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FLIGHT JOURNAL | AUGUST 2018

ON THE COVER: What might possibly be the most authentically restored B-25 ever to fly is owned, displayed, and operated by the Flying Heritage & Combat Armor Museum. (Photo by John Dibbs/Flying Heritage & Combat Armor Museum)

THIS PAGE: Part of the Collings Foundation's Wings of Freedom Tour, this TF-51D dual-control Mustang, one of only two originals known to still be flying, puts the participant at the controls. It's not just a ride. (Photo courtesy of the Collings Foundation)



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Warbird Attraction BY BUDD DAVISSON

here is a very complex set of factors that explains our attraction to warbirds, especially those of World War II. The appeal of their history and the heroics of those who took them into combat is easy to understand. What is much harder to understand is the way that some machines—Spitfire to Mustang to Flying Fortress and beyond—draw such strong responses from those entirely too young to understand the history. Or what about those living in thirdworld countries that exist far outside of the Allied/Axis world? Today, many in those countries are struggling to survive, yet images of a Mustang, for instance, draw their attention. Why?

I'd love to be able to answer that, but I doubt that an answer is even possible. What brought this subject to mind was prepping the article "So You Wanna Fly a Warbird" for this issue. All of us in the *Flight Journal* family spend an inordinate amount of time around warbirds—sometimes as part of the crowd drawn to them at events, sometimes from the cockpit. Unless it is pointed out to us, however, we often miss how young many of those around us are—and how excited they are. It's heartening and more than a little amazing.

What is even more amazing is the number of warbirds scattered throughout the country that have become available to the general public for rides or "flight instruction." From a local operator's Stearman to Mustangs to the top of the ladder with the CAF's B-29 FIFI, enthusiasts can actually go for a flight. Once off the ground, they'll taste the airborne sounds, the smells, and the emotions that exist nowhere else in the world. Looking at a warbird is one thing, but sitting where young men made history so long ago and letting the surroundings

vibrate their way into your thoughts is entirely different. Take our word for it: Once you've actually gone aloft in a warbird, every single warbird image you see or WW II word you read from that point on will affect you differently.

A lot of our WW II heroes didn't make it home. One of those was Lt. Col. Robert Westbrook. Known as "Westy," his story is told by Steve Blake. With 20 kills in the Pacific Theater under his belt, in both P-40s and P-38s, his contribution to winning the war may not have been his skill in combat but his skill as a leader.

Westbrook was taken down by a Japanese gunboat camouflaged as a freighter, the same targets that the 345th Bomber Group, the Air Apaches, and their B-25 gunships specialized in pummeling. In "Air Apaches," Jim Busha fills us in on the success and failures of the low-level attacks that typified their every mission. It was a dangerous business but something in which the 345th excelled.

When it comes to fighters, the Spitfire is almost always singled out, along with the Mustang, as being the best of the breed. Its ability to be adapted to many other roles tested its capabilities, however, and in one, it was a dreadful failure. In "Spitfire," Donald Nijboer delivers the sad news that as good as the Spitfire was as a fighter, that's exactly how bad it was as a dive-bomber. The Royal Air Force tried and tried but finally gave up. It's an interesting but seldom-told story.

So have a good time, and while reading, go to the Warbird Experience guide, pick your aircraft and location, and make your reservation for a flight. Make the summer of 2018 your warbird-experience summer. You'll never regret it. ‡

So You Wanna Fly a 11/4 R 3 R 17

YOUR GUIDE TO THE WARBIRD EXPERIENCE

BY BUDD DAVISSON



TOULOUSE NUTS



Is there an aviation enthusiast alive who hasn't wished that he or she could taste what it was actually like to be at the controls of a World War II fighter or manning the gun positions in a bomber—preferably, without being shot at? No, that individual doesn't exist. The visceral attraction of the warbird is universal, and at one time, that was quite frustrating.

