

Staff photos by Gary A. Davis

**Eighty-one foreign air chiefs, five national aerobatic teams, and nearly half a million people joined the Air Force and AFA for this historic week in Las Vegas.**

# Air Force Fifty

An aerial photograph taken from a high altitude, looking down on the Nellis Air Force Base. The base is a large, organized complex with numerous hangars, parking lots filled with cars, and various buildings. In the foreground, a long, straight flight line is visible, with several aircraft parked along it. The surrounding landscape is a mix of flat, open land and some distant hills under a clear blue sky. The overall scene depicts a busy airfield during a major aviation event.

*This was the view from the waist position on board the B-25 Executive Sweet as it passed show center during the Golden Air Tattoo. Below, aircraft and visitors dot the Nellis AFB flight line as the Canadian Snowbirds taxi by after their performance.*



**A**ir Force Fifty week, April 22–26, in Las Vegas, Nev., celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the US Air Force. Events included an International Airpower Symposium, sponsored by the Air Force Association, and a Global Air Chiefs Conference with the heads of 81 foreign air forces in attendance. Veterans from all eras of the Air Force past renewed acquaintances in "Reunion Alley" in the enormous AFA Technology Exposition hall. Among those on hand were seven former Secretaries of the Air Force, five former Chiefs of Staff, nine former Chief Master Sergeants of the Air Force, plus one former President and one former Secretary of Defense, and 16 members of Congress. At left, a P-40 Warhawk (piloted by former AFA National President O. R. "Ollie" Crawford) flies formation with an A-10 in the Golden Air Tattoo airshow held at Nellis that weekend.

The airshow at nearby Nellis AFB marked the first performance outside Japan of the Blue Impulse, the Japanese aerial demonstration team from Matsushima AB, Japan. At right, one of the Kawasaki T-4 trainers taxis past the crowd, as the airman in back waves an American flag. Four foreign aerobatic teams joined the USAF Thunderbirds (shown on the front cover) in etching their best wishes on the Air Force anniversary in the Nevada sky. Also part of the show were current and vintage aircraft, on static display and flying by in review, as well as demonstrations by Air Force fighter, bomber, airlifter, and helicopter crews.



Las Vegas has been the setting for three major Air Force Association events: the World Congress of Flight in 1959, the Gathering of Eagles in 1986, and Air Force Fifty in 1997. There's more to the choice than the glitter, though—including the availability of the lodging and exposition facilities required for a program like Air Force Fifty. Another attraction was Nellis AFB, "Home of the Fighter Pilot," located eight miles away and ideally suited to hosting a major airshow.



AFA National President Doyle E. Larson (center) greets visitors to the International Airpower Symposium. The keynote speaker was former President George Bush. He was followed by former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (on videotape), futurist Alvin Toffler, Boeing Corp. Chairman and CEO Philip M. Condit, former Secretary of Defense William J. Perry, Secretary of the Air Force Sheila E. Widnall, USAF Chief of Staff Gen. Ronald R. Fogleman, and Gen. Howell M. Estes III, commander in chief of North American Aerospace Defense Command and US Space Command and commander, Air Force Space Command.

The AFA Technology Exposition took place in the Las Vegas Convention Center in an area equivalent to five football fields. All together, the aisles in the exposition hall stretched for two miles, and 17,570 people registered to see the displays. The bubble-shaped objects at right are F-16 simulators from Armstrong Laboratory, and beyond them is an Air National Guard C-26.



