taking tickets, loading baggage, boarding passengers, distributing box lunches, signing for and loading and unloading the mail and cleaning up after sick passengers. One hundred and thirty hours a month for \$78. Meanwhile the pilots took all the bows and made the big bucks.



'Snakes' Bouvette towed Joe Kimm's airplane with a team of horses at Pembina, N.D. in January, 1936.



Northwest Airways Co-pilot  
Joe Kimm October, 1930

"I figured I had the wrong job," Joe said recently. "Northwest was then operating a flying school, too, so I managed some lessons and joined them." Just in time for the Great Depression.

"You were indeed lucky to have a job with Northwest Airways, or with any airline, during the Great Depression," Joe says. (Northwest Airways until 1934.) "It was steady work and you made good money, or at least enough to keep food on the table. We got paid by check once a month and I never heard of a Northwest check bouncing."

On display at the Northwest Airlines History Centre is a two-page document titled "Northwest Airways, Inc. -- Organization, July 1932 -- Personnel Assignments and Monthly Salaries." For all 135 employees.

Northwest's Founder, Vice President and General Manager Col. Lewis H. Brittin, topped the list at \$1,000 a month. The early-day pilots who commanded Northwest's then about 24-plane fleet (1) did all right for themselves, too.

Operations Manager Walter Bullock, (2) Chief Pilot Fred Wittemore and Ford Pilot M.F. Cole each pocketed \$775 monthly. Chicago Pilots J. F. Malone, Leon S. "Deke" DeLong and Mal Freeburg got \$600 a month. Fargo-based Pilots Carl Leuthi and A.W. Straith, \$450 a month and

*Continued on page 3*

## NWAHC Celebrates its 10th Anniversary This Year

by Pete Patzke, Founder



The first discussion, that I recall, of establishing an archive or museum relating to Northwest Airlines was in the old University Avenue GO about sixty years ago. Back then there were thoughts that memories of the tremendous efforts of the company and its employees may fade away. And what memories there were and would be.

Opening and operating St. Paul and Vandalia, Ohio Modification Centers. Establishing and maintaining air routes through Canada, Alaska and the Aleutian Islands. Introduction of the Great Circle flights to war-torn Japan, China and the Philippines. The debacle of the Martin 2-0-2. The Korean Airlift.

Great idea but neither space nor money could be found for a museum.

Over the years the idea was discussed many times but always the same problems: space and money. And over those years many more memories accumulated. The Boeing Stratocruiser fleet, horribly expensive to operate but loved by the traveling public. Newer aircraft DC-6, DC-7, L-1049 Super Constellation, entering the jet age with the L-188 Electra, the true jet DC-8, B-707, B-727 and capped with the mighty B-747.

And then deregulation, the Republic merger and things would never be the same.

It has been ten years since the day in 2002 when Tom Rostkoski, Dru Dunwoody and I greeted Jeanette Glick as the first visitor to the History Centre museum. What a decade it has been! The Delta merger and who would have believed the end of the Northwest name with the airways devoid of the Red Tails. The loss of some great names like Nyrop, Lapensky, Carr and so many others.

Thanks to the efforts of so many, in particular Paul Parish and the Wings Credit Union Directors who provided the space and the many, many friends who have donated so many artifacts, memories, their time and their wealth that made NWA History Centre possible and a living creature. ➔

### **Save These Dates!**

**February 25, 2012**

**NWAHC Volunteer Appreciation Party**

---

**April 21, 2012**

**Coffee & Conversation: Wisconsin Central and North Central Airlines**

*Did you work for either of these airlines? If so, bring yourselves, your stories and your photographs to this event. R.S.V.P. Mary Fryer at 651-699-8833 or Email [mcfryer@q.com](mailto:mcfryer@q.com)*

**Future Coffee & Conversation 2012 events:**

***The Mod Center*** in June, and ***Highjacked!*** in September

---

**October 20, 2012**

**Gala NWAHC 10th Anniversary Party**

---

**Payday 1932** *Continued from page 1*

Milwaukee-based Green Bay run Pilots, C. S. Chamberlain and R.W. Pears, \$400. (3) Co-pilots, including Joe Kimm, received \$150 a month.

