

AUGUST HOFFER

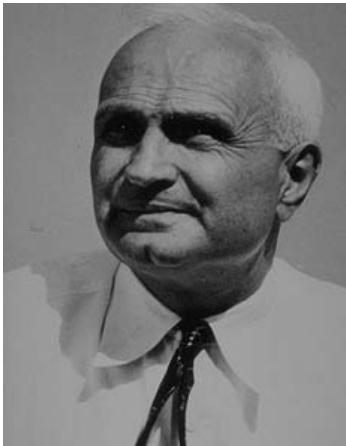


August "Gus" Hoffer was working as a farmer in Central Minnesota when war came to the United States. He knew there was a possibility of being drafted into the military so he tried to enlist in the Redwood Falls National Guard unit. Gus was rejected for the National Guard when they saw a problem with his tonsils. After getting his tonsils taken care of, Gus again tried to enlist in the National Guard but was told that all slots in the unit were full. Hoffer decided that rather than being drafted into the military, he would enlist on his own terms. He wanted to try to become a pilot.

Gus didn't know much about flying, but while working at a farm, a neighbor offered him a ride in a Taylor Craft air plane. He realized during the ride that he loved flying. When it came time to decide on military service, Gus first went to the Army and took tests to become an Army pilot. He failed the test but this did not deter him from wanting to try again. About two weeks later he went back to take a test, but this time with the Navy, and passed easily.

Hoffer enlisted in the US Navy in August 1942, becoming active on 7 September 1942. He was sent to Aberdeen South Dakota in November 1942 to Northern States Teachers College for three months. Here he began learning the beginnings of avionics. Gus was enrolled in a CPT (Civilian Pilot Training) program, specifically, Elementary CPT. They mainly learned general flight training, to prepare them for their eventual careers as pilots.

After training in South Dakota he was sent to St. Olaf College for 6 weeks. Gus says that here his day consisted of classes of Mathematics and Physics in the morning, then lunch, then classes of Mathematics and Physics in the afternoon. Math and physics seemed to be pretty important for him to learn and he felt that he didn't have too much problem with it. He also spent time learning Naval Lore and officer prep training, drilling, and learning Naval history and officer responsibilities.



U of M coach Bernie Bierman, USMC Colonel

Athletics training was another important part of Gus' training. He spent time playing football and basketball, and doing a lot of swimming. The man in charge of the Athletic program for the Navy when Gus was there was Bernie Bierman, the University of Minnesota coach that brought the Gophers to multiple championships in the 1930s and 1940s. Bierman was a Colonel in the Marine Corps, whose job was to work with the physical fitness of the men.



Gus Hoffer as a Cadet while in training.

After St Olaf, Gus continued his studies at the University of Iowa in Iowa City. After all of his schooling Gus was trained in Math and Physics, but also in Meteorology for evaluating the weather while flying and in Astronomy for navigation while flying.

Upon completion of training in Iowa, Gus was asked where he wanted to go for Primary flight training.

He decided to go to Olathe Naval Air Station in Kansas.



Stearman Bi-Plane, like the style flown by Gus at Olathe Naval Air Station in Kansas. This style plane was an extremely popular training plane for both the Army and the Navy.

At Olathe, Hoffer flew in Stearman Bi-Wing aircraft. Although the primary purpose of the training was the principles of flying, they did get a chance to have some fun as well. They spent time practicing formation flying, and night flying. They also focused on and practiced aerial acrobatics. The Stearman is known for its acrobatic capabilities.



After completion of his Primary Flight training in Kansas, Hoffer was sent to Beville Texas, to begin instrument flying. His instrument training began in a flight simulator, which taught them how to read and understand the instruments in the aircraft. The Aircraft the he trained in was the Vultee SNV-1 Airplane.



Vultee SNV Aircraft

While in Texas August served at Walden Field in Corpus Christi to further advance his flight training and log flying hours. He flew in SNJ Aircraft. They flew Gunnery and were tested in acrobatics.



