

# More Vaccine-Injured Pilots Speak Out as Groups Pressure Airlines, Regulators to End Mandates

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*In exclusive interviews with The Defender, more commercial airline pilots discuss COVID-19 vaccine injuries and the “hostile” industry environment injured and unvaxxed pilots must navigate.*

by [Michael Nevradakis, Ph.D.](#) , [The Defender](#)

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Sharp chest pains. Myocarditis and pericarditis. Heart attacks. Strokes and subsequent blindness.

These are just some of the many [COVID-19](#) vaccine-related adverse events reported by commercial airline pilots and by a growing number of advocacy groups representing aviation industry workers.

According to these individuals and groups, the number of pilots speaking out about their vaccine injuries is dwarfed by the number of pilots who are still flying despite experiencing concerning symptoms – but not speaking out because of what they describe as a culture of intimidation within the aviation industry.

These individuals fear they will lose their jobs and livelihoods in retaliation if they reveal their symptoms or go

public with their stories, sources told The Defender.

Still, a growing number of pilots are coming forward.

Last month, The Defender published the [accounts of several pilots](#) – and of the widow of a pilot who died from a vaccine-related adverse event.

Since then, more pilots have shared their stories, including one who is currently flying for a commercial airline.

A growing number of advocacy organizations, representing workers across the aviation industry and in several countries, are joining these pilots in speaking out.

The Defender [previously reported](#) on actions by the U.S. Freedom Flyers (USFF) and [other legal advocates](#) in the U.S.

Since then, representatives from the [Global Aviation Advocacy Coalition](#) (GAA) and the Canada-based [Free To Fly](#) also spoke with The Defender about their initiatives.

Meanwhile, pilots in Canada and the Netherlands recently reported significant legal victories in separate vaccine-related cases.

*In interviews with The Defender, pilots injured by COVID-19 vaccines said despite a “culture of fear and intimidation” they are compelled to speak out against vaccine mandates that rob pilots of their careers – and in some cases their lives.* <https://t.co/YYMCG9yWV>

– Robert F. Kennedy Jr (@RobertKennedyJr) [May 6, 2022](#)

## **More pilots come forward, speak to The Defender**

Steven Hornsby, a 52-year-old pilot with a legacy passenger airline company, was once an active weightlifter and cyclist, biking 10-26 miles every other day.

He is also a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps and [Operation Enduring Freedom](#). Per FAA requirements, he passed 24 medical exams in the past 12 years, including 12 electrocardiograms (ECGs).

Hornsby told The Defender, "I've never had any cardiovascular issues in my life, nor have I ever had any major health issues ... I eat healthy and live what I believe to be a balanced lifestyle."

Hornsby, however, is not flying today because, he said, he was "coerced ... to get the COVID-19 vaccine," and his employer "made it very clear that all employees would be required to get it and that medical/religious exemptions would be very difficult to get."

Hornsby's difficulties began after receiving the second dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine.

"After my second shot, I initially had zero issues, with little more than light fatigue on day two, Hornsby said. "The 12th day, however, was the culmination of the vaccine and the continuous stress I was adding to my heart from rigorous exercise."

As he was driving with family, Hornsby said he felt sharp chest pains, "pain radiating through my left arm, and my heart rate spiked as if beating in my neck."

Hornsby said it took several different diagnoses from doctors and medical practitioners to make a connection between his health issues and the vaccine.

A nurse at an urgent care facility first told him his symptoms did not correlate to a heart attack and were most likely unrelated to the vaccine. Later, at a hospital emergency room, he was again told his symptoms were not likely to be related to the vaccine.

“At that point,” Hornsby said, “I was indignant. Why would a healthcare provider dismiss that perspective? This was my eye-opening reality that a major cover-up was in play.”

Hornsby was ultimately diagnosed with elevated blood pressure but was told he had not suffered a heart attack. Doctors advised him to follow up with a cardiologist, and told him they would not report his case to the [Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System](#) (VAERS).

Hornsby said his cardiologist, after performing blood work, told him his heart was healthy, and though the doctor didn't dismiss the possibility that his heart issues were connected to the vaccine, he told him the symptoms were “most likely from stress or a musculoskeletal problem.”

