



This story about the “New Shannon Airport” at Fredericksburg was contributed by Bill Corbett of Poquoson, Virginia. Bill knew Jimmy Doman when Doman instructed at Gloucester. See Bill’s story about Gloucester in the last issue of the newsletter.

## Postwar Dream Comes Back

By Paul Muse

From the Fredericksburg, Virginia *Free Lance Star*

March 17, 1956

A decade after World War II finds the airplane still a stranger to Fredericksburgers.

Not that they don’t know something about airplanes, or that they haven’t broken the proverbial ice by riding in one. It is in the use of airplanes with regularity that Fredericksburgers have hardly changed in 10 years.

Predictions were a dime a dozen during the mass production days of the war that within 10 years, or even five, the airplane would become a standard means of private transportation.

“The basic idea back in 1946 really hit the skids,” concedes James D. (Jimmy) Doman, 46-year-old manager of Fredericksburg’s privately owned Shannon Airport.

“In 1949, it practically hit bottom,” he said.

But Doman can cite the experience of the Shannon field – which opened in 1950 – to show that the outlook for the small, private plane has been rekindled and is growing bright, this time on a solid, non-war-boom basis.

And he found himself again doing the dreaming done a decade ago – this time convinced the solid foundation will hold up. “I am just confident that in 10 years from now, a boy is going to say to his mom and pop: ‘I’ve got a date in Chicago, or St. Louis. Can I borrow the...’”

Staff Photo



**Two-Way Radio Gives Doman Contact With Planes**  
Number of Craft Using Shannon Has Jumped Sharply

### Type To Be Seen

As for the rest, Doman held back. He doesn’t know whether it will be helicopter, light plane or jet.

And Shannon wants to get Junior’s business. The airport’s confidence is evident today in diggings for an expanded main building, and for tanks to hold 100-octane gas, used by twin-rotor helicopters and twin-engine planes. It already supplies 80-and 91-octane fuel.

The airport is owned by Sidney L. Shannon, Jr., of Lee Hill Farm, son of vice president of Eastern Airlines. Though a small airport, it boasts several big city innovations, included

ground-to-plane radio facilities, lighted runways, a rotating beacon and a snack bar. All-weather sod runways are 3,000 and 2,000 feet long.

Statistics behind the airport's latest expansion moves include these two, Doman said:

(1) In 1952, about 1,500 transient airplanes used Shannon Airport as a stopping point. In the year just ended [1955] an estimated 2,500 used the field.

(2) For the past three years, the airport has recorded a steady increase of about 30 per cent each year in gross income. Thus far, business has been in five figures, but Doman predicted it will be in the \$10,000 bracket in two more years.

### **'Darndest Business'**

Paradoxically, the airport has yet to operate in the black. "It's the darndest business," the manager explained. "You have to do a tremendous business to show a good net profit. And then when we do get ahead, we expand at the same time."

What's behind this steady new growth?

"The business people have started using the airplane, the result being that last year they flew more miles than the airlines," reported Doman on the national picture.

"That's what becomes the backbone of private aviation. So much so, that I'm afraid they are forgetting the youth. Instead of young people learning to fly for careers, a lot of these people are businessmen learning to fly their planes."

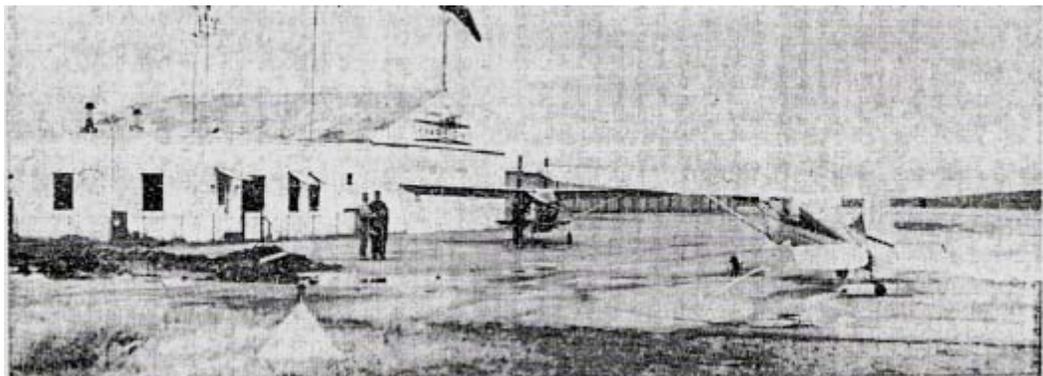
That the average Fredericksburg resident "is not yet air-minded," Doman conceded, is partly due to costs. It's still an expensive thing to maintain a small plane if a person uses it less than 100 hours a year. But operating costs are no more than for an automobile, he contended, if the owner uses it 300 hours or more.

### **Some Exceptions**

Fredericksburg has some exceptions. One local businessman has a plane based at Shannon which he uses to scout promising purchases of timber lands.

A contractor who needs parts quickly for his heavy equipment is buying a plane and learning to fly it for both business and pleasure.

Staff Photo



**Shannon Airport: Five-Year-Old Field Finds Private Aviation Starting to Grow on a Solid Basis.**  
Doman and Sidney Shannon, Jr. Stand Near Diggings for Expansion of Main Building, Fuel Supply.

Then there are about 35 persons on the rolls at the airport's flying school, which can turn out a private licensee in 24 weeks or a commercial licensee in two years. Too many of these are older people learning to fly for business and pleasure, and too few are younger people seeking aviation careers, Doman complains – though the students have ranged in age from 16 to 62.

Looking into the future, Doman sees the day when Fredericksburg's field will be a "suburban" airport for Washington. As airlines become more crowded in the metropolitan area, more business executives will land their small planes on less cluttered fields such as the one here, he predicted. They'll cover the final hour of their trip to the Capital by train, car or bus.

---

**Norm's Notes:** There are two pictures of Shannon and its people from our book, *Virginia Airports*, by Rollo and Crabill.

VAHS files



**New Shannon Airport, 1987**

VAHS files



**Scene of New Shannon Airport in 1950. Second from the left is Mrs. S.L. Shannon Sr.**