



FLIGHT-WATCH



VOLUME 188

By: Alan Armstrong, Esq.

JANUARY 2008

THE JOE-MAX FLY-IN IN DESTIN -- MAKING NEW FRIENDS AND GETTING A FAST CARD

1.

WEATHERED IN – IN DESTIN, FLORIDA

I met Joe Carnley and Mark Henley while the Kate was stuck at Falcon Field when it was supposed to fly to Rome, Georgia to re-enact the Battle of Midway. As I commit to paper an accounting of my activities over the last three days, I am again weathered-in, but the location is now Destin, Florida and I am sitting in Room 229 of the Marriott Courtyard. I have been in Destin for two and one-half days attending the “Joe-Max Fly-In” of 2007. Joe and Mark happened to be at Falcon Field during a low-overcast day in mid-September of this year. They were passing through as Joe was en route back to Destin, and Mark was en route back to Birmingham. Joe is a dentist and entrepreneur in Destin, and Mark is a member of the most exciting aerobatic team on the air show circuit, the AeroShell Aerobatic Team.



Joe, Mark and I hit it off during lunch two and one-half months ago. Joe mentioned he was having a little fly-in in Destin from November 29th to December 2nd. How would I like to fly down and give a presentation on aviation law? When I discovered the fly-in was to assemble a twenty-four ship formation of AT-6/SNJ Texans over Destin and Eglin Air Force Base, I was sold on the idea.

After our meeting at lunch, I followed up with Mark and found out that the AeroShell Aerobatic Team would be at Joe’s little fly-in. It seems being weathered-in can lead to constructive events in your life, if you meet the right people while you are waiting to get airborne.



A Diamond Formation



A 360 Overhead

2.

NOVEMBER 29TH-THE ARRIVAL DATE

The four days prior to my departure were fairly intense with preparing for a hearing in a major case, followed by an early morning drive to Muscogee County Courthouse in Columbus, Georgia, the hearing, the drive back to office and a day and one-half of researching and writing a 25 page proposed order addressing about 36 cases and their impact on the meaning of a liability insurance policy where the log-books to a Beech C-90 King Air were lost by a maintenance facility. The flight to Destin would be a respite from a hectic week in the office and in the courtroom.

Arriving at the Dixie Wing of the CAF the Kate was buried behind 3 other airplanes even though I had last seen it at the front of the collection of aircraft when I had flown it on Saturday, November 24. On that date, when I had flown the Kate for a pilot television project called "Plane Guys" being developed by my good friend John Lage. That Saturday after Thanksgiving Jim Buckley flew his SNJ-5 as the camera ship while Doug Matthews flew his F4U Corsair re-enacting an air battle between the Kate and Corsair. My court appearance in Muscogee County Superior Court had been sandwiched in between the filming for "Plane Guys" and my trip to Destin for the fly-in.



In any event, I got the Kate out of the hangar and my gear stowed and the plane pre-flighted by around 2:00 p.m. At the same time I was departing in the Kate for Destin, Keith Wood was flying the CAF P-51 Mustang "Red Nose" to Midland, Texas as part of its rotation (display cycle) with the CAF. A number of people gathered to watch our departure. Keith and I taxied out together. A few moments later, he departed heading west and I departed heading southwest for Destin.

My trip to Destin took me to the Montgomery VOR, then southwest on Victor 115 to the Pigeon Intersection and then south to the Crestview VOR to the Idges Intersection and then through the corridor between two restricted areas (R-2915A and R-2914A) and over Eglin Air Force Base Auxiliary Field and Eglin Air Force Base and then across the bay to the sliver of land that is known as Destin/Ft. Walton Beach.

The uneventful flight of about two hours consumed a mere 44 gallons of fuel as I had selected maximum range power of 22" of manifold pressure and 1650 r.p.m. As I landed at Destin, a number of AT-6/SNJ aircraft were visible on the apron.



After landing, I was met by Steve Mitchell, a local pilot at Destin and Joe's good friend and ET Murphy who had recently retired from the U.S. Air Force where he flew F-15 Eagles and more interestingly, F-4 Phantoms as part of the Heritage Flight. In fact, when the funeral of General Robin Olds was held, ET led the missing man formation as a tribute to the fallen warrior.