“I had to stop trying to force my perceived diagnosis – bias against the vaccine – and listen to the professionals,” Hornsby said, adding “I needed to be patient,” even after a union doctor also dismissed Hornsby's concerns that his symptoms were related to the vaccine.

Hornsby continued experiencing “intermittent pains,” despite taking home remedies such as tea and supplements to calm his heart rate, which he said were helpful.

It was only in December 2021, when his medical certification was due for renewal, that his aeromedical examiner (AME) advised him to wear a Holter monitor (a type of portable ECG) for one week to monitor his heart.

“That is when I discovered that I had arrhythmia issues, heart palpitations and [an] irregular heart rate, which was occurring almost exclusively at night,” said Hornsby. “I reported back to my AME, who then told me I was grounded and that I should go find a good cardiologist and get healthy.”

The following month, another cardiologist diagnosed Hornsby with [vaccine-induced myocarditis](#).

“My heart was inflamed,” said Hornsby. “After an echocardiogram, it showed my heart mildly dilated with fluid behind my heart.”

Hornsby said he’s “doing much better,” but he’s still not flying. He’s disappointed with the dismissive manner in which several doctors addressed his concerns.

“Had doctors been willing to view my case – and I suspect others – with an open mind, this could have been diagnosed much, much earlier,” he said. “Looking back, had my heart not been healthy, I would have surely died from cardiac arrest like you’re seeing in young athletes.”

Hornsby said he believes other pilots with similar symptoms are still flying.

“I suspect there are many pilots flying around with minor and perhaps major issues,” Hornsby said. “The vaccine is/was experimental and for good cause. No one knows the long-term effects.”

He added:

*“How many years have been shaved from my life? Will I develop scar tissue in my heart? Will I get cancer as a result? Has this trash degraded my immune system? Only God knows.”*

## **Pilot injured by Moderna shot: ‘I have a family to feed’**

In fact, The Defender interviewed another pilot – currently flying for a commercial airline in the U.S. – who is experiencing such health difficulties.

The pilot, who spoke to The Defender on condition of anonymity, said:

*“I was experiencing chest pain, usually at night, almost like somebody had their hand around my heart and was squeezing.*

*“Generally, [the pain] would subside during the day, but ... would appear occasionally out of nowhere and I would need to lie down.*

*“It would manifest as pain, but also like something was lodged deep in my esophagus, like I had a piece of food or air that was pressing upon my chest area.”*

According to the pilot, his symptoms “began about a week after the second Moderna vaccination.

He said the airline he works for threatened to terminate anyone who didn’t get the vaccine. “I have a family to feed, so I was left with little choice.”

He said he is “on reserve” and not flying often. While his symptoms have recently subsided, he felt that “looking into further treatment would result in an answer that would be unfavorable to my medical [certification].”

He added:

*“In the back of my mind though, the thought of what it could mean for my future health is there.*

*“The current situation I am faced with is that supporting a family is what is most important to me. Fear of loss of my pilot medical [certification] after being mandated to get this vaccine is the path I am currently on.”*

## **Terminated after 19 years for refusing COVID shot, former Australian pilot advocates for others**

Australia, like Canada, has a government-level vaccine mandate for airline crew and airport workers. In Australia, this mandate went into effect on Nov. 15, 2021.

Glen Waters is a former captain with Virgin Australia who is now a spokesman for a group of employees from the same

airline.

Waters, who had held the rank of captain for 19 years before being terminated by Virgin Australia for refusing the vaccine, spoke to The Defender on behalf of several pilots who are suffering from vaccine injuries.

According to Waters, "none of the pilots suffering from injuries are prepared to talk" because "the company is actively trying to terminate anyone reporting vaccine injury."

Waters said employees whose health issues are characterized as "unrelated" to the vaccine are being treated by Virgin Australia "as you would expect a company to care for its employees."

Waters stated "there are several reasons injured pilots will not come forward," including:

- "There is a stigma attached to anti-vaccine sentiment in any form.
- There is a reluctance on the part of the medical community to get involved with possible vaccine injuries.
- Vaccine makers will actively fight against injury claims.
- Insurance companies have distanced themselves from claims involving the vaccine.
- Pilots don't want to lose their medical certifications, jobs or careers.

