PICKENS E. WOODSON (1879-1951)

Prescott and Quartzsite

As a very early member of the Yavapai County Chamber of Commerce Aviation Committee, Pickens E. "Tex" Woodson was appointed Prescott's first airport manager. The job was strictly voluntary, but the responsibilities were real. Pickens dutifully drove to the field "beyond the Dells" on a regular basis to make sure the all-important markings were in place and unobscured. He then evaluated the overall condition of the runways. If the relentless prairie dog holes and encroaching brush were getting out of hand, reinforcements were called in the form of other Aviation Committee members armed with shovels, rakes and gloves.

There's no evidence that Woodson ever flew or even had a desire to fly. But he apparently enjoyed aviation and airports, even buying an abandoned landing field in Quartzsite, Ariz., in the 1930s.

Born in 1879, Pickens Evans Woodson was the foster son of a prominent attorney in Bonham, Texas. He received an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy in 1896, but attended for only one year before withdrawing and joining Troop H, 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry as a private. Following his adventures with Theodore Roosevelt's "Rough Riders," he enlisted in the regular Army, serving in Troop K, 12th U.S. Cavalry and rising to the rank of sergeant. He received an honorable discharge in 1902 and returned to civilian life, though he may have continued to serve in Texas National Guard. In 1905, he rejoined the regular Army, serving with the 8th Infantry. He was commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant and deployed to the Philippines.

By early 1908, Woodson was recuperating in the military sanitarium at Fort Bayard, N.M., possibly due to some malady encountered on deployment. Honorably discharged in 1909, he went to Phoenix to try his hand at ranching. The dormant property a few miles southwest of downtown Phoenix was owned by Col. E. E. Dravo and leased to Woodson. It was actually more of a farm and by all accounts Woodson did a fine job getting it cleared and under cultivation. During 1910, he built a house and married his first wife, 20-year-old Kathryn Cornish.

Evidently, farming was not to his liking. By 1915, Woodson and his family were residing near Globe, Ariz., where he was listed on his daughter's birth certificate as a merchant. Although retired from the Army, when rumors of a possible war with Mexico began to circulate, he was recalled for service and sent to Georgia and then Texas.

Woodson was soon back in the Globe district of Arizona, where in 1920, he accepted the task of enforcing the hunting laws on the San Carlos Indian Reservation. Violations

there were deemed to be excessive. For that purpose, he was given commissions as "a special Indian policeman, deputy sheriff and deputy Arizona game warden." By the following year, Woodson, with his wife and two children, were in the small mining town of Katherine (now a ghost town) in the northwestern part of Arizona, near the Colorado River. While there, he became the state distributor for Mospico Safety Spindles for Ford automobiles, touted in his newspaper display advertisements as "the greatest safety device ever invented for Fords."

Woodson's penchant for Arizona's mining towns – Globe, Katherine, Prescott and Quartszite – may be an indication that he was doing some prospecting in addition to his regular occupations.

By 1923, the family had left Katherine and was living in Prescott. Woodson's tenure as airport manager lasted only about two years. In late 1926, a delegation of Prescott dignitaries, which included Grace Sparkes and Woodson, made the trip along the recently improved "Sunkist Trail" between Wickenburg and Blythe to show support for highway's further development and the new Colorado River bridge under construction. They passed through Quartzsite, which may have planted a seed in Woodson's mind. By end of 1928, the Woodson family was settled at Quartzsite, where Pickens soon became involved in community affairs. Sometimes referred to as the "mayor of Quartzsite," there wasn't much that he didn't get involved in at one time or another – schools, roads and all other forms of civic betterment. He operated Woodson's Store and invested in land. He even purchased a large tract on the outskirts of Quartzsite that had been leveled by American Airways for use in emergencies by the big Fokker transports flying between Phoenix and Los Angeles. The field was no longer needed by the airline and Woodson hoped to develop it into the town's airport.

Pickens Woodson remained in Quartzsite well into the 1940s, helping to accommodate the Civilian Pilot Training school that relocated to the town from the West Coast following the attack on Pearl Harbor. He spent his last years in Blythe and then San Bernardino, passing away there on April 8, 1951 at the age of 71.