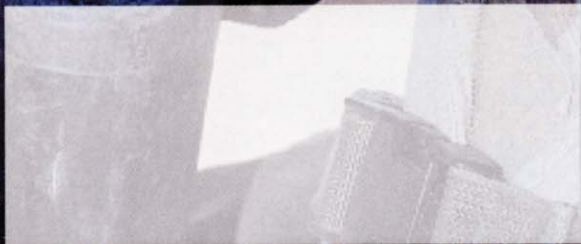


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*Army Aviation Heritage Foundation*

# SKY SOLDIERS

## A TRIBUTE TO PATRIOTS



By Sean M. Brady

**I**t is said in the Army that a soldier is recruited, but at reenlistment a family is retained. That individual family connects to the much larger military family, composed of today's military and the men and women who served before them.

Today's soldiers and their families are watching the way today's veterans are treated.

As universal military service fades from the public experience, fewer members of the public ever get to meet their soldiers. Military deeds will be recorded in history books, but the veterans themselves may not be heard. Their aircraft will come to rest in museums, but they will never fly again. How can the Army legacy live on beyond the hearts and minds of its veterans?

The Army Aviation Heritage Foundation (AAHF), a nonprofit all-volunteer organization, composed of more than 750 veterans, their families and civilian supporters across the United States, is acting to connect the American soldier to the American public through the use of the story of the Army and Army Aviation. The AAHF is providing America an opportunity to hear its veterans, share their stories and see its military legacy in flight and in action.

The Army Aviation Heritage Foundation has chosen to take its story to the American people through extensive and elaborate displays of its historic, flyable Army-aircraft fleet in living history programs presented at major public venues, such as air shows, and at other smaller community venues.

The AAHF outreach program emphasizes the air show as its most effective method of educating the American public and of reaching large audiences at single events while using historic Army Aviation aircraft in exciting and authentic living history programs. Each living history program is designed to honor our country's military and its veterans and also to inspire the public that ultimately supports them, while giving a glimpse of military life and service to the next generation.

By taking the legacy of its soldiers and aircraft to the American public, the AAHF gives America an opportunity to meet veterans and current military members. On seeing men and women in action who exemplify the best in soldierly virtues, today's youths can be both inspired and educated by the display of precision, teamwork and dedication necessary to defend our country.

Every aspect of the AAHF's air show outreach program is specifically designed to provide an exciting, yet realistic, demonstration of the soldiers, equipment and roles of Army Aviation in American military history. Delivered with a meaningful and patriotic presentation and narration, the shows intend to grab the public's ear and deliver the Foundation's enthusiasm and pride for the accomplishments of the Army, Army Aviation and America's military in service to the nation. There are currently three distinct modules in the AAHF's flying program that represent the three main eras of modern Army Aviation—World War II, the Korean War and the war in Vietnam.

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The World War II module includes an authentic, flying World War II L-4B "Grasshopper" aircraft and authentic Army ground vehicles that relive the story of the birth of modern Army Aviation.

The Korean War module uses a historic flying Army OH-23 helicopter and borrows from the depictions of the movie and television series *M\*A\*S\*H* to demonstrate the growth and development of Army Aviation and illustrate the initial use of the helicopter in the Army. The Korean

War module recreates the feel of the *M\*A\*S\*H* television series, complete with the characters Hawk Eye and Hot Lips, to remind the public that it was the Army that played a central role in this piece of American pop culture.

The Vietnam module combines seven of the AAHF's veteran Army helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft (AH-1, two UH-1s, OH-6, CV-2, OV-1, and L-19) with actual infantry assault teams to deliver a realistic and powerful portrayal of the use of Army Aviation and Air Assault forces in a typical AirCav troop action in Vietnam. The Vietnam module

includes multiple aircraft gun and rocket runs, artillery support, a low-level supply air drop and an infantry air assault with a realistic ground fire fight, complete with an Opposing Force and the liberal use of blank ammunition and pyrotechnic effects. Every effort is made to ensure that the audience receives a realistic representation of the Army and Army Aviation in action.

Air show selection committees are able to choose from the three-module menu, as desired. In combination, however, all three modules tell the unfolding story of the Army and Army Aviation from World War II through Vietnam. With the recurring support of active and reserve Army detachments, however, the AAHF has also been able to highlight present day Army and Army Aviation at many air shows. The shows have received overwhelmingly positive reactions from audiences; and the safety, professional presentation and effectiveness of the Foundation's performances have also established the AAHF as a highly sought after air show organization.