Salaries leveled off somewhat after the pilots, although most constituted a liveable wage in those desperate, hardscrabble days. In the Ship Department, nationally-known Jim LaMont, chief mechanic, earned \$300 a month. (4) Lou Koerner, his assistant, drew \$225. Top paid mechanics were Tom Hillis and John Rosbach at \$165. (Hillis later became a Northwest pilot.)

Chief Mechanic A.J. Mufford led the Motor Department payroll at \$300. Other salaries in this unit were a bit higher than opposite numbers in the Ship Department. At the bottom of the list was Mufford's clerk-steno, Leonard S. Holstad, at \$80. (5)

Manager C. E. Chadwick took home the largest paycheck issued to the Traffic (Sales) department, \$300. His then-assistant, Camille "Rosie" Stein, received \$125. (6) What today would be called "sales reps" in various Northwest locations received from \$75 to \$125 monthly.

In all, 130 of Northwest's 135 employees were paid \$23,957 that long-ago July. We couldn't determine the wages of five Chicago night-run pilots -- R. L. Smith, M.O. Fried, A.R. Mensing, M.E. Rueschenberg and A.W. Olson (7) - because they were paid on a mileage basis.

So Col. Lewis H. Brittin topped Northwest's payroll at \$1,000 a month (and deservedly so, in our opinion). And who was the lowest-paid Northwest employee?

She was Leslie Low, a maid who worked for Supt. Theodore Anderson and do-everything boss Charles "Snakes" Bouvette at Northwest's remote way-stop, Pembina, N.D. Leslie was paid \$1 a day. →

*Ed note: The entire July, 1932 payroll roster is on display at the NWA History Centre, on a ceiling support just beyond and to the left of the entryway merchandise counter. How much would a 1932 dollar be worth today? We like to hear from our readers. Let us know! editor@nwahistory.org*

**See Related Stories on page 6:**

*Pembina Where?*

*Joe Kimm Recalls His Pilot Training*

**Notes for Payday 1932 Story:**

1. *Northwest's fleet in July, 1932 consisted of about 24 planes: three bi-winged Wacos, possibly four "probably Wacos" - it is not certain when some of the "probables" left the fleet.; three Ford 5-AT Tri-Motors; nine all metal Hamilton H-47s; one Sikorsky S-38 amphibian; and four Travelaire A-600-A's.*
2. *Capt. Walter Bullock was a member of the "Early Birds" club, limited to those who soloed in balloons or airplanes before Dec. 17, 1916. At one time he was the youngest licensed pilot in the United States. He became a Northwest legend.*
3. *From 1928 to 1933 Northwest Airways served Green Bay, Wisconsin on its "Fox River Valley" airmail route from Milwaukee via Appleton, Neenah-Menasha, Oshkosh and Fond du Lac.*
4. *Jim LaMont worked with Glen Curtiss in developing flyable planes during the first decade of the 20th century. He was chief mechanic for Ruth Law, the famous female stunt aviatrix of the 1920s. For more on LaMont, see the chapter A Testimonial for Big Jim in the book "Voices from the Sky - Little-Known and Long-Forgotten Stories About Northwest Airlines' Earlier Years," available at the NWAHC gift shop.*
5. *Clerk-Steno Leonard S. Holstad went on to become treasurer of Northwest Airlines. He left Northwest in the mid-1950s for RCA in New York.*
6. *Rosie Stein joined Northwest as Col. Lewis H. Brittin's assistant in 1926. She eventually became a member of Northwest's Board of Directors. She is generally credited as being the first woman executive in commercial aviation.*
7. *In 1951 Capt. Allan W. Olson was chief pilot for TPA-Aloha Airlines, Honolulu. TPA-Aloha was then competing for inter-island traffic with entrenched Hawaiian Airlines. Olson died in 1960.*

★ Wayne Snyder - Gold Star Volunteer! ★

In every volunteer organization, a few dedicated folks are the backbone. Wayne Snyder is one of the NWAHC stalwarts who is always up to the challenge.

Wayne first answered the call in 2004. On his first visit to the museum, he found John Peterson, who was NWA Assistant District Manager (ADM) when Wayne was on third shift on the ramp. “John encouraged me to volunteer. I started coming in a couple of times a month. After I’d been there awhile, John asked me to take over depositing the receipts. I accepted.

