



# A treasured elder...

## James Shepard Holland

High-flying “aerobat” is still cruising at age 88

Treasure  
Our  
Elders

Jim Holland is surrounded by pictures on the walls of his immaculate room at Moultrie Creek Nursing & Rehab Center in St. Augustine, his home of the past two-and-a-half years. One photo shows Holland in his Royal Canadian Air Force uniform, another as the world-famous acrobatic pilot who delighted air show audiences for more than 35 years. On his desk are scrapbooks jammed with photos and mementos that document a career in aviation almost as long as aviation itself.

Holland was born in Princeton, Florida in the first month of 1917. His father was a land clearing contractor during a time when Florida was building lots of roads and new neighborhoods, so the family did well. “I used to ride on my Dad’s bulldozer when he was clearing the land for what is now Coral Gables.”

At an early age Holland was fascinated with flight and the sleek machines that he’d see buzzing high overhead. He would hang around nearby air terminals as a teenager, but it wasn’t until age 20 that his formal flight training began in Long Beach, California. With the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, Holland jumped at the opportunity to join the Royal Canadian Air Force and receive free flight training. “My father was dead set against me going,” he recalled, but soon Holland and his 70th Air Squadron were on daily bombing and strafing missions over north Africa. In 1943, the British government awarded Holland its Distinguished Flying Medal for gallantry in the fight for Tobruk in eastern Libya.

### Flying circus

After the war, Holland remained in aviation, starting a crop-dusting business, ferrying airplanes for manufacturers, hauling cargo, skywriting, giving flying lessons (actor John Travolta is a former student) and training a rapidly growing number of acrobatic flyers who based in St. Augustine. By 1965, Holland and partner Ernie Moser founded the “Holland and Moser Flying Circus” and for years thereafter astounded air show audiences all over the world with their death-defying stunts, which included flying their two planes chained together at the wings. “We also had a trick where we’d fly upside-down and cut a ribbon that was



### Sky King:

At left, Holland at the stick flying upside down, just inches above “Flying Circus” partner Ernie Moser; below, in uniform during WWII; as part of his flight school graduation class.



stretched between two poles only 15 feet above the ground. The crowds loved it.”

Last year Holland was inducted into the International Council of Air Shows Foundation Hall of Fame in Las Vegas, taking his place alongside such aviation legends as Curtis Pitts, designer of the Pitts Special, “the best plane ever built,” Holland said of the compact 200-horsepower biplane he still owns. Being only 15 feet long with a wingspan of just over 17 feet gave the aircraft a great power-to-weight ratio that was ideal for performing almost any maneuver and handling the G-forces that ranged from +6 to -3.

### Man of few words

As lunchtime nears, Holland turns a page in his scrapbook and points to a newspaper clipping from the *Egyptian Gazette* dated August 13, 1950. The story describes the nation’s first-ever use of a crop-dusting airplane to protect its vulnerable cotton crop. “That was me,” Holland said in his typically terse, just-the-facts manner. Indeed,

after more than 60 years of flying experience, Holland only shrugs when asked what he loves about flying and what makes a good pilot. “I guess just being up there,” he answers to the first part of the question. “I can tell you pretty quick if (a flying student) is not going to make it, but anybody who’s healthy and can take the G-forces can fly. You don’t have to be terribly smart — just look at me.”

Holland’s wife of 53 years and longtime Flying Circus business manager, Helen, died last year, so these days Jim is back to flying solo. “He’s a remarkable man,” administrator Brian Ferguson said. “We are truly in the presence of greatness.”

FHCA honors James Shepard Holland and treasures his many contributions to our nation.

*(FHCA Pulse will be profiling one of our state’s treasures each month in subsequent issues. To suggest a patient you think worthy, contact Ed Towey & Associates, Inc., at (850) 224-6242, or via e-mail, etowey@fhca.org.)*