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by Ruth M. Reinhold



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THE OLD DOUGLAS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

by Ruth M. Reinhold

THE DOUGLAS MUNICIPAL AIRPORT—not to be confused with the newer Bisbee-Douglas International eight miles north of the city—is only two and half miles from downtown, which means that it was laid out before airports had to move to the outskirts. It lies in flat, dun-colored unromantic desert country with a range of darker mountains rising ten miles to the east. It has no scheduled airline service or customs facilities and its three runways are of smoothly rolled gravel, but it still does more than half as much business as International. It offers fast, courteous service, Unicom, weather briefing as near as the counter phone, snack lunches from a machine, plenty of tie-down spaces and a stout metal hangar 100 feet by 120, big enough to house any general-aviation ship during inclement weather. These conveniences influence travelling pilots operating singles and light twins to use the field.¹

Inside Municipal's clean but cluttered operations office hot coffee bubbles and comfortable chairs invite conversation. The walls are covered with pictures of old Army aeroplanes and old civilian and military airplanes (the spelling changed after World War I). Should a young pilot remark that Municipal looks like an old field, Walter J. Johnson, the genial manager, will reply that it certainly is and that it was our first truly international airport, legally and physically, since it was originally separated from the Agua Prieta Airport by nothing more than a gate in the fence. As a matter of fact, it was the first such connected dual facility in the Americas, north or south. The gate enabled touring pilots to taxi from one country to its neighbor, thereby completing clearance and entry formalities with but one landing and takeoff. Thus was eliminated the annoying "pogo-stick" hop usually required between two international airports, in those days often only a few miles apart.

Mrs. Reinhold came to Phoenix in 1933 by way of Massachusetts, Maine and California. She has been a professional flyer (14,000 hours plus), dealer in aircraft and member of several aeronautics boards. At one time she was Senator Goldwater's pilot. Since 1968 she has been researching the history of aviation in Arizona.

Douglas was airplane minded and airplane conscious long before the airport was born. Trailing the Miracle at Kitty Hawk by only a few years, air-show promoters made their appearance, and this group soon learned that Douglas aviation audiences were both critical and sophisticated. Their expertise was due to the fact that beginning about 1908 and continuing through the years of the Aerial Border Patrol at the time of Mexican revolutions and incursions, the citizens were spectators at an almost continuous air show of their own.

They supplied some of their own acts. In 1908 several local young men built a single-place glider for which motive power was provided by a pair of fast buggy horses attached by a long rope to the frame. Guiding this two-horse aerial hitch was the teen-age son of the livery-stable proprietor atop Pancho, a cooperative racehorse. With John Wright at the controls of the glider, this exciting combination dashed down a mile-long stretch of dirt road at the old Overlock Tract, which thus became the city's first aerial field and the scene of some stirring flight exhibitions.²

The first formal air show to appear in Douglas arrived in 1910 when the famous Charles Hamilton presented two afternoons of flawless flying on February 26 and 27. During one superlative exhibition, witnessed by thousands of spectators from the town and the surrounding countryside, he kept his golden-winged box-plane in the air for twelve minutes. The reporters called it a cross-country flight.³

1911 was the year of the first United States transcontinental air race with \$50,000, contributed by William Randolph Hearst, as the prize. On a drizzly, chilly November afternoon Douglas citizens sighted the only eastbound contestant fluttering along above the guiding railroad tracks from Bisbee. After a cautious swing over Mexico, Robert C. (Bob) Fowler landed his Wright box-plane on a vacant lot behind the YMCA building and the city welcomed its first birdman flying the first transient airplane to arrive under its own power—not riding in a boxcar. Fowler eventually reached Florida but Hearst's prize money was safe since neither he nor Calbraith Perry Rogers, his west-bound opposite number, completed the trip by the stipulated date.⁴

By this time the two-horse glider already described had been strengthened, motorized and rebuilt to carry two passengers. On April 10, 1911, a news reporter for the Tombstone Prospector, along with some forty or fifty Douglas residents, witnessed a successful flight at the "Proving Grounds" north of town. Probably because these grounds were on or near the old quarter-horse track, the newsman credited the airplane with a "50 mile an hour gait." A snapshot taken in 1910 or 1911 shows the craft as a Curtiss-type box-plane with a pusher propeller. A. M. Williams, a member of the original group, roosts on the pilot's seat,

surrounded by the designer-builders, his face registering apprehension. George Z. Rogers and John Sierra, both Douglas residents in 1913, state that the little Douglas aeroplane was converted into a bomber and, with a second plane, flew off to harass General Huerta's supply lines south of the border. Neither aircraft returned—thus sharing the fate of a dozen or more American civilian airplanes, flown by American civilian pilots for both Mexican factions, which kept up an almost continuous air display along the border until late 1915.⁵

These were succeeded by General Plutarco Elias Calles' \$8,000 Cristofferson which lived in its own tent hanger at its own airport east of Agua Prieta. Flown by American pilot Lawrence Brown, it clattered along south of the border, occasionally dropping a carefully aimed bomb in open country. On one occasion, in an attempt at humor, Brown dropped a dummy bomb on the American encampment east of Nogales. General Frederick Funston saw nothing funny in the episode, however, and sent off a terse telegram to Washington.⁶

