The eagerly anticipated aviation event “The Gathering of Mustangs and Legends – 2007” was by all counts a resounding success. This huge airshow and aviation extravaganza took place from September 27-October 1 at Rickenbacker Airport, Columbus, Ohio. The driving force behind the event was Lee Lauderback, President, Stallion 51 Corporation (www.stallion51.com), Kissimmee, Florida. He and his organization held the first Gathering of Mustangs & Legends in Kissimmee, Florida in April 1999. That gathering was more of a reunion than an airshow, but set the seeds for planning a much bigger event. After considering several locations, Rickenbacker Airport was selected. This was the perfect choice. Rickenbacker Airport is celebrating its 65th Anniversary. It is also the 60th Anniversary of the United States Air Force, but, of course, the glory days of the P-51 Mustang dates further back with the U.S. Army Air Force.

The “star billing” for this weekend was the 85 P-51 Mustangs that flew in. No one was disappointed seeing 85 Mustangs flying into Rickenbacker Airport and lined up on the tarmac allowing close inspection by spectators. Attendance was estimated to total approximately 200,000 for the weekend with beautiful sunny blue skies on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. In addition to the Mustangs the sky was filled with flying displays by the USAF Thunderbirds doing their always spectacular routines and the USAF F-15, F-16 and F-22.

The crowds were treated by three Heritage flights; F-16 and P-51; F-15 and two P-51s; F22 and three P-51s. On Sunday, the final Heritage flight had a diamond formation of a P-51 leading an F-15, F-16 and F-22! There was plenty of excitement generated by flights by two P-47 Thunderbolts, two P-38 Lightnings, a P-63 King Cobra, two B-25 Mitchells, two B-17 Fortresses, the Canadian Warbird Heritage AVRO Lancaster and, of course, numerous P-51 Mustangs. Simulated bombing and strafing runs by all of these warbirds were enhanced by spectacular explosives pyrotechnics done by Rich’s Incredible Pyro of Rockford, Illinois, making for realistic looking and sounding battle scenes. In addition to the above-mentioned aircraft, there were aerobatic displays by the Red Barons PT-17 Stearman team, Aeroshell AT-6 team, John Mohr in his PT-17 and other aerobatic acts.

Visitors had the opportunity to meet and greet over 40 P-51 WWII lots, plus 48 Tuskegee Airmen veterans. This was fitting in that Rickenbacker Airport was formerly known as Lockbourne Army Airbase and was the final base for the Tuskegee Airmen Squadrons after the war. In 1948 President Truman signed the executive order ending segregation in the US Armed Forces and the Tuskegee Airmen were transferred around the world to integrate all USAF bases.

The real stars of the airshow were the Mustangs. It seemed that there were Mustangs in the air all the time, even before and after official show hours. The plan to put 51 Mustangs in the air together did not pan out. On both Saturday and Sunday, a formation of 20 Mustangs took to the air flying over in formation of flights of four. Then after flying off to regroup, they impressed the crowd with a flying formation in the shape of the number 51.

Throughout the day, spectators could walk the line-up of P-51s and the other aircraft, inspect them up close, and talk to pilots and aircrew. Most of the Mustangs were P-51Ds, of course (including a few 2-seat dual control TF-51Ds), but there were some rarely seen models, two P-51Cs, a dual control TP-51C and a P-51A. There was even a fuselage section of an XP.51G (only two were built), whose owner, John Morgan, actively plans to restore/rebuild it to fly the plane. It seemed that almost every P-51 fighter group in the European and Mediterranean theaters was represented by their group and squadron markings. There were also a few P-51Ds in Reno Air Racing schemes, including the much modified P-51D “Precious Metal” with a Rolls-Royce Griffon engine, clipped wings and a contra-rotating six-bladed propeller.

