

# Vintage USAF Thunderbird aircraft to perform at Air Expo 2000

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As an 11-year old child living in Hanahan, S.C., next to the Charleston Air Force Base airfield, Fowler Cary was ready to become a pilot. As a child, he loved to watch the F-86 and F-101 aircraft takeoff and land on the flightline in the 1960's. His dream finally came true as a pilot of a high performance 1950's era fighter aircraft.

Cary is the pilot for the Lockheed Martin T-33 that will perform what he calls a "graceful" aerial demonstration for the crowds as part of the Air Expo 2000 Saturday.

The T-33 is restored to look exactly like a U.S. Thunderbird demonstration aircraft of the 1950s. The T-33 is a two-seat version of the F-80, the first jet fighter that shot down MIG-15s in the Korean War. An Allison J-33-35 Turbojet engine with



*Courtesy photo*

Fowler Cary flying in the cockpit of his restored T-33 aircraft. Cary is ready to perform at Air Expo 2000.

4,600 pounds of thrust powers the immaculately restored T-33. The jet has distinctive external fuel tanks on each end of its wings.

Cary's dad was a lieutenant colonel assigned to the air base wing at Charleston AFB. "I saw my first jet in 1953 when I was living at Bitburg AB, Germany. I was only about 6 years old, and it was a T-33. I always wanted to fly fast jets. I grew up in an Air Force family, and my dad was career Air Force, and his last duty station was at Charleston AFB. I was born in the Hanahan area and moved to the Batesburg-Leesville area in 1963," Cary said.

He graduated from the Batesburg-Leesville High School and later attended the Citadel for two years. "I couldn't get into a military flight program while at the Citadel because I had unacceptable eyes for the military," Cary said. Instead he finished his college at another school and then pursued his private pilots license. He's been flying ever since and has flown just about everything on the civilian side.

"When I was a youngster at CAFB, I would ride my bike in from Hanahan to the base three or four times a week," said Cary. "I would either end up behind the old Hawthorne Aviation terminal where they had a yellow J-3 cub that had been beaten up in a hurricane and would hangar fly that for hours on end, or I would go down to the approach end of runway 15 and slip into the tall grass and

watch the F-86s and F-101s land over the top of my head."

The T-33 aerial demonstration has always been a crowd pleaser, according to Cary. "What people tell me they enjoy is it seems very graceful, fluid and it's a beautiful aircraft in flight as it has a great silhouette with those big drop tanks on the end of each wing. It is not a loud aircraft by today's standards and is non-afterburning. It's very graceful in the sky and a real joy to fly."

He performs a variety of basic fighter maneuvers during his 20-minute demonstration. "It has a about a third of the thrust-to-weight ratio that modern jet fighters have. You basically have to dive the aircraft at 5,000 feet to wind up the energy to around 500 mph so that when you hit show center with your initial speed, you can do your maneuver and then pop it back up to 5,000 feet and do a role reversal. You are basically yo-yoing the aircraft up and down to keep the energy up and keep the speed up at around 500 mph."

The aircraft, number 58-665, was one of the last jets off the production line. "I found an old country boy like myself, called Randal Hanes, who bought the aircraft, which was one of the last ones built in 1958. He had it restored and was looking for a partner to put it on the airshow circuit. We became business partners and blood brothers and had a ball for

four and half years until he was killed in a general aviation accident in 1996."

Cary arranges for all the maintenance on the T-33. "Parts are still pretty plentiful as there are still a couple of Air Forces flying the aircraft, the Canadians being the most popular.

It's a very dependable aircraft and we do a whole lot of work ourselves. Every year, we pull the tail off and the engine out and do a complete hot section, which is twice the cycle frequency of Air Force depot maintenance. I'm real particular about what I fly."

He said that keeping an old fighter flying is expensive and it doesn't pay for itself. "You can't really charge as much as you need to cover your expenses. But it's a labor of love and something I've always wanted to do and have always worked very hard to do. The only way to make it pay for itself is to have a big corporate sponsor."

"I have my favorite shows and my repeats like Charleston. It's a place near and dear to me and I have a lot of friends living there. I have a number of business clients living in the area also. It's a great city and my oldest daughter graduated from the College of Charleston. My whole family will be down there. I love to come back year after year. I can't think of any place better to go down and fly."

