



# REFLECTIONS



The Newsletter of the Northwest Airlines History Center  
Dedicated to preserving the history of a great airline and its people.

**NORTHWEST AIRLINES 1926-2010**



Buster Keaton, star of Northwest Airlines commercials during the 1950s and 60s, in a company advertisement which appeared in the Official Airline Guide (OAG).

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Northwest Airlines during World War II

*Wings for the Stars: the finale*

**NWA and Howard Hughes compete for Air West!**

Unsung cubicle warriors:  
**Northwest's Accounts Payable Dept.**

and

the usual columns from your friendly executive director  
and museum director, which I hope you'll enjoy.

*The Editor*

## THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD



The Changing of the Guard at Amalienborg Palace, Copenhagen.  
Photo: Robert DuBert

Beginning with the next issue, REFLECTIONS will have a new editor. Scott Norris is a native of Minneapolis, a graduate of the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management and a Channel Development Manager at Trend Enterprises in New Brighton Minn., a company which produces learning materials and publications for educational institutions. Although not a former employee of an airline, Scott is passionate about the industry and its history. He's the author and administrator of a website and travel blog, [weninchina.com](http://weninchina.com), whose topics include travel throughout Asia and the history of trans-Pacific airline service. He brings demonstrated publishing expertise to the Northwest Airlines History Center and will give REFLECTIONS a fresh, new outlook. We're lucky to have him. **Welcome Aboard, Scott!**



Scott Norris. Photo: Robert DuBert



## From the Executive Director

One of the NWAHC's Board of Directors' responsibilities is to be open to opportunities that will continue the work of the NWAHC beyond our physical stewardship. I don't remember exactly when, but somewhere around 2007 the NWAHC was approached by the Minnesota Air National Guard Historical Foundation (MANGHF) and asked to support their effort to build a museum that would focus on aviation in Minnesota. The board wholeheartedly agreed as the MANGHF goals included the NWAHC as a major component of this future museum.

In the intervening 10 years this effort evolved into its current form, AirSpaceMN (ASM). I have been fortunate to be part of this effort, as an ASM board member, as the NWAHC liaison representative to ASM, and as the Chair of the ASM History Committee. Of ASM's activities, its History Committee has been the most active—and successful—arm of ASM. The ASM History Committee is composed of the Minnesota Aviation Hall of Fame (MAHOF), the Minnesota Aviation History Education Center (MAHEC), the Minnesota Submarine League, the MANGFH, and the NWAHC. We have successfully secured Legacy Grant funding that enabled our respective history organizations to upgrade their computers, purchase a common museum inventory computer program, and craft a Memorandum of Understanding to work together, regardless of the success of ASM's museum-building efforts.

Unfortunately, the necessary support from the public, the business community and the state did not materialize and AirSpaceMN has been disbanded. Beyond my personal disappointment, this represents the loss of the best, long-term home for the NWAHC we have seen. Our board believes in options and while we hoped that this Plan B would succeed, our Plan A has always been to seek ways to allow the NWAHC to be a successful stand-alone operation, small if necessary, but self-sustaining regardless. We will continue to look for new Plan Bs. In the meantime, Plan A is succeeding—the museum is in a great spot (by any definition) and we are successfully standing on our own feet, thanks to the support of members such as you.

Lastly, Bob DuBert, the editor of REFLECTIONS, has decided that it's time for an editorship change and this is Bob's last issue as editor. Anne Kerr lifted our newsletter to a level that enticed Bob to take over when she decided it was time to pass the baton. Bob, in turn, has elevated the quality of REFLECTIONS, in style, in subject matter, layout and all-around visual and informational appeal. Bob has been editor since 2013; that's 22 issues, and each has carried new, previously unpublished information on the history of our 14 airlines. Among Bob's many articles, we've been introduced to the admen who branded Northwest Airlines and the movie stars who flew on Northwest Airlines. These articles, no doubt, enticed Scott Norris to take up the editorial baton. We really didn't have any leverage to persuade Bob to stay on, but change is good, so we reluctantly 'had' to accept Bob's departure and are relieved that he introduced Scott Norris to us. We are grateful for Bob's enthusiastic editorship and are eagerly looking forward to Scott's turn at the editor's desk. Thank you, Bob. CAVU. ➔

