



# Reflections

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

Fargo 'Victimized' More Than 60 Years Ago . . .

## Northwest's San Diego - MSP Overflight Was Not Its First!

by Bob Johnson

This story has been related to us by a retired NWA-er who was based in Fargo when it happened. He has asked us not to use his name -- a wish that is not related at all to the telling of the story. We'll call him Al.

We've all heard about Northwest's recent San Diego - Twin Cities overfly, ad nauseam. But it wasn't the first. Let's go back more than 60 years ago to Fargo, ND.

It was a beautiful spring Sunday morning in the late 1940s. A pungency in the air as only a spring day can have in the far north. Brilliant sun, blue sky, "a bright golden haze on the meadow," as the old song goes.

"The terminal was quiet but there was an undercurrent of excitement nonetheless," Al recalls. "For today we were to get our first look at one of Northwest's brand-spanking-new Martin 2-0-2 planes, one of 25 recently ordered from the Martin Company. Swift, powerful and handsome, Northwest was expecting great things from its 2-0-2's."

A crowd (by Fargo standards) stood on the tarmac as arrival time neared. "We saw it, coming from the south, so beautiful," Al recalls. "On it came and on it went, out of sight and sound. It overflew us, it didn't land. We stood around wondering."

---

***"Well, son, it wuz like this. We wuz readin' the Sunday paper and we forgot we wuzn't in a DC-3."***

**NWA Captain Leon S. "Deke" DeLong**

---



Greeted in Great Falls, MT by Mayor Russell Conklin (l), Deke delivers mail to Postmaster Mark Fuller with Captain Joe Kimm looking on, during the NWA 30th Anniversary Ford Tri-Motor flight in 1956.

"Minutes later we heard it returning from the north. Gleaming in the sunlight it made a wide curtsy around the field, touched down and taxied to the gate." Passengers deplaned. Al saw Captain Leon S. "Deke" DeLong, the plane's skipper, standing on the deck looking up at it.

Deke was a Northwest original by any definition, already a legend in the Northwest family. He learned to fly in France during World War I. Then barnstorming. He joined Northwest in December, 1928 flying the winter airmail on our short-lived Fox River Valley route between Green Bay, WI and Chicago. In 1929 he flew the first night airmail from the Twin Cities to Chicago in a Taper Wing Waco. He was Northwest's Senior Captain for a number of years before his retirement in 1959.

"I went out to meet him," Al recalls. "Deke," I said, "What happened? Why the overfly?" A mischievous smile creased Deke's friendly, weathered face. "Well, son," he said. "It wuz like this. We wuz readin' the Sunday paper and we forgot we wuzn't in a DC-3." (l)

"Honest," says Al. "Take it or leave it. That's what he said."

Continued on page 2

## President's Message by Bruce Kitt

On January 1, 2010, the last legal vestige of Northwest Airlines, its Single Operating Certificate, was cancelled. Northwest Airlines, the oldest U.S. domestic airline, flying under its own name since 1926, joined the palette of faded colors that once gave commercial aviation so many distinctive liveries and corporate personalities.

Never part of Northwest Airlines, the loss of our corporate namesake has raised questions about the NWA History Centre's future. Stated simply, we plan to be here for a long time. The NWA History Centre Board of Directors has made plans to insure we remain open and accessible to the public. Due in part to the good relationship with Wings Financial Credit Union, the museum and archives will remain at 8101 - 34th Avenue South. Plans are underway to improve our space in the Wings building to accommodate the influx of donations that have come our way as the physical presence of Northwest Airlines began to disappear. The NWA History Centre will take a methodical and steady approach to improve the museum and develop it into both a place to visit and a recognized learning and research resource.



