



FLIGHT-WATCH



VOLUME 179

By: Alan Armstrong, Esq.

APRIL, 2007



MOTIVATION FOR THE TRIP

The Sun ‘n Fun Fly-In and Air Show is one of the premier aviation events in America attracting exotic, classic, warbird, and active duty military aircraft from the eastern United States and Canada. The expansive airfield at Lakeland, Florida is a great location to showcase premier aircraft and the pilots who fly them. I had flown to Sun ‘n Fun a few years ago. However, in recent years, the demands of my law practice took priority over a visit to this fascinating air show. Friends and family members encouraged me to take a break this year and pay a visit to Lakeland.

In between preparing for an upcoming mediation and taking calls at the office, I jumped on the internet and downloaded the Sun ‘n Fun NOTAM, including arrival and departure procedures – a mere 36 pages. It took me about one hour to digest the material. Then, I had to work up a flight plan, get an IFR arrival reservation, get a briefing and file my flight plan. I got a reservation for an arrival at 12:00 noon on April 20, and reasoned that with the potential for a delay of up to thirty minutes, if I departed at 9:00 a.m., the two and a half hour flight would put me in my arrival window. A call to “Missy” at Columbia Air Center revealed that a hotel room could be obtained at the Imperial Swan Hotel. So, the stage was set for my trek to Sun ‘n Fun.

Awakening at 6:00 a.m., I grabbed a bowl of cereal, called Flight Service for an updated weather briefing and got a few clothes together.

There were IFR conditions in southwest Georgia and Northern Florida that were supposed to burn off by noon. With a short drive to the airport and a brief pre-flight, I was airborne shortly after 9:00 a.m. Flying over a solid undercast until reaching Crystal River, the flight was uneventful. The ATC personnel did a good job of marshalling the traffic on the arrival. Turning final, I was perhaps one-half mile behind a high-winged Cessna in front of me. We essentially “air taxied” half the length of Runway 27 Right, touching down about 4,000 feet down the 8,000 feet “runway.” In ordinary times, “Runway 27 Right” is a taxiway. After landing and clearing the active, the taxi to parking was a virtual odyssey as I was first directed to parking for camping and later for tie down in the grass adjacent to taxiway Echo on the southeast side of the airport.

After shutdown, I was promptly met by Chris of Columbia Air Center who serviced the Bonanza with 34 gallons of fuel. Chris helped me screw the spiral stakes into the ground to secure my tie down ropes and helped me place the canopy cover on the Bonanza. Before I knew it, the shuttle car had arrived and I was on my way to Columbia Air Service to get a rental car. Arriving at Columbia Air Center, my good friend, Chris Rounds, had a wrist band waiting for me that would give me access to the flightline and exhibits.





THE FLIGHTLINE AND EXHIBITS

A drive around the perimeter of the airfield let me to a gravel parking area about a half mile from an entrance gate. If you don't like walking, you won't like Sun 'n Fun, since the flightline and exhibits occupy many acres. In fairness, people were being shuttled about in trams that were pulled by John Deer tractors. People who did not care to walk could be seen shuttling about the flightline and exhibits aboard electric scooters that were apparently available for rental.

THE AIRCRAFT

After paying a visit to the Flight Service Station on the field and filing my departure flight plan, I wandered outside to see simulated bombing runs and pyrotechnics, not unlike the kind of flying I do in the replica Nakajima Kata bomber. As the bombing attacks were underway, formations of North American AT-6/SNT Texans flew overhead. In time, the Second World War era P-51 Mustangs, Spitfires and similar aircraft gave way to an O-2 Skywaster and a T-28 Trojan as representatives to the Vietnam War. They, in turn, were followed by jet aircraft such as the red T-33 flown by Chris Rounds.

As I wandered about the flightline, a Curtiss P-40 Warhawk caught my eye. It was painted in a camouflage pattern reminiscent of the American Volunteer Group and had the Walt Disney leaping tiger or Flying Tiger emblem behind and below the cockpit. It, of course, featured the tiger

shark teeth and eyes on the nose. However, rather than displaying the Chinese Air Force twelve pointed star in a blue disk, it bore American insignia. It could be theorized to depict an AVG/Flying Tiger P-40 taken over the China Air Task Force in the summer of 1942 when the AVG was officially disbanded. In time, the P-40 would fly in the air show with an active duty Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt (a/k/a "Warthog") as part of the United States Air Force "Heritage Flight."

There were acres and acres of warbirds, classic jets, military aircraft and antique – classic airplanes. A particularly attractive Lockheed Model 10 Electra like the one flown by Amelia Earhart on her attempted around-the-world flight caught my eye. The unpainted aluminum skin was so highly polished, it looked like a mirror.



