

The Girl With the B-29 Rating

AS DORA DOUGHERTY climbed into the cockpit of the Commemorative Air Force's B-29 *FIFI* this past March at Florida's Sun 'n Fun fly-in, she joked that the last time she was in a Boeing B-29 Superfortress, "God was a boy."

Sixty-eight years ago,

Dougherty was at the controls, along with Dorothea "Didi" Moorman,



In the cockpit of *FIFI*, the only B-29 flying today, Dora Dougherty (left), who demonstrated the four-engine bomber to reluctant pilots in World War II, encourages Tracy Toth, who is learning to fly *FIFI*.

GRAND RE-OPENING

Santa Monica Museum of Flying

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CLOSED FOR NEARLY A DECADE, Santa Monica Airport's Museum of Flying has relocated to a new building on the south side of the runway. The focus is on the history of aviation in southern California, with a nod to Donald Douglas Sr., founder of the eponymous company that built thousands of DC-3s and C-47s at Santa Monica. The 22,000-square-foot building hosts some two dozen aircraft – including a Wright Flyer replica, a BD-5 microjet, and the nose section of a FedEx Boeing 727 – along with the bagpipes that Douglas occasionally played on the factory floor during breaks.

CHAD SLATTERY



Donald Douglas' personal DC-3 roars over visitors.

flying the four-engine bomber to an Army airbase in Alamogordo, New Mexico. Lieutenant Colonel Paul Tibbets, who was training pilots to fly the Superfortress, had selected Dougherty and Moorman, Women Airforce Service Pilots, to demonstrate the aircraft to his men, many of whom were afraid to fly the bomber because of its reputation for engine fires.

"The word spread quickly," Dougherty recalls. "If the men were at all anxious about it, [others would say] 'Good Lord, they've got two women flying it, so you might just as well check out in it.'"

Although she didn't have much time in the B-29, Dougherty says it is her favorite aircraft, in part because of the people she flew with. "It was a beautiful airplane to fly, but the crew that I flew with was just a wonderful group."

After the war, Dougherty earned several degrees, as well as airline transport, helicopter, and glider ratings. While working as a human

factors engineer for Bell, she set women's altitude and distance records in the Bell 47G-3.

Dougherty and Moorman (who did not continue flying after her WASP service; she died in 2005) were the only women to fly the B-29—until now. Tracy Toth and Debbie Travis-King are training to fly *FIFI*. As B-29 pilots, they will be educating people about the airplane as it tours the country. But for now, Toth and Travis-King are the ones getting a history lesson.

Toth was curious: What was Paul Tibbets like? (On August 6, 1945, Tibbets flew the B-29 *Enola Gay*, named after his mother, over Hiroshima and dropped an atomic bomb.) "You know, he was really straightforward," Dougherty remembers. "He would tell you exactly how it was." She also tells Toth what she thought the first time she saw a B-29: "It was just *big*. Everything about it was big. But it wasn't as heavy on the controls."

STEVE SCHAPIRO