---

***"You . . . are the not-so-secret key to the survival of the museum. The NWA History Centre needs your support."***

---

These are big plans and it will take more than wishful thinking or History Centre volunteers to make it happen. The NWA History Centre needs *your* support. *You*, former and current employees and friends of the thirteen airlines that became branches of the Northwest family tree are the not-so-secret key to the survival of the museum. *Your* generous financial support is needed. It is an inescapable fact that keeping the museum doors open requires money. Please be generous when pledge forms arrive in your mailbox. *Your* monetary donation, be it cash, stocks or annuities will help keep the lights on so *you* and future generations can view the contributions of your co-workers and friends. *Your* donations of items you have held onto, that were part of yourself and your career, become the very objects that draw others to the NWA History Centre; to see, hear and feel what once made *you* proud to work at *your* airline, the best one in the world. The NWA History Centre is about all of us and what remains of 13 proud airlines. Support and visit your museum. ➔

---

### Fargo Overflight . . . continued from page 1

Captain DeLong was a native of Morning Sun, IA. Isn't that a pretty name for a little Iowa town? He lived for many years on Grey Cloud Island, down the Mississippi River a bit from St. Paul. He was hired by Charles "Speed" Holman, Northwest's first operations manager and famed racing pilot. "Charlie could have been President of the United States if he'd wanted to," Deke once recalled. "But he was dedicated to aviation. He was the most charming and persuasive man I ever knew." The Ford Tri-Motor was Deke's favorite airplane. "It was the best plane ever built," he once said.

It is believed that Deke is the only commercial airline pilot to fly to the age of 65, beating the FAA edict at that time that commercial pilots must retire at age 60.



Arthur Godfrey, Deke DeLong and Joe Kimm

In 1956, Captain DeLong, with Captain Joe Kimm, flew one of Northwest's original Ford Tri-Motors - ship 8419 - across the United States to help celebrate the airline's 30th anniversary. (See photo page 1.)

Before they left New York City, Deke was interviewed by Arthur Godfrey on Godfrey's national television show. Deke informed Godfrey that he was currently flying Northwest's Twin Cities-Winnipeg, Manitoba route.

Godfrey: "That must be a pretty good route if the senior captain flies it."

Deke: "It sure is. I leave at eight, get back at four and have an hour off for lunch." ➔

## Bob Kirkpatrick



Spokane, WA, 1943



## Betty Reynolds Lindberg



Fargo, ND 1945

***Much as Woody Allen paid tribute to the great radio personalities of the 1930s and 1940s in his 1987 movie Radio Days, we pay tribute to a now vanished breed - NWA radio operators.***

On June 16, 1942, NWA hired **Bob Kirkpatrick** as a radio operator. His first station was Watson Lake, Yukon Territories (QH).

Much as he loved Watson Lake the U.S. Navy beckoned, and Bob served with Naval Air Transport Service in the Pacific as an aviation electronic technician. He was discharged in 1945.

Back with NWA in early 1945, this time in Spokane, Bob learned to wear several hats. Its newly delivered DC-4s were posing a problem for NWA at Felts Field, the original Spokane airport. It seems the runways weren't long enough to accommodate them. Northwest decided to move operations to Geiger Field. There was a hitch in this plan. The U.S. government wasn't willing to move its weather bureau nor was the Civil Aeronautics Authority willing to move its tower operators out to Geiger. What to do?

The weather bureau folks trained the NWA radio operators to become official weather observers. As for tower operations, radio operators had already gained experience at Felts Field, whose tower didn't operate 24/7. If a NWA DC-3 came in when the tower was closed, the radio operators would go to the tower and do the job.

So when flights were due at Geiger, the radio operator on duty would go up on the hangar roof with their radio equipment and "talk down" the DC-4 crews, after giving a visual weather report from where they stood. This went on for a year or two.

Bob remained in Spokane until he was recalled into the U.S. Navy for the Korean War in 1950. He served with a carrier air group that operated off the east coast of Korea until May, 1952, when he was discharged. After having his NWA career interrupted not once but twice, Bob wasn't sure if he would have a job when he returned.

*Continued on page 5*

**Betty Reynolds Lindberg** began work as a ground radio operator for Northwest Airlines in the fall of 1943. During WWII, as male ground radio operators went into the service, NWA hired women to fill their positions for the first time.

After graduating from high school in 1942, Betty went to a National Youth Administration school, where young women were trained to work in factories to become "Rosie the Riveters," building military aircraft as part of the war effort. "We could receive instruction in sheet metal work or radio construction and installation," Betty said.

