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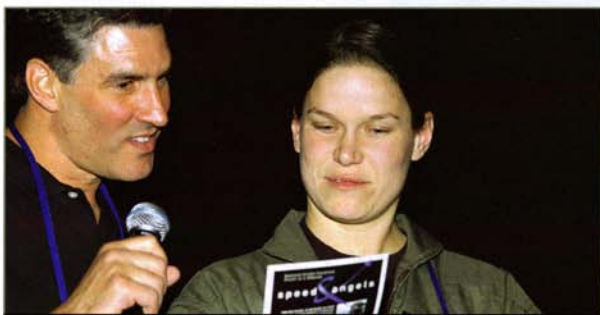
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The documentary *Speed & Angels* debuted at the Conference. "Slick" (right) and "Paco," one of the producers, answered audience questions after the film.

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COVER PHOTO

The WASP draw huge crowds at the annual WAI Conference—young and old are anxious to speak with the women and hear their stories.
Photo by John Riedel.

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THE FLYING CANFIELDS

An aerial romance marked by adventure and tragedy

Their flying career germinated on a beastly hot August day while Ed Canfield was stacking hay on his father's wheat farm near Fargo, North Dakota. He straightened up from his work when he heard the drone of a plane flying overhead in the cool, blue sky. At that moment, he resolved to leave farming behind.

That winter he spent a small fortune—\$600—for seven hours of flight instruction near Philadelphia. Then, using the argument that a new plane would be safer than the used Jenny he could afford, he convinced his mother to mortgage the farm so he could buy a Petrel, a German-designed plane modeled after the WW I Fokker fighter. It was \$6,500.

He opened an aviation school in Fargo and promoted "barnstorming"

air shows. People would put on their Sunday best, crank up the Model T and come out for the show. Many stood in long lines to take their first-ever flight. A few years later, Ed brought the aviation business to Williston, North Dakota, and became operator of Canfield Flying Service, which became the first Williston airport. He ran a charter service,

flying school and mechanical service.

In Williston he met Dorothea Busse,

by Jocelyn M. Canfield

who was attending Carleton College in Minnesota. He began courting her by airplane, flying up to visit her and bringing her home on school breaks. The local newspaper reported on his aerial visits with head-

Ed reported in an article he wrote in 1935 that, "the greatest danger in aviation is the danger of starvation."



lines like, "Carleton Coed to Fly Home for Turkey." Dorothea left college in 1929 to become Mrs. Ed Canfield. Her flying lessons began almost immediately and it wasn't long before the Flying Canfields were well known in North Dakota.

Ed and Dorothea learned early on about the power of publicity. They pitched stories and sent photos and were highly visible in the press. Ed wrote many articles himself for various aviation magazines. When Ed and Dorothea had their first child, Dennis, he set the record for being the youngest person ever to fly at the age of two days. He was accompanied in flight by three nurses. His sister Carol later broke her brother's record, flying at the age of 10 hours.

"Ed was a great showman," reported a former employee and close friend, Bud Thoma. "He was so well known in North Dakota that he could have made it into the state senate if he had tried. But flying was his great interest and love," Bud said. "Dorothea was a vibrant, dynamic, charming young woman, a perfect match and mate for Ed," he added.

That love for flying drove the two to undertake virtually every paid flying activity in order to make a living. Ed reported in an article he wrote in 1935 for *The National Aeronautic Magazine* that, "the greatest danger in aviation is the danger of starvation." He wrote in a memoir, "By the time one plane was paid for, it was worn out, and you had to go in debt for the next