The border troubles demonstrated the need for better planes and airports. Following the raid on Columbus, New Mexico, on March 9, 1916, General Pershing was ordered to enter Mexico in pursuit of Villa's forces. He requested assistance from the First Aero Squadron. The First Aero entered the field, but their outmoded and worn-out machines were not equal to their assigned tasks. The result was an appropriation of half a million dollars for new aircraft, Columbus being designated as a test station.⁷

Consequences of these measures became audible and visible on September 15, 1916, when a big, noisy biplane came roaring along the steel ribbons from Columbus and landed on the parade ground at Camp Harry J. Jones north of town. It was probably the first military machine to enter the state under its own power. Its happy crewmen, Lieutenants T. S. Bowen and Carl Spatz (later spelled Spaatz), were greeted by all the boys, dogs, horses and footloose adults in the city. The flight had covered 144 miles in an hour and forty-five minutes. The beautiful new bird, powered by a snorting 160-horsepower Curtiss VX engine, could make eighty-six miles an hour. Its gross weight was 2,800 pounds—a far cry from the sputtering, fluttering little box-planes.⁸

The flight took on an international character when the officers left for Columbus on September 18. They first circled the town and then made a fast pass over Agua Prieta to "test their machinery." The Mexican authorities considered filing a charge of violation but later dropped the idea.⁹

The Great War put a stop to all such aerial activities, but in 1918 the picture changed radically. The country was swamped with surplus materiel and with surplus aviators. Discharged pilots bought the superfluous Jennies (JN-4Bs) and Standard JIs and

began barnstorming, sometimes flying west through El Paso, Douglas and Tucson. Traffic increased after Villa attacked Juarez, Chihuahua, in June, 1919. Some Americans were killed and depredations increased along the border. An effective aerial border patrol seemed the best way to control the situation and El Paso was designated as the mid-point terminal. Douglas was chosen as the Arizona District Headquarters.¹⁰

The result was a beautiful new joint-use (military-civilian) airport, the immediate predecessor of old Douglas International. The Douglas Chamber of Commerce and Mines leased acreage near Camp Jones to the government for a dollar a year, thus giving Douglas the first operational military air field in the state. It welcomed the first aerial unit on active duty when the 96th Aero Bombardment Squadron started its patrol flights. Until completion of the new facility, pilots landed their big roaring DH-4s on the Camp Jones parade grounds. These monster ships wore 400-horsepower Liberty engines, weighed 4,000 pounds, and were capable of a top speed of 120 miles per hour. They were real fighters equipped with machine guns and bombs, and some had radios.¹¹

By 1921 the border was quiet. Patrol activities ceased and the Camp Jones Airdrome was reduced to servicing status.¹² In June of 1926 the border airdromes were abandoned and the Camp Jones field was subleased to the Cochise County Fair Commission, again for a dollar a year. Already most of the military and a few civilians were using the shorter, more direct route between El Paso and Tucson by way of Lordsburg. As aircraft and engines grew stronger and more reliable, this became the popular way to go. In 1925 or 1926 one of the two Camp Jones hangars was shipped to Lordsburg, where the Army built a new airport.¹³ After that all but the slowest trainers bypassed Douglas.

This was the low point in the aeronautical history of Douglas, but two small, bright stars were twinkling in the troubled sky. First was the signing of the Kelly Act on June 3, 1926, an amendment to the original Air Mail Act. The second was the passage on May 20, 1926, of the Air Commerce Act, the first attempt at federal regulation of air traffic. The result, hopefully, would be stability, sanity and prosperity for a faltering aircraft industry. It promised airmail service, foreign and domestic for Douglas.¹⁴

Regularly scheduled flights to Arizona were conceived in California and began on November 28, 1927. In 1926 three perceptive young pilots, Jack Frye, Paul Richter and Walter Hamilton, opened a flying school in Los Angeles and acquired a distributorship for Eaglerock aircraft, one of the first of the smaller ships to be granted the coveted ATC (Approved Type Certificate) under the new federal regulations. Eaglerocks were slow but tolerant and forgiving, ideal for beginning pilots in the hot, high country. The three partners formed the Aero Cor-

poration of California and appointed an Arizona dealer, the Aero Corporation of Arizona, operating from the Phoenix South Central Airport. The dealership necessitated flights to and from California, sometimes patronized by members of the movie colony who were interested in Arizona winter resorts, and in 1927 thrice-weekly flights from Los Angeles to Tucson and Phoenix were scheduled in a new Fokker F-VII.¹⁵