Naval SNJ Training Aircraft like those flown by Gus in training.



Ensign
August
Hoffer -
US Navy

In December 1943 while at Corpus Christi Cadet August Hoffer was Commissioned as an Ensign in the US Navy. When he graduated from Flight Training in Texas, he was asked by one of the instructors if he would like to comeback to the school to become an instructor. Gus told him that the decision wasn't entirely up to him and had to see what the Navy had in store for him. The Navy was losing a lot of pilots in the war and needed Gus to join a squadron and eventually go into the war.

Before his commission, Gus was also allowed to decide if he wanted to be a Naval pilot or a pilot for the Marine Corps after graduation. He decided that he wanted to fly for the Navy.

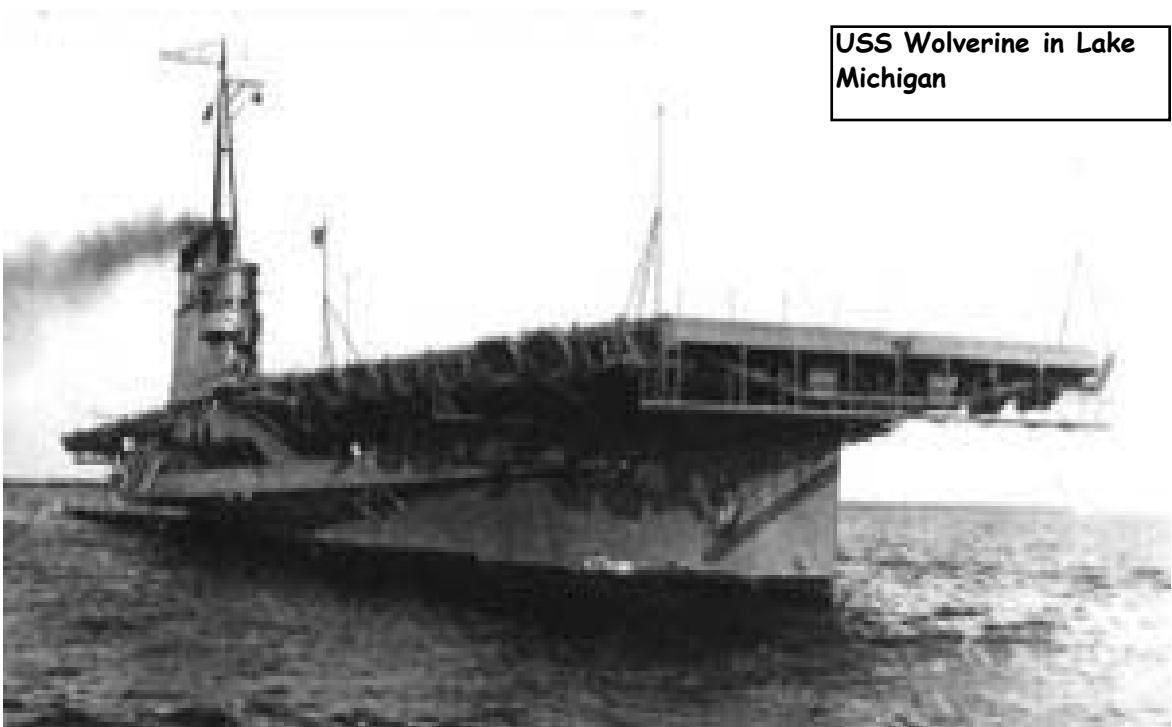
After graduation and commissioning, Gus was sent to Jacksonville Florida, where he received orders to report to Pensacola.

Hoffer was assigned to a small group, for further training, flying yet another type of Aircraft, SBD's. The instructors Gus had were all veteran combat pilots of the Pacific Theater of Operations. The Aircraft, SBDs, were Diving Bombers. During his time in Florida, Hoffer flew a number of Navigation Hops over the Atlantic.