“It was around this time I met Al Carriveau, retired NWA Director of Food Services and who, along with John, was putting in lots of hours at the NWAHC. Both Al and John wanted to scale back a bit and asked me to assume some of their duties, which I did. Soon I was asked to join the Board of Directors and became the V.P. of Operations. John and Al have been a big help to me in getting a handle on the VP job. We have had some great times talking about the NWAHC and Northwest Airlines.

“I suppose that one of the biggest highlights of my time at the NWAHC was giving former NWA president and C.E.O. Donald Nyrop, and two of his friends, a private guided tour of the Centre. Lunch at the Minikahda Club as Mr. Nyrop’s guest put a nice finish to the day.

“The meet and greet activity at the Centre is one of the most interesting things I find to do there. The many new people I meet and new stories I hear make it very rewarding.”

*At right, Wayne (second from left) tells museum guests about the Lowrey organ NWA installed on one of its Boeing Stratocruisers in 1959. Organists played passenger requests on flights between New York and MSP. He shows these visitors a book filled with newspaper clippings from all over the world, written about this unique airborne “piano bar.”*



**“I started working for NWA** on Jan. 12, 1959 in the electric shop in St. Paul, which moved to its new location at MSP in 1960. Over the next several months a flight engineers strike made it necessary for me to be moved several times, including aircraft overhaul back in St. Paul, then back to MSP to the DC-7 simulator shift in a hangar on 34th Avenue. I was laid off for four months, then was called back to hangar two, shift three, as a radio/electrical mechanic, I became the radio crew chief until that position was eliminated, then A/P crew chief as I had my airframe and power plant license by this time. I worked third shift at the red concourse at the terminal for 14 of the 17 years I was on third shift. After one of the 1980s strikes I was bumped out of that position and into a mechanics position in the radio shop on shift one. During this time I started an electronic repair business at home. I specialized in electronic timing machines, cleaning machines and the ultrasonic cleaners used by watchmakers. I also repaired TV sets for friends.”



Pictured with the radio shop crew, Wayne Snyder is in the second row, third from left.

Meanwhile, from the radio shop at NWA Wayne moved to a radio mechanics position in hangar two, shift one. Then in 1985 he was asked to take a temporary assignment in maintenance control (MC) while the controllers attended 757 school at Boeing, in Seattle. “After I had worked in MC for six months, LeRoy Shaw retired as a controller. I bid and was awarded his position at MC where I stayed three and a half years. Just after NWA took delivery of the 747-400 aircraft, my job classification changed to maintenance operations engineer. I stayed in this position under various titles until I retired in 2003.

*Continued on page 5*

**Wayne Snyder** *continued from page 4*

"My first test hop ranks as one of my most memorable events while a mechanic. The autopilot (A/P) on a B-720 had been written up many times over a two-week period. Many of us worked on it to no avail. I was selected to go on a test hop to troubleshoot it in the air. Bob Hinkle, the electronic instructor, also went along and we took several voltage readings and found nothing wrong, but the A/P still didn't work. While in the tunnel leading to the cockpit I just happened to notice that a component of the A/P was mounted reversed from its normal position. I corrected the installation and the A/P worked normally. The next morning the word spread quickly that I, a rather young mechanic, had fixed this vexing problem. For this I was tagged with a rather uncomplimentary nickname by some of the 'old guys' in the hangar. NO, it wasn't 'Snidley Whiplash,' which came later when I became a crew chief. One person in the universe still calls me that when we meet - all in fun.

"The delivery of a 757-200 to Bismarck stands out because I suffered two cracked ribs while we were on approach to Bismarck for a touch and go. Six of us were standing in the rear galley when we were thrown to the ceiling twice. Ouch! On delivery flights we were allowed to fly the airplane, and that was always fun.



Wayne Snyder occupies the right seat on a 757-200 flights we were allowed to fly the airplane, and that was always fun.

**In his "spare" time**, Wayne was one of the original firemen at Bloomington Fire Station Number 4 when it opened in 1971 and remained a volunteer fireman for 20 years. He was active in Boy Scouts as a Cub Scout leader, WEBELOS leader, and assistant scout master, all for troop 479. "Both of my sons achieved the rank of Eagle Scout, so that was a real treat for me."

