

AVIATION WALL OF HONOR

Robert (Bob) Joseph Shimanek



Bob in San Antonio, Texas, 1951

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Master Mechanic, private pilot and entrepreneur Bob Shimanek was born on June 30, 1932, in Kewaunee, Wisconsin. He started tinkering with machinery as a young boy working on his grandparents' farm and – thanks to guidance and inspiration from his grandfather and uncle – could fix just about any farm machinery by the time he was a teenager.

With the start of the Korean War in 1950, Bob knew that he was going to be drafted. Through the influence of some family and friends who had served in World War II, he decided to enlist in the newly formed United States Army Airforce, now called the United States Air Force (USAF), in May 1951.

Bob graduated from Kewaunee High School on June 6, 1951, and six days later left for basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, and aircraft maintenance training at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas. Various USAF aptitude tests confirmed that Bob was extremely mechanically inclined; once he

completed basic training, he began coursework in airframe and power plant mechanics.

While home on leave in December 1951, Bob got engaged to his high school sweetheart, Joanne Walecka. They were married in Kewaunee on June 14, 1952, and left for Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, Colorado, to begin their military life just a week later.

During 20 years of service, Bob was stationed at six different bases:

- Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas (1951)
- Sheppard Air Force Base, Wichita Falls, Texas (1951-1952)
- Lowry Air Force Base, Denver, Colorado (1952-1956)



Bob standing on the fuselage of a B-29

- Wheelus Air Force Base, Tripoli, Libya (1956-1959)
- Homestead Air Force Base, Homestead, Florida (1959-1966)
- K.I. Sawyer Air Force Base, Gwinn, Michigan (1966-1971)

Bob's key accomplishments during those 20 years include:

- Performing flight line maintenance and technical inspections on many different aircraft, including B-25, B-29, B-47, B-66, C-45, C-47, C-54, C-124, KC135, F-80, F-86, F-94, F-100, T-6 and the AGM28B missile.
- Being named Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge (NCOIC) of the Product Improvement program at Wheelus AFB.
- Being appointed Crew Chief for B-47 aircraft at Homestead AFB. Bob was responsible for turning a low-performing aircraft noted for late takeoffs and aborts into one of the top 10 out of a fleet of 40. He received many accolades for outstanding maintenance.
- Cross-training from multi-engine jet aircraft to AGM28B missile maintenance and serving as crew chief for the flight maintenance section, loading missile and operational checks at Homestead AFB.
- Planning and developing the Strategic Air Command Maintenance Standardization and Evaluation program for the Wing. Bob became the NCOIC in charge of 400 maintenance personnel at Homestead AFB.
- Performing quality control on maintenance facilities at Wheelus AFB, Homestead AFB and K.I. Sawyer AFB.

From May 1967 until retiring from the Air Force as a Master Sergeant in October 1971, Bob worked part-time on weekends at the fixed-base operator (FBO) Northern Airmotive at Marquette County Airport in Negaunee, Michigan. He obtained his private pilot license for single-engine aircraft on June 25, 1971.



The early days at Northern Airmotive

Bob performed all types of major and minor general aviation aircraft maintenance and inspections. He spearheaded and developed the first hands-on general aviation course conducted at both K.I. Sawyer AFB maintenance shops and at Northern Airmotive. He was awarded the position of Designated Mechanic Examiner (DME) of Marquette County after his first class at K.I. Sawyer AFB.

Once retired from the military, Bob began working full-time at Northern Airmotive and became part-owner with Emil Kaurala (also on the Wall of Honor) in 1973. Bob's continued accomplishments as a civilian in the aviation field have made a lasting impact on Michigan's Upper Peninsula community:

- Recognizing the need for a daily charter service for local business men and women who regularly travel to Michigan's capitol city of Lansing, he spearheaded the effort to create the successful Marquette-to-Lansing daily private charter service known as Capitol City Express.



Bob's business card from his brainchild, Capitol City Express

- He helped create many jobs in the local community by convincing Larry Simmons, founder/owner of Simmons Airlines, to designate Marquette County Airport as its main hub and contract with Northern Airmotive to perform maintenance on its growing fleet of aircraft. Bob also was pivotal in getting the new commuter airline FAA-certified. Simmons was so impressed with Bob's expertise that he hired him as the airline's first Director of Maintenance (1979-1981).

- He was the first approved FAA written test examiner for aviation airframe and power plant maintenance and pilot licenses for the Upper Peninsula. He administered hundreds of tests over the years.



Bob received this "Master Mechanic" Award in 2003

Northern Airmotive, Inc./Capitol City Express was sold in February 1993, but Bob didn't stop there. He spearheaded development of the Northern Michigan University FAA-approved Airframe and Power Plant training facility and was a part-time professor in the Aviation Maintenance Technology program until 2011.

In all, Bob spent more than 50 years in the aviation field. He was awarded the

distinguished Charles Taylor “Master Mechanic” Award by the Department of Transportation/Federal Aviation Administration in June 2003.

As of this writing, Bob and Joanne have been married for 63 years and are enjoying retirement in their home less than a mile from the old Marquette County Airport in Negaunee. They love to tease their five children (Gail, Deborah, Jane, Roberta and John) that each one is a “souvenir” from the various Air Force bases where they were stationed.

March 2016



Bob and Joanne Shimanek, 2011