In no time at all, a five ship formation came in and did a 360 degree overhead approach followed by the landing of the aircraft in trail. Then, came another formation and later another and another. The apron was filled with rows of AT-6/SNJ Texan aircraft. I secured the Kate, got my rental car and soon it was time for dinner when I got to meet a lot of new friends and become reacquainted with old friends. During the evening of our arrival, all the pilots and participants were welcomed by Joe and his partner in the fly-in, Max Matthews. Max was busy posting flight assignments for the various formations that would fly students, Air Force personnel and VIP's the following morning.



Two Flights of 4 Texans



24 Texans approach Eglin AFB

3.

MEETING NEW FRIENDS

When it comes to flying, pilots easily make new friends. We all have the same passion and the same interests. Some of the barriers that divide others are no problem for pilots. It is easy to strike up a conversation with a fellow pilot, particularly one who flies vintage aircraft. When you are a pilot who has arrived at an air show or fly-in, the experience of meeting so many people in such a short period of time is a virtual "sensory overload." In any event, I will try to account for a number of people I met in Destin.

Mark and Alan Henley, Steve Gustafson, and Gene McNellie were four members of the AeroShell Aerobatic Team who attended the little get together in Destin. As the events unfolded, Steve Gustafson prepared me for my wingman's check-ride, and Mark Henley administered the check-ride. Rick Hosking is a veterinarian who moved from Tucson, Arizona to Ocala, Florida with his significant other, Laurie Arnold who is a very accomplished entertainer and singer. Jim Keller was a former certified public accountant who tired of that

profession and took the benefit of some sound investments to become an air show pilot with the Red Baron Aerobatic Formation Team. He was flying his Silver AT6 during the fly-in. Don Stamp was a successful businessman and also the owner of an air taxi operation. As the story would unfold in Destin, Don would lead a series of flights where I received tips from Steve Gustafson to prepare me for my FAST (formation pilot) card. Phil Butcher was an anesthesiologist from Oklahoma and a very personable and nice guy. Ed Vesley was an aircraft salesman and broker who flies the Hellcat for the Commemorative Air Force. Terry Adams is a fine gentleman that I have known for years who moved from Atlanta to Texas and is an excellent formation pilot. Terry would also give me instruction on keeping it in tight in the slot while flying in the diamond as our story would unfold. Mike Anderson owns a radio repair facility and service facility. He was flying a red AT-6 racer. Curiously, this aircraft radio entrepreneur had only one radio in his airplane.



Bob Wall was a seasoned pilot who would lead my flight when we had 24 AT-6 and SNJ Texans flying in formation over the Destin area and Eglin Air Force Base. John Bizal was a physician who was in Destin with his wife and is an AT-6 pilot. Fred Johnson and his wife Julie moved from Memphis to Ocala, Florida. Fred was a captain with Federal Express and had a great deal of experience in the air show world including competitive aerobatic flying. John Espisito was a very friendly fellow and experienced pilot, but I did not get a chance to spend as much time with him as I would have liked. Billy Strickland and Jim Thompson were two pilots from Birmingham, Alabama who are owners in a P-51 Mustang and also have their own AT-6 Texan. Ray Watson owned a green AT-6 Texan, and was a person I had met in September when I first met Mark Henley and Joe Carnley.



Charles DuPlantis was successful businessman in Destin and had a beautiful AT-6 Texan with very attractive artwork on the nose. He was originally from Louisiana, and his accent was unmistakable. Doug Linville was an orthopedic surgeon who was very friendly, and I saw Walt Orth several times who apparently was an Army pilot; but, again, I did not have a chance to spend as much time with Walt as I would have liked.

4.