## MUSEUM INFORMATION FOR VISITORS

**Current Schedule: open Wed-Thurs 11am-6pm, Fri-Sat 11am-5pm.**

**Closed Sun-Tues and major holidays.**

**(Operating schedule subject to change: Call 952-698-4478 for latest schedule)**

**FREE Admission (special events may incur a charge).**

**FREE Parking: use hotel spaces in the ramp garage marked with blue lines.**

**Metro Transit Blue Line Light Rail: American Boulevard stop.**



## THE NORTHWEST AIRLINES

### HISTORY CENTER, Inc.

Founder **Henry V. "Pete" Patzke**  
1925-2012

**Museum:** Crowne Plaza Aire MSP  
Hotel

3 Appletree Square  
Bloomington MN 55425  
952-876-8677

**Archives and Administration:** 10100

Flying Cloud Dr., Suite A-306  
Eden Prairie MN 55347  
952-698-4478

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

facebook: NorthwestAirlinesHistory  
Center

Executive Director **Bruce Kitt**  
Museum Director **Chuck Huntley**  
Directors **Chuck Huntley, Fay Kulenkamp, Bill Marchessault, Vince Rodriguez, Jeff Schwalen**  
Collection Manager **Bruce Kitt**  
Retail Sales **Fay Kulenkamp**  
Director Emeritus **Jerry Nielsen**

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## ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

Email **\$30** (correspondence and digital edition newsletter via email.

USPS mail (print edition newsletter)  
**\$35**







Chuck Huntley

## From the Museum Director

Spring greetings to our museum members and volunteers!

First, I wish to start out letting each of you know that the museum's attendance has remained both good and stable since we moved to our new location. Also, we have seen an increased interest in group tours. Best of all we continue to receive positive comments about our new displays and a special appreciation for the increased interaction of the volunteer guides with our guests. Many of our volunteer guides continue to come up with great new ideas on how to improve our displays and how we operate as a museum. That good news stated, I want to move to the more difficult "reality" portion of museum operations.

So often I get into my car and turn on our local public radio station, only to discover it is that dreaded time of the year—a pledge drive. Yes, once again the host reminds us that in order to continue providing the news and information we assume will always be there, the station needs to raise funds to continue to offer quality programming. We are reminded that while so many listen, only a few actually support the station. Though my usual inclination is to yell at the radio each time I hear another pledge drive, I know in my heart there are valid reasons for the requests.

I feel a bit like that same public radio host in telling you that our museum needs help. While your financial support, in the form of dues and contributions, are definitely a lifeline of our museum, the other equally important piece is the volunteer. Many museums of all sizes and types in the U.S. will tell you that apart from raising money, the biggest single problem they face is recruiting or maintaining volunteers. Here in the Twin Cities, even some of our larger, better known museums struggle from time to time with finding volunteers, and we are no different. We currently have a small roster of dedicated volunteers— former airline employees or others who have no direct connection to the airline industry— and each of these persons volunteer from once a month to several days a week.

Perhaps you are asking yourself, "what can I do to help?" Here are some direct answers:

- Volunteer as a museum guide for one or more 3-hour shifts each month. (Remember, 10 individuals covering just one shift each once a month would leave us with 10 fewer shifts lacking coverage.)
- If you aren't able to volunteer, consider trying to recruit someone who you know who simply has a love for or an interest in aviation or the airline industry.
- Volunteer to help at our new archives department located at the Flying Cloud Airport in Eden Prairie. Archivist Bruce Kitt has a variety of tasks needing attention, to assist with the cataloging and preservation of our extensive collection of historic items.

- If you have some technical experience working with areas such as *basic* video file editing and basic small office computer software installation and/or testing, we have a number of projects needing your help and expertise.
- Last but not least, volunteer to help with social media outreach.

So please folks, if you can spare some time, we urgently need your help with any of these areas. Our future depends on it! ➔

## A DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

Visiting the NWAHC recently (May 25) was Thomas Pokonosky, donor of the gong which is one of the most popular items on display in our museum.



Mr. Pokonosky had a 21-year career in sales with Northwest, working as a sales manager in several market districts, eventually becoming General Sales Manager, with an office and staff in the corporate headquarters. He left Northwest in 1981 to found an airport currency exchange business. He and his wife live in the Twin Cities area and he's a longtime member of the NWAHC. Thank you again, Tom, for our gong, which we treasure and love!

Photo: Dave McCarthy

For the most current NWAHC news, be sure to check out our facebook page and "like" us!

# NORTHWEST AIRLINES DURING WORLD WAR II

by Robert DuBert

Every reader of this newsletter knows that Northwest operated a B-24 bomber modification center in St. Paul MN during World War II. The most complete history of the “mod center” has been written by NWAHC member Johannes Allert, published in *Minnesota History* magazine and readily available online—no need for me to repeat it here. Here's the link:

<http://collections.mnhs.org/mnhistorymagazine/articles/63/v63i08p324-333.pdf>

In this article I'll explain the reasons for the mod center, and using seldom-seen photos from the NWAHC archives, show how it functioned and reveal how Northwest Airlines employees on the Home Front contributed to victory.

