

The End Of An Era - Angwin Airport Closes Down

By JIM FALLBECK

ANGWIN — Surprise, disappointment and resentment are the reactions being expressed by pilots and community residents at word that the Angwin airport has been officially closed.

According to J. Fred Frakes, 58-year-old owner of Frakes Aviation which has a 22-year lease of the runway from Pacific Union College, the airport was officially closed to all private airplanes on Dec. 31. Huge white cross marks — the commonly accepted symbol among pilots that an airport is closed — have been made at each end of the lone runway.

Frakes said that an official of the Federal Aviation Agency visited the airport last week and made arrangements for listing the airport as "closed" in future editions of aeronautical maps and charts and other aviation publications.

Announcement of the closing was made by letter to owners of private aircraft which rent tie-down space from Frakes. "The first thing I knew about it," said one pilot, "was when I received that letter Dec. 22." In the letter Frakes said financial difficulties had brought about the decision. He instructed each aircraft owner to have his plane removed from the property by Dec. 31.

As of today — four days after the deadline — eight planes remain parked at the airport. Frakes explained that most of them are either for sale and are not being flown, or have already been sold and are waiting for their new owners to take delivery of them.

Several pilots contacted by the Register said Frakes has warned them not to fly into the airport once they remove the planes. They all agreed that landing at an airport, which is plainly marked closed, would cause their insurance carriers to not honor their policies should an accident occur.

Frakes told the Register that the \$7.50 monthly tie-down fee he has been charging customers has brought him about \$150 a month in income. But he said his expenses for liability insurance, taxes and runway maintenance have run about \$1,000 a month.

"Because of heavy debts I can no longer afford to keep the facility open to the public," he said. "I'm sorry I've had to do this. It really hurts me to inconvenience my good customers this way, but I have no other choice."

Asked how closing the airport would improve his financial picture, Frakes explained that as of Dec. 31 he had allowed his liability insurance to lapse. He also said that since the only

aircraft which will be using the runway in the future will be his own Grumman Mallard conversions, runway maintenance will be significantly reduced. He also predicted that his taxes will be lower in the future.

The airport closing has thrown plane owners into a spin over what to do with their aircraft. A check by the Register with several private plane owners indicated that most pilots have moved their planes to Usibelli's in Pope Valley, although at least one has gone to the Calistoga Airport. It is not known whether any have decided to tie-down at the Napa County Airport.

Frakes refused to discuss his plans for the airport except to say: "We're trying desperately to sell it. It's a stone around our neck financially." He would not speculate beyond the present.

Although the lessee would not reveal his asking price, the Register learned that he is asking about \$75,000. The price includes the runway and its improvements, an office trailer, a grader and roller, the hangar and gas pumps.

Frakes has operated the airport since March, 1967, when he in essence bought out the Angwin Flyers, Inc., a flying club composed of students and teachers at the college and community residents. At that time he paid more than \$80,000 for five planes owned by the Angwin flyers, for its debts, the hangar, and other equipment.

For a number of months an expanded program of flight instruction and charter service was available.

On April 7, 1968, Frakes flew into the airport with a twin-engine Grumman Mallard — an amphibious aircraft used extensively by bush pilots in Alaska, where he had operated his own aviation business for 23 years. That marked the beginning of an extensive gamble by the company that it could convert the propeller-driven airplane into one powered by jet propellers. Convinced that the plane, once converted, would fly much faster and farther and be more versatile than its original, Frakes set out to design and construct what amounted to nearly a completely different airplane.

Over the course of about 18 months Frakes borrowed more than \$350,000 to finance his conversion dream. Frakes came through with his dream and acquired full certification by the Federal Aviation Agency.

In the months that followed he flew extensively around the country demonstrating the "new" plane and its capabilities to its original manufacturer, other owners of Mallards, and government and transportation officials. To date he has completed four conversions — including his prototype — and is

Bureau of Land Management for use in Alaska at a "sizable" monthly figure, money from that source is paying back one of his larger creditors.

Although contacts continue with Mallard owners in Australia, Argentina, England, Alaska, and Indonesia, Frakes has no firm contracts in his pocket for more conversions, he said.

looking for more.

But financial troubles continue to plague his company. Living on borrowed money since his project began, he appears to have reached the end of sources who will finance his project further. One by one he has sold all of the private airplanes bought from the Angwin Flyers.

Although he has leased his original converted Mallard to the



THE ANGWIN AIRPORT (background of photo above) was closed Dec. 31. J. Fred Frakes, the lessee, said he was forced to take the action because of increasing costs. Large white crosses

were painted at each end of the runway to let pilots know the airport is closed. (Photo by Bob Jauch).