

2020: From a Year of Promise to the Perfect Storm

by Timothy A. Chopp, BAHF President and Founder



C-54 "SPIRIT OF FREEDOM" RESTS ATOP OF A T-HANGAR AFTER A MORNING TORNADO ON APRIL 13, 2020 AT WALTERBORO, SC.

We delayed writing this newsletter report simply because of the rapidly changing events that have taken place over the past 7 months that began with the Coronavirus outbreak in February. It is our fondest wish all of our supporting members and contributors are remaining safe and well during these unprecedented times of the Covid19 virus. At the beginning of the New Year of 2020, there was great optimism about the event schedule for 2020 that promised to be the best event season we have experienced over the past 12 years, possibly reaching 30 events in 2020. Just like the song "Every things coming up roses", we were in a great position to leap forward with our C-54 mission and especially with our very rare Boeing C-97 mission. We had 18 events confirmed by mid January with many more events waiting for confirmation. This was the first time in our 26 year history we had that many events confirmed this early in the year. It appeared we were off to a well above average year of income which we could use for improving our mission of history, education, and remembrance about the great Berlin Airlift of 1948 and 1949. We are now experiencing from the year of Promise to the Perfect Storm. Read on.

Catastrophe #1: The Covid-19 Pandemic

Like most people, when news began in early January about this virus, we all thought this would pass quickly and didn't think much of it. By mid March, the landscape had changed considerably which resulted in our optimistic event season to begin to crumble. On December 18th, 2019, following the very successful annual event at Manteo/Kitty Hawk, North Carolina where we honored the Candy Bomber Gail Halvorsen, we flew our C-54 "The Spirit of Freedom" to Walterboro, South Carolina for the installation of a new FAA mandated transponder. Beginning January 1, 2020, all airplanes flying in the US are required to have this new mandated transponder installed. Without it you were illegal to fly. The generous and patriotic Douglas Rupp of Swamp Fox Avionics, Inc located at the Low Country Airport, Walterboro, SC graciously offered to donate a new Stratus Transponder and all the parts and labor for the installation to help our purpose and mission as well as meet the FAA mandate. This was a \$7000 gift. We were very happy with this opportunity to fly to Walterboro because South Carolina placed us closer to Florida where our first 2020 events would begin in late March. As the Covid19 Virus was declared a major medical outbreak, by mid March all the events scheduled in Florida were cancelled soon followed by all events in April. For the month of May, Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina remained



on the schedule. Since we remained parked at Walterboro, SC, it was a logical decision to remain parked there until the Shaw Air Force Base event, not far from Walterboro, which up until that time had not been cancelled. You will read the results of this decision in Catastrophe # 3.

Catastrophe # 2 Covid-19 Financial disaster

The majority of the sustainable income to operate the Berlin Airlift Historical Foundation comes from air show events which are broken down into two categories of income. Income from appearance fees which help off set the cost of flying the C-54 to the event and income from fees charged to visitors who want to board the C-54 to see the on board educational Berlin Airlift Museum/Exhibit. For 2020, almost all of the air shows have been cancelled due to the Covid19 Pandemic. As a result, the major source of the Foundation's operating income has been reduced to practically zero. Until the public air show events are once again permitted to function, the only remaining source of income available to the Berlin Airlift Historical Foundation are from the kind, caring, and patriotic contributions from our supporters. Please help us get through these unprecedented difficult times by making a contribution. The Berlin Airlift Historical Foundation continues to remain a 501(c)(3) tax exempt charity ID # 22-3077587 with 30 years operating experience as a charity.

