



## Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum 2026 Michael Collins Trophy

### Nomination Guidelines

The Michael Collins Trophy has recognized extraordinary accomplishments in aviation and spaceflight since its inception in 1985. The Collins Trophy has grown in stature over the years and is now recognized as one of the most prestigious honors in the field. The Collins Trophy is presented annually at an event at the Museum in early spring.

Two Trophies are awarded each year: one for *Lifetime Achievement* and one for *Current Achievement*. Such achievements may include any of the following:

- The management of a significant project or activity.
- The execution of such a project or activity by a team, crew, or person.
- The attainment of distinction through a single extraordinary act.
- The attainment of distinction through a career of service.
- Distinguished accomplishments chronicling the history of aviation and spaceflight.

The Trophy for *Current Achievement* recognizes events or accomplishments from the beginning of 2024 to the present. The Trophy for *Lifetime Achievement* is awarded only to a living individual.

A nomination must include a brief written description of the significance of the nominee's accomplishments. One or two pages of text are sufficient. Nominations should not be lists of positions and awards. Successful nominations are thoughtful statements of the significance of contributions to the advancement of aviation and spaceflight.

**Nominations are due by May 16, 2025.** Please submit your nominations online at:  
<https://airandspace.si.edu/michael-collins-trophy/nominate>

The following lists of previous recipients suggest the caliber of candidates that should be nominated for the Michael Collins Trophy. A persuasive nomination from a previous year is also included for reference.

## Michael Collins Trophy Winners

| <b>Lifetime</b>                             | <b>Current Achievement</b>  |
|---|---|
| 2025 Margaret Hamilton                      | OSIRIS-REx Team   |
| 2024 Peggy Whitson                          | Double Asteroid Redirection Test Team                                     |
| 2023 Bill Anders                            | James Webb Space Telescope Team   |
| 2022 Wally Funk                             | MiMi Aung & the Ingenuity Mars Helicopter Team                            |
| 2021 Gene Kranz                             | SpaceX Team   |
| 2020 Charles Elachi                         | The Hubble Space Telescope Team   |
| 2019 Charles F. Bolden, Jr.                 | LIGO Scientific Collaboration   |
| 2018 John R. Dailey                         | Shaesta Waiz, Dreams Soar, Inc.   |
| 2017 Peter C. Theisinger                    | South Pole Rescue Team, Kenn Borek Air Ltd.                               |
| 2016 James A. Lovell                        | New Horizons Mission Team   |
| 2015 Stamatis M. "Tom" Krimigis             | Kepler Mission Team   |
| 2014 Norman R. Augustine                    | Dawn Flight Team  |
| 2013 Joseph F. Sutter                       | Mars Science Laboratory EDL Team  |
| 2012 Burt Rutan                             | Cassini-Huygens Flight Team   |
| 2011 George E. Mueller                      | Michael T. Suffredini and the ISS Program Office                          |
| 2010 Christopher Columbus Kraft, Jr.        | Chesley B. Sullenberger III and the Flight Crew of US Airways Flight 1549 |
| 2009 John R. Casani and C. Gordon Fullerton | No award presented  |
| 2008 Joseph W. Kittinger, Jr.               | Stardust Comet Sample Return Mission Team                                 |
| 2007 Robert A. "Bob" Hoover                 | N. Wayne Hale, Jr., and STS-121 Shuttle Mission Team                      |
| 2006 James A. Van Allen                     | Mars Exploration Rover Team   |
| 2005 Frank N. Piasecki                      | Burt Rutan, Paul G. Allen, and the SpaceShipOne Team                      |
| 2004 Neil A. Armstrong                      | Milstar Team  |
| 2003 No award presented                     | No award presented  |
| 2002 Stanley Hiller, Jr.                    | Predator Development Team, GA-ASI   |
| 2001 John H. Glenn, Jr.                     | Near Earth Asteroid Rendezvous Mission Team                               |
| 2000 A. Scott Crossfield                    | Chandra X-Ray Observatory Team  |
| 1999 Simon Ramo                             | Breitling Orbiter 3 Team  |
| 1998 Richard T. Whitcomb                    | Mars Pathfinder Team  |
| 1997 Anthony W. "Tony" LeVier               | Shannon W. Lucid  |
| 1996 Bernard A. Schriever                   | Boeing 777 Civilian Airliner Development Team                             |
| 1995 Najeeb E. Halaby                       | X-31 International Test Organization                                      |
| 1994 Michael H. Carr                        | Patty Wagstaff  |
| 1993 Olive Ann Beech                        | Compton J. Tucker   |
| 1992 Francis M. Rogallo                     | Magellan Project Team   |
| 1991 Arthur E. Raymond                      | John C. Mather and Cosmic Background Explorer Team                        |
| 1990 Kelly Johnson and SR-71 Design Team    | Pegasus Launch Vehicle Team   |
| 1989 Edwin Land                             | Voyager Spacecraft Team   |
| 1988 Harold Masursky                        | Paul MacCready  |
| 1987 John Steiner                           | Dick Rutan and Jeana Yeager   |
| 1986 Frank Whittle and Hans von Ohain       | John W. Young   |
| 1985 Robert R. Gilruth                      | Kathryn D. Sullivan and Bruce McCandless, II                              |