Veteran airshow participants from across the United States and Canada, as well as England, Belgium and elsewhere highly praised the event. The show management, volunteers, participants, security forces (civilian and military) did their jobs professionally and in a friendly manner. Observations such as “Best airshow I have been to!”; “Better than Oshkosh!”; “Excellent warbird show!”; “Wonderful combination of current and vintage aircraft” were heard time and again. Congratulations are due to all involved. Hopefully, we can have more “Last Gatherings”.

By Mike Raftus
The Final Roundup

The Gathering of Mustangs, “The Final Roundup” was held Sept 27–30, 2007 at Rick-enbacker International Airport in Columbus, Ohio. It was a great success with over 150,000 spectators in attendance to view a collection of P-51 Mustangs and legends at the show which included a gathering of the famous Tuskegee Airmen such as Lee Archer, (the only Tuskegee ace), Dr. Roscoe Brown, Harry Stewart and other airmen. Let us not forget the woman heroes of the day, the WASPS whose service to our country during WW II that ferried aircraft to distant lands so our pilots were supplied with new aircraft.

Among the 77 P-51’s attending were two each P-40 Warhawks, P-38 Lightnings, P-47 Thunderbolts, B-25 Mitchell’s and B-17 Flying Fortresses. A single P-51A King Cobra and Warbird bi-plane were also on the static line. We all had a treat with one of the only two flying British Avro Lancaster bombers from Canada on static and doing several fly-bys for us. At the far end of the field the modern military aircraft were present also with a C-5 Galaxy, C-130 Hercules, C-17, KC-135, two A-10 Warthogs and F-16 Falcon.

The outstanding performers of the show included the Red Baron Pizza Team Squadron, Aeroshell Texan Team, Michael Goulian, John Klatt, Ed Hamill and the first woman to win a flying show, Patty Wagstaff. To add some thunder to the shows the F-16 East Coast demo team, F-15 West Coast demo team and the new “kid on the block”, F-22 Raptor Demo Team which showed us what the latest aviation technology can do in the air. In a grand finale, the US Air Force Thunderbirds, which always, put on their flying demonstration to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Air Force. As an added treat on Saturday, the B-2 Spirit multi role stealth bomber did some fly-bys to show us that Mr. Northrop was right in the first place in his flying wing design.

In addition to the military demos and fly-bys, the P-51 Mustangs did their thing by joining up with the jets and did several Heritage flights to show us the old with the new. Some of the P-51 pilots showed the people what the Mustang can really do with outstanding performances by Jim Beasley and Ed Shipley performing their “Horsemen” routine and Lee Laderback, who put this show together, and his P-51, “Crazy Horse” also did some fancy flying. The P-51’s got together to do some formation fly-bys on Saturday and Sunday which also thrilled the spectators.

In all, the Gathering of Mustangs and Legends was a great success and we want to thank Stallion 51 Corporation, owners and pilots, ground crews, and all others involved in putting this show together. I and others want to give you a big, “well done.” For more information about the show, visit, www.GML2007.com

Bolen noted that, even as the Convention took place in Atlanta, NBAA was advocating for Member interests in Washington. Steve Brown, NBAA senior vice president of operations & administration and a former associate administrator for FAA Air Traffic Services, testified before a House subcommittee to challenge “the erroneous allegations from the big airlines’ attempt to blame their record-setting delays on the general aviation community,” as part of their campaign to vilify the industry. “I urge our Members to stay involved and communicate the threat that user fees pose to thousands of businesses and communities nationwide to their representatives in Congress,” Bolen concluded.

To review Convention highlights, including podcasts, photos, videos, articles and Member snapshots, visit NBAA’s online News Bureau at www.nbaa.org/2007.

