

A SKETCH OF THE SMITH REYNOLDS AIRPORT

By CHARLES E. NORFLEET

President, Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce (1935)
Chairman, Aviation Committee, Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce (1936-1942)

IN North Carolina's rolling Piedmont hills, on a plateau just 250 miles due west of the windswept sand dune where man first got his wings, is rising up today a great new air center--the Smith Reynolds Airport, pride of Winston-Salem.

service, should have a place on the "main line" of America's air transportation. Nearly twenty years of unceasing effort lie behind that determination, twenty years of defeats and temporary set-backs and finally of real successes.

Already rated by experts as one of the finest in the nation for cities of comparable size, the airport constitutes a distinguished achievement in modern engineering and design. Its facilities are the "last word" in aviation progress.

But it is much more than field, runways, hangars and superb terminal building; it is the dreams and the enthusiasm and the combined "blood, sweat and tears" of a score of Winston-Salem business men who yesterday envisioned for their city of tomorrow a magnificent key air terminal providing the best direct commercial service available.

Local in a unique sense, as indigenous as the red earth on which it rests, the new flying center means much more to the city than just an ordinary airport.

It is not the result of high pressure promotion from any major airline or corporation, nor the creation of out-of-town capital invested for private gain. It is, fundamentally, the people's answer to the challenge of modern transportation, and into it have gone not merely Winston-Salem ideas and Winston-Salem money but the hopes and the struggles of men determined to build well for their home city and its future.

These men were determined that Winston-Salem, which a century ago had had to fight for adequate railroad



Above: Charles E. Norfleet. Left: This invitation gathered huge crowds of celebrating Twin Citizens in the larger hangar at Smith Reynolds Airport for a real old-fashioned barbecue last summer.

Interest in aviation became widespread in the city during the immediate post-World War I era. First airport was a small tract of land south of the city limits, about four miles from the

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present site, named "Maynard Field" in honor of the famous war ace who visited it. At best only a cow pasture, a windsock and a name, the field very quickly became inadequate and was soon abandoned.

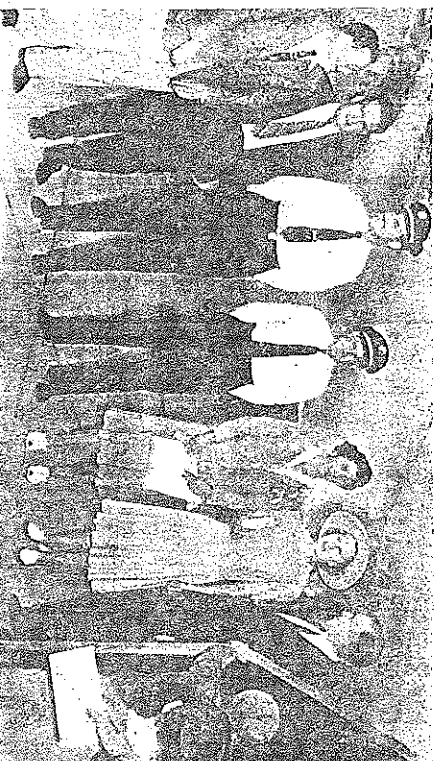
Commercial aviation expanded rapidly in the ensuing few years, and Twin Citizens came to realize more and more the need for first-class air service. During the middle 1920's the city joined with nearby High Point and Greensboro to establish a tri-city airport at a central location serving all three communities. The inadequacy of the semi-direct service provided by this set-up soon became apparent, with the result that the Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce named a special committee from its membership to investigate possible local sites for an airport.

Head of this group was Lieutenant-Colonel Paul N. Nonreque, Winston-Salem Ace of the first World War who has recently returned to active Army service in the Air Corps Ferry Command. After a careful survey, the committee selected a 90-acre tract of land just four-tenths of a mile from the city's northern limits and only ten minutes from the heart of the downtown district. This land, a part Forsyth County Farm, was duly approved and leased from the Board of County Commissioners. Labor and machinery for grading and clearing 1,600 feet for a runway were borrowed from the Forsyth County Highway Commission. Operations were begun on the proverbial "shoe-

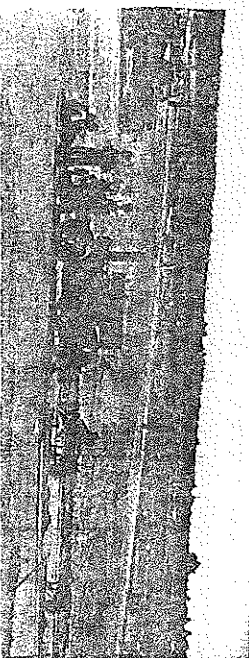
contributed funds for the erection of the original hangar and the installation of the necessary lighting system.

