

LEGENDS AIRSHOW 2007

The Flying Legends Air Show does not have the romantic and exciting popularity of Farnborough and Oshkosh, but it is one of the biggest gathering of vintage aircraft in Europe. This year it took place on the weekend of 7 – 8th July at its usual venue, the Imperial War Museum, Duxford, in the eastern part of England. It was organised by The Fighter Collection, one of the largest warbird operators in Europe. The weather played along for part of the show every day, giving both cloudy and sunny conditions. The show is run differently to our air shows in South Africa, in that it the flying only starts at 13:45 pm, giving the visitor's time to visit all the sales stalls and museum halls in the morning.

These stalls are designed to separate you from your money, and do so with great success. Every year a new group of old vets will sit and sign their books, or prints, done by well known artists like Robert Taylor. This year it was the turn of the Tuskegee Airman, i.e. the Negro Squadron that flew supportive missions to some of our SAAF Squadrons during WWII, in their red tailed Mustangs.



Other personalities present to sign their books included Capt. Eric "Winkle" Brown CBE, DSC, AFC, RN who was the most highly decorated navy pilot and became well known for his testing of all the captured enemy aircraft. He ended up as the holder of the world records for flying the most types of aircraft, and for the highest number of aircraft carrier landings.



Others were Lieut. Commander Peter Twiss OBE, DSC who set the world airspeed record above 1000mph for the first time in the Fairey Delta 2; Capt. Allan Sutton CBE, DSC; Lieut. Commander Edgar Lee; Lieut. Commander George Richard Blackburn (son of the founder of Blackburn Aircraft Company), to name but a few.

Both flying days were opened by a USAF F-15E Strike Eagle from RAF Lakenheath. As luck would have it, both his display times coincided with the most clouds and rain, so that the grey aircraft merged well with the grey clouds.



The white water condensation showed up well. It did two formation fly pasts with P-51's which contrasted well, especially when they hit a bit of sunlight.



New to their Jet and Mustang 'heritage formations' as they are called, was the addition of a P-39Q (Airacobra) (the Fighter Collection) flown by Steve Hinton from Chino in California.



The next slot was occupied by a collection of 8 Spitfires. Both Merlin and Griffon types flew, with the collective sound giving you goose bumps.



They don't give aerobatic shows but fly up and down the flight line, chasing each other.



A Mk. Vc T-B/JG891 (Spitfire Ltd) in Desert scheme



performed next. Since many of our pilots flew this type in the same colours, I naturally went all out to get as many photos of this aircraft as possible. Another relevant aircraft was TA 805, a Mk. HF IX in the temperate scheme.



This aircraft is ex SAAF (WWII Italy era) but I was unable to establish which Squadron. It is painted in the temperate land scheme, as used by our SAAF in Italy. This aircraft flew together with AE-A/EP120



a clipped wing Mk. Vb (Fighter collection), another variant known to the SAAF, which is the highest scoring Spitfire in existence today, with 7 kills to its credit. Two other Spitfires stood out. A PR Mk XIX PS890 variant made more colourful by its D-Day stripes



was in stark contrast to the dark clouds. This Spitfire was re-engined at Chino with a Griffon engine from a Shackleton, together with its contra-rotating propellers.

Another Griffon powered Spit was a Mk. FR XIVE marked JE-J/MV268 (actually MV293) with clipped wings.



During the Luftwaffe slot we were fortunate to be entertained by a Messerschmitt Bf 109 albeit with a Merlin engine (Buchon) (Spitfire Ltd).



It was flown alongside the Spits a few times, showing the sharp contrast between the Allied and Axis camouflage doctrines



Unfortunately the very rare new build FW 190 that was recently brought to Duxford by Tom Blair has not yet received its CAA clearance. It was therefore not allowed to fly but did taxi along the runway to show off its lines and give us the sound of its BMW engine.



The other two aircraft in this section were two Ju-52's, one in an original Luftwaffe colour scheme, T2B-212 JB (Salis collection).



The other was in a Lufthansa scheme, WK-NR 5489, both giving excellent low and slow shows.



Two very impressive A/C are the FG-1D Corsair (Fighter collection),



and a F4U-4A (Corsair Warbirds),



flown by Smith and Frenchman Goujon respectively.



The Frenchman was a real treat with a wonderful sense of humour. For those not in the know this A/C performed splendidly in the Far East Campaign during the WWII and afterwards in Indochina (French) as well as Korea.

I am sure that many of you will have heard of the Shuttleworth collection, operating from Old Warden Airfield. They brought their Lysander IIIa V9552 painted in black as used during infiltrating ops in Western Europe.



Three new flying A/C to me were the Gladiator I L8032,



and the two Hawkers i.e. Nimrod



and Hind.



I never realized those Kestrel engines were so quiet. Amongst all of us standing photographing, it was unanimous that these old Hawker Biplanes were something really special. The Nimrod is the Navy version of the Fury that is familiar to many of our Old-Timers, whereas many of our SAAF vets will have flown the Hind and its closely related Hartbees.

The only WWI related aircraft shown off was the Tummelisa 01 that is owned and flown by Michael Carlsson.



Swedish built it served as an advanced trainer between 1920-1933, having the distinction that its type never had a fatal accident during its use.

Another welcome performer was the Polikarpov I-15. A real noisy brute.



It belongs to the Avia Restoration Company and our readers will recognise it as similar to the ones flown at Wanaka in NZ. It gave a beautiful show, just showing how slow and vulnerable it is. One can understand how the Luftwaffe experts notched up such high scores when they encountered these biplanes in the initial stages of the Russian campaign.



The Fighter collection then gave a formation as well as individual show by its 'Grumman Cat' collection.



The oldest was the FM 2 Wildcat. It sure is noisy, but it was painted in FAA colours and therefore known as a Martlet.