A U.S. Navy T-38/F-5 in a light gray paint scheme with a red sunburst on the vertical fin was an interesting looking airplane. This unusual paint scheme was complete with a tiger shark mouth on the nose, replicating the tiger shark emblem displayed on the P-40. Shark mouths on airplanes are still very popular.



INTERESTING PEOPLE

In time, I got to say hello to Chris Rounds and spend time with his parents and friends at his motor home. Among his friends was Carols Gann, a superb aircraft engine builder in Lafayette, Georgia. Gann flies a Bonanza powered by a powerful Lycoming engine that reportedly has a true airspeed at altitude of 200 knots. This performance comes at a cost, since it burns about 24 gallons per hour while a stock Bonanza with a Continental IO-520 burns about 14 gallons per hour at about 160 knots.



For years I have corresponded with Corky Fornoff. I got to meet Corky who is the demonstration pilot for the LoPresti Fury, a high performance, low wing monoplane developed from the Globe Swift. I also met Curt LoPresti, the CEO of the LoPresti Fury. Curt is an aeronautical engineer, and his father, Roy LoPresti, was a very accomplished aircraft designer at Grumman, Beechcraft, Mooney and Piper.

I got to spend time with Tom Norton, the editor of *Southern Aviator* who reviewed my book, *Preemptive Strike – The Secret Plan That Would Have Prevented The Attack On Pearl Harbor*. Tom has encouraged me to persevere with that project as has Corkey Fornoff who had a very successful career as a motion picture pilot. Corkey flew in one or more of the James Bond movies and, according to my understanding, wrote the motion picture pilot operating procedures.

Lynne Birmingham is a good friend who represents the interests of Tecnam Aircraft, an aircraft of Italian design. I spent some time with her to learn about her plans for growing her company. It was then time to drop by the gift shop and purchase some items to take home to my wife and daughter.

THE TRIP HOME

After having breakfast Saturday morning, I drove to Columbia Aviation to return my rental car. Standing in front of me was Martha King who, together with her husband, Steve, is a remarkable aviation educator and entrepreneur. She declared she was departing in her jet aircraft, perhaps for her home in California.



The courtesy van dropped me off near my Bonanza which was sitting in a grassy field that was nearly empty when I arrived. After a pre-flight and engine start, the departure information declared IFR aircraft should depart VFR and remain clear of the Tampa Class B Airspace. I altered my GPS flight plan to fly northwest on Victor 157 to the HYZER Intersection, since I planned to climb to 6,500 feet. If I had proceeded on my original course, a 6500 foot altitude would have put me inside Tampa's Class B Airspace.

I followed the conga line to the departure intersection and was eventually directed to the departure intersection of Runway 9 Right with a Cessna lined up on my right wing. The flagman gave the Cessna a signal to depart and seconds later I received the same signal. As I climbed out on an easterly heading, I was overtaking the Cessna and a Grumman in front of the Cessna, so I kept my altitude lower than theirs to keep them in sight and ensure my own separation. At this point, my formation training and experience came in handy.

Finding a hole in the clouds, I climbed up to 6,500 feet and put a call into Tampa Approach. The next thing I knew, I had my IFR clearance to PDK and turned northwest to intercept Victor 7 and fly to my first check point, Cross City (CTY). For some reason, Tampa had me descend to 4,000 feet that put me in and out of the clouds until I passed the Florida, Georgia border. There was one advantage to flying at that low altitude, I could admire the swamp and coastal waters of the Florida panhandle through breaks in the clouds. I considered grabbing my camera and taking a picture, but turbulence would not permit me to do so.

As I approached Valdosta, I was flying in clouds of smoke from a raging forest fire below and gave a pilot report (PIREP) to Valdosta Approach.

By the time I reached Vienna (VNA), the weather was clear with light turbulence. Eventually, I was cleared to the TUCKR (sic) Intersection and then directly to PDK. I flew over Covington, where my daughter attends Oxford College of Emory University and then flew near Stone Mountain. The descent and landing at PDK was uneventful and I was glad to have been afforded the opportunity to visit one of the world's premier aviation events.



Alan Armstrong is engaged in the general practice of law with an emphasis in the following areas:

Aviation Matters, Personal Injury,
Professional Negligence (Malpractice),
Products Liability

Phone: (770) 451-0313 Fax: (770) 451-0317
Email: alan@alanarmstronglaw.com

Website Addresses: www.alanarmstronglaw.com
www.flyingtigersfilm.com

Please contact us at
flightwatch@alanarmstronglaw.com
with any questions, comments, or if you no longer wish to receive Flightwatch via email.

Copyright 2006. Alan Armstrong. All rights reserved.
All Rights Reserved.



Alan piloting the Kate during the Greater Georgia Air Show—10/15/06

Photo Courtesy of Neil Estes