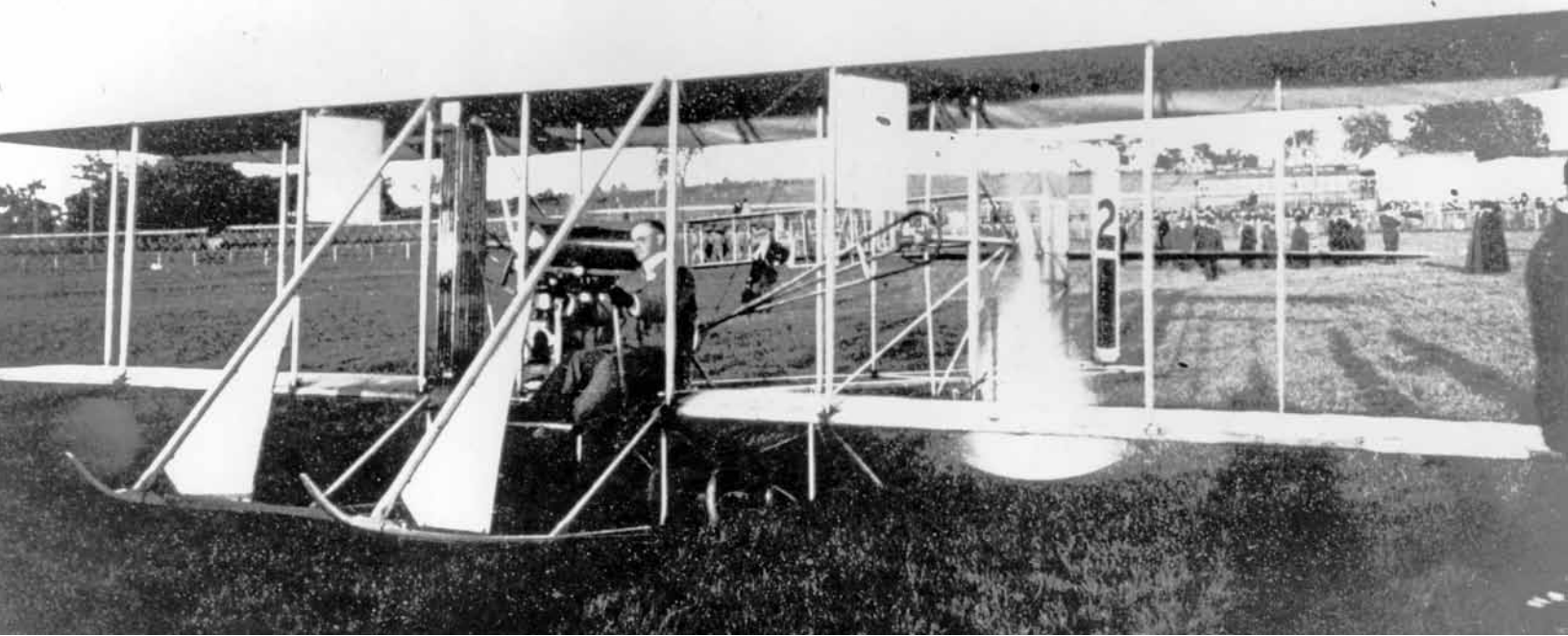


The Development of Airline Service to St. Louis

By Frederick W. Roos



The first airmail flight in St. Louis took place on October 4, 1911, during an air meet at Fairgrounds Park. Maj. A.B. Lambert is seen warming up the Wright biplane that pilot Walter Brookins flew from Kinloch Field to Fairgrounds Park with some 5,000 pieces of mail. (All photos from the author's collection except as noted)

Beginnings: The Establishment of Airmail Service

The tremendous air transportation system in this country, taken so much for granted by most of us these days, had its origin in the Contract Air Mail routes that were put into operation in the spring of 1926. Because a St. Louis-based organization was involved in one of those first commercial airmail runs, which eventually developed into one of today's trunk airlines, it is appropriate to trace the development of airline service to St. Louis, from the beginning back in 1926 up to WWII.

Emphasis throughout this article will be on the types (and markings) of airline aircraft operated into St. Louis, and on the evolution of routes and services involving St. Louis.

Airmail flying began in the United States with a series of short flights on Long Island in 1911. During an air meet there, Earl Ovington, the owner and pilot of a Bleriot monoplane, flew daily demonstration hops with packets of mail from September 23 through October 2.

St. Louis was not far behind. On October 4, 1911, during a "Festival Week" air meet held at Fairgrounds Park in St. Louis, pilot Walter Brookins (who had just left the Wright organization to join the Pioneer Aeroplane & Exhibition Co. of St. Louis) guided a Wright biplane from Kinloch Field to Fairgrounds Park 12 miles away, carrying two 50-lb sacks of mail strapped to the wings. The 10-minute flight had been authorized by the U.S. Postmaster General, and the 5,000 pieces of "Aerial

Post" had been specially marked for the demonstration. On the closing day of the event, October 8, Brookins dropped a sack of mail from an altitude of 1,000 feet over Fairgrounds Park in a demonstration of possible rural deliveries.

