

GROVER CLINTON TYLER

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Grover Clinton Tyler was born in Knox County, Nebraska in 1892. Most of his youth and early adulthood was spent in Idaho where he attended schools and opened and closed a couple of small business. Accounts of the airplane's growing role in World War I captured his imagination. Tyler moved to the Minneapolis-St. Paul area where he learned to fly in 1917. The Armistice ended his dreams of air adventures in Europe, but in 1918, Tyler paid \$5,400 for a Jenny, had it shipped to Boise and soloed in the fall of that year. From then on, flying was to be a constant part of his life. He began barnstorming through Idaho, Utah and Nevada charging \$15 for a "straight" flight and \$25 if the intrepid passenger wanted the jaunt to include a loop.

As the public's interest in aviation grew, Tyler moved to California where he helped establish two flight schools. Many first generation commercial and general aviation pilots recall Captain Tyler as a stern task master - one who repeatedly drove home that flying was an unforgiving endeavor.

Tyler began staking his claim to aviation fame in 1926 when he and another pilot teamed up with Verne C. Gorst to get Pacific Air Transport off the ground. The first job he tackled at PAT made Grover Tyler quite literally a trailblazer. He and fellow pilot, Arthur Starbuck roamed up and down the San Joaquin Valley in an old Ford loaded down with tools and old automobile headlights. They set out the headlights to be used as beacons to guide their flights and located emergency landing field and navigational landmarks. When this task was completed, air mail service from Los Angeles to Seattle was begun.

On August 18, 1926 Grover Tyler landed his M-1 Ryan bi-plane along the Duwamish waterway and delivered the first commercial air mail to Seattle. Fifteen years later he would characterize this flight as the toughest of his life. A violent rain storm forced him to fly at 200 to 500 feet in order to stay under the clouds. "My plane just grazed treetops and I wound my way around the valleys," he recounted, "virtually feeling my way. But I made it all right, just 19 minutes ahead of our 14 hours schedule with 12,000 letters."

Two years later, the young Pacific Air Transport became Boeing Air Transport and subsequently United Air Lines. Tyler continued to fly for UAL, becoming senior pilot of its Pacific Division. He flew mail and passengers over various Pacific routes until 1942.

Without doubt, the most harrowing experience in his flying career came in March of 1931 when his Boeing 40-B-4 caught fire over the Umpqua Forest near Roseburg, Oregon. Using his familiarity with the terrain, Tyler spotted the most likely of unlikely clearings and put his plane on the deck. The wings

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were sheared off and smoke billowed but no one was seriously hurt. In fact, the only "burn" victim was a passenger who picked up an over heated fire extinguisher.

In the same year, 1931, the United States Congress authorized the awarding of the Air Mail Flyers Medal of Honor to Captain Tyler. It was presented to him by Franklin D. Roosevelt. The deed was later chronicled by the popular American documenter of champions, the Wheaties cereal box.

During World War II, Tyler moved to Cleveland, Ohio where he became chief test pilot for Jack and Heintz Co., makers of flight instruments. Captain Tyler retired from flying in 1946. His illustrious career had spanned four decades, over 3,000,000 miles and nearly 25,000 hours in the air. Grover C. Tyler died in a Seattle hospital in 1966. He was a true pathfinder of aviation.

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