Catastrophe # 3 Douglas C-54 "Spirit of Freedom" severe tornado damage

Already crippled by the loss of income from the cancellation of many of our 2020 scheduled events, we were devastated to learn on April 13th, 2020, our beloved C-54, our flagship, our primary income producer and workhorse was literally run over by a F3 tornado while parked at the Walterboro Low Country airport. There was a breakout of 4 tornados in the Walterboro, SC area and the worst of the 4 remained on the ground for 9 miles tracking directly across the airport destroying several hangars and 22 airplanes, one of them our C-54 "Spirit of Freedom". It simply was at the wrong place at the wrong time. Had the first scheduled events in Florida not been cancelled, we would have flown the C-54 out of Walterboro to Florida two weeks earlier. The damage occurred at 6:40 AM on Monday morning, April 13, 2020, the day after Easter Sunday. We officially received word about 9:00 AM about the incident and photos began arriving all day revealing our C-54 with the aft fuselage resting on top of a damaged hangar. The power of the F3 tornado was such that it picked up the entire C-54 and flew it backwards either above or between two hangars and drove it into another hangar 170 yards from where it was parked. It struck the hangar with such force that it drove a 20 foot 8 inch diameter hangar beam thru the left wing just behind the # 1 engine. The beam entered and destroyed the left flap, then entered the wing thru the rear spar, then the center spar, the fuel tank, the front spar, then thru the engine firewall and finally stopped only 1 inch from the # 1 engine generator. Had the beam been any longer, it no doubt would have gone thru the # 1 engine as well. While there was heavy damage to the leading edge of the right wing as well as the aft lower fuselage where it was resting on the hangar. It was the left wing damage that sealed the fate for our C-54. By the afternoon of April 13th, the same day the tornado occurred, we dispatched Jason Pence and his wife Shae from Woodstock, Virginia to make the 9 hour drive to Walterboro to survey the



DAMAGE TO OUR BELOVED DOUGLAS C-54 "SPIRIT OF FREEDOM" AFTER A TORNADO RIPPED THROUGH WALTERBORO, SC.

damage. Jason and Shae are both very dedicated flight crewmembers in our organization. Jason not only is a certified A&P Mechanic and works on the C-54 but also owns and Operates Valley Towing and Recovery Inc. of Woodstock, Virginia. After driving all night, Jason and Shae were at the site by 9 AM on Tuesday morning. Via telephone calls and photos, they were able to make reports to the Foundation officers and directors as to the damage. At this time in April, it was very difficult to travel from New Jersey as a result of the Covid19 travel restrictions as well as fear of the virus. The willingness and effort displayed by Jason and Shae to make the trip at their own expense was invaluable to the Foundation and we offer a sincere thank you to the both of them for a job well done. Because of Jason's many years experience in the towing and recovery business, he was able to supervise the removal of our C-54 from on top of the hangar before he returned to Virginia. All of the photos in this newsletter were taken by Shae during their survey mission of the C-54 damage.

Following the tornado damage, several expert sheet metal mechanics were brought in to survey the damage and provide estimates as to how long it would take to repair the damage and what costs would be involved. We took our time gathering this information and made every conceivable effort to find a way to save our beloved C-54. Due to its location with no hangar facilities and shortage of skilled volunteer help, the cost of the repairs could easily surpass \$300,000 and take many years to repair. The Foundation board of directors unanimously agreed the best course of action would be to locate a replacement C-54 and salvage what spare parts we can from our beloved C-54. the "Spirit of Freedom". Our C-54 will still live on inside the replacement C-54 by providing valuable spare parts and of course the on board museum/exhibit which will be transferred to the replacement C-54 with marked improvements to the displays.



THE REMOVAL OF THE C-54 FROM OFF OF THE HANGAR WAS EXPERTLY PERFORMED BY JASON PENCE AND HIS CREW.

Catastrophe # 4 C-97G "Angel of Deliverance " catastrophic engine failure

Last June of 2019, we were very excited about the progress made in our Phase II Operational Training Phase for our C-97 Program. Our C-97 wintered at Hagerstown, Maryland where our maintenance and flight crews worked together to become more knowledgeable about this rare and complex transport. As you know one Boeing C-97 was used in the waning weeks of the Berlin Airlift and was destined to replace all the Douglas C-54's had the airlift continued into the 1950's. After meticulous inspections the C-97 was brought back to life and on June 4th, 2019 departed Hagerstown, MD for a 40 minute flight to Reading, Pennsylvania to participate in the annual World War II Weekend event hosted by the Mid Atlantic Air Museum. This would be the first time the C-97 "Angel of Deliverance" was being flown to a destination to participate in a air show event and everyone was excited and confident this



was the beginning of a great future for the C-97 adding a new dimension to our educational mission about the great Berlin Airlift. The flight was going extremely well and the C-97 was performing flawlessly until reaching a point 20 miles south of Reading when the flight engineer reported the # 2 engine was losing oil pressure followed quickly by a catastrophic failure. While the entire flight crew was new to the C-97 they performed professionally and shut down the #



Catastrophe #4 (cont)

2 engine and made a routine 3 engine approach and landing safely at Reading, Pa. Despite the engine failure the C-97 still participated in the event and was a very popular attraction for visitors. Several times during the weekend event a demonstration of loading and off loading 5 jeeps was performed by the Foundation's flight and ground crewmembers giving the public an example of the load carrying capability of the C-97. Income from the C-97 tours doubled that of our C-54 which also participated as it does every year.

