

The Flying Life of Iris Louise McPhetridge Thaden: A Trailblazing Aviatix and the Legacy of Thaden

The annals of aviation history are replete with tales of extraordinary individuals whose daring exploits and groundbreaking contributions have shaped the course of flight. Among these luminaries stands Iris Louise McPhetridge Thaden, a pioneering aviatrix who left an enduring legacy through her unwavering pursuit of aviation excellence and the establishment of Thaden, a company that would become synonymous with aircraft manufacturing and pilot training.

Early Life and Aviation Beginnings

Iris Louise McPhetridge was born on April 18, 1905, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. From a young age, she displayed an unyielding fascination with the sky and the allure of aviation. In the early 1920s, as aviation was gaining momentum in the United States, Thaden enrolled in a flying school and embarked on her journey to become a licensed pilot.

Her first solo flight in 1926 marked a significant milestone in her aviation career. Thaden's exceptional skills and determination quickly garnered attention, and she soon became a sought-after instructor and airshow performer. She gained further recognition for her record-breaking flights, including setting an altitude record for women pilots in 1928.

THE FLYING LIFE Iris Louise McPhetridge Thaden and the Launching of THADEN SCHOOL: Presented to the '81 Club Monday 21 November 2024 by Mrs. Alan R.



Marsh ... Nonfiction Books About Women and Men)

by JOAN MARSH

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The Birth of Thaden

In 1931, Thaden founded her own aviation company, Thaden Metal Aircraft Company, in Columbus, Nebraska. The company specialized in the design, production, and sale of light aircraft. Thaden's aircraft were renowned for their innovative design, advanced engineering, and exceptional performance.

The Thaden T-2, a sleek and versatile single-engine monoplane, became the company's flagship product. The T-2 was widely used for flight training, air racing, and recreational flying. It also served as a trainer aircraft for the United States Army Air Corps during World War II.

Thaden's company also offered a comprehensive range of aviation services, including aircraft maintenance, repairs, and pilot training. Under Thaden's leadership, Thaden became a leading aviation hub in the Midwest, attracting students and pilots from across the country.

Aviation Accomplishments and Legacy

Thaden's flying career was filled with numerous accomplishments. She set several aviation records, including the first transcontinental flight by a woman in 1934. She also became the first woman to fly solo from New York City to Los Angeles in a single-engine aircraft.

In addition to her record-breaking flights, Thaden was a highly skilled airshow performer. Her thrilling aerobatic routines and precision flying captivated audiences at airshows across the United States. She was known for her fearless and graceful aerial maneuvers, which earned her the admiration of both pilots and spectators alike.

Thaden's contributions to aviation extended beyond her own personal achievements. Through her company, Thaden played a significant role in the development of aviation technology and the training of new pilots. Her emphasis on safety and innovation left a lasting impact on the aviation industry.

Later Years and Continuing Legacy

After retiring from active flying, Thaden continued to be involved in aviation through her support of various organizations and initiatives. She served as a member of the National Aeronautic Association and the Ninety-Nines, an international organization of women pilots.

Thaden's legacy continues to inspire generations of aviators. The Thaden School of Aviation, founded by Thaden in 1931, remains a leading provider of flight training and aircraft maintenance services. Thaden's aircraft, particularly the T-2, are still highly sought after by collectors and enthusiasts.

Iris Louise McPhetridge Thaden was a true trailblazer in the world of aviation. Her unwavering passion for flying, combined with her remarkable skills and determination, shattered barriers and paved the way for women in aviation. Through her accomplishments as an aviatrix and her visionary leadership of Thaden, she left an unforgettable mark on the history of flight. The legacy of Iris Louise McPhetridge Thaden continues to inspire and empower aviators to soar to new heights.



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