It was followed by a F6F-5K Hellcat



that was real agile and fast, despite its big appearance. It became the darling of many a naval aviator and was one of the main annihilators of the Japanese Air Force in e.g. the Mariana's Turkey shoot.

As far as performance went the last 'Cat' of WWII produced by Grumman i.e. the Bearcat, was flown by Steven Grey, owner of the Fighter collection.



This is a real performer and must rank in the similar league as the radial engined Tempest and Sea Fury.

Many of our Vets will know the name Alex Henshaw, who was one of Britain's foremost test pilots. He passed away aged 94 in February of this year. As a tribute to him there was a slot with three A/C that he was involved with. Probably the most significant was the Mew Gull G-AEXF in which he broke the solo records between the UK and Cape Town. He also acted as the Technical Director of Miles A/C (SA).



His other A/C was the Arrow Active II G-ABVE



with a Gipsy III engine in which he learned to master outside loops and inverted spins.
The third was the TFC's Spitfire MkV,



this flown by Marchasson.

Legends are known for throwing different A/C in formation and flying a show. Under Bomber and escorts they had a B-17 (Sally B)



and a B-25 (from Duke of Brabant A/F)



that was escorted by a P-39 (TFC) and a P-51 (Old Flying Machine Co). All four A/C ended up giving individual displays with the bombers sounding very much like six Harvards in formation. Some of our readers may have heard of the European

bureaucratic fiasco that is threatening the heavyweights whereby the B-17 is now classed as the same insurance risk as a full Boeing 747. This limits the flying time severely so the days of seeing a B-17 in European skies may be limited. These four A/C were then followed by five Mustangs being thrown about all over the airfield. Their show consists of various groups of Mustangs approaching from different directions making it very difficult to decide what to photograph. I am sure our readers will agree that all the colours together in these beautiful machines makes for a spectacular show.



Probably the most well known at the moment was Miss Velma which attempted the trans Atlantic flight with P-38 Glacier Girl that was restored after recovery from 268ft of ice in Greenland. Glacier Girl again did not complete the flight but Miss Velma did and showed off her colours to us.



The next P-51 was the colourful Old Crow that was flown by Bud Anderson during WWII who became well known for his exploits in WWII, Korea and Vietnam.



Ferocious Frankie



and Big Beautiful Doll



flew formation and single displays as well.

They were followed by a Naval Section that comprised a Seafire F XVII SX 336 (Kennet Aviation),



and a Skyraider AD-4NA that is well known to Duxford visitors with its Hornet insignia on the tail. It used to reside at Duxford but has since moved after it was sold to Kennet Aviation.



The FBII Sea Fury VR 930 (RN Historic Flight) still impresses and has a different colour scheme to the two we sometimes see flying at our air shows. A real brute that performed well with the Skyraiders.



With them there was a low and slow show by a PBV-1 Catalina (Plane sailing).



It is again relevant to us as 35 Squadron during WWII operated a derivative of this A/C.

The French and Russian slot impressed me greatly. One of the A/C was the Curtiss Hawk 75 (TFC).



Although it was painted in French colours it will be recognized by many of our Vets who flew 3, 4, 5 Squadron and some of the OTU's, as the Mohawk. It gave a beautiful show, matched by a MS 406 (Ass Morane Charlie Fox).



I never realized this A/C was so fast and agile.

It was accompanied by Yak 3 (Marc Mathis) looking similar to the Yak 11 in colour that we had at our shows for a while.



Two Hurricanes



turned up giving a very docile show. AE-C/BD707 has just been repainted into its new colours, showing off to the crowds for the first time. It used to be painted in the all black night fighter scheme.

A section was attributed to transports, which consisted of a yellow coloured Beech Staggerwing



which is always a favourite with the crowds.

A very silver C-53 from Norway dazzled all of us as it performed in the sunshine.



The Lancaster from BBMF appeared for a few flypasts on Sunday only. One can see that it is handled with kid's gloves as its movements were certainly so docile that it is not trying to induce any G-forces.



On each day the show was ended by a 'Balbo', the name originating from the massive Allied Air formations in Europe as a show of force during Victory Celebrations.



(For your information; Italy's most famous interwar pilot, Italo Balbo served with the Alpine troops during WW1 and then joined Benito Mussolini's Fascist movement. In 1926,

despite knowing nothing about aviation, he was appointed Secretary of State for Air. He quickly learned to fly, and set about reorganizing Italy's air force, the Regia Aeronautica. In 1933, he led a mass formation of 24 Savoia-Marchetti SM.55X flying boats on a transatlantic round-trip flight from Italy to Chicago, landing on Lake Michigan. As a result the collective noun balbo was coined in Italian to describe a large formation of aircraft. Balbo was subsequently appointed governor of Libya. During WW2, he called for Italy to side with Britain, contrary to Mussolini's plans. He continued to lead air patrols over North Africa and was killed when returning from a patrol in 1940, shot down by the anti-aircraft guns of his own base.)

This is a real exciting concept where the formation breaks into smaller sections at each pass until only small formations of three or four aircraft remain who come in to land. Not something you can really photograph so most of the time one just stands in awe listening to the engines.

The last two photos show something sadly lacking in South African Air Shows. It is common to see re-enactors dress up in period uniforms and mingling with the crowds and being amongst the aircraft. The first photo is a typical scene where aircrew are lying about waiting for a scramble,



while the second shows a USN Pilot in front of 'his' Corsair.



My impression of the Legends Air Show – What an experience!!! Not just the flying, but also due to the people we met. I wore my SAAFA cap with a S.A. Flag pin and it amazed me how many people, officials, pilots and the public started to talk to me about our Aviation History. We have a lot of friends out there. A definite must for anybody interested in historic flying machines.

STEFAN BOUWER