

**FRYE, JACK** Mar. 18, 1904- Air line executive

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TWA, American, United, and Eastern are the "Big Four" of the nineteen American air lines that are already competing in the international struggle for postwar air leadership. Heading TWA (Transcontinental and Western Air, Inc.) is "big, burly, go-getting" Jack Frye, the youngest president of a major air-transport line in America and the only air-line president to hold a transport pilot's license, having over six thousand flying hours in his own log. Active in aviation since the age of nineteen, Frye has been a pioneer in designing planes and establishing air lines, and believes that commercial aviation will be a primary factor in uniting the nations of the world in the future.

The son of William Henry Frye, Jack Frye was born March 18, 1904, in Sweetwater, Oklahoma. After his mother's death when he was eight years old, Jack spent much of his youth with his father and grandparents on the fifteen-thousand-acre family ranch near Wheeler, Texas. Texas has always seemed like home to him, and he is often referred to as a Texan. It might be said that Jack began his aviation career at the age of fourteen, when he ran errands for several stranded airmen who were forced down near his home. Jack almost immediately developed pneumonia and was ill for ten weeks, but his first vision of the romance of flying probably came to him at this time. After that his life pattern fol-



Transcontinental & Western Air, Inc.  
JACK FRYE

lowed the popular American "success" tradition—he became known as a man with "a habit of making dreams come true."

Jack went to public school, leaving high school before graduation to spend a year in the Army Engineering Corps. In 1923 he went to California, where he worked as a soda clerk in Los Angeles. One day a friend drove young Frye past an airfield where a barnstorming pilot was taking passengers on fifteen-minute hops. The flier took lack for a ride, with the result that the nineteen-year-old boy began taking flying lessons at twenty dollars an hour, paying for this first investment in the future with savings from his soda fountain earnings. After seven hours of instruction Jack was allowed to solo, and soon after that he took a passenger up with him. The passenger, incidentally, was not aware of the inexperience of his pilot.

His aeronautical novitiate completed, young Frye, together with his flying instructor, bought a battered old war-veteran plane, a Curtiss Jenny, put it in working order, and with it formed the nucleus of a flying school and aerial taxi service known as the Burdett Flying School. By 1926 Frye had become president of the Aero Corporation of California, which also operated a flying school as well as a service and maintenance base and an aircraft sales agency. (He was president of Aero until 1930.) In November 1927 the company launched a regular service between Los Angeles and Tucson, Arizona; a year later the route was extended to El Paso, Texas, with Fokker single-engine planes; in 1929 it was using Fokker three-engine F-10's.

Jane and Woodrow Wirsig, writing in *This Week*, tell a typical Frye story in connection with his next venture, the formation of the Standard Air-Lines for service between Phoenix and Los Angeles: It was a hot night in Phoenix in 1927. Bored and restless reporters were sitting around in the city room of the local newspaper when in strode a tall, gangling

stranger wearing grease-covered work clothes, with goggles pushed up under his flier's helmet. "My name's Jack Frye," he announced. "I'm going to start an air line here and I'd like to tell somebody about it." Frye and his partners, Paul E. Richter and Walter H. Hamilton, who had been his flying students, had established a one-plane subsidiary to the Aero Corporation to operate a scheduled air-transport service between Phoenix and Los Angeles. This subsidiary they named the Standard Air Lines.

Frye was president of Standard Air Lines until it merged with Western Air Express in 1930, when he became vice-president in charge of operations in the new company. This post he continued to hold when later that same year Western merged with Transcontinental Air Transport-Maddux, to become Transcontinental and Western Air, Inc. (One writer has compared Frye's merging of air companies with his youthful "ambidextrous merging of raspberry flips.") TWA immediately inaugurated the first coast-to-coast service to carry passengers entirely by air—thirty-six hours, with an over-night stop at Kansas City. In 1931 it acquired Northrop mail planes and took the lead in mail flying, while continuing passenger service in Fords and Fokkers. That same year TWA drew up specifications for a faster, larger, and more comfortable plane, which Donald Douglas<sup>11</sup>, then a maker of military aircraft, built for the company and called the DC-1—the first Douglas plane designed exclusively for the commercial field. From this was developed the fourteen-passenger DC-2, which TWA was the first to fly. By the spring of 1934 it had thirty-one DC-2's in service and had reduced the cross-country flying time from twenty-four hours, which TWA had maintained since 1932 with DC-1's, to sixteen.

