

Julie Clark, Her Awards Keep Flying In

... as she Pilots Her T-34 — Smokin' the Skies

By Linda Hanf McIntosh

Julie Clark, among the first women pilots employed by a major airline and known by many as the First Lady of the air shows, just keeps racking up the awards.

A Cameron Park, Calif., resident, Julie has received numerous awards and honors over the years — too many to list here (but you can “Google her” online). The latest award is among the most prestigious, The Aero Club of Northern California (NAA) Crystal Eagle, presented to her November 2012. The annual award recognizes an individual whose accomplishments have significantly contributed to the advancement of aviation or space technology.

Julie shares the honor with past recipients Gen. James “Jimmy” Doolittle (1983 first-year recipient), Brig. Gen. Chuck Yeager, Wayne Hadley, Eileen Collins, and “Bud” Anderson, to name a few.

“I was so honored and humbled. Knowing who the former honorees were, I just didn’t feel I deserved it. The first was given to Jimmy Doolittle and, last year, Bud Anderson received it. I mean, they’ve been my heroes,” Julie said.

Inscribed on her award is: *“In recognition of outstanding contributions to the field of aviation while overcoming great personal adversity to become one of the world’s foremost air show aerobatic artists and one of the modern pioneers who opened the flight decks of major airlines to women pilots.”*



Photo by Clark Cook, Air Show Productions



Julie Clark, left, is awarded the Crystal Eagle

The inscription provides a clue to the passion, the travails, the hurdles and the hard-won accomplishments that have made up Julie’s life.

Two other prestigious honors are her inductions into the International Council of Air Shows Hall of Fame in 2011, and the Women in Aviation International Pioneer Hall of Fame in 2002. Her many achievements have been listed in Who’s Who publications, and she has been featured

in TV documentaries, publications, and books. In 2004, Julie (with Ann Lewis Cooper) wrote about her life experiences. The book, *“Nothing Stood in Her Way, Captain Julie Clark”* is now in its 3rd printing. To be published spring 2013, her autobiography is updated with an epilogue.

Julie has always loved flying. Long ago, a friend remarked that she loved flying more than breathing.

A captain with Northwest Airlines for 27 years, she retired in 2004 to turn full attention to another aviation passion: precision aerobatics. The routine she choreographed puts her Juice Plus+™ T-34 Mentor through exciting and graceful loops and rolls while air show spectators watch intently.

Three+ Decades of Aerobatics

Julie has been flying her Beechcraft T-34 and North American T-28 Trojan in air shows and fly-ins for 33 years. Sponsored by Juice Plus+, the T-34 is decked out in the motif and colors of Air Force One — red, white, and blue. The bright yellow T-28 is named the “Top Banana” in honor of Hughes Airwest, whose slogan was “The Top Banana in the West.”

Julie’s corporate career followed the path of her father, also a commercial pilot. He was a captain with Pacific Air Lines, which later became Air West then Hughes Airwest. Julie’s first airlines job was with Golden West Airlines in 1976, starting as first officer. She was first and only woman pilot with the company.

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Both She and Her Father, Ernie Clark, Flew the F-27

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Later she was hired by Hughes Airwest, which became Republic Airlines then Northwest Airlines. At Hughes, she experienced the thrill of flying the sister ship of the F-27, the aircraft her father Ernie Clark had regularly flown.

Hometown: San Carlos

Julie grew up with her two sisters in San Carlos, a small town south of San Francisco. Julie's interest and love for aviation began early; her dad sneaked her aboard some of his short trips. While other girls loved



Photo by Linda Hanf McIntosh, 2012

Above, Julie poses in her T-28, aka The Top Banana, October 2012



One of 40 top "Living Legends in Aviation"

dolls and makeup, Julie was drawn to airplanes and flying. In May 1964, when Julie and her twin were 15, their father set off for work.

Ten minutes after flying out of Stockton on a routine run he was shot dead when a deranged passenger stormed the cockpit. The plane, crew, and passengers went down in the Mt. Diablo hills. There were no survivors. Later, a regulation named after Capt. Ernie Clark required cockpits to be locked. "He would have been my mentor on everything," Julie said. The tragedy followed in the wake of Julie's mother's death the year before.