Staff photo by Guy Acefio



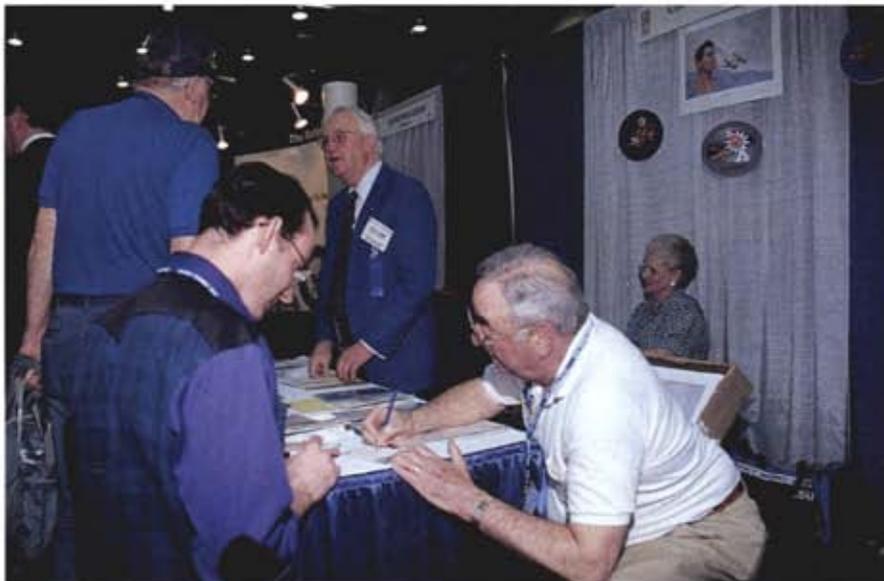
Air Force Fifty was an occasion for meeting old friends and for making new ones. Here, a member of the Russian delegation meets retired Col. Bernard F. Fisher, one of eight Air Force Medal of Honor recipients in attendance. Approximately 160 military-related organizations held reunions or meetings in conjunction with Air Force Fifty.

One of the most popular attractions in the exhibit hall was Reunion Alley, where 80 affinity groups operated booths. Dozens of World War II units and pilot training classes held reunions.

The Red River Valley Fighter Pilots Association gathered at the "River Rats" booth at right. The group was formed in 1967 by the airmen who flew combat missions over North Vietnam. River Rats numbered 1,097 members at Air Force Fifty—the most of any of the reunion groups that participated.

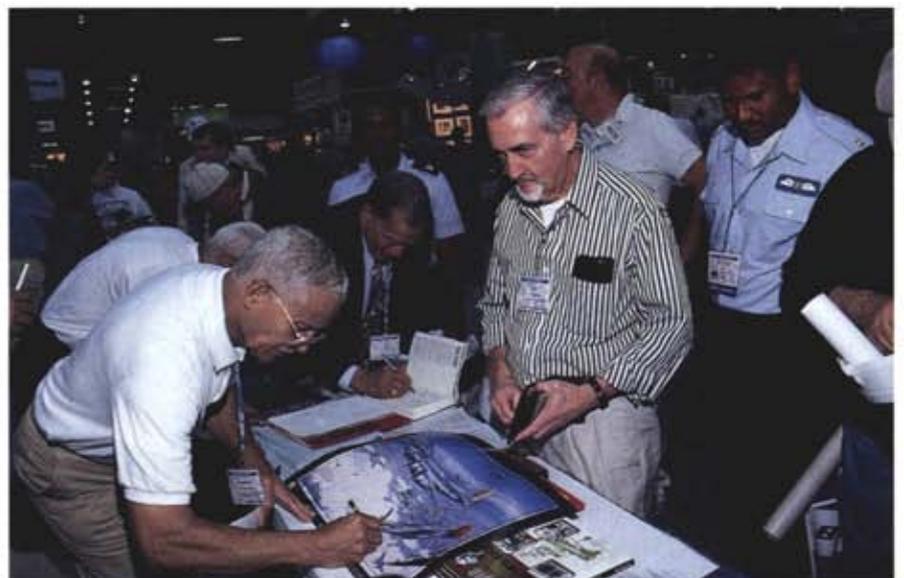


Photos by Paul Kennedy



Visitor action was brisk at the 14th Air Force Association table (left) and at Reunion Alley booths run by such groups as the Air Force Memorial Foundation, Air Force Sergeants Association, Air University Foundation, and Vietnam Veterans of America. Also attending the celebration were several foreign groups, such as the Italian Air Force Association, New Zealand Wings Reunion Group, and the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund. In addition, 80 groups came to Las Vegas for Air Force Fifty but did not operate booths in the exhibit hall.

Col. Charles E. McGee, USAF (Ret.), of AFA's Thomas W. Anthony (Md.) Chapter, autographs a poster at the Tuskegee Airmen booth in Reunion Alley. About 40 Tuskegee Airmen were present for Air Force Fifty. McGee is presently first vice president of Tuskegee Airmen, Inc.



Cooperation between USAF and AFA made this event possible. On the Nellis flight line at the airshow are (left to right) AFA Executive Director John A. Shaud, AFA National President Doyle E. Larson, National Director Jack C. Price, and Gen. Lloyd W. Newton, commander of Air Education and Training Command. Before assuming his present duties this spring, General Newton was USAF assistant vice chief of staff and in charge of preparations and plans for the Golden Air Tattoo and the Global Air Chiefs Conference.