## Example Nomination

### Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum Michael Collins Trophy

Current Achievement

Lifetime Achievement **XX**

Name of Candidate or team: **Col. Joseph W. Kittinger, Jr.**

#### Briefly summarize the accomplishments of this nominee:

Joseph Kittinger was born in Tampa, Florida, July 27, 1928, graduated from high school in Jacksonville, Florida, and attended the University of Florida. He entered the USAF as an aviation cadet in March 1949, was commissioned in March 1950, and served for the next three years with the 86th Fighter Bomber Squadron in Germany. On June 2, 1957, while assigned to the Air Force Missile Development Center (AFMDC) at Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico, Kittinger flew a balloon to an altitude of 96,000 feet in the first of the Air Force Project Manhigh ascents, for which he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

While serving with the Aerospace Medical Research Laboratories, Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, Ohio, Kittinger was appointed Test Director of Project Excelsior, investigating equipment and techniques that would allow aircrew to survive bail-out from very high altitudes. During this project he completed three high altitude jumps from a balloon gondola--from 76,400 on November 16, 1958; 74,700 on December 10, 1958; and 102,800 feet on August 16, 1960. On the last occasion he was in freefall for 4.5 minutes, experienced temperatures as low as -94 degrees Fahrenheit, and reached a velocity close to the speed of sound. Forty-six years later, he continues to hold the world record for the highest parachute jump, the longest freefall, and the fastest speed achieved by a human being in free fall. His work on Project Excelsior earned Kittinger an oak leaf cluster to the Distinguished Flying Cross, the J.J. Jeffries Award of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, the Leo Stevens Parachute Medal and the Wingfoot Lighter-Than-Air Society Achievement Award. President Eisenhower awarded him the C.B. Harmon Trophy on October 3, 1960.

On December 13-14, 1962, Kittinger and astronomer William C. White rose to an altitude of 82,200 feet over Holloman AFB, New Mexico in a Project Stargazer balloon. The pair remained at altitude for the next 18.5 hours, checking variations in brightness of stars caused by the atmosphere.

Kittinger volunteered for three combat tours in Vietnam, serving as commander of the famous 555th "Triple Nickel" Tactical Fighter Squadron flying the F-4 Phantom II during his final tour. After downing a MiG 21 on May 11, 1972, he was shot down and spent 11 months as a POW.

Following his retirement as a Colonel in 1978, Kittinger worked as an engineer with Martin Marietta Aerospace but continued to fly airplanes and balloons. He won the Gordon-Bennett balloon races in 1982, 1984, and 1985 before accomplishing his most ambitious feat, a solo balloon crossing of the Atlantic. Taking off aboard the balloon, *Rosie O'Grady* on September 14, 1984, he traveled over 3,500 miles at altitudes ranging between 10,000 and 17,000 feet. Although beset by cold, fatigue, and tricky winds, he successfully completed the historic flight in

3.5 days. Crash-landing in northern Italy on September 18, he set a record for the longest solo balloon flight as well as a distance record for this class of balloon. Kittinger continues to fly, competing in the 2004 Gordon Bennett balloon race.

**Briefly describe the significance of this accomplishment to aerospace:**

Joseph W. Kittinger, Jr., exemplifies the best traditions of military test flying. His most important achievement was to pioneer the use of high-altitude balloons to test equipment and techniques that would save the lives of crew members forced to abandon their aircraft at extreme altitudes. His experience not only demonstrated that survival was possible under those conditions, but led to the development of procedures still in use today. He is arguably the most important balloonist active since 1945. Beyond all of that, as a fighter pilot, POW and record setter, he is a genuine American hero.