

Luke Air Force Base presented “75 Years of Airpower” to the Arizona community on April 2-3, 2016, a commemorative milestone for their popular annual air show. Visitors witnessed exciting aerial acts, and static displays both classic and ultra-modern. The show gave civilians a chance to interact with the Airmen who carry out the Luke mission of “Training the World’s Greatest F-35 and F-16 Pilots.” More than anything, it’s a chance for the Airmen at Luke to say “thank you” to the community for the incredible support given to their mission each day.

Featured demonstrations included the US Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron, known to fans everywhere simply as the Thunderbirds, in a 75-minute show combining solo and formation flight, including the popular diamond formation and head-to-head passes that demonstrate the power and agility of their F-16 Fighting Falcon.

The US Army Golden Knights Parachute Team (featured on prior pages) took off from a strip elsewhere on the base and landed with the utmost precision right at the crowd’s feet.

“Farmer Clem Cleaver” of the Alabama Boys ascended the announcers’ stand demanding a flight lesson, “stole” a 1946 Piper J-3 Cub, then wowed the crowd by landing it atop a moving truck. The Commemorative Air Force brought history alive 75 years after Pearl Harbor with their “Tora! Tora! Tora!” attack simulation. Other features included Jack Lind’s Screaming Sasquatch, the Desert Rat Warbird Demonstration Team, Red Bull Demonstration Team, Gregory “Wired” Colyer in his T-33 Ace Maker, and our hosts, the US Air Force, with their F-35 Heritage Flight Team.

Static displays ranged from the small T-6A Texan II, T-38 Talon and F-15 Eagle fighter jet, to the huge KC-135 Stratotanker and C-17 Globemaster II cargo plane. Bombers spanned the decades, from B-17, A-26 and B-25 Mitchell, to the blended-wing supersonic B-1.

Visitors also enjoyed booths of fried foods and chilled refreshments worthy of any county fair.

Crowds entering from the east also had a chance to spend some time getting up close with nine aircraft at the Luke Air Force Base Air Park, featuring planes that have served at Luke. ■

Thousands of attendees thrilled to aerobatics by the Thunderbirds (Doris Ong photo, top); this B-25 Mitchell Bomber catches the dawn light before the crowds arrive; “Tora! Tora! Tora!” the Commemorative Air Force recreates the attack on Pearl Harbor (but in a much dryer environment); and dozens of show-goers seek afternoon shade below a Fairchild Republic A-10 Thunderbolt II Warthog.



US Air Force Thunderbirds photo: Doris Ong