Being active in his church is important to Wayne. He is a busy HAM radio operator, involved with community emergency service activities. He belongs to the Edina Model Yacht Club (EMYC) and has enjoyed building and running several radio controlled boats. He sails a one-meter sailboat at Centennial Lakes in Edina, and he is Commodore of the EMYC this year.

**Wayne and Joy** have been married for 51 years and have lived in their Bloomington home for 50 years. They have four children and 14 grandkids, the best and smartest in the world, of course! Both Joy and Wayne enjoy genealogy, travel, and are avid readers. They are both officers in a small Christian non-profit organization.

They say the busiest people get the most done. Wayne epitomizes that statement. The NWAHC is grateful for Wayne's commitment and tireless efforts. ➔

**Publisher**

**NWA History Centre**  
**8101 34th Avenue South**  
**Bloomington, MN 55425**  
**952-698-4478**

[www.nwahistory.org](http://www.nwahistory.org)

**Board of Directors**

Bruce Kitt, President  
 Pete Patzke, Treasurer  
 Jerry Nielsen, V.P. Administration  
 Wayne Snyder, V.P. Operations  
 Mary Fryer, Secretary  
 Al Carriveau, Director  
 Dru Dunwoody, Director  
 Jay Harrington, Director  
 Bob Johnson, Director  
 Fay Kulenkamp, Director  
 Bill Marchessault, Director  
 John Peterson, Director  
 Susan Rostkoski, Director  
 Anne Kerr, Editor  
 Joan Lee, Assistant Editor

**NWA History Center Hours**

**Monday through Friday**  
**11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

**Saturdays**  
**9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.**

**VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

**Put your talent to work for the NWA History Centre!**

**Hosts/Hostesses needed during museum hours.**

**Call Wayne Snyder 952-698-4478**

**Story and photograph submissions for the newsletter.**

**Call Anne Kerr 612-865-5377**

**Help with many H.C. projects**  
**Call Bruce Kitt 952-698-4478**

## Pembina - Where?

### How a Small N.D. Town Became Important to NWA

Pembina is a little town with a current population of about 800 souls in the extreme northeast corner of North Dakota, virtually on the borders of Minnesota and Manitoba. In the early 1930s it had an importance for Northwest far greater than its size.

To backtrack, Northwest Airways went international long before its Orient service began on July 15, 1947. It became an international airline (albeit temporarily) Feb. 1, 1928, when it inaugurated weekly service from Minneapolis-St. Paul to Winnipeg, Manitoba, via Fargo.

Service lasted about three months. It wasn't profitable, and the Canadian government was unhappy about a U.S. airline infringing its border.

A satisfactory deal was negotiated three years later. On Feb. 2, 1931, Northwest began flying the mail to Pembina where it was transferred to Western Canada Airlines for the remainder of the 67-mile trip to Winnipeg.

So Pembina gained a spot on the Northwest map. It remained there most of the time until Oct. 10, 1935, when Northwest won approval for through flights to the Manitoba capital, a service maintained to this day.

Interestingly, Northwest was forced to abandon its Pembina service from April through December, 1934, when the Federal government cancelled the airline's Chicago-Twin Cities-Fargo-Pembina route authority and gave it to Hanford Tri-State Airlines.

This left Northwest with only its Fargo to Seattle route, putting the airline in the unenviable position of maintaining its headquarters and overhaul base 250 miles from Fargo, in St. Paul. Fortunately, Northwest management was successful in buying back the route from Hanford late in the year. (But that's another story.)

For more than four years, little Pembina was important far beyond its size to Northwest's airmail operation, a fact that virtually has been lost in the churn of airline history. ➔

## A Historical Sidebar From Capt. Joe Kimm

*Ed. Note: Since Joe is quoted at length in the front page main story, we sent him a pre-publication copy for review. Here he adds some interesting facts about Northwest's early flight school and how he earned his wings.*

Your story brings back so many memories of my early days with Northwest Airways. Forgive me for interfering, but I do believe more detail about Northwest's Flight School is historically more interesting than the story reveals.

Actually, Northwest Airways was originally a flight school - one of the very early ones. However, in 1926 they bid on the federal airmail contract. Upon receiving the contract, they abandoned the flight school, but kept the airplanes.