Another spectacular mail-carrying flight was also made on October 8, 1911, when St. Louisan Hugh Robinson flew his Curtiss hydroplane up and down the St. Louis riverfront. Incidentally, this 20-minute flight, which ranged up and down the Mississippi, over and under the various bridges, was the first public demonstration in St. Louis of a water-based aircraft.

But these flights were just simple demonstration hops. Truly functional airmail flights did not begin until 1918. A \$100,000 appropriation by Congress in 1917 allowed the establishment of a Government-operated airmail service between New York and Washington. This service, begun with Army pilots and Curtiss JN-4H aircraft on May 15, 1918, was taken over by the Post Office in August of that year. The real potential value of airmail, however, lay in the time that could be saved in carrying mail across the continent, and the Post Office quickly went to work establishing a transcontinental airmail route. The first section of this route went operational on May 15, 1919, and the entire route was in service by September 1920.

The people of St. Louis were anxious to obtain airmail service, too. As early as March 1918, the St. Louis postmaster went to Washington to urge that the Post Office establish a St.



Curtiss JN-4H "Jennies" flew regularly-scheduled runs between St. Louis and Chicago from August 16, 1920, to June 30, 1921, using this flying field in Forest Park. (Photo courtesy John Geppert)



Robertson Aircraft Corp. began CAM-2 airmail service with these revamped WWI DH-4s. The smartly-painted ships (maroon fuselages, silver wings and tails) began round-trip operations on April 15, 1926.

Louis-Chicago airmail route to link up with the transcontinental service. While he was there, Congress appropriated \$850,000 for continuation and expansion of the airmail service; a St. Louis-Chicago run was specifically included.

Action was immediately taken in St. Louis to establish an appropriate airmail field. A total of \$28,000 was put up by the City of St. Louis, the Chamber of Commerce and the Missouri Aeronautical Society to cover the expenses of setting up this field. A 100-acre field was prepared in the southeast section of Forest Park and in April 1919 a surplus 200-ft. by 66-ft. army hangar was erected on the site. More than another year passed before the city and the U.S. signed a contract covering "Aerial Mail Service" operations from the Forest Park field.

The St. Louis-Chicago service was finally inaugurated on August 16, 1920, with Curtiss JN-4H aircraft covering the route. Over 10,000 lb of mail was carried during the first month the service was operated, and the pilots achieved the highest-possible efficiency rating. Unfortunately, however, the St. Louis-Chicago airmail run only cut about three hours off the 7 hr. 40 min. railroad time between the cities, not enough to make a day's difference in the time required to get a letter between St. Louis and New York. As a consequence, the route fell victim to the new Harding administration's economy drive, and the service was terminated on June 30, 1921, (along with a similar route between Chicago and Minneapolis-St. Paul).

Airmail service was not to return to St. Louis until the Contract Air Mail routes were put into operation in 1926. These resulted from a decision by the U.S. Government, culminating in the Kelly Air Mail Act of early 1925, to turn the airmail over to commercial operations, thereby promoting the development of a commercial air transportation system in this country. The first step in this process was the establishment of several airmail feeder routes to connect with the transcontinental route. Contract Air Mail Route 2 (CAM-2) was to link St. Louis and Chicago, and a bid for this route was entered by the Robertson Aircraft Corp. of St. Louis.

Started by two WWI fliers, Bill and Frank Robertson, along with a younger brother Dan, the Robertson Aircraft Corp. had by the mid 1920s built up quite a business in the refurbishment and sale of surplus WWI army airplanes, in addition to

providing flight instruction and a variety of aerial services for hire. Realizing that the operation of their business would not permit them the time to fly the airmail route if they succeeded in winning the contract, the Robertsons offered the job of chief pilot to a fellow who had acquired a substantial reputation as a knowledgeable and capable pilot in the time since his arrival at Lambert Field with his OX-5 Jenny during the 1923 Air Races: Charles "Slim" Lindbergh.

Having been awarded the contract for CAM-2 on October 7, 1925, the Robertson organization set about preparing to begin operations. Four de Havilland DH-4 ex-army observation airplanes were overhauled and rebuilt as mailplanes for the route (flight controls were rigged to the rear cockpit, the front cockpit serving as the mail compartment), and finished off with a beautiful maroon-and-silver paint job. Landing fields between St. Louis and Chicago, for mail pickup and emergency use, were picked out, and Lindbergh selected two other pilots, Phil Love and Tom Nelson, to assist him on CAM-2.

Service on CAM-2 was inaugurated on April 15, 1926, with Lindbergh taking off from Maywood Field, Chicago at 5:50 a.m. for the first run to St. Louis. The return trip to Chicago, also flown by Lindbergh, departed Lambert Field at 4:00 p.m.



and arrived at Maywood Field at 6:53 p.m., appropriately timed to meet the transcontinental mail flights. This was to be the schedule for at least the first year of CAM-2 operations.

Certainly the most famous airmail pilot to come from CAM-2 (or any other route, for that matter!): Charles A. Lindbergh.



Lindbergh again, this time in the cockpit of a CAM-2 Travel Air, which he never actually flew in regular airmail service, preparing to fly a ceremonial run to Chicago after his epic transatlantic flight. Alongside the aircraft are Assistant Postmaster General Glover and Frank Robertson. Date: February 20, 1928.