Julie's strength and determination carried her through the grief and through life; her sisters came to play a big role, and throughout life they have given each other mutual support.

First Flying Lessons

In college, 18-year-old Julie started flying lessons. She saved all her loose change to take her first lesson at Goleta Airport in Santa Barbara. "Just like my father, I was bitten by the flying bug." To feed this passion for flying, she continued to sock away extra dollars for more lessons.

By 1969, Julie graduated from UC Santa Barbara. Armed with a degree in Spanish, she went to

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Start of a Career in the Sky

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Alabama to teach Spanish, speech, and math. It wasn't long before she knew that flying was her real passion. And now the idea of flying for a major airline was shaping itself into a goal.

"In life it takes what I call the three Ds: Desire, Dedication and Determination," Julie said. She used the three Ds to achieve her goal, holding several jobs to fund her plan. She worked as a waitress, and a performer in a water-ski show at Marine World. When she logged enough hours in the air to get her pilot's license, she earned money by flying.

Her love affair with the T-34 started in 1975. She was hired as a flight instructor



at Lemoore Naval Air Station to teach U.S. Navy airmen to fly. The next year she bought a T-34A, sight unseen. She was the high bidder in a USAF surplus sale. She paid \$18,000 — some of it borrowed — claimed her prize, and flew 2,900 miles solo from Anchorage to home in California.

Women Pilots

As she worked to launch her airline career, she fought uphill battles in a mostly all-male profession. Globally, women pilots as a whole started making some headway in aviation careers in the 1950s. In the United States, airlines were being pressured to follow suit. "A few women had been hired but the airlines were very reluctant to even talk to women pilots," Julie recalls.

Other hurdles included thwarting an employer's sexual advances, which cost her a flying job. In general, she found that her biggest hurdle was employer ignorance and a fear of hiring women pilots. This hit her as ironic, since for the most part women held the same credentials as their male counterparts.

First Flying Jobs

As Julie worked her way up, she took every flying job she could to stack up more hours, experience, and credentials. She worked as a flight instructor and as a pilot of charter flights. One job she took piloting a twin-engine Cessna 421 required transporting sick babies in incubators to urgent medical care.

She also flew a Cessna 310, ferrying agriculture equipment around the Western states. The airplane had to land at farms where there were no runways and no margin for error. "This was dangerous work since the plane was gutted to hold equipment and was typically over the gross weight limit," she says. She finally decided the risk wasn't worth it.

Still determined to get on with an airline, Julie continued her outward flow of resumes. At the advice of her husband, a Navy fighter pilot, she stopped sending her photo, and then dropped the "e" at



the end of her name and added "an" (Julian) so it didn't sound like a guy at first glance. Meanwhile, she continued to upgrade her skills and gain new certification, calling to inform the human resource departments of her latest credentials. Her plan was to be in their face, to be remembered, to show her grit, to get the job.

Interview Process

Hearing from a male friend that Golden West was hiring pilots, Julie called for an interview. She was told, "You know, we've never hired a woman." Deciding this wasn't exactly a "no," Julie called again and was told that if she went to the ground school held by the product support team of de Havilland, her application would be considered.

Scraping together the money, she flew to Toronto, Canada, where people from all over the world met for the training. She passed the rigorous

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Waging an Uphill Battle to Get On with Airlines



Julie's Air Show plane, T-28 aka 'The Top Banana'

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course, learning everything there was to know about the de Havilland DHC-6 Twin Otter. Next, Golden West told Julie she needed to cut her waist-length hair; she did. Then in June 1976, she successfully passed the company's flight test. Still no job offer.

"What is it that is keeping you from hiring me?" she asked bluntly at an interview. She was told that her hair needed to be shorter, and that the company's Operations area at LAX has but one restroom, for men, which has no door.

Another Barrier: The Door

Frustrated, Julie recalls saying: "I'll cut my hair short and I'll buy a damn door; I'll even install it myself if you give me the job." After blurting it out, she thought "Oops!" Then remembers saying: "I'm sorry, that just slipped out." The interviewer smiled, and said that he liked her spunk, and then added: "When can you start?"

Julie was with Golden West one year before she went to work for Hughes Airwest.

Today, she has now logged more than 32,000 accident-free hours in the air, not only in commercial DC9s, but also in more than 66 different types of aircraft, including the Airbus A320, which she was flying when she retired.