Lo, along about 1929 I show up as a Flight Steward. It took me some time to get into the job. Someplace along the way, as your story says, I found that I really had the wrong job - I was doing all the work and getting \$78 a month, while the Captain did nothing further than fly the plane, and he got \$700 a month! To add to my problems, I had no money to spend - just \$15 a month left from my salary. You might say I was dead broke.

But I kept looking at those two old Flight School Waco 10's, tied up by the ramp, finally deciding that could be a way out of my problems. And so I ended up going in to Rosie Stein's office saying, "I'd like to borrow one of those Wacos out there." She was very silent for a moment, literally shocked, then she said "You'll have to pay for the gas and oil." That was no problem in my mind as gasoline was only nine cents a gallon.

Now that I had an airplane, I went to Chad Smith, one of our early captains, and said, "Chad, I have an airplane. Will you teach me to fly?" A bit of a long pause, then "Sure, Joe, I can do that!" He soloed me after six hours of training and I was on my way. I built up my time, received my rating from the Department of Commerce just two months ahead of the government's decision to require two pilots on aircraft weighing 12,500 pounds or more, meaning the Ford Tri-Motor. Obviously the Lord had me in His pocket. I would never have had a career in aviation if I had not taken that step. ➔

To the editor: Enclosed is what Stan Fukai had written to read at "Orient Day," Aug. 6, 2011, at the NWAHC. Before Stan's plane left that evening I took him out for supper. It was then he showed me what he had planned to share at the event, but for whatever reason, elected not to. I asked him if he would allow his recollections to be published in the *Reflections* newsletter. He agreed. **Shirley Huskins**

*Ed: Thank you, Shirley and Stan. We are happy to publish Stan's remarkable story.*

## Stan Fukai Recalls NWA Career With Much Gratitude

I started working for NWA on Nov. 6, 1947 at Haneda Airport in Tokyo. How did I get there? It's quite a story. My brothers and sister were born in Salem, Ore. where my parents had leased a farm in suburban Brooks, which did well, I think. But in 1937, instead of renewing the lease, my father decided we should go back to Japan where we kids could receive some Japanese education. In the U.S. at that time, the Japanese couldn't purchase real estate, although some families bought land using a son's name, because they were citizens by birth. I remember tears flowing when I said good-bye to my cousins and friends on the Seattle dock on Nov. 30, 1937, wondering if we would ever return to Salem. I was 12, Father was 40, Mother was 32. None of us wanted to leave our home and school.

Once in Japan, we were placed in schools in lower grades, since we did not know the language well. After three years I was in the first year of high school, two years behind the normal class for my age. On Dec. 8, 1941 (Dec. 7 in Japan) as I was about to ride my bike to school, the radio news announced that Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor and Japan was at war with the U.S. My father predicted that we would not be returning home for a while. For whatever reason, in 1938 Father had taken us to the U.S. Consulate in Kobe to register his kids as U.S. citizens residing in a foreign country. I did not know this was a common practice, but my father did. It no doubt helped us return to America at a much later date. Meanwhile, we struggled throughout the war, Father trying different businesses to earn a living, since a monthly bank remittance from the U.S. had ceased. Our family endured many hardships, too many to recount here. After the war my sister died of typhoid fever, having cared for my mother, a carrier of the disease who eventually recovered. In 1943 my youngest brother was born, a Japanese citizen by birth, who later encountered some difficulties entering the U.S.



**Meet NWA Orient Route Pioneers** August 6, 2011

*l-r: Debby Huskins, Ken Bauman, Norm Midtbun, Shirley Huskins, George Hamernick, Stanley Fukai*

Father found work with the occupation forces, as did I, while my siblings continued in school. Perhaps it isn't difficult to imagine that extended warfare causes many shortages, especially in a country like Japan where most major industrial material is imported. By the end of the war, everyone was on a starvation diet and everything was rationed, a situation that continued into the early '50s. In the summer of '47 I heard that two U.S. airlines flying to Japan would need interpreters or other help so in October I went to Tokyo to apply as a ticket agent for NWA. I rode the NWA bus to Haneda where I was interviewed by the Station Manager, Mr. C. A. Schole. His assistant explained my duties. I was given a few days to relocate from the countryside, and I started working for Northwest on Nov. 6, 1947.

