



## Aviation Milestones for Professional Pilots

### Significant Dates and Events in Aviation History

(Note: The short list provided below has been chosen with airline pilots in mind; there are many more general lists of aviation milestones available on the Internet.)

**1783-1927** **Important aviation “firsts”** include the first balloon flight (Mongolfier brothers, **1783**); the first glider flights (George Caley & Otto von Lilienthal, **1800-1890**); the first air transport company (London, Aerial Transit Company, **1843**); the first flight by a heavier-than-air machine (Orville Wright, Kittyhawk, U.S.A., **1903**); the world’s first airline (Deutsche Luftschiffahrts-Aktiengesellschaft, the “German Airship Transport Corporation,” **1909**); the first commercial air mail flights (Allahabad, India, and New York, U.S.A.—both in **1911**—and in Queensland, Australia by Qantas in **1922**); the first strike (U.S. air mail strike of **1919**); and the first nonstop flights across the Atlantic (Alcock & Brown, **1919** & Lindberg, **1927**).



**1926-36** The Railway Labor Act and Decision 83 (U.S.A.) provided the first legal and industrial protection for airline pilots and the first formulation of a rational method of calculating pilot pay.

**1929** Formation of the oldest existing pilots’ association, VNV (Vereniging van Nederlandse Verkeersvliegers), the Dutch Airline Pilots’ Association.

**1930-6** Jet engine invented by Dr. Hans von Ohain (Germany) and Sir Frank Whittle (United Kingdom).

**1935** First flight of the Douglas DC-3, which is still in active service in some parts of the world today. It was the first passenger aircraft to be economically viable without the benefit of air mail contracts. It was responsible for increasing and broadening the public appeal of air transportation.



**1944** Signing of the Chicago Convention, which has governed international aviation since that time; shortly after ICAO was formed (Montreal, Canada) and a number of important initiatives to promote aviation were taken, including the development of the ICAO annexes, bilateralism, and the “5 Freedoms of the Air.”

**1946** The first helicopters to enter commercial service were the Sikorsky S-51 and the Bell 47B.

**1946-51** The formation of the first transnational airline, SAS (Scandinavian Airline System), by Denmark, Norway, and Sweden (under Swedish law).

**1947** IFALPA was formed (in London, United Kingdom), and in **1948** the first meeting was attended by pilot representatives from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Central Africa, Denmark, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.





- 1948** The first aircraft autoland was achieved. Increasingly rapid and significant technological advances took place after World War II, including progressive improvements in engine and airframe reliability, the introduction of precision landing aids, and other technology-driven changes that improved aviation safety.
- 1952** The first commercial flight by a jet—a de Havilland Comet of BOAC (the British Overseas Airways Corporation).
- 1959** Introduction of the Age 60 rule requiring the mandatory (licensing) retirement of pilots at age 60. This requirement was changed to age 65 in **2006**.
- 1969** Peak year for hijackings from the U.S. to Cuba. In the 1970s, there was an outbreak of hijackings associated with the Palestinian movement, including three hijackings to Dawson's Field (Jordan, **1974**) and the subsequent destruction of the three aircraft. In **1972** IFALPA called for a worldwide day of action by airline pilots in protest at the lack of international action on the hijacking problem. In subsequent years international coordination of security improved steadily.
- 1975** The then-prevalent idea of “pilot error” as an explanation for accidents and incidents was challenged at the 20th IATA Technical Conference (Istanbul, Turkey). This led to significant advances in the approach to “human factors” in areas such as accident investigation and flight operations; these changes accelerated after notable human factor accidents in Tenerife (Canary Islands, **1977**) and Portland, Oregon (U.S.A, **1978**).
- 1978** The U.S. Airline Deregulation Act was passed, starting a series of far-reaching developments (including Europe initiatives in **1993 & 1997**) that eventually led to globalization of the industry. The changing national and global circumstances led to a number of significant pilot strikes at Continental Airlines (**1982**), Eastern Airlines (**1983**), United Airlines (**1985**), and Ansett & Australian (**1989**).
- 1985** The first commercial ETOPs-90 flight (90 minutes) initiated changes that have contributed considerably to the growth of international long-haul transportation.
- 1987** The privatization of British Airways signaled the decline of state-owned flag carriers as a major force in international aviation and the new era of airline privatization.
- 1991** Global airline alliances began with the formation of the oneworld alliance. By **2008** three major alliances were carrying more than 60% of all aviation passengers.
- 2001** The 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States using passenger aircraft became the major influence on the development of new procedures for international aviation security.
- 2003** The merger of Air France and KLM was the first European cross-border airline merger. In **2008** Delta Air Lines and Northwest Airlines merged to become the world's largest airline.
- 2008** The EU/US Air Transport Agreement (“Open Skies”) takes effect and negotiations on a second-stage agreement begins. These developments reflect the continuing influence of globalization on the aviation industry.

