



**Winter 2023**

**Newsletter**

**Volume 47**





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### **About the Museum**

When it was founded in 1986, the museum became a place of honoring our past heroes. The men, women and machines that shaped the history are all exhibited here.

The founders of the air museum wanted it to be a place where one could appreciate the blood, sweat and tears put forth in the past. Not only that, but to see how rich with aviation North Dakota truly is.

Displaying vintage aircraft, war memorabilia, dedications to fallen soldiers, or even restoration projects, the Dakota Territory Air Museum has something to please all. Not only that, but the air museum has hosted many local school tours.

In recent years, partnering with Jeff Farstad, the museum has been able to present scholarships to help those interested in aviation expand their horizon.

To figure out how YOU can help the Dakota Territory Air Museum continue to expand, either stop in or visit our website:  
[www.dakotaterritoryairmuseum.com](http://www.dakotaterritoryairmuseum.com)

Dakota Territory Air Museum P.O. Box 195 100 34th Ave. NE  
Minot, North Dakota 58702 701-852-8500



**Cover Photo:** An L-4 Grasshopper, an L-5 Sentinel, and an L-19 Bird Dog lined up at the Festival of Flight on June 17, 2023.  
Photo courtesy of Gordon Krech.



## 2023 Public Events

2023 proved to be yet another year of growth for the museum's public events. With that in mind, we are very excited for what is in store in 2024! Look for a 2024 event schedule to be announced soon! We are always looking for new ideas and feedback so please reach out to us at [airmuseum@minot.com](mailto:airmuseum@minot.com) or 701-852-8500 with your ideas and feedback on events!



**Photo Above:** The P-47D Thunderbolt sits on the ramp after arrival to the DTAM at the Festival of Flight on June 17, 2023 for its first public outing.

**Photo Right:** A handful of vintage aircraft sit on the ramp during the Festival of Flight on June 17, 2023 waiting their turn to fly.

Thank you to our sponsors for the 2023 events!



**Photo Above:** The Night at the Museum Hangar Dance on October 21, 2023 proved once again to be a crowd favorite.



**Photo Above:** Over 150 vintage and classic vehicles with the Dakota Cruisers Car Club packed the museum grounds for Wings & Wheels on July 12, 2023.





# P-51C Thunderbird and P-47D Bonnie at EAA Oshkosh Airventure and the Reno Air Races!

What a busy summer at the Aircorps Aviation Restoration Shop! P-51C Thunderbird was test flown within a few weeks of P-47D Bonnie being test flown. Both Bonnie and Thunderbird made appearances at Oshkosh and both aircraft were showcased on Warbirds in Review and both flew aerial demonstrations during the week. Bonnie would go on to take home the Grand Champion World War II Aircraft trophy and the Phoenix Award while Thunderbird brought home the Keep 'Em Flying Award.

In September both Bonnie and Thunderbird flew out to Reno, Nevada for the final Reno Air Race. Thunderbird, skillfully piloted by Bernie Vasquez, flew several demonstrations during the weeklong races.

**Photos Courtesy of Xavier Meal, Sarah Hokuf, and William Campbell.**



# Why I Do What I Do: My Experience with Captain Donald Emerson

By: Jenna Grindberg, DTAM Director

I get asked a lot why I went into history. The most obvious path is teaching, which in a way I suppose I do teach, just not in the way most tend to think of. This story is perhaps one of my favorite stories since I started working at the DTAM in 2020 and it all started with a postcard.

A postcard seems so insignificant. But this particular postcard ended up being important in so many ways. Supposedly, this little postcard was found inside of a wall in a home in Minnesota that was being remodeled. The postcard was taken to Aircorps Aviation and put on the desk of their historian, Chuck Cravens, who would eventually pass it along to me after doing some research on the person who filled it out. After I received the postcard, I began researching utilizing some of the research that had already been done. The ultimate goal was to reunite the postcard with any surviving family if they'd be interested in having it.

The name on that card? Then 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Donald Emerson of Pembina, North Dakota. It was a simple change of address postcard that had been mailed to a friend in Bemidji, Minnesota in January 1944. That would've been about the time that Donald was transferred to New York to await deployment overseas. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt., later Captain, Donald Emerson would be stationed with the 4<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group, 336<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron, better known as Eagle Squadron or the Debden Eagles, based out of Debden, England. Captain Emerson was a P-51 pilot who flew a number of Mustangs during his time in combat but most famously his own Mustang nose was emblazoned with a hopping mad Donald Duck, ready to fight. Captain Emerson completed at least 89 combat missions during his time in Europe and like most fighter pilots had had his fair share of close calls.

