



Thomas J. Clifford

1921

Thomas J. Clifford, born in Langdon, ND, graduated from the University of North Dakota (UND) with a B.S. in commerce in 1942. A Marine during WWII, he served in the Pacific Theater and rose from the rank of Private to Major. After returning stateside he joined the faculty of the University in 1945.

His academic experience has included the roles of student, instructor, and professor, Department Chair, Business School Dean and Vice President. He became President of UND in 1971 and retired in 1992. He was the interim Chancellor of the North Dakota University System.

Among Tom Clifford's many accomplishments were initiatives putting UND and North Dakota on the aviation map nationally and internationally. It started small with John D. Odegard, a business school instructor, asking permission to teach an aviation ground school course. Based on the success of these classes, Tom arranged for the donation of two airplanes, with two additional aircraft being financed by the Alumni Association. With twelve students, what is now known as the John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences was launched in 1968. It was the beginning of a program that under the leadership of the Clifford and Odegard team became an internationally recognized premier aviation-training center. Currently there are 1,580 students majoring in aerospace sciences.

The innovative melding of an academic degree program with traditionally thought of vocational training has resulted in a unique program placing UND Aviation in a position to compete nationally and internationally. A student graduating from UND's aerospace program is well-equipped to enter the many faceted world of aviation.

Always looking for new opportunities, Clifford was instrumental in convincing a reluctant Congress to bypass other existing aviation centers and fund an Air Traffic Control Training Center at UND. He also helped in the negotiation of a first in the industry, internship program with Great Lakes Airline and China Air, where Chinese aviation students training at UND were given hands-on experience as co-pilots while providing air service to smaller communities across a four-state area of operation.

Today Tom Clifford continues to serve as Chairman of the UND Aerospace Space Foundation. Tom's legacy of support to an internationally known quality program has put North Dakota in the forefront of modern aviation education.