

Eddie Holland — He Promotes Flying In Arkansas

By Lamar Dodson

In the year 1943 Eddie Holland was a young man of 23 as his flying boots clicked across the airport apron in Arcadia, Florida and climbed into the cockpit of a biplane Stearman Kaydet PT-13 for his solo flight.

Holland was more enthusiastic than apprehensive about his first flight in a plane alone at the controls. At long last his dream of being accepted as an Army Air Corps Aviation Cadet had come true. The experience was not a unique one, because thousands of eager young American men were being trained as pilots, bombardiers and navigators during World War II.

Except that in Eddie Holland's case, he'd already flown 37 missions as a radio-operator and gunner, an air crew member on a B-17 Flying Fortress bomber in the South Pacific. He received four Air Medals, and individually was credited with shooting down a Japanese aircraft.

Edward W. Holland was born at Warren, Arkansas in 1920 and moved to Rison when he was in the third grade. He graduated from high school at Rison. He has been the Director of the Arkansas Department of Aeronautics for 14 years. He is a fine artist whose paintings, though primarily of antique and some modern aircraft, may one day be as treasured as New England's Grandma Moses works.

Asked if he could remember his first interest in aviation, Eddie smiled and answered without hesitation.

"When I was just a kid at Rison, an old 'Jenny' aircraft, flown by a barnstormer of that era had landed in a pasture just outside of town. The 'Jenny' airplane was a World War I training plane used at Eberts Field in Lonoke, and sold as surplus after the war to barn-



EDDIE HOLLAND, aviation artist, former fighter pilot, and decorated for meritorious action as a bomber aircrew member in the South Pacific during WWII, has for 14 years served as Director of the Arkansas Depart-

ment of Aviation and has furthered flying progress in the state. Holland and wife of 40 years, Madeline, have a daughter Sheila who is a noted Canadian artist. They stand in front of some art work done by Holland.

storming pilots, nicknamed after its official designation, the JN-4.

Admirer of Lindbergh

"I stood there in the pasture and watched with great awe as local townspeople were taken for an air ride for \$2 each. I would have gone up too, except I didn't have the \$2 back in 1930," Eddie laughed.

"I was seven years old when Charles Lindbergh made his solo Atlantic flight; a neighbor carved a model of his plane, 'The Spirit of St. Louis' out of wood and gave it to me, and

this started me making model airplanes during my boyhood."

Holland's artistic bent evolved in the early years as a sign painter around the Monticello and Pine Bluff area; eventually he became assistant manager of a Malco theatre in Camden.

"This included the job of projectionist and pop corn seller at times," Eddie recalls.

"After Pearl Harbor in 1941 I immediately volunteered to enter the Army Air Corps, and came running back into the theatre at Camden that day

and shouted to the manager, 'I'm going to be a pilot!'"

The manager, Steve Coan, offered a disparaging answer. "Sure you are, Eddie — sure you are — you're gonna be a pilot, alright — you're gonna pile it here, and you're gonna pile it there, and..."

(1941 war humor may need an explanation: at that time, a horse cavalry armed service unit still existed at Fort Bliss, Texas.)

Goes To Scott Field

Holland didn't have enough college requirements which ex-

isted at that time for entry into the aviation cadet program — he tried to enter photography, but failed, and eventually went to Scott Field near Bellville, Illinois as a radio-operator.

"I nearly froze to death," Eddie remembers, "since classes were held in a large hanger and in addition, we had to walk from our far away barracks to the flight line."

Holland graduated in the top five percent of his class by learning to copy radio code at 40 words per minute, and was sent to radar training at Morrison Field in the South part of Florida.

