Airborne archaeology: Aviation Museum to livestream July 4 flight exploring ties of U.S. founders to Ancient Rome

Online ‘Around the World Flight Adventure’ to cruise over Italy on Saturday, July 4 to highlight influence of classical ideals on new nation.

When the founders signed the U.S. Declaration of Independence, they looked forward to a new era of freedom. But they were also looking to the past: specifically, to ancient Greece and Rome, from which they drew inspiration for the new nation.

The strong connection between the U.S. Founding Fathers and the classical civilization will be highlighted on Saturday, July 4, when the Aviation Museum of N.H. takes online visitors on a virtual flight over Italy, including Rome’s many surviving ancient sites such as the Colosseum and the Parthenon.

The livestream event, which will run from 10 a.m. to noon Eastern Time, is part of the Aviation Museum's ‘Around the World Flight Adventure’ online learning program. Generated on a flight simulator and available free online, the program is taking students and teachers on an ongoing global journey.

To catch the July 4 livestream, visit the Aviation Museum's Web site at www.aviationmuseumofnh.org.

"The aims of the Founding Fathers were in many ways rooted in the ideals of the Greco-Roman world," said Jeff Rapsis, executive director of the Aviation Museum of N.H. "With our Independence Day livestream of a flight over landmarks of Ancient Rome, we hope to highlight this crucial element of the American experience. It's 'archaeology by aviation.'"

As was common at the time, most of the new nation's statesmen had received classical educations, and so were familiar with the history, leaders, and ideals of ancient Greece and Rome. In setting up the new republic, they drew inspiration from their knowledge of classical society and literature.

George Washington, for example, modeled himself after Roman statesman Cincinnatus, a citizen farmer and patriot. Thomas Jefferson cited the Roman orator Cicero as a major influence in writing the Declaration of Independence. In 1775, revolutionary Joseph Warren delivered a fiery speech about the Boston Massacre while dressed in a flowing Roman toga, at the time considered a symbol of democracy.

"Classical ideas and personalities come up all the time among the Founding Fathers," Rapsis said. "They often used phrases in Latin, the language of Ancient Rome. This influence survives even today, such as on our coinage, which bears the Latin phrase 'E pluribus unum,' meaning 'Out of many, one.'"

The July 4 virtual flight will take off from Naples in southern Italy and will first fly over the ruins of Pompei, the Roman city destroyed in 79 A.D. by an eruption of nearby Mount Vesuvius.
two-hour journey will head northwest along Italy's Tyrrhenian coast and then inland to Rome, where it will fly over the Colosseum, the Roman Forum, the Pantheon, and other famous Roman sites.

"If you've been unable to travel during the Covid-19 pandemic, this is a great way to satisfy that urge," Rapsis said. "Plus, we hope you might become curious about connections between our nation and ancient classical civilization, which itself is a whole world waiting for you to explore."

The virtual flight will be made with a simulated vintage C-47 transport plane, the U.S. Army's military version of the iconic Douglas DC-3 twin-engine airliner. The route, flown using the Museum's Elite professional simulator, will include flight deck views as well as external viewing angles.

Commentary and background will be provided by museum personnel familiar with the region and its history. As the flight progresses up the Italian peninsula, other topics for discussion will include the Allied invasion and air campaign in Italy during World War II.

"We're offering this livestream as a new and different way to honor our nation's birthday in an era of social distancing," Rapsis said. "And we'll be done well before any fireworks celebrations begin."

An earlier virtual flight over the beaches of Normandy, France was highlighted by Newsweek Magazine as one of five ways in the U.S. to livestream Memorial Day.

The virtual around-the-world flight departed from Manchester-Boston Regional Airport on May 1, crossing to Europe via the historic North Atlantic Ferry Route used in World War II, with stops in Labrador, Greenland, and Iceland. Since then, the program has visited European cities from Paris to Moscow.

Flights are flown using the museum's simulator and enhanced terrain software that can render
realistic landscapes and weather conditions around the globe. A new segment is posted online once a week, complete with a flight deck video of highlights and information about science, geography, history, and local culture.

The flight is expected to return to Manchester in mid-August. The 'Around the World Flight Adventure' program will be repeated this fall to enable teachers and students to take full advantage of its potential as a learning tool.

Supporters of the 'Around the World Flight Adventure' include N.H. Humanities, Wire Belt Co. of America, Terrafugia, Signature Flight Services, Brady-Sullivan Properties, and Queen City Rotary.

The Aviation Museum of N.H. will livestream a virtual flight over key sites of Ancient Rome on Saturday, July 4 from 10 a.m. to noon Eastern Time. The flight will focus on how the founding of the United States was influenced by the ideals of classical civilization. As part of the museum's ongoing 'Around the World Flight Adventure,' the livestream is free to all and can be found online at www.aviationmuseumofnh.org

The Aviation Museum of N.H., 27 Navigator Road, Londonderry, N.H. is a non-profit 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization. Housed in the original 1937 passenger terminal at Manchester-Boston Regional Airport, the museum is dedicated to celebrating New Hampshire's role in aviation history and inspiring tomorrow's pioneers, innovators and aerospace professionals.

For more information, visit www.aviationmuseumofnh.org or call (603) 669-4820. Follow the Aviation Museum on social media at www.facebook.com/nhahs.