

## Carl Clark, a Dedicated Pilot and Historian

By John W. Howland

The tale of Carl Clark and the unbelievable takeoff he made one dark night in 1944 is well known to many. What most people do not know is that Carl Clark is still piloting. Early in the month of April 2001 Carl called me at my home in Carthage, Texas and invited me to drive to Idabel, Oklahoma to attend a fly-in of The B-17 "Nine O Nine" and the B-24 "The Dragon and his Tail" both owned and operated by the Collings Foundation. There was no way I could resist since it was only a three hour drive.

It was a clear, crisp spring morning when I arrived in Idabel. Carl and the rest of the Collings team of volunteer pilots had flown the two planes in from Dallas just the day before. The fly-in was a big event for the small town of Idabel, but most of the local visitors were youngsters. There were approximately 2000, all delivered by school buses. All received an on-the-site history lesson including a trip through the planes and a lecture delivered by Carl Clark and other Collings volunteers. I have never seen such a well-mannered, well-behaved group of excited youngsters. They bubbled and chattered with excitement and enthusiasm as they made their way through the planes. However, as Carl delivered his lecture they were quiet, attentive, and often raised their hands to ask serious and meaningful questions. Discipline is reportedly a ongoing problem in our national school system. However, it was no problem in Idabel. The mere thought of missing the trip to the airplanes made firm believers out of even the most rebellious students.

I was quite impressed with Carl's talent as a professor of history. His talks were interesting, colorful and his young audiences were captivated. It should also be noted that his schedule was rather grueling. It took two full days to run two thousand youngsters through the planes (two school busloads at a time) and give each group a lecture. At the end of the school day Carl and the other volunteer pilots had extra duties to perform. They carried adults aloft, for a fee of course, that helps the Collings Foundation maintain the aircraft.

The story of Carl Clark would be incomplete without mentioning the work done by Carl's lovely wife Maudie who works at the side of her husband. Her specialty is housekeeping and she works heroically at the many unsung but necessary jobs such as upholstering the pilot's seats, repairing and fabricating new tail wheel boot covers, installing foam padding to seat cushions and repairing torn curtains. While Carl is serving his turn as a pilot, Maudie also serves as the Flight Coordinator. Just like Carl, she is a completely dedicated volunteer and spends many unheralded hours making her private and valuable contributions to the Collings Foundation.

Carl and Maudie Clark as well as the Collings Foundation merit a well deserved vote of thanks for the fine job they are doing. The nostalgia associated with witnessing these fine restored airplanes is a thrill in itself. It is doubly rewarding to see a fine new generation of youngsters made aware of the contributions made by another generation of 'once upon a time' youngsters who flew these 'Chariots of the Sky' into battle more than fifty years ago.

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Idabel Oklahoma students boarding the B-17 "Nine O Nine" restored by the Collings Foundation of Stow, Mass.



Carl Clark delivering historical lecture to Idabel students adjacent to the B-17 "Nine O Nine" while a second Collings Foundation volunteer does the same under the wing of the B-24 "The Dragon and his Tail" in the background.



Carl, Maudie and a police officer helper at the air show in Farmingdale, New York, 1999.