

THE COLLINGS FOUNDATION



Keeping History Alive

Background

The Collings Foundation is a non-profit, Educational Foundation (501c-3), founded in 1979. The purpose of the Foundation is to organize and support "living history" events that enable Americans to learn more about their heritage through direct participation. The original focus of the Foundation was transportation-related events such as antique car rallies, hill climbs, carriage and sleigh rides, and a winter ice-cutting festival in the Stow, MA area. During the mid-eighties, these activities were broadened to include aviation-related events such as air shows, barnstorming, historical reunions, and joint museum displays on a nationwide level.

Since 1989, a major focus of the Foundation has been the national "Wings of Freedom Tour" featuring WWII aircraft. This tour showcases two fully restored heavy bomber aircraft: a B-24 Liberator and B-17 Flying Fortress. The newest addition to the Wings of Freedom Tour is a WWII P-51C Mustang dual-control fighter aircraft.

The Foundation's 1944 vintage Consolidated B-24J Liberator is painted as "Witchcraft", in honor of an 8th AF bomber that flew a record 130 missions over Europe as part of the 467th BG. The Boeing B-17G Flying Fortress flies as "Nine-O-Nine", in honor of an 8th Air Force, 91st BG heavy bomber. The B-17 was the companion of the B-24 in thousands of wartime, bombing, and reconnaissance missions. Together they were the backbone of the daylight strategic bombing campaign of WWII. The Foundation's P-51C was named "Betty Jane" to honor Col. Charles M. McCorkle, P-51 pilot who was an "ace" fighter pilot and commander, with 11 confirmed kills under his belt – 6 of them in a P-51 Mustang named "Betty Jane". "Betty Jane" has joined the tour as a representative of the "little friends" that engaged the German fighters as the huge bomber formations flew toward enemy targets, saving countless bomber crew lives.

The "Wings of Freedom Tour" has two goals: to honor the sacrifices made by our veterans that allow us to enjoy our freedom; and to educate the visitors, especially younger Americans, about our national history and heritage. The Foundation encourages people to tour the planes, talk to the veterans who come to visit the aircraft, and participate in a "flight experience". In twenty-one years, the tour has made more than 2,378 visits to airports across the United States and Alaska. While the exact number of visitors is difficult to gauge, it is estimated that between 3 and 4 million people see these warbirds annually.

In honor of America's Vietnam Veterans, the Collings Foundation has developed the "Vietnam Memorial Flight" of the McDonnell F-4D Phantom II, Douglas TA-4J Skyhawk, and the Bell UH-1E Huey. The F-4D Phantom II is the only civilian operated example of the type and has appeared at major US air shows since 1999 in the markings of the aircraft flown by Gen. Robin Olds in Vietnam. In 2005 the F-4 was joined by the Douglas TA-4J Skyhawk that has been painted to represent the markings of H&MS-11 "The Playboys", a distinguished all-volunteer fast forward air control group operated out of DaNang by USMC MAG-11. The UH-1E Huey, one of the most recognizable symbols of the Vietnam War, operates in the markings it carried while flown in combat by Medal of Honor recipient Captain Steven Pless, CMDH, with USMC VMO-6. This combat distinction is rare as many Hueys never returned from the war, much less surviving in the years since.

The Foundation also operates additional historic aircraft that have made joint appearances with the Wings of Freedom Tour and Vietnam Memorial Flight, in addition to solo appearances. These include a 1909 Bleriot XI, Fokker DR-1 Triplane, Boeing PT-17 Stearman, North American AT-6 Texan, North American B-25 Mitchell, Grumman TBM Avenger, Chance-Vought F4U-5NL Corsair, Fiesler FI-156 Storch, Grumman S-2F Tracker, UC-78 Bobcat, Lockheed T-33 Shooting Star and the Messerschmitt Me-262. The Foundation continually seeks projects to

expand its collection of fully restored and flying aircraft. Currently, the Collings Foundation is restoring a North American A-36 Apache to flying condition.

From our headquarters in Stow, MA, the Foundation coordinates the "Wings of Freedom" and "Vietnam Memorial" flights and acts as a clearinghouse of information on issues of both aviation and history, along with overseeing the operation of our other aircraft and projects. The Foundation also publishes web and print newsletters that are sent to over 70,000 contributors and has an active membership and volunteer program.

The Stow facilities include an aviation museum and a vintage automobile and racecar collection, which are open by appointment for group tours from May through October. On average, twenty-five events are hosted every year, many of them fundraising events for non-profit groups. The Foundation also hosts three public open house / "living history" events annually at the Stow headquarters.

The vintage car collection includes over sixty-six American-built automobiles and vehicles from the first half of the century. Included in the collection are midget, sprint and "Indy" racecars and Fred Duesenberg's personal Duesenberg SJ Dual-Cowl Phaeton, along with a 1940 Cadillac V-16 owned by Al Capone. The aviation museum is home to a number of the Foundation's smaller aircraft, including a 1902 Wright Glider (replica), an original Bleriot XI (1909), 1911 Wright "Vin Fiz" (replica), Fokker DR-1 Triplane (replica), PT-17 Stearman (1942), AT-6 Texan (1945), TBM Avenger (1945), Fiesler FI-156 Storch (1943), and a static T-33 Shooting Star (1948). Military vehicles and artifacts include a Vim "Camp Devens Express" (1918), Model T Ambulance (1918), Ford Jeep (1942), M16 Half-track with anti-aircraft gun turret and a German 88mm anti-aircraft cannon.

The Foundation also sponsors off-site educational/restoration workshops nationwide. Currently, these projects include the restoration of an A-36 Apache in New Smyrna Beach. In Houston, TX, with the CF West group of volunteers based at Ellington Field, the S2F Tracker and T-33 Shooting Star are undergoing both restoration and on-going maintenance. The F-4D Phantom, TA-4J Skyhawk and UH-1E Huey are also maintained there. The New Smyrna Beach, Florida location is responsible for the award-winning restoration of the F4U-5NL Corsair, as well as the annual and continued maintenance of the B-17, B-24, B-25 and P-51. These workshops provide the Foundation with valuable services and expertise, and the volunteers and veterans provide countless hours of labor—and enthusiasm.

Over the past thirty years the Foundation has undertaken and completed more restoration projects than many of the major aviation museums in the United States such as the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum (NASM) or the United States Air Force Museum. The importance of volunteers who support the Foundation's efforts by hosting the aircraft in their towns, maintaining and restoring the planes, educating the American public about the heritage the planes represent, and financially supporting the Foundation's efforts is invaluable. The Foundation's living history programs have caught the attention of people of all ages and backgrounds (the youngest volunteer started at age 12). The Foundation also relies upon the volunteer services of a number of pilots, many of whom work for major US-based airlines, who have been certified in the operation of our aircraft.

The Foundation depends solely upon private funding—receiving donations from individual members, as well as the people who visit the aircraft in each city and town. In addition, the Foundation receives on-going corporate support from: Bose Corporation, Champion Spark Plug, Goodyear, Martin-Baker, Pacific Oil Cooler, Textstars, Gentex, Concord Batteries, Meguiars and Houston Aircraft Instruments. Tax-deductible donations may be sent to the Collings Foundation, at the address listed below, and may be earmarked for any of the above-mentioned aircraft or for the general fund. If there are any questions you'd like answered, please contact us.

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