Waters said of approximately 900 pilots flying with Virgin Australia, he is aware of nine who are no longer flying because of medical complications that could be linked to the vaccine.

"No doubt there are many more who are continuing to fly with troubling symptoms," he said.

These symptoms, according to Waters, most commonly include myocarditis and pericarditis. Some symptoms, however, are even more serious.

Waters told The Defender:

“We have one captain [who had] a stroke and went blind, and another had a heart attack and fell down the boarding stairs after landing.

*“There have been complaints of constant headaches and numerous reports of chest pains and shortness of breath.*

*“A number of cabin crew have reported pins and needles in their limbs, almost like electric shocks that persist for hours at a time.*

*“I have heard [about cases of] tinnitus, vertigo and brain fog, including temporary blindness, in several crew. Disrupted [menstrual cycles](#) are reported frequently, perhaps affecting dozens [of employees].”*

However, according to Waters, perhaps due to the work environment, not all pilots are comfortable in stating openly that there may be a connection between their health difficulties and the vaccines.

“I’m only aware of three who say the symptoms started within an hour of the vaccine, one within seven days,” he said.

“The stroke and heart attack victims are not attributing their medical event to the vaccine as far as I am aware. Neither [did] the captain who died of a sudden onset of cancer early this year.”

Some employees may not understand their symptoms might be related to the vaccine, Waters said. “Many of the early warning signs – persistent headaches, chest pains, breathlessness – are not recognized by aircrew as possible



adverse reactions," Waters said.

"The heart attacks and strokes are occurring in otherwise fit and healthy individuals. They are sudden and are a real risk to flight safety."

Waters explained that Australia's Civil Aviation Safety Authority, similar to other such bodies globally, has "a 1% rule" for pilots: If they have a medical condition "that presents a greater than 1% chance of resulting in an incapacitation event within the next 12 months, then they are considered medically unfit to fly."

In light of this, according to Waters, "numerous aviation doctors, including Lt. Col. Theresa Long and Lt. Col. Peter Chambers, have recommended tests that will help determine the real risk to pilots."

These include the D-dimer test for blood-clotting conditions, a complete blood count, post-vaccination ECG analysis, a cardiac MRI and others.

### **As pilots speak out, there are some legal victories**

Despite what numerous pilots call a hostile environment in the aviation industry toward claims of vaccine injury, a recent series of legal decisions were in pilots' favor and more legal actions are in progress.

A judge at the Amsterdam Court of Appeals in the Netherlands [on June 2 ruled in favor](#) of the Dutch Airline Pilots Association, in a case that challenged vaccine mandates introduced by Dutch airline KLM for new pilots.

According to the [ruling](#):

*"It is considered that requesting and demanding a vaccination against corona constitutes an unjustified infringement of the fundamental rights of the candidate pilots.*

*“In particular, it infringes the privacy (Article 8 ECHR) [the [European Convention on Human Rights](#)] of the candidate pilots.*

*“After all, the decision whether or not to have yourself vaccinated is something that belongs pre-eminently to this private sphere.*

*“Requiring the candidate pilot to be vaccinated and to give a positive answer to that question about vaccination status, therefore, violates this. KLM thus leaves no choice to candidate pilots who want to join KLM.”*

Per the June 2 ruling, KLM is prohibited from requesting or collecting such information from candidate pilots, or rejecting candidates on the basis of their vaccination status, under penalty of €100,000 (approximately \$105,000) per violation.

Following the ruling, the Dutch Pilots Association issued a [statement](#), remarking:

*“The [association] endorses the government’s position that vaccination is important, but that compulsory vaccination by the employer is not permitted.*

*“We were of the opinion that KLM did not comply with this and, moreover, violated our agreements about this, without there being any operational necessity.”*

In Canada, the federal government on June 14 [announced](#) most travel-related vaccine mandates would be lifted as of June 20.