Along with two agents from MSP training us, I was one of the six or seven Transportation Agents at Haneda. We checked in passengers and baggage while equipment servicemen took the carts, mail, airfreight and baggage to the DC-4s and loaded them in the cargo compartments. The crew consisted of a Captain, First Officer, Navigator, Radio Operator, Engineer, Purser and two Stewardesses and occasionally, a supernumerary or

*Continued on page 8*

**Stan Fukai** *Continued from page 7*

extra crew member. Some days I was in operations working on weight and balance, some days at the ticket counter, some days in freight and mail. But we would always type up all the manifests.

Management must have realized that Japan was a war-beaten, starving country, with little food or clothing. At Christmas, a shopping bag with canned goods and other foods was given to each employee. I shared mine with the family I lived with, and it was greatly appreciated. When we were

*"I believe I have a singular distinction: I may be the only living NWA retiree who had three clock numbers during my working years with the same company. When Republic and NWA merged in the mid '80s, we added a zero or a one ahead of our original numbers, which means there are many people who did have two employee numbers with NWA. The employees in the Orient used the same system, but Japan employees added a 3 ahead of the numbers and other numbers for other Orient countries. Once I returned to the U.S. payroll, my 3 was dropped. So I am one of the few who did have three ID numbers."*

married in 1949 my wife was overjoyed with the Christmas bag that NWA provided. We even had a little party. Soon after I started, Mr. Schule called the flight kitchen to prepare sandwiches for the field employees. That was a big help for the workers.

Those who know me know that I love to fish, starting as a boy fishing with my father. On some of the DC-4 flights from Anchorage and Shemya, crew members would go salmon fishing during their layovers and put a box of the fish they caught in a cargo compartment for the NWA airport employees. They were silver or pink salmon, five or 10 pounds, but to us it was a big help as even fish were rationed by the slice. And these fish were fresh! Each agent and equipment serviceman would receive a whole fish, which really brightened our dinner tables. If there are flight crews that remember this, on behalf of the employees in Tokyo at that time, a much belated thank you. Those were very difficult days for all the Japanese, and we were most grateful to NWA and the flight crews. Years later, in the '60s, '70s and early '80s I would spend part of my annual vacation in Anchorage, salmon fishing and meeting Mr. Schulte again. Then the Anchorage station manager, he met

flights and greeted passengers from the lower 48. It was embarrassing to me when I first approached him and he told the flight crew coming off the plane that he hired me in Tokyo right after the war. He always offered to arrange a fishing trip for me.

Back to my story. I transferred to the stockroom in 1951, involved in shipping, receiving and importing aviation parts and supplies for NWA, especially during the Korean War. In the ensuing years, the DC-4s became DC-6s, B-377 Stratocruisers, L-1049G Super Constellations, DC-7, DC-8s, 720s, 707s and 747s. I wonder how many remember that other carriers, such as TWA, Delta and another airline also operated DC-4s to aid in the Korean War effort, with NWA flight dispatch handling all Orient operations. With the arrival of the Stratocruisers, the Shemya stop was eliminated. About the time the Boeing Stratocruiser and the Lockheed 1049G Super Constellation arrived in the Orient, Bill Huskins was assigned Director of Operations. It was during this period that flight radio operators, navigators and flight engineers were eliminated and only captains and first officers were assigned to the Tokyo base. Cabin attendants continued to work flights to Tokyo and other Orient cities, but some were also hired and trained locally to fly the Orient routes.

During and after the Korean War NWA was involved with the U.S. government as a member of the Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF) where certain aircraft and personnel could be used from the NWA fleet in the event of warfare or emergency. I was chosen to have special U.S. security clearance to store and control aircraft parts reserved for that purpose. I think this system continued even during the Gulf War.