IN MAY 1940, one week after German forces launched the Blitzkrieg in Holland, Belgium and France, President Roosevelt, addressing Congress, called for the annual production of 50,000 warplanes, a goal which seemed impossible (Luftwaffe commander Hermann Göring called it “pure propaganda”). Prior to the war, aircraft were produced in small batches, in a system called “craft production.” For war, an urgent conversion to “mass production” would be required, and in 1940 this was beyond the capability of America's aircraft manufacturers. General Motors president William Knudsen, serving on the National Defense Advisory Commission, advised that converting the automobile industry to the production of aircraft parts would be the only way to achieve Roosevelt's production goal.

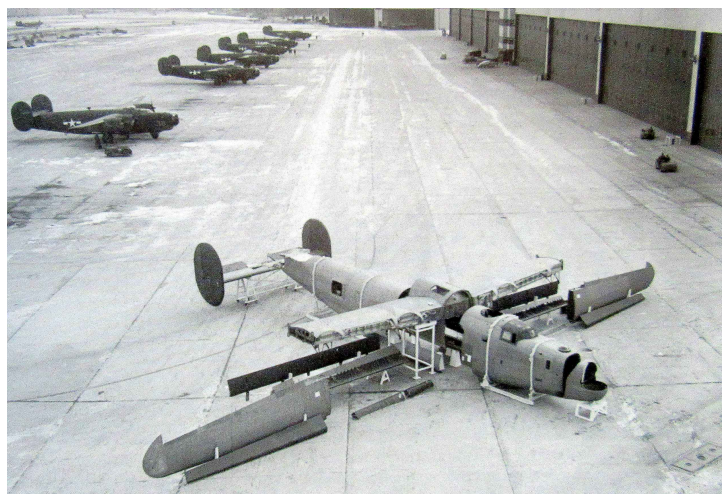
In November, 1940, the Consolidated Aircraft Corporation and the Martin Aircraft Company agreed to license car companies to manufacture parts for the B-24 and B-26 bombers. Henry Ford, however, insisted on building complete aircraft and Charles Sorensen, Ford's executive VP of manufacturing, pledged that “Ford can build one bomber an hour.” However, when Sorensen and Ford engineers visited Consolidated's B-24 assembly plant in San Diego, they were horrified to discover that the plant was built on tidal marshland that constantly shifted and that the planes were assembled outside in the hot California sun, the metal parts expanding and contracting during the day. Workers had to do a lot of tinkering to assemble each plane, with the result that no two planes were exactly alike and major structural components were not interchangeable. Worst of all, Consolidated had no complete set of master blueprints for the B-24! To build bombers to Ford's production tolerance standard for parts of 1/1000 inch, Ford engineers had to start from scratch, creating detailed plans and designing the machine tools and production line necessary to fulfill Sorensen's promise. Ford built a massive assembly plant and airfield at Willow Run in Ypsilanti, Michigan, and created an assembly line that could be staffed by a vast workforce of semi-skilled wartime workers, many of whom had never worked in a factory before. It was like building a Ford car, where each worker had a specific task to accomplish, but on a vastly larger scale.

To achieve high-speed mass production, Ford had to build a basic B-24 model. However, the military demanded periodic design changes (based on operational experience) and each aircraft was different—a B-24 assigned to anti-submarine patrols in the North Atlantic required a different configuration and equipment roster compared to one assigned to tactical

bombing in the South Pacific. To keep the production lines rolling, the Army Air Corps established 27 aircraft modification centers throughout the country, where each production aircraft could receive its theater and mission-specific equipment (this is a process analogous to the “dealer installed options” you can order when you buy a new car). Several of these centers were operated by airlines (see below).

Out of a total of over 18,000 B-24s produced during the war, Ford's Willow Run plant produced 6972 complete B-24s and about 1900 “knockdown kits” for final assembly by Consolidated or Douglas. Each of the 6972 “flyaways” were flown from Ypsilanti to one of eleven mod centers where each underwent a series of steps to make it fully operational and mission-ready. According to Capt. Randy Hotton of the Yankee Air Museum in Ypsilanti, the Bechtel-McCone-Parsons Corp. mod center in Birmingham AL led the way with a total of 3857 aircraft modified. Northwest was second with 3114, with the remainder distributed among the nine other centers.

