



# Reflections

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

## NWA Planes were Military Charters for 69 Years

Reported by Robert DuBert

As the United States withdraws forces from Iraq and Afghanistan and our troops return home, NWA employees can recall with pride our airline's role in times of conflict, transporting troops and cargo for the military during the 69-year period from the bombing of Pearl Harbor until Northwest Airlines merged with Delta and officially ceased to exist.

As a flight attendant from 1996 to 2009, I never had the opportunity to work a military charter flight, but I knew some who did. This report includes accounts of my interviews with DTW-based flight attendants Keith Mock and Tim Yoder, and their experiences on NWA military charters between Amsterdam and Kuwait City during the years of the "surge" in the Iraq war.

### Historical Background of Military Charters

In 1936, Edgar Staley Gorrell was elected the first president of the Air Transport Association, representing the nation's airline industry. Gorrell had

*During the Korean War, Northwest operated 1,380 trans-Pacific crossings, carrying 40,000 troops and 6,000 tons of cargo.*



DC-4's were chartered during the Korean War

Photo: NWAHC Archives



Troops return home during the first Gulf War.

Photo: NWAHC Archives

served in the Army during World War I as Air Chief of Staff to the American Expeditionary Force, second-in-command to Gen. Billy Mitchell. In the tense political climate of the late 1930s, the visionary Gorrell devised a systematic plan to voluntarily place the aircraft and employees of America's airlines at the disposal of the military during wartime, and he persuaded President Roosevelt to adopt this plan soon after the Pearl Harbor attack of Dec. 7, 1941. As a result, by mid-1942 the Army had requisitioned 60 percent of the nation's airline fleet (including six of the 13 DC-3s operated by NWA). Discretionary civilian air travel became nearly impossible for the "duration," and airlines had to drastically reduce or eliminate service on their route networks. The postwar years saw two further mobilizations of the airlines, in support of the 1948 Berlin Airlift and the Korean "Police Action" War of 1950-1953, both of which took particular advantage of the trans-oceanic range and reliability of the DC-4 aircraft.

These war-time mobilizations strained the airlines' normal operations, with diversions of

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## ***President's Message***

by Bruce Kitt

The NWA History Centre has a visitor's log that we encourage people to sign when they walk in. At the end of the year Wayne Snyder, Director of Volunteers, goes through the log and provides a breakdown of how many visitors have walked through our doors and where they have come from. Being a destination is a good thing for a museum, and last year 1,358 visitors registered their names and addresses in the roster. We estimate that another 10 percent come and go without signing.

One thousand, three hundred and fifty-eight people sought out the NWA History Centre as a place to spend their time; to see things that held a special place in their memories and, sometimes, to run into somebody they knew from their time at their airline. They are often surprised to find a variety of their airline's memorabilia for sale in our gift shop, as well as books that recall the glory days of our historic carrier.

On a day-to-day basis, you don't realize how the number of visitors adds up; there is no one person at the NWA History Centre who is there every day. There are days visitors come, and there are days visitors don't come, and there are days it feels as if tour buses full of visitors are lined up outside. At the end of the year, it is a source of amazement to realize that so many people chose to spend some of their time visiting what a few volunteers, many donors and many financial supporters have made possible. Our 2011 visitors came from 33 states and eight foreign countries and they often tell us their time at the NWA History Centre was enjoyable and well spent.

On behalf of everyone involved in making the NWAHC museum experience possible, thank you for coming. If you have not yet been our guest, those of us who volunteer at the NWA History Centre hope you will accept our invitation to see what you are missing. Come learn what others have found and rediscovered. CAVU



## **Save These Dates!**

**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 memorabilia to this event. See page 11 and R.S.V.P. to Mary Fryer at 651-699-8833 or Email [mcfryer@q.com](mailto:mcfryer@q.com)*

### **Future Coffee & Conversation 2012 events:**

***The Mod Center*** June 23, and ***Highjacked!*** September 8

**October 20, 2012**

**Gala NWAHC 10th Anniversary Party**

## **NWA Military Charters** *Continued from page 1*

aircraft and crews and disruptions of the employee work forces. Given America's pre-eminence in a postwar world of almost continuous conflict, there appeared a need for a "Ready Reserve" force of transport aircraft and airline crews which could be called up, on short notice, to supplement the military's own airlift capacity. Accordingly, in 1951, the Military Air Transport Service and the Air Transport Association jointly proposed the creation of the Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF), a voluntary, quid pro quo plan where airlines would contractually pledge to make a portion of their long-range fleets and associated crews available for immediate appropriation in time of war, in exchange for "cost plus" remuneration, government-supplied insurance coverage for the involved aircraft, and priority access to the lucrative charter business offered by the International Airlift Services Contract during peacetime or when the level of conflict was relatively low. CRAF was formally launched in 1952, and since then has been activated only twice: in 1990 during Operation Desert Shield, and in 2003 during the initial phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom. At other times, the military airlift needs have been met by airline flights under the International Airlift Services Contract, often referred to as "military charters."