While this incident occurred in 2019, the plan was to make a formal announcement of this bad news followed at the same time with an announcement of some good news. The good news was going to be we found the answers to our dilemma. For the past few years we have been negotiating with B&G Industries in Greybull, Wyoming to purchase another C-97 to be used for spare parts with the potential to acquire two more also for spare parts. This acquisition would provide us with all we need for spare engines, propellers, and a lot more to secure a great future for the world's only flyable Boeing C-97, our "Angel of Deliverance". A purchase agreement was drawn up and we were prepared to sign the agreement in February of 2020 when the bottom fell out as a result of the Covid19 Pandemic and the 2020 events being cancelled with the loss of our sustaining income. Despite this, because of the importance of this purchase, we still considered signing the agreement but the loss of our C-54 was the deciding factor. Under these unprecedented times and hardships, we simply were unable to commit to the purchase. This was a great opportunity to not commit to. I only hope and pray the future will allow this opportunity to return once again. It is very important to say a sincere thank you to Russ Strine, president of the Mid Atlantic Air Museum, for his compassion and understanding to donate parking space on his museum ramp until we find a solution to replacing the # 2 engine on our C-97, the "Angel of Deliverance". A sincere thank you to Russ Strine and the Mid Atlantic Air Museum.

Great News ! Purchase of Replacement C-54

Trying to function and pull out of the realm of shock, sadness, and despair over the loss of our beloved C-54 has not been easy due to the severe damage sustained by a F3 tornado on April 13th, 2020. Traveling from state to state trying to evaluate and seek answers during this Covid19 Pandemic is like walking thru a mine field. Despite these obstacles, in a four month period from April 13th, 2020 to August 15th, 2020, we were able to evaluate our C-54 damage and make the decision to replace it with another C-54, then locate another C-54 and negotiate its purchase. We are most happy to report a purchase agreement was signed on August 15th, 2020 for a C-54D located at New Smyrna Beach, Florida., owned by Island Air Transport, LLC. This is one of three C-54's in the US being considered by the Foundation to acquire as a replacement C-54. This particular C-54 has a lot of modifications and improvements over our damaged C-54 that will make it a great replacement and is actually in many



ways a much better airplane. To begin with our replacement C-54 brake system is modified with DC-6 brakes which are not only simpler and easy to maintain but also have much greater stopping power. The hydraulic system includes two upgraded accumulators versus the older spherical bladder type accumulators that gave us a lot of trouble over the past 5 years. The oil cooler regulators have been changed to a newer type that better controls engine oil temperatures and also eliminates the oil cooler doors. The engine driven generators are of a bigger capacity at 300 amps versus our smaller generators of only 100 amps on our damaged C-54. The fuel tank system on the replacement C-54 has 6 tanks versus the 8 tanks we had reducing fuel tank maintenance as well as the possibility of fuel leaks. Another plus is on the main cargo doors at the rear of the fuselage. There is a third door that can be used for candy drops eliminating having to open a side emergency exit as well as the

need for a safety harness for the load master. The engine times on this replacement aircraft are incredibly low time on three of the engines being 70 hours, 200 hours and 15 hours. While this particular C-54 is 2 years older than our damaged C-54, it has 2500 hours less flight time. We are now researching it's operating history to learn more if it was a veteran of the Berlin Airlift. We are very fortunate to take advantage of this opportunity to turn lemons to lemonade by taking all of our past successful 26 years of experience operating our C-54 "Spirit of Freedom" and create a new and improved "Spirit of Freedom". With what this replacement C-54 has to offer, we can take all the lessons and mistakes we have learned over the years from our beloved damaged C-54 and create a much better functional on board museum/exhibit to help with our purpose and mission of history, education, and remembrance about the great Berlin Airlift and to those who served. The replacement C-54 will be painted exactly the same as our damaged C-54 and will also carry the very same markings of the 48th Troop Carrier Squadron as well as the same registration number of N500EJ. It too will be named the "Spirit of Freedom" and will simply carry on with the same mission. We want to say a special thank you to Eddie Ide, who represented the Berlin Airlift Veterans Association, for making the trip to New Smyrna Beach, Florida in early May to help evaluate this C-54 during the Covid19 restriction period. Eddie, along with Jason Pence and his wife Shae, made the trip to make the initial assessment of this C-54 as well as another C-54 located in Starke, Florida. Thank you Eddie, Jason, and Shae for taking on this valuable and worthy mission to determine the possibilities if this C-54 would be a suitable replacement for our damaged C-54. A job well done. Eddie, Jason, and Shae gave a thumbs up to continue our efforts to pursue this particular C-54.