FLY, FLY, FLY

The best description for Saturday, November 30, is that we flew and flew and flew. Texan pilots were giving rides to high school students, Air Force personnel and VIP's. On Saturday, we briefed and flew four separate formation flights. The members of this flight were Don Stamp, Mike Anderson and Jim Keller. During the first couple of flights, Don led the flights with Jim as his #2 and Mike was my #3. That meant that Don and Jim took off as an element, and Mike and I took off as an element. My job after our formation take off was to join on Mike as we joined on our #1 (Don) and our #2 (Jim) and settled in to a finger tip strong right formation. That meant that Don was at the point of the flight. Jim was on his left wing. Mike was on his right wing, and I was off Mike's right wing. During these flights, we would shift from a fingertip strong right to a diamond formation where I was in the slot. The diamond formation means that Don was the leading plane. Jim was on his left wing. Mike was on his right wing, and I was behind Don's aircraft. It looks like a square that has been canted 45 degrees. One has to become comfortable sitting in the slot, since you are surrounded by airplanes: one directly ahead of you, and one on either side of you. In order to give you an escape option, you step down below the leader so that in the event the flight leader has a catastrophic engine failure or abrupt loss of power, he will fade behind you and over you as you fly under him. From the ground, the aircraft appear to all be on the same altitude. However, for reasons of safety, #2, #3 and #4 are stepped down in the flight below the altitude of #1.



Joe Carnley's SNJ



The Author and his Kate



Two members of the AeroShell Aerobatic Team depart

Compared to a stock AT-6 Texan, the Kate is not a great performer. It weighs more and it is larger. It was carrying the torpedo during the formation flights, and that meant that I had to carry the manifold pressure to 32 inches and the rpm to 2150. Even with these pronounced power settings, the Kate could barely keep up with the stock AT-6-SNJ Texan aircraft. After about three formation flights with Steve Gustafson in the back seat giving me pointers, I flew one flight with Terry Adams in the back seat giving me the benefit of his experience. The four flights on Saturday was a real eye opener. I had mastered formation takeoffs before the clinic. However, I had never flown in the slot in the diamond formation. It took some getting used to to push forward in the formation into the proper position.



5.

THE TWENTY FOUR SHIP FORMATION

Saturday, December 1, was the date of a mass formation flight over Destin and Eglin Air Force Base. The briefing was led by Max Matthews and then Fred Johnson and Rick Hosking gave the pilots additional briefings. On take off, we would join up in the diamond formation. There would be six flights of four aircraft in the diamond. The center of the first wave of aircraft would be a flight with B flight to its left and C flight to its right. The second wave of aircraft would be led by D flight (in which I flew) with E flight to our left and F flight to our right. We started engines at 10:50 a.m. and the check in went like this; "A flight check in; A2, A3, A4. B flight check in; B2, B3, B4. C flight check; C2, C3, C4. D flight check in; D2, D3, D4. E flight check in; E2, E3, E4. Flight check in; F2, F3, F4." The check in was over in about 30 seconds. Because we were trying to get so many aircraft up in such a short period of time, the two ship elements were instructed to begin their takeoff row in unison as soon as they saw the tails up of the aircraft ahead of them. The wind was out of the southeast, so we departed Runway 14. The early components of the flight took off the southwest departing to the right after taking off of the southeast runway, but eventually the massive formation turned left as we orbited left to allow the formation to form up. It was critical to be able to identify your formation leader and his wingman to form up with the diamond with your number 3 off to your right. In time, we were formed up. However, the Kate had to be run at the highest possible power setting to catch up with the members of its formation.



Joe Carnley and Max Matthews

I spent most of my time in the "slot" of Delta flight. It was imperative to stay tucked in tight so that my flight would look sharp when viewed from the ground below. From time to time, number 2 in Delta flight would trail back just a bit, but I had to stay in position ever mindful of my proper position. I compensated ever so slightly by flying down lower just a bit to compensate for number two flying slightly sucked. As I stayed focus on keeping my proper position, I was generally aware as we flew over Destin and across the bay to Eglin Air Force Base. After over flying Eglin, we turned back to the south and the formation began to break apart. In time, when Delta flight was separated from the rest of the vast formation, I was moved to a fingertip strong right formation. Then, as the flight approached the airport, we moved to an echelon right. As we over flew the field, the flight broke left in three of four second intervals and our landings were accomplished. The post flight briefing was basically unremarkable, and I got my check ride recommendation from Steve Gustafson to fly with Mark Henley.

