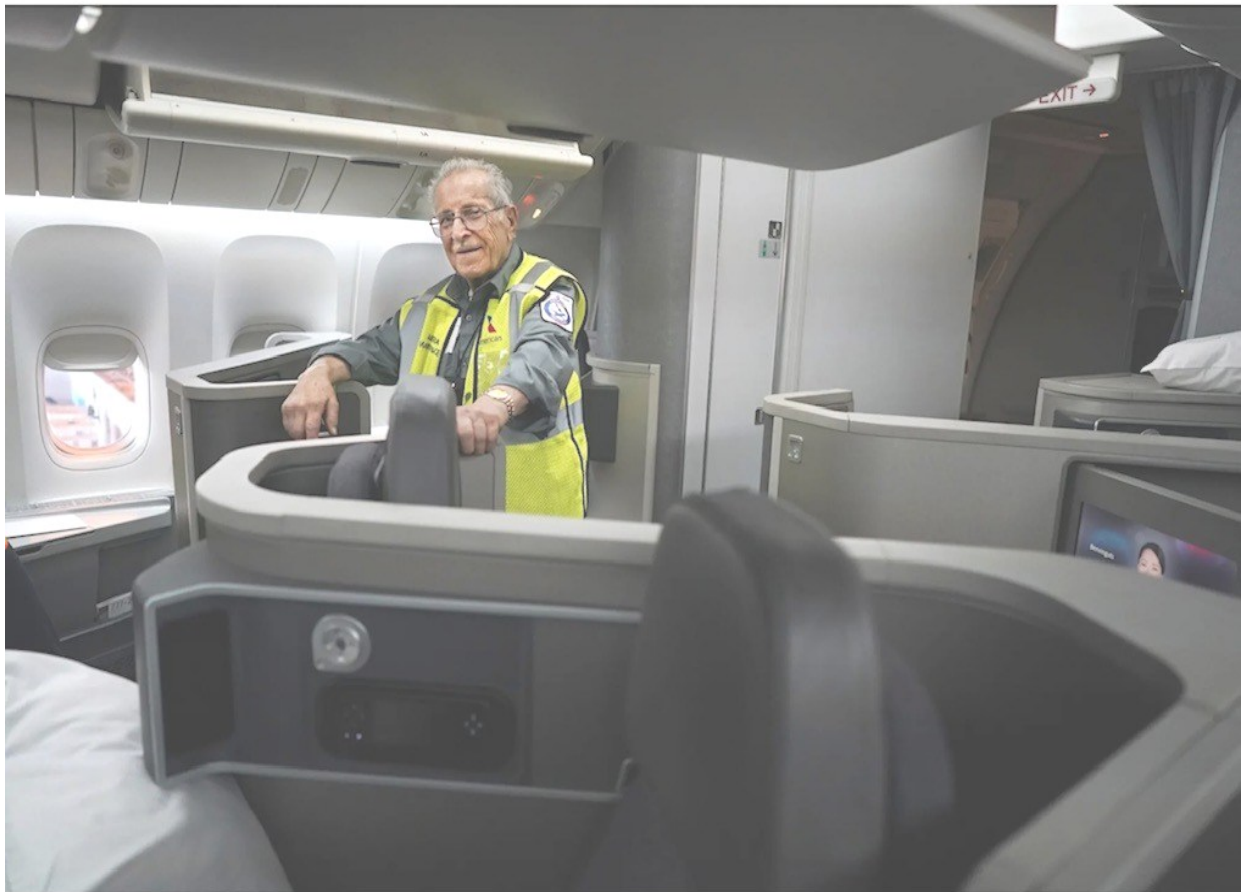


Azriel Blackman, Airline Mechanic for 80 Years, Dies at 100

With a career commemorated by Guinness World Records, he started as an apprentice in 1942 and worked on a panoply of propeller-driven and jet aircraft until he retired in 2022.



Azriel "Al" Blackman, then 91, in 2017, the year American Airlines, his longtime employer, dedicated a Boeing 777-200 in his name. Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Azriel Blackman was born in Manhattan on Aug. 30, 1925, and grew up in Brooklyn. His father, Aaron, a tailor, was from Russia, and his mother, Mary (Goldberg) Blackman, who managed the home, was from Poland.

In 1942, Mr. Blackman graduated from Aviation High School, which was then in Manhattan and is now in Long Island City. He was 16 when he was hired as an apprentice in the sheet-metal shop at American Export Airlines (which was later acquired by American Airlines) at New York Municipal Airport — LaGuardia Field (now LaGuardia Airport). His skills in the shop enabled him, for the rest of his career, to mold parts needed to fix aircraft.

