

Donny Schmit and Tom Benolkin: A Story of Unlikely Friendship and Aviation Enthusiasm

In the annals of aviation history, there are countless stories of legendary aviators, aircraft designers, and industry pioneers. But among these giants, there are also lesser-known individuals whose contributions, while no less significant, have often gone unnoticed.



Pioneers of Minnesota Motocross: Donny Schmit and Tom Benolkin by Bob Chase

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Donny Schmit and Tom Benolkin were two such individuals. Their lives were marked by an unwavering passion for flight and a deep commitment to preserving aviation history. Despite their humble beginnings, they made remarkable contributions to the aviation community.

Donny Schmit: The "King of Warbirds"



Donny Schmit was born in 1926 in Cincinnati, Ohio. From a young age, he was fascinated by airplanes. He built model airplanes and spent countless hours reading about aviation history. After graduating high school, he joined the U.S. Army Air Forces and served as a pilot during World War II.

After the war, Schmit returned to civilian life and pursued his passion for flying. He became a flight instructor and airshow pilot, thrilling audiences with his daring maneuvers in vintage warplanes. In 1960, he founded the Confederate Air Force (CAF), a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and flying historic military aircraft.

Under Schmit's leadership, the CAF grew into one of the largest and most respected aviation organizations in the world. He was instrumental in

acquiring and restoring dozens of historic aircraft, including the P-51 Mustang, B-25 Mitchell, and F-86 Sabre. His efforts helped to ensure that future generations would have the opportunity to experience the thrill and wonder of aviation.

Tom Benolkin: Aviation Historian and Model Maker



Tom Benolkin, a renowned aviation historian and model maker, was known for his meticulous research and attention to detail.

Tom Benolkin was born in 1941 in Chicago, Illinois. Like Schmit, he had a lifelong fascination with airplanes. He spent his childhood building model

airplanes and studying aviation history. After graduating college, he worked as a technical writer for McDonnell Douglas.

In addition to his work at McDonnell Douglas, Benolkin was a prolific writer and publisher. He authored over 100 books on aviation history, including definitive works on the P-38 Lightning, B-24 Liberator, and F-14 Tomcat. His books were highly regarded for their accuracy and depth of research.

Benolkin was also a skilled model maker. He created hundreds of meticulously detailed model airplanes, which were featured in museums and private collections around the world. His models were known for their realism and attention to detail, and they helped to inspire a new generation of aviation enthusiasts.

A Shared Passion



Donny Schmit and Tom Benolkin first met in the early 1960s at an airshow. They quickly bonded over their shared passion for aviation. They became close friends and collaborators, working together on numerous projects to preserve and promote aviation history.

One of their most notable collaborations was the creation of the National Museum of the United States Air Force in Dayton, Ohio. Benolkin served as the museum's first curator, and he helped to assemble a collection of over 300 historic aircraft and artifacts. Schmit was a major supporter of the museum, and he often loaned his own aircraft for display.

Schmit and Benolkin also worked together on several publications, including the "Airpower" magazine and the "Osprey Encyclopedia of

Aircraft." They also collaborated on a number of educational programs, designed to inspire young people to pursue careers in aviation.

A Legacy of Inspiration

Donny Schmit and Tom Benolkin passed away in 2008 and 2018, respectively. But their legacy lives on through the countless lives they touched. Their passion for aviation and their commitment to preserving aviation history inspired generations of aviators, historians, and enthusiasts.

Today, the Confederate Air Force continues to operate as one of the world's leading aviation museums. The National Museum of the United States Air Force is one of the most visited museums in the United States. And the books and models created by Tom Benolkin continue to educate and inspire aviation enthusiasts around the world.

The stories of Donny Schmit and Tom Benolkin are a reminder that even ordinary people can make extraordinary contributions. Their passion, dedication, and friendship left an indelible mark on the world of aviation. They will always be remembered as true pioneers and legends of the skies.



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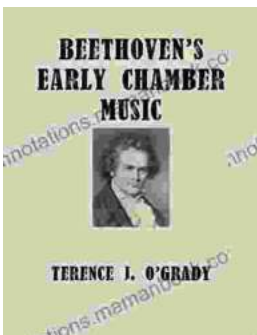
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