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What Happened to the Dinosaurs?



By Maj. Gen. Morris J. Brady, Ret.

How often have you thought of the sight or sound of a familiar aircraft? For most of us, probably not at all until we come to the time or place where aircraft are no longer a part of the everyday scene. When we're hit by the realization of the impact aircraft have had on who we are, what we do and how we do it, some might even have thoughts of how we can hold on to the special meaning aviation has had for us. Even though aircraft have become a central part of life, we

The Army Aviation Heritage Foundation's TAH-1P Cobra in the final stages of a complete restoration.



don't seem to be consciously aware of how fundamentally important they are. What a great tragedy it would be to lose the spirit of our aviation history beyond the same veil of years that hides the fate of the dinosaurs.

It could happen. All it takes is some indifference and a little neglect spiked by a touch of apathy, and there we are. As the inventory of an aircraft from our past dwindles down to the single digits, that aircraft becomes an endangered species on its way to becoming extinct. When that happens, another piece of our heritage is about to be lost. A small bit of the glory that aircraft may have inspired fades. The memory of the struggles and sacrifices dulls. Soon the live evidence of its contributions and failures is gone.

For some aircraft the process has already begun and they are now an endangered species. For others it may be too late. Extinctions have

occurred since the beginning of flight. For example, where are our World War I aircraft today? For that matter, how many World War II aircraft are still with us? Some are still around, but which ones and how many? More importantly, what is being done to preserve these warbirds and keep them flying?

The Experimental Aircraft Association says that during World War II 296,429 military aircraft were produced and most of the survivors didn't make it to the post-war period.

Many of those that made it through the war were considered not to be worth the price of a ticket home. They were destroyed because no further need was seen for them. Some were pushed off aircraft carriers, others were blown up, cut apart or scrapped. A few made it to the bone yard. Others were used up in fire fighting, transport duties and other causes deemed at the time to be more important than the aircraft themselves. A few old warbirds, generally highly modified, were used for sport flying.

When the number of surviving aircraft of a particular species drops, the demise of the species is accelerated as the nonflyable hulks and pieces are consumed for parts to keep the ever dwindling survivors flying. Accidents and neglect further complicate the issue.

In spite of the thousands of aircraft produced for World War II, their numbers are finite. These aircraft, some of the most famous in the

As these aircraft slowly slip into oblivion, one can almost hear their funeral dirge drawing closer.



AAHF's restored L-4 served with the U.S. Army from the invasion of North Africa, through Europe, to the fall of Berlin.

world, are slowly fading away. Arguably one of the most popular and effective fighters of that war was the P-51 Mustang. The United States built 15,686 of them. A few years ago, only 295 were known to exist. Half, less than one percent, of those surviving, are flying today. We know of ten flyable P-38s out of a total of 9,923. Just 11 P-47 Thunderbolts are known to exist. As these aircraft slowly slip into oblivion, one can almost hear their funeral dirge drawing closer.

This regrettable circumstance has come about largely because of a low level of interest and too little effort directed toward preserving the history and technology of these grand old aircraft. Sadder still is the loss of the great contributions to American arms by these flying machines and the heroic men who flew them. What better way is there to illustrate and commemorate their valor and dedication than by flying examples of the machines?

Although the aircraft mentioned are widely accepted as part of the heritage of the U.S. Air Force, they started out as part of the Army Air Corps and later the U.S. Army Air Forces. But who is keeping track? Current-day Army aviation heritage is generally traced to the Army liaison aircraft of World War II.

The burden of recording the Army's history of flight has so far been left to museums and the written word. A number of military aircraft are in great museums throughout the country. Others are still in storage facilities awaiting restoration or display space. Some are being cannibalized.

Almost none actually fly, whether they are capable of flight or not. They sit static and quiet.

The tradition has been to entice the public to come to us. How much more can be done to reinforce the work of these fine institutions by adding aircraft that can be seen and heard and touched? Flying aircraft should be taken to the public so young and old can see their aerial performance, inspect the aircraft and talk to the crews. America's flying history is one of the brightest and most vital chapters of our national record. More

needs to be done to proclaim it.