*Below: Fully assembled B-24 bombers and a knockdown kit, at Willow Run Airport. Photo: Yankee Air Museum*



## WARPLANE MODIFICATION CENTERS OPERATED BY THE AIRLINES and Principal Assigned Aircraft Types

American (LaGuardia) P-47  
Chicago & Southern (Memphis) A-20  
Continental (Denver) B-17; B-29  
Delta (Atlanta) various  
Mid-Continent (Minneapolis) B-25; A-36  
Northwest (St. Paul) B-24  
Northwest (Vandalia OH) various



TWA (Kansas City) B-25  
United (Cheyenne) B-17

Sources: Army Air Force Historical Study No. 62 (1947);  
oral communication, Capt. Randy Hotton, Yankee Air Museum

The Northwest Mod Center began operation in 1942, and the company's employee roster grew from 881 to over 5000 to meet the demands of the war effort. Northwest began publishing a monthly newsletter, *Field and Hangar*, for the Mod Center employees. By June 1945, with Germany defeated, the newsletter was permitted to print a series of photos offering glimpses of the modification process for an aircraft, by following mythical ship 119 on its arrival from Willow Run:

All photos: NWAHC Archives

Ship 119 arrives in St. Paul.



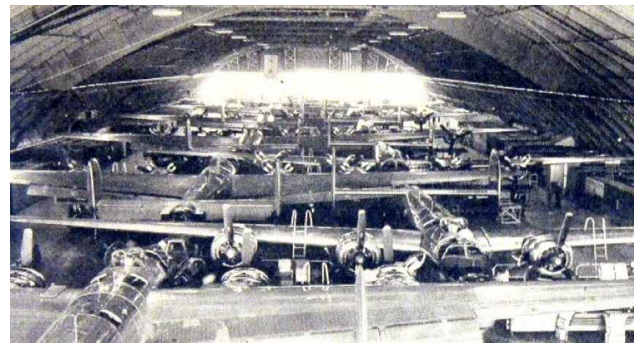
The USAAF delivery pilot is released and Northwest takes formal possession of the B-24. This administrative step will be reversed when aircraft modifications are completed.



A "Confidential Crew," NWA employees with security clearance, remove top-secret equipment from the aircraft, for testing and later reinstallation.



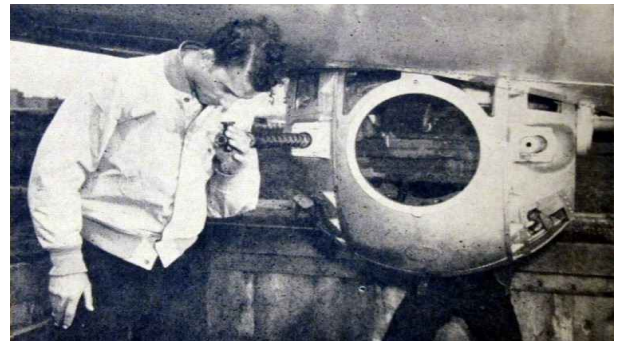
Ship 119 joins other B-24s in the crowded modification hangar.



Northwest technicians install electronic equipment, including H2X ground-mapping radar and the Honeywell C-1 autopilot, which is linked to the Norden bombsight.



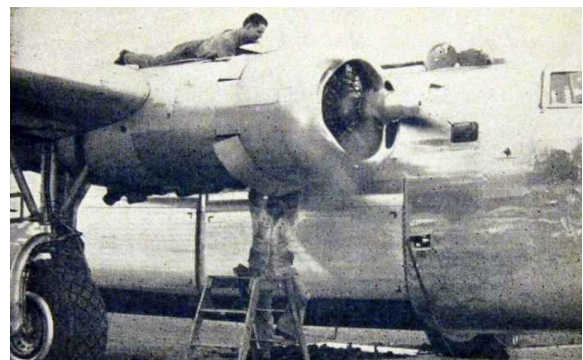
Installing and calibrating (boresighting) the .50 calibre machine guns.



Calibrating the ship's compasses against a reference point called the polaris..



Each engine is given a thorough check and run-in by NWA mechanics.



Cont. on p6



Cont. from p5 After modifications are complete, ship 119 is test flown by a Northwest crew to insure that all aircraft systems are fully operational.

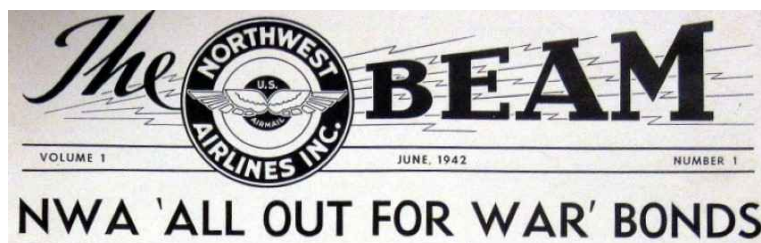


Ship 119 is handed over to the USAAF, and departs St. Paul with a military crew, destination -classified.



