

Remembering Don McDermott

By Marijane Sipple

I was deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Don McDermott. He played an important role in making my dream of flying for Antilles Air Boats come true.

Don stood out from the other pilots at Antilles Air Boats, most of whom were retired military aviators. Not only was he much younger, but he had not come from a military background. It wasn't just his age that made him different—it was also his attitude. He was open-minded, encouraging, and willing to judge people by their ability rather than by preconceived ideas.

When Antilles Air Boats made the transition from the Grumman Goose to the larger Grumman Mallard, many of the pilots grumbled about switching to an aircraft that required a copilot. I didn't realize how much that change would affect me as a new pilot until I encountered two male chauvinists based in St. Thomas who did their best to make my life miserable.

Don, who was based on St. Croix, was such a skilled and proficient Mallard pilot that he was entrusted with training new pilots and conducting their periodic check rides.

I was worried about taking my Mallard check ride with Don, but he immediately put me at ease. He was completely professional, fair, and encouraging throughout the flight. His confidence in me gave me the confidence to keep flying, and flying has always been the greatest joy of my life.

I knew Don primarily as a fellow pilot and as my instructor during my years at Antilles Air Boats. Although I didn't know him well outside of flying, I came to appreciate his professionalism, fairness, and quiet encouragement. Those qualities made a lasting impression on me and helped shape my confidence as a pilot.