The first aircraft he worked on was the amphibious Sikorsky flying boat. He serviced more than a dozen kinds of planes over the next eight decades, including the Douglas DC-3, the Convair CV-240, the Lockheed Constellation, the Boeing 377 and the McDonnell Douglas MD-80.

After enlisting in the Army, he served in the Korean War, repairing helicopters for Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals. Following his discharge in 1952, he returned to American at LaGuardia, then moved as a crew chief to New York International Airport, better known as Idlewild Airport, in 1960, three years before it was renamed for President Kennedy.

“Behind-the-scenes aircraft mechanics, when they succeed, you don’t hear about them, because they’re not glamour jobs,” said Gary Santos, a mechanic who started working at American in 1988. “To have a career as long as his is just mind-boggling.”

Mr. Blackman’s love of airplanes continued in volunteer work on his days off, like helping to restore aircraft for an ongoing project at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn and a Sikorsky flying boat at the New England Air Museum in Windsor Locks, Conn., near Hartford.

By 2017, Mr. Blackman’s age led to restrictions on his ability to perform some physical tasks that might injure him, and he was supervised by a crew co-chief. At first, he objected to the limitations but eventually accepted them.

Even though Mr. Blackman’s job had become more paperwork than mechanical, his experience remained important to American.

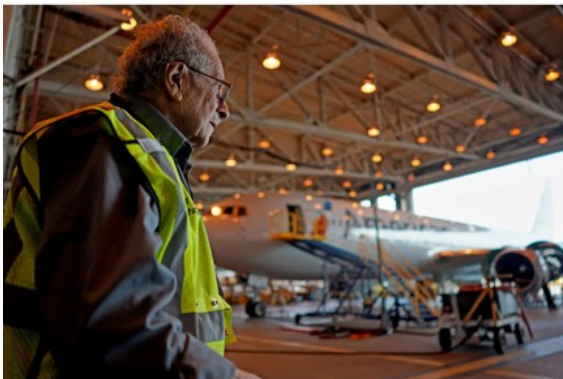
“He represents a valuable institutional memory that says, ‘This is how we do it at American,’” Robert L. Crandall, the president of American from 1980 to 1998, said at Mr. Blackman’s 75th anniversary ceremony. “He’s the guy who sits with the new kids at lunch and passes it on.”

In 2017, his 75th anniversary was [commemorated](#) by Guinness World Records, which cited him for having the longest career as an airline mechanic. That same year, American [dedicated a Boeing 777-200 in his name.](#)

“Every day, the job is different,” Mr. Blackman, a maintenance crew chief since 1960, [told The New York Times in 2017.](#) “You’re not doing the same thing repetitively, and that’s good. If, in my journey around the hangar I see something I can help on, I do that.”

Mr. Blackman, who was known as Al or Blackie, died on July 24 at a nursing home in Queens. He was 100.

Four years ago, his son said, Mr. Blackman fell at work, broke two vertebrae in his neck and suffered a traumatic brain injury. Spinal-cord damage led to a loss of mobility.



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“If, in my journey around the hangar I see something I can help on, I do that,” he added. Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Wayne Hanna, an aircraft maintenance technician whose father was Mr. Blackman's crew chief in the 1950s, said that, for the past few years, a group of mechanics visited Mr. Blackman at his home to celebrate his birthday, including his 100th last year.



Mr. Blackman in 2017. "He's the guy who sits with the new kids at lunch and passes it on," said Robert L. Crandall, a past president of American Airlines. Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

"He was older than American Airlines," he said in an interview. The company has been [celebrating its 100th anniversary](#) this year, noting the first flight of Robertson Aircraft, one of the dozens of small airlines that combined in 1930 to form American Airways; it became American Airlines in 1934.

In addition to his son, Mr. Blackman is survived by a granddaughter. His daughter, [Adrienne Larrain](#), died in March. His wife, Dolores (Cooperstein) Blackman, whom he married in 1954, died in 2011.

[In 2012, American honored Mr. Blackman's](#) tenure by flying him around New York City in a restored, propeller-driven DC-3, part of the airline's fleet that carried passengers between the mid-1930s and the late 1940s. He sat in the cockpit as it flew along the Hudson River, over Central Park and past the former site of Aviation High.

"He was taken aback by all of that," his son said. "He didn't really know how to accept praise of that magnitude. In his mind, he didn't feel he had done anything extraordinary. He loved going to work. He considered the people he worked with family, and it was enjoyment to him. That was his real reward."

[Richard Sandomir](#), an obituaries reporter, has been writing for The Times for more than three decades.