One has to go back only a couple of decades to find a time when it was next to impossible to even get a ride in something like a Mustang, much less receive flight instruction. Plus, there were so few B-17s and other bombers flying that dreaming of hitching a ride in one wasn't even worth wasting the mental energy on. That, however, has changed—big time!



Today there are numerous operators—some working out of fixed facilities and others literally barnstorming around the country, giving rides or instruction in a wide variety of warbirds. This is the result of an interesting intersection between warbird operators and the regulatory agencies, specifically the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

The Regulations Rule

Very few combat warbirds were ever licensed in FAA's transport or normal category, which is necessary for an owner/operator to carry passengers for hire. When in civilian hands, most ex-military birds fly in limited, restricted, or experimental-airshow/exhibition categories, in which the carriage of paying passengers is strictly forbidden. In 1996, several not-for-profit organizations (e.g., the Collings Foundation and the Experimental Aircraft Association [EAA]) petitioned the FAA to allow them to carry passengers in nonstandard category warbirds, citing the historical nature of the aircraft and the importance of being able to expose the public to the aerial artifacts while, at the same time, generating cash flow to help maintain those aircraft. The regulations that the meetings generated now come under the heading of Living History Flight Experience (LHFE) operations, and the organizations now using those regulations to expose the public to their historical aircraft are doing so only at the will of the FAA. That is another way of saying that there is no guarantee how far these organizations will be able to operate in the future simply because of the changeable nature of governmental regulations. So if you've been wanting that warbird experience, do it sooner rather than later.

A rider's view from the bombardier position in a B-17. (Photo courtesy of the Collings Foundation)

The Warbird Experience Community

The warbird experience community is populated by several types of organizations offering experiences in many different types of warbirds—trainers to fighters—in many different operational settings. Some are working out of a fixed location, often museums, while others constantly tour the entire United States. Others set up at aviation events, airshows, and fly-ins.

Some entities are purely commercial and are recognized as such by the FAA, while many others, like the EAA, the Collings Foundation, and the museums, are 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, which utilize the funds generated to keep their aircraft flying while, at the same time, giving the aviation community the chance to live out some of their fantasies. Also, since they are operating as nonprofits, a portion of the cost of a ride is (theoretically) a tax-deductible donation.

It should be noted that some of the operations are strictly limited to giving rides, while others, like Stallion 51 and Warbird Adventures, give flight instruction in their airplanes. Inasmuch as under FAA definitions, a student receiving flight instruction is not a passenger for hire, these organizations have gotten permission to operate their aircraft in the flight instruction role. Whether you're a pilot or not, you'll actually fly their airplanes under the guidance of their experienced instructors.

What follows is a general guide to some of the major operations and a list of some of the smaller ones. A complete guide to warbird experiences worldwide is also included. Be sure to look at the guide closely because you'll see quite a range of warbirds available from Stearmans to Helldivers.



Touring with four airplanes requires a substantial crew. (Photo courtesy of the Collings Foundation)



The Collings Foundation >> WINGS OF FREEDOM TOURS



The biggest player, by far, in the warbird-experience community is the Collings Foundation based in Stow, Massachusetts. While it does charge for rides and instructional flights, the revenue, which helps support its aircraft, is not the reason why it conducts its Wings of Freedom Tours. The Foundation's "foundation" was laid down by Bob Collings back in the 1970s, when he began collecting cars and then developed a serious appreciation for the history those vehicles represented. History became the incentive to collect and that morphed into a personal goal of keeping history alive and getting the general public involved.

Being in New England, Bob Collings began organizing living history events in which, as the Foundation's director of marketing, Hunter Chaney, puts it, "Participants got hands-on historical experience. It was a tactile form of history. Mr. Collings's attitude is that to read about history is one thing but to participate in it is something altogether different and [one] that leaves a more long-lasting mark on those involved."

In that arena, Collings organized events like ice cutting, a true New England tradition, or operating farm equipment and other activities that made New England what it is.

