

AVIATION WALL OF HONOR



Emerson Fleury

Emerson Fleury was born in Marquette, Michigan on December 27, 1914. His family lived in Big Bay where his father ran a general store. Emerson attended primary school in Big Bay, finishing the eighth grade before the family moved to Marquette.

Here he was enrolled in St. Johns Parochial where the language was French. This proved to be a bit of a hurdle because his father never spoke French at home. After a couple of years, he transferred and

ultimately finished high school at Bishop Baraga.

Well before this however, at the age of twelve, Emerson had seen a few planes flying and knew in his heart that some day he would be a pilot. He got his start at Northern Michigan College of Education under the government-funded Civilian Pilot Training Program directed by athletic director and coach C.B. Hedgecock with Sig Wilson instructing. He soloed in 1939 and that flight could have ended his career right there when his engine sputtered and died. He ended up crash landing at the edge of the landing field. Fortunately he was able to walk away with no serious injuries; the plane wasn't as lucky.

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Subsequent training occurred at Michigan Tech, University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, and finally Milwaukee where instruction in cross country flying, acrobatics, and instrument reading were stressed. Following this, he was assigned to Randolph Field in Texas where pilots who had been trained in universities across the country were gathered together to learn the standardized methods and procedures developed by the military. He was then transferred to the military base at Victoria, Texas where he was ranked one of the best of a group of ten out of one hundred pilots evaluated. This achievement landed him an instructor's rating.

Those who know Emerson know he's a little man, or rather he's a short man. At five feet, two inches tall, you can't argue with that. But he's got a big heart and a big smile that goes with a great sense of humor. And he was strong. In those days, he could tear a Sears Roebuck catalogue in half with his bare hands.

While instructing a student, he would tell him his final exam before soloing would be the maneuver called "Loop the Loop". But before going up he would warn him: "At the top of the loop, you're going to be upside down, so make sure your seat belt and shoulder harnesses are really cinched tight. If you fall out of the plane, you flunk."

So they would get in the plane, student in the forward cockpit, Emmy in the rear. After take off, climbing to three thousand feet and checking to be sure the airspace was clear, the student would give the engine full throttle before pulling back on the stick. The plane would climb up, finally in a vertical and then over on its back plunging earthward and the leveling off in assuming horizontal flight again. With the proper feel for the aircraft, the stunt was not technically that difficult, but it was an exciting accomplishment when done the first time. Invariably in the heady elation of success, the student would then turn his head back to his

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instructor with a grin and, maybe, a thumbs-up, but can you imagine the shock when he suddenly realized his instructor was gone! Obviously he fell out of his seat at the top of the loop! He must have neglected to tighten his seat belt and shoulder harness; this after being so adamant in his advice to the student. But then, slowly but surely, a helmeted head would emerge from behind the cowling of the rear cockpit and a grinning Emmy would appear. At five feet two, scrunching down in his seat to a position of invisibility was not that big of a problem for this instructor. It must have unleashed a roller coaster ride of emotions in the beginning pilot that mirrored the path of the plane on that memorable day!

When his tour of instructing military pilots ended, Fleury returned to Big Bay where he took over the grocery portion of his father's store. He purchased a Piper Cub and flew that for a while before moving to a Republic Seabee, a four-place amphibian. With that plane he could pile in the wife and kids and fly west to the mouth of the Huron River on Lake Superior. Dropping the wheels he could taxi right up to the beach. They might fish, cook supper, camp overnight, and then fly back the next morning to Lake Independence. It was a tough life! That is, tough to beat for pure pleasure.

Today, in 2004, Emmy and his wife, Mary Ann, still live here in Marquette and their five children are in the area as well. At ninety years of age, he doesn't fly anymore, but he has years and years of fond memories of the days when he did.

TJ Mudge, July 2004

EMERSON FLEURY WITH THE WACO UPS-7