### **Interviews**

For this article, I interviewed DTW-based flight attendants Keith Mock and Tim Yoder. Keith comes from an airline family - his father was a Southern Airways agent in MSY, VPS and BHM - and he proudly notes that "I was conceived at a Southern Airways Christmas party." He went to work for Republic on the ramp in 1986, and became a Northwest flight attendant in 1989. Prior to joining NWA in 1989, Tim Yoder attended the U.S. Navy Nuclear Power School in Bainbridge, MD, and subsequently served as a Chief Petty Officer/Nuclear Machinist's Mate onboard the guided missile cruiser



Tim Yoder checks his computer at the DTW Inflight Office.

Photo courtesy of Robert DuBert

U.S.S. Texas. Between them, Keith and Tim have a wealth of experience working military charters, and both continue to fly for Delta Airlines.

### **The Flights**

While NWA also operated military charters within the U.S.A., I focused on the ones actually flying to the Middle East. A typical itinerary for military passengers included a trans-Atlantic flight from their base in the U.S.A. to a European transfer station, usually the NWA hub in Amsterdam (AMS) but sometimes Frankfurt Hahn (HHN). After a crew change and cleaning/catering, the aircraft and passengers would continue to Kuwait International Airport (KWI), near which the Central Command of the U.S. Army (ARCENT) maintains a base for ROSI (Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration.) After deplaning, passengers and crew departed company, with the military boarding buses for ROSI and the NWA crew proceeding through Kuwait Customs and Immigration and then boarding a bus for their crew hotel in downtown Kuwait City.

A typical trip for NWA flight attendants (and pilots) lasted 8-12 days, and included multiple AMS and KWI overnight layovers, in effect operating an air shuttle service between the stations.

### **Why Work Military Charters?**

"Honestly, they are a pleasure to work because the passengers are grateful and polite. I never, EVER, heard a cross or upsetting word towards a crew member from a military passenger. You want to do everything possible, give whatever you can, to make their flight enjoyable," Mock says

Yoder says that he feels a sense of duty. He derives great personal satisfaction from working the charters, and feels that his Navy vet status makes him "very empathetic with people who will be isolated from family and home" for a long time. Both note that these were "coveted" trips, worth a lot of flight time (pay), easy to work, and offering the opportunity to see and experience unusual places.

### **Crew Briefings**

Flight attendants were advised on behavior and customs specific to an Islamic country - *don't show the soles of your feet or shoes, don't cross your legs.*

*Continued on page 6*

★ **Vince Rodríguez - Gold Star Volunteer!** ★



Vince Rodríguez proudly displays the tribute he received when he retired from NWA in June, 2006, after 24-1/2 years with the airline - beginning as a stock clerk and working the last 17 years in purchasing.

In 1982 Vince Rodríguez was a brand new Northwest Airlines stock clerk on third shift, working line maintenance in MSP, hangar 2. One day Vince was zooming around on a three-wheel bike loaded with parts, and he heard someone paging "Julio." Although he heard the page several more times, he ignored it. He didn't know who Julio was and he figured it wasn't his business. Just then the line maintenance mechanic, a great big guy, approached and said "Didn't you hear me paging you? I've been paging you for half an hour."

"No," said Vince. "I heard you paging someone else, but not me."

"The big guy gets right in my face and says, 'Your name Julio?'"

"No," I said.

"It is now," he said.

That is how Vince learned that line maintenance mechanics liked nicknames. And he learned that the great big guy who dubbed him "Julio" had one too. His was "Large."

*(Ed. note: Vince's step-dad was an A&P mechanic for United Airlines when Vince was growing up in California. His nickname was "Ace.")*

Fast forward to Spring, 2007. "I was at Wings Credit Union, saw the Northwest Airlines History Centre sign and decided to go downstairs to

investigate. Al Carriveau showed me around and asked me to volunteer.

Now you will find Vince at the NWAHC every Wednesday afternoon between 2 and 5 p.m., except when he is somewhere else in the world, running in a World Airline Road Race (WARR), hiking and white-water rafting in the Grand Canyon, or cross-country skiing the Birkebeiner in northern Wisconsin or the Mora, Minn. Vasaloppet.

