

MANSFIELD MEMORIES: Barry Goldwater uses local airport to attend area commencement

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MANSFIELD The temperature was a scorching 95 degrees. Otherwise the afternoon of Sunday, June 11, 1967 seemed like any other at Mansfield Municipal Airport.



Barry Goldwater flew into Mansfield Airport in June 1967 to speak at Dean College in Franklin

“Link” Noble of Carleton-Whitney Aero Service was seated at his desk as usual. Just before noon two men appeared at Noble’s office door identifying themselves as police officers from the nearby town of Franklin. Noble asked the officers how he could be of service. He was surprised when they replied, “Barry Goldwater will be here in 15 minutes.”

Three years earlier Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona was the Republican nominee for president. He lost the 1964 election to President Lyndon Johnson

decisively, carrying just six states and garnering 38 percent of the popular vote. A stickler for the Constitution and a strong fiscal conservative, Goldwater’s candidacy would later be seen as having laid the groundwork for future successful GOP candidates like Ronald Reagan. He returned to the Senate in 1969 and remained an elder statesman in American politics for the rest of his life.

He also obtained his pilot’s license in 1930. In World War II Goldwater flew P-47 Thunderbolts and C-54 transports. He would later serve as a brigadier general in the Air Force reserves where he piloted a U2 reconnaissance plane to 50,000 feet. He was enshrined in the National Aviation Hall of Fame in 1982.

On that hot Sunday in 1967, Goldwater took Link Noble by surprise. The officers explained that Goldwater was delivering the commencement address at Dean Junior College that afternoon. Another man, who Noble assumed was the president of Dean, stood nearby as the officers laid the ground rules.

“No publicity. No pictures on arrival,” the officers said.

About 15 minutes later a seven-seat twin engine Beechcraft landed direct from Washington. Barry Goldwater emerged and was whisked into a black Chrysler Imperial and headed to Dean. The two pilots remained behind and began to speak with Link Noble, who invited them to lunch.



The pilots explained that Goldwater’s chartered Beechcraft was small enough to land in Mansfield, which was in fairly close proximity to Franklin. They seemed interested in that fact that Mansfield was central to Boston, Providence and Cape Cod, which might make it ideal for future chartered flights. They explained that upon his return they would fly Goldwater to JFK Airport in New York from where he would return to Washington on a 6 p.m. flight.

Link Noble did not spread the news of Goldwater’s arrival. But a handful of observant townspeople noticed him having lunch with “two white-shirted – and white-haired pilots with natty black ties and deeply tanned.” They also saw the Beechcraft stationed at the airport. A small gathering of about six adults and a handful of children gathered to see who the mysterious visitor was. They were joined by photographer Joan Wood of the Mansfield News.

The Imperial returned at 4:10 p.m. Barry Goldwater emerged from the car and made his way to the plane. The pilots lowered a four-step stairway covered by a chartreuse rug. Joan Wood asked for a picture in front of his plane, and Goldwater obliged. He removed his coat after she snapped a photograph.

“Glad to have you in Mansfield,” someone called to Goldwater.

“Glad to be here,” he replied.

He then climbed aboard the plane with the two pilots. Goldwater waved to the small crowd as the plane prepared for departure. He was the only passenger on board.