He also practiced carrier style landings on land numerous times. They flew into Daytona Beach because all of the fighter bases were already full.

In February 1944 Hoffer was sent to Glenview Illinois for training on Air Craft Carrier Landing. At the time the US Navy had put a smaller Aircraft Carrier, the USS Wolverine, in Lake Michigan for training pilots for Aircraft carrier landing. During his time in Illinois, Gus made 8 landings on the Wolverine.



After his training in Illinois, Hoffer was sent to Norfolk Virginia and then on to Atlantic City. He was assigned to Fighting Squadron 81 (VF-81).

In the squadron book, it is noted of Gus: "Whether the machine was made by McCormick to till the soil of Minnesota or by Grumman to roam the ship ways of the world, old Gus characteristically took the transition in stride. His husky frame, broad grin, good humor, easy going manner and amiable chuckle will long be remembered by his squadron mates."



The squadron was formed on 1 March 1944 in Atlantic City. The men of the squadron, including Gus, began flying the F6F-3 Hellcat Aircraft. The group practiced flying formations, carrier breakups, gunnery, and bombing while in Atlantic City. In the spring of 1944, the squadron was sent to Otis Field in Cape Cod Massachusetts. Otis Field was an Army Air Corps base. They had 36 Hellcat planes that needed to be flown up there. Gus piloted one of the aircraft to Otis Field.

At Otis, they practiced and trained. They worked on carrier landings on ships in the Atlantic. Gus remembers doing both night and day landings. They also trained in Dive Bombing and Torpedo Bombing practice missions. Over and over again they flew their F6F's through the skies above, learning with every flight.

Gus specifically recalls being out flying on D-Day, 6 June 1944. He remembers hearing about it over radio communications and on the radio after completing his flight.

In August, they were granted a leave and then were transferred to San Diego California to board the USS Hancock. They left California for Pearl Harbor, and then to Maui at Puunene and the Naval Air Strip.

While in Hawaii the squadron continued to train and practice for the eventual fighting with the Japanese. They flew gunnery, bombing, air support, and rockets during their training in Hawaii.



The stage was set for Fighter Squadron 81 to go head to head with the Japanese, and Gus was set to go with them. He had been flying all of his training missions, practicing night flying, and carrier take offs and landings. They also practiced bombing and gunnery missions into a small uninhabited island that became so riddled with ordinance during the war years, more than 50 years later it is still closed to the public.

While in Hawaii, August flew over and around all of the islands except for the big island. After Pearl Harbor, the air space over that one was still closed, even to US Naval training missions.

Fighter Squadron 81 (VF-81) Patch



Gus's plan changed on the night of 14 October 1944. At around 1930 hours (7:30 pm) Gus was sitting in his plane getting ready for a night flight, waiting on the taxi mat in Maui. He was fully fueled and loaded with ammunition. Another plane, piloted by Lieutenant Junior Grade Henry B Hales Jr., was getting ready to move into position for takeoff when something went wrong. Instead of going where he should have, Hale's plane came the wrong way and barreled at high speed into Gus's plane, head on. The collision set off the fuel and ammunition in Gus's plane and turned both planes into a fireball.

Somehow in the wreckage, Gus was able to get out of the plane, but was fully engulfed in fire. His flight suit was on fire, his helmet, everything. The leather gloves he wore were charred to his skin. Gus did

what he could to clear out of the fiery clothes. Other men from the flight line rushed to his aid. Gus recalled watching one of the men patting out flames on his legs and body.

Henry Hales, pilot of the other plane, wasn't able to make it out. He was killed in the crash. Seaman First Class Paul Zamera, serving as the plane captain for Hoffer, was taxiing Gus to the runway. Seaman Zamera also died in the crash that night. Both planes were a total loss. The opinion on the Navy Administrative report states, "Hales became confused by various lights in the vicinity and was unable to re-orient himself in time to align himself on the runway." Gus suffered second and third degree burns from the crash.