*Ed. note: Watch for a special story on NWA Military Charters during the Iraq War coming in the next issue.*

In 1958, I requested a transfer to work in the stockroom of any station in the U.S., but found that positions were scarce and were usually filled by persons with higher seniority. Finally, I filled a position in Chicago in January, 1959. Following my transfer, and after becoming a union member, again with the help of Mr. Huskins, my wife and daughter joined me. I started attending classes after work

*Continued on page 9*



Holman Field, St. Paul, MN

## Hangar Talk . . . Stories from and about *Reflections* Readers

**Joe Kimm** celebrated his 100th birthday last year, Aug. 18, 2011. This year he will be inducted into the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame on Saturday, April 28. Check out this link to their website <http://mnaviationhalloffame.org/award.html> and sign up for tickets so Joe will have good NWA representation that evening. It is always a great event with wonderful stories told by Minnesota aviation legends.

**Joseph Lapensky** started with Northwest Airlines as an accountant in 1945 and never worked anywhere else. He worked his way up the financial side of the airline until he was made president in 1976. He became chief executive officer three years later, following Donald Nyrop.

He strengthened the airline's position in the Pacific and launched operations in northern Europe. He invested more than \$1.5 billion modernizing the fleet, and the airline still largely avoided the debt that crippled its competitors. He had a good relationship with the airline's unions and was known to acknowledge employees with thanks and small bonuses. And he did all this during the turbulence of deregulation in the 1980s. He did all this without ever seeking the limelight. Under his steady hand, Northwest became one of the most profitable and stable airlines in the world.

Joseph Lapensky died on January 12, 2012. He was 93.

### **Stan Fukai** *Continued from page 8*



Stan Fukai taxiing a B-747 from the International Terminal to the Northwest Terminal in Chicago. He wears a hat bearing NWA's logo, knit by a radio mechanic's wife. December, 1988. Stan Fukai photo

and passed exams for the FCC licenses, became a radio mechanic, and eventually passed the A&E license exams. In 1975 I became a crew chief. I retired at the end of 1988.

For the past 15 years I have volunteered as a driving instructor for the Secretary of State of Illinois and AARP, but will perhaps retire from these positions in a year or two. Since my education was rudely interrupted in August of 1945, I am now studying calculus and thermal dynamics again. Whether or not I complete these studies, I think that if I were to rest the gray matter it would expire, so I keep reading the same sentences over and over again. I rather suspect that many of you have similar experience in these matters as well.

In summary, it has been a great life for me and my family.

*Stan Fukai*

## Remembering NWA's First Accident

by Johannes R. Allert

The neighborhood known as Mounds Park overlooked the city of St. Paul, and from its vantage point provided a panoramic view of the area. The children who grew up there came from middle-class families, predominantly of German or Scandinavian stock. Situated directly below and across the Mississippi River from the heights lay the St. Paul Airport (later renamed after the great aviation pioneer Charles "Speed" Holman) where the fledgling Northwest Airways was in its third year of operation. Using the Ford Tri-Motor as its primary workhorse, the airline offered flights to and from Chicago. Until June 1929, they had logged over one million miles without a major incident.

Just two years before, Charles Lindberg had successfully completed his solo flight across the Atlantic. Commercial air travel was still perceived as a novel form of transport with attending risks and possibilities for error.

Late on the afternoon of June 24, 1929, a Northwest Airways Ford Tri-Motor, aircraft #30, s/n #NC 7416, piloted by Capt. Edwin Middagh, prepared to take off. Middagh was an experienced pilot credited with over 4,000 flying hours. Assisting him on this trip was 18-year-old Cabin Steward Robert Johnston, who had worked with Middagh several times before. Warm light winds and clear skies were forecast as the aircraft taxied down the strip and lifted off for its final leg to Minneapolis.

As the aircraft cleared the field and headed south over the heights, something went terribly wrong. Suddenly, the starboard engine cut out and stopped, followed in quick succession by the center and port engines. In a desperate attempt to save the passengers and crew, Middagh swung the aircraft back toward the field for an emergency landing. Unfortunately, his Tri-Motor had neither the power nor lift required to make it back and the aircraft came down hard, clipping two houses along the way. On impact the aircraft broke into three pieces and came to rest on the corner of what was then River Street and Mounds Boulevard. By managing to kick out one of the panel windows, Johnston was the first to emerge, unscathed, from the aircraft. After

assisting all of the passengers, he checked on the pilot, but it was too late. The pilot was knocked unconscious on impact and as the cabin steward tried to extract Middagh from the wreckage, the plane caught fire and the pilot burned to death. Although all the passengers escaped, they suffered various injuries. Four bystanders suffered burns while attempting to assist Johnston in his rescue efforts. Another resident was struck by falling debris from a porch that was clipped by the Tri-Motor's wing.



