

Former flier proud of her museum piece



PHOTOS BY MARK HUME / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Ruth Deerman flew her 1950 Cessna 140 in the Powder Puff Derby in 1954. The plane is on exhibit at the War

Eagles Museum at Santa Teresa Airport. Newspaper clips of the flight also are on exhibit.

By Charlie Edgren
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Ruth Deerman stood and looked at her airplane, the Cotton

Clipper Cutie, hanging about 20 feet above the floor at the War Eagles Air Museum.

"It's a beautiful airplane, isn't it," she said. It wasn't a question; it was a statement of fact.

Ruby Hays Nearly 39 years ago, Ruth was thinking much the same thing as she and co-pilot/navigator

WINNING PLANE

THE COTTON Clipper Cutie:

- Cessna 140-A, built in 1950.
- Engine: single Continental C-85-12, generating 85 HP.
- Maximum speed: 125 mph.
- Weight: 1,500 pounds.
- Wingspan: 33 feet, 4 inches.
- Maximum ceiling: 15,600 feet.

Ruby Hays roared over the United States at 500 feet in the Cutie, flying to victory in the 1954 Powder Puff Derby.

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Two El Paso Women Pilot Win Air Race



Determination Wins For Women Fliers

Mrs. Deerman And Mrs. Hays First to Descend



Ruth took her first "flight" when she was 7 years old.

"The boy next door and I thought that we could hold on to an umbrella, jump off the garage roof and fly down," she said. "He let me go first, and the umbrella turned inside out."

A more serious attempt came in 1944, when she earned the pilot's license that allowed her to amass 3,500 hours, most of it in single-engine light planes. Later she got her flight-instructor's rating, which is still valid, and a helicopter rating that she used to fly a Hughes 260.

Flying was not just a casual hobby to Ruth; it was more a visceral need.

"You can just be bogged down with all your worries, but then when you get up in the air, you come back with a whole new attitude toward life," she said. "All your troubles seem so insignificant when you're up there."

The highlight of her flying days was the Deerman-Hays victory in the Powder Puff Derby.

Her metal-winged Cessna 140A — the previous version, the 140, had fabric-covered wings — made nine stops during the 1,986 miles from Long Beach, Calif., to Chattanooga, Tenn.

"Ruby would navigate with her finger along the lines on the map," Ruth recalled. "If I got off, even a little bit, she'd be on me."

Ruby said, "Yes, we flew a lot of straight lines along that map. The only time we deviated from those straight lines was when we came to a mountain. It was fun, but it was also a lot of work."

"When we landed at the airport, they put a blanket of roses on the nose of the plane, Ruth said. "One woman said, 'They won't get that many roses again until they die.'"

Now, nearly four decades later, the Cotton Clipper Cutie is where it belongs, according to Ruth.

"I donated it to the museum last fall because it's a winner and it deserves to be here," she said.

The floor of the War Eagles Air Museum at Santa Teresa Airport is filled with history.

There's the gull-winged Corsair that flew off aircraft carriers in the Pacific and helped win World War II. There's the P-51 Mustang that sliced through the skies over Germany protecting Allied bombers and establishing air superiority over the Luftwaffe.

A German observation plane, the Fieseler Storch, perches on the ground like a praying mantis. An F-86 jet fighter, a P-40 Warhawk, a twin-tailed P-38, the proud legacy of wars past, also taxi in place.

But peacefully — and maybe symbolically — above them all flies the pink Cotton Clipper Cutie. And with it still fly the memories of Ruth Deerman and

THE MUSEUM

WAR Eagles Air Museum:

● Located at Santa Teresa Airport. Take Country Club Road to McNutt Road, turn right on McNutt, then left on Airport Road.

● Hours: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday.

● Admission: \$4 for adults; \$3 for 65 or older; free for children under 12. Memberships: \$25 a year for families, \$15 for individuals.

● Exhibits: Airplanes from World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam and war with Iraq. Also old cars, extensive photo and uniform exhibits, video presentation. Gift shop and reference books are available, as are guides who will take you through the exhibit and answer questions.

● On the first Saturday of every month, some of the planes are flown beginning at 9 a.m., weather permitting.

Ruby Hays.

Both women volunteer at the Air Museum on Wednesday afternoons. They work in the office and make sure there's a little time for reminiscing.

"We all get together and talk flying," Ruby said, "whether we can fly anymore or not."

DEERMAN

RUTH GILLET DEERMAN, 90, passed away on Sunday, April 30, 2006. She was a life long resident of El Paso, Texas.



Mrs. Deerman was very active in her community throughout her life. She was a Flight Instructor with Border Aviation in El Paso in 1944; a Beauty Consultant for Mary Kay Cosmetics from 1969-1970; winner of the All Woman Transcontinental Air Race in 1954; inducted into the El Paso Aviation Hall of Fame in 1983, was on the Board of Directors for the American Cancer Society and was a member of the Ladies Oriental Shrine. She is preceded in death by her

husband, Charles L. Deerman. Mrs. Deerman is survived by her three sisters, Emilene Gillett Newman, Pauline Gillett Tree Filleman and Betty Jo Gillett Mings. Visitation will be held on Friday, May 5, 2006 from 12:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at Martin Funeral Home West.

Funeral Service will be on Saturday, May 6, 2006 at 10:00 a.m. at Martin Funeral Home West. Interment to follow to Restlawn Memorial Park Cemetery. Services entrusted to Martin Funeral Home West, 128 N. Resler Drive.