The workhorse of CAM-2 airmail service was the big DH-4, a WWI aircraft converted for airmail use. Inset: Note the landing lights on the upper side of the lower wing.

During the summer of 1926, things went reasonably smoothly on CAM-2. The days were sufficiently long that takeoffs and landings at the “cow-pasture” fields at Springfield and Peoria posed no real problems. All this changed, however, as fall evolved into winter, and the hazards of cold, fog, snow and darkness began to tell. The reader is referred to Lindbergh’s book, *Spirit of St. Louis*, for vivid description of the difficulties and dangers the CAM-2 fliers encountered. Before that first winter had passed, two of the DH-4s had been lost on CAM-2.

Although there had been lean times (in terms of mail loads) and great difficulties, the airmail continued to go through, and by the end of the first year of operations, the Robertson Aircraft Corp. had almost broken even on CAM-2. Slim Lindbergh was on leave, busily engaged in preparations for his great adventure. Philip A. Love had taken over the chief pilot’s duties.

The DH-4 continued to be the primary aircraft operated on CAM-2. Used initially because they were so inexpensive to obtain, the DH-4s were not the ideal aircraft from an operational

standpoint. Their payload was nowhere near that of more modern aircraft, and they were becoming rather old. Although the DH-4s continued in use on CAM-2 well into 1928, Liberty-engined Douglas M-2 mailplanes were added to the Robertson fleet for CAM-2 during 1927, and at least one Travel Air 4000 was put into CAM-2 service in 1927 (carrying the same maroon & silver color scheme as the DH-4s). Robertson Aircraft Corp. began making money with CAM-2 in 1927, carrying 34,772 lbs of mail. A passenger was occasionally carried, too; altogether, 10 passengers flew over CAM-2 that year.

Of course, by this time Lindbergh had made his epic solo flight across the Atlantic, and in so doing had triggered a phenomenal boom in aviation around the world. A tremendous interest in air travel developed, and sizable quantities of investment capital became available for the development and promotion of aviation. The capabilities of aircraft for transporting people as well as mail began to be appreciated among businessmen, and the age of the airlines was dawning.



Ryan Broughams were later added to the Robertson CAM-2 fleet. Introduced in late 1927 or early 1928, they permitted passengers to be carried between St. Louis and Chicago in reasonable comfort. The Whirlwind engine made the Brougham a much-more efficient airplane than the DH-4. (Photo courtesy Betty Robertson Uhl)



Robertson Aircraft Corp. aircraft and facilities at Lambert Field, ca. early 1928. The three aircraft at right were all used on CAM-2 airmail service. From right: Travel Air 4000, Ryan Brougham and de Havilland DH-4. Note the profusion of other aircraft (Wacos, Standards, DH-4s, etc.) used by the Robertson organization for flight training, aerial photography, charter, and so on. (Photo courtesy Betty Robertson Uhl)



Robertson Aircraft Corp.'s first trimotor, Ford 4-AT-B, NC6893, at Lambert Field on November 4, 1928. A total of four Fords was acquired by Robertson between August and December 1928. All were used for St. Louis-Chicago passenger service. (Photo by Vic Stuhr)

Robertson, Universal, and Passengers

Along with the rest of the aviation world, Robertson Aircraft Corp. awakened to the economic benefits of the new air-cooled radial engine, the reliability of which was amply demonstrated by Charles Lindbergh's solo transatlantic flight. Late in 1927 they ordered a Ryan B-1 Brougham (production version of the "Spirit of St. Louis") for mail and passenger service on CAM-2, and in January 1928, a Travel-Air 4000 was purchased. Both of these Whirlwind-powered aircraft went into service in January 1928, the Travel-Air becoming the primary mailplane on CAM-2. Efficiency went up, maintenance costs dropped, and the CAM-2 airmail operation became a profitable one.

But it was a very dynamic period in the aviation business. After helping to persuade the Curtiss interests to establish an aircraft plant at Lambert Field, Bill Robertson resigned as president of his Robertson Aircraft Corp. on January 28, 1928, to become head of the Curtiss-Robertson Airplane Manufacturing Company. Frank Robertson took over the presidency of Robertson Aircraft. At the same time, the Robertson operations were reorganized to separate the airmail service from the aerial photography, charter service, and aviation school activities.

In the spring of 1928, several steps were taken to increase services on CAM-2. On April 6, the line became

part of the American Express system; the carrying of small freight shipments on CAM-2 as part of this service actually commenced the following month. Also, plans were made to increase passenger service, which had already reached the level of three per day.

Expansion in other directions was taking place, too. On May 9, the government announced the award of another airmail route, CAM-28, to the Robertson Aircraft Corp., with mail service scheduled to begin the following January. This route extended westward, linking St. Louis with Kansas City and Omaha.

Possibly the most important thing to happen to the Robertson concern that spring was the sale of Robertson Aircraft Corp. to a group of investors headed by Arnold G. Stifel of St. Louis. The corporation was recapitalized to \$1,000,000, and Stifel became president, with Frank Robertson as vice president and general manager. The first official act of the new officers and directors was to authorize the purchase of four Ford Tri-motors, to establish regular passenger service between St. Louis and Chicago. Plans also called for the spending of \$250,000 for passenger facilities at Lambert Field, including hangars, a ticket office, express and baggage rooms, a lunch counter, and a waiting room. Construction began almost immediately.

