
Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Commission

Dwight D. Eisenhower and Aviation

Dwight D. Eisenhower made substantial and wide-ranging contributions to aviation in America. Though not as great an aviator as his fellow-Kansan, Amelia Earhart, his impact on the modernization and regulation of aviation was immense. Convinced by his experiences in the military and as President of the United States, Eisenhower worked to promote and standardize the use of aviation. He was involved in the field of aviation in the following ways:

- **President Eisenhower's marquee aviation legislation was the Federal Aviation Act of 1958**, which replaced the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) and several other agencies with the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA). The FAA later changed to the Federal Aviation Administration. This change in aviation policy developed as a result of the dawn of the jet age and a series of mid-air collisions. The FAA had broader authority to combat the hazards associated with aviation that plagued the CAA's airspace management system. The FAA was given sole responsibility for developing and maintaining a common civil-military system of nationwide air traffic control.
- **Eisenhower played a key role in creating the United States Air Force.** He was the first Army Chief of Staff to support forcefully and help facilitate the creation of the United States Air Force as a separate and coequal branch of our nation's military services. As president, in April 1954, he signed the legislation creating the U.S. Air Force Academy. He was a strong advocate for the role of the Air Force playing a crucial role in U. S. national security structure and policy.
- **President Eisenhower initiated and was a driving force behind the development of Dulles International Airport**, America's first commercial airport designed for jet-propelled aircraft. Following World War II and the advancement of aviation technology, there was a growing demand for greater airport capacity. Building on initiatives and studies from the Washington Airport Act of 1950, Eisenhower in 1958 personally designated the 10,000-acre site located in Fairfax and Loudoun counties west of Washington, D.C. for the construction of the new airport. In 1959, he dedicated the unfinished project to his late Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and was present in 1962 for the opening ceremony with President John F. Kennedy.
- **President Eisenhower was first to use a helicopter for Presidential transport.** This occurred on July 12, 1957 when President Eisenhower flew in a Bell H-13J Ranger during "Operation Alert," a major civil defense exercise. The need for Presidential helicopter transport became evident during a prior civil defense drill that tested how quickly national leaders could be transported from Washington D.C. to rural command post bunkers. Eisenhower had traveled in his personal limousine, which arrived at the bunker far behind his cabinet members who flew in a helicopter.

- **President Eisenhower was first to use a jet aircraft for Presidential transport.** President Eisenhower visited Germany, France, England, Scotland, and Italy aboard the Boeing SAM 970 VC-137A on August 26, 1959. Prior to this, President Eisenhower flew in a Lockheed Constellation 48-610 VC-121A named “Columbine” after the official flower of Mrs. Eisenhower’s home state of Colorado. In 1954, he flew in a Super Constellation named “Columbine II” until his inaugural jet flight in 1959.
- **President Eisenhower was the first U.S. President to have a pilot’s license.** Private Pilot’s License No. 93258 was issued to Lieutenant Colonel Eisenhower when he served under General Douglas Macarthur in the Philippines. Born before the Wright brothers flew, he passed a CAA (Civil Aeronautics Authority) written examination and flight test in 1939. Although he never renewed his license after it expired the following year, and would never fly an aircraft again, the thrill of his days of flight led him to later note, “That experience reaffirmed my earlier conviction of the vital role of aviation in our national life.”

