

A black and white portrait of Donald Douglas, a middle-aged man with dark hair, wearing a suit and tie, looking directly at the camera. The background is a cloudy sky.

# HONEST VISION

## **The Donald Douglas Story**

Julie Boatman Filucci

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Timeless leadership lessons  
from an engineering mind and aviation icon

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*Honest Vision: The Donald Douglas Story*  
*Timeless leadership lessons from an engineering mind and aviation icon*  
by Julie Boatman Filucci

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Find more stories about this book, and the the author's ongoing research, by visiting the "Honest Vision" and "Together We Fly" pages on the author's web site: [julietbravofoxmedia.com](http://julietbravofoxmedia.com).

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# Introduction...

## with Acknowledgments

Tracing a man's history—and that of his company—requires delving into a multitude of sources, and for this project, the assistance of many people. I began the research for this biography while I was writing *Together We Fly: Voices From The DC-3*. I found it impossible not to explore Doug's life while telling the story of the airplane that is arguably his greatest contribution to aviation.

Each thread I found made me want to know more, and that discovery led to this book.

But its genesis came from a special moment in 2010, around the time of the 75th anniversary of the Douglas Sleeper Transport's first flight. On a visit to Santa Monica, California, with friends, happenstance smiled upon us, and we gained entrance to Doug's former house on San Vicente Boulevard. While standing in the study Doug crafted for himself, I felt the echoes surround me of a man who foresaw and developed a critical part of our daily modern lives, the commercial airliner—yet remained relatively unknown to the general public.

His company no longer survives, except in the hearts of its people and deep in the archives now kept, ironically, by Boeing, one of his primary competitors and now owner of the transport airplane manufacturing business in the United States. Doug's story took on for me a very personal charge at that moment, one I've not been able to let go.

## Acknowledging with Thanks...

Several people and their respective entities were critical to illuminating areas of his life, or assisting me with finding source material within the reams of newspapers, records, memos, photos, microfilm, and notes:

The archives of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, for access to Jerome Hunsaker's papers.

The archives at the Brooklyn Historical Society, specifically for Andy's help locating Doug's former home on old maps of the city—a bit of a tangle to unwind.

The archives of the United States Naval Academy, for access to cadet records, and special thanks to then-Midshipman Abigail White, who helped me compare cadet life at the academy in Doug's time to today.

The National Aerospace Library, part of the Royal Aeronautical Society, at Farnborough, England, for records of the Wilber Wright Lecture series, among other sources. A special thanks to Brian Riddle for his assistance in this regard.

The staff at Threave Castle, near Castle Douglas, in Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland, for their context and background on the history of the Douglas name.

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The Santa Monica Public Library, for maintaining excellent records of the *Douglas Airview*, which I referenced multiple times for a view into the “day in the life” at Douglas Aircraft Company.

A friend in the aviation industry who shall remain nameless gave me a brief background on the “Conquistadores de Cielo”... let's just say he was in a position to know.

Dorothy Cochrane and Brian Nicklas at the Smithsonian Institution's National Air & Space Museum and Udvar-Hazy Center archives, for their support while poring through the notebooks and papers of Daniel Beard and Lee Atwood, among others.

Pat McGinnis and staff at the Boeing Douglas Archives at Long Beach, for access to a variety of company sources, and insight into Doug's life from those who worked closely with him.

I drew from interviews with former Douglas Aircraft Company folks, such as the late Jackson McGowan. The picture they helped form of the company gave me new respect for all they accomplished collectively.

Doug himself rarely took credit—he routinely directed accolades to his team—which I feel was his greatest strength as a leader.

Most poignantly, James S. Douglas, Doug's son, who worked at Douglas, McDonnell-Douglas, and (briefly) The Boeing Company, was generous with both his time and his stories of life with his father. Jim passed away on May 24, 2014. He was a character, alternately garrulous and charming. I missed him greatly as I drafted this work.

This biography would be incomplete and hollow without the support of Robert and Kathy Arnold. Good wine and hospitality were just the beginning. Robert's time spent going through the twists and turns of Douglas history helped me frame this book in a way that makes Doug's vision come through, yet also demonstrate with compassion his humanity and his failures. Thank you for all!