Photo by Paul Kennedy

Staff photo by Guy Aceto



Esquadilha da Fumaça, the Brazilian "Smoke Squadron," thrilled crowds with tail slides and tight formation flying. Formed in 1952, the team now flies the EMB-312 T-27 Tucano trainer, painted in red, black, and white.

More than 100 aircraft types were represented at Air Force Fifty. They included classic warbirds that were on static display as well as in flybys: the A-26, B-17, C-121, and F-86. Active-duty aircraft included the A-10, B-1, C-17, E-3, F-117, MH-53J, and SR-71.

The biggest crowds of the week flocked to the Golden Air Tattoo open house and airshow at Nellis. Friday's airshow attracted a crowd of 160,000. The next day, 300,000 attended. Even those with plenty of flying experience—such as former USAF Chief of Staff Gen. Merrill A. McPeak, USAF (Ret.), at right—were impressed by the show in the sky. Public address announcer Larry Strain of Fort Worth, Tex., told the crowd that this was the "premier airshow" of his experience, which encompasses 20 years of announcing airshows.



Photo by Paul Kennedy



*A pair of World War II aces flies P-51 Mustangs in the markings of the aircraft they flew during the war: Chuck Yeager in Glamorous Glen III and his squadron mate, Clarence E. "Bud" Anderson, Jr., in Old Crow. At one point in the Golden Air Tattoo, Yeager led a five-ship formation of Mustangs in a flyby. Visitors to the show saw an extraordinary number of vintage Air Force aircraft in flight. Some foreign aircraft, notably a MiG-15 and a British Spitfire, flew as well.*

*Passing in front of a rare F-86 representing the Korean War is an F-4 from the 20th Fighter Squadron, Holloman AFB, N. M., painted in Vietnam War-era camouflage. Richard S. "Steve" Ritchie, USAF's only pilot ace from that war, flew the aircraft for the crowd during the two-day airshow.*



*At left: A C-121 "Connie" gleaming in the sunlight was open to visitors for reminiscing or seeing the rare bird for the first time. More than 100 current and vintage aircraft were on static display on the ramp where the crowd could see them up close.*



*The view above is from the nose position of the B-25 Executive Sweet as it runs down the airshow line. A B-2 bomber on the ground is neatly framed near the center of the photo. At right, in the cockpit of Executive Sweet, the pilot and copilot carefully check their position. A full view of the grand old Mitchell, with the Sunrise Mountains in the background, is at bottom right.*



Staff photo by Gary Aceto

Maj. Dunning Idle (left), in modern aviator's garb, and Capt. Gene Wall, dressed in the work clothes of a 1947 test pilot, talked with the pilot's pilot, Chuck Yeager. The retired brigadier general attended the unveiling of the Air Force Flight Test Center's exhibit that contained a full-size reproduction of his Bell X-1 Glamorous Glennis (in background, upper right), in which he broke the sound barrier on October 14, 1947.



Photo by Paul Kennedy

Staff photo by Guy Aceto



Gen. Richard E. Hawley, Air Combat Command commander, talks with Kent Kresa, Northrop Grumman Corp. chairman, president, and chief executive officer. Senior commanders from the USAF major commands and industry leaders were on hand for most of the week's events, including the Global Air Chiefs Conference and the International Airpower Symposium.

At the exhibition, industry and military organizations had spectacular exhibits showing off aerospace capabilities. Armstrong Lab had an integrated setup of simulators in which they demonstrated joint operations with four F-16s, a C-130, and two A-10s. At right is Elaine Stebelton in an A-10 simulator, coached by Maj. Milt Lutton from Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz.



Staff photo by Guy Aceto



A view from the rafters shows just one section of the many exhibitors in the convention center, packed with displays—from major defense contractors to reunion groups to USAF major commands. At right, a member of the Global Air Chiefs Conference group visits Air Force Special Operations Command's exhibit and talks to TSgt. Kenneth A. Knutson from the 23d Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Fla.

Below right is an engine from the GE exhibit. The size of the exhibit hall permitted manufacturers to bring in full-size items instead of the usual trade show models.