"I chose radio work and was lucky to have an instructor who was also a ham radio operator," she said. "After our regular classes, he helped some of us study for the FCC license test. I received a second class radio telephone license with a code permit and was hired by Northwest in the fall of 1943." Starting salary was \$125 per month with deductions for war bonds in addition to income taxes and FICA.

After stints in Minneapolis and Chicago, a position became available in Fargo in the spring of 1945. Betty applied and was accepted.

"The terminal building at Fargo was a small three-story frame building which we claimed was held together by the termites holding hands," Betty says. "The ground floor held a lobby, restaurant, the airport manager's office, NWA passenger check-in counter, radio room and operations. The weather bureau was on the second floor and the third floor was the tower."

"We worked six days a week, rotating each week from midnight to 8 a.m., 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., 4 p.m. to midnight shifts. There were nights on the midnight shift when the only people in the building were three women."

*Continued on page 7*



## Adventures of an NWA Orient Route Pioneer ~ Phyllis Curry



Phyllis Tack Curry and Charles Curry, 1947



Phyllis in front of her "hotel" ready to do some wash. Remember LUX flakes? The sign above the door says "Home for Wayward Girls."



### We listened as Phyllis "talked through her hat" recently . . .

"I've been approached by collectors and museums over the years wanting to acquire that hat. Unfortunately I have no idea what happened to mine," Phyllis Tack Curry ruefully admits.

It is an extremely rare hat. Phyllis figures that no more than 20 women wore the distinctive chapeau made especially for the first MSP-Tokyo crews in 1947.

We met Phyllis not long ago when Wayne Snyder, History Centre board member, offered to personally deliver a model of a NWA DC-3 that Phyllis' daughter had purchased for her. Wayne came back from his "good deed" with this photo and the suggestion that we interview her for *Reflections*. Thanks, Wayne!

"Jessie McCloud was Chief Stewardess at the time, and the company decided to hand-pick the new "Orient" route cabin crews without regard for seniority," Phyllis said. (*Ed. note: Wonder how they got away with that?*) Initially they were looking for four stewardesses. Phyllis applied, but wasn't accepted. The route proved successful. They needed four more stewardesses. Phyllis was called for the second round of hiring and got the job.

NWA Flight 1 flight time to Tokyo was 33 hours. And for Phyllis and other crew members, add another 48 hours for a layover mid-flight in Shemya, an island in the Aleutians so barren and harsh the ceaseless winds blew the snow horizontally.



Above: Shemya, as seen from a DC-4. Left: Crew accommodations in Shemya. Below left: The venerable DC-4 on the ground in Tokyo.

"The weather was often so bad a bus had to pick us up at our huts to run us to the mess hall for meals. And they always parked the DC-4 about a block away from the shack," Phyllis complained, explaining that "shack" in Shemya-speak meant the terminal building. As she lunged into the weather, fighting her way through the brutal winds and stinging snow towards the airplane, Phyllis wondered, "If my mother could see me now, would she still consider this a glamour job?"

Passengers on Flight 1 were mainly wives and children of occupational forces, joining their spouses in Japan. "We had a little tin refrigerator on board and had to rotate the baby bottles to give each one equal refrigeration time," Phyllis said.

*Photos courtesy of Phyllis Tack Curry.*

*Continued on page 6*

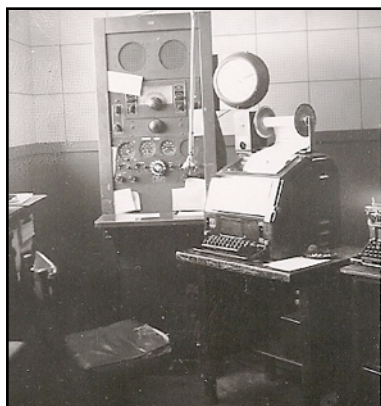
# Radio Days/Bob Kirkpatrick . . . continued from page 3



Bob donated the Morse code telegraph key transmitter and case that he used at Watson Lake, Yukon, Canada in 1942-1943 to the NWA History Centre.



Below: Spokane Radio Room, 1946



Not only was his job waiting, he soon received a call from the G.O. asking him to come to MSP for an interview.

"They were looking for a Regional Supt. of Communications, Western Region, based in Seattle," Bob said. The Western Region extended from Billings, MT to the west coast and included Hawaii and the Aleutians. It seems the experience Bob gained in the U.S. Navy raised his profile at Northwest. He got the job.