The day of his final mission was Christmas Day, December 25, 1944. It was a bomber escort mission over Kassel, Germany. Flak and fighters were encountered, but after successfully escorting the B-17s to Kassel, they turned for home. Not long after turning to head home, his group was jumped by no less than thirty German fighters, a mixture of Me-109s and Fw-190s. Donald lost his group in the fray but headed for the Belgian border with several Fw-190s in pursuit. Donald managed to shoot down two of the pursuing aircraft before crossing into Allied airspace with no ammunition and flying low to the ground. Unfortunately, Allied anti-aircraft guns opened up, hitting Captain Emerson's P-51 causing him to crash. Captain Donald Emerson was just 21 years old when he was lost to the brutality of war.



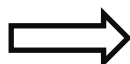
**Above:** Portrait of Capt. Donald Emerson.

**Below:** Capt. Emerson's P-51D Mustang featuring the Donald Duck nose art escorts B-17's during a mission.



**The photos above and the patch on the following page are from the Donald Emerson Collection.**

Continued on the next page...





Donald's family has worked to keep his legacy alive. His niece, Sandra Merrill, wrote a book about his life and his experiences during the war called "Donald's Story". The book chronicles his early life and his life during the war primarily using letters he sent home as source material.

I kept hitting dead ends attempting to find and contact the surviving family of Captain Emerson. I knew he had a surviving niece, but couldn't find any contact information for her. One day, while scrolling Facebook, I happened upon a photo posted in one of the World War II aviation groups I am in of a P-51 with Donald Duck on the nose escorting a B-17! I knew that plane! It was originally posted by the 4<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group Association so I quickly moved to get added to that group. Once I was in the group it enabled me to reach out to their Vice President, Tim McCann, to see if they had any contact with Sandra. Fortunately, he emailed me back and said that he does indeed know Sandra! He reached out to her to see if she would be interested in the postcard, but she informed him that she had passed on the torch to her cousin who happens to also be named Don Emerson and he still lives in North Dakota! Tim forwarded this information on to Don to see if he would be interested in the postcard, if so, Don would be in touch.

To my great fortune, Don did indeed reach out! Not only was he interested in acquiring the postcard but he wanted to come to Minot to see the museum and bring along some of the items he had that were his Uncle Don's. This communication would've been early in 2023, March or April. He was hoping to visit sometime later in the summer. I was sure hoping he would make it out to Minot and as September came around, Don called to say that he would be in Minot on that Wednesday and he was bringing his Uncle Donald's things!

Don visited the museum on a Wednesday afternoon. We chatted for a while and I brought out the postcard for him to look at. I told him how I came into possession of the postcard and then he had me come outside to help him carry in some things that he had brought with him. Much to my amazement he brought everything he had of his Uncle Donald's things! His dress uniform, his Bible, dozens of photographs, newspaper and magazine articles, books, letters, pieces of shrapnel from an Me-109 that exploded in front of Donald's Mustang, and even the tail wheel from the Mustang that Donald lost his life in which had been recovered by a local farmer and used for years as a wheelbarrow wheel until finally being returned to the Emerson family!

To be given the opportunity to become the caretaker of Capt. Emerson's legacy is beyond humbling. It is because of sacrifices like his that we enjoy the freedom we have today. I think often of Capt. Emerson, especially as we close in on the Christmas holiday. May he Rest in Peace and hopefully he knows he has not been forgotten. Look for a brand-new display in the showroom featuring Capt. Emerson in 2024.



**Above:** Leather patch featuring the Donald Duck nose art of Capt. Emerson's P-51D Mustang.

**Below:** Don Emerson, Capt. Donald Emerson's nephew, visits the DTAM and gets an up-close view of P-51D Mustang Little Horse, the same type his Uncle Donald flew in the war.



# Learn and Build Model Sessions

New event seeks hands on approach to history

Even though the museum is closed to the public in the winter-time, we still wanted to have a way to engage our audience in the long winter months. We kicked off the first

Learn and Build Model Session on December 2, 2023 with the P-51 Mustang.