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From The Gathering of Mustangs & Legends
After the great success of Stallion 51’s first Gathering of Mustangs & Legends at Kissimmee, Fl, in 1999 (65 Mustangs and 12 Legends), the organizers had hoped that they could pull off one more such event before the legendary P-51 pilots, ground crews, and others associated with this famous WWII fighter passed on. So “The Last Roundup,” was located at Rickenbacker International Airport near Columbus, Ohio. More than 150,000 visitors poured into the airport for the four-day event, September 27 to 30. Spectators came from all 50 states and 22 foreign countries. While the hoped-for 100 Mustangs didn’t quite materialize, at last count 76 made the flight to Rickenbacker. That’s half the flying P-51s in the world today. It represented the largest group of Mustangs assembled since the Korean War. The Ohio airport had plenty of apron to contain the huge crowds, parked aircraft, heritage pavilions, military encampments, and air show seating. Pavilion tents housed exhibits and Legends from the ranks of the Tuskegee Airmen and the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). The Tuskegee Airmen, famed black Red Tail P-51 pilots of WWII, actually were based at the airfield for a few years after the war. Some 45 of their number were expected to attend the event. They signed autographs and conducted interview sessions.

The Women Airforce Service Pilots were well represented. Belatedly recognized for their courageous service in WWII, these female veterans ferried P-51s and other fighters and bombers from factories to airfields across America and beyond. It was dangerous work; courageous service in WWII, these female veterans ferried P-51s and other fighters and bombers from factories to airfields across America and beyond. It was dangerous work; adventurous service in WWII, these female veterans ferried P-51s and other fighters and bombers from factories to airfields across America and beyond. It was dangerous work;}

his namesake plane Old Crow—actually another restored Mustang now owned by Jim Hagedorn. Colonel Anderson graciously signed T-shirts, caps, and other items handed to him (including my Bud Anderson Mustang cap!). Earlier I had attended a media panel consisting of Anderson and four other Legends. Each veteran related hair-raising tales of flying Mustangs against the enemy.

But the real action took place in the sky over Rickenbacker. Many visitors had traveled great distances just to thrill to the sweet sound of the Mustang’s Rolls Royce Merlin engine and to behold the beauty of the old fighter plane’s sleek design. The airshow ran almost nonstop. The acts featured both civilian and military aerobatics and flight demos. The former included John Mohr, the Red Baron Pizza Squadron, Ed Harill, Eric Frasier, the AeroShell Aerobic Team, Patty Wagstaff, Michael Goulian, and John Klett. Wagstaff also flew a P-51 in her tribute to the WASP. Selecting GML to highlight the 60th anniversary of the USAF, the Air Force brought to Rickenbacker an F-16, F-15, F-22, and the USAF Thunderbirds. Apart from the always popular T-birds, the F-22 Raptor stole the heavy iron portion of the show. For anyone who hasn’t yet witnessed the amazing maneuvers of this revolutionary, all-avionics fighter, the Raptor’s performance is truly breathtaking!

Of course, the Mustangs were the true high point of the air show. P-51s appeared in solo performances (Lee Lauerback in Crazy Horse), in the precisely executed dual Horsemen routine (Jim Beasley in the P-51C Prince Edward, Elizabeth and Ed Shipley in Twilight Tear as well as Crazy Horse), and as part of the Heritage Flights. The latter involved one, two, and three P-51s in combination with one of the three participating jets.

On Sunday a single Heritage Flight produced an exciting surprise. A Mustang leading a tight formation of all three jet fighters. Needless to say, the P-51 appeared dwarfed by its modern counterparts! Prior to each day’s finale, the airshow audience was treated to an aerial parade of P-40s, P-47s, a P-38, P-51s, and a rare P-63 King Cobra. Then a “bomber escort mission” featured four Mustangs escorting a bomber procession of B-17s, B-25s, and one of only two flying British Lancasters in the world. Exploding pyros illuminated the airfield as the planes “bombed” their imaginary targets. On Sunday the Lanc “dropped” a Grand Slam bomb, astonishing the spectators with a curtain of boiling fire and black smoke across the ground, generating heat felt by everyone along the fence line.

The climax of the show came after the bomber parade. A common occurrence during the war years, 20 Mustangs lined up on the runway for takeoff. The combined sound of many Merlins running together brought smiles and even a few tears to the eyes of veteran fighter pilots and P-51 buffs. After the planes launched and disappeared in the sky, spectators anxiously waited for the group to form up and return.