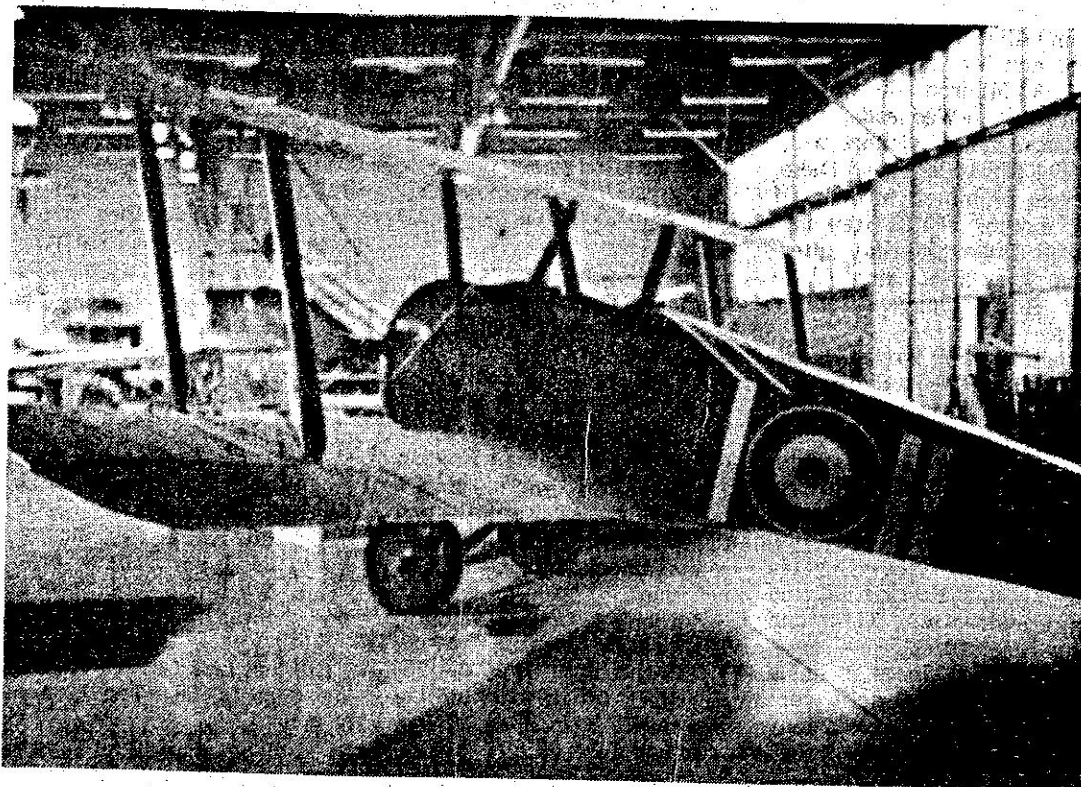
"Radar was so new then, and so secret, we weren't even allowed to say the word, and all our classrooms were guarded and surrounded by barbed wire."

His class studied a radar set made by the British, which was carried in the lead bomber over the ocean to pinpoint enemy shipping; it had a range of 50 miles.

He was sent to Hawaii with the 11th Bomb Group, and as a radar operator, flew as a crew member in the lead aircraft in the Solomon, Guadalcanal, Rabaul area. When attacked by Japanese planes, Holland would drop his radio-operating duties and man twin 50-mm machine guns from a turret just above the radio compartment on the B-17.

A Japanese 20 mm shell exploded between his feet and "cut my flying boots apart just like a razor," Holland recalled. Holland didn't receive a scratch.

He flew bombing missions



SOPWITH CAMEL, a restored World War I fighter plane, is now owned by the Arkansas Aviation Historical Society. The aircraft is

one of five antique planes acquired by the society.

from a small air strip on Guadalcanal after the U.S. Marine invasion even before the island was secured from the enemy forces. One of his four Air Medals was won March 15, 1943 when his aircraft was one of only two out of nine that made it to the target, Rabaul, a Japanese stronghold, and his craft even managed to score hits on a large cargo ship.

Bags Japanese Plane

"My pilot was a fellow from Mississippi named Walter Lucas, or 'Luke' as we called him, Holland continued. "On one of our missions I shot down a Japanese aircraft, and since it was witnessed, received credit for it. The Japanese pilot bailed out, and we saw him floating down slowly in the vicinity of the tail of our aircraft. The tail gunner on our B-17 just happened to have been at Pearl Harbor when it was attacked back in 1941 —

and still remembered!" Holland grimly recalled.

"We heard the tail gunner's voice over the intercom. — 'I'll get the — when he drifts by,' he shouted."

"But about that time," Holland smiled, "we all heard Luke's voice blare out through our headphones, "DON'T YOU DARE SHOOT HIM — HE'S HELPLESS!"