A very special thank you to editor Jennie Trerise, of ASA, for her significant research, skill, and determination to bring the Donald Douglas story to life. A member of the extended Douglas clan herself, her intuition often led us to a better story. Without her interest, passion, and sharp eye, there is no way this book would be what it is now.

My family and friends have again proved tremendous support, particularly over the last three years as I took the leap to bring this book to life. Your love gives me wings.

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### *Some Photograph and Illustration Credits*

A number of sources proved invaluable for providing and validating photos and other images used in this book. In particular, I would like to thank the following:

- Robert and Kathy Arnold
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- Jon Proctor, of JonProctor.com
- HistoricImages.com staff
- Ancestry.com members



# Telling the Donald W. Douglas Story

Binding together the pieces of a person's life story challenges the biographer enough when you have the subject on hand to interview; it takes on an entirely new dimension when that person has been gone from us for more than 30 years. Donald Wills Douglas was a private, modest man—and a genius engineer. He left behind bits and clues to his life, but the public might know him only through the brief letters he exchanged with colleagues and friends, memos from the Douglas Aircraft Company, and a handful of interviews and quotes from news accounts in his time.

Instead, fleshing out his story comes mostly from the memories of the people who knew him, saw his vision, and navigated his quirks of personality and temperament. As any biographer does, I made choices in vetting these sources, gleaming the gems from them, and then telling his story.

One choice lay in how to refer to him in the text. Few people ever called him “Donald” (save, perhaps, his mother) or “Don” (generally those in the industry who knew him only formally). Upon entering the U.S. Naval Academy, he quickly took on a variation of his older brother's nickname, becoming “Little Doug.” That handle swiftly shortened to “Doug” once Harold graduated, and he was “Doug” from that point forward. When Doug's oldest son, Donald, Jr., joined the Douglas Aircraft Company, folks took to calling him “Junior” and his father “Senior.” I've chosen to adopt the name “Doug” at the point in his story where he is first given that name by his peers. Similarly, “Junior” is how I refer to Donald, Jr., in much of the later chapters.

Contributing greatly to the personal history of the man, as well as stories involving the company and its employees, were my interviews with Robert Arnold (Doug's grandson, and Hap Arnold's grandson, too), and, as mentioned, conversations with James S. Douglas. Robert went through memories his mother, Doug's daughter Barbara had passed on to him... and recalled his own precious times spent with his grandfather in his late years.

Among other choices I made: How to handle the private side of a man who kept those feelings close, and for whom integrity held such importance—yet whose most miserable failure in this regard had a lasting impact on his family and his company? I believe in the power of love, and familial love comes back around in his story, after a long, difficult stretch. I have to believe there was a reason for the choice he made, but after extensive research I have no conclusions other than the ones you'll read here. In the end, Doug was human, after all.

As emblazoned through Douglas history in its crest, Doug embodied “a heart with wings.” An honest vision that he strived to make real. And he succeeded, as we do, in spite of—or because of—being human.



# Origins of the Douglas Legend

**THE LAND THAT WAS HOME** to the first Douglas clan called to young Donald Wills Douglas as he read of their exploits in ancient Scots history. So strongly did the Douglas past intrigue him that he would study that history throughout his life, and even make a kind of pilgrimage to Scotland when his later travels allowed.

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» Stained glass window in Stirling Castle in Scotland shows the Douglas crest with the heart at its center.

To look back into the Douglas name is to find a rich story indeed. Though direct lineage cannot be traced back before it was common for vital family milestones to be recorded, there is a limited trail for Donald's own line that can be followed... Stories enough to create a Douglas legend in the imagination of a young boy, and fact enough for us to establish an idea of his roots in Scotland.

The ancient history of the name Douglas that so fascinated Donald during his childhood in New York City started long before his forebears came to New York State around the turn of the 19th century.

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The Douglas clan fought hard for the Borders, and honed its strength protecting the hills and valleys laying along the English borderland, now also called “the Marches.” You can tell you’ve come into Scotland immediately, even today, as the land takes on a less organized, more organic structure. Fields follow natural curves of the land and hilltops are reserved for fortification. The forests only look to be in neat rows because they’ve been replanted after centuries of man’s harvest from them for snug homes and firewood and furniture.

