



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Colonel Eileen Collins, USAF (Ret.) to be Honored with 2022 Wright Brothers Memorial Trophy**

**Washington, DC, September 15, 2022** – The National Aeronautic Association (NAA) is pleased to announce that Colonel Eileen Collins, USAF (Ret.) has been selected as the recipient of the 2022 Wright Brothers Memorial Trophy for ... “her perseverance in the advancement of aviation and aerospace as a teacher, astronaut, and leader, and for serving as an inspiration for all those seeking to break barriers in their field.”

Established by NAA in 1948 to honor the memory of Orville and Wilbur Wright, the trophy is awarded annually to a living American for “...significant public service of enduring value to aviation in the United States.” One of the most important, historic, and visible aerospace awards in the world, the Wright Brothers Memorial Trophy reflects a timeline of the most innovative inventors, explorers, industrialists, and public servants in aeronautics and astronautics.

“For decades, Eileen Collins has been an explorer, educator, spokesperson, and champion for aerospace,” said NAA Board Chair, James Albaugh. “She has given tirelessly to our industry and joins an esteemed list of prior recipients.”

According to the nomination submitted to the Wright Brothers Memorial Trophy Selection Committee, Collins knew from a young age that she wanted to fly and worked several jobs to take flying lessons as soon as she was able. At Syracuse University, Collins took further steps toward her aviation future by joining the United States Air Force ROTC program. While at Syracuse, NASA announced they were accepting women for the shuttle program, but at that point, she didn’t have all the requirements. It would be another decade before Collins was ready to submit her application.

Collins understood that the best route to her dreams was with the United States Air Force. Already a proven competent pilot, Collins was selected into the first class at Vance Air Force Base to include women. She graduated from Undergraduate Pilot Training at Vance in 1979 as one of the first four women to go through the program.

From 1983 to 1985, she acted as the C-141 aircraft commander and instructor pilot at Travis Air Force Base in California. The following year, Collins attended Stanford University as a graduate student through the Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT) program. As she soared to the rank of Colonel, Collins earned an M.S. in Operations Research from Stanford University in 1986 and then an M.A. in

Space Systems Management from Webster University, St. Louis, Missouri, in 1989. After graduating from Webster, Collins was assigned to the U.S. Air Force Academy, where she was an assistant professor in mathematics and a T-41 instructor pilot.

Collins was next selected as one of the first females accepted to Air Force Test Pilot School at Edwards Air Force Base. Her reputation throughout the program was as a cool, level-headed test pilot and in 1990, Collins became the second woman pilot to graduate from the school.

That same year, her drive, passion, perseverance, skill, and tenacity paid off. She was accepted for NASA's astronaut program and went on to fulfill her life-long dream of becoming an astronaut in July 1991.

Following a year of training at Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, Collins was assigned to Orbiter engineering support. In 1995, she became the first woman pilot of a Space Shuttle, serving on the orbiter *Discovery*, whose mission was to rendezvous and dock with the Russian space station *Mir*. Collins piloted a second shuttle flight in May 1997, successfully docking the *Atlantis* with *Mir* to transfer personnel, equipment, and supplies.

With hundreds of hours in space to her credit, Collins became the first woman to command a shuttle mission in July 1999, taking *Columbia* into Earth's orbit to deploy the *Chandra X-ray Observatory*. The STS-93 mission, highlighted by the deployment of the *Chandra X-Ray Observatory*, was designed to conduct comprehensive studies of the universe by enabling scientists to study exotic phenomena such as exploding stars, quasars, and black holes. Collins later shared that the Chandra X-Ray deployment was one of the most rewarding events of her shuttle missions.

In July 2005, Commander Collins flew her last Shuttle mission. STS-114 was the "Return-to-Flight" mission after the tragic loss of the *Columbia* crew and orbiter. In the nomination, former NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe said of Collins, "As we prepared for the Return to Flight mission upon adoption of all recommendations advanced by the Columbia Accident Investigation Board, she was the obvious selection to lead the mission. Her capacity to lead, adapt, and take initiative was the precise character traits we needed at that critical moment. No surprise, she executed that task brilliantly as she has so many others. Eileen is nothing short of heroic."

Additionally, Collins served on the Kennedy Space Center team responsible for Orbiter pre-launch checkout, final launch configuration, crew ingress/egress, and landing/recovery. She also worked in Mission Control as a spacecraft communicator, served as the Astronaut Office Spacecraft Systems Branch Chief, Chief Information Officer, Shuttle Branch Chief, and Astronaut Safety Branch Chief.

Throughout her career, Collins has logged over 6,751 hours in 30 different types of aircraft.

Collins has received numerous awards including the Distinguished Flying Cross, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, French Legion of Honor, NASA Outstanding Leadership Medal, Free Spirit Award, the National Space Trophy, and induction into the National Aviation Hall of Fame. She retired from NASA in 2006.

"Eileen Collins has blazed trails, broken barriers, and achieved greatly at every step during her consequential career," said NAA President, Greg Principato. "Not satisfied with that, Eileen has continued to serve and inspire others in all kinds of ways. Her service to aviation and to her country

embodies the qualities the Wright Trophy was created to honor. It will be an honor to present the Wright Trophy to her.”

“I accept this honor with humility and a desire to serve,” Collins said. “My life has been full of opportunity, challenge, and adventure. I hope to continue inspiring young people to choose aviation and space careers, a path which is an incredibly rewarding life vocation.”

2022 Wright Brothers Memorial Trophy Selection Committee Members:

James F. Albaugh, Board Chair, National Aeronautic Association  
Julie Boatman, Editor in Chief, Flying Magazine  
Major General Charles F. Bolden, Jr., 2020 Wright Trophy Recipient  
Nicholas E. Calio, President & CEO, Airlines for America  
Jana Denning, President, Aero Club of Washington  
Daniel L. Dumbacher, Executive Director, American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics  
Eric Fanning, President & CEO, Aerospace Industries Association  
Joan Sullivan Garrett, Founder, Chair of the Board of Directors, MedAire, Inc.  
Pamela A. Melroy, Deputy Administrator, National Aeronautics and Space Administration  
Russell W. Meyer, Jr., 1995 Wright Trophy Recipient

Collins will be presented with the Wright Trophy at the Aero Club of Washington’s 74<sup>th</sup> Annual Wright Memorial Dinner on December 16, 2022, in Washington, DC. For more information about the award or to view a list of past recipients, please visit [www.naa.aero](http://www.naa.aero). For updated information regarding the presentation of the Wright Trophy, please visit [www.aeroclub.org](http://www.aeroclub.org).

***The National Aeronautic Association is a non-profit membership organization devoted to fostering opportunities to participate fully in aviation activities and to promoting public understanding of the importance of aviation and space flight to the United States. NAA is the caretaker of some of the most important aviation awards in the world and certifies all national aviation records set in the United States. For information, visit [www.naa.aero](http://www.naa.aero).***

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