

Forrest Morton Bird, M.D., Ph.D., Sc.D., D.S.



AVIATOR – INNOVATOR – ENTREPRENEUR – SCIENTIST –  
PROFESSOR – PHYSICIAN – VETERAN – RENAISSANCE MAN

Dr. Forrest Morton Bird has taken his final flight on Sunday, August 2, 2015, at his home overlooking the airstrip on beautiful Lake Pend Oreille in Sagle, Idaho, with his family by his side.

Forrest Morton Bird, M.D., Ph.D., Sc.D., D.S., was born on June 9, 1921 to Morton and Jane Bird in Stoughton, Massachusetts. He graduated from high school at the age of 14. He became a pilot at an early age due to the encouragement of his father, a World War I pilot. Dr. Bird learned from some of his best forefathers -- meeting Orville Wright and Henry Ford. Mr. Ford used to come to his father's clambakes each Memorial Day and Labor Day, and was impressed by the 12-year-old boy who was building homemade tractors out of Model T Ford car parts.

Dr. Bird performed his first solo flight at age 14; by age 16, he was working to obtain multiple major pilot certifications. He enlisted with the United States Army Air Corps and entered active duty in 1941 as a Technical Air Training Officer due to his advanced qualifications. This rank, combined with the onset of World War II, gave him the opportunity to pilot almost every aircraft in service, including early jet aircraft and helicopters.

Dr. Bird served honorably in the Military, serving in WWII and assisting in the Korean and Vietnam wars. He retired as a Colonel. He had a great love for his country and served it well. He was

General Patton's pilot for a while but wanted a change to continue with his own missions – the life yet to come as he went on to become one of the greatest contributors to mankind. Dr. Bird was frequently quoted saying, "Life was fate, time and circumstance."

During WWII, he invented the anti-g pressure suit regulator. This device helped pilots fly to an altitude of 40,000 feet, (as opposed to 28,000 feet), giving the US and allies a downwind advantage in air "dogfights." In 1946, he invented the first Positive Pressure Inhalation Device, followed by the 1950 first prototype of the Bird Respirator with advanced positive pressure. (This device was made from three strawberry shortcake tins and a metering device.) Because of this device, the newest models of aircraft were able to exceed altitudes at which humans previously could breathe normally, reducing the risk of altitude sickness.

This little green machine was the Bird Mark 7. After years in the service, Dr. Bird continued to pursue his dreams while attending numerous medical schools and completing diverse residencies. At this time in the 1950s, there weren't many options for people with respiratory problems. The worst cases required the iron lungs, which were extremely primitive, expensive and confining. Dr. Bird developed the prototype Bird Universal Medical Respirator for acute or chronic cardiopulmonary care. He tested the device by traveling to medical schools throughout the world and asking doctors for their most ill patients. In each previous case, known therapies had failed and the patient was expected to die of cardiopulmonary failure. A little green box called "The Bird" became familiar to hospital patients throughout the world after it was introduced in 1958.

In 1967, Dr. Bird developed the Bird Innovator, a conversion of the Consolidated PBY Catalina amphibian aircraft. This was the only 4-engine PBY aircraft in the world. Using this aircraft, he traveled throughout the world to the various medical residencies,

teaching the young doctors “how to use the little green machine.” It was the first highly reliable, low-cost, mass-produced medical respirator in the world. The physicians were the ones whom Dr. Bird stated would give him a hard time saying, “A machine breathe for you – that is never going to happen!” Thus, the medical respirator/ventilator was invented. Dr. Forrest Bird developed this invention in his company, Bird Oxygen Breathing Equipment, Inc, later renamed Bird Corporation, located in Palm Springs. Dr. Bird was a serial inventor, one of the greatest in history. The "Babybird®" respirator, introduced in 1970, reduced infant mortality due to respiratory problems from 70 percent to less than ten percent. Both of these inventions changed history and saved millions of lives. He was often quoted as saying, “Physiology is God’s engineering of the body.”

Dr. Bird’s respirators and anesthesia ventilators have been used during many of the first human surgical procedures. Among these were the first open heart procedure and the first liver transplant.