Embodying USAF's fiftieth-anniversary motto, "Golden Legacy, Boundless Future," some of the legendary Doolittle Raiders gather round to check out a computerized interpretation of their story in the exposition hall. The Doolittle Raiders took off from a carrier and bombed Tokyo April 18, 1942. Twenty-one members of the unit were present in Las Vegas for Air Force Fifty.



Photo by Paul Kennedy

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Exhibitors were kept busy by throngs of people attending the exposition. At government, industry, and organizational booths, visitors collected pins, posters, and other items as souvenirs of Air Force Fifty.

At right, Tony Nargi, a marketing manager, explains the important features of the new T-6 Joint Primary Aircraft Training System trainer to Capt. Gilbert E. Petrina, Jr., USAF, a B-52 instructor pilot from the 96th Bomb Squadron, Barksdale AFB, La. Petrina is also an AFA National Director and the Ark-La-Tex (La.) Chapter president.



Staff photo by Guy Aceto

*Flying high above the registration area for the exposition is a wooden replica of a B-17 bomber, provided by Robert Henderson, sculptor of the B-17 Flying Fortress Memorial to be dedicated at the Air Force Academy Honor Court in Colorado Springs, Colo., August 22. The memorial will be a bronze, one-sixth-scale model atop a three-ton, polished granite base.*



Photos by Paul Kennedy



*At the Global Air Chiefs Conference, the presentations and most of the discussions were conducted in English, but a team of interpreters provided simultaneous translations into Spanish, French, Russian, Chinese, and Arabic. The air chiefs and senior distinguished visitors were provided with wireless headsets. Gestures helped. At left, Gen. Ahmet Corekci, Commander, Turkish Air Force, makes his point in chatting with a fellow flyer.*

*During a break in the proceedings, General Fogleman discusses the conference with Gen. Col. Peter S. Deynekin (left, back to camera), Commander in Chief of the Russian Air Force. The Russian air chief became an unscheduled speaker at the International Airpower Symposium when General Fogleman called him from his seat to address the audience.*





Staff photo by Guy Aceto

*For the benefit of those in the back of the hall, images of the speakers at the Global Air Chiefs Conference were projected onto a large screen. At the podium above is Lt. Gen. Bernhard A. C. Droste, Commander in Chief of the Royal Netherlands Air Force.*

*The most lasting benefit of the Global Air Chiefs Conference was probably the chance it gave to those participating to meet and talk with each other. At right, Maj. Gen. Norodom Vatvani, Chief of the Royal Cambodian Air Force (left), engages Brig. Gen. Ahmad Abidin, Commanding General, Royal Brunei Air Force (right), in conversation.*

*The variety of hats on a table at a reception was a reminder that this was the largest gathering ever of global air chiefs.*



Photo by Paul Kennedy



Staff photo by Guy Aceto

The Chilean Air Force's *Escuadrilla de Alta Acrobacia "Los Halcones"* ("The Falcons") did their aerial exhibition in German-built Extra 300 aircraft. Their crisp maneuvers and seemingly uncontrollable spins in the small, nimble airplanes highlighted their world-class aerobatics. Since their formation in 1981, *Los Halcones* have performed more than 600 exhibitions.



Photo © Erik Simonsen

Staff photo by Garry Aceto



A virtual history of the Air Force flew by during the airshow. Demonstrations of military airpower history began with World War I fighters recreating a dogfight over France. Visitors also saw in flight aircraft from World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, as well as modern aircraft, including the stealthy F-117A fighter and B-2 bomber. At left is a rare B-24J recreating a World War II bomb run on Ploesti, Romania.

In addition to the airshow and the speeches, Air Force Fifty was replete with pageantry and color, as seen here with the flags of the visiting nations in the opening ceremonies for the Golden Air Tattoo.



Photo by Susan Kennedy



Before the show, the Snowbirds of the Canadian Forces gave Air Force Magazine an opportunity to see what a tight formation looks like from the inside. At top is the view that Capt. Brock Andrew sees from his spot in the number seven airplane. In the background is Valley of Fire State Park near Lake Mead. At right, after a formation change, number nine, Capt. Jean Guilbaut, banks left and shows the two pods that contain the diesel fuel that, when released into the jet's exhaust, forms the smoke. At bottom, Andrew waves to the crowd after a performance. The Snowbirds, established in the 1930s and based at 15 Wing Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, Canada, fly the CT-114 Tutor jet trainer in a nine-plane, diamond formation that made them famous. It brings them as close as possible—tight, graceful, and powerful. They move as a single unit, even taking off and landing in this formation. Moving nine airplanes together through aerobatic turns and loops is some of the most difficult flying there is.





