

The Pilot

Jim Tobul is the man behind the stick in "Korean War Hero", but rather than the owner, he considers himself more the caretaker of this beautiful warbird and her storied history. An avid pilot for over 40 years, Jim takes great pride in carrying the legacy of the veteran Corsair to airshows all over North America. He lives in Bamberg, SC, and owns a successful industrial hydraulic accumulator manufacturing business which was started with his father, Joe.

"It's very important that we keep the history of these aircraft and the men that flew them alive and active," said Jim in a recent interview. "The role these heroes played in securing democracy and our freedom cannot be measured. We owe them a great debt, and it is an honor and privilege to carry on for them and tell their stories."

Jim began flying at the age of 9 years old flying his dad's Stinson 108 and acquired his pilot's license in the mid '70's. His dad purchased a 1943 North American SNJ-4 in 1980 and Jim started to fly that plane in 1981. Since that time, Jim has flown many different Warbirds such as the B-25, T-28, L-5, B-17, P-51, F-18 Super Hornet, PBY-5 and others. Currently, Jim fly's his company's Mitsubishi MU-2 Solitaire all over the US and has flown this type since 1987.

Over the years, Jim & Joe have owned many different aircraft such as F8F-1, F8F-2 Bearcats, T-28, Goodyear Inflatoplane, 300 & 400 series Cessna's, C-152, C-172 and others.

Jim has amassed over 5000 hours of flight time, many at the controls of this military icon. He also flies his SNJ-4 at airshows when not flying the Corsair.

Jim's father Joe served in the United States Marines, and instilled his love of military aircraft in his son. After Jim attended college, the two set out to find a warbird to restore and fly. In 1981, they found a Corsair in a lime and avocado orchard near Homestead, FL. Completely dismantled, the aircraft's 10,000 lb weight made for quite a project to relocate, much less restore, but Joe and Jim made the purchase, took the aircraft home to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and began an arduous 10-year restoration.

In 1991, the "Korean War Hero" flew again, and both Jim and Joe piloted the airplane at airshows all over the East Coast until November 2002. Sadly, while on the way to an airshow in Columbia, SC, Joe developed engine trouble and died in the resulting crash. Onlookers said he made a heroic effort to steer the plane away from as many homes and populated areas as he could, ultimately crashing into a grove of pines.

Jim stored the wrecked plane parts for six years, then decided to put it back in flying condition. He worked at it for a year himself, laboring over the project while finding the parts and materials he needed. Then an old friend, Bill Klaers of Westpac Restorations in Colorado Springs convinced him to send the aircraft to him to finish the job. Finish he did, and two years later the "Korean War Hero" took to the skies once more.

Jim now performs at 18 or more airshows per year, bringing tears to the eyes of veterans and awakening the curiosity of upcoming generations to learn more about the fight for freedom waged by those who came before. He also is proud to participate in the U.S. Navy Legacy Flight program, in which he flies

alongside a modern Navy F-18 Super Hornet fighter in a poignant display of military heritage and tribute.

“Korean War Hero”

The "Korean War Hero" F4U Corsair has a legendary history. She served two tours on two different carriers. She has the distinction of flying over 200 combat missions.

June thru October 1951 Aboard the USS Boxer (CV21), VF884 Naval Reserve Squadron from Olathe, Kansas. This squadron was known as the "Bitter Birds" using the Kansas Jayhawk on their jacket patch. This exact aircraft was flown in combat by the following pilots:

Lt. Duane Edge from Brondon, Mississippi

Lt. R. Fritz Schierenberg from Fort Collins, Co.

Lt. Robert Warner from Pensacola, Florida

Lt. Bill Wallace

We have in hand their logbook entries showing the types of missions flown and targets struck.

While in Korea, The "Bitter Birds" flew 1,519 missions, dropping 750,000 lbs of bombs and firing 3,800 rockets, also 1,400,000 rounds of ammunition. The fighting did take its terrible toll. Eight pilots of VF884 were killed or listed as missing in action, including the squadron's skipper Lcdr. G.F. Carmichael USNR. Normal squadron compliment of pilots were approximately 22 to 24 pilots.

December thru May 1951 Aboard USS Valley Forge (CV45), VF653 Naval Reserve Squadron from Akron, Ohio. This squadron patch emblem consisted of a dragon holding a shield which had a golden triangle and a checkerboard stripe. The golden triangle signified the large percentage of Pittsburgh area pilots in the squadron. The checkerboard stripe signified the winning of the Cleveland National Air Races twice by their Skipper Lt. Cmdr. Cook Cleland. Cook won both races with Corsairs. Many other pilots of VF653 previously flew in World War II.

"Korean War Hero" was flown by at least five VF653 pilots in combat:

Cmdr. Cook Cleland Pensacola, Florida

Lt. Henry Sulkowski Bel Air, Maryland

Lt. J.R. Rohleder (became Admiral) Az

Lt. Robert Jeffel Pittsburgh, Pa

Lt. David Robertson San Diego, CA

Six pilots of VF653 were killed or listed as missing in action during this combat tour. The greatest toll was taken by enemy radar guided anti-aircraft guns while repeatedly striking the same targets.

From approximately 1960 to 1970, the aircraft flew with the Honduran Air Force. In 1970 was sold to an American Airline pilot and brought to the USA.

Joe & Jim Tobul bought this airplane in 1981 and started a very long rebuilding project. Ten (10) years later "Korean War Hero" proudly flew again on December 8, 1991 fittingly over the Pittsburgh skies.