Responding to this announcement, in a statement sent to The Defender, Free to Fly credited those who opposed the mandates, stating:

*“This dark season helps reinforce an important maxim; true*

*change only comes about through tenacity, courage, and the relentless pursuit of truth by principled men and women.*

*“Across our nation, many Canadians refused to give up on freedom and fought for our fragile democracy. We feel no ‘gratitude’ towards an emboldened state for ceasing to violate God-given freedoms.*

*“We must never forget our recent travails, and cannot be lulled into complacency, certainly with Trudeau’s government openly threatening reinstatement of mandates with any ‘new variant’.”*

*“We will continue to pursue them, insisting on uncompromising standards in our industry and the assurance we never again go down this road of medical segregation.”*

In another recent development, Canadian pilot Ross Wightman became just one of a small number of people who have [received compensation](#) from Canada’s Vaccine Injury Support Program.

Wightman was diagnosed with Guillain-Barré Syndrome, a rare condition that affects the nervous system and may cause muscle weakness, paralysis or even death.

He developed the condition within days of receiving his first and only dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. For the past year, Wightman has been unable to work, as he has substantially limited mobility in his arms and legs.

## **Global Aviation Advocacy Coalition pens open letter to aviation industry**

In an [open letter](#) to the aviation industry, the GAA raised serious allegations regarding industry vaccine mandates, which the GAA said resulted in a growing number of vaccine-injured pilots who are unable to fly and who may never do so again – and an increasing number of pilots who continue to fly while experiencing potentially serious symptoms.

The letter was signed by organizations including the USFF, Free To Fly Canada, the [Aussie Freedom Flyers](#), the [UK Freedom Flyers](#), the [Southwest Freedom Flyers](#), the [International Medical Alliance](#), the [Global Covid Summit](#), the [Canadian Covid Care Alliance](#), the [UK Medical Freedom Alliance](#), the [Association of American Physicians and Surgeons](#), and several other groups in the U.S., France, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the U.K., as well as more than 17,000 physicians and medical scientists from around the world and “thousands of pilots at over 30 global airlines.

The GAA said it is in communication with pilots at the following U.S.-based airlines: Alaska, American, Delta, Frontier, JetBlue, Southwest, Spirit and United, and 12 major air carriers in Australia, Canada, France, Germany and the Netherlands.

According to the GAA’s open letter, the organization and the scientists and doctors it works with “are hearing daily from vaccine-injured airline pilots” about conditions including “cardiovascular issues, blood clots [and] neurological and auditory issues.”

The injured pilots are experiencing a broad spectrum of symptoms, “ranging up to death,” the GAA wrote, adding the symptoms “at least correlate to receiving COVID-19 vaccinations.”

The GAA wrote that in many instances, these conditions are serious enough that “pilots have [lost medical certification](#) and may not recover the same,” while others “are continuing to pilot aircraft while carrying symptoms that should be declared and investigated, creating a human factors hazard of unprecedented breadth,” and “a landscape which should greatly concern airlines and the traveling public.”

Pilots continue to fly despite experiencing such symptoms, said the GAA, because those “who report their injury face

possible loss of licensing, income, and career while receiving little to no support from their unions, and a prosecutorial invective from employing airlines.”

The GAA said many pilots were reluctant to receive the COVID-19 vaccine and opposed mandates:

*“Pilots are trained to be careful analysts of their environment, recognizing risks and actively mitigating. For many, their training and differential risk analysis led to concerns and negative conclusions regarding the compatibility of COVID-19 vaccination with health and flight safety.*

*“Not only did many pilots disagree with arbitrary requirements embodied in vaccination mandates, but they also saw risks in the unanswered questions and unjustified speed and pressure behind the vaccine rollouts. They lobbied their airlines and politicians, recommending caution and opposing mandates.”*

However, stated the GAA, for many pilots, it was a choice between vaccination and job loss:

*“Once airlines mandated vaccination, many pilots steadfastly refused based on risk and were subsequently put on unpaid leave or outright terminated.*

*“Principled professionals were forced out of aviation and the industry lost hundreds of thousands of hours of experience. Now, the global airline industry is heading into a dire staffing crisis.*

*“Thousands of other pilots were coerced into vaccination to provide for their families. This has taken a toll on their mental health.”*