Jack Frye took over his present duties as president and director of TWA in 1934. (Walter Hamilton became a Douglas Aircraft executive, and Paul Richter an executive vice-president of TWA.) That same year all air-mail contracts with commercial lines were canceled by the Government and in February the Army Air Corps started flying the domestic mail. Later that same year, in June, following the deaths of ten Army mail pilots, the Government re-offered the contracts to the commercial lines on a bid basis. Frye had set a cross-country transport plane record in a DC-1 when he himself flew the last load of air mail under the old contract from Los Angeles to New York in thirteen hours and two minutes; then set another record under the new TWA-Government contract when he carried the first mail load in eleven hours and thirty-one minutes in a Northrop Gamma plane. In 1936 Frye made still another record when he flew from Chicago to Washington in two hours and twenty-two minutes. A "record" of a different sort was perhaps President Roosevelt's<sup>12</sup> use of TWA planes to cross the Atlantic on several history-making conferences of the Second World War. And in December 1945 a TWA Lockheed Constellation set a new commercial record of twelve hours and fifty-seven minutes from Washington to Paris.

In 1935 TWA began experiments in high-altitude flying in order to overcome one of

the major dangers in scheduled flights. Frye has pointed out that pilots had trouble in clearing cloud formations which might be obscuring mountain peaks, and had difficulty in breathing above twelve thousand feet. TWA used the DC-1 for many high-altitude test flights, then in 1936 equipped a single-engine Northrop Gamma mail plane with a turbo-supercharger lent by the Army. On several occasions it was found that the Gamma, because of its higher ceiling flying level, could fly in safety in weather which necessitated the cancellation of regular lower flying transport service. By 1940 TWA had a fleet of thirty-three-passenger, four-engine Boeing Stratoliners, built to cruise at high altitudes. These were equipped with "pressurized" cabins in which atmospheric pressure was controlled so that passengers could enjoy low-altitude comfort while flying as high as twenty-two thousand feet. For eighteen months TWA operated five Stratoliners in domestic service; in the winter of 1941-42 Frye turned them over to the Army for use in the foreign courier service. But their use in commercial air service had been long enough to prove that high-altitude flying was acceptable to the traveling public.

In an article published in the *Commercial and Financial Chronicle* in January 1941, Frye listed the domestic transport service provided by the luxurious Stratoliners among the highlights of the year 1940, during which the air-transport industry "undertook one of the most rapid expansion programs ever to be carried out in one year." Other important projects of the year were the handling of capacity traffic at La Guardia Field, the opening of Philadelphia's new multi-million-dollar airport, the opening of Pan American Airways' new route across the South Pacific, and the completion in midtown New York of the world's first airline terminal building. TWA nearly doubled its personnel and office facilities that year, Frye pointed out. In addition to the introduction of five Stratoliners at a cost of two million dollars, (on which, according to *Newsweek*, they lost money), TWA placed orders for new twin-engine Douglas planes and a number of Wright engines. Applications for several new routes were filed with the Civil Aeronautics Board to provide new service into cities and regions without mail, passenger, and express air schedules.

In 1941 Frye with Howard Hughes "the fabulous flier, movie producer, industrialist," began work on plans for the Lockheed Constellation, today considered TWA's most spectacular achievement. A triple-rudder transport, the Constellation, or "Connie," is said to be faster than a Japanese Zero, with a carrying capacity of from seventy-five to a hundred armed soldiers, or fifty-seven passengers and a crew. It has pressurized cabins, can fly at a ceiling of over thirty thousand feet, cruise for four thousand miles at more than three hundred miles an hour, and it has a wing spread three feet broader than the entire distance covered in the entire first flight of Orville Wright at Kitty Hawk in 1903. In discussing the Constellation, Jack Frye has pointed out that it has a range of flight and speed that would bring any capital in the Western Hemisphere within sixteen and a half hours of the United

States. Sydney, Australia, could be brought within forty flying hours of Dayton, Ohio, for example, as against twenty-three days by rail and steamer. In April 1944 a Constellation made a spectacular record when it was flown by Jack Frye and Howard Hughes from Burbank, California, to Washington, D.C., (2,663 miles) in six hours and fifty-eight minutes at an average speed of 355 miles an hour. Constellations, the largest land-based transports in full production in 1945 were, at the end of that year, in Government service, flying personnel and supplies out from fighting fronts and bringing wounded and about-to-be-discharged men home.

