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Gone West: Aviation Legend Bob Hoover

Called 'The Greatest Stick And Rudder Man Who Ever Lived' By General Jimmy Doolittle

ANN is deeply shocked and saddened to learn of the passing of aviation legend R.A. "Bob" Hoover, who was often referred to as a "pilot's pilot." Hoover passed away early in the morning on Tuesday in a hospital near his home in Rancho Palos Verdes in California. He was 94 years old.



Hoover was born in Nashville, TN on January 24th, 1922. He learned to fly at Nashville's Berry Field, using money earned while working at a local grocery store to pay for his flight training.

Bob's accomplishments in aviation are too numerous to recount here. He joined the U.S. Army Air Corps and was sent to Casablanca where he was tasked with test-flying aircraft that had been assembled there for combat. He was shot down on his 44th combat mission over Southern France, and famously escaped from the German prison camp Stalag Luft 1 in Barth, Germany after 16 months by stealing an Fw 190 and flying it to the Netherlands.

Hoover was Chuck Yeager's backup pilot for the Bell X-1 program, and flew the chase plane for the famous first Mach 1 flight. He flew many military jets through the Korean conflict.

Hoover later became a world-renowned air show pilot, flying P-51D Mustangs, and later demonstrating aerobatics in an Aero Commander Shrike Commander. His signature finale was a dead-stick loop and eight-point hesitation roll on approach. At some airports, he was able to land the plane and roll up in front of the grandstand without restarting his engines.



One of his most famous demonstrations, recorded on film, was pouring iced tea into a glass on the glareshield of his Aero Commander while performing a 1G roll ... never spilling a drop. He recounted in the video that he had the Secretary of the Air Force in the right seat, and a group of generals in the back of the airplane. He was asked if the airplane could be rolled. "And I said 'Yes Sir.' And I rolled and the generals were all having a cup of coffee, and none of the spilled a drop. And then I got so bold as to think maybe I could even pour iced tea. Believe it or not, you could see the horizon going around as the tea is poured in the glass."

Hoover's medical certificate was revoked by the FAA early in the 1990's, which led to an extensive campaign in the aviation community to have it restored. He was reinstated first in Australia, and shortly thereafter by the FAA, and returned to the air show circuit. He officially retired from aerobatics in 1999 because he was unable to pay out of his own pocket for insurance for his performances. His last air show flight was at Sun 'n Fun in Lakeland, FL in 2000, and he did not perform any aerobatics.



Hoover was presented with multiple military medals, including the Distinguished Flying Cross; Soldier's Medal for Valor; Air Medal with Clusters; Purple Heart, and Croix de guerre. He received the Living Legends of Aviation Freedom of Flight Award in 2006, which was renamed as the "Bob Hoover Freedom of Flight Award" the following year. In 2007, he received the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum Trophy.

His Shrike Commander is enshrined at the Smithsonian Institution's Air and Space Museum Udvar-Hazy center near Dulles Airport in Virginia.

"We lost a true, one-of-a-kind aviation hero today," said EAA Chairman and CEO Jack Pelton. "We all knew of Bob's incredible aviation career and witnessed his unmatched flying skills. It was Bob Hoover as a person that also made him legendary. He was a true gentleman and unfailingly gracious and generous, as well as a true friend of EAA through the years. We can only hope to use his lifelong example as a pilot and a person as a standard for all of us to achieve."

"Bob Hoover has been a source of awe and inspiration, who has provided a shared connection for generations of aviation enthusiasts," said NBAA president and CEO Ed Bolen said. "He was a national treasure, who was respected and beloved by history's most significant aviation figures, and the millions who saw his air show performances or heard him speak.

"The boldness and grace of Bob Hoover the pilot was matched only by the humility and graciousness of Bob Hoover the human being," Bolen continued. "He was simply the best. Our aviation community has been fortunate to have such an extraordinary person with us for so many decades."

It is fair to say that aviation will never know another pilot like R.A. "Bob" Hoover.

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