

## Distinguished Alumni

### Canaday pioneers sophisticated U.S. military aircraft



By Marty C. Padilla  
Alumnews Editor

It was at one of America's premier aviation firms, the Douglas Aircraft Company, that Robert F. Canaday, EX '39 and 1989 Distinguished Alumnus, would embark on a career that has clearly distinguished him in the engineering, testing and marketing of some of the United States' most sensitive and sophisticated military aircraft. Canaday considers his association with the legendary Donald W. Douglas, founder of the company, and brilliant aircraft designer, E.H. Heinemann, as the highlight of his aviation career.

The year was 1935 when Canaday entered UW. The country was beginning to feel the ends of the great depression and the future looked brighter than the recent past. Economically, the times were tough and many of the students were working at jobs to supplement their resources.

Canaday described the atmosphere at the University as being one of "awe" for an incoming freshman out of Natrona County High School in Casper, Wyoming.

"The campus was impressive then and remains so today," he said. Canaday noted that the early architects showed a great deal of wisdom in dictating the buildings would come from native stone. "It makes UW one of the most beautiful campuses in the country today," he added.

Shortly after arriving in Laramie, Canaday pledged Phi Delta Theta Fraternity and was a member of the National Society of Scabbard and Blade. He was enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences with a

major in Geology and a minor in English. During his junior and senior years he served in advanced R.O.T.C., achieving the rank of cadet captain and attending R.O.T.C. camp at Fort George Wright, in Spokane, Washington.

Canaday withdrew from the University his senior year during the spring quarter of 1939, with the intent of enrolling as an aviation cadet in the Air Force at Randolph Field, Texas. He was unable to pass the eye exam and proceeded to Los Angeles, Calif., where he was hired by Douglas Aircraft.

Canaday married Mary Lou Agnew of Lusk, Wyo. on Sept. 5, 1939. She is a member of the UW class of 1940.

In 1945, Canaday was promoted to the company's General Office and was sent to Washington, D.C., to represent Douglas Aircraft in the nation's capitol where he remained for 17 years. While in Washington he served as Wyoming State Society President and as a director of the Conference for State Societies.

Throughout his career Canaday has continued to pursue educational opportunities. In 1941 he attended the California Institute of Technology, in 1965 the French Flight Test Center, Centre D'Essais Evol at Bretagne, France. In 1965 he attended the U.S. Navy's War College and in 1967 the U.S. Air Force Air Ground Operational School at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida.

In 1963, he returned to Long Beach, Calif., as sales director for combat aircraft. He was elected by the newly named McDonnell Douglas Board of Directors as vice president of military sales in 1968 and served in the Government Marketing Division of McDonnell Douglas until his retirement from the company in 1980 after 41 years of service.

During his career with the aviation giant he traveled the globe for more than a quarter of a century in an international sales capacity. He played a major role in introducing the Douglas manufactured A4 Skyhawk jet fighter into the Israeli Air Force, Royal New Zealand Air Force, Royal Australian Navy and the Indonesian Air Force and Royal Malaysian Air Force.

He became known to such notables as former President's Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Nixon, as

well as David Ben-Gurion of Israel, Ezer Weitzman, then Israel's minister of defense, Prime Minister Muldoon of New Zealand and many others.

Canaday was responsible for McDonnell Douglas' effort to manufacture the British Hawker Harrier jet fighter for the U.S. Marine Corps. He was aboard the British Royal Navy Aircraft carrier HMS Eagle to conduct carrier suitability trials of the Harrier Aircraft in 1969.

Canaday has also been cited for his expertise in many aviation publications, including "Air Force Magazine," "Naval Aviation News" and featured in an editorial in "Aviation Week." He has also been a contributor to "Combat Aircraft Designer" by E.H. Heinemann. Canaday's career at Douglas included engineering or sales activities on 41 different types of aircraft. He is also a member of and active in numerous national aviation organizations.

During World War II he assisted in the development of the famous SBD Dauntless dive bomber, used extensively in the war. The SBD is credited with sinking more combatant tonnage than any other arm in the U.S. forces. "The SBD really turned the tide at the battle of Midway, where four enemy carriers were sunk," Canaday said.

In the Korean war he was involved in the development of the

F3D Navy jet fighter which is credited as the first jet night fighter to destroy an enemy jet solely with radar acquisition of the target.

In the Vietnam conflict Canaday was aboard the U.S.S. Independence, U.S.S. Coral Sea and the U.S.S. Oriskany in the South China Sea, as well as air bases ashore at Tan Sun Nut, Chu Lai and Da Nang, in an effort to improve the operational effectiveness of Douglas fighters being operated by the U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Marine Corps.

Throughout his career Canaday participated in executive-diplomat seminars in the U.S. State Department and received a Department of Defense Certificate for distinguished service to the United States and to the Department of Defense for serving on the Secretary's Military Exports Committee.

Outside of his career, one of the many organizations he has been active in is the Orange County California Eagle-Scout Council, and he, was cited by the Australian Boy Scouts International Commissioner for efforts with the Australian Contingent to the 12th World Jamboree in 1967. Canaday has also served as a Marshal for the past seven years at the Bob Hope Chrysler Desert Classic.

Throughout the past two decades Canaday has also been active in

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## Canaday's career at aviation giant spans four decades

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 aviation museum work and has donated to the San Diego Aerospace Historical Center. He has also initiated an effort to create an aviation museum for the State of Wyoming and has enthusiastically contributed a collection of aviation memorabilia to the University of Wyoming. He has also donated a voluminous amount of historical

material on aspects of the early west in Wyoming to the UW Western History Archives and was a contributor to Henry B. Sell's book "Buffalo Bill and the Wild West."

He has a strong interest in re-covering World War II aircraft from the Pacific basin and has worked with such notables as Charles "Bunny" Darby of New Zealand,

who has inspected and photographed hundreds of wrecked or abandoned aircraft shot down in World War II.

Following his 41 years of service to McDonnell Douglas Canaday devoted his time to international aviation consulting through the Canaday Corporation as president and chief executive officer. He still retains the position while the

company is in a dormant status. He has also found time to pursue his hobbies of flying, golf, long distance running, swimming, photography and world travel. He and Mary Lou will return from a venture to London and East Africa in early September. The Couple make their home in Rancho Mirage, Calif. 🏠