For the GAA, blame lies with the mandates – and more broadly, with the airlines, regulators and unions:

*“ ... there appears to be no evidence of aviation regulators, airlines or unions having performed any of their own due diligence into COVID-19 vaccines and the impact on pilot health or performance.*

*“This is at complete odds with existing aviation medical standards. Questions exist around competence and possible negligence.*

*“Failure to address this potential medical watershed will make the airlines and unions complicit in a culture shift that has rocked the aviation mantra of ‘safety first, always.’”*

The GAA called on civil aviation authorities such as the Federal Aviation Administration, Transport Canada, UK Civil Aviation Authority, the European Union Aviation Safety Agency and Australia’s Civil Aviation Safety Authority to begin fulfilling their regulatory obligations.

“The crisis in pilot health must be publicly addressed by airlines and representing unions to restore flight safety to what we once knew,” their letter stated.

GAA called for:

- “Where it exists, mandated COVID-19 vaccination for aviation workers must be discontinued.
- A permissive environment for self-reporting needs to be reemphasized by regulators and airlines.
- Thorough and objective aviation medical screenings of pilots and cabin crew need to be a high priority. These must be backed by the regulator and should focus on high prevalence harms which are now showing up in the general public and in our flight crews.
- Airlines and regulators hold data about sickness and medical certificate suspension, including symptoms and causal reasons. This data should be analysed by

independent third parties to establish or rule out COVID-19 vaccination as a possible cause.”

## **Free to Fly pursues legal action against Canadian authorities, airline**

Canada-based Free to Fly represents close to 3,000 aviation professionals, according to its director, Greg Hill, who spoke to The Defender.

These professionals include pilots, flight attendants, air traffic controllers, maintenance workers and customer service representatives.

According to Hill, industry workers have reported a wide range of health issues, including “generalized chest pains, [myocarditis](#), enlarged heart, [blood clots](#), hearing loss, partial paralysis, lymph issues [and] broad autoimmune dysfunction.”

Some of the injured pilots are “high-end athletes” who experienced a “major decrease in their performance capacity.”

“We’ve had some inexplicable deaths at unreasonably young ages,” Hill said, and “an increase in in-flight diversions with one of our airlines in particular.”

While Hill left open the possibility that at least some of these incidents weren’t vaccine-related, he said that Canadian authorities show “an unwillingness to do a proper investigation.”

“Transport Canada, the airline industry, the airlines and the unions have been uniformly silent on the matter,” Hill said.

Indeed, Hill said the aviation industry, regulators and unions in Canada have not been responsive to outreach from Free to Fly.

Referring to a [document](#), prepared in conjunction with the

Canadian COVID Care Alliance, that said flight crew pilots were most at risk of vaccine-related adverse effects due to their work environment, Hill said:

*“We gave this to the two largest pilot unions in the country, the Air Canada Pilots Association and ALPA, the Airline Pilots Association ... they have refused to respond to it.*

*“We also sent it to management at two of our largest airlines ... they also have refused to even respond to it. And this was raising very explicitly the risks that these medical professionals felt needed, at the very least, to be investigated.*

*“And as yet, we’ve had nothing but silence formally as far as a response from these groups, as far as adverse events, vaccine injuries.”*

The document provides: information on a union’s obligation to its members; a differential risk analysis of COVID-19 versus the vaccines; an analysis of natural versus vaccine-induced immunity; an analysis of adverse reactions to the vaccines and particular risks faced by flight crews; a list of alternate treatment options for COVID-19; and a discussion of informed consent and coercion.

According to Hill, the policy is “no jab, no job” for pilots and aviation professionals in Canada, unless they are granted religious or medical exemptions.

But, said Hill, even in the rare instance when an exemption is granted, those employees nevertheless have found themselves out of work, due to airline practices that Hill described as extortionate.