1929 Photo courtesy of The Minnesota Historical Society

Having just turned nine, Charles Henry Allert and his younger brother, William Donald, were playing with their pals near their home at 652 McLean Street when they heard the crash. He later recalled they were the first on the scene. According to news reports in the local paper, the neighborhood was quickly mobbed with onlookers. In their quest for souvenirs, the mob was reported to have trespassed through several private yards tearing down fences, trampling gardens, and taking everything from the accident scene that wasn't nailed down. Some of the youth from the area were reported to have sold scrap pieces of the aircraft to onlookers. The police, fire fighters, and a recovery team from Northwest Airlines found it virtually impossible to reach the crash site. Eventually the Minnesota National Guard was called in to assist with crowd control, but even with reinforcements things did not quiet down until after sunset.

*Continued on page 11*

**Crash** *Continued from page 10*

1929 Photo courtesy of The Minnesota Historical Society

The following day a joint investigation led by F. H. Longway, aircraft inspector for the U.S. Department of Commerce, and 'Speed' Holman, representing Northwest Airways, concluded the crash was caused by catastrophic engine failure. Their report was quickly sent to Washington, D. C.

Eighty plus years have passed since the date of that tragedy. Shortly before my father's death in 2009, I showed him the photos obtained from the Minnesota Historical Society, taken after the crash. The memory of that day always remained with my father.

Aviation historian Noel Allard later provided further insight from his interview with a NWA employee who stated they were instructed to remove all company logos from the aircraft to avoid negative publicity - a fact quite evident in the period photographs.

My curiosity about the crash finally got the best of me. Shortly after my father's passing I traveled back to his old neighborhood in an attempt to locate the area and see what it looked like today. Research, courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society, provided me with photographs and news articles of the period; however the actual site remained elusive. After several failed attempts, I prevailed upon a gentleman sitting on the porch in his front yard. As luck had it, he was the neighborhood's unofficial historian. He said the corner street listed in the period articles had been

changed from River to Wilshire Street, and he pointed me in the proper direction.

The site is now occupied by a stucco house that was built in 1939. Residents of the home came out to visit as I was taking photos and confirmed that the location was indeed the former crash site.



2009 Photos courtesy of Johannes R. Allert

Much has changed over time, yet I'm still intrigued by the old set of photos taken on that tragic day. In reviewing the pictures I contemplate the possibility that one of the young boys standing in the crowd gazing at the accident and at the photographer is my late father looking back at me. Thanks for all the memories, Dad. ✈

*Ed. note: This story was sent to the NWAHC some time ago and recently came to light. Happily, internet "white pages" produced a phone number for Johannes Allert. He answered the first call and gave his permission for us to print it. If anyone else out there has historic stories like this please send them to [editor@nwahistory.org](mailto:editor@nwahistory.org) Thank you.*

NWA History Centre



8101 34th Avenue South  
Bloomington, MN 55425

Please Note:  
The NWA History  
Centre will be closed  
Feb 11th thru 19th  
for inventory and  
cataloging new  
additions.

*NWA History Centre Reflections*

*Winter 2012*



## **‘Coffee & Conversation’ at the NWA History Centre**



***DVDs of these popular events are now available!***

*Remembering Donald Nyrop, June 11, 2011 \$20 plus \$3 S&H*

*Meet NWA Orient Route Pioneers, Aug. 6, 2011 \$20 plus \$3 S&H*

*No Rules, Rick Seireeni, Sept. 29, 2011 \$20 plus \$3 S&H*

***\* Purchase all three DVDs for just \$49 plus \$3 S&H \****

***Stop at the NWA History Centre Gift Shop to purchase your copies or mail your check  
to Mary Fryer, NWAHC, 8101 34th Avenue South, Bloomington MN 55425***

---

***\*Coffee & Conversation: Wisconsin Central and North Central coming April 21, 2012\*  
R.S.V.P to Mary Fryer at 651-699-8833 or Email [mcfryer@q.com](mailto:mcfryer@q.com)***