

For It's a Jolly Good Administration

Let's celebrate the 62 years of the FAA.

A very special day comes around every August, a day when all of us in the FAA can rejoice. On August 23, 1958, President Eisenhower signed into law the Federal Aviation Act. Nine days later, on November 1, 1958, retired Air Force General Elwood "Pete" Quesada became the first Federal Aviation Agency Administrator. Then, sixty days later, on December 31, 1958, the FAA opened its doors for the first time. Not everyone gets to claim two birthdays.

Sixty-two years later, the [FAA continues to evolve](#) the safety standards of aviation at home and worldwide.

When the agency was born on August 23, it replaced the Civil Aeronautics Administration and took over many of the regulatory and oversight duties of the CAA. With the signing of the Federal Aviation Act of 1958 (P.L. 85-726) into law, the functions that had previously been dispersed across the government were consolidated into two independent agencies—the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA), which was created by the act, and the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB), which was freed of its administrative ties with the Department of Commerce, continued its economic regulation of commercial airline operations and accident investigations until its dissolution in 1985.

Many of the original mandates for the FAA are recognizable today, with such powers and responsibilities as regulating air commerce to best promote its development and safety, promoting the development of civil aeronautics, control of the airspace within the U.S., the ongoing improvement to and development of air navigation facilities, and the development and operation of a common air traffic control system. Throughout its 62 years, the FAA has been at the forefront and responsible for [many safety innovations](#), and innovating aviation safety defines everything we do.

The FAA's inception began over half a century of federal oversight and expertise in aviation administration, with decades of commitment and excellence growing from the leadership of Quesada. For its first administrator, the FAA couldn't have asked for a more distinguished leader. A 27-year veteran of the U.S. Army Air Corp, Quesada flew many combat missions during World War II, during which time he held commands in the 12th Fighter Command, the 9th Fighter Command, and the 9th Tactical Air Command. Units under his leadership contributed to the success of the Normandy invasion and other campaigns by achieving air superiority, flying interdiction missions and providing close air support to ground troops. During his time in military, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal with one oak leaf cluster and the Distinguished Flying Cross, among many other medals and awards from the U.S. and our allies.

Following the war, he continued to serve the country's burgeoning Air Force and aviation sectors, including as the first Commanding General of the Tactical Air Command, Chairman of the Joint Technical Planning Committee of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Commanding General of Joint Task Force Three. He retired from the Air Force with the rank of Lieutenant General. Following his military career, he served in private industry before returning to government first as the Special Assistant to the President for aviation matters and then as the Chairman of the Airways Modernization Board before

Under During Quesada's two-and-a-half year tenure, the young FAA began its life as a preeminent aviation agency. The first administrator focused on increased inspections of pilot qualifications and making sure airline maintenance practices made flying safer. Quesada made safety oversight a priority, basing the oversight standards on four Fs he identified:

- Firmness in application
- Fairness in considering the interests of the public and airspace user
- Faster enforcement proceedings and better investigations
- Factual basis for legal and administrative decisions

Just as it is in the world of technological jumps that has defined aviation, the FAA revolutionized its roles and its organization to meet each epoch of aeronautics. On April 1, 1967, with the goal of developing a more comprehensive transportation policy and program system, President Johnson and Congress stood up the Department of Transportation, with the Federal Aviation Agency being reformulated as the Federal Aviation Administration and transferring under the auspices of DOT. At this time, the Civil Aeronautics Board transferred its investigative duties to the newly created National Transportation Safety Board. Both roles and relationships of the FAA and NTSB continue to this day.

The agency continued to evolve with the growing demands and complexities of the NAS, increasing its roles in safety oversight, environmental impact mitigation, facility improvements and Air Traffic Control modernization, among many others. Over the following decades, the FAA met every challenge of monitoring and regulating an advancing aviation and aeronautics industry and has only gotten better.

As our FAA enters into its 63rd year, the FAA stays on the forward edge of technological innovation and maintains its world-wide presence as the preeminent aviation organization. What started back on that August Saturday in 1958 has continued the line of excellence begun by Quesada. Every one of the 46,000 employees of the FAA can look back over the years and see the lineage of their expertise and commitment to safety, a line that they can draw from those early days into the next 60-odd years ahead of us.



Quesada during his years in the U.S. Army Air Corp as a Lieutenant General



Quesada, watching planes in an air traffic control tower.



FAA Headquarters, the Orville Wright Federal Building, known now as 10A, bustling with as much activity 60 years ago as it does now.