Meanwhile, airmail operations continued over CAM-28. Harlan A. "Bud" Gurney was promoted to chief pilot. Several pilots were added to the roster, including E.L. Sloniger and Leslie Smith. Les Smith became the line's first operational



A strange aircraft, still a bit of a mystery to the author. Can anyone help? It's obviously a cabin-fuselage modification of a Standard trainer, but an old-time Robertson employee does not think this airplane was ever operated by Robertson Aircraft in spite of the markings. This staged photograph shows a news photographer (left) handing photographic plates to the "pilot" (Harry Perkins, a Robertson executive who couldn't fly anything), evidently illustrating Robertson's charter operations.



Robertson's original Ryan Brougham as it appeared during 1929, carrying Universal Air Lines colors and markings. (Photo courtesy the Ryan Aeronautical Library)



Boeing 40B-4, NC181E, at Lambert Field, May 19, 1929. Logo on fuselage side reads "UNIVERSAL AIR LINES SYSTEM" across top, "ROBERTSON AIRCRAFT CORPORATION" across bottom. Paint scheme is the usual maroon and silver. Ray Fortner is the pilot. (Photo by Vic Stuhr)

fatality when he crashed in a DH-4 during a fierce storm in mid-1928. He was engaged in a charter flight, round trip to Houston and back, in connection with the Democratic National Convention (carrying newspapers, photos and newsreel films).

Bud Gurney took delivery of the first of the Ford Trimotors at the Ford factory on August 5, 1928, after a three-times-around-the-field check ride. On the following day, most of the Robertson Aircraft Corp. directors rode the trimotor from Dearborn to St. Louis by way of Chicago. The aircraft arrived in St. Louis at an opportune time, for it made several flights over the city on August 7 to help promote a favorable vote in that day's \$2,000,000 municipal airport bond issue election, which passed by a five-to-one margin! Another of the trimotors was delivered later in the month.

Regularly-scheduled passenger service between St. Louis and Chicago (with stops at Springfield and Peoria, Ill.) began on August 20, 1928. One round trip was flown each day, six days a week. On Sundays the trimotor was used for sightseeing hops around St. Louis -- although aviation was becoming a more serious business all the time, the barnstorming era was far from ended! The Ford left Lambert Field at 9:00 a.m., arriving at Chicago Municipal Airport (now Midway) at noon. The

return trip began at 3:00 p.m., reaching St. Louis at 6:15. While mail was carried aboard the trimotors, the airmail service was primarily maintained by a separate schedule of flights by the Ryan or Travel Air ships.

At about this time, a novel arrangement was worked out between the Illinois Central Railroad and Robertson Aircraft Corporation. Upon payment of a special joint fare to either one of the lines, a passenger was entitled to travel round-trip between Chicago and St. Louis, one way via trimotor and the other by train.

Spurred on by the success of the St. Louis-Chicago passenger service, and anticipating the beginning of airmail operations on CAM-28, Robertson began once-a-day passenger service between St. Louis and Kansas City on November 15, 1928. Four-passenger Ryan B-1 Broughams (two more had been acquired in 1928) were used for this run, which was called the "Skyline Express."

A syndicate of Chicago, St. Louis and Minneapolis bankers organized the Continental Air Lines Corp. on July 30, 1928. Following incorporation in September, the name was changed to Universal Aviation Corporation. This line began flying a Chicago-Cleveland passenger service on September 15. More



Another of Robertson's Fords, NC7584, being given the once-over at the Lambert Field terminal. This ship had the name "MORNING STAR" painted on the nose. (Photo by Ted Lueders)



A staged photograph depicting a typical scene at the Universal Passenger Depot and hangar at Lambert Field. Aircraft is a Fokker Super Universal. (Photo from Gerald Balzer archives)



Fokker Super Universal NC9128 on the Universal ramp at Lambert Field. This six-passenger Wasp-powered transport had the reputation of being very stable and a fine instrument ship. Unfortunately, the casein-glued plywood wings did not weather well, so the aircraft were retired after a relatively short service life. (Photo by Vic Stuhr)



Ford Tri-motor NC7584 again, this time taking off from Lambert Field. Factory in the background is the Curtiss-Robertson Airplane Manufacturing Co. plant, built in 1928 to produce the Curtiss Robin. (Photo from the Stephen J. Hudek archives)

importantly for St. Louis, these investors had plans to develop an extensive system of airline service in the midwest, and the airmail and passenger operations of Robertson fit right into their plans. Negotiations were begun in the latter part of 1928, and resulted in Robertson becoming a division of the Universal Air Lines System. L.H. Piper (one of the bankers) headed Universal, which had its corporate headquarters in Chicago; Frank Robertson was made vice president for operations. The operating headquarters of Universal was in St. Louis. A great deal of new equipment was ordered for the Universal system, with most of the business going to Tony Fokker. At least 15 Fokker F-10A trimotors (a bit faster than the Fords, but not very stable) and nine single-engine Super Universals were purchased.

