

Legends soaring into Rickenbacker

By Linda Dillman

Staff Writer

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The roar of more than 100 World War II P-51 Mustangs, guided by the same legends whose exploits live on in the planes they continue to pilot, will be heard in the sky over Rickenbacker Airport on Sept. 27-30.

"A Gathering of Mustangs and Legends: The Final Roundup," takes to the skies for a rare opportunity to watch the Air Force's premier fighters, including the newest member of the flying inventory, the F-22, alongside their older brethren, such as the P-51.

The event is open to the public and coincides with Air Force Heritage Week. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the U.S. Air Force and the 65th anniversary of military operations at the former Rickenbacker/Lockbourne Army/Air Force Base.

The four-day event is expected to draw 200,000 people to Rickenbacker and includes static aircraft displays, formation flights, demonstrations by military and civilian aircraft, aerial demonstrations by the USAF Thunderbirds, a Legends auction, and vendors offering food and souvenirs.

Legendary pilots scheduled to attend the gathering include astronaut Frank Borman, commander of the Gemini 7 and Apollo 8 missions; WW II ace Bud Andersen; and retired Brigadier General Regis Urschler, who is flying his own P-51 from his home in Nebraska back to familiar territory.

Urschler served as vice commander of the 301st Air Refueling Wing at Rickenbacker from August 1975 to July 1977 and then as wing commander until May 1978 when he assumed command of the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska. He flew his Mustang to air shows on weekends when he was stationed at Rickenbacker and continues to fly even into his 70s.

The P-51 Mustang is commonly credited with being a pivotal element in the Allied Forces' effort to win World War II. Since the military retired the Mustang, the aircraft has been purchased by civilians like Urschler and restored to its original glory. Of the over 15,000 produced, approximately 150 remain in flying condition today. "The Gathering of Mustangs and Legends" will bring together the aircraft and honor 51 legends associated with the P-51 such as flying aces, Tuskegee Airmen, crew chiefs, and WASP.

About the event

Activities take off on Sept. 27 with the arrivals of P-51 Mustangs, other war birds and bombers, the USAF Thunderbirds, USAF Demonstration Teams, performers, and the opening of static aircraft displays and limited vendors and concessions.

Gates open at 8 a.m. Sept. 28-30, followed by opening ceremonies daily at 9:30 a.m. Scheduled flying activities begin directly thereafter and feature P-51 pilots; the USAF Heritage Flight;

practice flights by F-15, F-16, and F-22 aircraft and the Thunderbirds; the U.S. Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron; and various other formations and performances. Gates close at 6 p.m. Scheduled flying activities and acts throughout the

duration of the event are subject to change due to weather and safety and all times and performances are subject to change.

General admission advance tickets are \$15 to \$20 depending on the day of the week and \$20 to \$25 at the gate. Admission for children age eight and under is free with a paying adult. Tickets for students, active-duty, and retired military veterans with identification is advance \$10 to \$15 and \$15 to \$20 at the gate. A four-day combo package, including entry on Sept. 27 is \$55/\$65 and \$45-\$55 for students and military. Grandstand seating, close to the airfield and show center, is also available.

Traffic issues

Traffic patterns in and around the base will change on Sept. 29 and 30 to accommodate thousands of vehicles expected in the area.

According to Franklin County Sheriff's Department Major Al Mann, State Route 317 from Shook Road to Port Road will be closed Sept. 29 and 30 until the air show ends for the day. Motorists not attending the event, or who do not have business on the base, will be diverted off Alum Creek Drive to Rohr Road.

"Alum Creek Drive is the main route into Rickenbacker," said Mann, "and I don't suggest using it unless you intend to go to the base."

Groveport Police Chief Gary York said area businesses and residents will see a marked increase in traffic and asks drivers to be patient during the run of the air show. When the event lets out for the day, both lanes of State Route 317 from Alum Creek Drive to Groveport Road will be northbound only and southbound traffic on State Route 317 will be temporarily stopped at Groveport Road.

"Our plans are to have extra officers on duty," York said. "The change in direction is an attempt to get people out of the area a lot faster. It's going to have some affect, but shouldn't be too big of a problem as long as people pay attention to the signs. My biggest advice is if you're not going to the show, avoid State Route 317."

Parking is free on airport-owned property, but RV and camper parking is not available at the site.

An auction of current and historic aviation items will be held on Sept. 28 at Columbus Athenaeum in conjunction with "The Gathering of Mustangs and Legends."

For information, visit www.gml2007.com.