Hill told The Defender:

*“If you’re not willing to take the jab and you can’t be accommodated with a religious or medical exemption, then you*



*are either on unpaid leave or outright terminated. Some of our pilots have already been terminated.*

*“The vast, vast majority of these accommodations were outright denied ... some of the stories of people that were denied medical accommodations are truly shocking, the same on the religious aspect.*

*“The handful that were approved ... are simply another round of extortion. Some of them were denied, then they were approved retroactively ... essentially they were approved, but then it didn’t change anything ... you continue your unpaid leave, but you’re allowed your benefits.”*

Similar to claims made in an [open letter hand-delivered](#) to the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and major U.S. air carriers in December 2021, Free to Fly also alleged a violation of existing aviation regulations, this time in Canada.

According to Hill:

*“There was, at one point, on the Transport Canada website, this was July 2021, a line that specifically said it remains a general position of Transport Canada ... that participation in medical trials is not considered compatible with aviation medical certification.*

*“A number of us were asking questions ... and saying, ‘Well, what’s up with this?’ And the answer was these [vaccines] are approved. And we said, ‘No, they’re [not fully approved](#), they’re approved under interim order.’*

Hill said if you read that interim order, it was quite laughable. It basically said, ‘We’ll roll these vaccines out and we’ll gather data. Right now we feel that they’re okay and we’ll continue to assess as we continue to jab people,’ which just seems insane.

“So we asked these explicit questions, got no suitable answers,” Hill said. “And the week following ... they simply memory-holed it, they removed that line and it’s no longer on the website. That was their response.”

Hill also described a culture of intimidation in Canada among pilots and flight crews, resulting in a reluctance to come forward with vaccine injury claims:

*“Unless the individuals involved are willing to speak to it, I can’t say ... every pilot that’s currently still employed ... is living in fear of speaking explicitly, certainly in any public forum ... for fear of the retribution that has been rolled out against those of us who no longer have work because we refuse to go down this road and insisted upon medical freedom and in doing a proper analysis of what we’re up against here.”*

This has not stopped Free To Fly from pursuing legal action in Canada. According to Hill, in Canada, “ ... you can’t seek private representation against your company. You have to do it through your union. And when the unions decide to not engage, you’re left between a rock and a hard place.

Hill added:

*“ ... if you read through the case law precedent over the past year or two in Canada, the courts have very, very much chosen a side. And the concern is within an English common law system, if we continue to litigate, litigate and lose and lose and lose, you create precedent that makes it harder and harder to dig your way out.*

*“Unfortunately, in this country, the law is downstream of politics. It’s heavily influenced by it, certainly in my opinion. And politics, of course, is downstream of culture. So unless you impact culture and impact the broader narrative, it’s very difficult to see legal solutions.”*

Free to Fly on June 6 sent a [letter](#) to Canada's minister of transport, co-signed by the GAA, containing "important, detailed questions regarding COVID-19 vaccines and flight safety," according to Hill.

As of this writing, the minister has not responded.

Hill said:

*"It's just mind-boggling ... we've literally stood the [aviation industry's] safety culture on its head, and that's the greatest concern to us.*

*"It's not an interest in a desire for conflict. I long for the world before this became an all-consuming role, where we're pushing to try and get ourselves back to a sense of normalcy and proper risk assessment and risk mitigation, which is what pilots are really dedicated to.*

*"So that's all we want: that ability to look at this properly and analyze it properly ... aviation medical screenings focusing on some of the high prevalence harms that we've seen, that we're hearing about ... these screenings need to be backed by the [Canadian] regulator who, in our opinion, has not done their job properly over the past couple of years."*

As far as suspensions, Hill said, pilot who are off and on have not been able to get their medical [certification] back. And these need to be analyzed by independent third parties.

Some pilots and aviation professionals, in addition to speaking out, are joining advocacy groups.

For instance, Hornsby and the pilot quoted in this story who opted to remain anonymous, have joined USFF, according to its co-founder, Josh Yoder, as are the [pilots](#) and [air traffic controllers](#) who previously shared their stories with The Defender.

USFF has recently begun filing a [series of lawsuits](#) against airlines and federal agencies in response to the vaccine mandates and their aftermath.

Ultimately, though, the public – not just pilots and aviation professionals – must also speak out, according to Hill.

*“Whether it’s Canada, the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, etc., we’d like to see the public as a whole rising up and speaking out publicly about these issues, asking why the regulators haven’t done proper risk assessments in regards to where we’re at with these jabs.”*

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