In 1942, NWA president Croil Hunter exhorted his growing workforce: "Every one of us in Northwest Airlines has an increasingly vital role in the world today—WINNING THE WAR! We'll give it that extra something—whatever it takes!" He advised, "Talking in wartime is always dangerous. Avoid gossip. Just do your job well. The results will speak for themselves. Northwest Airlines can and will come through with flying colors."

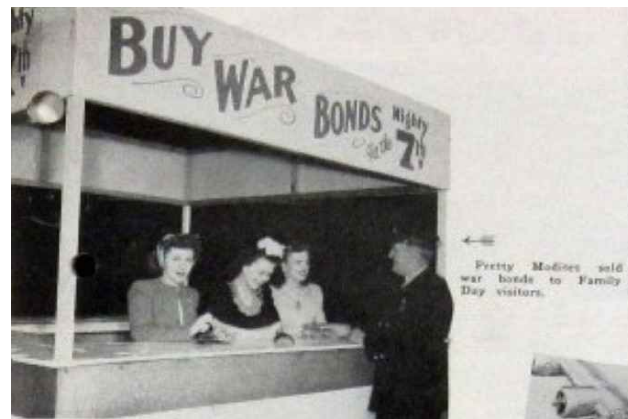
During World War II, the US Treasury Department issued War Bonds, maturing in ten years with an annual yield of 2.9%, to help finance the war effort. Unlike other countries, purchase of the bonds was voluntary and the government organized eight "war loan drives" from 1942 to 1945 to promote their purchase. Northwest Airlines encouraged employees to allocate 10% of their wages to the purchase of the bonds and become members of the "Ten Percent Club."



NWA president Croil Hunter (right) is the first employee to sign a pledge to join the Ten Percent Club.



The Northwest employee booth during the Seventh War Loan Drive, May 14-June 30, 1945.



"Mein Gott in Himmel! Vy didn't Goebbels or the Gestapo tell us about the scrappers on the NWA Ten Percent Club Front?" A cartoon showing Mussolini, Hitler and Tojo on the run.

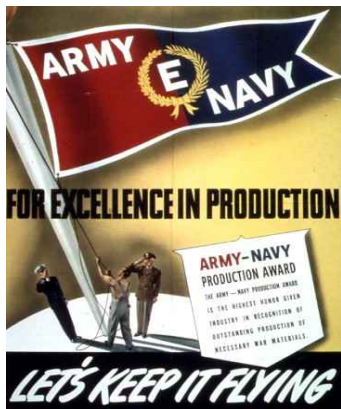


Daniel Berg clutches bonds purchased by his father James.





On Nov. 24, 1944 the NWA mod center was presented with an Army-Navy E Award, an honor presented to corporations "For Excellence in Production." Of the over 85,000 American companies involved in the war effort, only about 5% received this award. Below, center: the award ceremony in one of the hangars in St. Paul. Right: The Northwest Airlines choir performed for the occasion.

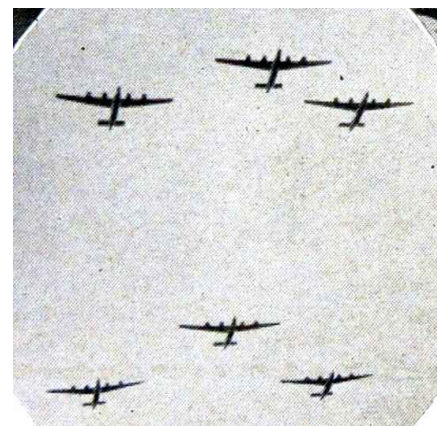


On June 18, 1945, the mod center held a Family Day open house, attended by over 20,000 employees and their family members. Although the war was clearly in its final stage, it came to an abrupt, somewhat unexpected end following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The military immediately canceled its contract with the mod center, which promptly shut down in September. The war was over. The postwar era was about to begin. ➔



NWA employees, dubbed "The Mod Center Beauties," handed out copies of *Field and Hangar* (containing the photos on pp.5-6 of this article) to visitors.

Below, left: Wendella Lindquist, NWA engine instructor, with Sgt. John Zimmer, injured war veteran. Center: visitors paint shark's teeth on an aircraft nose. Right, upper: a family watches the airshow presented on Family Day. Right, lower: B-24s, flown by NWA test pilots, in formation over St. Paul.





# News and Announcements

**Question:** Who are those guys in the Hangar Talk photo, and why are they working on a piston engine in their underwear?

**Answer:** They are Northwest mechanics, in a photo from the 1950s, when a new policy was instituted allowing them to dress comfortably during hot weather. We have no information on when this policy was discontinued.