Douglas became involved when Jack Maddux, owner of the prosperous Lincoln-Ford dealership in Los Angeles, ordered his third Ford tri-motor and announced his intention of starting an airline from San Diego to Douglas and El Paso. The new plane would stop at Douglas en route to Los Angeles from the factory in Michigan. The citizens went into action. Underbrush was hastily cleared to make a fifty-foot-wide runway at what the Douglas Daily Dispatch called the "International Airport"—actually the almost-abandoned Camp Jones Airdrome. The governor and other dignitaries were invited and a big banquet was planned for November 1, 1927. There were delays, however, and the huge, shiny Ford landed on November 3. Hundreds flocked to the field to stare at this first multi-engine aircraft to reach the town. Following lunch the governor, guests and the Maddux family took off for Tucson in the beautiful silver ship. Before he disappeared beyond the horizon, Maddux told city officials that Douglas was on the preferred route from the Coast to Mexico City; that it should not be bypassed by any carrier for the fifteen-mile saving through Lordsburg; and that everyone should write or wire Washington requesting the airmail service which would inevitably come in the near future.¹⁶

Maddux did nothing further for Douglas. He continued to flutter about like a confused moth experimenting with schedules between Los Angeles, San Diego and Phoenix, but his heart was in California. He had awakened the citizens of Douglas to the need for a concentrated effort to get airmail service, however, and the next step was the realization that Douglas must have a new and larger airport or the cause was lost. International boundaries engender paired communities, and by August of 1928, a wonderful joint international airport for Douglas and Agua Prieta was on paper. The architect-engineer of this Class A1A facility was J. P. Sexton, R.P.E., who labeled his drawing, "The Only International Airport in the Americas." With the wide gate in the wire fence open, he noted, almost 8,000 feet of solid dirt runway would be available, the longest in either country.¹⁷

After February 1, 1929, the new Air Commerce Regulations required that international flights be cleared for entry into and exit from the United States. The pilots had to register their ships with the U.S. Customs and give the names of all passengers and crew members. It was then necessary to obtain a permit from the Mexican Consul, who required a letter of recommendation for

each pilot from his local chamber of commerce or a similar organization. On the return trip the pilot telephoned or wired his estimated arrival time to the Mexican officials (customs and immigration), and also the United States authorities. Tourist papers were surrendered to the Mexican officials at Agua Prieta and the ship sedately taxied through the big gate to the American side for the required American inspections. Much easier and more efficient than the two usual landings and takeoffs at airports that sometimes were only a mile or two apart!

No charges were levied for the aircraft, but permits for entry into Mexico were seventy-five cents per person.¹⁸

This monster facility encompassed a total of 1,294 acres—640 on the Mexican side; 654 on the American. Leveling and clearing costs would be minimal and the city planned to spend the major portion of its funds for lighting.¹⁹ There was need also for a modest hangar. The abandoned Camp Jones hangar with its smashed windows and scabby metal covering was serving no useful aeronautical purpose, but its steel frame was sound. If the military could be persuaded to release it, the budget might be strained to include a shelter. Correspondence commenced in May of 1928 and continued for six months, at the end of which the Aviation Committee was informed that "the donation was rejected under the Air Corps Five Year Plan with the policy of not giving any hangar material to civilian organizations."²⁰

Federal aid to airports (including even an old hangar frame) was, of course, far in the future. Nevertheless when the new airport approached completion in mid-October, it was shaping up as one of the best in the Southwest. Its illumination shoved both Tucson and Phoenix well into second place. There were obstruction, boundary and landing-area floods. A twenty-four-inch rotating beacon made its six stately revolutions a minute, while a green auxiliary code flashed the airport's designator: D A. The big floodlights were by request. The rest operated from sundown to sunrise. An illuminated wind indicator south of the buildings added a nice touch. The passenger station was finished. The hangar could wait.²¹

Business started almost at once with the inauguration of "plane-train schedules." Beginning on February 4, 1929, travelers could ride the "Sunshine Special" of Standard Airlines (the operating company of the Aero Corporation of California) from Los Angeles, Phoenix, Tucson or Douglas to El Paso, transferring there to the Rock Island train for Chicago, thereby saving sixteen hours from the coast. At Chicago a variety of train, plane and bus combinations for Eastern centers were available. Transcontinental Air Transport (TAT), known as "The Lindbergh Line," claimed the first transcontinental plane-train schedules with inaugural flights on July 7 and 8, 1929. Standard's com-

bination came first, however, and gave Douglas the distinction of being the first Arizona community to host a viable westbound plane-train schedule.²²

International travel did not fare as well. Standard was "contemplating" a spur line to Nacozari in 1929 but the plans came to nothing when the Escobar rebellion broke out. Again the border had to be patrolled. Mexico planned an aerial program to protect the line, but the country was short of planes and pilots and the United States had to provide them, agreeing to assist the Mexican federal government "upon solicitation." Douglas citizens prepared to witness another revolution with its accompanying air shows.²³

The United States promised the Mexican federal forces a "fleet of Vaughts which had presumably been shipped." Possibly because shipment was delayed, the government decided to buy some civilian models. Charley Mayse, Arizona's best-known pioneer aviator, acted as intermediary. He began operations by walking into the Phoenix offices of the Aero Corporation of Arizona, Eaglerock dealers, and purchasing a brand-new model. He paid for it in gold—a gesture that caused considerable comment at the Phoenix South Central Airport. His wife Lola says that the Federals bought numerous small airplanes from Charley. Some were "junkers," but they were flyable and therefore acceptable. Other vendors found eager customers on both sides in Mexico as Eaglerocks, Wacos and Travelairs crossed the line near Bisbee and at Nogales and Douglas. All were paid for in good American bills. The pilots were courteously treated and driven across the line to return in an accompanying ship.²⁴

