

PILOT AND PRW MAN

Most people know Russ Borstelman as a public refrigerated warehouse firm. But he also pilots World War II vintage planes at air shows.

When Russ Borstelman is not at his desk at Interstate Cold Storage in Napoleon, Ohio, you might just find him piloting C-47, JU 52, T-34A or other vintage aircraft. He's had



Borstelman is piloting this T34 in a photo taken during an air show in Oshkosh, Wis.

a lifelong love of flying, and is a member of the Commemorative Air Force and Hooligans Flight Team, which flies at air shows, military funerals and dedications.

When did you first start flying?

I learned to fly when I was 18 or 19 in Napoleon, Ohio, where I still live. The county airport is here, and all the kids used to chase airplanes around. Another kid on the block got his pilot's license, so I got mine. It took eight or ten months to get it — I first learned in a Piper Cherokee PA 28.

My private pilot check ride was on the 8th or 9th of June in 1966, and the next day I got on a bus to report for duty with the Army.

Where did you serve?

I wound up in the 24th Division in Europe, which was a good deal at the time. I did my two-year stretch, and got out in 1968.

What did you do then?

I studied general business at Northwest State College in Northwest Ohio. At this time, I was a little more serious about aviation, and I got my certification as a flight instructor, instrument instructor and multi-engine instructor, and a commercial pilot's license.

When did you join the Commemorative Air Force?

I'd been interested in World War II planes for some time, but joined the CAF in 1979, with the Great Lakes Wing. I flew a Douglas C-47 and a JU 52, a counterpart in the German military in World War II. (Editor's note: The C-47 had been restored by the Great Lakes Wing of the CAF to the colors and configuration of the "Black Sparrow," the lead ship of the 302nd Squadron, Troop Carrier Command, 9th Air Force during the D-Day invasion of Europe in June of 1944.)

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Did you fly the old planes at air shows?

Yes. The last four or five years or so, I've been a member of the Hooligans, and we donate our services and planes for air shows, funerals for soldiers who lost their lives in Afghanistan, dedications for museums and things like that. With a partner, I own a Beechcraft T-34A, a propeller-driven military trainer aircraft.

Any hair-raising experiences with these old planes?



The C-47 played a crucial role in World War II, including during the D-Day invasion.

No. These older planes deserve more attention, and the CAF's maintenance was always outstanding. They're truly a great group of people. I can't speak highly enough about them, and the members of the Hooligans. They're truly outstanding individuals.

What were your best experiences flying these planes?

Flying the airplanes has allowed me to meet many wonderful people I would never have met, including the veterans who show up and say "I used to work on these planes!" What really strikes you is that these fellows were trained and sent off to war with relatively few hours. They had maybe 400 to 500 hours of flying time, which was twice as many as other allied countries' pilots had. Training was dangerous. There were just as many aviators and aircraft lost in the U.S. as there were on the World War II fronts. I've always enjoyed meeting these people, including German and Japanese fliers from World War II. We're all friends now.

Tell me a bit about your professional and family life.

I've been with Interstate Cold Storage for 36 years. It's been an outstanding place to have spent my career, and I will probably close it out here. My wife Carol and I have been married for 40 years, and we have three children, two grandchildren and one more in the hangar, ready to come out.