## WE LOVE OUR VISITORS—two recent visitor groups

The Twin Cities branch of the **Red Hat Society**, an international organization which encourages women to pursue fun, fitness, fellowship and fulfillment to get the most out of life. *Photo: Gail Diercks*



Members of the Senior Class from Lemmon High School, Lemmon SD, on a field trip to the Twin Cities, seen here listening to museum director Chuck Huntley explaining about the history of NWA. Next stop on their itinerary: The Mall of America! *Photo: Gail Diercks*



teers every week at the Armed Forces Service Center in Terminal 1 in MSP (REFLECTIONS, Fall 2013). Gail was recently recognized by the center with a plaque acknowledging, with gratitude, her 4000 (!) hours of service at the center, which assists members of the military and their families. Very camera-shy, Gail refused to let me take her photo with her plaque, but I was able to grab this photo of Gail when she wasn't paying attention to me. Here she is, with Chuck Huntley, checking out something with our B-747 flight engineer's panel during her regular museum shift. *Well done, Gail!*



*Photo: NWAHC Archives*

**Dateline:** June 22, 1962, St. Paul, Minnesota

A reporter from *The Pioneer Press* followed NWA stewardesses Marygale Matthiesen and Carol Hanson (Hall) to a local playground, where they frolicked in the warm weather for an article entitled "Oh, for a Day With Two Stewardesses." The article even included their home addresses! As NWAHC volunteer Hall explains, "It was a different time." *Photo courtesy Carol Hall*



One of our most dedicated NWAHC volunteers is retired flight attendant Gail Diercks. In addition to her weekly shift as a guide in the museum, she volun-





# PAYING THE BILLS

## THE ACCOUNTS PAYABLE DEPARTMENT at NORTHWEST AIRLINES

*The most visible elements of any airline are the planes, their crews, the airport terminals and staff. But above all, an airline is a business and, like the unseen but furiously paddling legs of the proverbial gliding swan, a behind-the-scenes army of office employees keeps the enterprise aloft, functioning smoothly, efficiently and most importantly, profitably.*

At Northwest Airlines, one such vital department was **Accounts Payable**, the next door neighbor of the Payroll Department in the vast warren of offices at the company headquarters in Eagan, Minn.



*The door sign at the headquarters.  
Photo: Robert DuBert*

To learn more about this department, I interviewed **Karen Melchior**, an NWAHC volunteer who served as secretary to the department director from 1981 until her retirement in 1999, and **Karen Crosier**, a clerk/lead clerk from 1977 until 2007. For brevity, I'll refer to them as **KM** and **KC** and to their department as **AP**.

According to KM, the department consisted of about 70 staff members—the director, secretary, lead clerks, clerks and support staff. It was a large department and all were present during the day (KM's typical work schedule was Mon-Fri, 0730-1600). While Payroll was in charge of issuing employee paychecks, AP paid the bills from a multitude of third-party vendors for everything the company used in its worldwide operation—"field payables" (aircraft fuel, airport fees, crew hotels, etc.), aircraft parts and office supplies are just a few of the bills Northwest paid through the Accounts Payable department.

A major task of the clerks was matching up purchase orders issued by Northwest with invoices received from the vendors, to verify accuracy before a

check could be issued. When KC joined AP in 1977, it was all done by hand; the department wasn't computerized until the 1980s! A few vendors chronically over-billed and KC would have to make a phone call to "straighten things out." This might occur inadvertently due to a mismatch in the vendor's billing cycle vs. Northwest's payment schedule, a 30 day cycle where checks were issued on the "payment due date." For the rare, flagrant over-billings, KC might have to threaten legal action, but this could be complicated by the fact that, at some smaller "downline" stations, there was only one vendor (such as a fixed-base operator) who could provide what NWA needed. But she could almost always "work out the problems."

There was a vast amount of paper and computer spreadsheet work—on any given day, the department might issue 500-600 checks! At the end of each month, it was KC's job to "balance the books." And KM notes, proudly, "We paid our bills on-time and we had the money." There was one exception: during the difficult summer of 1993. There had been a recession beginning in 1990, Northwest had suffered a string of money-losing years and was negotiating concessions from labor to avoid declar-

ing Chapter 11 bankruptcy. To conserve cash, the company delayed paying some bills. Once the cash flow crisis was averted, all bills were paid, in full.