"Bob's turn to aviation history," says Chaney, "was caused mostly by his wanting to make the public more aware and more appreciative of the tremendous contributions made to the country by its military veterans. So he began seeking out WW II aircraft that he wanted to develop into some form of living history event."

Chaney says, "The Foundation was aided in the Liberator restoration by B-24 veteran groups that put together a grassroots funding drive that literally had them collecting donations in tin cups."

While all of this was taking place, Bob Collings was thinking about a way to bring people closer to their aviation heritage. Living history events were still on his mind, and that led to him form an alliance with the EAA and approach the FAA about selling rides in the B-24. His thought was that there would be nothing that could give an individual a better understanding of what veterans experienced than actually sitting where they sat in combat. The process that was involved in asking the government to allow something that had never been done before is too long and complex to be described here. The fact that the FAA recognized some of the same values that Collings saw in living history flights, however, speaks volumes about making history live again today.

Today, the B-24 is joined on the 109 stops (37 states) of the 2018 tour by the Foundation's B-25, B-17, and one of only two original Temcoconverted, dual-control TF-51Ds known to exist. Soon, other aircraft, including a TP-40 and an AD Skyraider, will be offered to the public. And while the public is seeing the Collings Foundation aircraft on tour, construction is underway back in Stow on a massive new museum building that is designed specifically to put museum visitors into historically accurate combat environments (trenches, airbases, etc.). Plus, a wide number of aircraft are under restoration, including a backup B-17, a Hellcat, and two FW 190s (A and D models), among others. According to Chaney, "Our continual challenge in everything we do is how to integrate educational standards with thrilling experiences, both in the air and on the ground." collingsfoundation.org



THE COLLINGS FOUNDATION'S FIRST ACQUISITION

The first aircraft the Foundation acquired was a B-24 airframe that badly needed a complete, down-to-the-last-rivet restoration. The aircraft was in England, but that was only the last stop in a long history. Initially,



it had been a Royal Air Force airplane that had flown combat and supply missions all over the South Pacific during WW II before being integrated into the China/Burma/India campaigns. When the war ended, that plane, along with many of its peer group, was left abandoned in India. At the time, India was building its own air force, and selected

several dozen B-24s to be rebuilt and put back into active service. This particular airplane served India into the 1960s before being once again abandoned. A collector brought it to England and then sold it to the Collings Foundation. Several years and more than 97,000 rivets later, the airplane was put into service.



Stallion 51)) EVERY FLIGHT IS A LESSON



The Stallion 51 crew—KT, Beth, Angela, Kelly, Richard, Zak, Steve, Lee, John, Bill, Peter, Marco, John, and Greg—is experienced in giving the public seamless access to the warbird experience. (Photo courtesy of Stallion 51)

tallion 51, located in Kissimmee, Florida, is a professional flight operation that offers a wide range of warbird-oriented services besides simply putting an individual at the controls of a P-51 Mustang. Stallion 51 is the go-to place for new Mustang owners and pilots, but the lion's share of its business is letting those who have always dreamed of flying a Mustang actually live out their dream. There are, however, no "rides" given. Each flight has clients going through a thorough preflight briefing before being ushered to one of two dual-cockpit/dual-controlled Mustangs, where they receive instruction. The "students" have virtually every control the instructor has, and depending on the mission—whether a checkout training or flight of fantasy—the "students" will get more than their share of stick time.

This is rather improbable and very successful business was borne of, and is based on, one thing: a passion for the North American P-51 Mustang. And passion is something Lee Lauderback, Stallion 51's founder and president, has in



abundance. Among other things, he has logged well over 9,000 hours in Mustangs, probably a world record.