Not all deliveries were routine performances. Carl Knier, an instructor at South Central, recently from Missouri, was introduced one morning to a tall fellow who asked him to fly an Eaglerock to Douglas. Carl would return on Standard's afternoon plane. His passenger was a pilot and would show Carl just where to land. The journey was uneventful until they reached the outskirts of Douglas. Haze and smelter smoke were so thick that Carl had trouble locating the International Airport. His passenger willingly took over, remained on top, and headed for the tip of a small black hill poking through the dun pall. When they were almost on top of it, he made a turn and dove straight into the stuff. An unhappy Knier broke into a sweat, but seconds later the Eaglerock was rolling toward a happy group of welcoming Mexicans at the Agua Prieta airport. The passenger was paid for the ship with crisp American bills which he counted and handed to Carl, who was profusely thanked for his efforts and driven to Standard's small office on the American side in time to catch the afternoon flight to Phoenix. Carl's knees were still shaking when he staggered off the big Fokker at Sky Harbor. He wanted no more international transactions.²⁵

American planes were assigned to border protection when the 3rd Attack Squadron and aircraft from the 12th Observation at Fort Sam Houston were ordered to Arizona. Most of the men were billeted at Fort Huachuca but others with their ships were quartered at Tucson, Nogales and Douglas. Eighteen armed machines flew dawn to dusk patrols of two planes each.

No incidents worth mentioning happened until April 2, when a careless insurgent pilot dropped two home-made bombs on Naco, Arizona, and a third so close to the town that windows were broken and several bystanders injured. In spite of apologies by both Mexican parties, the American government was incensed and issued a warning that there must be an end to such careless incidents. To make the warning more convincing, a massive demonstration was planned secretly for April 9.²⁶

On that very day an American pilot known only as "Red," who flew for the Escobaristas, took off solo to work over the Federal trenches. Because of poor aim or high winds, his bomb fell on the American side. It did no damage but Red was panic stricken. He flew to the Purdy Ranch and landed there, dreading the consequences of Secretary of State Stimson's order forbidding any American pilot to fly for either faction.

About the same time the skies thundered and the ground vibrated as eighteen big American planes emerged out of the swirling dust, passed over in stately parade, and disappeared in the west. They had roared over Douglas at nine o'clock and swooped low over the rebel camp at Agua Prieta before vanishing in the murk. At 9:20, as they came in full view of General Topete's headquarters, the federal troops stood in their trenches and cheered. When the grand procession roared low over Ambos Nogales, buildings emptied on both sides of the line.

No shots had been fired and no bombs had been dropped on that day except the single missile tossed out by the quivering Red. No doubt he thought the whole show was for his benefit as the big birds made a wide circle and headed for Tucson. He is reported to have served as manager of the Douglas International Airport at a later date, but no one now remembers his name or any details of his tenure.²⁷

Hostilities were concluded on May 8, 1929. The pathetic little revolutionary brush fire had burned itself out, and now the border people could settle down to business. Civilian activity at the Douglas International Airport could flourish again.²⁸

Everything was fine except the local Douglas weather. The annual monsoons moved into Southern Arizona on July 23, bringing spotty showers during the night, a cloudburst in the morning, and a residue of drizzle and fog which mixed with smoke from the Douglas smelter to produce near-zero-zero conditions at International. Late that afternoon a pair of bewildered ferry pilots

in two Ryan Broughams churned around in the murk looking for the field and in desperation turned north. A quick-witted airport crew flipped on all the lights including the big beacon and in minutes two happy and relieved aviators were rolling through the mud to the fuel pits. They told numerous spectators that the big beam cut through the fog like a burning Texas oil well and since no other such facility was near, it had to be the airport beacon.²⁹ The next day Jack Frye and Paul Richter landed in their new Fokker F-10 Tri-motor. This comfortable monster was scheduled to begin service through the city on August 4, 1929.

Right on time, Standard's east-bound flight arrived at 10:30 that same day and the west-bound plane came in on time an hour later. Both of these luxurious airliners were musically welcomed by the 25th Battalion Band from Camp Jones, and that afternoon more traffic came in. One of Scenic Airways' Eaglerocks that had somehow escaped sale during the Escobar rebellion shot some practice touch-and-go landings with instructor Cecil Sherwin and trainee "Shorty" Miller aboard—both from the company's school at Nogales.

Another arrival brought pretty Ruth Elder and her instructor Jim Granger on their way to Clover Field, where Ruth would take off solo as a contestant in the first ladies' transcontinental air race, named by Will Rogers the Powder Puff Derby. She was a celebrity of some note, having been a passenger on the Fokker Tri-motor Friendship, flown by George Haldeman in 1927 on an attempted flight from New York to Europe. Forced down near the Azores, both were rescued without getting their feet wet through Haldeman's skill in ditching the ship beside a freighter. Now the friendly and photogenic Miss Elder was an almost-famous movie star and a pilot of considerable ability. She had planned an overnight stop at Douglas, but since no hangar was available and she did not wish to leave her \$18,000 airplane outside in the monsoon season, the couple took off for Tucson.³⁰

Compared to the present carefully organized and strictly conducted Powder Puff Derby, this first women's air race was a hare-brained safari. Although it was sponsored by the Exchange Clubs of America and managed by so-called professional race experts, nothing seemed properly planned. Routings were frequently changed, little consideration was given to the girls' comfort or safety, at many stops no protection was furnished for the aircraft, and the well-publicized contestants were mobbed, photographed and harrassed by enthusiastic but unthinking crowds.

