

Wings of Freedom tour brings World War II aircraft to Bullhead City

- SAUL A. FLORES, News West



The P-51 Mustang is one of the five planes that the Wings of Freedom Tour brings in order for people to get an up-close look.

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Visitors attending The Wings of Freedom Tour admire the sight of the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress at the Laughlin/Bullhead City International Airport on Monday. The Wings of Freedom Tour continues today and Wednesday from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Thursday from 9:30 a.m. to noon.

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BULLHEAD CITY — Five World War II aircraft landed at Laughlin/Bullhead City International Airport on Monday.

The five aircraft — a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress, a Consolidated B-24 Liberator, a Curtiss P40 Warhawk, a North American B-25 Mitchell and a P-51 Mustang — are part of The Wings of Freedom Tour, presented by the Collings Foundation.

“We tour all year long and during that tour, we will land in about 110 cities,” said Jamie Mitchell, coordinator for The Wings of Freedom Tour. “A fun fact: Our B-24 Liberator is the only one left flying and it served during the war for the Royal Air Force. After the war, they kind of scrapped all of them so ours is the only flying example of the bombing configuration.”

People who are interested in seeing the aircraft up close can go to Signature Flight Support at the airport. Admission is \$15 for adults, \$5 for children under 12 years of age. The visiting hours of The Wings of Freedom Tour are 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. today and Wednesday and 9:30 a.m. to noon on Thursday.

Wherever The Wings of Freedom Tour goes, it always has a goal it wants to achieve.

“We know that we wouldn’t have all that we have today if it wasn’t for all the people who went to war in the ‘40s and all the sacrifices they made for us,” said Mitchell. “Once those guys are not with us, which is going to be pretty soon because they are all in their 90s, we’re concerned that people are going to forget about this and they’re going to lose their appreciation for this.

“Everywhere we go, we want to keep their legacy alive and keep the memory of this event alive.”

Mitchell said this is the 30th year that The Wings of Freedom Tour has been in operation.

“Basically at the beginning, Bob Collings, who owns all the aircraft, wanted to start a museum,” said Mitchell. “I believe that he had a relative that served in the Navy during the war and he was a role model for Bob’s son who wanted to become a pilot. Of course, Bob has a connection to the era and even though he didn’t serve in the war,

because he was too young, he lived through it and he knew a lot of people who did go to war.

“For them, this was a personal connection to these plans and originally they were not going to fly them but when they acquired them, they started to fly around. At first, it was just going to be for a year or two but it’s been going ever since because, at the time, World War II veterans were amazed that someone was flying one of the planes they served on.”

According to Mitchell, people have an option to be able to fly in the aircraft while they are at the airport.

The prices are: B-17 and B-24, \$450 per person; B-25, is \$400 per person; the P-51, \$2,400 for a half hour and \$3,400 for a full hour; the P-40, \$2,200 for a half hour and \$3,200 for a full hour.

“It’s a lot of money but that’s just to cover our operational cost because each aircraft costs about \$5,000 per flight hour,” said Mitchell.

“It costs a lot of money to just keep them going but the good thing is that since we are a museum people can write it off as a donation since we are a 501(c)(3),” Mitchell said. “At the end of the day, we hope to inspire other people to get involved in this program whether that be by donating or becoming a pilot or mechanic.”

For more information or to schedule a flight, go to www.collingsfoundation.org.