6.

THE FAST CHECK RIDE

Like Steve Gustafson, Mark Henley flies with the AeroShell Aerobatic Team. With my paperwork in order, we briefed for a check ride flight that would be lead by Don Stamp with Terry Adams as number two and Rick Hosking as number three. In the backseat of Terry Adams's aircraft was Ed Vesley. Ed Vesley is a lead pilot as is Terry Adams, and Rick Hosking is a check airman as is Mark Henley. The flight briefing was accomplished rather quickly. As I recall, we had an engine start time of 1400. We taxied out for departure, did our run ups, and in no time I was sitting off Rick Hosking's wing on the runway when he gave the run up signal followed by the head nod, and we raced down the runway. We joined up in a fingertip strong right and then went to an echelon left. We then went to a fingertip strong left. The check ride was very intense, because the formation was constantly changing. My number three, Rick Hosking was giving head nods, but I could not tell what signals he was nodding to. All I could do is go wherever my number three went. That is the responsibility of number four in a four ship formation. Eventually, we got set up in an echelon left, and we did several breakaways and rejoins. Because the Kate is relatively underpowered with its lengthened fuselage and carrying the torpedo, I could not make up for poor intercepts with power. I had to use geometry to catch the other airplanes. In no time at all, we were heading back for the airport in a fingertip strong right formation which shifted to an echelon right followed by the 360 overhead break and landing. I learned a lot from Mark Henley during the check ride. Mark could see things happening before I could because of his experi-

ence. I also learned to try to stay high during landings to avoid flying through the propwash and wingtip vortices of the previous aircraft in the flight. I got a "satisfactory" on all of the elements of the check ride. I was congratulated by the other pilots in my flight upon passing my check ride.



24 Texans over Eglin AFB

7.
**THE DEPARTURE DINNER,
WEATHERED IN
AND THE FLIGHT
BACK TO ATLANTA**

There was an elegant dinner at an exclusive condominium on Destin Beach on Saturday evening. The food was great and everyone present was cordial. A toast was given to the new formation pilot, and I had a chance to visit a good bit with Mark Henley about his adventures in air show flying. All too soon, the evening was over since we anticipated departing early the next morning.

The next morning, Destin was fogged in with ceilings which ran between six to eight hundred feet. The cloud layer was fairly thin, but the Kate was not IFR certified. I spent the whole day at the airport waiting for the clouds to lift along with Rick Hosking, Jim Keller and Fred Johnson. Eventually, with sunlight dissipating, Fred, Rick and I decided to wait for better weather the next morning. That evening we all had dinner at a seafood restaurant near our hotel accompanied by Fred's wife, Julie and Rick's significant other, Laurie Arnold.

Monday morning dawned clear and bright, and in no time at all, I was en route back to Falcon Field via Eglin Air Force Base and Montgomery, Alabama. I was glad to be heading home, since the next day I had a speaking engagement that I could not afford to break. The Kate crawled home with a strong headwind, and the flight took about two hours and eighteen minutes or so. In time, the Kate and I made our way to the Dixie Wing hangar where the aircraft was put away, and I discussed the aircraft maintenance with my good friend Captain Jim



Joe Carnley, Laurie Arnold and Rick Hosking



I was soon motoring back to Atlanta to catch up on a lot of paperwork. I only had a few days to get everything in the office together, since I would be traveling to the annual meeting of the International Council of Air Shows in Las Vegas the next week. Upon returning to my office, I had the pleasure of dealing with a semi emergency created by a lawyer who filed a motion for legal fees against me in a case when he did not confer with me as required by the rules, that required that Valerie Long and I work on Sunday, December 9, 2007, prior to my December 10, 2007, departure for ICAS. Ultimately, the ill-advised motion was dismissed. Yes, air show flying is challenging. However, it is a wonderful escape from the petty bickering and disruptive behavior one sometimes sees in lawyers.

PHOTOS ON THE PREVIOUS PAGES OF THIS ISSUE OF FLIGHT
WATCH ARE COURTESY OF JULIE JOHNSON



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



Copyright 2007. Alan Armstrong. All
Rights Reserved.