Douglas was not involved at first. The route as announced was via Yuma, Phoenix, Tucson and Lordsburg to El Paso and points east. Douglas found this unbelievable. The Chamber of Commerce wrote indignantly to the race officials and the routing was

changed to skip Tucson and make an overnight stop at Douglas International. Over twenty-five Derby flyers were expected at Douglas on August 20. ETA was given merely as "early," but the city was ready. Eleven volunteers were standing by to assist Airport Manager Russell, local women with cars were prepared to furnish help and transportation to the contestants, and a banquet at the Club Social in Agua Prieta was on the evening program.³¹

On August 18, 1929, twenty shiny airplanes took off from Clover Field, Santa Monica. The first overnight stop was at San Bernardino. One ship was damaged there. The long noon halt at scalding Yuma on the 19th was a nightmare. Two aircraft suffered landing damage and the girls were becoming tired and edgy with the constant bickerings of the race managers and the Exchange Club officers flying with them. One of the damaged planes was repaired and able to continue. Bobby Trout, lost in Mexico, sent word that she would rejoin the group following some repairs to her ship. She lost two days but managed to finish the race.

After the long, hot bumpy flight to Phoenix, Marvel Crossen was missing. Since she was one of the most experienced pilots in the race, the managers felt that she was delayed but surely was safe. There was a banquet at the Westward Ho that night. In the morning, after a good rest, the contestants were off to Douglas.³²

There were no weather checks. The managers simply looked at the skies and approved the start. The faster craft arrived safely at Douglas International, but the slower ones encountered scattered rain squalls between Benson and the border. Vera Dawn Walker, lost and confused in the boiling disturbance, found herself over Lordsburg. She bought fuel at the Army Field and headed along the tracks for Douglas. When she was about twenty miles from her destination, a cloud too mean and large to ignore blocked her route. She sat her Curtiss Robin down in a pasture which was occupied at the moment by contestant Jessie Keith Miller's damaged ship and a large bull.

Vera's landing was good, but the bull held her a terrified prisoner in the cabin while he snorted, pawed mud and peered at her through the windows. After about an hour, the owner of the animal drove up, accompanied by Jessie. He shooed the bull away, explaining that he was just "playful and friendly"—a statement that Vera, forty years later, still rejects. A mechanic from Cochise was on his way to repair Jessie's damaged landing gear. Both girls reached Douglas without further incident late that afternoon.

Ruth Elder was another who had bull problems. Trapped by the same disturbance, she chose another muddy pasture for a landing. As she rolled to a stop, a huge red bull charged for the ship. Deciding that the animal was more dangerous than the elements, she opened the throttle and splashed off for a muddy but safe departure.

Another lost contestant landed "somewhere in Mexico," received directions from two friendly cowboys and made it to International before sundown. The international authorities made a joint decision ruling that her illegal entry, illegal exit and illegal return to this country cancelled each other out, and no charges were filed.

The evening banquet was saddened by the news that Marvel Crossen had been found dead north of Wellton, the victim of a forced landing. She was the only fatality.³³

About ten o'clock on August 21 the contestants took off from a muddy airport and Douglas citizens knew they had operated a good race stop in spite of meteorological handicaps and bungling professional managers. They knew also that something would have to be done about the condition of their runways following heavy rains.³⁴

With the departure of the Powder Puff contestants, Douglas International settled down to routine business. Standard continued its thrice-weekly schedule. Charley Mayse passed in and out and transients stopped for fuel. By 1929 Charley needed a cabin ship, something that would allow patrons of his growing charter and local passenger trade to complete a flight fresh and unrumpled. With some Los Angeles assistance he bought a Ryan Brougham, "just like Lindbergh's—a sister ship to the famous Spirit of St. Louis." Actually the Ryan Broughams were not identical with Lindbergh's collection of flying fuel tanks, a special model built for a specific purpose and not eligible for commercial licensing.³⁵ Charlie and his new Brougham cleared customs through Douglas several times. On January 30, 1929, he was in Cananea, Sonora, carrying passengers and there were flights to Nacozari, most of them noted in the Ryan's log as "short hops," meaning local passenger rides.³⁶

1929 had been a fabulous year for aviation and the effects of Black Monday in Arizona seemed minimal. 1930, however, was catastrophic for general aviation. For all but a chosen few of the carriers, it was a disaster. Arizona's arrogant, sprawling Scenic Airways—builders of the Grand Canyon Red Butte facility and of Phoenix Sky Harbor, owners or operators of some fifteen other airports—failed, along with Pickwick Airways, Apache Airlines (operating between Globe and Phoenix), and the Aero Corporation of Arizona. The airports along Highway 66, so enthusiastically dedicated in the years between 1925 and 1930, were abandoned. Only Kingman and Winslow remained. The Prescott air field was relinquished to the gophers and the deer. Farther south everything closed down except Yuma, Phoenix Sky Harbor, Tucson and Douglas, and these were either airline or joint-use facilities. Clemenceau remained active until the smelter closed; then its business withered away.

