

GATHERING OF MUSTANGS AND LEGENDS

HISTORY, EMOTIONS FLYING HIGH

By Mark Ferencik
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Up close, they remain sleek and strong, these World War II aircraft lined up at Rickenbacker Airport.

And up close, the pilots who flew them retain as much strength as their age allows. More than 60 years later, some still swagger, still have the cockiness that helped them survive the skies over Europe and the Pacific.

But look closely at those planes. How cramped they appear. How fragile.

The same goes for the pilots. They're aging, certainly. Consider the subtitle of the Gathering of Mustangs and Legends at Rickenbacker Airport this weekend: The Final Roundup.

The emotions remain fragile, too.

William Foard is 83, a quiet man from South Carolina with a soft Southern accent. The

See **FLYING HIGH** Page **A4**

event program says he flew 23 missions in a P-51 Mustang for the 357th Fighter Group based in England.

That's the fact behind William Foard the legend.

William Foard the man recalls watching a shot-up B-17 bomber he was escorting plow into another bomber and spiral together toward the ground.

His voice breaks. He still wonders what drove bomber crews back into those lumbering planes that had to fly straight, easy targets.

He mentions that his brother was on a B-17 and begins to weep.

"My brother was a tail gunner," he said. He can barely go on. His brother's plane was shot down over Yugoslavia. Henry Foard was killed in action.

Dominick Olivito Jr. is a

If you go

► **What:** Gathering of Mustangs and Legends

► **Where:** Rickenbacker Airport

► **When:** Gates open 8 a.m.-6 p.m.

► **Tickets:** General admission, \$25; students, veterans and military with ID, \$20; children 8 and under, free. Available at the gate or online at www.gml2007.com

judge in Carroll County in eastern Ohio. Yesterday, he was pointing to a British Lancaster bomber and describing it to his son, Jonathan Olivito, an Ohio University history major.

The elder Olivito, a military history buff whose father was a World War II veteran, said that when you look at such a plane, you get the impression it is indestructible. But dozens were lost in bombing raids.

"The men had the courage to go up and fly," he said.

One of them was Bob Yarrington of the Northwest Side. The 82-year-old was a radio operator on a B-24 in the Pacific, bombing Japanese targets. Yesterday, he was explaining to his grand-

children, Allan Griggs, 9, and Anna Griggs, 6, how a belly turret worked on a B-17 at the air show.

Yarrington said he felt secure in his bomber during his 33 missions. One thing he learned from the war: "You take things day by day."

Dave Lowry of the Yankee Air Museum, the group that cares for the B-17, slipped inside the belly turret to show 12-year-old Cory Richards of Westerville that someone could truly fit inside.

"Pretty cool," Cory said. "Pretty tight."

To Cory, that seemed the safest place on the airplane.

For the pilots, their safety depended on their skill — and a lot of luck, said Roscoe C. Brown.

Brown, retired president of Bronx Community College in New York, was a squadron commander in the 332nd Fighter Group — the Tuskegee Airmen, the famed squadrons of black pilots.

"The greatest plane I ever flew," Brown said of the Mustang. "The Cadillac of the skies."

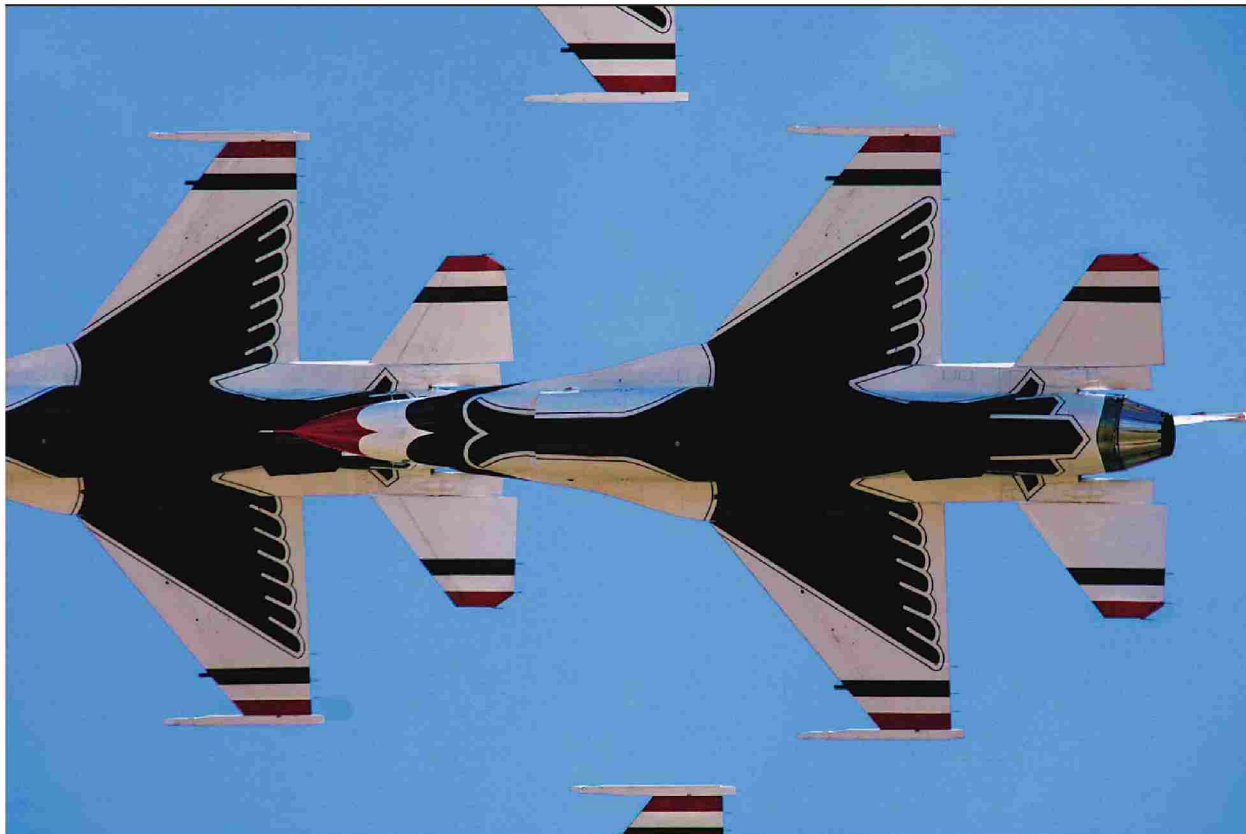
Olivito, the judge, has immersed himself in military history over the years. His father landed on Omaha Beach in 1944 on D-Day.

He came to look at the planes yesterday. But his curiosity isn't just from his interest in the war.

"I honor my father," he said.

That tie isn't fragile.
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The Thunderbirds Aerobatic Team performs maneuvers during the Gathering of Mustangs and Legends air show at Rickenbacker Airport.



Veteran Dave Lowry shows 12-year-old Cory Richards of Westerville how an airman could squeeze into the belly turret of a B-17 "Yankee Lady."



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All eyes are fixed on an F-22 Raptor as it makes a pass over Rickenbacker Airport during a rare public demonstration.