In 1956 he moved back to MSP as Superintendent of Telecommunications with an office at the G.O. When Bob retired in 1988 he was Director of Communications.

Kirkpatrick participated in huge changes in airline communications systems. HF radios gave way to VHF radios after WWII. Later came digital transmissions between cockpit and ground, known as ACARS, Aviation Communication and Radio System.

Meanwhile, the reservations system was changing too. Morse code transmissions were replaced by teletype communications and eventually data networks and computers. Teletype operators were absorbed into other communications positions. Radio operators were phased out in the 1990s when dispatchers had the ability to talk directly to the crews.

Bob did a fair amount of flying over the course of his career, setting up communications systems in places like Tokyo, Anchorage, Miami, Atlanta, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Oslo, Glasgow, San Francisco and Los Angeles. At least he didn't have to move to New York.

"When General Harris came from PanAm to lead Northwest in the early 1950s, he wanted to move the G.O. to Fifth Avenue, in New York City," Bob says. "The board of directors decided against that and fired him. Then they hired Don Nyrop." ➔



Kirkpatrick & Margaret Cline, SEA Chief Teletype Operator - 1954

## 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**

## Publisher

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

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

## Board of Directors

Pete Patzke, Chairman & Treas.

Bruce Kitt, President

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.**

**Members:** We'd like to hear from you! Have ideas of stories you'd like to see in your newsletter? Photos to share? Send to [editor@nwahistory.org](mailto:editor@nwahistory.org) or call Anne at 612-865-5377





Holman Field, St. Paul, MN

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



David Desnick 2008

At the age of 99, he may be the oldest living retired NWA mechanic. **David Desnick** was employed by NWA as a mechanic's apprentice in December, 1942. He retired in 1973.

After spending six years in the wheel and brake shop, he applied for an outside job, working the ramp in MSP. He had two gas trucks to take care of and two battery-starting carts. Part of his job was making sure the gas tanks on the parked airliners were grounded. Equally important, he walked the ramp twice a day checking gear pins. Gear pins had long red ribbon tails so they could easily be identified. Before an aircraft could be cleared to leave the ramp, main gear and nose gear pins were removed and laid under the tip of the left wing.

Dave tells a story on himself of an incident that led to an unexpected five-day vacation without pay. It seems the ramp agent was ready to get a flight off. He asked Dave, "Can you send them off?" Dave went through his checklist, and checked for red ribbon tails, signifying gear pins still on the airplane. He saw none and released the flight from the ramp. Not long afterward Joe Rausch, the Chief Mechanic, was paging him. The flight had taken off, but when the crew couldn't retract the main gear they came back. It seems the gear pins were still attached but there were no red tails on them. No one was sure how that happened but Dave, as noted before, was held responsible. He does remember that the Captain was good-natured about it, which helped.

Dave is also remembered as "Dave the Tool Man," because he eventually had a business selling tools to aircraft mechanics. You can find Dave at Knollwood Place, St. Louis Park. He'd love to engage in *hangar talk* with other retired NWA mechanics. ➔ (Ed note: When we talked to Dave a while back, his son Les and I realized that we were both on the first NWA flight to Florida in 1958 - he as a non-rev passenger and I as a stewardess. That's what makes this job such fun!)

---

### **Phyllis Curry . . . Continued from page 4**

Phyllis met her future husband, Captain Charles Curry, flying the Orient. They had three trips together. It was a two week trip, so the crews flew only one per month, then added one domestic trip to accrue enough hours. After their third trip together Charles broke his ankle skiing and when she visited him in the hospital he said, "Would you like to get married and go with me to Miami?"

Phyllis answered, "What, and give up my Tokyo run?" ➔



Yes she did! Phyllis Tack and Charles Curry were wed in 1948 and stayed wed for 55 years until Charles' death.



Phyllis Curry today with her DC-3

**Radio Days/Betty Reynolds Lindberg . . . Continued from page 3**

I would be the radio operator on duty and there would be a woman in the weather bureau and one in the tower. Back in those days we didn't worry about things like that," she said.