By the end of 1928, Robertson had carried 2,492 passengers over the St. Louis-Chicago and St. Louis-Kansas City lines. But the airmail operations were still very important, and Robertson had established an enviable record. From the beginning of CAM-2 service on April 15, 1926, through the end of 1928, Robertson achieved an efficiency rating of over 97%, highest of all the contract air mail lines then in operation.

Partly in recognition of their exemplary work with the airmail, the Robertsons were honored when, on January 1, 1929, the Post Office Department complied with the request of the 400 residents of Anglum (the mailing address of Lambert Field) to rename their village "Robertson."

Early in 1929, the passenger schedule for the Robertson division of Universal Air Lines was as follows:

Skyline Limited (Ford Tri-motors)

9:45 a.m. Lv.	Chicago	Ar. 3:30 p.m.
1:00 p.m. Ar.	St. Louis	Lv. 12:30 p.m.

Skyline Express (Ryan Broughams)

2:15 p.m. Lv.	St. Louis	Ar. 11:10 a.m.
5:15 p.m. Ar.	Kansas City	Lv. 8:30 a.m.

Fares on the two routes were identical, at \$30 one way or \$55 round trip.

Apparently, some newly-acquired six-passenger Stinson monoplanes (J5 Whirlwind-powered) were also employed on the Chicago run in the spring of 1929. One of the pilots



Fokker F-10A NC879E at Universal's Gate No. 1, Lambert Field. Although this airplane was technically not a Robertson division ship, it was obviously carrying passengers over one of the Robertson runs. The name "SKYLINER" just below the cabin windows was associated with Universal's Chicago-Cleveland service. (Photo by John Geppert)

involved was Benny Howard, who constructed his first racer, "Pete," in one of the Lambert Field hangars during his tenure with Universal.

The Fokker equipment soon began appearing, and the Robertson division of Universal was able to begin airmail service over CAM-28 with Fokker Super Universals on May 1, 1929. Passenger traffic did not develop as expected on this run, however, so two Boeing 40B-4 four-passenger biplanes were purchased to free the Super Universals for more-productive passenger service. Although they often appeared at the Lambert Field gates of Universal, the Fokker F-10A trimotors were not normally scheduled on the runs into St. Louis.

Columbia, Mo., was being considered as a possible stop on the St. Louis-Kansas City run in May 1929. Non-passenger-carrying flights were made to assess the suitability of the Columbia airport for airliner operations, but for some reason the plan was not put into effect.

In addition to the Fords, Fokkers and Boeings already mentioned, a variety of other aircraft wore the Universal Air Lines color scheme of maroon and silver (the colors of the original Robertson DH-4 mailplanes), and appeared from time to time in passenger service. These aircraft, which included a Whirlwind Cessna, a Whirlwind Vega, a Wasp Vega, a Monocoach, and a Challenger Robin, served primarily as speedy executive transports (except the Robin, used as an instrument trainer), but were available for substitute use on scheduled runs.

As Robertson had been incorporated into the Universal system, so did Universal become part of a still-larger organization. A giant aeronautical holding company, the Aviation Corp., was incorporated on March 1, 1929. It immediately sought to gain control of several airlines and a number of manufacturing concerns. Universal came under the control of the Aviation Corp. (AVCO) on May 17, 1929. In addition to Universal, which by that time extended from Cleveland in the east and Minneapolis in the north down to

Dallas and Ft. Worth in the south, AVCO acquired controlling interest in a number of other airline systems, with an eye toward constructing a nationwide airline network.

However, all this had no immediate effect on the Universal Air Lines System. Traffic continued to grow on the Robertson Aircraft Corp. routes, and the second daily St. Louis-Chicago round trip, originally a mail-only run, was also made a scheduled passenger run. By November 1929, the Robertson division schedule had become:

Skyline Limited (Super Universal)

1:00 p.m. Lv.	Chicago	Ar. 3:15 p.m.
3:40 p.m. Ar.	St. Louis	Lv. 12:45 p.m.

Air Mail Limited (Boeing 40B-4)

5:50 a.m. Lv.	Chicago	Ar. 7:30 p.m.
7:25 a.m. Lv.	Peoria	Lv. 6:10 p.m.
8:15 a.m. Lv.	Springfield	Lv. 5:20 p.m.
9:15 a.m. Ar.	St. Louis	Lv. 4:15 p.m.

Skyline Express (Super Universal)

7:25 a.m. Lv.	St. Louis	Ar. 5:50 p.m.
10:15 a.m. Lv.	Kansas City	Lv. 3:10 p.m.
10:40 a.m. Ar.	St. Joseph	Lv. 2:15 p.m.
12:05 p.m. Ar.	Omaha	Lv. 1:10 p.m.

Air Mail Express (Boeing 40B-4)

7:30 p.m. Lv.	St. Louis	Ar. 6:15 a.m.
10:15 p.m. Lv.	Kansas City	Lv. 3:35 a.m.
10:40 p.m. Ar.	St. Joseph	Lv. 2:35 a.m.
12:20 a.m. Ar.	Omaha	Lv. 1:10 a.m.

At the beginning of 1928, an occasional passenger was permitted to squeeze in with the mail sacks; by the end of 1929, the passenger had become the focus of attention.



