



**Late World War II Pilot Ike Nicholson with his plane in Maryland in 1941.
During war, he leaned out the door of his military aircraft to make pictures
over Germany, then convert to maps upon return to base.**

THE IDLE AMERICAN

Only Constant is Change....

Commentary by Dr. Don Newbury

Column #1,136 for Release Week of March 23, 2025 or Later

The ballyhoo about “no free lunches” was first bandied about in the 1880s and today, Southwest Airlines’ “bags fly free” death bell is on the verge of gonging.

Long known for allowing passengers to check two pieces of luggage “free,” SWA is altering its policy and there’s more story-spinning underway than a 10-year-old pulling the string from a new top.

Policy changes confuse mere mortals, but a couple of truths are emerging: SWA stockholders expect stronger returns on their investments, and the uniqueness of the “airline that LUV built” will occur again only when pigs fly, if then....

Researching the “no free lunches” thing is mind-boggling, but really nothing new. One 1880 come-on offered “free” lunches with alcohol purchases--IF enough of the devil’s brew was ordered. Asterisks explaining detailed restrictions have been with us forever.

Josephine Pollard’s poem “Somebody Pays”--written more than a century ago--seems to “fit” today as well, reading: “Free lunches, free passes, they have at command, Rich gifts that to others are lost, And gaily they feast on the fat of the land, And travel regardless of cost. But for all the fine banquets,

The wear and the tear, Of public or private displays, **Though you may go free, 'tis as sure as can be, That somebody pays.**"...

I commend SWA story-spinners for their efforts to help the medicine go down.

The two best-known figures in SWA history--co-founder Herb Kelleher and Colleen Barrett, first woman president of a major airline--might have fought to the death for the "bags fly free" policy, working into the night until their eyes either crossed and/or had bags under them. But, circumstances change. Sadly, the current "hubbub" is symbolic of our overall cultural funk: Instead of "something special in the air," we're gripped by "something dismal in despair." Oh, 'tis true, 'tis true.

SWA social media folks are churning out messages at warp speed for damage control. No doubt, they preferred bygone days when their aim was to keep SWA in the news and off the front page. I still consider it the airline of choice, as long as my SWA credit card allows me to check one bag free. (It'll be packed to the last ounce.)...

All this airline stuff lead me to aviation research once more. I've learned that the first motor-powered flight faced the prospect of splashing down rather than gliding in, since Kitty Hawk, NC, is in fact on an island.

The Wright brothers' first "flight" spanned 120 feet and finished 12 seconds later, having attained an altitude of eight feet!

Taking turns in the pilot's seat, Wilbur and Orville completed a total of four flights on that December day in 1903, the final one climbing to 20 feet and measuring almost a thousand feet. Alas, the plane sustained damage each flight, winding up on the scrap heap at day's end....

Further, I learned about Brown County aviation history. I lived there for 40 years, remembering four flights daily by Trans Texas Airways, its DC-3 "blue goose" flying over our farm home in the 1950s.

Planes flew there as early as 1913. The postal department approved "Route Number 650.003, 'aeroplane' mail service between Brownwood and Comanche," 25 miles away, during the four-day "Brownwood Free Fall Fair" in October, 1913. Katherine Stinson, then the world's youngest aviator, carried passengers "up into the clouds" for \$25. (Free Fall?)

Numerous airlines served Brownwood for some four decades, ending in the late 1980s when government subsidies helping remote airports to attract scheduled airline service dried up. For about 20 years, Trans Texas Airways' flight schedules included daily service from Brownwood to San Angelo and Dallas. Later, the company name changed to Texas International Airlines. Still, playful TTA monikers abounded, including "tree-top airlines, tinker toy airlines and trick-or-treat airlines" (a trick to get on and a treat to get off).

One last thing: Rumor has it that some Southwest Airlines flight attendants are claiming "at least we didn't fire Luka."....

Dr. Newbury, longtime university president, continues to write and speak. The Idle American, begun in 2003, is Texas' longest-running syndicated column.

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