"I enjoyed working at NWA," Vince says, "and now I enjoy volunteering at the museum. Every once in a while someone will come in with incredible stories, and I enjoy talking with them. Even if it is a quiet afternoon, I like being there. There is still a lot of stuff here I haven't read yet." He wants to learn more about Hughes Air West before it was acquired by NWA. "When I was still living in California I flew on that airline to Mexico to do an inventory audit. There were 12 or 14 people on board. We heard a big bang out of one of the (two) engines. I was scared to death!

"There were a couple of cowboys on board. One said to his friend across the aisle, 'What does it look like over there?'"

"Well, the engine's still running," he said, "It must be okay."

Born in San Francisco, Vince was five years old when he moved to Manhattan Beach, south of Los Angeles, where he lived for 27 years. After receiving B.S. and B.A. degrees, he was a buyer for a company that made electrical wiring for industrial and commercial use. After 13 years he moved to the Twin Cities and was a sales engineer for a conveyor manufacturing company for three years, then was laid off due to a strike.

In 1982 he applied for a management position with NWA. Although there were no openings, he soon received an offer to work as a stock clerk on the third shift. "I'd been out of work for four months and I was hungry," Vince said. "I went to work."

Six years later, Vince moved into Purchasing where he stayed 17-1/2 years. Among his procurements, were hydraulics (landing gear), flight control surface actuators (flaps, ailerons, rudders),

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**Vince Rodriguez** *Continued from page 4*

lavatory replacement parts, windows and windshields. "There are two windshields on a DC-10," Vince commented. "Each one cost around \$40,000 in the late '90s and early 2000s."

Since retiring in 2006 Vince has intensified his athletic activities. "Back in California in the '60s, I was a blond-haired, golden-tanned surfer and beach volleyball player. I was a distance runner in high school; Track in the spring and Cross Country in the fall. I dropped out of running for many years, but took it up again when I was 37 and I have run 20 marathons - the first one when I was 38." Vince qualified for the Boston Marathon twice, and ran it once.

An avid cross-country skier, he has skied the Birkebeiner in northern Wisconsin 28 times and the Mora, Minn. Vasaloppet 25 times.

These days Vince keeps busy hiking and biking. "In May of this year I will hike six National Parks in southern Utah. I have hiked the Grand Canyon five times. Last September I went on a five day white-water rafting trip in the Grand Canyon. We hiked down, spent five days on the raft, camping at night, until we helicoptered out. The ages of the 23 participants on that trip ranged from a 10-year-old girl to an 80-year-old guy," he said. When at home, Vince bikes an average of 15 to 20 miles a day, 100 to 125 miles a week.

The only running Vince does these days is once a year at the World Airline Road Race (WARR). He'll go to China this year. "Most airlines have running clubs," Vince says. "They get together for one race a year, sponsored by different airlines. The NWA Running Club accounts for most of my travels the world over. I've run in Durban, South Africa; Sydney, Australia; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; London, Prague, Dublin and Cancun twice. I might never have gone to many of these places, otherwise. Last year the race was in Dallas,



sponsored by American Airlines. I meet lots of people and renew acquaintances year after year. About 1,000 to 1,500 people show up. The races are 5k and 10k. I like to say I spend three days partying and one hour running," Vince chuckles.

Vince and his wife Carol have been married 43 years and have three grown daughters and three grandchildren. They live in Maplewood. ➔

Left: Vince finishing the 1984 Twin Cities Marathon in 3 hours, 10 minutes, 6 seconds; which qualified him for the Boston Marathon in 1985.

**BITS AND PIECES**, the NWA Flight Attendant Newsletter, now features a NWA History Centre page <http://web.mac.com/karenschmit/>

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**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**

## **NWA Military Charters** *Continued from page 3*

*Don't bring any alcoholic beverage into the country.* Attire during layovers? Long pants and long-sleeved shirts for men; women's attire must cover their elbows and knees, and head covering is suggested. Crew members were warned to avoid going out alone in Kuwait City, but they often did anyway. During the month of Ramadan, all restaurants are closed, so crew had room service meals in their hotel rooms, and were cautioned against being seen in public with food or drink during daylight hours.

### **The Aircraft**

The charters were often operated using two 747-251 aircraft, ships 6623 and 6624, which in their final years were dedicated to charter work only. The aircraft interiors showed the wear and tear of their hard usage, and weren't always thoroughly cleaned between flights. Keith remembers the aft cabins always smelling of sweat, rotted food and urine, and cabin maintenance could be hit or miss: "I kept tripping on the loose last step of the spiral staircase on 6624, but they wouldn't fix it because they were getting rid of the aircraft."



Mock served military passengers  
on Ship 6624.