Finally, the entire formation came into view and proceeded down the length of the field in a trail of individual elements. It was an awesome sensation to eye and ear, something this reporter will never forget! After the formation again faded over the horizon, there was an even longer pause before the Mustangs returned once again, this time across the field directly in front of the stands. The 20-plane formation approached in a giant number “51,” causing gasps and cheers from the crowd as the planes passed directly over show center.

Each day’s show closed with the familiar Missing Man Formation. As four Mustangs flew overhead to “Taps” from the loudspeakers, a single plane rose out of the formation and curved away, symbolizing those airmen who never returned home from the war. This year’s Gathering of Mustangs & Legends was truly a once-in-a-lifetime event and as such will be talked about for years to come.
The Best of Gathering of Mustangs
A Tribute to Tuskegee Airmen

The Gathering of Mustangs and Legends event will forever be recorded in history as a formidable and fitting tribute to the veterans of World War II. There are many reasons anyone could give after having been at Rickenbacker Field those four days in September that would be perfect examples as to why it was so great. All of what they experienced would certainly sound unbelievable but would have been true. But let it be known that it was not due to the size and scope of the project the Gathering had pulled together. It was absolutely huge by anyone’s standard of measurement. It might be said that it was because of the numbers and rarity of vintage aircraft on the grounds and flying overhead that made it so uniquely great. Truly there were some aircraft there that were some of the finest in the world. To sum it up, it will be the event in history known to most as having been the celebration that stirred the hearts and minds of the Legends, the performing pilots, volunteers and patrons who came to Rickenbacker to witness the Gathering first hand. The Gathering of Mustangs and Legends allowed us an opportunity to show our love and appreciation for the veterans who served in World War II and also for the men and women who are serving now in our armed forces. What was displayed on the veteran’s faces, observed in their conversation and heard in their sharing of their stories gave families missing history that was held secret for so long and now finally was being told?

This was the greatest use of aviation space anyone has ever seen and the aviation event of the century. As a son of a World War II veteran, I often wondered, during my teenage years, what took place so many years ago that rendered my father to silence over his service time during WW II. Some of my questions were answered after hearing the testimonies of the Legendary airmen during those four days in and around Rickenbacker Field. Tuskegee Airmen Roscoe Brown from the 322nd Fighter Group and Squadron Commander was sharing his testimony as a Tuskegee P-51 pilot with five other Army Air Corp veterans Barry Davis, John Kirla, Paul McCormick, Robert Powell and William Foard at the media center legend panel. Roscoe spoke for the group and mentioned how thrilled they all were to be here at the Gathering of Mustangs and to be recognized on behalf of all the Tuskegee Airmen who served. “This is the highlight of our careers” Roscoe said.

“The P-51 Mustang was the Cadillac of the skies and thanks to North American for the P-51 the war ended six months earlier saving thousands of lives. No flying skills brought us here - only luck got us here. We are not heroes. We were just kids that rose to the occasion. Flying a P-51 was a great experience, but seeing the people come together to reflect, tell stories and show their appreciation was one of the most exciting things to ever happen. This is all a very bitter sweet time for us. We think about who we lost and yet we are proud to be a here and be part of the changes that we brought to our country and to the world. Yes, we are very thankful for being here today”. After hearing Roscoe and the others speak, the Legends to me now will have a much greater meaning than referring to something handed down. When I think of a Legend I will be thinking of those men I met at the Gathering of Mustangs who put it all on the line for our freedom that we have in America today. The silence of what has not been said for some sixty-five years has been officially broken. Broken is also what I, the other Legend pilots and volunteers and patrons felt as we sat and listened to them recite the history of events that they endured some sixty years ago during a time of great conflict.

They were the great generation of ordinary people committed to duty and dedicated to honor and passionate about freedom. Through this event we were finally able to give back to those soldiers the recognition for what they have done and a chance to heal from their losses by giving them a platform to speak from. I think this gathering was the best way we could have ever said ‘Thank You’ to them.

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