Holland said the enemy pilot fell safely into the ocean, and "Luke buzzed over him a time or two. The last we saw of him he was throwing respectful salutes in our direction."

Following his tour of the South Pacific, Holland completed his flying cadet training, graduated as the top fighter pilot in his class of 22 students at Craig Field, Selma, Alabama. Shortly after his pilot training ended, the war ended.

Pilot For WR

After five years as manager of the Dardanelle theatre Holland returned to flying as a

corporate pilot full time, including the Petit Jean Air Service. At one time Claude Holbert (owner of Central Flying Service) was Winthrop Rockefeller's No. 1 pilot, and eventually the future governor of Arkansas had five pilots.

Holland was one of these. He flew Rockefeller all over the United States in the 60s before Rockefeller became governor, and when elected in 1969, Holland became Director of the Arkansas Department of Aeronautics, his present position.

Holland married Madeline Oliver of Hampton 40 years ago. Artistically, genes must tell. Their daughter, Sheila Cotton, lives in Nova Scotia and is one of Canada's emerging new artists with national recognition.

Sheila has exhibited in galleries in Toronto and many other Canadian cities. Recently the Museum of New Brunswick exhibited 23 of Sheila's paintings (many are

murals as wide as eleven feet). The paintings traveled for a year in the Atlantic provinces, and all 23 were acquired by museums or prestigious buyers.

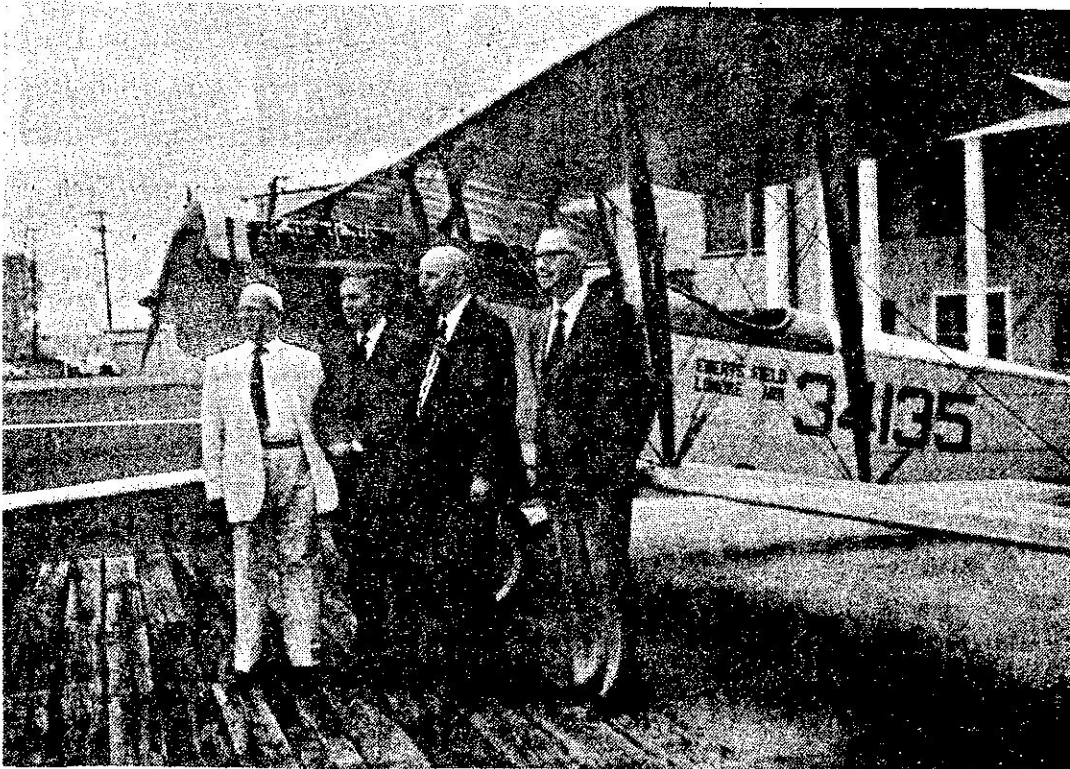
Mrs. Cotton and her art have been featured in several Canadian magazines. Her subjects are "the people of Canada", according to her proud parents.