Gus had been with the Squadron for a little over 7 months. The Squadron boarded the USS Wasp and went on to fight the Japanese. They engaged the enemy throughout the Pacific including the Philippines, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and in Japan.

After the crash, Gus was sent to the main infirmary at the Naval Air Base at Puunene Maui. He remained hospitalized until the Navy felt he was stable enough to travel to the mainland for further medical attention. Hoffer was loaded on a stretcher, and loaded into a DC-3 and flown into Pearl Harbor. On 30 November, Hoffer was put on the Hospital Ship MS Welteveeden. He traveled by ship to Oakland California, arriving on 8 December. On 15 December 1944 he was admitted to the Naval Hospital at Great Lakes Illinois.

Gus spent the next seven months in the hospital recovering from the crash and burns. He rose to the rank of Lieutenant Junior Grade while in the Hospital, but didn't get the rank until after he got out and went back into the Navy circulation. After his recovery he was released from the hospital on 26 July 1945, and was released for full duty.

He was sent to Glenview Illinois again to begin Type 2 flying. He served as an instructor for a group of Midshipmen from the Naval Academy. Gus was then sent to Pensacola Florida at Corey Field for Type 1 flying and began training for combat flight again.

Then the war ended, but Gus wasn't released from the Navy. He was transferred to the Naval Air Base and served as the Assistant Officer of the Day of the Main Air Base.

Gus Hoffer was discharged from the US Navy on 23 February 1946. After active duty he started in the Naval Reserve unit in Willmar. He stayed in the Naval Reserve for four more years and rose to the rank of Lieutenant. He decided to end his career in the Navy after 7 years in the Active and Reserve forces. He was farming full time and it was getting tougher for him to go for the training.

Gus moved to Kandiyohi shortly after his active duty service. He was married and had three daughters, Lynette, LeeAnn, and Laurie. He became a leader for the local Civil Air Patrol unit in Willmar for a time in the 1960's.



Gus Hoffer's Naval Uniforms. At top is left is his Cadet White uniform, top middle is his Ensign Blue Uniform, and top right is his Khaki Uniform. Bottom Left is his last White Uniform, bottom middle is his Aviation Green Uniform, and bottom right is his final Dress Blue Uniform.





Above left are Gus' Navy Dress White shoes. Above right is a pair of Navy swim trunks. Below left is a Flight Helmet and Oxygen Mask worn by Gus while flying in the Navy. Below right is his Navy wool sweater.





In the late 1960's, Gus became a leader of the Willmar Civil Air Patrol Unit. The Civil Air Patrol is an Auxiliary of the United States Air Force, and allowed Gus to fly along with teaching and training youth his love of flying.



THURSDAY, JULY 27, 1967

Willmar Civil Air Patrol Buys USAF Plane

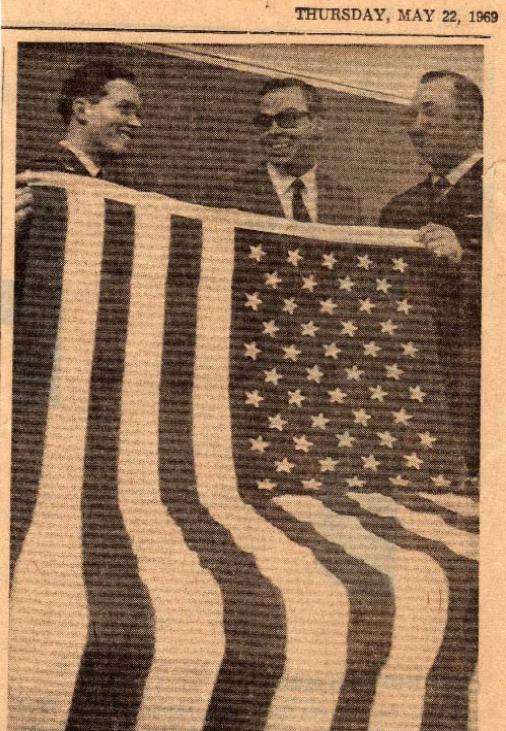
WILLMAR — An air force plane, a Ryan Navion 4-place plane, was delivered to the Willmar squadron of the Civil Air Patrol Saturday.