The Foundation's initial season, completed in 1999, reached 380,000 members of the public through nine static presentations and one flying program. Based on this initial success, the AAHF was able to expand its outreach efforts during the following year.

The 2000 season saw the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation sharing the story of Army Aviation with 1,950,000 individuals at three static presentations and 13 flying programs. At the Fort Rucker Armed Forces Day Air Show, the AAHF executed its entire program after receiving a personal invitation from the branch chief of Army Aviation. For the EAA Oshkosh Air Show, with an estimated attendance of 950,000, the Foundation received a rare formal invitation to participate in its official 2000 air show program.



The invitation represented the first known time that any representative of Army Aviation, active, Guard or civilian, had ever been asked to be a part of the official air show flying program at Oshkosh.

During the Detroit (Selfridge) Air Show (the second largest civilian air show in the country, with an attendance of 700,000), the AAHF was asked to provide the closing performance in place of the Navy's Blue Angels flight demonstration team. The Foundation's 1999 and 2000 air show seasons have been covered by a variety of publications and featured on several national television specials, including the *Discovery Wings* program, and on the SpeedVision and ESPN cable channels.

To date, the AAHF has devoted more than 122,600 volunteer hours and more than \$4.4 million dollars in donated aircraft, cash and equipment to organize, develop and present 25 public programs that have taken our military's story to five million people since the Foundation's inception in 1997. All of this was accomplished at no cost to the U.S. Army, Army Aviation or the federal government. In partnership with \$43,000 in corporate sponsorship money, the remaining majority of the cash donations needed to present the Foundation's living history programs was provided by the AAHF's internal membership volunteer donation program. Veteran volunteers, from maintenance and marketing, to air assaults and air show narration, perform all vital functions in the AAHF.

In May of 2001, Maj. Gen. Anthony R. Jones, then Army Aviation branch chief, nominated the AAHF for the Zachary and Elizabeth Fisher Distinguished Civilian Hu-

manitarian Award, which is presented annually by the Secretary of Defense to a civilian individual or organization that has demonstrated outstanding support of the military and the fostering of patriotism. This is the first known time that the Army Aviation Branch has nominated a civilian organization for this award. At the time of the writing of this article, the nomination had been endorsed by Gen. John Abrams, commanding general of Training and Doctrine Command, and forwarded to the Department of the Army.

At the end of the recent 2001 air show season, the AAHF

members decided to name their air show program and demonstration team the Sky Soldiers—A Tribute to Patriots.

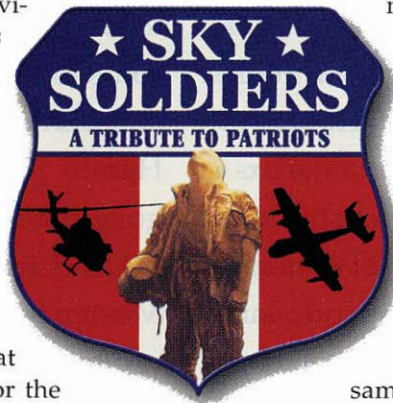
The AAHF chose this name because it fully describes what the AAHF represents. The Sky Soldiers demonstration team organization and program is a part of their larger nonprofit educational foundation organization. The AAHF would like for the public to come to know its public presentation program as the Sky Soldiers, in much the same way that the public identifies the Air

Force demonstration team as the Thunderbirds, the Navy's team as the Blue Angels and the Army's parachute team as the Golden Knights.

The AAHF's eight shows in 2001 reached an estimated 2,700,000 members of the public. In the past three air show seasons, the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation has reached five million people, an impressive effort on behalf of our military and veterans, accomplished by an all-volunteer civilian organization. Because of the increasing size of its operation—currently over 20 flyable Army aircraft—the AAHF is also beginning the process of expanding to a larger, permanent facility.

Our soldiers and their story should not be forgotten when they are gone. Their machines should not be kept from the skies when they retire. The Foundation's volunteers understand that today's soldiers are watching how America treats its veterans. The Army Aviation Heritage Foundation is dedicated to ensuring that their legacy and heritage of service are never forgotten.

For more information on the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation, call (770) 897-0444 or visit its web site at [www.armyav.org](http://www.armyav.org).



Army Aviation Heritage Foundation

A squad of the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation's air assault soldiers at the St. Louis air show. The AAHF is a nonprofit all-volunteer organization composed of more than 750 veterans, their families and civilian supporters that takes the Army story to the public through displays and demonstrations using its historic Army-aircraft fleet at air shows and other community venues.