

Record

JACK WILHITE

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*From the Denver Post, Feb. 5, 2015*

With an abounding history of aviation accomplishments, Col Jack Wilhite will be remembered as a dedicated pilot, philanthropist and adventure enthusiast.

Wilhite, 87, died – or “flew west” as the aviation community says – Jan. 26 of unknown causes, said Bea White, his wife of 37 years.

In place of “Good morning,” the Morrison, Colo., couple would always greet each other with, “Looks like a great day to fly,” she said.

“I never knew when he took me on my honeymoon to Kenya on a photo safari that that was only the beginning,” she said.

Wilhite, known to friends as Smilin’ Jack, had so many piloting accolades and experiences that it is nearly impossible to list them all, Bea Wilhite said.

Born in Deep River, Wilhite began his 32-year flying career in the Army Air Corps in World War II. He flew more than 41,000 hours in the Air Force, joined the Colorado Air National Guard 140th Fighter Wing and was hired as a United Airlines pilot in 1956. He also participated in airshow acrobatics.

He was president of the Colorado Aviation Historical Society and a Colorado Hall of Fame Laureate – and that list omits many of his piloting journeys, she said.

One of his favorite activities was educating children about the world of aviation, she said.

“He loved kids and sharing his passion,” she said. “We got to travel all around the world,” she said. “He was fun. He was a fabulous husband and a wonderful father.”

In addition to flying, Bea Wilhite said her husband loved to play baseball and had an “amazing robust” time playing ball, flying his prized Steen Skybold Colorado-built plane and going to a health club on the day he passed away.

“He lived such a robust life,” she said. “I just feel like he did so much and accomplished so much, and I can’t be sad about that.”

A wake was held Feb. 8 at the Rocky Mountain Metropolitan Airport. The Colorado Air National Guard and others honored Wilhite with flyovers.

In addition to his wife, Wilhite is survived by his sons, Michael Wilhite and Lance Wilhite; a stepson, James Harrod; a stepdaughter, Jan Carr; cousins; grandchildren; and great-great grandchildren.