

The Great New England Airshow 2000



By Capt. James Bishop

The rain held off until the final hour.

Even so, after a night of torrential down-pour, by 6:45 a.m. on the first day of the Great New England airshow, phones were ringing.

"Is the airshow cancelled?" asked callers.

Not on your life. The show went on both days, with acts performing under cloudy skies Saturday, and a light rain by 3 p.m. Sunday.

An estimated 100,000 people attended Saturday's airshow, watching headliner acts such as the Air Force Thunderbirds and the Army Golden Knight parachute team, as well as civilian champion aerobatic pilot, Sean Tucker, and 18 other flying demonstrations. Some 62 static displays showed the new and the old in aviation: from the WC-130J weather plane, like the one seen in *The Perfect Storm*, to the single-propeller, pre-World War II P-40 Warhawk fighter.

The Sunday crowd count reached 200,000, according to Col. Thomas Mazauka, 439th Airlift Wing vice commander.

Saturday, August 12 marked five-year-old Amanda Matusko's second time at Westover's airshow. The Holyoke resident has been going to airshows since she was one year old, when she went to the New River Air Station airshow in Jacksonville, N.C., with her parents.

Sitting on her grandfather's shoulders in the front row on Saturday, she said she liked seeing the tricks the planes did.

The Great New England airshow is the culmination of two years' planning, said Lt. Col. Dan Nichols, airshow operations director. Planning made the difference.

"It's running very, very, very smoothly,"

Nichols said on Sunday, adding that planning has already started for the 2002 airshow.

No arrests were made during the show, and other than one broken ankle and a seizure, there were no serious injuries during the two days, according to security and medical authorities.

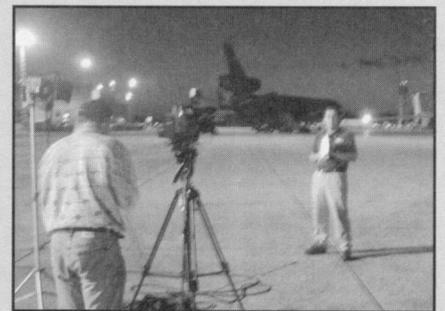
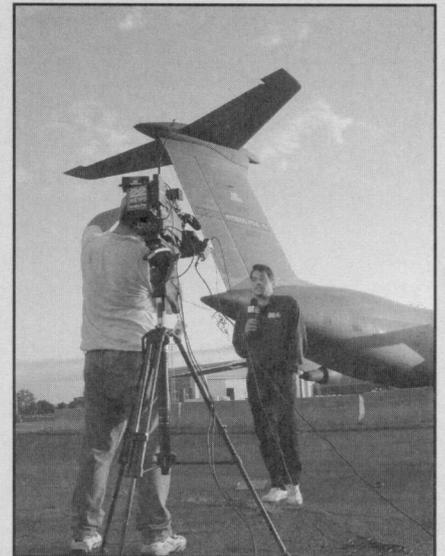
Four-year-old Walker spent most of the airshow with his nose down, sniffing various items. A black Labrador retriever explosives detector with the Mass. state police, Walker, like the six other bomb-sniffing dogs the state police have, only gets food when he actually finds explosives. (Just so Walker doesn't starve, his handler, state police bomb technician Paul Kastrinakas, keeps a ready supply of gunpowder he can hide and let Walker sniff out.)

Vendors were at the show, selling everything from denim Warthog A-10 hats, to double-folding chairs and cups of beer.

In the southeast corner of the ramp, an F-117 Nighthawk stealth fighter from Holloman Air Force Base, N.M., drew a crowd. Two around-the-clock, armed guards patrolled the perimeter around the oddly-angular plane.

Items other than airplanes were on display. Marines from the TOW Platoon, 25th Marines maintained a static exhibit of their humvees, showing passersby the top-mounted 40 millimeter grenade launcher, and one of the grenades.

When asked which event was his favorite, Nichols, who is the chief pilot at the 337th airlift squadron when he's not planning airshows, said, "I love them all."



MEDIA BLITZ

DAWN TO DUSK — New England media flocked to the Great New England Airshow, eager to cover the weekend's big events. For many, Westover's airshow is their favorite assignment. "I love it," said Don Sutherland, Channel 22 cameraman. "Let me put it this way — I'm on vacation and I was out here at 4 a.m. to help with the coverage." Select area media representatives had the rare privilege of flying with the Thunderbirds and tandem-jumping with the Golden Knights.