"I guess I have North American in my blood," he says. "At two years of age, my first airplane ride was in a North American Navion with my dad. I began flying gliders at 14, soloed on my 16th birthday, and got my private license soon thereafter. Commercial, ATP [advanced turbo-prop], and CFI [certified flight instructor] followed, as age allowed. I wanted to fly military fighters; my eyes weren't quite good enough, so after graduating from Embry-Riddle [Aeronautical University], I drifted into the corporate flying world. As chief pilot, I flew Arnold Palmer's jets and helicopter for 18 years, but the Mustang was always reaching out to me.

"A defining moment," he continues, "is probably when Gordon Plaskett put me in the front seat of his TF-51 and let me fly it with him. That was it! I was hooked. In 1987, a partner, Doug Schultz, and I bought a TF-51 and started flying under contract for the Navy's Test Pilot School at NAS Patuxent River, Maryland, as well as doing orientation flights and checkout training. This was the beginning of Stallion 51. In the late 1990s, I bought him out and began expanding the company. I'm one of five boys; my twin brothers, Peter and Richard Lauderback, have their own business: Stallion 51 Maintenance. They are the best Mustang mechanics you'll ever meet, and we have a symbiotic relationship: I break 'em—they fix 'em. They also build them, and our little brother, John Lauderback, he sells them.

"As we expanded from military contracting, I began looking at a different audience. At the time, the warbird community was like the Wild West with very little training or thought given to safe operations of warbirds in general, with the Mustang being the most numerous of the breed. Things have changed since then as the result of rising costs, FAA regulations, and insurance. The community now recognizes the value of training."

At the same time that the demand for training was building, the Mustang's reputation and general nostalgic attraction was also growing and that became a Stallion 51 market unto itself.

Lee says, "It's hard to imagine how farreaching the Mustang is; the airplane is recognized worldwide. Further, the Mustang's appeal isn't limited to a specific generation. It draws in the youngest and the oldest, each for their own reasons. Last year was a particular stellar year for Stallion 51, in both social media and print, keeping our two Mustangs quite busy.

"Today, a person can walk in our front door for their appointment, and when they walk out, they do so with a clearer understanding what it takes to fly a Mustang. The preflight briefing (which addresses a specific syllabus), the flight, and the debriefing thoroughly saturate them with Mustang knowledge, and they come away with a much better appreciation for the airplane and its place in history. More important, the sights, sounds, and smells that can only be found in a fighter cockpit give them an entirely different perspective of aerial combat. When I see that grin on a person's face after the flight, having been there myself, I know just how excited they are. A dream has come true, and we've been part of making that happen. It's all very cool! Mustangs forever!"

stallion51.com



"IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE HOW FAR-REACHING THE MUSTANG IS: THE AIRPLANE IS RECOGNIZED WORLDWIDE. FURTHER, THE MUSTANG'S APPEAL ISN'T LIMITED TO A SPECIFIC GENERATION. IT DRAWS IN THE YOUNGEST AND THE **OLDEST. EACH FOR** THEIR OWN REASONS." -LEE LAUDERBACK. STALLION 51

Two of founder Lee Louderback's brothers, twins Richard and Peter, are part of Stallion 51 and re known for their warbirdmaintenance skills. (Photo courtesy of the EAA)



Warbird Adventures)) THE TEXAN PEOPLE



"SOME WANT
TO RECAPTURE
SOMETHING FROM
THEIR YOUTH.
OTHERS WANT TO SEE
WHAT IT IS LIKE TO
FLY A WARBIRD, AND
MAKE NO MISTAKE,
THE TEXAN MAY BE
A TRAINER, BUT IT'S
JUST AS MUCH OF A
WARBIRD AS MOST
OF THE OTHERS."
-THOM RICHARD, WARBIRD
ADVENTURES

haring a ramp with Stallion 51 in Kissimmee, Warbird Adventures offers its clientele a first-class flight training/warbird experience and from the get-go clients are in the driver's seat. Pilot or not, the adventurer will be in front of one of its T-6/SNJ Texans with a highly experienced instructor in the back.