What were the job stresses? For KC, it was the communication with problem vendors. For KM, there was no stress from the job itself, however sometimes fellow employees would come to her with distressing personal problems, and for those folks she was a surrogate mom. However, she adds that the AP directors really cared about the employees, so there was a very low turnover in what KC remembers fondly as a "happy department." Both Karen Melchior and Karen Crosier loved their jobs, the opportunities they enjoyed to meet many Northwest people and the pride that accrued from working for a company that demonstrated financial integrity, was admired in the industry and respected by the community. ➔

*Below: some members of the Accounts Payable department, in a photo taken at Karen Melchior's retirement party in 1999.*

*L-R, Front: Sue Holmen; Barb Wagner; Jim Rathmell; Barb Brunes; Bun Wittl  
Rear: Marliese Augustine; Tom Ketcham; Joyce Commerford; Jenny Larson; Teresa Bellows*

*Photo courtesy Karen Melchior*



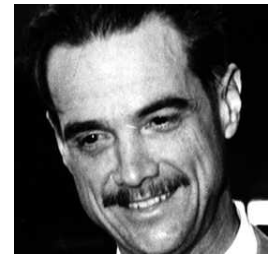


# REPUBLIC AIRLINES PROFILES

## AIR WEST and HOWARD HUGHES

by Robert DuBert

When West Coast Airlines, Pacific Air Lines and Bonanza Airlines merged to form Air West (REFLECTIONS, March 2018), an executive team composed of the presidents of those three airlines was created to run Air West: Nick Bez (WCA), CEO, Chairman; G. Robert Henry (Pacific), Vice-Chairman; and Edmund Converse (Bonanza), President. Three strong egos soon clashed, and when joint operations began on July 1, 1968, Air West struggled to combine three computer reservation systems, three employee workforces and three corporate cultures.....just in time for the peak travel period of the July 4th holiday weekend.



Howard Hughes.  
Photo: The Mob Museum

Chaos ensued immediately, with hundreds of lost reservations and passenger misconnections and other operational difficulties. Especially hard-hit was Las Vegas, a favorite vacation destination, and Air West's mayhem attracted the attention of Howard Hughes, whose hotel and casino empire lost revenue during the fiasco. The eccentric billionaire, who in 1966 had been forced by court order to sell his remaining shares in Trans World Airlines, dispatched Robert Maheu, the executive director of the Hughes Nevada business operation, to meet with Air West management to see if they might consider selling the airline. This chain of events ensued:



Robert Maheu.  
Photo: Las Vegas Review-Journal

**July 30:** Maheu meets with Nick Bez in Los Angeles, in an exploratory meeting.

**Aug. 11:** Without consulting the other Air West board members, Bez signs an agreement to provide his "best efforts" to achieve the sale of Air West to Hughes.

**Aug. 12:** Edmund Converse, G. Robert Henry and David R. Grace (Air West Executive Committee Chairman) announce their opposition to the sale. However, the Air West board votes, 13 to 11, to accept the Hughes offer.

**Sept. 19:** The Bank of America terminates the Air West line of credit.

A formal prospectus and shareholder proxy statement is mailed to every Air West stockholder, outlining the Hughes offer to purchase Air West for \$22 per

share, subject to shareholder approval and stable Air West market capitalization (share price X shares outstanding), with a midnight, Dec. 31 deadline to approve the deal. A shareholder meeting is scheduled in San Mateo CA on Dec. 27 to vote on the proposal. As the Christmas holiday week approaches, a dramatic series of events plays out, much of it reported almost daily in the business pages of *The New York Times*:

**Dec. 22:** *The Times* reports that Howard Hughes is "fretting" that shareholder proxies might be delayed or lost in the crush of holiday mail. Meanwhile, Air West directors receive an offer from the Mallory Randall Corporation, a manufacturer of food and beverage containers, to acquire Air West in a stock swap. This bid is endorsed by Edmund Converse.

**Dec. 24:** Northwest Airlines submits a bid, approved by Donald Nyrop, to acquire Air West in a stock swap, where each Air West shareholder would receive one share of NWA stock for every four shares of Air West, contingent on Air West maintaining a stable market capitalization. This bid is endorsed by G. Robert Henry.

**Dec. 27:** At the shareholder meeting, Nick Bez refuses to submit the Mallory Randall and Northwest proposals for shareholder consideration. The shareholders vote, 52% to 48%, to accept the Hughes offer. Actor Jimmy Stewart, owner of 11,890 shares dating from his investments in Southwest Airways (REFLECTIONS, Dec. 2017) votes "no."

**Dec. 28:** The Air West board now votes, 13 to 11, to *reject* the Hughes offer, thereby refusing to ratify the shareholder voting results. Robert Maheu reports to Hughes, "I do not think those selfish bastards are about ready to change their position." Nick Bez, frail and terminally ill with liver cancer, is distraught.

