

## A Thumbnail Sketch Of Western Airlines' History

Source: Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

In 1925, the United States Postal Service began to give airlines contracts to carry air mail throughout the country. Western Airlines first incorporated in 1925 as Western Air Express by Harris Hanshue. It applied for, and was awarded, the 650-mile long Contract Air Mail Route #4 (CAM-4) from Salt Lake City, Utah to Los Angeles. On 17 April 1926, Western's first flight took place with a Douglas M-2 airplane. It began offering passenger services a month later, when the first commercial passenger flight took place at Woodward Field. Ben F. Redman (then president of the Salt Lake City Chamber of Commerce) and J.A. Tomlinson perched atop U.S. mail sacks and flew with pilot C.N. "Jimmy" James on his regular eight-hour mail delivery flight to Los Angeles.

The company reincorporated in 1928 as Western Air Express Corp. Then, in 1930, purchased Standard Air Lines, subsidiary of Aero Corp. of Ca. founded in 1926 by Paul E. Richter, Jack Frye and Walter Hamilton. WAE with Fokker aircraft merged with Transcontinental Air Transport to form TWA.

In 1934, Western Air Express was severed from TWA and briefly changed its name to General Air Lines, returning to the name Western Air Express after several months. In a 1934 press release by the company, it called itself the Western Air Division of General Air Lines.

In 1941 Western Air Express changed its name to Western Air Lines (WAL) and later to Western Airlines. The carrier also billed itself as Western Airlines International at one point. After World War II, Western was awarded a route from Los Angeles to Denver via Las Vegas, but financial problems forced Western to sell the route as well as Douglas DC-6 new aircraft delivery positions to United Air Lines in 1947.

Western was later awarded a route between Minneapolis and Salt Lake City via Casper, Wyoming, thus allowing the airline to develop from a large regional airline into a major mainline air carrier.

This growth also enabled the airline to introduce Douglas DC-6 (DC-6B models), Lockheed L-188 Electra turboprops and eventually Boeing 707 service.

Pressured in a famous phone call by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to "buy American made aircraft", Drinkwater reportedly responded: "Mr. President, you run your country and let me run my airline!" For years after this exchange, the federal Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) would not award Western new routes. In August 1953 Western was serving 38 airports. By June 1968, that number had only grown to 42 airports.

Western entered the jet age in 1960 when it introduced Boeing 707 jetliners with flights between Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, OR and Seattle.

In 1967 WAL acquired Pacific Northern Airlines which served the state of Alaska from Anchorage and Seattle. In the late 1960s Western aimed for an all-jet fleet, adding Boeing 707-320Bs, 727-200s and 737-200s to their fleet of 720Bs.

Western was headquartered in Los Angeles, California. The airline's principal hubs were located at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), Salt Lake City (SLC) and Minneapolis/St Paul (MSP). Prior to airline deregulation, Western operated smaller hubs in Las Vegas, Nevada (LAS) and Denver (DEN). By the spring of 1987 shortly before Western was acquired by Delta Air Lines, the airline operated only two hubs with a major operation in Salt Lake City and a secondary hub in Los Angeles.

At their peak in the 1970s and 1980s Western flew to many cities across the western United States, Mexico and Alaska. Western also had many flights within California, competing with PSA, Air California and Hughes Airwest. In addition, Western operated nonstop "Islander" jet service to Hawaii from a number of mainland U.S. cities in its route system that previously did not have direct flights to the 50th state. The airline also flew nonstop jet service between Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada and Honolulu as well.

In the late 1970s Western Airlines and Continental Airlines agreed to merge. A dispute broke out over what to call the combined airline: Western-Continental or Continental-Western. An infamous coin toss occurred. Bob Six, the colorful founder of CAL, demanded that Continental be "tails" in deference to their marketing slogan "We Really Move Our Tail for You! Continental Airlines: the Proud Bird with the Golden Tail". When the coin flip turned up "heads" Six was so disappointed he called the merger off.

In 1981 Western Airlines began international flights from Anchorage and Denver to London Gatwick Airport with a single DC-10-30. At one point as an extension of the service to the U.K., Western operated one stop, no change of plane DC-10-30 flights between Honolulu and London via a stop in Anchorage.

### **Delta Air Lines merger**

,On September 9, 1986 Western Airlines and Delta Air Lines, entered into an agreement and plan of merger. The merger agreement was approved by the United States Department of Transportation on December 11, 1986. On December 16, 1986, shareholder approval of the merger was conferred and Western Airlines became a wholly owned subsidiary of Delta. The Western brand was discontinued and the employee workforces were fully merged on April 1, 1987.