The owner of the operation, Thom Richard, well-known Reno racer, says, "I started the company, January 7, 1998 with one SNJ-6, which we still have. That grew to three, and we keep them busy. We've flown over 40,000 customers—about half of which were pilots but all received flight instruction. The rest are buffs and are flying with us for a variety of reasons. Some want to recapture something from their youth. Others want to see what it is like to fly a warbird, and make no mistake, the Texan may be a trainer, but it's just as much of a warbird as most of the others. Everything about the experience is exactly the same as in a fighter except the airspeed numbers aren't as high. We can do some aerobatics, if wanted, or make the flight as smooth as glass. That's all up to the customer.

"Those customers who are pilots also come for a variety of reasons. Some just want the proficiency. Others have never flown a tailwheel and want to learn. Others are preparing to fly a fighter of some kind. During WW II, the Texan



was the last airplane a student flew before they climbed into a fighter, and almost all current warbird pilots go the same route.

"We are an FAR [Federal Aviation Regulation] Part 61 flight school, so we're the same as the local Cessna flying school and do all of our training the same way. It's just that our aircraft are a little different."

An advantage to the Texan is that the cost is much lower to both buy and operate than any single-seat fighter, which makes its warbird experience within reach of more people.

warbirdadventures.com



B-17 Rides: The Fortress Folks

Nearly every B-17 in the United States that is still flying is now being used to offer warbird enthusiast rides. And these are true rides, not flight instruction, and exist under a different set of very special FARs than the warbird flight school operators do. Also, most of the B-17s tour the country giving rides at different locations all summer long. These are in addition to the B-17 "909" that the Collings Foundation tours with.

EAA's Aluminum Overcast

Based in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, the EAA keeps the plane on tour during the summer months. The EAA worked with the Collings Foundation in approaching the FAA for waivers to operate their aircraft in a "passengers for hire" environment, which resulted in the Living History Flight Experience regulations.

Commemorative Air Force's Sentimental Journey

The Arizona wing of the Commemorative Air Force (CAF) tours with its B-17 for much of the year, and is one of the few offering wintertime rides because of its location in Mesa, Arizona.

Commemorative Air Force's Texas Raiders

The Gulf Coast wing of the CAF bases its B-17 in Conroe, Texas, and tours to major events and locations.

National Warplane Museum's The Movie Memphis Belle

Located in Geneseo, New York, the museum operates *The Movie Memphis Belle* (it was used in the movie) and bases the airplane with Warbirds Adventure in Kissimmee during the winter months.

The Liberty Foundation's Madras Maiden

Madras Maiden belongs officially to the Erickson Aircraft Collection in Madras, Oregon, but the Liberty Foundation keeps the airplane on the road almost continuously. It says that Douglas, Georgia, is likely to be its home for the 2018 winter months while it undergoes maintenance.

Lone Star Flight Museum's Thunderbird

Not as active as other B-17 operators in the United States, Lone Star Flight Museum offers rides at its Houston location.

Yankee Air Museum's Yankee Lady

Located at Willow Run Airport in Belleville, Michigan, the Yankee Air Museum does limited tours with the aircraft, but sells rides from its museum location during the summer flying season.



Clockwise from above: ■ Not all spectators take a flight on the B–17 but settle for a tour inside the airplane. ■ A bombardier from long ago revisits his old position in the EAA's B–17. ■ Do you think he'll remember this flight? Absolutely! ■ Many generations of aviators and enthusiasts relive memories or make new ones. (Photos courtesy of the Collings Foundation)













The listings below might be entitled "Seeking out the Impossible Dream" because all of them offer rides/instruction in a wide variety of warbirds, from the tiniest liaison bird to the CAF's B-29, FIFI. Some work out of a fixed-base location as indicated in the guide, but some also tour and their schedules may be found on their websites.

