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FIVE DECADES OF PHOTOS, HISTORIC HIGHLIGHTS

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50 YEARS OF SERVICE



5, 1997

LINE

Airlines' Firsts:

and 50 years of service to Asia, impressive list of "firsts" including:

Historical Firsts

First U.S. airline to operate an international route. (February 1928 between Minneapolis/St. Paul and Winnipeg, Manitoba)

First airline to operate regularly scheduled U.S.-Tokyo flights. (July 1947)

First airline to serve Seoul, Shanghai and Manila from the United States via Japan. (July 1947)

First U.S. airline to serve Taipei and Osaka. (1950 and 1967, respectively)

First U.S. airline to hire Japanese employees. (1947) (Today, Northwest employs more Japanese than any other foreign carrier.)

First U.S. airline to employ Japanese flight attendants.

First major airline to operate an all-jet fleet across the Pacific. (1960)

First U.S. airline to use Japanese interpreters in flight.

First airline to operate the 747-400 to Asia. (March 1989 with stop in Tokyo)

Service Firsts

Northwest has provided the longest uninterrupted service between North America and Asia of any airline.



Bridging the Pacific



Celebrating 50 Years of Service to Asia

DC-4 (top) first flew across the Pacific

Seating: 24-50

Cruising speed: 225 mph

Range: 2,200 miles

Actual flight time, Minneapolis/St. Paul to Tokyo: 33 hours

747-400 (left) is Northwest's largest aircraft

Seating: 418

Cruising speed: 600 mph

Range: 8,100 miles

Actual flight time, Minneapolis/St. Paul to Tokyo: 12 hours

Historical Firsts

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- First U.S. airline to serve Taipei and Osaka. (1950 and 1967, respectively)
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Service Firsts

- Northwest has provided the longest uninterrupted service between North America and Asia of any airline.
- Northwest is the leading U.S. carrier serving Japan in terms of number of flights, capacity and passengers flown.
- Northwest is the leading airline between the U.S. and Osaka.
- Northwest is the only airline that operates daily nonstop service from eight U.S. gateways to Japan.
- Northwest is the largest foreign airline to serve Japan.
- One out of every 10 passengers who depart Japan by air travel on Northwest.
- Northwest has helped develop Japan's aviation infrastructure including Japanese air traffic research (introducing the turbulence prevention flight procedures at Narita), operating Control center at Narita and flight management centers in Japan.
- Northwest has maintained close working relationships with Japan through 50 years of service.



Kenji Shimanaka, left, Japanese employee, in 1947. With him is Paul Bencoter, vice president.

DOTS®

the nation



By Judy Willard, USA TODAY



Celebrating 50 Years of Service to Asia

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COVER STORY

Northwest enhances travel, convenience across Pacific

NWA's success due to technical expertise, commitment and true grit

By John Heenehan, Northwest Orient

A crowd of media people, politicians, business leaders and well-wishers gathered at Wold-Chamberlain Field, site of the present-day Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport, on July 14, 1947.

Mrs. Fileman Balbuena, a Philippine native living in St. Paul, splashed some water from Manila Bay in the Philippines to christen the imposing four-engine DC-4 next to her.

The aircraft, dubbed "The Manila," would soon take off for Tokyo, Shanghai and Manila, the final stop on its historic journey. (The aircraft departed in the wee hours of the following morn, on July 15.) A second aircraft connected with The Manila in Tokyo and flew on to Seoul. Thus, Tokyo first began operation as a hub.

The flight also transformed Northwest from a relatively small airline that flew largely in the sparsely populated northern tier of the United States into a world airline, and a leading force in the Pacific. The Manila connected the Northwest of 1947 with the Northwest of 1997, and the Northwest of the future well beyond today.

In October 1947, the airline celebrated its 21st anniversary. Many of its pilots first flew biplanes in World War I and as barnstormers in the '20s. They were a tough lot who, along with hardy mechanics, agents, pursers and stewardesses (introduced in 1939), and the company's managers, helped develop a brand new industry.

