

# AVIATION WALL OF HONOR

## **Paul W. Theriault**



Paul Theriault, though considered a Negaunee boy, was born at the Ishpeming Hospital on June 10, 1919. This was not by choice; there were no maternity facilities in Negaunee at that time, a problem that has yet to be solved. He graduated from Negaunee High School in 1937 as valedictorian of his class. His superior performance in academic fields paralleled by his accomplishments in athletics earned him a scholarship in aeronautical engineering at the University of Michigan. Upon graduating in 1941, his brilliance was recognized by the Lockheed Corporation in Burbank, California, when they recruited him to come out west to work at their wind tunnel. The success of the German Luftwaffe in the early years of World War II gave added impetus to the need to gather the best engineering minds together to improve our lagging aircraft industry.

The wind tunnel was a critical testing step in aircraft development. Here, accurate models of proposed planes were subjected to high wind speeds to determine such things as drag, stability, and controllability. Also, component parts such as engine inlets, for example, were tested to determine ram pressure and development of final configuration for maximum efficiency. All models were fabricated on site and were accurate to five thousandths of an inch.

The Lockheed testing facility was limited to speeds up to three hundred miles per hour. For higher speeds, Theriault conducted tests at the California Institute of Technology where high

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subsonic speeds were obtained. If the Lockheed facility and Cal Tech facility did not meet his needs, he was able to use the more specialized wind tunnels at the NASA site in Sunnyvale, California. Such tests allowed supersonic speeds and full scale testing. The NASA tunnels were made available because much of the work done was on military aircraft.

Over the years, Theriault tested models of over seventy-five different aircrafts. Included are names many remember such as the highly lauded Constellation, a commercial passenger plane, the P-38 Lightning Fighter of WWII fame, the F-94, the C-130 Transport, the Hudson Bomber, and the U-2, the high altitude surveillance aircraft, to name just a few.

After spending eleven years, from 1948 to 1959, as manager of all Lockheed wind tunnel operations, he attended an Executive Course at Stanford University.

Subsequent major assignments with Lockheed included: Division Engineer of Aero Dynamics, Chief Engineer of AH56A program, Engineering Program Manager AH56A, Chief Rotary Design Engineer, and finally Chief Engineer of Rotary Wing.

Theriault retired in 1975 and lives with his wife Maryalice in Chico, California.

TJ Mudge

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# LOCKHEED'S P-38 DESIGN TEAM

MARQUETTE COUNTY'S CONNECTION



NEGAUNEE  
PAUL THERIAULT ▶

▶ ISHPEMING — KELLY JOHNSON

With a model of the P-38—one of the United States' most deadly fighter aircraft of the World War II era—engineers Paul Theriault, Johnson, Hall Hibbard, Joe Johnson, and James Gerschler.