"The duties of the ground radio operators were to keep in voice communication with the aircraft before and after they were under tower control. We also handled all reservation and operation information by radiotelegraph. These days you can go on the internet and make almost an instant airline reservation. Back in the 1940s it was a little different," Betty recalls.

"If someone wanted to make a trip from Fargo to Minneapolis, they would telephone the downtown Fargo reservation office with their request. The reservation clerk would then send a teletype message to the radio operator at the airport, who would then relay the message, using Morse code, by radiotelegraph to the MSP radio operator, who then gave it to the main NWA Minneapolis reservations office," Betty explains.

"As I recall, all flight information at the Minneapolis office was written on huge blackboards. This was possible because at the time NWA was only flying DC-3's with 21 seats, so not too much space was needed to keep all that information. If the reservation was available, the information was given to the MSP radio operator who sent the message to Fargo. The Fargo operator would then type out a teletype message to the downtown office confirming the reservation. The speed with which all this was handled depended not only on how heavy radio traffic was, but also on atmospheric conditions, which sometimes prevented transmissions between stations," Betty said. (*Ed. note: Whew!*)

After teletype service became available for reservations, radio operators duties focused on transmitting operational information for each incoming and outgoing flight by radiotelegraph, again using Morse code. "There were two other female radio operators in Fargo. I am sure we were only tolerated at first, but I think once we demonstrated we could do as good a job as the male operators, we were accepted.

Well . . . maybe our code speed wasn't as fast as some of the more experienced operators, but we did the job," Betty said.

Betty Reynolds married H. O. "Lindy" Lindberg, sales representative for NWA in 1948, and retired in 1950 to raise a family. She and her husband moved to Atlanta in 1958 to prepare for opening NWA service to Atlanta in 1959. "Lindy" retired in 1986 after 39 years in sales. He died in January, 2006. Betty still makes her home in Atlanta. ➔

*Ed. Note: Betty expressed interest in other NWA radio operator stories. For starters, Betty, how about that guy next to you on page 3?*

*Right: Betty and "Lindy" on a Norwegian cruise a few years ago.*

**Coming in the June 2010 Reflections:**

**"The Nelson B.C. Incident"** by David Johnson, Frank C. Judd's son-in-law.

**Frank C. Judd** was with Northwest Airways/Airlines from 1931 - 1974. He went from pilot number 15 to Vice President of Operations during his career with NWA. Judd was a pilot in 1935 when "The Nelson B.C. Incident" occurred.

**Bob Johnson, Gold Star Volunteer**

We have all enjoyed Bob Johnson's work on many feature stories in **History Matters** and **Reflections**. Another major contribution to the NWA History Centre and its members is the book **"Voices From The Sky,"** which Bob researched, wrote and edited. Don't you think it is high time we found out who this Bob Johnson guy is? Stay tuned . . .

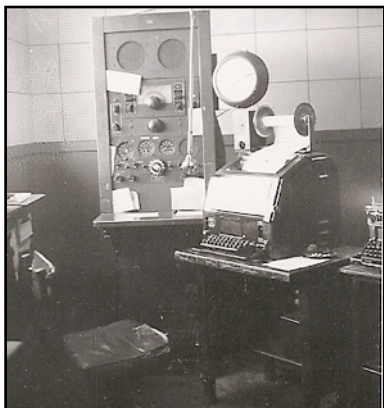
. . . and, in the meantime, stop by the NWA History Centre and pick up a copy of **"Voices From The Sky"** or telephone the NWA History Centre **952-698-4478** to place an order.





8101 34th Avenue South  
Bloomington, MN 55425

***Address Service Requested***



Radio Room, Spokane, 1946  
See "Radio Days" stories on page 3.

## **Only Yesterday . . . from our History Centre Archives**



*Left:* "Pleased to meet you," says Mal Freeburg to an even more famous flier, Amelia Earhart. The meeting occurred as the aviatrix helped carry Northwest's routes to the Pacific Coast on the Northern Transcontinental Survey Flight in 1933.

*Below:* "Time's a'wastin'," say L.S. "Deke" DeLong, pilot, and Ronnie Stelzig, flight dispatcher, as they check watches before a flight years ago. ***Reflections*** readers: Can you identify the aircraft?

