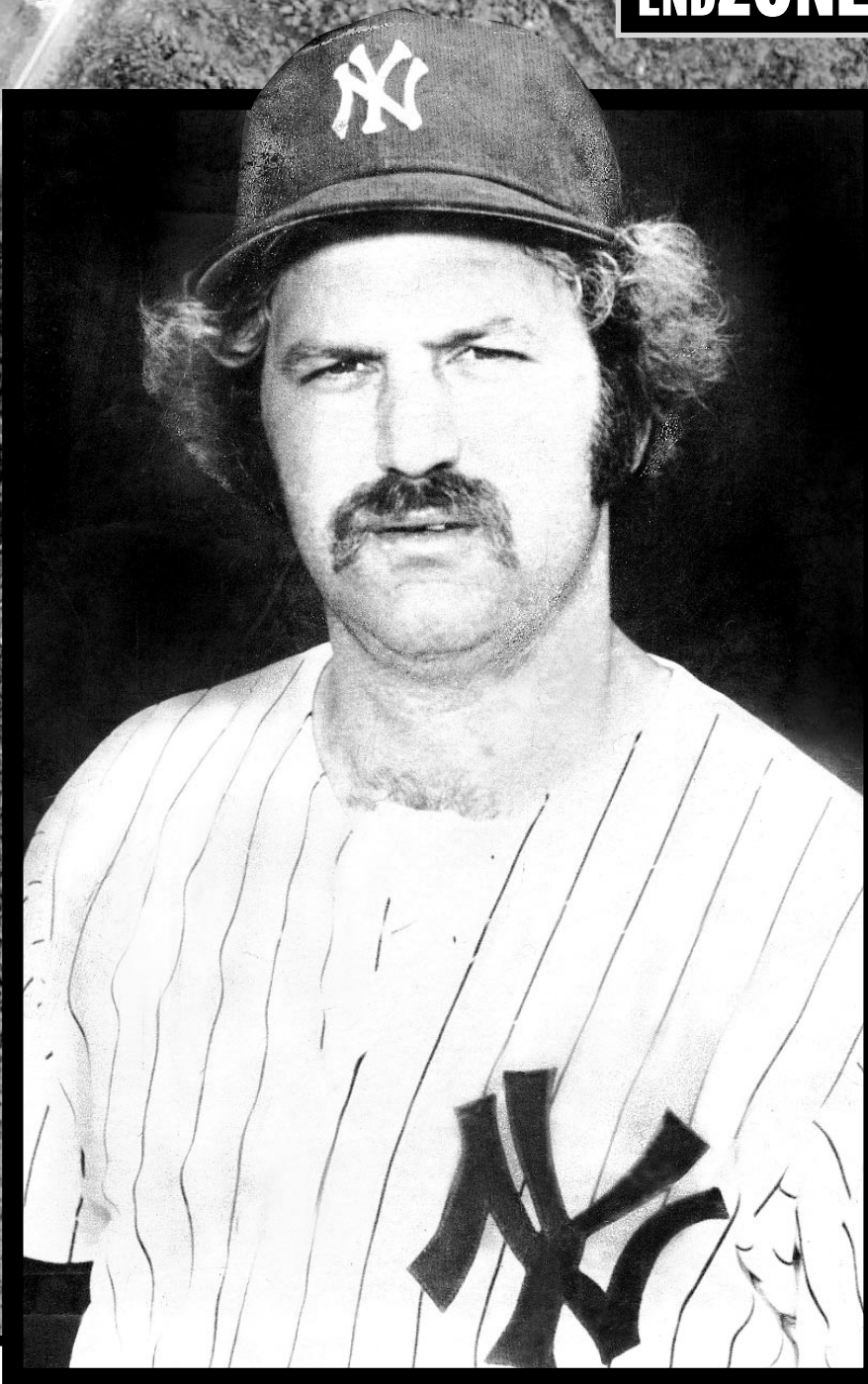


Thurman Munson (r.) died 25 years ago when his plane crashed on Greensburg Road in Canton, Ohio, just 600 feet from the airport runway.