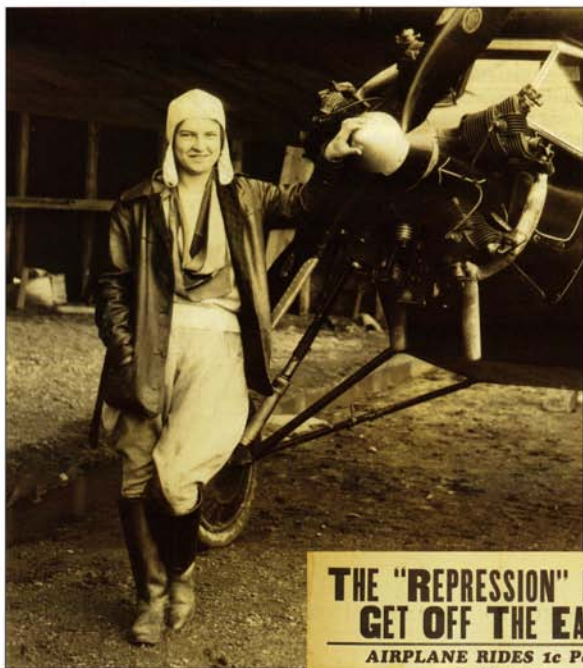
one. On the other side of the ledger, what a wealth of fun, of going places, of meeting wonderful people, of really living!"

They prevented starvation by spreading grasshopper bait and dusting cotton. They provided air taxi service, often under emergency circumstances, such as bad weather. They carried doctors and priests by air to reach critical patients during blizzards. They provided air ambulance service to people in desperate medical situations.

The Flying Canfields also worked as "aerial cowboys," assisting in the round up of wild horses and cattle in Montana, Wyoming and the Dakotas. They could do in a few days what had taken months



The 1930s were difficult times, to say the least. The Flying Canfields made their best living doing a service for farmers by hunting coyotes via airplane. Dorothea flew, while Ed did the shooting. A good day's take of coyote pelts would more than cover expenses.



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for a team of cowboys on horseback.

Of course they continued to appear in countless air shows where people would pay a penny a pound for rides. Ed would try to get the local barber and the mayor—the best-known folks in town—to parachute from his plane, a privilege for which they would each pay a dollar. A few passengers would ultimately decide on flight lessons. Ed Canfield had many students, including Florence Klingensmith, whom he taught to do the inverted loop. (Klingensmith later made some 1,200 inverted loops to attain the world record for women.) In 1934, after Dorothea became the second woman in North Dakota to obtain her transport license, she too began giving flying lessons.

Finding winter work was the biggest challenge. The first real winter work Ed engaged in was patrolling power lines and gas lines for the Montana Dakota Power Co.

The winter work that ultimately gained them national notoriety was the aerial hunting of coyotes. It was lucrative, as Ed was an expert marksman.

"It may seem unsportsmanlike to stalk game from an airplane," Ed said in a press interview, "but the coyote is the scourge of the prairies and in this great drought-stricken territory, people are putting up a brave fight for a bare existence." Ed commented in a press interview that his family would either live off coyotes or the Red Cross, adding that the Red Cross had enough mouths to feed due to the drought and the Depression. In fact, The Flying Canfields were quite successful at living off coyote hunting, in part because they were

paid multiple times for the same animal. The state paid a bounty of \$3 a head and the county paid \$2.50 to \$10 a head. The pelts would sell to furriers for \$5-\$12 each. Individual farmers or farmers' associations would also occasionally pay on a per animal basis or an hourly basis for the Flying Canfields to fly in to hunt.

They were the subject of quite a few articles on their coyote hunting, and Ed always praised the 55 horsepower Kari-Keen as being an ideal little plane for such a task. They nicknamed the Kari-Keen the "Coyote Special" and even painted a snarling coyote head on the side.

Aerial hunting had many safety hazards and challenges that taxed the pilot's flying ability, including very low altitude flying, and landing and taking off on rough terrain. Typically Dorothea would pilot the plane while Ed did the shooting.

"Our usual method is to dive down within a few feet of the ground, a little to the side of the animal," Dorothea reported in a news story. "It is a game of luck and wits and a good many times the coyotes outsmart us. Almost every one pulls something new in his attempt to evade us," she added. "After the coyote has been killed from the air, the game is by no means bagged. The next procedure is

to mark the location of the dead animal so that it may be found from the ground." The couple used bright flags to mark the location to increase their chances of finding their kill.

"Coyote hunting has brought us more revenue than any other one item in winter flying," Ed reported. Over 12 winters of hunting, they took 2,852 coyotes.

