



and Sunday, April 28 and 29 at Rafael Hernandez International Airport in Aguadilla on the north-west coast of Puerto Rico, about a two hours by car from San Juan.

The show had a robust static line that included a B-52, KC-135, C-130, C-5, F-18, Learjet

45, Gulfstream G-200, C-90, B-200, a Premier jet, and two King Airls. Airboss Royce used the resources available to him – including a number of performers from the continental United States (CONUS) – to develop a full and entertaining show. In addition to Greg Poe, the show

included a number of ICAS members: the Golden Knights Parachute Team, Blue Angel 7 Demo, and Dan Buchanan. The United States Coast Guard Search and Rescue team also captivated the crowd with a fabulous demonstration.

A helicopter from the Puerto Rico Electrical Power Authority provided an interesting departure from “normal” air show performances when it lifted a huge tower, flew it across the flight line and placed in a prepared docking station. The MD530F hovered as workers repelled to the tower and hung the U.S. flag.

It’s funny how air shows work. Organizers conceive a plan. Performers draw the crowds. But it is the fans that make the show! The fans in Puerto Rico were some of the most enthusiastic and animated air show fans I’ve ever seen! I’ve learned that the very best place to be at an air show is in the middle of the crowd that pushes toward the front line. Excitement is contagious and there was an epidemic in Aquadilla this weekend. When Dan looped his glider, the fans oohed and aahhed. The Golden Knights were cheered as they landed. Greg’s famous tsunami maneuver almost created a riot! As each performer entertained, the audience applauded, appreciated and pointed skyward. Almost as if they had practiced, the crowd would shriek and gasp in unison as planes tumbled, looped and pulled skyward.

Comparatively few U.S. air show performers get the opportunity to travel deep into the Caribbean to perform in an air show. Even fewer grunts get to make this kind of trip with the performer to whom they supply support. But I would encourage anyone who has the opportunity to take advantage of it. We work in a wonderful, exciting

business. And our trip to Puerto Rico demonstrated that very clearly. There is something about being out of CONUS with other Americans that leads to a feeling of camaraderie. And the enthusiasm with which our group was received by the Puerto Rican air show fans was nothing short of inspiring.

All Eyes on Columbus

It is difficult not to both pity and envy the organizers of this month’s Gathering of Mustangs and Legends (GML2007) at Rick-enbacker Airport in Columbus, Ohio.

On the one hand, Lee Lauderback, Angela West, Bobbi Thompson and the rest of the GML2007 crew are faced with a considerable challenge. They are in the unique position of organizing and conducting a one-time only, world class air show on September 29 and 30. In a business where a show typically evolves and matures over a number of years, the GML2007 team is expected to get it all exactly right in their very first year. From the volunteers and marketing to the ramp space and social events to the sponsorship and flying, they’ll get only one bite at the apple. There will be no GML 2008.

And expectations are high. Indeed, GML2007 is likely the most highly anticipated air show of the 2007 season. The event will include performances by the Thunderbirds, the F-22 Raptor, the F-15 Eagle, the F-16 Viper, the F-4 Phantom, the Red Barons, John Mohr, Michael Goulian, Patty Wagstaff, John Klatt, Ed Hamill, and the Aero-shell Aerobatic Team.

On top of all that, the air show represents only about one-third of the overall event. Because, of course, the real stars of this event are the North American P-51 Mustang and the pilots who flew them during World War II. That means that the

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GML2007 team – even as they organize a truly extraordinary air show – must also handle logistics for one hundred Mustangs and their pilots. And GML2007 is also hosting four

dozen World War II veterans for three days in late September.

On the other hand, the GML2007 team has created for itself the kind of opportunity that many air show profession-

als can only dream about. Even without the Mustangs, the collection of performers is impressive. The U.S. Air Force has thrown much of its support behind this once-in-a-generation event. Virtually every flyable P-51 in North America will be converging on Columbus for the show. And most people realize that this will be the last time that World War II Mustang pilots will have the opportunity to gather as a group; many of the participants in this event are in their mid-80s.

Every significant benchmark suggests that the organizing team has been up to the challenge. With a level of enthusiasm and creativity that demonstrate their understanding that this is both an opportunity and a responsibility, the GML2007 organizers have organized a weekend that will

reflect the historic nature of this event, including social events, an auction, an interactive and educational website, a fly-over involving 51 different Mustangs, a student-oriented educational program, and much more.

Locally, the show is getting early, positive buzz. Nationally, aviation enthusiasts and air show professionals are adjusting their schedules and making arrangements to attend at least a portion of the event.

Sadly, the second Gathering of Mustangs and Legends (the first was also organized by Lee Lauderback and his team in Kissimmee, Florida in 1999) will also be the last. But fortunately, the GML2007 have organized an event that will live up to the hype and give our WWII Mustang veterans the grand send-off that they so richly deserve. ✚

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