This 205 horse-power plane with a cruising speed of 150-160 mph will be used for air search and rescue operations, training and other activities of the Willmar CAP. The purchase of the plane was completed by the air patrol unit of Willmar with financial assistance from the County of Kandiyohi and the City of Willmar.

The Willmar CAP, commanded by Lt. August Hoffer, comprises 18 seniors, and 12 cadets. The group meets regularly on Monday nights, such sessions having been held at the municipal airport and at the Legion building.

The accompanying photos were taken at the airport on Saturday, when the local CAP squadron was on hand to receive the recently acquired plane.

Col. Robert Cleary, commander of the Minnesota Wing of the Civil Air Patrol, on the left, is presenting the ownership certificate and the plane's log to Lt. August Hoffer, commander of the Willmar Squadron. On right is Col. William Ramsey of Minnesota CAP. In the background is shown a part of the new plane.



CAP Gets Flag

WILLMAR — Cadet Airmen Second Class Larry Taylor, left, and August Hoffer, right, commander of the Willmar Civil Air Patrol, accept a U. S. flag from Glen Deutz, who presented the flag to the local CAP on behalf of Sixth District Congressman John Zwach. The flag, which has flown over the nation's Capitol, was presented to the local group on May 15.



Pictured here are some of the men and cadets of the Willmar Civil Air Patrol unit, assembled at the municipal airport on Saturday to witness the arrival of their recently purchased airplane.

Standing, left to right, are CAP seniors, Jim Belknap, Lt.

Hoffer, Luverne Sondrol, Conrad Aasen, Paul Strandberg, Luverne Sondrol, Doyle Eckhoff, Rog Tinter, Irv Tallakson, Don Steigerwald, and Bruce Johnson.

Kneeling are the cadets, James Hagert, Loren Underland, Brad Burch, Larry Taylor, Stan Sellner, Dave Underland, Craig Peterson and Wayne Arnzen.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 21, 1969

Willmar CAP Called to Search For Missing Plane

WILLMAR — The Willmar squadron of Civil Air Patrol was called Saturday evening to assist in the search for a lost aircraft piloted by Frayne Anderson of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The plane carried four members of the Augustana College debate team and their coach.

Members answering the alert in Willmar were Capt. August Hoffer of Kandiyohi, squadron commander; Irwin Tallakson, warrant officer, Willmar; Capt. Dennis S. Claypool, Sgt. 1st Class Ray Treter (pilot) of Willmar and Roger Thompson of Blomkest.

Search planes are based at the Pipestone Municipal Airport. The Willmar squadron search mission comprises an area west of Pipestone and north of Sioux Falls. The search mission began Sunday at 8:30 a.m., but was called off at 11:30 a.m., because of severe weather conditions. The crew is on standby and will resume the search as soon as weather permits.

In June 2007, Gus traveled to St. Paul Minnesota for the dedication of the World War II Memorial on the capital grounds. Each veteran was presented with a special WWII medal recognizing them for their service.

He traveled on bus with about 80 other veterans from Kandiyohi County for the event. They saw static displays of WWII era equipment and vehicles, fly overs from WWII Aircraft, medal presentations, roll call of the fallen from the state, and everyone in attendance was given cake for the celebration. Thousands attended this dedication ceremony.

In 2010, Gus' wife of over 50 years passed away. He continued to live at the farm near Kandiyohi. That summer, an opportunity came about for Gus to travel to Washington D.C. as a part of the Honor Flight, Southwest Minnesota based in Luverne MN. Excited at the prospect, Gus signed up to go.