Just as the aircraft of earlier times have been lost or are in danger of becoming so, more recent Army aircraft are steadily moving toward extinction. Not too long ago, an Army aviator requested that an H-13 be present on the parade field at his retirement ceremony. The problem was that H-13s are long gone from the Army inventory. So a contractor was called on to provide the H-13, but he didn't have one, either. However, after an appeal to local maintenance operators, three pieces of an H-13 were found that could be cobbled together and trucked to the parade field.

Two years ago a well-done tableau depicting the various periods of military history presented a three-quarter-ton truck to represent the Vietnam War. It was reported that the truck was used because no UH-1s were available, nor were the funds to pay the National Guard for flying one in. With the emphasis on scrapping the helicopters as they are surplus, recalling or

The AAHF's second of three UH-1H's arriving at the Foundation's hangar at Tara Field on the South side of Atlanta.



The last TL-19D in government service is delivered to Tara Field to begin restoration.

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Heritage Update

The Army Aviation Heritage Foundation (AAHF) would like to thank the Army Aviation Association of America for its ongoing support. AAHF is in its second year of operation and things are developing extremely well — we currently have nine flyable examples of Army aircraft dating back to 1943.

You may have had an opportunity to view the

AAHF's first restoration project — a Hughes OH-6A Cayuse — at last year's AAAA convention.

The aircraft sparked an exciting response from a number of Army aviation enthusiasts following the convention. Upon flying home from the convention the AAHF had officially registered 10 new lifetime members! Membership meetings are held at the Foundation headquarters at Tara Field, 4A7, on the first Saturday of each month.

The Foundation is still in pursuit of historic flying examples of Army aircraft that can be restored and utilized in the educational flying presentations scheduled to begin this summer. If you or someone you know is interested in helping to preserve the rich heritage of Army aviation and educate the American public (particularly the younger generation) on the contributions and accomplishments of Army aviation, please let us know. AAHF is an IRS approved 501 (c) (3) organization,



making donations of money, parts and equipment, or aircraft fully tax deductible. Come join AAHF and be a part of living history — your assistance to our cause is greatly appreciated.

You can call us at (770) 897-0444, fax us at (770) 897-0066 or access our web site at www.armyav.org. Our mailing address is: The Army Aviation Heritage Foundation, 506 Mt. Pleasant Road, Hampton, GA, 30228.

Adam Hollick, director of the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation.





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commemorating the deeds of our first turbine powered helicopter that changed the entire Army's thinking will be left largely to museums and books.

Something, perhaps the concern about terrorism, has produced a bureaucratic reaction that makes excess flyable AH-1s unavailable to legitimate civilian interests for any reason. Occasionally, "demilitarized" (weakened and stripped) nonflyables are offered to be hoisted to the tops of concrete pillars to become silent testaments to another time.

When Americans care, they are capable of prodigious tasks. So why not a concerted effort to vitalize the Army's flying heritage?

Army aircraft extinctions seem to be inexorable. Extinction, in this case, means the permanent loss of unique warplanes. The preservation of their contributions, deeds and technology is a building force in education, the evolution of Army aircraft and our aviation heritage. Much credit is due to the aviation museums and other advocate agencies, as well as to a number of private collectors. But Army aviation isn't a small fleet of liaison aircraft anymore. It's much more now: a maneuver branch, a major budget item, a prime tactical and strategic factor. More can and needs to be done to tell the story of this flourishing arm to a larger portion of the American public.

Unfortunately, the dinosaurs had little public support and weren't well enough organized to help their cause. Happily, that's not the case with Army aviation. We just have to get to work. That's what the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation is all about. If you are interested in being part of the effort, contact the Foundation at: 506 Mt. Pleasant Road, Hampton, GA 30228 or by phone at (770) 897-0444 or fax at (770) 897-0066.



Maj. Gen. Morris J. Brady, Ret. — a master Army aviator and a former assistant deputy chief of staff of the Army for operations and plans — is chairman of the Army Aviation Heritage Foundation.

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