



# News Release

## UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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**Release No. 04-10**

**April 27, 2001**

### **WWII-era B-25 to be displayed May 19 at CAFBs Air Expo 2001**

**CHARLESTON AFB, S.C.** - Charleston's upcoming Air Expo May 19 will feature more than fast moving jets, it will also include an immaculately restored North American B-25 Mitchell, the same type of aircraft that was launched off an aircraft carrier for the first Tokyo raid April 18, 1942, by Gen. James H. Doolittle.

The B-25J, named Panchito after one of the "Three Caballeros" in the famous World War II-era Disney cartoon, is restored and painted to represent an aircraft of the 396<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron, 41<sup>st</sup> Bomb Group, 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force, stationed in the Central Pacific in 1945. The aircraft is powered by two, 1,700 horsepower, Wright R2600-35 Cyclone, 14-cylinder, air-cooled, radial engines.

The B-25, owned and piloted by Larry D. Kelley, was restored in 1986. Kelley purchased it in September 1997. His aircraft company, Rag Wings and Radials Vintage Aircraft, owns several WWII aircraft that tour the East Coast air show circuit. His rare UC-78B will also be at the show.

The B-25 was produced in greater numbers than any other American twin-engine combat aircraft. It had a crew of six, a range of 2,700 miles and could carry 3,000 pounds of bombs or depth charges. Only 34 flyable aircraft remain in the world today.

According to Kelley and the U.S. Air Force Historical Research Agency at Maxwell AFB, Ala., this particular aircraft spent some time on the ramp at Charleston AFB in the 1950's.

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The aircraft was eventually converted to a TB25N configuration and served with various Air National Guard Units. It was deployed to Charleston AFB from 1954 to 1955 with the Westchester N.Y. Air National Guard.”

The B-25 was sent to the “bone yard” at Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz., in 1958 and was sold to its first civilian owner in 1959, where it was used as a fire bomber and later orange grove sprayer in Florida. By the late 1960s it was worn out, corroded and no longer airworthy. Tom Reilly, a vintage airplane restorer in Kissimmee, Fla., obtained the remains of the airplane in 1981, disassembled it, and began a five-year restoration that involved a total rebuild of the airframe. It has been flying continuously since 1986.

Kelley performs at about 27 airshows a year. He flies out of love for the aircraft and what it accomplished during WWII. “It is an honor to be a temporary custodian of a piece of our aviation history,” said Kelley.

“Airshow revenues provide just a drop in the bucket toward the total costs to keep this aircraft flyable, but it is worth it to me. It is getting harder and more expensive to get the parts though. I have already collected a barn and two hangars full of spare parts, including seven spare engines. Fortunately, a few old timers bought up trainloads of spare parts after WWII and are still in the old airplane parts business. Some parts, such as tires and brakes now must be custom manufactured. As a result of this, a tire for a B-25 now costs the same as a tire for the space shuttle.”

When out on the airshow circuit, Kelley and his flight crew wear WWII-era Air Corps uniforms to give the public a better sense of what it was like then. Cherie McClung, the scheduler and logistics officer for their company, also joins in and wears uniforms worn by women in the military from that period.

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“Cheri always wears a uniform with rank higher than me just to remind me of the value of what she does. The uniforms always get a reaction from the crowds and we enjoy meeting and speaking with many of the veterans who fought and preserved our freedoms during WWII.

“Too few people today give the veterans of WWII the respect they are due,” Kelley added.

Kelley says there are not many differences between the “J” and famed “B” model used by the Doolittle raiders on Tokyo. The “J” model had improved armaments and could use most of its guns offensively, but essentially the airframes were the same.

The B-25 was selected for this first strike back at the Japanese mainland, four months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, because it could take off in less than 500 feet, Doolittle said in a video in 1980, describing the bombing raid by 16 B-25Bs launched from the carrier deck of the USS Hornet.

Although the attack was inconsequential in terms of damage on the Japanese, Doolittle said it was the first good news that the U.S. had in World War II. “It caused the Japanese to question their warlords.”

Kelley says the B-25 is an easy plane to fly and was advanced for its time.

**(Story can be run as is. Photos and interviews are available. Contact Lt. Col. Ed Memi at 963-5608 or Master Sgt. Dan Murphy at 963-5582)**

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