

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Second Saturday @ Museum **SPECIAL VETERANS DAY** **RECOGNITION PROGRAM** **FOR** **America's Flying Ace**

New Hampshire's Native Son, Joe McConnell

It's been nearly sixty years since the tragic loss of Dover native and national US Air Force hero Captain Joseph Christopher McConnell Jr. To this day Captain McConnell remains the top American air ace; a triple-ace having recorded 16 shoot-downs of MIGs in the Korean War with F86 Sabre Jets ("MIG:" from the Russian term *Mikoyan-Gurevich Design Bureau* which was responsible for developing the Soviet aircraft design). McConnell was also the first jet-on-jet fighter ace and ranks among the top ten aces in world aviation history.

He was born in Dover in 1922, the son of Joseph C. McConnell Sr. and Phyllis Winfred Brooks, and attended local schools. He started his military career in 1940 when he enlisted the First Infantry Division of the US Army at Fort Devens, Mass. Later he received a transfer to the Air Corps. His dream of becoming a fighter pilot was dashed when instead of going to pilot training he was assigned to navigator school. Upon being certified a navigator, he flew combat missions in World War II in Europe as the navigator on a B-24 Liberator.

On August 20, 1942 he married Pearl Edna "Butch" Brown in Fitchburg, Mass. He eventually entered flight training and in 1948 he achieved his goal of becoming a fighter pilot. The Korean War began in 1950 and he sought to be part of it. He was assigned to the 39th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron of the 51st Fighter-Interceptor Wing late in 1952. He was gifted with keen eyesight and proved to be an aggressive MIG hunter even though he did not bag his first MIG until 1953. He scored all his shoot-downs over a four month period from January 14th to May 18th, 1953.

Joe McConnell flew at least three Sabre Jets, all of which he called "*Beautious Butch*," nicknamed after his wife: Pearl "Butch" Brown. He was shot down on 12

April 1953. After ejecting safely he was rescued from the Yellow Sea by a helicopter. His final combat Sabre was an F-86F and it was repainted following his final mission with a name change to "*Beautious Butch II.*"

On his final day of combat on May 18th. 1953 he shot down three MIGS on two separate missions bringing his total to 16, thus making him a triple ace – a record that holds to this day. He still ranks as the top ace in United States military history. Immediately after his 16th kill he was sent back to the states to do bond promotion drives.

For his service he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Silver Star for combat heroism. After returning he settled in Apple Valley California and was stationed at George AFB in Victorville California where he continued flying F-86's. In 1954 he was temporarily assigned to Edwards AFB to fly the latest F-86H; the best and most powerful version of the famed SabreJet, intended to be a fighter-bomber.

On 25 August 1954, while testing the fifth production model, Captain Joseph McConnell was killed in a crash in the Mojave Dessert following a control malfunction. The cause of the crash was attributed to a missing bolt. In the 1955 film "The McConnell Story" his career was chronicled based upon a book by Charles Ira Coombs. The book was a fictionalized biography and the movie's leading roles were played by Alan Ladd and June Allyson.

He was buried with full military honors in Victorville where his wife and three children – daughters Kathleen Frances, Patricia Ann and son Joseph, III – resided. His wife Pearl "Butch" Brown never married again and she died in 2002 at the age of 87. She was buried with her husband in the family memorial. Their son Joseph, III served in the United States Navy in Vietnam in 1965 and he died in 1999. His two daughters are still living in California.

Some years back the City of Dover, through the untiring efforts of his cousin Mrs. Arlene McConnell-Meserve, named the city recreational center in his honor.

The heroic service of Captain Joseph C. McConnell has faded from memory over the years, and it is for this reason that the Aviation Museum of New Hampshire is planning to recognize his unique and gallant service with a celebration and an exhibit of memorabilia of the Nation's only triple ace on Veteran's Day weekend, November 10, 2012.