

BETTY THE PAN AM STEWARDESS -A REVIEW



We all recognize them: uniformed figures striding down terminal halls, weaving among passengers, luggage in tow; welcoming words as we enter the aircraft door; polite but firm reminders that departure is imminent. Stewardess, Flight Attendant. Titles have changed, and gender and appearance expectations have morphed into something more realistic than the former ideals of Barbie perfection, but their purpose has remained constant. Stow those bags, lock that cabin down! The Diet Coke and bag of pretzels on your tray table may quiet hunger pangs until your next meal, but we all pray that we never need the attendants for their ultimate, indispensable purpose.

We know that without them, we cannot go. But do you know the weight of their history?

Betty the Pan Am Stewardess, created by historian Dr. Leslie Goddard, is a summary of the lives of the first Stewardesses in the early days of jet travel. She epitomizes the ideals of the day—slender and attractive, well-groomed and well-spoken. From her excitement at receiving her Pan Am acceptance letter to her feelings of uncertainty mixed with pride upon completing weeks of demanding training, Betty details her life as a Stewardess during the Golden Age of passenger flight.

Along with appearance standards, Stewardesses endured restrictive uniforms, a focus on youth, and women-specific rules. Today's Flight Attendants would be aghast at the workload, the regularly scheduled weight checks, and what some might call Betty's subservient duties. The days of a Flight Attendant can be long and hard, sometimes requiring one to reach deep into the last stores of energy to complete the last leg of the trip. But in the gut-wrenching years of the Vietnam War, Betty and her comrades remained true to their purpose and beyond, flying troops into combat zones, sometimes with tragic results.

Anna, our Executive Director, and Cheryl, Cindy, and I, museum volunteers, attended Betty's presentation last year. We felt her pride and giddy excitement while we sympathized with the demands of her job. Ultimately, we realized that the role of the Flight Attendant has been an integral part of aviation and military history for decades. Their story is for everyone, and we think you should know it. Dr. Goddard's meticulous research creates memorable and authentic characters to entertain and inform you. You will laugh, shake your head in disbelief, and you may even shed a tear or two.

Please join us on October 10, 2025, to meet Dr. Goddard and Betty the Pan Am Stewardess. When you do, I hope that your new-found knowledge will nudge you towards an even greater respect for the people who attend to you as you settle back in your seat and anticipate the arrival at your destination.

-Connie Fowler