AKRON CANTON AIRPORT



whenever she was with him. It was a wonderful way to feel.



**3:10 p.m.** Munson sits in the cockpit of his new twin-engine jet, a seven-seat aircraft with N15NY written on both sides, along with David Hall, his flight instructor, and Jerry Anderson, a real-estate associate and friend he met playing handball at the Canton YMCA. The 5-11, 195-pound Munson liked to call the 5-7, 155-pound Anderson "Munchkin." Anderson has just returned from a flight of his own when Munson asks if he wants to see his new jet. Anderson says sure. Hall is scheduled to take a student up at 3 o'clock but changes plans after Munson asks if he'd like to go up and see how the Citation flies. They sit in the plane, on the ground, for close to a half hour. Munson enjoys educating Hall and Anderson about the plane, and how it differs from turbo-prop aircraft. It is Munson's fourth

airplane in not even 18 months, a rapid climb by any standard. He has logged 516 hours of flying time in all, 33 of them in a Citation.



Thurman Munson never wanted to be famous, or special. One of the reasons he didn't want to live in North Jersey anymore during the season is that the celebrity got to be too much. He just wanted to be the boy from Canton. Once in Manhattan, he stopped for gas with the family. He was dressed in jeans and a flannel shirt and no socks. Munson almost never wore socks. He pumped his own gas and cleaned his windshield and when he was done a guy pulled in and said, "Hey, buddy, can you fill me up?" Munson filled him up. Diana had to push him like crazy before he called Neil Diamond's people to see if he could meet the singer after a concert in Cleveland. Munson didn't want to be a green fly — his term for hangers-on

and celebrity worshippers. When he traveled with Munson, Jerry Anderson was struck at how many ballplayers would hook up with women — and how faithful Munson was to Diana and the kids.

Munson never really wanted to talk about baseball with Anderson; he'd much rather talk about where a new office park might go, or just joke around. When Anderson, a pilot himself, flew with Munson to Toronto for a Yankees-Blue Jays series, a man at the terminal greeted Munson, who introduced him to Anderson by saying, "I'd like you to meet my friend, Willie Randolph."

Anderson and the guy shook hands, Anderson trying to suppress his laughter. Munson had a straight face. As they walked away, Anderson said, "Thurman, Willie's black."

"These guys up here are all hockey fans," Munson said. "They won't know the difference."



**3:35 p.m.** Engines on, headset in place, secured with a seat belt but not a shoulder harness, Munson taxis N15NY from the private-aviation terminal toward Runway 23. Hall is in the co-pilot's seat, Anderson behind him in a rear-facing seat. Munson marvels at how smoothly the plane taxis and lets Hall take the controls briefly. Neither passenger knows what Munson's plans are until he contacts the tower and says he would like to

stay in the local traffic pattern and do a series of touch-and-go landings. He will be flying the plane to Teterboro Airport in New Jersey the next day for the Yankees' weekend series. He has had his jet rating for the Citation for just 16 days. "From the onset to completion of training Mr. Munson displayed well above average skills and judgment as a pilot," his instructor with Flight Safety International wrote in his evaluation.



Michael Munson, the youngest of the Munson's three children, celebrated his fourth birthday on July 29, 1979. Now 28, he has grown up into a 5-10, 240-pounder with slabs of muscles, a serious weight-lifting habit and a dream of going into the restaurant business. He played four years of pro ball and always wore No. 15 and always played his father's position. He was signed by the Yankees organization in 1995, playing three years and then spending a final year in Double-A ball with the Giants.

"It felt like I was competing against a ghost, because I didn't know if he would've been proud of what I'd done," Michael Munson says. "Nothing people said affected me, and the comparisons didn't affect me, because the pressure I put on myself was more than any pressure other people put on me."

Michael was hyperactive as a little boy, and often woke up five or six times

Continued on next page

FROM THE NTSB AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT REPORT

The probable cause of the accident was the pilot's failure to recognize the need for . . . sufficient airspeed to prevent a stall into the ground during an attempted landing. . . Contributing to the pilot's inability to recognize the problem and to take proper action was his failure to use the appropriate checklist.

