



FLIGHT-WATCH



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THE FLYING LEGENDS AIR SHOW AT DUXFORD – 2007

I.

DUXFORD – ELECTRIC BUT CIVILIZED

The aerial performances of The Flying Legends Air Show at Duxford Airfield were superbly flown and featured a fast-paced tempo that kept the audience engaged in the unfolding drama. Unlike air show flying in the States where there must always be 500 feet of lateral separation between the audience and the performing aircraft, the crowd line at Duxford on the departure end of Runway 06 appears to offer the audience a more intimate perspective on aircraft in flight, particularly on departures from the grass Runway 06 to the south of the paved parallel runway, than I have seen at American air shows. This permits fairly close viewing of departing aircraft which is particularly exciting in mass formation take-offs of Spitfires and Hurricanes.



We also have as a premise in American air shows that no energy is directed toward the crowd. However, a number of the patterns, both in aerobatic sequences and in simulated combat regimes, permitted the pilot to fly toward the crowd line and pull up, directing the aircraft's energy vertically. This approach encourages dramatic and exciting displays while still satisfying safety concerns.



When you combine formation take-offs of fighter elements together with flight patterns that may approach the crowd but turn or climb away to provide separation, it gives the audience a more intimate interaction with the aircraft than would otherwise be available.

Besides giving the appearance of the aircraft being flown closer to the crowd in some regimes, air traffic control at Duxford makes good use of the parallel runways. While an aircraft may be landing on the grass runway, a high speed pass may simultaneously be conducted over the parallel paved runway. So, while the audience may have its attention focused on a landing aircraft, it may be surprised by a low pass in ap-

parent close proximity to the landing aircraft. The effect is to increase the tempo of the show and provide the audience a view of two flight operations at once. A variation on that theme appeared when an aircraft was landing on the grass runway but a low pass or formation flight was conducted in the opposite direction over the paved runway to the north of the crowd. Finally, there were several times when aerobatic sequences were flown simultaneously by two aircraft or two groups or elements of aircraft which, again, adds to the excitement and variety of the air show.



Besides presenting an exciting air show with a fast tempo, the conditions of the campus of the Imperial War Museum are, in a word, civilized. As opposed to camping out on acres of asphalt or concrete, persons attending an air show at Duxford can walk among the trees and buildings, dine inside or outside at a table enjoying proper English food in a relaxed and cordial environment. The buildings and facilities of the Imperial War Museum campus at Duxford are so extensive that there is little need to resort to the rash of portable toilets that blight American air shows.

II .

THE COLLECTION OF AIRCRAFT

Despite the best efforts of Steve Hinton and his support crew, the Lockheed P-38 Lightning “Glacier Girl” was unable to attend the air show due to me-

chanics difficulties. However, the aircraft in attendance were more than ample to satisfy any hard core aviation enthusiast.

There were six North American Mustangs, including a TF-51D flown across the North Atlantic by Ed Shipley as part of Operation Bollero II, the attempt to fly “Glacier Girl” to the show. With nine Spitfires and two Hawker Hurricanes, the Duxford Air Show had its typical British flavor. The spirit of the Battle of Britain was reinforced by the presence of an HA-1112-M1L Buchon portraying a Messerschmidt BF-109G and a Focke Wulf FW-190, both German aircraft being owned and operated by Spitfire, Ltd.



The Curtiss P-40B that survived the Pearl Harbor attack, the Bell P-39Q, and the Curtiss Hawk 75 owned by The Fighter Collection provided a contingent of American built fighters in addition to the Mustangs. The only remaining Morane D-3801 (a license-built version of the Morane 406 and the only surviving example in the world) gave the show a French flavor, and Russia was represented by the Polikarpov I-15bis biplane fighter as well as a Yak 3 and a Yak 11. German interests were reinforced by two flying Junker Ju-52 trimotor transport aircraft, one dressed out in Lufthansa colors and the other appearing in Luftwaffe colors.

The interests of the United States Navy were defended by three Grumman aircraft: the FM-2 Wildcat, the F6F Hellcat, and the F8F Bearcat which served as the mount of Sir Steven Gray, the principal and mainspring of The Fighter Collection which is the major force behind this air show.



The show was rounded out with performances by a PBY Catalina, a B-17G, a C-53, a Hawker Hind, a Hawker Nimrod, a Hawker SeaFury, a Bristol Gladiator, and a B-25 Mitchell bomber to name a few. In recognition of the 60th anniversary of the U.S. Air Force, the Heritage Flight included an F-15 Strike Eagle staging out of Lakenhealth Air Force Base accompanied by the Fighter Collection's P-39Q Airacobra flown by Steve Hinton, and the TF-51D Mustang dubbed "Miss Velma" flown by Ed Shipley together with a second Mustang in the four-ship formation.

III.

WAR HEROES AND DISTINGUISHED AVIATORS AT DUXFORD

Besides offering aerial displays by unique and historical aircraft flown by superb pilots, an air show at Duxford permits one to meet some great men involved in the history of aviation. As a young pilot, I remember reading the flight test evaluations and notes of Captain Eric “Winkle” Brown, CBE DSC AFC RN. Brown holds the world record for flying the most types of aircraft and the greatest number of carrier landings. Captain Brown was in attendance at Duxford as was Lieutenant Commander Peter Twiss, OBE DSC, who was a prominent test pilot and world air speed record holder. The list of aviation legends continues with Captain Alan Sutton, CBE DSC, who is the last surviving veteran of the British attacks on the Italian fleet anchored at Toronto, and Lieutenant Commander John Moffat, RNVR, who is credited with launching the torpedo that struck and jammed the rudder on the German battleship Bismark. These and other heroes of great battles and test pilots truly are “flying legends.”



IV.

CONCLUSION

The 2007 Flying Legends Air Show at Duxford must be considered as one of the premiere air shows in the world. It offers displays of many unique and singular aircraft demonstrated by talented pilots in a comfortable and pleasing setting. The 2007 edition of the Flying Legends Air Show was, to use a British expression, “Smashing.”





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