Fairchild FC-2 NC6692 was Interstate Airlines' first aircraft. Ship was powered by a J5 Whirlwind and could carry four passengers. (Photo courtesy Fairchild Republic Co.)



Fairchild FC-2W2 NC8038 in flight along CAM-30. This Wasp-powered version of the Fairchild cabin monoplane carried mail and/or as many as six passengers. (Photo courtesy Fairchild Republic Co.)

American Arrives

Another line that began serving St. Louis in the late 1920s was the small but important Interstate Airlines. This airline company was organized in June 1928 for the purpose of bidding on the Chicago-to-Atlanta airmail route. Interstate was granted an airmail contract on August 9, 1928, and proceeded to set up its route between Chicago and Atlanta. Scheduled mail operations over CAM-30 commenced on November 19, 1928, the route being flown once each way per day by Fairchild cabin monoplanes (FC-2, FC-2W2 and F-71). Passengers were carried intermittently, but because of poor airport facilities the passenger operations were not regular.

The significance of this line to St. Louis was the fact that the CAM-30 route included a spur connecting St. Louis with Evansville, Ind., which was Interstate's base of operations. Interstate operated one round-trip flight daily between St. Louis and Evansville, occasionally carrying passengers in addition to the mail. Another daily connecting flight between Evansville

and Louisville was operated by Interstate, although this run did not involve airmail. The Interstate route system provided St. Louisans with their only direct air access to the southeastern United States.

When AVCO was being formed in the spring of 1929, it viewed Interstate Airlines as an important link in the airline network it was attempting to establish. With connections to other AVCO-controlled lines at Chicago, St. Louis and Louisville, and with its airmail route into the major southern city, Atlanta, Interstate was a valuable addition to AVCO's group of airlines when the latter bought up all of Interstate Airlines' stock in mid-1929. The change of ownership had no immediate effect on Interstate's services to St. Louis, the single daily round trip to and from Evansville continuing in operation as before. Some new equipment did appear on the Interstate routes in 1929, however. The Stearman LT-1, a large open-cockpit biplane with an enclosed cabin for up to four passengers plus mail, was put into service after having been developed especially for Interstate Airlines. Later on, the Stearman 4CM



Pitcairn Mailwing in a rare combination of markings. The short-lived early version of the American Airways emblem carries the words "Universal Division" at the top and "Robertson Aircraft Corporation" at the bottom. Ship was used in mail-only service to and from St. Louis. (Photo courtesy Ron Davies)



Stearman 4CM Junior Speedmail, NC469W, was powered by a 300-hp J6 Whirlwind. This ship was operated over the Interstate Division of American Airways during 1929-30, carrying mail only. (Photo courtesy American Airlines)



Fokker F-10A about to depart American's Lambert Field gate for the 9:15 a.m. nonstop run to Chicago. Barely-visible lettering on fuselage side reads "American Airways" above the American logo, "Universal Division" below it. (Photo courtesy Betty Robertson Uhl)



Ford 5-AT-C, NC8486, in typical American Airways markings. This particular ship was a bit unusual, having been built as model 6-AT-A and used by Ford Motor Co. for about a year before American bought it. (Photo courtesy American Airlines Museum)

Junior Speedmail open cockpit biplane was added, providing faster, more efficient mail-only service over CAM-30.

As the AVCO empire continued to grow during 1929, it became obvious that a great deal of route consolidation, schedule re-arrangement, and equipment reallocation were necessary if AVCO's collection of airlines were to be organized into an efficient, reliable, convenient and profitable airline system. To enable this to be accomplished, plans were made to establish a new operating company that would assume control of AVCO's various airlines. Each of the airline holding companies within AVCO (e.g., Universal Aviation Corp., which controlled the Universal Air Lines System, itself made up of six airlines) was invited to exchange its stock for stock in the new operating company. The result of all this was the corporate birth on January 25, 1930, of American Airways as the airline operating company of the Aviation Corporation.

Here in St. Louis, the most obvious immediate change was that the Universal Air Lines System became the Universal Division of American Airways. Previously-employed aircraft

color schemes and markings quickly gave way to the new American Airways paint and logo. But more meaningful changes soon followed. The new management moved ahead with the task of organizing and simplifying American's operations and reducing losses.

One of the first services to be eliminated was the passenger run between St. Louis and Omaha (formerly known as the "Skyline Express"), although, of course, the revenue-producing contract airmail service over this route was kept in operation. At the same time, the nonstop St. Louis-Chicago run (formerly the "Skyline Limited") was made an element of a new "Cleveland to Dallas Dual-Trunk Service" over the American system. The "Dual-Trunk" terminology expressed the fact that parallel schedules were flown between Chicago and Tulsa, with one route passing through St. Louis and the other through Kansas City. Because passenger traffic over the St. Louis route was expected to increase, 12-passenger Fokker F-10A Trimotors were put into service in place of the single-engine Fokker Super Universal used earlier. These changes were all in



Stearman LT-1, NC8832, in service with the Universal Division of American Airways. Big, four-passenger ship with 525-hp P&W Hornet was originally built for Interstate Airlines; used for combined mail and passenger operations. (Photo courtesy American Airlines)



