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B-17 ‘FLYING FORTRESS’ BOMBERS TO MARK AIRCRAFT’S 75TH ANNIVERSARY DURING EAA AIRVENTURE 2010

EAA AVIATION CENTER, OSHKOSH, Wis. — (June 16, 2010) — At least four of the remaining airworthy Boeing B-17 “Flying Fortress” aircraft will be on hand to commemorate the legendary World War II bomber’s 75th anniversary during EAA AirVenture 2010. “The World’s Greatest Aviation Celebration” will be held July 26-August 1 at Wittman Regional Airport in Oshkosh.

Only about a dozen of the iconic aircraft remain airworthy anywhere in the world, including EAA’s “Aluminum Overcast” that brings aviation history to the public through national tours. Already confirmed to join it at AirVenture for the week-long “Salute to Veterans” is “Texas Raiders,” “Thunderbird,” and “Yankee Lady” to honor the exact 75th-anniversary date of the B-17’s first flight – July 28, 1935. Numerous events throughout the week will celebrate the B-17’s legacy in aviation.

“These magnificent warbirds gathering in one place will mark this special occasion in a memorable way,” said Tom Poberezny, EAA chairman/president and AirVenture chairman. “As we celebrate the B-17’s 75th anniversary, we honor these living links with aviation’s past and a reminder of the sacrifices of the young men who flew them.”

“Texas Raiders,” scheduled to arrive Tuesday, July 27 and depart Sunday, August 1, recently emerged from an intensive eight-year restoration at Houston’s Hobby Airport. The warbird, which is maintained and flown by the Commemorative Air Force’s Gulf Coast Wing, was one of the last B-17s built by Douglas and was delivered to the U.S. Army Air Forces on July 12, 1945.

“Thunderbird,” scheduled to arrive Sunday, July 25 and depart Monday, August 2, flew 116 missions with the 303rd Bomb Group in World War II. The warbird, which is housed at the Lonestar Flight Museum in Galveston, Texas, will be featured at the “Warbirds in Review” program on Wednesday, July 28, at 1 p.m.

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“Yankee Lady,” scheduled to arrive Thursday, July 29 and depart Sunday, August 1, was built by Lockheed (Vega) and delivered on to the U.S. Army Air Forces on July 16, 1945. The following year, the warbird was transferred to the U.S. Coast Guard until its military retirement on May 11, 1959. “Yankee Lady,” owned by Yankee Air Force and housed at Yankee Air Museum in Belleville, Mich., was featured in the movie “Tora, Tora, Tora” in 1969.

The B-17’s 75th anniversary will be celebrated through several events coinciding with the week-long “Salute to Veterans” festivities honoring America’s veterans, including a planned “Missing Man” formation by four B-17s.

At Theater in the Woods on Wednesday, July 28 at 8 p.m., retired U.S. Army Air Forces Col. Harold “Hal” Weekley (EAA #169329/Warbirds #2651) and former volunteer pilot for “Aluminum Overcast,” will recount his experiences flying on bombing missions over Germany. Weekley, one of the last B-17 aircraft commanders from World War II still flying, made his last B-17 flight at EAA AirVenture 2001, a week after his 80th birthday.

The B-17, which first saw combat in 1941 when the British Royal Air Force took delivery of several B-17s for high-altitude missions, was the first Boeing military aircraft with a flight deck instead of an open cockpit, and was armed with bombs and five .30-caliber machine guns mounted in clear “blisters.”

Boeing plants built a total of 6,981 B-17s in various models, and another 5,745 were built under a nationwide collaborative effort by Douglas and Lockheed (Vega). Most B-17s were scrapped at the end of World War II. Some of the last Flying Fortresses met their end as target drones in the 1960s – destroyed by Boeing-built military missiles. EAA’s “Aluminum Overcast,” fortunately, was saved from the scrap heap when it was originally purchased as surplus for \$750 in the mid-1940s.

EAA AIRVENTURE OSHKOSH is The World’s Greatest Aviation Celebration and EAA’s yearly membership convention. Additional EAA AirVenture information, including advance ticket and camping purchase, is available online at www.airventure.org. EAA members receive lowest prices on admission rates. For more information on EAA and its programs, call 1-800-JOIN-EAA (1-800-564-6322) or visit www.eaa.org. Immediate news is available at <http://twitter.com/EAAupdate>.