

From Avengers to TBM 960s: Conair's long History with the TBM



Timothée Larribau



Technical Writer at Daher Aircraft in Tarbes, France, Timothée is also a French Air Force Reserve Officer, a Private Pilot, Ultralight Pilot, US Paratroopers and US Cavalry reenactor and volunteer at the French Airborne Troops Museum, that has worked in various aviation related jobs: Airport Security, Flight Attendant, Flight Dispatcher and Administrative assistant in a Part 66 maintenance company. He is a big history fan, with special interest in Aviation History, World War II paratroopers and U.S. Civil War Cavalry.

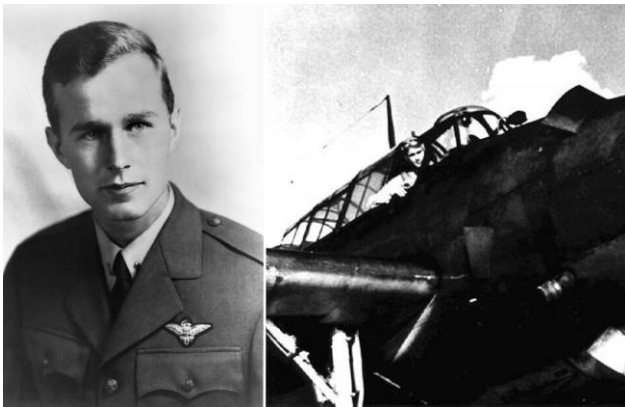
It's not the first time that Conair has used TBMs for firefighting.

In 2025, Conair put into service two Daher TBM 960s as "Bird Dogs", its reconnaissance and air attack aircraft against forest fires.

But in 1969, Conair purchased Grumman TBF Avengers, designated TBM Avengers, when they were manufactured by General Motors.

The Avenger made its first flight on August 7, 1941, four months to the day before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. With a wingspan of 16.51 m, a length of 12.19 m, a maximum weight of just over 8 tons and a Wright R-2600 Twin Cyclone 14-cylinder radial engine developing 1900 hp of power, the TBF/TBM Avenger quickly became the best torpedo bomber of the US Navy and also served in the British Fleet Air Arm in the Royal New Zealand Air Force, the Royal Canadian Navy and the French Navy, among others.

George H.W. Bush, who became the 41st President of the United States in 1989, was a TBM Avenger pilot in the Pacific during World War II and Admiral Philippe de Gaulle, the son of General Charles de Gaulle, also flew the Avenger in the French Naval Aviation in Algeria in the 1950s.



George H.W. Bush, was a TBM Avenger pilot in the Pacific during World War II. Enlisting on his 18th birthday, he became one of the youngest naval aviators in the U.S. Navy and flew 58 combat missions.



Lieutenant Philippe de Gaulle at the pilot's seat of a TBM from his 6th 6F squadron, at Lattigue in May in 1952, near Oran, Algeria.

Transformed into a water bomber and put into service by several aerial firefighting companies, including Conair, it could carry 2250 liters of water or retardant dropped through two hatches, generally at a height of about 30 m and about 200 km/h of speed. The last TBM Avenger water bomber was withdrawn from service in Canada in 2012.



But while we're at it, why are Conair's air attack aircraft called "Bird Dogs"? Most likely because they have a similar role to the Cessna L-19/O-1 Bird Dog. In Korea and Vietnam within the US Air Force and the US Army, as well as in Algeria within the French Army Aviation Corps, the L-19 "Bird Dog" served in observation, reconnaissance, airborne command and guidance of artillery or air strikes on enemy positions.

Conair's TBM 960 "Bird Dog" perform the same type of mission, but the enemy is now forest fires, whose devastating power is indeed comparable to that of a military enemy, if we consider the recent fires in California or the south of France.



Fly Differently with the **New TBM 980**



HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?

SwissFly Aero LLC
Embracherstrasse 8
CH-8185 Winkel
Tel: +41 79 890 02 02
Email: info@swissflyaero.com