As a Douglas, Donald descended from the long heritage of these independent yet loyal families, who would pledge allegiance to one Scottish king but maintain a distinct identity, and a fidelity to their own clan above all. Tracing the web of fealty during the period when the Douglas clans were at the height of their power takes patience and an ability to read between the lines. What is clear is that their vow to serve was taken seriously by whoever was (nominally or actually) in charge of the loose collection of clans called Scotland during the period roughly spanning the 12th through 18th centuries.

4 | The waning of those clans’ power began once truly strong Scottish kings were on the throne and certainly by the time that Mary Queen of Scots ascended. To understand that rise and fall, and Douglas’ own fascination with it, we must go back to the genesis of the clan and their involvement in the fantastic story of Robert the Bruce.

The original Douglas lands surrounded the Douglas Water, a river running through South Lanarkshire and hugging the town of Douglas. It’s from this geography that the ancestors of the clan took their name — “dhu glas” — or dark blue and green water, in reference to the verdant, impenetrable color of the river. It is generally agreed that Theobald the Fleming was the first true patriarch of the clan. He took possession of the lands near the Douglas Water that would form the heart of the clan’s stronghold. Legend has it that Sholto Douglas was the original chief, having supported the Scottish king in a battle in 767, but this is legend alone. Still, Donald Douglas gave this name to one of his sons (James Sholto Douglas), and to one of his hunting dogs,<sup>1</sup> in later years, as a tribute to this vein of lore.

The first use of the Douglas name was around the last part of the 12th century, by “William de Dufglas” (*“Fleming’s son”*...the name is of Flem-

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with James S. Douglas, 2010.

ish origin, as is *Archibald*, mentioned below). Further refinement created the common spelling used through modern times.

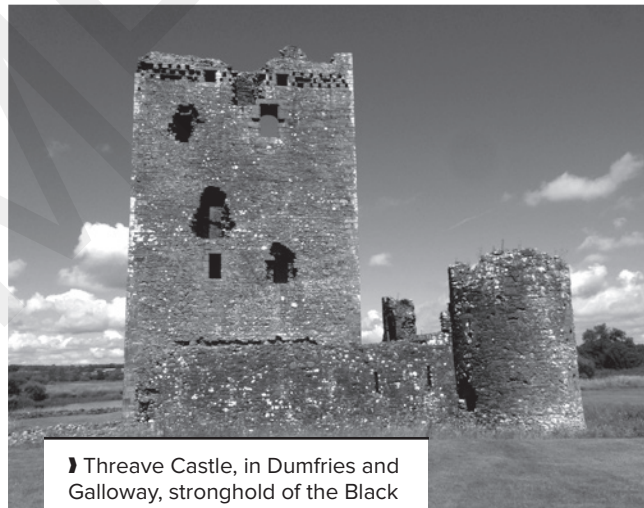
Over the next century, the clan built strength by its backing of various Scottish leaders whose names would carry significant weight through time: William Wallace and Robert the Bruce. So it's no surprise that these men were the heroes of Donald's boyhood play and sparked his imagination and a lifelong interest in epic poetry.

For much of the 14th and 15th centuries, the Douglas clan was the real ongoing power behind the throne. The Wars of Scottish Independence cemented this power, and the Douglasses joined forces with the Scots heroes Wallace and Bruce. William the Hardy/William de Harde, Lord of Douglas, in the late 1200s, governed Berwick-upon-Tweed during its siege by the English. After capture and release, he joined forces with William Wallace and continued to fight for independence from England. He was captured again and died in the Tower of London in 1302.

It was William the Hardy's son, James Douglas, who first was named a "Black Douglas." James the Black fought alongside Robert the Bruce in defeats at Methven and Dalrigh in 1306. Through these setbacks, the faction honed its skill in guerilla warfare, using the terrain and their intimate knowledge of it to great advantage — tactical intelligence to defend against England's greater numbers. This skill would play out when