Over the years, she lovingly restored and maintained her T-34, once a post Korean War training aircraft. In her spare time, Julie continued flying it, experimenting with its

limits. As it turned out, the T-34 became more than a passion, more than a hobby. It became her second career, one as an aerobatics pilot. After flying competition aerobatics in a Pitts S-2A, Julie decided air shows in a T-34 would be "cool." She had been performing as part of a 3-member aerobatics team called the Falcons. She decided to take her act solo.

Aerial Ballets

Performing at air shows proved to be second nature for her. She had learned to fly the T-34 while at Lemoore Naval Air Station in '75 and '76. "In the Navy way, I learned to fly formation, how to fly on their wings, stay steady, follow the lead," she remarked. While there, she mastered the precise skill and art of aerobatics. It took her beyond the rolls and loops taught to her by former flight instructors. And she loved it... precision flying was fun, thrilling... intoxicating.

She designed her show as an aerial ballet, with the plane streaming ethereal red, white and blue smoke. Hundreds of thousands of air show lovers have been craning their necks to watch Julie Clark perform her routines nationwide and in Canada. Her show is now sponsored by Juice Plus+. "They manufacture the world's most researched whole-food supplement. I've been taking it for 13 years," Julie said, adding, "I couldn't 'promote' something I don't believe in."



Autographing copies of her book at Air Shows

Exacting Maneuvers

At air shows, Julie's T-34 is carefully controlled through exacting maneuvers. Since the T-34 was built as a basic training aircraft to teach trainees the solid skills in piloting, it requires a steady, calm focus during the workout she puts it through. When flying the T-34, she is

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The Finale: A Smoky-White Heart in the Sky

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constantly working the controls. The heavy aircraft requires heavy-handed control and must be encouraged to achieve precision. When flying, Julie likes to push the envelope, yet she makes smooth and graceful maneuvers look easy. As she comes out of long vertical rolls and loops, she makes low passes. She is a thrill seeker. Yet with 32,000 accident-free hours, it's apparent she has the instinct for survival.

Frosting on The Cake

Her signature act at the end of the show is a dedication to the U.S. troops and, one suspects, a tribute to her father, who was a patriot like Julie. The T-34 makes the long swooping arcs that paint a smoky-white heart across the sky — perfectly synchronized with “God Bless the U.S.A.” The song, created by her longtime friend Lee Greenwood, became a beautiful finale when, with Greenwood’s blessings, she started using it in 1984. “It’s really helped to make my show popular,” she says. As the song plays and her routine comes to an end, fireworks light up from the ground.

The years of determination to get where she is today wasn't easy. But when you love flying more than breathing, what's the alternative?

“All I wanted to do was fly. And,” Julie added, “nowhere is there an office with a better view.”

For more information about Julie Clark and her aerobatics shows: www.julieclarkairshows.com, and Katja@julieclarkairshows.com



“All I wanted to do was fly,” Julie

2013 Coming Performances & Appearances of Julie Clark

April 11-13	Juice Plus Conference, Long Beach, CA
May 11-12	50th Anniversary Air Show, Jackson, MS
June 15-16	Indianapolis Air Show
June 29-30	Rhode Island National Guard Open House & Air Show
July 6-7	Freedom Festival / ShrinersFest Airshow, Evansville, IN
July 29-Aug 4	EAA Air Venture 2013, Oshkosh, WI
Aug. 17-18	“Wings Over Wine Country,” Sonoma Cnty Airport, Santa Rosa, CA
Aug. 24-25	KC Aviation Expo, Kansas City, MO
Sept 6-8	South Jersey Regional Air Show, NJ
Sept 21-22	Winston-Salem Air Show, Winston-Salem, NC
Sept. 28-29	Memphis Air Show, Memphis, TN
Oct 4-5	“October West” Air Show in Prescott, AZ
Oct 17-19	Juice Plus Conference, Orlando, FL
Nov 2-3	“Randolph AFB Open House,” TX
Dec 2-5	International Council of Air Shows, Las Vegas

Linda Hanf McIntosh is editor of Around Here Magazine, published in El Dorado County, Northern California. Article source: interviews with Julie Clark; Clark’s book “Nothing Stood in Her Way;” news releases, internet searches.

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