Ford 5-AT-B, NC9667, at Sweetwater, Tex., the opposite end of the SAFEway system from St. Louis. This ship was SAFEway's first Ford, delivered in December 1928. (Photo courtesy Bill Larkins)



Ford 5-AT-B, NC9662, in a dramatic takeoff shot. Southwest Air Fast Express operated 10 Ford Tri-motors. (Photo courtesy International Museum of Airlines)

effect in February 1930, just weeks after the birth of American Airways. By mid-1930, passenger traffic growth required the addition of a second daily nonstop round trip between St. Louis and Chicago, while the remainder of the Chicago-to-Dallas operation, i.e., the Chicago-Kansas City-Tulsa route and the St. Louis-Tulsa-Dallas segment, was discontinued as being unprofitable (primarily because these were not contract airmail routes). American's mail runs into St. Louis from Chicago and Omaha continued to be operated with Boeing 40B-4s.

Interestingly, Interstate Airlines was not immediately affected by the establishment of American Airways, but continued to be operated independently for a time. Published schedules from mid-1930 identify Interstate as a division of AVCO and not as a division of American Airways. However, on July 15, 1930, the St. Louis-to-Omaha airmail route, CAM-28, was consolidated with CAM-30 (Interstate's Chicago-Atlanta airmail route) through the St. Louis-Evansville spur. It is presumed that around this time Interstate Airlines was fully integrated into American Airways, becoming the Interstate Division. Passenger service was discontinued on the St. Louis-Evansville line, as it was some time later discontinued on the Interstate Division's main Chicago-Atlanta route.

During this same 1929-1930 time period, an airline set up and run by Oklahoma oilman Erle P. Halliburton was operating between St. Louis and points to the southwest. This line, formally named Southwest Air Fast Express but commonly known as SAFEway Air Lines, had begun service on April 2, 1929. The line's equipment consisted of 10 Ford 5-AT-B Wasp-powered Tri-motors, which were delivered between December 1928 and July 1929. SAFEway's route map was X-shaped, with Oklahoma City and Tulsa, the line's home base, in the center of the X. The terminal points at the ends of the four arms of the X were St. Louis and Kansas City to the north, and Sweetwater and Dallas/Ft. Worth on the Texas end. The route system was unusually set up in that all flights operated through Tulsa and/or Oklahoma City. That is, to get from Kansas City

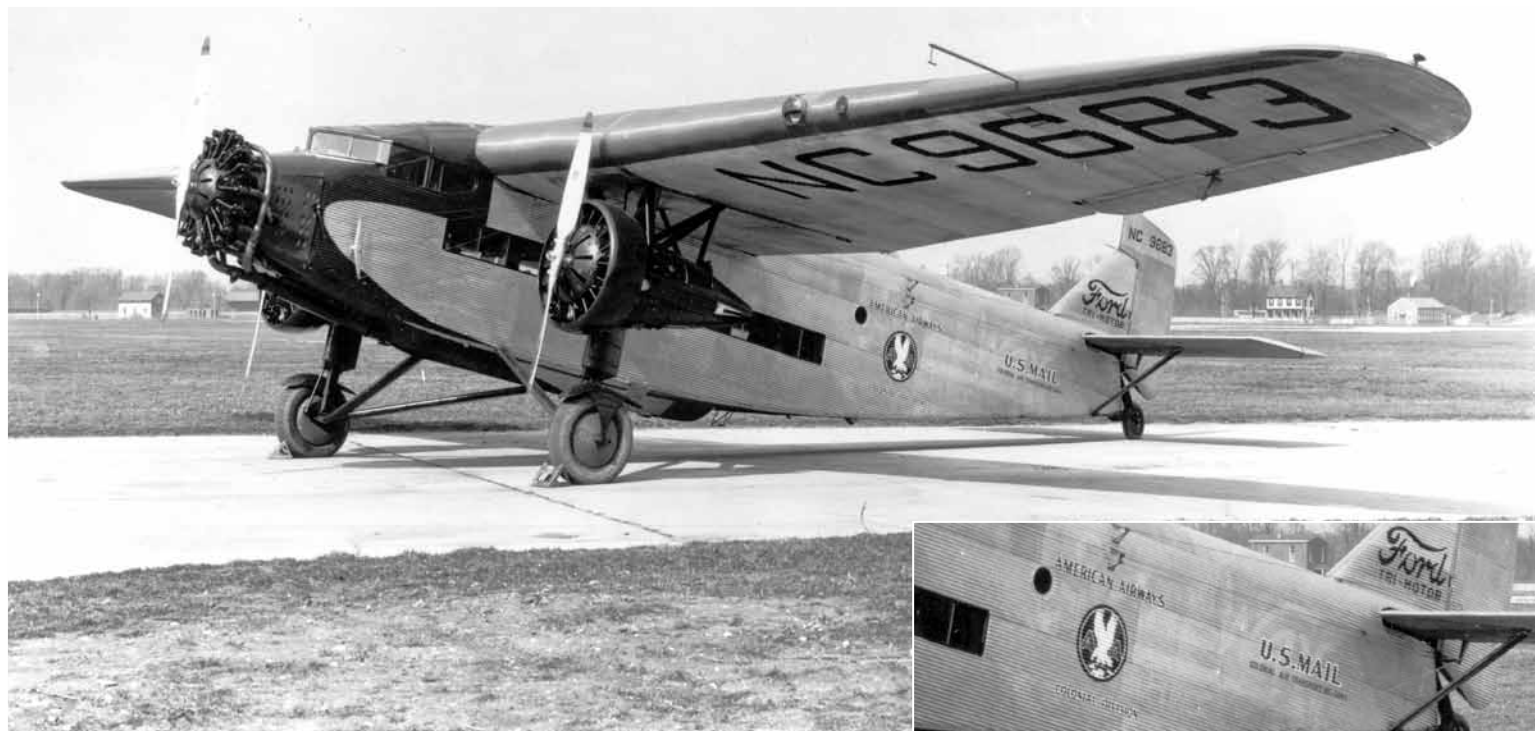
to St. Louis, a passenger on SAFEway had to ride from Kansas City to Tulsa and then from Tulsa to St. Louis.