The depression was biting deep. Charley Mayse's lucrative

business evaporated. He turned in the Waco trainers and the pretty Ryan as partial payment on two new cabin Wacos, engaged a second pilot, and went off to Honduras to fly for the government there.³⁷

Airmail contracts under these circumstances assumed major importance. They were due for renegotiation on November 7, 1929, and Herbert Hoover's new postmaster general, Walter Folger Brown, asked for a six-months postponement in order to study the situation. Brown was an astute politician, a fine organizer, a fair-minded man, but the airmail service had become a national mess, approaching the scandalous. Brown's studies showed him a hodgepodge of short-haul mail runs. Passengers were seldom counted and often sat on portable chairs jammed between mail sacks. A single young pilot crouched outside in an "open-cockpit trap." This had to be changed. The new postmaster general persuaded congress to pass the McNary-Waters Bill giving him sweeping powers to consolidate existing airline routes. He wanted four well-financed transcontinental lines to carry both passengers and mail. The passengers would travel in comfort. Payment would no longer be by the pound but by the space mile (space furnished and miles flown). The contractors would be paid whether there was mail or not, and vacant space could be filled with passengers or cargo, thus encouraging the lines to invest in larger, faster and safer equipment.³⁸

TAT-Maddux was losing millions a year on its luxurious train-plane schedules. Western Air Express, paralleling TAT's route to Kansas City, was also showing a deficit. The lucrative Los Angeles-Salt Lake City mail contracts, however, kept the big airliners operating. In an attempt to protect all possible bidding opportunities, a number of companies merged. Western Air Express bought spunky, efficient little Standard Airlines on May 1, 1930. TAT-Maddux merged, on Brown's orders, with Western to form Transcontinental and Western Air, the central trunk line from Los Angeles to the East Coast. During the first week in October, again at Brown's insistence, the southern route (through Douglas) of Western Air Express was sold to American Airways, a new organization hastily formed by putting together a dozen or so short haulers, a number of well established airlines with mail contracts, and a few carriers who were only hoping for choice agreements. To say that the general public was confused by all this would be an understatement, but everyone was happy when on October 15, 1930, Southwest Air Fast Express, part of American Airways, flew into Arizona with the first load of airmail. Designated as CAM (Contract Air Mail) No. 33, the plane was a Standard-Western F-10 Fokker, its paint hardly dry, flown by some of the original Standard pilots wearing new, unrumpled American Airways uniforms with shining American insignia.

Douglas as usual made the most of its aeronautical opportunities. Over 2,000 people waited at the airport to greet the pilots of the eastbound inaugural flight which landed at twelve o'clock loaded with 132 pounds of mail. Johnny Martin was the pilot. The westbound flight in charge of H. B. "Hap" Russell came in at 5:17. Distinguished guests Earl Ovington and Frank H. Hitchcock arrived on the eastbound flight, enjoyed lunch at an Agua Prieta restaurant as guests of the Chamber of Commerce Aviation Committee, and left for Tucson on the westbound flight. Total pieces of mail boarded at Douglas for the two flights was 9,468.³⁹

Prosperity breeds success. In mid-1929 a generous Cochise County allocated \$9,000 for airports. Willcox got \$1,000. Bisbee and Douglas received \$4,000 each. Work on the Douglas International commenced immediately and by January 2, 1931, a new 100-by-120-foot hangar with a cement floor and ramp had been completed. Free storage was extended to all military aircraft and Chamber of Commerce President A. G. Crouch, describing the situation to Assistant Secretary of War F. Trubee Davidson, expressed the hope that transient government pilots would be allowed to purchase fuel at the new facility.⁴⁰

An Airport Directory dated September 1, 1934, shows the Douglas International Airport in all its splendor—by far the finest in Arizona. The rating, says the directory, is A-1-E. Temporary Airport of Entry. Mud problems, except for very unlucky pilots, have been solved by a 3,000-foot paved east-west runway and two caliche strips, northeast-southwest and northwest-southeast, all 100 feet wide. The really exquisite touch is a big red neon M DOUGLAS glowing on the hangar roof. Pilots approaching the city from the direction of Tombstone say that at first sighting as they come over the rise, it appears that the entire town is burning. Twenty-four-hour service is available, and a taxi to town costs fifty cents.⁴¹

Through the period of panic between the 1932 elections and the inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the M DOUGLAS red neon sign continued to blaze from International's hangar roof though many other airports advised "No Service" and ceased to attempt any maintenance. Gradually, however, things improved and the wounded economy began a slow but definite recovery. Mexico's internecine squabbles quieted. Charley Mayse returned from Honduras and the city offered him a modest salary, the small brick house reserved for the airport manager, and the privilege of operating his own flying business if he would manage the facility. Charley accepted. He bought a used Stinson SM-8A for passenger work, picked up a trainer, and acquired a state distributorship for Taylorcraft planes. Soon these small, agreeable side-by-side machines became popular with flight schools and private owners

who wanted easy-to-fly, inexpensive aircraft. Lola Mayse says that Charley sold more units than any other distributor in the United States.⁴²