They were so well known for their coyote hunting, that they incorporated a "coyote kill" into their air shows. Four colored balloons would be positioned in front of the crowd. In a low-altitude pass, Ed would lean out of the open cockpit of the plane, fire in rapid succession and puncture the four balloons on a single pass. A miss was a rare occurrence.

Ed and Dorothea took their airplanes to Noonan, North Dakota, on July 18, 1936, to conduct an air show. Before the show began, Dorothea took coal miner Albert Lee up for 15 minutes of student flying time in her Kari-Keen, which had dual controls for teaching. Lee, a coal miner, owned an airplane but was unlicensed.

As they came in for a landing, Ed noticed with concern they were overshooting the landing field. "I particularly noticed that Lee was at the controls, and that worried me," Ed reported to the *Williston Daily Herald*. The motor was opened and the plane was flown around the field for a second time. When the ship had reached an altitude of about 125 feet, it wobbled sideways, climbed sharply then fell straight down with the motor on, crashing in a vertical position five blocks from the landing field. Ed jumped in a car and reached the crash site moments later, and attempted to cut Dorothea from the plane with a hacksaw. By the time help arrived, both Dorothea and Lee were dead. She was 27.

Upon inspection of the wreckage, it was found that the aircraft had been

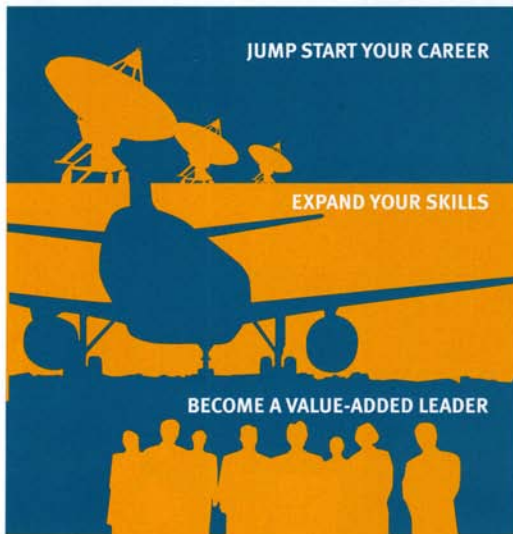
flown directly into the ground at full power. "There is not the slightest doubt in my mind but that Lee had possession of the controls and would not release them to Mrs. Canfield," said aeronautics inspector for North Dakota, Lester Orcutt, who inspected the plane and who had administered Dorothea's transport pilot examination several years before. "I can say without hesitation that she was one of the best pilots—man or woman—that I have ever known," Orcutt reported to the press. He added that he had known something of Lee's flying experience and his record was not good. "On three previous occasions, Lee has been known to try to take the controls away from pilots for the purpose of stunting," reported Orcutt in the aircraft accident report.

A report in the *Crosby*, North Dakota paper, said "Testimony was presented by several persons to the effect Lee had made plans the evening preceding the celebration to go aloft in Mrs. Canfield's ship. He had expressed interest in the dual control feature of the Coyote Special." Lee was reported as having said both the evening preceding and the morning of the flight

that he was going to "do the flying himself." News reports also indicate that Lee had been drinking before the incident and was heard to say that he never took orders from a woman. Despite testimony of witnesses, the coroner's jury of three men from Noonan attached no blame to either crash victim and indicated that the cause of the crash was unknown.

"Ed was shattered over Dorothea's death," said friend and former employee Bud Thomae, who remembered 50 years later that Ed had to be supported as he walked when he returned home after the incident. Ed continued to fly solo from Williston, and several years later took a job with Aero Services Corporation, based in Philadelphia. He did aerial photographic and magnetic surveying and mapping. He died in 1983, still unable to talk about Dorothea's death and the end it brought to The Flying Canfields. ➔

Jocelyn M. Canfield is the granddaughter of the Flying Canfields. Her father, Dennis Canfield—age four at the time of his mother's death—went on to fly for the U.S. Navy.



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