*The Japanese Blue Impulse began performing in 1960 in F-86Fs. Today, the team flies the Kawasaki T-4 intermediate trainer and combat support aircraft. Its round-shaped airframe led to the nickname "dolphin." The aircraft is highly maneuverable in turns and loops.*

*Young or old, they all took advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get an up-close look at Air Force aircraft, equipment, technology, and people. School groups, like the one at right, spent hours touring aircraft, talking to crew members, and collecting autographs from just about anyone in uniform.*



*The good flying weather that helped make the Golden Air Tattoo spectacular meant relentless desert sunshine on the ramp at Nellis. Here, visitors take advantage of every inch of shadow cast by a B-1 bomber on static display.*



Even in such talented company, the home team wowed the crowd every day. Since 1953, the US Air Force Demonstration Squadron, the Thunderbirds, have impressed airshow visitors with their precision maneuvers in high-performance aircraft. The pilots perform about 30 maneuvers in a demonstration that takes more than an hour. Above is their four-aircraft diamond signature formation. At right is Thunderbird number six, Capt. (Maj. selectee) Mark R. Arlinghaus, acknowledging the cheers from an admiring crowd.

More than 287 million people in all 50 states and in 59 foreign countries have seen the Thunderbirds in more than 3,400 aerial demonstrations. Since their inception, the Thunderbirds have performed in a variety of aircraft: first the F-84, then the F-100, the F-4, the T-38, and since 1983, the F-16.



Staff photos by Guy Acetta

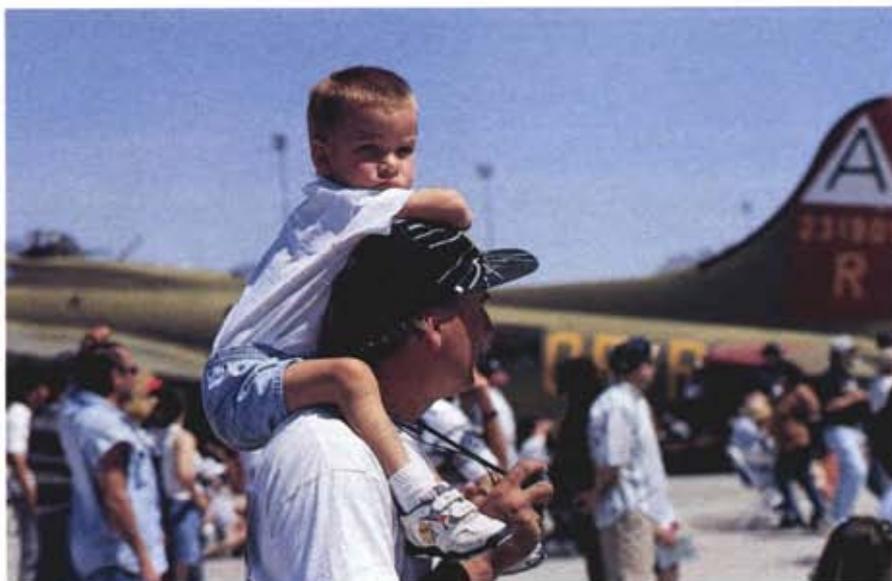


Unique to the airshow at Nellis was the span of history, experience, and technology represented by the airplanes. Sharing space on the same flight line, leading-edge aircraft that will take USAF into the twenty-first century sat next to classic warbirds; The beak-like nose of the B-2 Spirit at right presents a far different profile from that of the B-17 Flying Fortress beyond it—dramatically demonstrating the scope of the Golden Air Tattoo.



Staff photo by Guy Acello

Photo by Paul Kennedy



Youngsters at the Golden Air Tattoo fully enjoyed the sights and sounds, to say nothing of the food offered by vendors all along the show line. For some, a visit to such a display of airpower just might head them in the direction of an Air Force career.

From beginning to end, Air Force Fifty was a week to remember. At right, striding across the ramp in World War II garb, is Wilbur R. Richardson, a former B-17 crew member and retired teacher who now does restoration work for the Chino Air Museum in California. ■



Photo by Paul Kennedy