Very often in those days—and many times later on—"the going was tough." Aviation, though it was becoming more vitally a part of the nation's transportation network each day, had not yet proved its wings widely and well enough to capture the dollars-and-cents interest and support of the general public. But the city's backers of the new venture kept up their enthusiasm and their efforts. Some gave their money, some their services, some their influence and their genuine personal support.

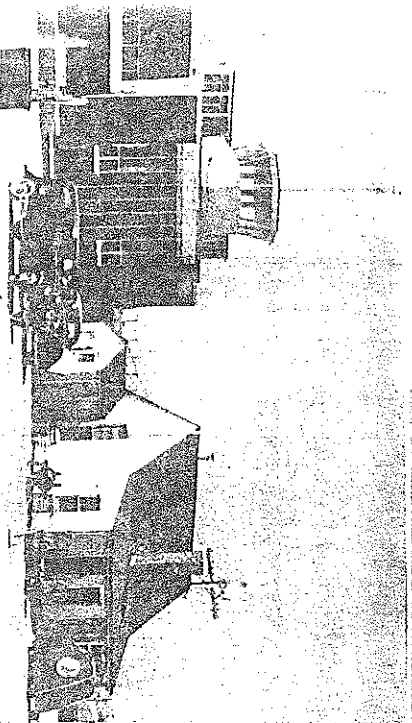
Whenever construction difficulties and the problems of financing the embryonic air center seemed almost insurmount-



Above: Among those taking part in the celebration of the inauguration of the city's first regularly-scheduled direct commercial service by air, were, left to right: Charles E. Norfleet, Frank Spencer, sports editor of the "Winston-Salem Journal"; Eastern's Captain Harmon and Co-pilot E. L. Foss; Mrs. Norfleet; Mrs. W. K. Hoyt; and W. K. Hoyt, gen. mgr. of "Journal-Sentinel" newspapers. Left: Tons and tons of earth were moved in leveling the Smith Reynolds Airport.



Below: The old and the new side by side at Winston-Salem's Smith Reynolds Airport. The small white frame structure which has seen years of service, has been replaced by the splendid modern terminal building, complete in every detail.



string." The field was cleared by cutting the crown off a hill and leveling the small valley surrounding it. Ultimately two other adjoining hills were incorporated into the cleared area, to complete the present 220-acre tract which comprises the present airport.

From the earliest days, engineering and construction work was done under the personal supervision of J. E. Ellerbe, official airport engineer since the beginning of the project. Soon after its beginning, another Winston-Salem citizen, A. Clinton Miller, became an enthusiastic supporter of the project and

able, one of Winston-Salem's young citizens with a deep affection for flying and a lively interest in the development of the field always stepped in with the necessary aid—from renting dump trucks to hiring laborers. He was Richard J. Reynolds, now Mayor of the City of Winston-Salem, and one of the men most responsible for the airport's final development. At one time he leased and operated the field himself.

Among others who gave long and arduous service to the building of the project was W. T. Ritter, for many years secretary of the Chamber of Commerce. The assistance furnished both by Forsyth County and, especially during Mayor George W. Coan, Jr.'s term of office, by the city, meant much to the field's successful completion. Coan's interest in the airport continued into later years when he served as North Carolina's W. P. A. Administrator, and it was the judicious use of W. P. A. funds and labor which made possible much of the expansion program. This constructive interest and helpfulness on the part of the W. P. A. continued under Coan's successor, C. C. McGinnis, who now serves as state administrator.

The airport was completed, after many ups and downs, and officially opened in 1927 with a huge celebration honoring the visit of Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh. (Continued on page 16)

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just returned from his historic New York-to-Paris flight. Public interest in flying boomed rapidly. To give a boost to the airport's further development, R. E. Laster presented to the Winston-Salem Foundation the generous gift of \$100,000 for use on the field. Soon the income from airport operations made possible the construction of a second hangar.

A small white frame house was erected for use as an office. This little building, for so long an integral part of field operations that airport employees regard it almost with superstition and refuse to see it demolished, is still in use after having served as office, administration building, waiting room and classroom. It has just undergone its fourth removal to a new spot on the edge of the field and will be used henceforth for the unromantic business of tool storage.