The war in Europe spurred the economy at home and the aviation business really took off. Businessmen arrived at International in chartered aircraft and the stop was popular with transients. Some of Charley Mayse's students became instructors and turned out more pilots. Everybody seemed to be flying. Miners and cattlemen from Mexico used Charley's charter service and Bill Greene, Jr., son of Colonel W. C. Greene of Cananea, bought a ship and learned to fly.⁴³ The amount of airmail increased and American Airways, now known as American Airlines, replaced its plodding Fords, Fokkers and Curtiss Condors with sleek, fast DC-2s. International traffic remained unimpressive by today's standards (probably no more than ten to fifteen aircraft clearances a month), but the new Agua Prieta Airport some two miles southwest of the town was acceptable and helped to keep International in business.⁴⁴

These good things, however, carried with them the seeds of decline for the Douglas Airport. Like many other municipalities, Douglas learned that a fine new airport was merely a construction permit for a bigger and better facility or for moving to another site. By the late 1930s it was obvious that a larger commercial field was required—one that would accommodate the huge new transports which American Airlines had on order, at the same time keeping pace with the expanding Civilian Pilot Training Program and increased activity by the military. International's runways were too short for the new behemoths; its approaches were poor. It was time to move.

The first step was the purchase of 160 acres at the present site of the Bisbee-Douglas International Airport about nine miles north of town. A two-runway facility was started. Then the WPA and the military moved in, acquired additional land, and completed a three-runway airport. The longest strip was 7,506 feet. Support facilities included hangars, shops, and buildings for service and administration, plus barracks and a hospital. The total government investment was over \$8,000,000. An advanced twin-engine school was opened and over 8,823 wartime trainees graduated, including 342 Chinese cadets.⁴⁵

But old reliable Douglas International was not closed and according to Everett Jones, Sr., long-time member of the Cochise County Airport Board, it never has been closed. During World War II Charley Mayse first secured a small non-college CPT contract and then was invited to operate a college program at Safford. He soon found that winging back and forth to manage both operations, at the same time continuing his growing charter business, was too much. He sold the school to the Moreau Flying Service of California and moved to Safford.

Old International lost its international designation and became Douglas Municipal when American Airlines moved to the new and larger facility following cessation of military activities. Because of its convenience and good condition, however, Municipal remained popular with general-aviation pilots. Even in 1974, business continues to be good. Manager Walter Johnson states that transient movements are running over a thousand a month, and these would not include scheduled air carriers, turbine-powered aircraft, or pilots needing customs service.⁴⁶

Changes will have to be made, however, if this prosperity is to continue. Unless facilities are updated and improved, the old field may not be able to stay open. Recommended expenditures for the years 1973 through 1993 add up to half a million dollars and include a new administration building, pavement for two of the gravel runways, and modern lighting.⁴⁷ A non-precision approach would be desirable also; pictures and scale models of old aeroplanes would emphasize the rich historic background of the place.

If Municipal can survive for a few more years, it may come back into its own. Aviation specialists foresee the gradual demise of big, land-consuming airports except at the very large metropolitan centers. At these strategically located major hubs, the transcontinental and global flights will be fed by a variety of small, fast and efficient units aided by rapid ground transportation. When and if this time comes, many of the airports will move again, this time nearer to their communities to reduce travel time. Douglas will be ready for this change with a good municipal airport only "two and a half miles due east of the Post Office."⁴⁸

