

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 "Wings of Freedom Tour" of WWII aircraft. This tour showcases two fully restored 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", 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", 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. Joining the bombers is a P-51C Mustang escort fighter "Betty Jane". The P-51 was affectionately nicknamed by the bomber crews as their "Little Friends". The P-51 Mustang and the pilots who flew them saved countless lives in the skies and on the ground, and helped turn the tide of WWII. The P-51 is arguably the finest fighter aircraft in the history of aviation.

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". Celebrating 25 years, the tour has made more than 2,800 visits to airports across the United States and Alaska. While the exact number of visitors is difficult to gauge, it is estimated that over 3.5 million people see these fully restored historic aircraft 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, Bell UH-1E Huey and F-100F Super Sabre. 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 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 F-100F Super Sabre is the newest addition to the Vietnam Memorial Flight. This F-100F is painted in the markings of Medal of Honor recipient Bud Day's favorite MISTY jet. In April 2012, a Douglas A-1E Skyraider has joined the foundation's collection and will be flying in honor of our Vietnam Veterans. In addition to attending air shows and living history events, we offer unique "flight experience and training" programs in the jets and helicopter.

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, Boeing PT-17 Stearman, North American AT-6 Texan, Grumman TBM Avenger, Chance-Vought F4U-5NL Corsair, Fiesler FI-156 Storch, UC-78 Bobcat, Grumman FM-2 Wildcat, Douglas A-1E Skyraider, North American A-36, Grumman G-21A "Goose" and a Me-262 Jet Fighter. The Foundation continually seeks projects to expand its collection of fully restored and flying aircraft. The Foundation's newest acquisition is a P-40B Tomahawk. This particular Tomahawk is the last fully restored and flying fighter that survived Pearl Harbor. Currently, the Collings Foundation is restoring to flying condition a F6F Hellcat and Fw 190 F-8 and Fw 190 D-9.