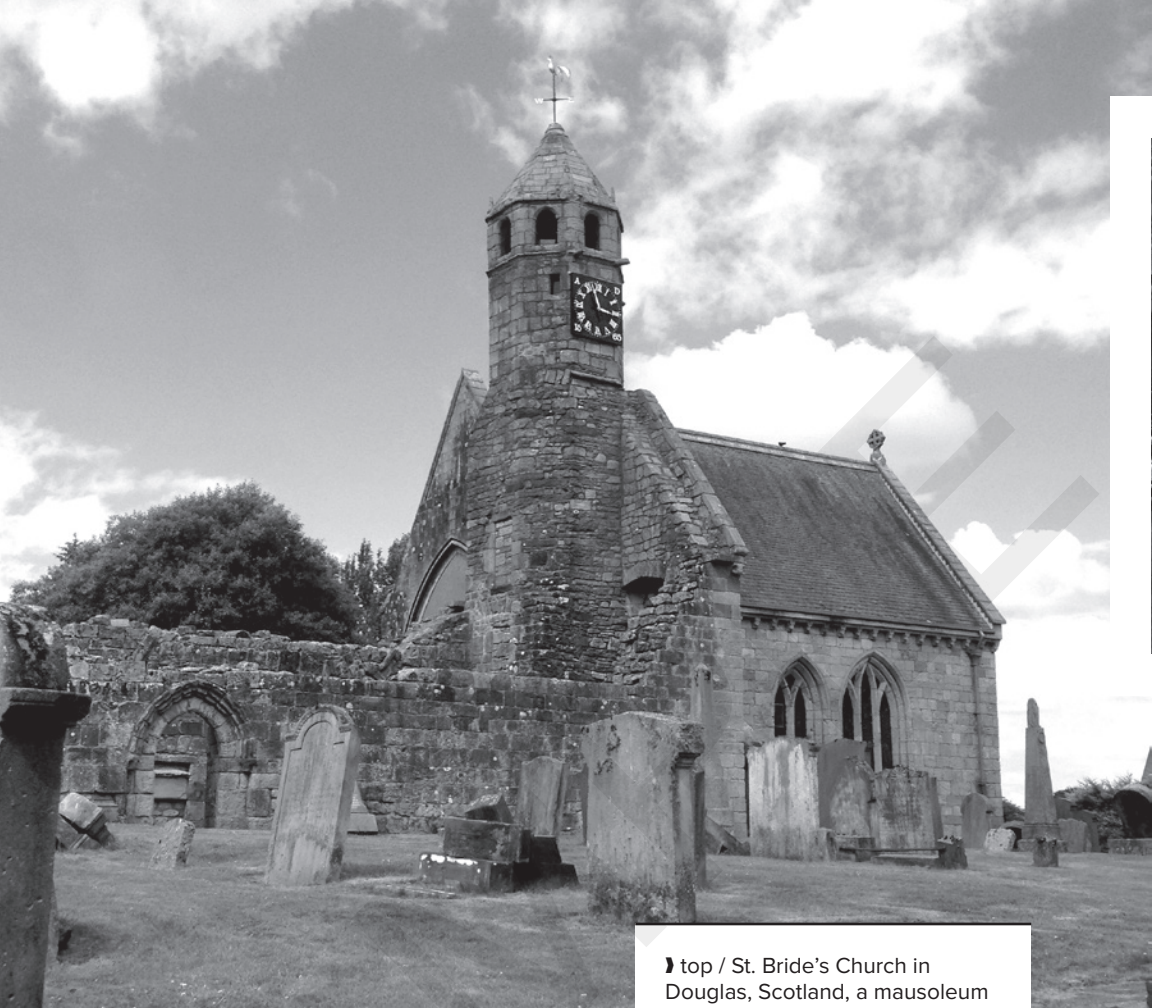
James the Black took back Roxburgh Castle at the junction of the rivers Tweed and Teriot in the Borders in 1313. With this success, James was bestowed the title "Knight Benevolent." He took command of the wing of the army for the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314.

This would be one of the major battles to survive in lore passed down and told to Donald when he was still a boy, the story so told in epic poems and narrative paintings from the *Scotichronicon* (the 15th



► Threave Castle, in Dumfries and Galloway, stronghold of the Black Douglasses from the 14th century.





】 top / St. Bride's Church in Douglas, Scotland, a mausoleum of the Black Douglasses that contains a leaden casket holding the heart of Good Sir James, killed in 1330.

】 right / The courtyard at Stirling Castle... the unfortunate landing spot of the corpse of William, the 8th Earl of Douglas.

century account of the Scots history by Walter Bower). A Scottish force of more than 10,000 men defeated an English army coalition estimated to be twice its size. Stirling Castle, then occupied by the English, was under siege by Robert the Bruce's army. When the English army's attempt to relieve the siege failed, the retreating army was vanquished by Robert's forces in a battle lasting two days. This victory to take back an important slice of Scottish homeland rang like a bell through the ages to young Douglas and impressed upon him the value of tactics over brute strength (or numbers).

