VFF Receives Biggest Donation Ever

The Vertical Flight Foundation (VFF) has received nearly $1M as part of an estate bequeathal.

In 1984, VFS member Robert E. Head and his wife Elizabeth J. Head created a trust fund for the benefit of their daughter, Martha Ann Head. With all three now having passed away, the remaining assets and investments were liquidated, with the majority donated to VFF. As of Dec. 31, 2019, the assets were valued at $983,739.08 and are expected to be received by VFF in the April-May timeframe.

Bob Head was a longtime member of VFS (then the American Helicopter Society) — joining the Society in 1954 — and worked in the aerospace industry for 46 years. After serving in the Army during World War II, he joined McDonnell Aircraft Company in St. Louis, Missouri. He worked on the diminutive XH-20 Little Henry helicopter where the rotor was driven by ramjets at the end of the blades; he later worked on the much larger tipjet-powered XV-1 Convertaplane. Head became highly knowledgeable on “reactionless” powered rotors and he went on to work for Hughes Helicopters in the early 1960s. He contributed to the XV-9 hot-cycle helicopter, which used the exhaust of turbine engines ducted to the blade tips to drive the rotor.

Head left Hughes Helicopters in the late 1960s to join Learjet, which was developing the Gates Twinjet light helicopter. When development was stopped in 1971, he returned to Hughes where he worked until his retirement, through company changes to McDonnell Douglas and finally, Boeing.

Head was a valuable contributor on many projects and helicopter models: the first Apache composite main rotor blade, an Apache composite flex beam tail rotor, the Hughes Advanced Rotor Program (HARP) — with a composite flex beam hub and composite blades with new airfoils — which was flown and tested on a modified MD500E, the MDX Program (which led to the MD902 Explorer), and numerous other projects.

He retired as a Senior Research and Engineering Fellow and was widely respected and admired. In addition to all his other positive attributes, he was one of the best mentors of young engineers.

Bob Head passed on July 1, 2009, at the age of 86. His legacy will live on, enhanced by his extremely generous gift to the Vertical Flight Foundation.

With this bequest, we can finally reach our goal — set in 2011 when our annual scholarship awards averaged only $30,000–$35,000 — of $100,000 for annual VFF disbursements, with the continued support of our members.

Note: As a result of the March 2020 “Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security” (CARES) Act, US taxpayers can now benefit from donations to charities. If you take the standard deduction on your 2020 tax return (which you will file in 2021), you can now claim an “above-the-line” deduction of up to $300 for any donations to charity you make this year.

Please consider making a donation to VFF as part of your annual giving — or designate VFF as a beneficiary in your estate planning — so that we can reach even more students in the future. Or make a donation any time at www.vtol.org/VFF. The future leaders of vertical flight will thank you!

Edwin P. Birtwell
Chair, Vertical Flight Foundation