The question of international air routes is a controversial issue in 1945; tied up with it is the matter of postwar Atlantic fares, which *Time Magazine* calls "the battle of plane fares." Pan American Airways and American Export Airlines have had the only transatlantic air carriers operating in the Second World War. Pan American has taken the position that in order to meet foreign competition the United States must have only one air line operating internationally; Frye has consistently maintained that the United States was "large and powerful enough in relation to other countries to support a relatively greater number of international air lines." In April Frye told a Senate subcommittee that his company would have no part in a proposed cooperative international air line, feeling that a single monopoly for all United States international air transportation would lead only to Government ownership or failure. He thinks also that American competition would produce better service for the traveler.

In 1943 and 1944 TWA had applied to the Civil Aeronautics Board for commercial routes to the Azores and to Calcutta via London, Paris, and Cairo. By the end of 1944 there were more than a dozen air lines applying for transatlantic routes, but it was not until July 1945 that CAB authorized Pan American Airways, American Airlines (through its subsidiary the American Export Airlines), and TWA to fly to Europe. (Pan American is the only air line which had previously had permanent authorization for the North Atlantic service or for landing rights in the Azores, though TWA like many other domestic lines had been flying foreign routes for the Army.) The new CAB authorizations, limited to seven years to permit review by the Board, cover general routes instead of the usual point to point pattern, thus in effect giving permission to serve the general area through which the route passes.

Pan American strongly protested the new ruling, claiming "gross favoritism" to TWA and American. Frye in his counterargument claimed that he was in a better position than anyone else to begin transatlantic service; that TWA had "operated more flights across the Atlantic than Pan American or any other carrier"; that the "only modern, high-speed, four-engine equipment that Pan American can get in the near future is the Constellation, which TWA developed and on which TWA has prior delivery rights. [TWA had in operation, in October 1945, five Boeing Stratoliners returned by the Army.] This leadership is the product of competition which Pan American seeks to extinguish. It explains that operator's con-

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stant effort for two years now to prevent the establishment of any United States foreign air route by anyone but Pan American." And the rate war was on. Frye announced a one-way fare from New York to London of \$263.80, and the next day Pan American announced that it expected to drop its one-way fare to about a hundred and fifty dollars as soon as its new 128-passenger planes were available. At about the same time spectacular reductions in flying time schedules—ten-hour service from coast to coast and eleven-hour service between New York and London—were announced by the four major air lines, to take effect probably by January 1946.

A story illustrates Frye's plans for aviation: During the early days of his presidency of TWA he once was sitting at a directors' meeting when the bankers asked why the company was not paying dividends. "I'll tell you why," said Frye earnestly. "No airplane today is good enough. No air line flies often enough, or fast enough. Air lines shouldn't pay dividends for ten years—not until they reach the point where they can really serve the public." Today Frye thinks that vast merchant air fleets capable of transporting most of the world's cargo will emerge from the Second World War and may be the key to lasting peace. Aviation, which was a struggling young industry in 1932, has now a real record of achievement. The air line president thinks that the transport plane of tomorrow will be much larger than anything yet built, capable, perhaps, of carrying as much as two thousand tons vast distances on nonstop flights. American youth should be given a sound education in aviation, he thinks, to be prepared to carry on the enormous expansion in air routes that may be expected in the future. Before the end of 1946 Frye expects to triple the TWA fleet, and his goal is to make aviation both the fastest and the safest means of travel—but this he thinks will take another fifteen years.

Jack Frye is director of the Air Transport Association of America and a member of the advisory committee of the Institute of Aeronautical Sciences, the National Aeronautical Association, and the Air Lines Committee of United States Air Policy. He is a member of a number of clubs in cities not so far apart from an aviation expert's point of view: in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Kansas City, Chicago, New York, and Washington. In the Second World War he holds a commission as lieutenant commander in the United States Naval Reserve.

The air-line official is described as a dynamic person who knows his business "from swivel chair to cockpit." Over six feet tall, weighing close to two hundred pounds, he has brown eyes and dark brown hair peppered with gray. He is said to be meticulous about his clothes, liking red ties, tweeds, and dark worsteds "as snappy-looking as his planes." In 1941 he was married to Helen Warner Vanderbilt, who had formerly been married to Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr. Mrs. Frye has told newspapermen that her interest in TWA advertising was partly responsible for their romance: she had told Frye that air-line advertising should portray the adventure of flying instead of emphasizing comfort and

speed. Mr. and Mrs. Frye spend as much time as possible on their ranch near Flagstaff, Arizona. Frye has written numerous newspaper and magazine articles on aviation and has other literary interests. His home library contains "practically everything from eighteenth century poetry to Saint Exupéry."

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