The airport, as it stood in 1927, seemed to its builders completely adequate for many years of service. It was used increasingly by private plane owners and served as "home base" for a highly successful charter service. Many prominent flyers, including Major Roger Williams and the late Amelia Earhart, visited the field. But the dream of the builders—direct commercial service—still was unrealized.

Meanwhile, because of tremendous strides in aviation engineering, the field like many others throughout the country was rapidly becoming obsolete. Expansion and modernization were imperatively needed. Realizing this fact, the Chamber of Commerce under Secretary Ritter's active supervision reopened its long-standing campaign for adequate air service and began work in earnest on a large-scale expansion program.

Support of the North Carolina Emergency Relief Administration was

enlisted and a small group of men went to work with wheel-barrows, picks and shovels to enlarge runways and make other improvements. Two 40-foot-wide runways, 1,800 and 2,200 feet in length, were paved and made ready for use.

By 1935, the expansion program under the direction of the W. P. A. was substantially developed. In that year Field, which serves the Greensboro-High Point area, necessitated the removal of Eastern Air Lines operations from that terminal. Local citizens realized at once that here was an opportunity to secure, at least temporarily, Eastern's services for Winston-Salem. Overnight they succeeded in raising \$4,500 to finance lighting system improvements on the field which would be approved for air-line use. For eight months thereafter the city benefited from its first regularly-scheduled commercial plane service.

Desirable as it was, this service proved to be short-lived. Eastern soon adopted for its use the new DC-2 planes, and the east-west runway on the field was found to be too short to accommodate them safely. Again, the problem of expansion and new construction faced the project's sponsors; again, their efforts were redoubled. Through W. P. A. cooperation and under Chamber of Commerce auspices, a new extensive development was started. Forsyth County's commissioners financed the purchase of additional land and the county also furnished the requisite sponsor's contribution. A new east-west runway was built, this time with a long look toward the possible future demands on the field; and the airport's two hangars were moved to new locations to lend added field space.

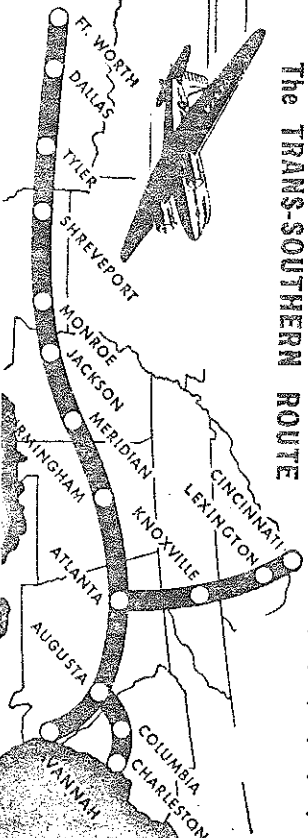
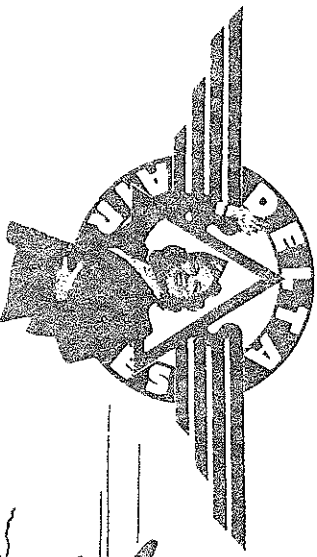
Always, the goal of direct mail and passenger service remained uppermost

in the minds of local citizens. Especially was its importance felt by "Dick" Reynolds, who with his sisters, Mrs. Charles Babcock and Mrs. Henry W. Bagley, generously offered to provide funds for a splendid, completely adequate terminal building if such service could be secured.

From the project's inception, close contact had been maintained with Eastern Air Lines executives, and as the work progressed they were appraised of the extensive modernization program nearing completion. In the early months of 1940, Eastern's President and General Manager Eddie V. Rickenbacker gave the Chamber definite assurances of the airline's interest in Winston-Salem as one of the South's great industrial centers rich in potential air traffic. He advised the Chamber's aviation committee that direct service by his company would be available if necessary developments could be made at the airport.

