

## Hunter Sullivan



### MEMBER PROFILE

**August 24, 1949, Wilson, NC, Carolina General Hospital, Labor and Delivery: Grace Sullivan, a registered nurse usually working these cases at Carolina General, now finds herself going through a difficult delivery, a footling breech. Many agonizing hours pass, and finally in the early morning hours Wilmar Hunter Sullivan performs his first aerobatic maneuver as he comes into this world upside down.**

**Well, that was my arrival but many years would pass before my next attempt at aerobatics.**

**As previously mentioned, my mother was a nurse at Carolina General Hospital and later at Wilson Memorial Hospital until her retirement.**

**My father, J.W. Sullivan, was an auto mechanic in my early childhood, and then owned a T.V. sales and repair business until his retirement, but it was his lifelong love for aviation that would be passed on to me.**

**As did many young men in the early 1940's, he joined the Army Air Corp. completed primary and advanced flight training flying PT-19's, BT-13's, AT-10's, and finishing his military career flying B-17's and B-29's.**

**After leaving the military he continued flying at The Wilson Airport until the early 1960's. It was during this time that he took me for my first airplane ride in, I believe, a Taylorcraft. The aviation bug had now bitten me and from this point forward I was the kid tagging along with dad to the airport every chance that I got. Although I had come to love airplanes and aviation, his flying career ended without me having yet developed, as I would later, a real appreciation for his aviation accomplishments (I have for years now carried his pilot's license in my wallet.)**

**Even though trips to the airport were now few and far between, my love for airplanes continued as I built an untold number of plastic models and would, on occasion, tear up a Cox control line model.**

**I graduated from Ralph L. Fike High School in 1967 and later attended Wilson Tech.**

**In late August of 1969 I received my draft notice, and on September 10, 1969 I was sworn into the U.S. Army and sent to Fort Bragg for basic training. Nearing the end of basic**

training I took all the tests necessary and was deemed “qualified”(I put the round peg in the round hole and the square peg in the square hole) to proceed to helicopter flight school. However given the current state of affairs, I figured this might not be the time or place to start my aviation career and decided to forego flight school.

After completing basic training my MOS assignment was 11B, light weapons infantryman, and I was sent to Fort McClellan, Alabama for advanced infantry training. It was common knowledge that from here we were all bound for Vietnam, but when I received my overseas assignment I was sent to Germany where I remained for the next year and a half, playing baseball for the Army (tough duty but somebody had to do it).

After returning home from overseas in 1971, flying was still on my “things to do” list, and finally in the summer of 1974 the perfect opportunity arose to take to the air. I traded a 1946 military surplus jeep for a ski kite which I flew many miles up and down the Pamlico River. This was a flying apparatus which would, simply put in aviation terms, “bite you”.

My next flying machine would come in the late 1970’s. While attending a boat show in Raleigh, NC I became quite intrigued by something called an ultralight airplane built by Quicksilver. I hadn’t ever seen anything like it but knew right off that I had to have one. After about an hour of talking to John Harris, owner of Kitty Hawk Kites, who had the airplane on display, it was a done deal. I would pick up the airplane kit in Nags Head, bring it home, put it together and John would come to Wilson and teach me how to fly. Since it was a weight shift model and flew much like a hang glider, John demanded that I take hang gliding lessons. It was on my trip to pick up the airplane that I took the lessons, strapped a hang glider on my back and jumped off Jockey’s Ridge a couple of times.

Let me interject at this point that John Harris was an expert hang glider and in 1974 became the first person to fly a hang glider from Grandfather Mountain.

I made arrangements with Cecil Pearson to use his grass strip for my flight training. Since there wasn’t yet any such thing as a two place trainer, flight training consist of John telling me what to do followed by my trying it in the airplane. After several lessons of taxi work and mastering the short hop, he looked me in the eye and said, “you’re ready to fly”, followed by my response, “am I”, to which he replied, “I believe so, now take off, fly the pattern and suddenly while on final approach the stark realization hit me that I was going to have to make a landing and I hadn’t ever done that before. Fortunately, it somehow all worked out, not pretty, but it worked out. It is from this experience that I claim to have one thing in common with the Wright Brothers, I soloed with no dual instruction.