UNITED STATES

ARIZONA

Commemorative Air Force, Arizona Wing azcaf.org

Warbirds Unlimited warbirdsunlimited.com

CALIFORNIA

Air Combat USA aircombat.com

Air Group 1 ag1caf.org

Biplane Rides biplanefun.com

Commemorative Air Force, Southern California Wing cafsocal.com

San Diego Air Tours airtoursofsandiego.com

Sky Thrills!

skythrills.com

Stearman-Aero **stearman-aero.com**

Vintage Aircraft **twinbeech.com**

Warbirds West Air Museum warbirdswestair museum.homestead.com

COLORADO

Barnstormers Aero Services, Inc. **basi.org**

Commemorative Air Force, Rocky Mountain Wing rockymountainwingcaf.org

FLORIDA

Fantasy of Flight Museum fantasyofflight.com/collection

Florida Air Tours floridaairtours.com

History Flight

historyflight.comStallion 51

stallion51.com

Warbird Adventures, Inc. warbirdadventures.com

Wings of Dreams Aviation Museum wingsofdreams.org

GEORGIA

Bi-Plane Adventures, Inc. **biplaneride.com**

Biplane Rides Atlanta **biplaneatlanta.com**

Commemorative Air Force, Dixie Wing

dixiewing.org

Preston Aviation flytailwheel.com

HAWAII

Pacific Warbirds **pearlharborwarbirds.com**

IDAHO

Legacy Flight Museum rexburg.org/pages/lfm-legacy-flight-museum

ILLINOIS

Code 1 Aviation code 1 aviation.com

Gauntlet Warbirds gauntletaerospace.com

Lima Lima

Warbird Aviation Rendezvous, Inc. **flyawarbird.com**

MICHIGAN

Yankee Air Museum yankeeairmuseum.org

MISSOURI

Historic Aircraft Restoration Museum historicaircraftrestoration museum.org

NEVADA

Sky Combat Ace skycombatace.com

NEW MEXICO

Jet Warbird Training Center **jetwarbird.com**

NEW YORK

American Airpower Museum americanairpowermuseum.com

National Warplane Museum nationalwarplanemuseum.com

Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome oldrhinebeck.org

Wings of Eagles Discovery Center wingsofeagles.com

NORTH CAROLINA

OBX Biplanes obxairtouradventures.com

OREGON

Jim's Biplane Rides **jimsbiplanerides.com**

PENNSYLVANIA

Mid-Atlantic Air Museum maam.org

TEXAS

Cavanaugh Flight Museum cavanaughflightmuseum.com

Commemorative Air Force, Gulf Coast Wing **b17texasraiders.org**

Commemorative Air Force, West Texas Wing **sb2chelldiver.com**

Flight of the Phoenix Aviation Museum flightofthephoenix.org

Lone Star Flight Museum lonestarflight.org

VIRGINIA

Bay Aviation **bayaviationonline.com**

Stearman Biplane Rides **brownsbiplanerides.com**

Texan Flight texanflight.com

WASHINGTON

Historic Flight Foundation **historicflight.org**

Olde Thyme Aviation, Inc. **oldethymeaviation.com**

WISCONSIN

EAA Air Venture Museum eaa.org



PHOTOS COURTESY OF AMERICAN AIRPOWER MUSEUM

CANADA

ONTARIO

Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum warplane.com

Waterloo Warbirds waterloowarbirds.com

MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

American Aeronautical Foundation **aafgroup.org**

Collings Foundation, "Wings of Freedom"

collingsfoundation.org

Commemorative Air Force B-29/B-24 Squadron **cafb29b24.org**

EAA Fantasy Flight Camps eaa.org

FlyFighterJet.com flyfighterjet.com

GoAviator goaviator.com

Incredible Adventures incredible-adventures.com

J's Bird

warbirds-eaa.net/js-bird

Liberty Foundation **libertyfoundation.org**

Planes of Fame planesoffame.org

Waldo Wright's Flying Service waldowrights.com