

Greater Huntsville Section Participates in Wings Over Columbus Air & Space Show

By Ken Philippart

Images courtesy of Lisa Philippart and Lauren Badia.

The Greater Huntsville Section exhibited at the Wings Over Columbus Air & Space Show at Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi on April 21, 2018. This was the first time the section conducted a non-student member activity in Mississippi which falls within the section's geographic area of responsibility.

The show was the first at Columbus AFB since 2014 and the US Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron, better known as the Thunderbirds, had been scheduled to perform. But the Thunderbirds' performance was cancelled due to a fatal training accident a few weeks before. The show went on as planned with other aerial and static performers.



Brittani Searcy, Lauren Badia, Naveen Vetcah, Ken & Lisa Philippart and Brenda Kimani staff the section booth.



Skywriting heralded the flying performances.

Eight Greater Huntsville Section members traveled to Columbus from Huntsville, Birmingham and Starkville, MS to staff the section's table. Five members arrived on Friday and enjoyed dinner and camaraderie prior to the show the next day.

Saturday morning dawned clear but blustery with strong winds that threatened to disrupt the day's events. Fortunately, the winds subsided enough to permit the flying events to take place as scheduled.

The show opened with a mass parachute drop by the US Army Golden Knights spiraling down with the Stars and Stripes while the National Anthem played.

Other aerial performances followed by the Ghostwriter skywriting team, the 58th Airlift Squadron's C-17 Globemaster III Rat Pack Demonstration Team, a B-52 Stratofortress flyby, T-6 Texan II, P-51 Mustang in Tuskegee Airmen livery, a F-86 Sabre and MiG-17, F4U Corsair, Pegasus Pitts, T-33 Shooting Star, a pyrotechnic simulated bomb run and many other flying acts. The flying culminated with a stunning display of aerial virtuosity by Air Combat Command's F-22 Raptor Demonstration Team. Using thrust vectoring, the F-22s performed maneuvers that once would have been impossible for fixed wing aircraft, amazing the 21,000 visitors in attendance.



A B-52 'BUFF' flies by the crowd.

Besides the flying exhibitions, over 50 aircraft were on static display, allowing visitors to view the aircraft up close or even step inside to tour.

AIAA was one of only a dozen exhibitors allowed to publicize their organizations during the event. Section members distributed many recruiting brochures, AIAA logo items and foam gliders to the enthusiastic, aviation-minded crowd.



The F-22 Raptor put on an impressive display of aerial maneuvers using thrust vectoring.

The show had been scheduled to continue on Sunday and the section was prepared to staff the booth for a second-straight day, another section first. Unfortunately, the weather was forecast to turn wet and stormy and the Air Force preemptively cancelled Sunday's show. Disappointed but undaunted, the section members packed up the exhibit and returned home.

Despite the challenges of distance and weather, the section successfully conducted its first-ever big professional event in Mississippi, serving AIAA members and the general public 150 miles away from Huntsville. Many members traveled great distances at their own expense to spread the AIAA message within Mississippi. The section thanks Lauren Badia, Eric Collins, Ken and Lisa Philippart, Brenda Kimani, Jakayla Robinson, Brittani Searcy and Naveen Vetcha for their dedication and service in making our first Mississippi airshow event a success!