We had twenty kids' sign-up for the first class, which was the maximum allowed, plus each child had at least one adult chaperone. After a brief introduction

Museum Director, Jenna Grindberg, took the group on an up-close tour of P-51D

Mustang Little Horse where the group learned not only the history of the Mustang but the personal history of the plane before setting off to build their very own P-51

model kit. Overall, the class went very well and we are excited to continue to offer this program through the winter-months. The next scheduled Learn and Build Session is December 29, 2023 at 1pm in the Flying Legends Hangar and this class will feature the Supermarine Spitfire. The cost of the class is \$20 per participant and that cost includes the tour, model kit, and a snack and bottle of water. The class is open to kids ages 8+. For complete information and rules or to sign-up for the next session, please visit our website, [www.dakotaterritoryairmuseum.com](http://www.dakotaterritoryairmuseum.com)



**Above:** Museum Director, Jenna Grindberg, gives a history lesson on the P-51 Mustang before building the Mustang.

## Learn and Build Model Session Schedule for 2023-2024:

Saturday, December 2, 2023: P-51 Mustang

Friday, December 29, 2023: Supermarine Spitfire

Monday, January 15, 2024: P-40 Warhawk

Saturday, February 17, 2024: P-51 Mustang

Wednesday, March 6, 2024: Supermarine Spitfire

Tuesday, April 2, 2024: P-40 Warhawk

\*The days where the class is set up on a weekday, Minot Public Schools are not in session.



**Above:** Jenna giving directions prior to beginning the class.



# Artifact Spotlight

## 1937 Shellback Certificate

This item was donated by a local person whose father was enlisted with the Marine Corps in 1937. What makes this item more unique is that if you look closely at the certificate, you can see that he was stationed on board the U.S.S. Colorado and they were on the mission to search for Amelia Earhart's missing airplane. We know there are a few of these certificate's that survive, but have to wonder how many survive that were a part of this mission.

This particular piece is among some of the more unique items that have been donated to the DTAM. The certificate was a part of the ceremony for Sailors and Marines who had crossed the equator for the first time. Those who had not crossed the equator were often called Pollywogs, Slimy Pollywogs, or Slimy Wogs. Once they'd crossed the equator the nickname could be Shellbacks, Trusty Shellbacks, Honorable Shellbacks or Sons of Neptune. The history of the ceremony in the United States dates back at least to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.





## DTAM Partners With the Forever in the Clouds Committee to Commemorate the RCAF Air Disaster at Estevan, Saskatchewan



**Photo Right:** Marie Donais Calder speaks to the audience.



**Photo Above and Top Left:** The memorial plaque is unveiled and flanked by Lt. Col. Buddy Walker, Marie Donais Calder, Board President Larry Linrud, and Lois Olson.

On May 29, 2023 (Memorial Day (U.S.)), the DTAM hosted a memorial event in conjunction with the Forever in the Clouds Committee to commemorate the RCAF Air Disaster at Estevan, Saskatchewan. On September 15, 1946, a C-47 Dakota (Skytrain) left the Minot Airport for the quick jaunt to Estevan. The aircraft was carrying 20 RCAF pilots and 1 RCAF crewman who were on their way home from ferrying aircraft back to the United States that were loaned to Canada during the Second World War as part of the Lend Lease Program. Unfortunately, an elevator control-lock was left on the aircraft resulting in the loss of the aircraft just outside of Estevan with all on-board killed in the accident.

The DTAM held a small ceremony with several guest speakers followed by the plaque unveiling memorializing these 21 fallen heroes. If you're interested in learning more about this tragedy, you can find a copy of the book, *Together Forever in the Clouds: Commemorating the RCAF Air Disaster September 15, 1946, Estevan, Saskatchewan*, by Marie Donais Calder on Amazon Canada. The museum also has a copy on-hand if you wish to check it out.



**Photo Above:** Lois Olson speaks to the audience.



**Photo Above:** Lt. Col. Buddy Walker gives the invocation and speech to the audience.



# Dakota Territory Air Museum's 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Sweepstakes

For 2024, we will be giving away our 28<sup>th</sup> airplane, this beautiful 1947 Aeronca Champ! If you recognize this aircraft, it's because we bought it back from the 2019 winner! For additional details or questions on the aircraft please visit our website, [www.dakotaterritoryairmuseum.com/sweepstakes](http://www.dakotaterritoryairmuseum.com/sweepstakes) or drop us a line at [airmuseum@minot.com](mailto:airmuseum@minot.com).





# In Memory.....



The Dakota Territory Air Museum would like to recognize and extend our deepest condolences to the Williamson family on the passing of Gary Williamson. Gary was one of the original members on the museum board when the museum was founded. As a manager at Central Power Electric Cooperative, he and the Coop were extremely helpful in providing equipment and assisting with air shows when the museum needed it. It is because of people like Gary that we have gotten to where we are today and he will be sorely missed.



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