Now a new breed of pilots were coming aboard — flyboys from World War II who rode the wave of modern aviation technology and training. These pilots were the future and they would dominate Northwest and the industry's cockpits for more than a generation.

Along with the rest of the growing work force, they built Northwest into a sprawling network airline that operated with military precision — and was a largely profitable organization as a result.

Northwest anchored its position in Asia in 1952 when the United States and Japan signed a bilateral aviation agreement. That pact continues to maintain Northwest as one of three U.S. carriers that can provide extensive service to Japan as well as beyond service to other Asian nations.

Northwest enhanced its position across the Pacific in 1960 when it introduced its first jet aircraft. These DC-8s enabled Northwest to offer the fastest U.S. service across the Pacific. By 1963, Northwest became the nation's first all-fan-jet airline.

In 1975, Northwest greatly expanded its operations in the Pacific when it began its freighter service with three 747-200s. Five more of these aircraft were added to the cargo fleet, making it the only U.S. passenger airline to also offer Asia-U.S. 747 freighter service.

The airline's reach extended to a new continent — Europe — in 1979. The early service was mostly to Northern Europe, but eventually shifted to the four central European cities of London, Paris, Frankfurt and Amsterdam.

Northwest underwent its next transformation in 1986

when it bought Republic Airlines. Northwest was well established as a trans-Pacific carrier but the acquisition gave it the local feed and fleet it needed to grow and compete in the newly deregulated world of hub-and-spoke network airline service.

One shining example of how Northwest has grown over the last half century was in its market share in the Pacific. Of the U.S. airlines, Pan Am carried about 75% of the trans-Pacific traffic in the late 1940s, while Northwest carried about 25%.

Today, Northwest has a far larger operation in Japan than United, which obtained Pan Am's Pacific routes in 1986. Northwest gained the edge in 1984 over Pan Am, and remains the leader to this day in a heated competitive race with United, Pan Am's successor.

The 1990s saw Northwest develop a partnership with KLM, which soon developed into a trend-setting alliance based on an "open skies" agreement between the United States and the Netherlands, and on the antitrust immunity granted by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The 1990s, however, were oppressively difficult for the U.S. airlines, which lost a combined \$13 billion through the first half of the decade.

Northwest succeeded in a 1993 financial restructuring that restored it as one of the nation's most financially sound airlines. That transformation was only the most recent example of the grit, determination and commitment that have proven so successful for both Northwest and its people.



1947 Ad: Northwest built its expansive trans-Pacific network on a strong foundation of service routes established in 1947.

Northwest's Great Circle Route brings U.S.-Japan 2,000 miles closer

By Bill Yenne, Northwest Orient

World War II gave the average American a more global view. The world became a smaller place, and the airlines planned elaborate, expanded route structures.

One of the most important expansions was Northwest's "Great Circle Route," which crossed the Pacific by flying north, passing close to the Arctic Circle — bringing New York 2,000 miles closer to Japan than the conventional mid-Pacific route along the equator.

During the war, the U.S. Army Air Forces commandeered half of Northwest's fleet, and service to many smaller cities had to be suspended. Because of its expertise in the field of cold weather flying, Northwest's assignment was to set up an air bridge to Alaska, including the Aleutian Islands via Canada and the North Pacific.

Operating its own aircraft as well as USAAF Curtiss C-46 Commandos and Douglas C-47 Skytrains, Northwest developed military air routes to Alaska. By the end of the war, Northwest pilots had flown more than 21 million miles with an enviable performance factor.

After the war, Northwest built two commercial routes along two of the military routes it pioneered during the war. On Sept. 1, 1946, Northwest inaugurated service to the 'Outside Route' up the rugged British Columbian and Alaskan coasts from Seattle to Anchorage. Flying began on the 'Inside Route,' from the Twin Cities to Anchorage.

It was from these commercial routes that Northwest expanded its service to the Far East. On July 15, 1947, using the U.S. Army Air Forces airfield on Shemya, at the tip of the Aleutians, Northwest began service to Tokyo, Seoul, Shanghai and Manila.