FOUNDATION PRESIDENT TIMOTHY CHOPP SHAKES HANDS WITH LYNNE FLOREY AFTER SIGNING THE PURCHASE AGREEMENT FOR C-54D 43-17228.

Facing the Facts: Our damaged C-54 worth more as spare parts

The Foundation acquired our C-54 in December of 1992. Other than working with our very rare Boeing C-97, during the past 26 years we had no reason to keep up with what has been happening in the vintage aircraft market. In our efforts to locate a viable replacement C-54, we were stunned by how much has changed and there are now only a few viable airworthy C-54's remaining in the world. We simply were too busy flying and maintaining our own C-54 for our Berlin Airlift Mission to pay attention to what was going on elsewhere. Along with this learning experience came the realization of the shrinking C-54 parts inventory. So, it became very clear if we somehow acquired and spent \$300,000 and 3 years trying to repair our damaged C-54, in the end what would we have? The same airplane repaired but with no improvements of any kind and a lot of time and money spent. By spending less money, not only can we be back in the air flying our educational Berlin Airlift missions by next spring with a replacement C-54 but we will be in the air with a new paint job and new improved interior as well. The real bonus will be we now have 4 spare engines, 4 spare propellers, and countless of other parts from our damaged C-54. In total, an estimated \$250,000 worth of spares. As for the engines, what we would have that we have never had since we began operating our C-54 and that is what is known as a QEC meaning a quick exchange engine. These are engines with the engine mounts and accessories installed and ready for installation. We will now have 4 of them.

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The Berlin Airlift Historical Foundation is a non-profit, tax exempt corporation which meets the charitable requirements of Section 501 (3) (c) of the Internal Revenue Code.



**FUNDING NECESSARY TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN AND CONTINUE OUR MISSION!
IMPORTANT IMPORTANT IMPORTANT**

We are very happy to report the replacement C-54 is being paid for in full from reserve funds by the Foundation and funds from the insurance claim for our damaged C-54. In order to be able to retain our C-54 for spares, the maximum settlement was for \$95,000. We were very fortunate to be able to receive that amount and still keep the airplane. Where we will need and ask for financial support and help is for costs associated with having the replacement C-54 painted, for interior improvements, insurance, for fuel and oil flying the replacement C-54 from Florida to South Carolina, then to the Crider Aircraft Paint shop in Mena, Arkansas, and return to New Jersey, as well as for all the travel expenses associated with this entire project. All of this totals nearly \$125,000. A large amount considering the majority of the Foundation's income has been curtailed except for direct contributions. Let me add something regarding aviation insurance. The aviation insurance industry has taken a big hit over the past 10 years with heavy claims and losses. Many aviation insurance companies have gone out of business. I was recently informed by our insurance representative there are now only 3 insurance firms available in the US accepting applications to insure vintage airplanes like our C-54 and C-97. We are now waiting to receive a quote as to what our premiums will be for the new period which begins September 14th. The premiums are to dramatically increase. We have a blemish free 26 year safety record flying our C-54 plus a reputation for an "attitude of compliance." Let's hope the new premiums will not hurt us too bad. Now that we have a firm direction to pursue, our Vice President, Kevin Kearney, has set up a Go Fund Me Page at <https://www.gofundme.com/f/c54-spirit-of-freedom-road-to-recovery> to help secure additional contributions. Thank you very much, Kevin. You can also donate electronically through PayPal to Airlift48@aol.com. If you prefer to send a check or money order, please use the form below. Thank you all very much for your consideration!

Dear Tim:

Yes! You can count on me to help with the creation of the new and improved version of the **Douglas C-54D "Spirit of Freedom"**. It will be better and improved in all aspects to continue our never ending **"Mission of History, Education, and Remembrance"** about the great Berlin Airlift of 1948 and 1949. The goal is to be ready to fly missions again by Spring 2021. Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!

Here is my contribution of \$ _____ to help reach the goal of \$125,000 for paint, interior display improvements fuel and oil, insurance, and travel expenses. travel

Name: _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

E-Mail _____



Note: The Berlin Airlift Historical Foundation is listed as a tax exempt charity as a 501(c)(3) charity by the IRS Revenue Code. ID # 22-3077587. Our web site is www.spiritoffreedom.org.

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