THE OLD DOUGLAS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT NOTES

- 1Walter J. Johnson, interview with Ruth M. Reinhold, Douglas, May 15, 1974.
- 2George Z. Rogers letter to Ruth M. Reinhold, November 14, 1971. Numerous interviews during 1972-1973.
- 3Douglas Daily Dispatch, Bisbee Review, February 25, 26, 1910.
- 4Robert Fowler, "Fowler Writes for the Dispatch," Douglas Daily Dispatch, November 5, 1911.
- 5George Z. Rogers, letters to RMR, February 25, March 31, 1972, August 4, 1974. John Sierra, a resident of Douglas in 1913, signed an affidavit confirming Rogers' story, dated April 27, 1974.
- 6Nogales Oasis, July 31, 1915.
- 7Robert B. Casari, U.S. Military Aircraft 1908 to April 6, 1917 (Chillicothe, Ohio: published by the author, 1974), Vol. 4, Part I, p. 60.
- 8Ibid., pp. 41-52.
- 9Douglas Daily Dispatch, November 16, 1916 (the Curtiss R-2's arrival in Douglas); Tombstone Prospector, November 18, 1916 (departure).
- 10Stacy C. Hinkle, Wings over the Border (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1970), pp. 1-10. Border newspapers ran continuous releases on the situation but Hinkle quotes from orders and sometimes gives more specific information.
- 11Colonel Morton H. McKinnon, letters to RMR July 13, 22, August 7, 1969. Col. McKinnon was assigned to the 96th Aero Squadron and later was transferred to Flight B of the 12th and based at Nogales. His log shows first flight El Paso to Douglas June 25-26, 1919. His correspondence and some of his original orders are on file at the Arizona Historical Foundation, ASU, Tempe, Arizona.
- 12Hinkle, Wings over the Border, pp. 61-64.
- 13Air Service News Letter, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, May 18, 1926, p. 14.
- 14Arnold E. Briddon and Ellmore A. Champie, Federal Aviation Agency Historical Fact Book, Office of Management Services, Federal Aviation Agency (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1966), p.1.
- 15Henry Ladd Smith, Airways: A History of Commercial Aviation in the United States (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), pp. 114-115.
- 16Douglas Daily Dispatch, November 4, 1927. News of this first tri-motor in Douglas commenced about October 28, 1927, and continued until early November. The welcoming festivities were postponed several times.
- 17National Archives, Record Group 18, xerox copies of an original probably provided for the City of Douglas and donated by Walter J. Johnson, Manager, Douglas Municipal Airport, to the Arizona Historical Foundation, ASU, Tempe, Arizona. The originals were probably produced by the Government Printing Office in Washington. They include a two-page map of the field and a two-page airport description. The latter was reprinted by the Douglas Dispatch, no date given. One of the maps is dated August 17, 1928.
- 18Ibid., Regulations and Suggestions for Touring Pilots Entering Mexico.
- 19Airway Bulletin No. 680, July 19, 1929. Washington: Department of Commerce, Aeronautics Branch. The description of the airport is confirmed by George Z. Rogers, who says the land was "acquired" from him.
- 20Xerox copies from National Archives, Record Group 18, in files of Arizona Historical Foundation, ASU, Tempe, Arizona.
- 21Airway Bulletin No. 680, July 19, 1929, p.2.
- 22Douglas Daily Dispatch, February 3, 4, 1929. All Arizona papers carried news of TAT's inaugural flights through Kingman and Winslow on July 7, 8, 9, 1929.

- 23Bisbee Evening Ore, March 11, 1929.
- 24Dr. J. Gordon Shackleford, interview with RMR, Phoenix, April 4, 1974.
- 25Carl Knier, telephone interview with RMR, Phoenix, April 5, 1974.
- 26Bisbee Evening Ore, April 3, 1929.
- 27Ibid., April 9, 1929; Fred Valenzuela (retired Customs collector), interview with RMR, Naco, March 20, 1970.
- 28Lola Mayse, interviews with RMR, Phoenix, August 15, 17, 1974.
- 29Douglas Daily Dispatch, July 24, 26, 1929.
- 30Ibid., August 3, 4, 1929.
- 31Ibid., August 15, 1929.
- 32Ibid.; Yuma, Phoenix and Tucson newspapers started carrying news of the Derby on August 17, 1929.
- 33Vera Dawn Walker, interview with RMR, Phoenix, August 12, 1972.
- 34Douglas Daily Dispatch, August 22, 1929.
- 35Rockwell Hereford, Carmel, California, letters to RMR, January 10, July 6, October 28, 1969. In the files of the Arizona Historical Foundation are xerox copies of correspondence between Mayse and Hereford with descriptions of corporate structure, agreements, financial statements, and a brochure issued by the Mayse Air Service, Inc.
- 36Ryan log book now in possession of Lola Mayse, Phoenix, Arizona.
- 37Lola Mayse, interviews.
- 38Henry Ladd Smith, Airways, pp. 156-196, 400.
- 39Douglas Daily Dispatch, October 14, 15, 1930.
- 40Aero Digest, Vol. 25 (January, 1930), unpagged clipping in files of RMR; Harold Bean, interview with RMR, Phoenix, April 20, 1974. Bean was in charge of the Oakland Navigation District and Arizona was in his region. He signed the papers for government financing of the new hangar.
- 41"Description of Airports and Landing Fields," Airway Bulletin No. 2, U.S. Department of Commerce, September 1, 1934, p. 5.
- 42From 1936 to 1947 RMR was employed by Carl Knier, owner of Sky Harbor Air Service. The company had a Taylorcraft dealership; Charley Mayse was a distributor.
- 43RMR, personal log book, shows numerous charter flights from Phoenix to Douglas and to the San Rafael Ranch, part of the Greene ranch empire.
- 44The Agua Prieta Airport connecting with the Douglas International Airport was never fully developed.
- 45Captain Robert Moore, "History of the Douglas Army Air Field," Ms. (hand-written notes compiled at the request of Senator Barry M. Goldwater, used with Captain Moore's permission).
- 46Walter J. Johnson, interview with RMR, Douglas, June 15, 1974.
- 47Daniel, Mann, Johnson and Mendenhall, R. Dixon Speas Associates, and Earl V. Miller Engineers, "State of Arizona Aviation Systems Plan 1974-1993," Ms. Phoenix, Arizona, December, 1973. Copies at Division of Aeronautics, Arizona Department of Transportation, Phoenix.
- 48"Description of Airports and Landing Fields," Airway Bulletin No. 2, June 1, 1933, p. 5.