

\$11 million sounded so stratospheric in 1949...

By JACK HAUPTLI
Associate City Editor

The talk around city desk was about the early days at Seattle-Tacoma Airport.

"I covered the dedication," I chimed in. "It was on a Saturday afternoon. I was on the night shift, and Larry Dion and I were late getting there."

"Good," pronounced Lane Smith, city editor. "You can write a piece for the airport's 25th-anniversary section."

"It couldn't have been that long ago," I protested. But it was.

The Times information bureau sent me a copy of my article from the July 10, 1949, Sunday Times.

"Puget Sound's \$11,000,000 new gateway to the world, the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, officially took its place on the map yesterday at colorful dedication ceremonies," the article began.

Eleven million, that's all? But they were 1949 millions.

"A crowd estimated by state patrolmen at 30,000 jammed into the Bow Lake field to watch the ceremonies and view the giant airliners that will fly from its wide concrete runways, bound for all parts of the world."

Who calls it Bow Lake anymore? Giant airliners like Western's Convairs and Northwest's Martins, both with D. B. Cooper-style drooping steps from the fuselage. And Douglas DC-4s and DC-6s.

"Today we become a dynamic world center, and we are justly proud!" proclaimed Gov. Arthur B. Langlie in dedicating the field."

Langlie had begun the second of his three terms six months earlier. It's now almost eight years since he died.

"The airport operated by the Port of Seattle received a thundering salute from precise formations of Air Force

and Navy planes which swooped low in passing in review..."

Larry Dion, then, as now, a Times photographer, and I were still driving out on the Seattle-Tacoma Highway when they flew by.

"Ice-cream and soft-drink salesmen did a land-office business as a hot sun beat down on the crowd gathered around the \$3,000,000 terminal and administration building."

Three million? I guess that was an impressive sum to toss into the article. How much did the modernization project cost again? I remember it was a hot day. The speakers were on an open balcony facing the runway, the balcony that got swallowed up in the remodeling.

"Speakers on the flag-decked balcony paid glowing tribute to the field, many repeating the phrase, 'A dream come true.' Congressman Hugh B. Mitchell

declared, 'I can say on the basis of experience on two continents, you have the finest facilities here of any airport in the world.'"

Mitchell served in the Senate in 1945-46, then lost to Harry Cain. In 1949 he was in the first of two terms in the House. He challenged Langlie for governor in 1952, then went into business here.

Other speakers included William F. Devin, Seattle's mayor from 1942 to 1952 and now an attorney, and G. Val Fawcett, mayor of Tacoma from 1946 to 1950. He died in 1965.

"After the formal dedication Northwest Airlines' first Boeing Stratocruiser, aptly named 'Seattle-Tacoma,' was christened by Mrs. William M. Allen, wife of the president of the Boeing Airplane Company."

"Mrs. Allen christened the plane by dousing on its nose a champagne bucket filled with water flown from China, Japan, Hawaii, Alaska, Korea and the Philippines."

"Gaily costumed girls from the distant lands, and an Alaskan girl, sweetening in a fur parka, filled the bucket with bottles of water flown here with them."

Another clipping mentioned that the water from Japan was scooped out of the moat around the Imperial Palace — and the water from Alaska was charged water from an Anchorage bar.

The Stratocruiser undoubtedly was the biggest giant airliner on the field that day — four 3,500-horsepower Pratt & Whitney engines, a cruising speed of 300 miles an hour, 110 feet 4 inches long with a wing span of 141 feet 3 inches, a lower-deck lounge, room for 50 to more than 100 passengers.

By June, 1954, the Stratocruiser Seattle-Tacoma had flown 3 million miles and had carried 150,000 passengers. It was one of the 56 Stratocruisers Boeing built from 1947 to 1949.

Northwest was the last airline to phase out the Stratocruisers, the last flight going from New York to Minneapolis-St. Paul on September 19, 1960.

Dion and I have one more vivid memory of the airport dedication. Mary Blake,

United Air Lines' public-relations representative then and now, lined up a DC-3, as we remember it, for a press flight over the field.

We swooped and banked sharply as Dion with his 4-by-5 Speed Graphic photographed the \$3 million terminal, the crowd, the parked planes and all the parked cars.

Bonnie Schmid in The Times photo lab looked and looked for the negatives of Dion's pictures taken that day, finally finding them filed under "Bow Lake."

Jeepers. Twenty-five years.



Larry Dion took this picture during the dedication ceremonies 25 years ago.

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