**Dec. 30:** A group of the dissident board members flies to New York to meet with a negotiating team from Northwest Airlines

to pursue a deal. Meanwhile, a shareholder group (including six other board members) seeks a court order to force the acceptance of the Hughes offer. Rumors of the turmoil (leaks possibly orchestrated by Nick Bez) cause the price of Air West shares to drop 20%.

**Dec. 31:** A second group of disgruntled shareholders sues the Air West board. The dissident board members ask Northwest Airlines for an immediate cash infusion to prevent the collapse of Air West. Northwest's negotiating team balks at completing any deal. The dissident board members, in a panic, telephone Nick Bez in Seattle, asking him to change their votes to "yes" for the Hughes offer. With a few hours to spare before the midnight deadline, the Air West board of directors formally agrees to sell Air West to the Hughes Tool Corporation, and Nick Bez signs the purchase agreement just before midnight.

**Jan. 17, 1969:** Howard Hughes and Air West petition the Civil Aeronautics Board to approve the deal, which is opposed by Northwest Airlines and Western Airlines.

**April 30:** The CAB approves the deal.

After the financial computations were completed, due to the decline in value of their stock, Air West shareholders received \$8.25 per share instead of the initially offered \$22; Howard Hughes had bought the airline for a bargain-basement price, but he was not elated. The ordeal had taken a toll on his already fragile emotional state and he sank further into the mental illness that would eventually claim his life. As for Nick Bez, he died almost three months earlier, on Feb. 5, and could not savor the consummation of the biggest business deal of his life. ➔

### References:

1. *The New York Times*
2. Bartlett, Donald and Steele, James. *Empire: the Life, Legend and Madness of Howard Hughes*. WH Norton, New York, 1979.



# WINGS FOR THE STARS—Part 4 (continued from REFLECTIONS, Jan. 2018)

Previously on **WINGS FOR THE STARS**: We've seen publicity photos of famous musicians who flew Northwest, and this installment includes more classical and pop artists. The photos originally appeared in the Northwest Airlines employee newsletter, and the original captions appear in italics.

**1956 Liberace** 1919-1987. *"Hello, Ladies.' Arriving at Detroit for a concert, Liberace stepped off a Boeing sporting a white tie, suit, coat and knit gloves. That's George [his brother] behind him."*



Wisconsin native Wladziu Valentino Liberace was a classically-trained pianist whose flamboyant personal style earned him the name Mr. Showmanship. At the height of his career during the 1950-70s, he was the highest-paid entertainer in the world, answering his critics by claiming "I cried all the way to the bank."

*Photo below: Rex Features*



**1957 Eartha Kitt** 1927-2008 *"Singer Eartha Kitt is one of many entertainers who have used NWA to shorten Orient trips."*



Singer, actor, dancer, activist, comedian and author Eartha Kitt's storied career encompassed film, stage, screen and outspoken social activism. Her career was set back when she criticized the Viet Nam war to Lady Bird Johnson during a White House luncheon. But we'll always treasure Kitt for her vocal rendition of the song "Santa Baby" and her appearances as the Cat Woman in the Batman tv series during the 1960s. *Photo: ABC Television*



**1959 Van Cliburn** 1934-2013. *"Pianist Van Cliburn obliges Northwest stewardesses Donna Ehlert and Beverly Fleming after his arrival in Minneapolis aboard an NWA plane from Chicago. The gals agreed he was 'an awfully nice passenger.'"*



Classical pianist Harvey Levan Cliburn Jr. achieved international recognition when he won the International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in Moscow in 1958, during the height of the Cold War.



In 1987 he performed at the White House for President Reagan and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, and was awarded the US Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Russian Order of Friendship in 2003-4.

*Previous, left: Van Cliburn with Nancy Reagan and Raisa Gorbachev at a White House State Dinner. Photo: Associated Press*

**1979 Beverly Sills** 1929-2007. *"A Northwest welcome for Metropolitan Opera star Beverly Sills, who arrived in the Twin Cities from New York to perform in the opera Don Pasquale. She remarked that her flight was flawless and right on time. Bravo!"*



Sills was a coloratura soprano, a type of singing voice noted for its agility and grace. After a distinguished career on the opera stage and in recordings, she achieved even greater acclaim in arts administration as general manager of the New York City Opera, and later as chairwoman of Lincoln Center and the Metropolitan Opera.

*Photo: EMI*



And that brings to a close this series, which I hope you've enjoyed as much as I've enjoyed bringing it to you. ➔



# THEY'RE SMALL *but they have* BIG EARS



Workers in the aviation industry are an important part of the war program. Remember "the enemy is listening." Guard your conversation. Don't talk—unless it's about war bonds.

An advisory for NWA Mod Center workers



Remember? I warned you about stopping off at the Mod Center!

A mod center cartoon from the USAAF Historical Study no. 62

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