Soon, Gus' service to the Civil Air Patrol was over, and he returned to activities closer to home. He continued farming, and raising his three daughters. Later in life, he retired from farming and cared for his wife who was growing ill.

In February/March 1999, Gus, his wife Tess, and their three daughters traveled back to Hawaii. Gus had the chance after nearly 55 years, to see the area that he flew around and from, and the sight of that horrible crash.

The hangers and bunkers that once housed the aircraft were gone, leaving only large grassy covered areas in the ground. The old flight line that he flew out of was now a racing strip. Even with all of the changes to the landscape, Gus knew exactly where he was and how to get there, without a map or directions.

Even after all those years, navigating in the area was still like a second nature to him. When Gus talked with one of the people that lived in the area, they had known nothing about the Naval Air Base having been there. After over fifty years, it had been forgotten. But for Hoffer, the time spent in the Navy on Maui, and the crash was something he could never forget.



Medal presented to the World War II veterans at the 2007 dedication of the Minnesota World War II memorial in St. Paul.



Gus on the bus with my Daughter, Savannah, prior to leaving Willmar for his trip to D.C.

On 30 September 2010, Gus and 10 others from Kandiyohi County boarded a bus for Luverne MN to depart on Honor Flight the following morning. The next two days would be crammed with traveling and activities.

Kandiyohi County Veterans services allowed the use of their van to transport them all to Luverne where an informational dinner was held that evening. At 5am on 1 October, the group traveled to Sioux Falls South Dakota to board a plane for D.C.

Over 100 veterans traveled on Honor Flight, along with a number of Guardians. I had the honor to travel as Gus' Guardian on the trip.

Arriving in Washington, Gus was surprised to see the huge amount of people there to welcome them. Hundreds of people were standing in a line all the way out of the airport to welcome him and the other Veterans to Washington. Leaving the Airport, the first stop was the World War II Memorial at the Capital Mall.



The group spent a couple of hours touring the Memorial and visiting with each other. They took a large group picture of all of the participants of the Honor Flight prior to them going on their way to tour everything.

Gus and I walked through the memorial looking at all of the sculptures and relief carvings. All too soon, it was time to leave for the next stop.





Following the World War II Memorial, the group went to the Lincoln Memorial, Korean Memorial and Vietnam Memorial. At the base of the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Gus and his friend Alfred posed for a picture with the reflecting pond and Washington monument in the background.



Other stops the group made were at the Air Force Memorial, Marine Corps Memorial, Navy Memorial, Arlington and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum.

Over two days, we made a rapid tour of many of the highlights of Washington D.C. The group stayed at the Westin hotel in Alexandria Virginia for a night with a “thank you” banquet in honor of the veterans.

The last stop on the second day was the Air & Space Museum where Gus had

the opportunity to see a Hellcat F-6F airplane again. As he stood looking at the plane, a man with a couple of kids came by and started to ask some questions. Gus was able to help talk to them a little bit about flying that aircraft. Also at the museum was the Enola Gay bomber, which dropped the Atomic Bomb and helped end the war.



At the send off in the Airport, another line of people were there to greet them, and again thank them for their service. Lines of Scouts, military service members, and others lined the whole way to the gate of the airplane.

We arrived back to Sioux Falls around 10pm on Saturday 2 October 2010. The whirlwind trip was almost over. That night, we traveled back to Kandiyohi County and dropped off all of the veterans who traveled on Honor Flight.

Gus was the last one home that night, arriving home at nearly 4am. The whole ride back to the area the men talked, laughed, and recalled all of the fun they had on their trip.

It was a tiring trip, but Gus loved it. Within a couple of days he was rested up, and talking to everyone about his excursion.



Gus became a very close friend over the years. In November 2010, Gus was recognized during a special program at the Veteran's Day Observance in Willmar with a Defender of Freedom Award from the American Patriot Program. Numerous family and friends attended the special showing of recognition for Gus.



