

NORTH DAKOTA AVIATION HALL OF FAME

Vernon Baltzer

Inducted: 2003



Vernon Baltzer was born and raised on a farm near Napoleon, ND. After graduating from high school in 1939, he attended the University of North Dakota where he joined the Civil Air Patrol and began a life-long relationship with aviation. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1943, and after receiving his commission and wings he was assigned as a flight instructor in the Air Corps Training Command. Following his discharge in 1945, he returned to Napoleon to farm with his father. For the next several years he farmed and was active in the Napoleon community but he always found time and a reason to fly.

In 1958, Vernon accepted the position as the first Assistant Director of the North Dakota Aeronautics Commission and moved his family to Bismarck.

The Commission's Mooney Super 21 became familiar to the state's airports as Vern performed airfield safety inspections and helped find solutions to airport needs. He helped communities develop airport authorities

to facilitate better management practices and planning for airports. Vern was actively involved in the planning, financing, repair, maintenance and new construction of airports throughout the state. His ability to negotiate red tape and obtain federal surplus equipment benefited many small airports in North Dakota.

Vernon was a "safety guru." He organized flight planning, and weather and safety seminars in partnership with AOPA and the FAA. In 1961, Vern obtained 100 surplus helmets and distributed them to aerial applicators and strongly encouraged their use. This effort evolved into the nation's first agricultural aviation mandatory safety helmet program and has saved the lives of many spray pilots.

Recreational flying was Vernon's passion; he received his glider pilot rating in 1978 and organized a two-aircraft glider club. His love of flying was passed on to many students including five of his six children. A well-liked but demanding instructor, he expected attention to details and procedures and had high performance standards.

Vernon's dedication to aviation, warm personality and professionalism were instrumental in the development of aviation in North Dakota.