From this victory, the Scots became somewhat unified under Robert the Bruce, now Robert I of Scotland. While the English called Robert's ally James "the Black" as an epithet, the Scots referred to him as "the



Good.” And thus began the line of the Douglas clan known as the Black Douglasses. There was another major branch of the family known as the Red Douglasses who descended from George Douglas (first Earl of Angus), the illegitimate son of Margaret Stuart and the first official Earl of Douglas (who was William son of Archibald, James the Black’s brother). The Black Douglasses’ title, created in 1358, was forfeit in 1455.

The renown for loyalty ascribed to the Black Douglasses stems from a promise that James made to Robert the Bruce, that in the event of his death, James would carry Robert’s heart to the Holy Land. Douglas was killed in a siege of Teba, Spain, on his journey to Jerusalem to fulfill that promise. The reliquary containing

Robert’s heart returned to Scotland where it was interned at Melrose Abbey. James Douglas’ own heart was returned to be interred at the Kirk of St. Bride; his bones have not been located, though they were said to have been returned as well.

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What a story for a young boy to hear! Such loyalty, dramatized by bones and hearts returning those thousands of miles to a cherished homeland... It’s no wonder that these same bonds called to Donald — and he would return to them, absorbed in reading the stories and poems, and later in life in his travels. The Douglas heart, found on the clan’s crest, symbolized the loyalty and integrity to which Donald aspired.

At a certain time of day, in the late afternoon, the golden light strikes the Kirk of St. Bride, the church in which the bones of several Douglas clan leaders lay interred — the heart of James the Black, among others. From this vantage point in the surrounding graveyard, there’s a lookout over the Douglas Water and across the shallow valley to where the ruins of Douglas Castle lay covered over in emerald grass and moss. These ruins — both the church and the castle — would have been in no better condition 80 years ago when Donald first made the journey to Scotland to see his family’s ancestral homeland.

The Black Douglas line (at least those carrying the Earl of Douglas title) met an unconscionably ignominious end at Stirling Castle in 1452, when James II of Scotland became weary of the 8th Earl of Douglas’s

formidable power. Legend has it that James II invited William Douglas to dinner at Stirling Castle, and when William refused to break ranks with his allies, the Earl of Crawford and John of Islay, the king stabbed the 8th Earl several times, and had his corpse thrown out of a second story window onto the courtyard below. This, as would be expected, sent William's brothers, James (now the 9th Earl of Douglas), Archibald (Earl of Moray), Hugh (Earl of Ormond), and John (Lord of Balvenie) into open rebellion against the crown. They ultimately met their end to power following the battle of Arkinholm in 1455, when the title "Earl of Douglas" was forfeit, and the Black Douglas line came to a close.

Only one brother survived: James, the 9th Earl, who was conveniently at Lindores Abbey, near Newburgh, Scotland. That power lost to the Black Douglas line was picked up in some respects by the Red Douglas line: George Douglas, 4th Earl of Angus, led the royal forces at Arkinholm. The Douglas estates were divided between James II's supporters, and one of those was that Red Douglas: George, Earl of Angus.

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The Douglas name continued to thrive forward through the years, in family lines and kinships taking on the clan name. Its members went into trade and industry and agriculture all over Scotland. When living conditions warranted and opportunities rose, Douglasses followed emigration paths into the rest of the U.K. and the Americas. Later on they continued their spread to the United States with waves of emigration from Britain starting in the 1700s—the man who would be Donald's great-great grandfather landed in New York in 1801.

Duncan Douglas (born 1771) came from Scotland to a still-wild land in many ways. Outside of New York City, the state of New York lay under forest and fells much like those of the country he'd left behind. Duncan, originally a tea merchant in Glasgow, in the fall of 1801 crossed over to America with his wife Isabella Campbell and newborn son, John Douglas. Their crossing was aided by Isabella's brother who either owned or captained a sailing vessel. Given the similarity to their native Argyllshire, it's natural, perhaps, that the Duncan Douglas family would find opportunity in the challenges of their new home, and specifically in the lumber business.