Soon, Gus' health grew worse. The cold Minnesota winters took its toll on his lungs which were already damaged from the crash in Hawaii during the war. He eventually had to leave the farm and stay in an assisted living center in Willmar. In March 2013, Gus celebrated his 93rd Birthday with family and close friends at the Assisted Living center in Willmar. Shortly after, he started Hospice Care.

On 17 May 2013, with the help of MN Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Chapter 34, a special transport was rented and Gus was brought home to his farm near Kandiyohi one last time. After a brief stop at the cemetery just south of his home, he went around the farm looking at the sheds, land, and had lunch at home.

A week later, on 24 May, Gus traveled to the Fagen Fighters museum in Granite Falls Minnesota as a part of the Hospice Program, "Sentimental Journey". The museum gave him a great tour of the various aircraft in the collection, and talked with him in depth about his experiences in World War II.

August "Gus" Hoffer
March 22, 1920 - June 21, 2013

KANDIYOH - August "Gus" Hoffer, 93, of Kandiyohi, died Friday, June 21, at Sterling House in Willmar.

Funeral services will be 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 26, at Ebenezer Lutheran Church in Kandiyohi. Interment will be in the church cemetery with military honors provided by the American Legion and the Patriot Guard.

Visitation: 5-8 p.m. Tuesday, June 25, at Peterson Brothers Funeral Home in Willmar and one hour prior to the service at the church. In lieu of flowers, memorials are preferred to Rice Hospice or the Disabled American Veterans.



August "Gus" Hoffer was born March 22, 1920, on the family farm in Nobles County, Minnesota, to Inger (Fredericksen) and Herman Hoffer. He was baptized and confirmed in the Christian faith. Gus attended grade school and graduated from Delhi High School in 1938. Following high school, he worked for area farmers and enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1942. He served as a naval aviator until his honorable discharge in 1946.

In 1946, he started farming northeast of Kandiyohi. On September 24, 1947, he married Thoreta "Tess" Knudsen. To this union three daughters were born. They shared 63 years of marriage before Tess's death on April 10, 2010.

Besides being a dairy farmer, Gus was a DeKalb seed corn dealer for many years. He had been a member of Ebenezer Lutheran Church in Kandiyohi since 1946. He served on numerous boards over the years in addition to being a commander of the Willmar Civil Air Patrol. He was a member of the Atwater American Legion and the Willmar Area Disabled American Veterans.

Gus enjoyed spending time with and raising his daughters and square dancing with friends. He also enjoyed camping and fishing. He especially loved his John Deere tractors.

He is survived by three daughters, Lynette (and Joseph) Gordon of St. James, LeeAnn (and Craig) Goran of Spicer and Laurie (and Robert) Ellanson of Lake Crystal; six grandchildren, Lincoln Gordon, Lindsey (and Kyle) Olson, Michael Aitkin, William Aitkin, Andrew (and Karen) Fostervold and Daniel (and Ashley) Aitkin; and six great-grandchildren, Hannah, Andrew & Ayla Aitkin, Ava & Ila Olson, and Castiel Fostervold. Also surviving are one brother, Charles Hoffer of St. Louis Park; four sisters-in-law, Virginia Knudsen of Lakeland, FL, Frances Knudsen of Hector, Marilyn Knudsen of Kandiyohi and Ramona Perron of Waconia; a very special friend, Mary Nelsen of Willmar.

He was preceded in death by his parents; his wife, Tess in 2010; one sister, Mae Hewitt; one brother, Edward Hoffer; and a son-in-law, Robert Aitkin in 2009.

On Friday, 21 June 2013 my friend Gus passed away at Sterling House in Willmar, taking his final flight. His Funeral was held on 26 June and he was laid to rest next to his Wife, Tess, at Ebenezer Lutheran Church Cemetery in rural Kandiyohi. The Patriot Guard stood a flag line during an Honor Mission for Gus that day and a local pilot performed a fly over at the cemetery. Military tributes were paid by the American Legion Post 167 and the DAV Chapter 34.