Photo courtesy of Keith Mock

### **The Onboard Experience**

Passengers boarded in uniform, with their unloaded weapons, backpacks and other gear - officers, NWA loadmasters, mechanics, and the charter coordinator in Business Class, enlisted men and women in Economy. The flights were full, and stowage posed a problem (especially the unit colors of the color guard) yet flight attendants were

mindful that the same FARs (Federal Air Regulations) apply to military charters as to commercial flights. A special requirement is that a soldier or marine must have ready access to his/her weapon at all times. Keith noted that "weapons are an attachment of their souls, but did I enforce the (stowage) rules at the exit rows? You bet your sweet rear-end that I did." Nevertheless, there was gear everywhere, and Keith said, "I was constantly bumping into rifles with my serving cart" during meal services.

The flights were catered according to Department of Defense (DoD) requirements: one class of meal service throughout with a choice of main dish, and full-can service for soft drinks and juices. While there were no special meals (vegetarian, kosher, etc.) of any kind, the aircraft was always stocked with plenty of extra snacks, milk, bottled water and soft drinks. But, Mock noted, "liquor is never allowed on any military flight, period!"

For entertainment, headsets and inflight movies were free, although Tim observed that many passengers brought along their own iPods and DVD players. He remembers that soldiers became upset on one flight when the scheduled inflight movie was "Dear John," a film about an American soldier fighting in the Middle East whose girlfriend back home leaves him for another guy.

A unique DoD mandate is that playing cards must be available and provided by the airline.

### **The Passengers**

Army soldiers, Marines, Reservists, and some naval and air force special personnel made up the passenger loads, sometimes in mixed groups. All were disciplined, professional, and took direction from crew members. Mock noticed that "the Army guys tended to be younger than Marines - 17, 18, 19 years old. Marines have a different mindset, slang, and mannerisms." The Reservists were older, and Yoder remembers a few who were "more demanding, less respectful, and kind of a pain, really." On one flight, Tim's passengers were an Army medical unit consisting of doctors, nurses and medical technicians. The unit was 50 percent women and "they all carried weapons."

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## NWA Military Charters *Continued from page 6*

On the eastbound flights to Kuwait, Keith described the passengers as usually “sombre and quiet, anxious and alert.” (*Author’s note: Apparently there were none of the troop-train antics you see in WW II movies!*) Westbound, however, the mood was usually more relaxed, with light-hearted banter among the passengers. Often the troops appeared exhausted and simply wanted to sleep. When awake, they seemed eager to talk with the flight attendants about simple human things - their hometowns, families, sweethearts, daily lives. Yoder remembered quiet talks with officers in the upper deck galley: “They would talk about their homes and families, and military vet stuff. It had a very World War II quality, like you see in the movies.”

“Every soldier had a story to tell, something they couldn’t share with friends or family back home, but they would tell the pilots or the flight attendants. They would let it all out,” Mock said.

### Crew Layovers in Kuwait City

The crew hotel was (and is) a luxurious property that was shelled and bombed during Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Now fully restored, photos of the battle damage are on display in the lobby. When I asked Keith and Tim about sightseeing on layovers, both mentioned the heat as a major deterrent - over 130 degrees during the day, cooling off to 95 degrees at night. The high value of the Kuwaiti dinar against the U.S. dollar discouraged shopping and dining out. Tim visited the tallest buildings in the city skyline, the Kuwait Towers - water towers which contain an observation deck and restaurants - while Keith was fascinated by the historical and cultural exhibits at the Kuwait National Museum.

Both loved going to the Souq Al-Mubarakiya marketplace, for its timeless Middle Eastern sights and smells. Mock noted that most service workers in the restaurants and shops are Filipinos who travel to Kuwait for its plentiful jobs. One ruefully told him, “We do all the work, and the Kuwaitis sit home and count their money.”



Mock poses with Saddam Hussein, firmly embedded in concrete, in the Kuwait National Museum.



Mock takes in the sights at the Souq Al-Mubarakiya.  
Photos courtesy of Keith Mock

### Epilogue

Tim Yoder cherishes a unit medallion presented to him by soldiers on one flight, a tribute for his service both as flight attendant and veteran.

Unit medallion presented to Tim Yoder



Front



Back

Photos courtesy of Robert DuBert

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**NWA Military Charters** *Continued from page 7*

Keith and Tim continue to bid and work military charters for Delta, and each flight only enhances their respect for our nation's military personnel: their resolve, their commitment, and their grace.