Holland's love of flying is evident when one enters his office at Adams Field. Arkansas' progress in the field of aviation is nationally recognized as near the top, and Eddie Holland during his tenure as director of the state agency has made a significant contribution to this progress.

The walls of his office are lined with photographs of planes and personalities, and many of his own paintings add a touching reminder of days past, including beautiful water color renditions of the Ford trimotor aircraft, built a half century ago, and other classic aircraft such as the Douglas DC-3, the work horse of World War II and the first successful commercial airliner.

Personal mementos of Rockefeller, Pryor, Bumpers, Clinton and White, Arkansas governors whom he has served, are everywhere in Holland's quarters. One of his last projects is a large oil painting of Governor Frank White.

Holland is very active, as a member of the board of directors, in promoting the growth of the three-year-old Arkansas Aviation Historical Society.



CLAUD L. HOLBERT, Central Flying Service founder; his son, Richard; Eddie Holland, Director of Arkansas Department of Aeronautics and Raymond J. Ellis, founder of Skyways Airlines, stand by a JN-4 "Jenny", World War I training aircraft, owned by the

Arkansas Aviation Historical Society. Ellis and Holbert are two of the 1982 Hall of Fame inductees of the society. The third inductee is the late Field E. Kindley, Arkansas' air ace of World War I.

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Edward W. Holland, 73, Mr. Aviation, ex-head of aeronautics panel

BY TRACIE DUNGAN
Democrat-Gazette Staff Writer

Edward W. Holland, 73, of Naples, Fla., former director of the Arkansas Department of Aeronautics, died March 31.

Holland was director for 16 years. He resigned from the post on Feb. 22, 1985, for health reasons and retired to Naples.

He came to the department in March 1969 when it needed a lobbyist because the Legislature was considering abolishing it, according to newspaper files.

Holland later was dubbed Mr. Aviation for his efforts to establish the aviation industry and airports in the state.

In his resignation letter to then-Gov. Bill Clinton in 1984, Holland noted he had been unable to serve in the position full time since suffering a stroke in June of that year.

During his tenure, Holland served under six full-time governors — Clinton twice — and saw the establishment of 10 public airports to bring Arkansas' total to 86 at the time.

He helped organize the state Aviation Historical Society. He had an extensive collection of aviation-related information, which was said to be a major source of Arkansas aviation history.

In November 1984, he received the society's highest honor when he was inducted into its hall of fame. He called that honor the highlight of his career and listed his appointment as the department director as another highlight.

"It's good to go out like this — by my induction in the hall of fame and not being fired," Holland was quoted as having said at the time.

Holland's first airplane ride came in 1938. He paid \$5 for a 15-minute ride that took off from a cotton patch near Pine Bluff. His pilot was a barnstormer, the chariot a two-seater. The next time he flew, it was for his country.

Holland enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II and flew 37 combat missions as a radio operator and gunner on a B-17 in the South Pacific-Guadalcanal area.

Asked in a 1984 Arkansas Democrat interview what his most harrowing military experience



Edward W. Holland

was, he replied: "All 37 missions."

He also earned four air medals, two battle stars and a presidential citation.

In 1964, he became a corporate pilot and later a personal pilot for former Arkansas Gov. Winthrop Rockefeller.

Holland's aviation talents extended into the art world. He was a noted watercolor painter whose aviation paintings are on permanent display at Little Rock Air Force Base.

After World War II ended, Holland returned to his civil job as a motion-picture theater manager with Malco Theatres in several Arkansas cities. He also continued flying as a part-time charter pilot.

Holland also worked as an aide for former Lt. Gov. Maurice L. "Footsie" Britt.

Holland held memberships in the National Association of State Aviation Officials, the Airplane Owners and Pilots Association, Quiet Birdmen, the North Little Rock Chamber of Commerce, the North Little Rock Lions Club and the North Little Rock First Methodist Church.

Graveside services for Holland were Saturday at Naples Memorial Gardens.

Survivors are his wife, Madeline; a daughter, Sheila Cotton Bards of Naples, Fla.; a sister, Cordelia Ragen of Benton; and a brother, Bernard Holland of