Reynolds and his sisters readily agreed not only to supply funds for the new terminal building now urgently needed but also to give additional money for improvements on the field itself. Work progressed rapidly. Three runways, 100 feet in width, were completed and paved according to best accepted standards. They included an east-west runway of 3,200 feet, a prevailing wind runway of 3,500 feet, and a north-south runway of 4,000 feet. For the first time anywhere, ultra-modern contact field lights were installed. Foundations were laid for the terminal building, designed by famous Architect Howard L. Cheney, who drew the plans for the new Washington National Airport terminal building, in collaboration with Associate Architect Ben Lane Smith.

Then came the real highlight of
(Continued on page 21)



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16

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The TRANS-SOUTHERN ROUTE

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(Continued from page 16)

almost two decades of effort; on June 14, 1941, direct air mail, passenger and express service for Winston-Salem became a reality as Eastern's sleek north-bound Silverliner, "Manhattan Flier" taxied to a smooth landing before the airport's tiny administration building. Ten thousand citizens were on hand to greet the plane and to take part enthusiastically in the day's celebration.

Today, just eleven months later, the new terminal building is completed. Already in use by Eastern, it will be formally opened to the public late this month or early in June. The brick-and-stone-and-steel fulfillment of a Winston-Salem dream many years ago-growth, it stands today a beautiful and efficient structure built for the needs of many years ahead.

The blue-gray building, trimmed in white pre-cast stone, is as modern as aviation architecture could make it and is complete in every detail, from intercommunicating telephone system to magic-eye doors. In exterior design, it is a pleasing blend of functional lines and the softer influences of southern colonial architecture.

The broad concrete loading ramp at its field entrance is large enough to ac-

commodate five DC-4's, airliners bigger than any now in commercial use.

From the spacious marble-trimmed lobby, two stories high with modern glass walls facing both the main entrance and the field side of the building, passengers may get unexcelled views of all field operations and of the countryside west of the airport.

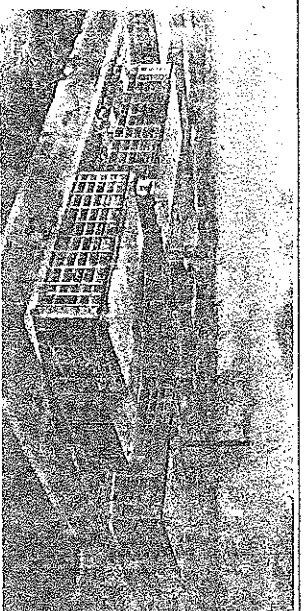
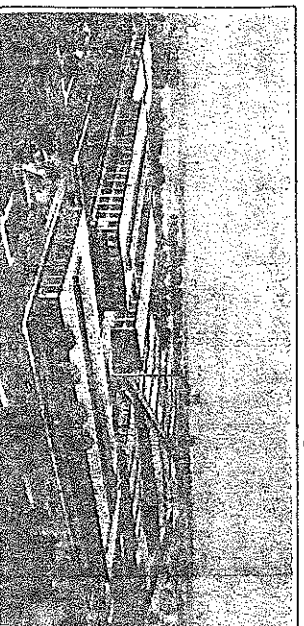
Features of outstanding interest in the terminal building include the control tower, an up-to-the-minute adaptation of the Rawlins tower at the Baltimore terminal; a completely-equipped dining room and adjacent luncheonette; a unique "club room" for pilots and other aviation enthusiasts, which includes a large wall map of the airport made of inlaid wood. Designed by Supervising Architect Hall Crews, this map shows every detail of the field and is equipped with wind velocity and direction indicators which give exact data on local flying conditions. Six modern offices for airline and other uses occupy the left ground-floor wing of the building; beneath them is a large classroom for use in pilot training.

Landscaping, still under way, has been designed to give the building a charming and appropriate setting. Key-

note of the landscaping as a whole will be mass plantings of native spring-flowering shrubbery, with a seven-foot bed of shrubs bordering the cafe terrace. The circular roadway leading to the main entrance from the public highway will be banked with evergreens which will serve to screen the hangars. The sloping grounds fronting the building will be treated as a park area, with plantings suited to the uneven contours of the land.

The airport has recently been officially designated "Smith Reynolds Airport" in tribute to the late young Zachary Smith Reynolds, brother of Mayor Reynolds who was himself a lover of aviation and an amateur pilot. It can boast an entirely modern lighting system and field layout, adequate runways in A-1 condition, and a terminal building with facilities equal or superior to any in the nation.

To say that the field is complete, however, would be to say that aviation has reached its fullest development. Even now, plans are being made for further expansion. The spirit which has brought the airport to this stage of development will see that it stays in the forefront of aviation progress.



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