

Dakota Images

During a nearly sixty-year aviation career, Clyde W. Ice was a barnstormer, charter pilot, airline pilot, crop duster, flight instructor, and aerial coyote hunter. He was born on 28 May 1889 to Hand County homesteaders John W. and Josephine Ellis Ice and graduated from high school at Saint Lawrence. After trading two used automobiles for a damaged biplane in 1919, Ice taught himself to fly and spent most of the 1920s on the barnstorming circuit.

In 1927, Ice and two Rapid City businessmen formed Rapid Air Lines. The company earned large profits from barnstorming after acquiring a Ford Tri-Motor in 1928. Ice, who had traveled to the factory to help with the airplane's assembly, used it to tour from Buffalo, New York, to Mexico. The proceeds helped the company branch out into other aviation ventures, including charter service and a flight school. The partners operated passenger service between Rapid City and Watertown briefly in 1929 but gave up after failing to obtain a government airmail contract. Ice left the company a few months later and tried to establish passenger service linking Watertown to Minneapolis with different partners in the early 1930s. That effort also failed due to the lack of an airmail contract.

Ice then founded a flying service at Spearfish. After building a sprayer for his Piper Cub, he entered the crop-dusting business in 1938 and was still spraying crops after his eightieth birthday. He also worked as a flight instructor, training over two thousand pilots during World War II. Of the many rescue missions Ice flew over the years, two stand out. In 1941, he dropped supplies to stranded stunt parachutist George Hopkins on the summit of Devils Tower. In 1947, he flew into a blizzard to transport a premature infant from an isolated Harding County ranch to a Spearfish hospital. Ice took special pride in the latter rescue, calling it his greatest achievement as a pilot.

In 1989, the aviation legend celebrated his one-hundredth birthday by piloting two airplanes. The following year, he was inducted into the South Dakota Aviation Hall of Fame. Ice died in Jackson, Wyoming, on 17 July 1992 and was survived by his wife Audrey, three sons, and one daughter. The Spearfish airport now bears the name "Clyde Ice Field."

—Stephen S. Witte



Clyde W. Ice

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On the covers: Since the time of the Wright brothers, flight and progress have become synonymous. In this issue, Steven J. Bucklin gives a bird's-eye view of the development of aviation in South Dakota from the days of the barnstormers to the present. (Front, top) A Curtiss Model D biplane races a train past the newly finished South Dakota capitol around 1915. (Front, bottom) This flying machine thrilled spectators at the South Dakota State Fair in Huron in 1912. (Back) Pheasant-hunting season has remained a peak time for general aviation for decades, as seen here at the Pierre Regional Airport at the opening of the 2011 hunting season. (Photograph by Jim Peitz).

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