Dr. Bird developed what today is called “Intensive Care Transport” (modern day Medivac) during the Vietnam years. Fidel Castro specifically requested Dr. Bird’s respirators in return for American soldiers who had been captured during the Bay of Pigs invasion. Robert Kennedy personally called Forrest requesting the respirators for Cuba. He devised and piloted one of the first air flights of racehorses - the flight made the headlines from coast to coast and around the world.

Dr. Bird moved to northern Idaho and lived on his ranch with private airstrip after selling Bird Corporation to 3M. He then started a manufacturing company Percussionaire® Corporation which continues to operate in Sagle, Idaho, producing a variety of revolutionary medical pulmonary devices.

Dr. Bird was probably the world’s longest flying helicopter

instructor pilot. He has been flying helicopters for 64 years.

In 1995, Dr. Bird was inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame (located in the United States Patent and Trademark Office in Alexandria, Virginia) for his invention of the medical respirator. The National Inventors Hall of Fame “is committed to honoring visionaries, inspiring inventions and challenging the next generation.”

He was featured on national television’s CBS 60 Minutes with his life story. He has been featured in countless newspapers, magazines, journals, television and radio interviews and has mentored generations in the field of advanced pulmonary care.

In 2007, Drs. Forrest and Pamela Bird opened up the Bird Aviation Museum and Invention Center. “The Bird Aviation Museum and Invention Center strives to educate visitors about the historic contributions of aviators and innovators who have helped create modern technology, and celebrate these individuals who have forever changed the way we live. It only takes one person to change the world.” The Bird Aviation Museum and Invention Center proudly displays his medical respirators, vintage aircraft and automobiles. Dr. Bird’s legacy lives on in the people and lives he has touched now and forever.

In 2008, Dr. Bird received the Presidential Citizens Medal from President George Bush for his groundbreaking contributions and keeping America on the forefront of discovery and for saving “countless lives”. In 2009, Dr. Bird was awarded the National Medal of Technology and Innovation by President Barack Obama, in recognition of his “outstanding contributions to the promotion of technology for the improvement of the economic, environmental or social well-being of the United States.”

Dr. Bird was inducted into the Living Legends of Aviation in 2007

for his contributions in the aviation industry. In 2008, he was an inductee into the Idaho Aviation Hall of Fame.

Dr. Bird has two schools named after him – the Forrest M. Bird Charter Schools in Sandpoint, Idaho. He was a mentor, teacher and advocate education.

In 2012, Dr. Bird was awarded the Charles Lindberg Award, as well as the Idaho Technology Council's Hall of Fame. Dr. Bird had numerous patents, primarily in the areas of medicine and STCs for aviation on a variety of aircraft.

Dr. Forrest Morton Bird was preceded in death by his parents, Morton and Jane Bird, and his sisters Shirley Bird and Ramona "Bobbie" Belonga, and his wife, deceased Mary Bird. Dr. Forrest Morton Bird is survived by his loving wife, Dr. Pamela Bird, his daughter Catherine Bird Natoni, his step daughter, Rachel Schwam (husband, Nathan), granddaughter Julianna ("little blue eyes") and Autumn Grace Schwam, step son, Brandon Riddle (wife, Chanity), grandchildren Darren Natoni (wife Danielle) and Devon Natoni. In addition to his family, he leaves behind numerous extended family members and friends.

The world is a better place because of the overall impact of Dr. Bird's inventions due to the countless number of lives he has saved. Dr. Forrest Morton Bird will be missed by many but his legacy will continue to live on.

A Celebration of Life will be held in Sagle, Idaho, at the Bird Aviation Museum and Invention Center on Saturday, August 8, 2015 at 11:00 a.m. For additional information call 208-255-4321 or review the website at [www.birdaviationmuseum.com](http://www.birdaviationmuseum.com).

In lieu of flowers, donations can be sent to Bird Aviation Museum and Invention Center at Post Office Box 817, Sandpoint, Idaho 83864.

An interesting article on Dr. Forrest M. Bird <http://www.desertsun.com/story/news/2015/07/10/history-column-dr-forrest-bird/29994403/>

