

IT BEGAN A LONG TIME AGO IN JULY, 1940 TO BE PRECISE

For it was on July 2, 1940 that Piedmont Aviation was incorporated under the laws of the State of North Carolina. And at that time, negotiations with the Piper Aircraft Corporation and Stinson Aircraft resulted in the infant company obtaining distributor franchises for the sale of these airplanes in North Carolina. Until the outbreak of World War II, the principal activity of the Company was aircraft sales and service.

Then came the war, and Piedmont's thinking and efforts were turned toward the war effort, and pilot training shifted into high gear. Approved by the CAA as a primary and advanced flight school, later as an aircraft and engine overhaul agency, (the only one between Washington and Atlanta) Piedmont was awarded contract after contract for flight training in all phases, primary, pre-glider, secondary, cross-country, instructor, and night-flying courses.

Turn back the clock still further. Imagine a young man of 21, who had learned to fly at 16, who held a commercial pilot certificate and an instructor's rating. This young man was a native of Winston-Salem, had attended the University of Arizona, and in the summer of 1939, returned to Winston-Salem associating with the Camel City Flying Service as sales manager. In 1940, when Piedmont Aviation was formed from the nucleus of the Camel City Flying Service, this young man became the controlling stockholder, Vice President, Treasurer, and a Director of the new company.

In 1943, this young man was elected President of Piedmont Aviation, and justly so, for since he had been instrumental in expanding Piedmont's sales to the point where the Company sold more aircraft than the total of all competitive makes, he was an obvious choice. Furthermore, Piedmont's training programs had been built up to the point where they were recognized as being among the country's finest, and had received special recognition by the State Department as the agency selected to train Central and South American students.

But much of Piedmont's success was war-stimulated, and the days of expanded training programs were numbered. Convinced of the permanence of commercial aviation, sure of its growing place in the American economy, this young man had a vision, a vision which when carried to completion was to earn him the respect of the entire aviation industry, and the admiration of his employees and fellow-citizens. His name is Thomas H. Davis.

Yes, Tom Davis had a dream, and it was well-founded. Rail and road transportation North-South through this area was highly developed, but to the West, the peaks of the Appalachians set up a permanent barrier to East-West surface transport. Travel across the mountains was laborious and slow, to say the least. What better area for air transportation could be found? The economic need was there -- what about the actual operation?

In Piedmont Aviation, there was the nucleus of an airline. Pilots? Plenty, to start out with. Names familiar to all of us, Gilley, Saunders, Tadlock, Browning, Taylor, Nicholson, Dobbins, Gaither, Odum, Dark, Hagans. Maintenance people like Culler, Cartwright, Young, Waggoner, Whisenhunt, Barber, Rehder, Fix, all were here, qualified, used to working as a team, and ready to go.

So, in June, 1944, Piedmont filed application with the Civil Aeronautics Board for authority to conduct scheduled local service operations. Later in 1944, CAB consolidated all applications in this area into the now famous "Southeastern States Case". When the Board announced its decision in April, 1947, Piedmont was the only carrier certificated from a group of 16 applicants.

The first scheduled flight on the new system was flown on February 20, 1948, with Leon Fox and "Horse" Dobbins in the cockpit, and Bill McGee as purser. As soon as practicable after that date, all other segments were inaugurated, until by May 14, 1948, the system was in full swing.

But Piedmont far from stopped growing. Newport News and Fayetteville were added to the system in 1949, Myrtle Beach in 1950, Beckley and Knoxville in 1952, Huntington in 1953, London-Corbin in 1953, Bluefield in 1954, and Parkersburg and

Columbus in 1955.

Piedmont's original certificate was granted for a three year period, and on May 26, 1952, the Civil Aeronautics Board rendered a decision granting Piedmont a renewal for a seven year term, longest thus far granted to a local service carrier. The Board's decision read in part, "The record achieved by Piedmont is so outstanding . . . as to merit special recognition".

Business has grown as people came to know and trust Piedmont service, and as the fleet was expanded. In the first full month of operation, March, 1948, the Pace-maker fleet carried 838 passengers. In our best month to date, August, 1954, Piedmont transported 31,893 passengers, nearly 40 times as many in five times as many airplanes. From a nucleus of 14 pilots, that group has grown to 122 active pilots.

Yes, Piedmont is growing, and will continue to grow. Howard Cartwright began his Piedmont experience as a line boy, as did Eddie Culler, and Joe Fix. Bill Barber started as a stock clerk, Red Willard as a mechanic's helper, George Willard as a purser, as was Bill McGee, Capt. Tom Orrell began as a line boy, Capt. Tom Goodson as a purser, Capt. A. E. Smith as a mechanic. Dozens of pilots were either instructors or students at Fixed Base after the war, and have moved up the ladder. Nearly all Piedmont Station Managers have come up through the ranks, as have most Chief Agents. Most supervisory maintenance personnel have risen through the ranks, and the list keeps growing.

Where will it end? No one knows for certain. But one thing is sure. Piedmont progress has provided a goal for every local service carrier to shoot at. It will provide a further goal in the years ahead.

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

Grow ye must, for growth and health are partners.

Yes, grow ye must, for when growth ceases, death begins.

Anonymous