The service to St. Louis operated into Lambert Field, with an intermediate stop in Springfield, Missouri. The Von Hoffman Aircraft Co., a fixed-base operator (aircraft sales and service, flight training, etc.), provided terminal services for SAFEway at Lambert (although Lambert Field had already become a municipal airport, it would be several years before airlines could make use of a municipal airline terminal building). Initially, one round trip per day was scheduled between Tulsa and St. Louis, the outbound flight leaving Lambert Field at 8:30 a.m. and the return trip terminating at St. Louis at 3:30 p.m. By the summer of 1930, a second daily round trip had been added to the schedule.

SAFEway was evidently a well-financed, well-run operation, as it offered the finest equipment, a convenient flight schedule, and fares that were little higher than those charged by the railroads. Although losing money, the line was actually close to breaking even. Consequently, Halliburton was very conscious of the financial benefits and security that a government airmail contract would bring to SAFEway, and was very anxious for an opportunity to obtain one.

Airmail volume was increasing steadily on the single transcontinental route operated in 1929 (by United Air Lines, the first of the airline giants). Because of this, and the government's intention to establish a solid, dependable, nationwide system of air transportation, the Post Office began making plans for two additional transcontinental mail routes. In addition to the existing route, which extended from New York to San Francisco via Chicago (the Columbia line, formerly operated by the government), there would be a central route from New York to Los Angeles via St. Louis and a southern route from Atlanta to Los Angeles by way of Dallas.

Before these routes were officially announced for bids, SAFEway offered to carry mail all the way from New York to Los Angeles at a rate that was only a fraction of what the



Ford 5-AT-B, NG9683, in the markings of American Airways' Colonial Division, which operated in the northeastern United States. Ship is included here because it originally belonged to SAFEway, before that line was bought out by American (Inset: Note evidence of SAFEway legend still visible on rear fuselage). This airplane was restored by American Airlines and flown on a tour of the U.S. in the mid-1960s. It is now prominently displayed in the National Air and Space Museum. (Photo courtesy Steve Hudek)

government was then paying on the existing transcontinental route. Walter F. Brown, the postmaster general at the time (November 1929), was not favorably disposed toward the "independent" airlines such as SAFEway. He firmly believed that a sound, sturdy, country-wide air service had to be built on the background, experience and financing that only the large mail-carrying lines could provide. As a result, the SAFEway offer was not accepted, much to the irritation of Mr. Halliburton. To make matters worse, Halliburton was not even invited to a conference of airline operators that was held by Postmaster General Brown in May 1930, to discuss the establishment of the two new transcontinental mail routes. The postmaster general already had definite ideas as to who should, and who should not, be awarded the contracts to fly mail over the two new transcontinental routes.

When the Post Office finally advertised for bids on the two new routes in the summer of 1930, Postmaster General Brown included a requirement that qualified bidders had to have flown at night for a period of at least six months over a route of not less than 250 miles. Because only veteran mail-carrying lines had operated at night, this provision effectively excluded all independents from the bidding. Halliburton, by now extremely incensed, charged that the night-flying provision was illegal and threatened court action. To quiet the uproar that Halliburton was generating, and thus to "insure" the desired outcome of the mail contract bidding, the postmaster general saw to it that a compromise was engineered. SAFEway would be allowed to enter a joint bid on the southern transcontinental route with Robertson Aircraft Corp. that had retained its corporate identity while being absorbed into Universal and then into American

Airways. American was given an option to buy up Halliburton's line if the joint SAFEway/Robertson bid were successful.

Of course, American Airways did gain the Atlanta-to-Los Angeles mail route, having in fact submitted the only bid. American proceeded to purchase the SAFEway operation for the predetermined price of \$1.4 million, which was almost twice what SAFEway's assets were worth. Airmail service over the new route, CAM-33, commenced on October 15, 1930, by which time Southwest Air Fast Express had ceased to operate. The SAFEway fleet of Ford Tri-motors was absorbed into the American Airways inventory, but none of the SAFEway routes was integrated into American's system.

Thus it was that by the end of 1930 the names Universal Air Lines, Interstate Airlines, and SAFEway Air Lines had all disappeared, having been replaced at Lambert Field and elsewhere by a name that is still very prominently with us: American. ➔

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