By 1800, roughly three-quarters of the state was settled in small villages, most of which had their own sawmill for processing timber, and



powered by human hands.<sup>2</sup> Arthur Noble built the first mill in Herkimer County in 1790, northwest of Albany. Fires were an early bane to the fledgling industry—which took trees selected for marketability rather than the general utility to burn or make rough housing—as farmers burned brush indiscriminately across the state. Forests of white pine still covered much of New York, however, when Duncan Douglas arrived. An advertisement for a one-half share of a sawmill in Ulster County (Rochester), New York, in November 1799 notes an “inexhaustible quantity of pine wood” nearby. Until 1850, lumbering was almost exclusively confined to white pine as a result.

In the lumber industry, “logmarks” have been used to trace the origin of the lumber since 1851, and one example includes a “Thomson, Douglas & Dix” mark, among a list of many.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, this logmark “D” with a slash, from the upper Hudson and its tributaries (the Scandaga, Schroon, and Boreas rivers), was owned in part by Curtis Noble Douglas, son of John Pettit Douglass and Henrietta Hughson Douglass, born in 1856. Curtis Douglas’ obituary states that he was “for years prominent in the wholesale lumber business and upstate public affairs.” He married Nancy Thomson and going into her family’s business he “contributed much to the advancement of the industry.”

Though these Curtis Douglasses happened to be unconnected to the Duncan Douglas line, their story helps illustrate the upstate New York life that Donald’s forebears inhabited. An old family genealogy only recounts that John Douglas “was originally a carpenter but started the lumber yard on West Street [in New York City]...previous to 1835.”<sup>4</sup>

Duncan passed away in 1852. There is a memorial inscription on an obelisk in the Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn for him and his wife that says, *“In Memory of Duncan Douglass – A Native of Scotland – Who died in the 82nd year of his age. Also of his wife Isabel – Who died in the 88th year of her age. For theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”*

Duncan and Isabel’s son John married Catherine Jane Miller and they had 11 children between the years 1832 and 1849, eight of whom were alive and listed with them on the 1850 Census for the “8th Ward of City of New York”—including Donald’s grandfather, Edward. At some point John and Catherine moved to Albany, as they are buried at Albany Rural Cemetery in Menands, New York.

<sup>2</sup> “A History of the Lumber Industry in New York State,” William F. Fox, 1902 (Archive.org)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.26

<sup>4</sup> “Douglass Genealogy,” shared by Dr. Laura Holt (via Ancestry.com). Note: In early genealogical documents the Douglas surname is spelled many different ways and “Douglass” is a variant.

Around the time when John Douglas's son Edward (Donald's grandfather) went into his father's lumber business, yellow pine was added to the mix of marketable wood, along with hemlock, balsam, and spruce. Edward had actually begun his working life prior to the Civil War at a jewelry manufacturer, having married Miss Wills (the source of Donald's middle name), and had a family, including son William Edward Douglas (Donald's father) born in Albany on January 1, 1863.

Following the Civil War, Edward joined his father's lumber business in Albany, but when the industry along the Erie Canal suffered recession, he moved back to New York City. This set the stage for Donald's family settling in, and then his childhood growing up in the Brooklyn neighborhoods of the 1890s.

# HONEST VISION

## The Donald Douglas Story

by Julie Boatman Filucci

**THE LEGENDARY DOUGLAS DC-3** flies on in the hearts of aviators around the globe, but few today know much about the man with the vision that brought her to the skies. From the author of *Together We Fly: Voices From The DC-3* comes an exploration into the life of Donald Wills Douglas, **founder of the Douglas Aircraft Company**, a genius innovator and engineer.

What inspired Douglas to envision a commercial airliner when aviation was in its infancy? What motivated him, and what key elements to his leadership style led Douglas Aircraft Company to success? What secret came to light that likely contributed to the downward spiral of that same business?

*Honest Vision: The Donald Douglas Story* brings into sharp focus a facet of a momentous time in world history, illuminated by one man's drive to make the skies available to all.



**JULIE BOATMAN FILUCCI** has made her career in the aviation industry, first at Jeppesen Sanderson, then the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, Cessna Aircraft Company, and again at Jeppesen under Boeing Flight Services. In 2014, she founded JulietBravoFox Media, an aviation marketing and consulting company. She holds flight instructor and airline transport pilot certificates, with Douglas DC-3 and Cessna Citation Mustang type ratings.



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