Delta Airlines continues to be a member of CRAF. As of January, 2012, Delta aircraft assigned to CRAF for potential mobilization include 14 747-451, 16 A330-300, and 9 A330-200 aircraft, all from Northwest Airlines. Their red tails may now be painted blue, but these aircraft and their crews, many also ex-NWA, stand at the ready, prepared to serve if the call comes. They'll do us proud. ✈

**References**

1. Serling, Robert. "When the Airlines Went to War," Kensington Books, New York, 1997
2. Yenne, Bill. "Northwest Orient," Bison Books, London, 1986
3. Websites of the United States Air Force, Airlines For America (A4A) and the United States Department of Transportation Office of Intelligence, Security and Emergency Response



NWA heads up a lineup of C-17s at the Kuwait International Airport.



Troops prepare to board NWA at an undisclosed location.  
Photos courtesy of Keith Mock



Photo courtesy of Mark Kaplan, ice lanterns provided by Wintercraft,

On March 7, 2012, 15 ice lanterns were lit in memory of Flight 307 near its new memorial in south Minneapolis. [Northwest Orient Airlines Flight 307](#) crashed on March 7, 1950, during a snowstorm, killing 10 passengers, three crew, and two children on the ground. [Mark Kaplan](#) has been working with a variety of interested parties to preserve the memory of this tragic event. Reprinted with permission from MN Historical Society *Local History News* <http://mhs.informz.net/MHS/archives/>



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

*"Ship 842 was bought in August of 1948 at Bush Field, Augusta, Georgia. It was a former CAA aircraft, noted by the small "N" number. It was flown back from Georgia -- with bird nests in the air intakes! It was overhauled and placed into service in December, 1948."*

*Congratulations, Stan, and thank you, Joe Hoover, of the Minnesota Historical Society. Ed.*



## Blast From the Past



*Intrepid volunteer Robert DuBert rustled up these 1970s ads while working in the NWAHC archives recently. We especially love "Chicag-a-go-go," don't you? and the not-so-muted sexy stewardess appeal of "leg up to Seattle?" And how about that price to Hawaii! ... Ed.*



## NWAHC Salutes Museum Volunteers February 25, 2012

Northwest Airlines History Centre honored the dedicated volunteers who make it “go” day after day. Attendees previewed newly preserved 16 MM films of NWA commercials, made possible by a grant from the Airport Foundation-MSP; toured the museum’s working spaces and archives, and enjoyed meeting and chatting with one another.

☆☆☆ See names of NWAHC Volunteers on Page 12 ☆☆☆



Photos courtesy of Joe Callaci



# Coffee & Conversation at the NWA History Centre



*Dedicated to preserving the history of a great airline*

## *Remembering the days of Wisconsin Central & North Central Airlines and "Herman"*



Katie Lund and Lona Falencykowski, 1970's North Central stewards, found Herman at the NWAHC.

Saturday, April 21, 2012

1-3 p.m.

NWA History Centre  
8101 34th Avenue South  
Bloomington, MN 55425



Did Don Swanson and/or Steve Marks have anything to do with painting a smile on Herman? Come and find out!



Wisconsin Central President Francis Higgins hired designer Karl Brocken (r) to design the new logo. We'll tell you how long Brocken had to wait for his pay.

Light Refreshments  
Door Prizes  
\$5 per person donation for  
admission\*



Reserve your DVD of this program now through April 21 at a special discounted price of \$15 Order from: [mcfryer@q.com](mailto:mcfryer@q.com)

We look forward to hearing crackerjack stories from Wisconsin Central and North Central veterans! Please bring any personal photos or mementos of your days at Wisconsin Central and/or North Central to share with other survivors and airline buffs who want to know more about these historic carriers.

**R.S.V.P to Mary Fryer at 651-699-8833 or Email [mcfryer@q.com](mailto:mcfryer@q.com)**

**Space is limited. . .** For advance reservations send your check today to Mary Fryer, NWA History Centre

\*Income received from memberships, donations, events and the sale of merchandise support the goals of the NWA History Centre.  
Donations are tax deductible to the full extent of state and federal levels.





8101 34th Avenue South  
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See Page 10 for photos of our  
Volunteer Appreciation Event

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### **NWA History Centre Appreciates its Volunteers:**

O'Dean Bakken	Kay Ferrell	Karen Kihlman	Felix Perry
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Sandy Dobossy	Jack Ingersoll	Jerry Nielsen	Donny Swanson
Ray Dolny	Regina Johnson	Keith Oberg	Dave Trautman
Flora Dryer	Robert L. Johnson	David Olson	Arlye Weisheim
Robert DuBert	Robert V. Johnson	Joseph Olson	
Dru Dunwoody	Willie Johnson	Bruce Palaggi	
Bradley Emsley	Anne Kerr	Pete Patzke	

**Thank you all!**

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