



FLIGHT-WATCH



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THE 2008 WINGS OVER MARIETTA AIR SHOW AT DOBBINS AFB

I.

BETTER LUCK THAN SKILL

I was driving home from work the night before our departure after calling Pop Wilson, our operations officer from my office. Pop was checking on our PPR numbers that would allow us to land at Dobbins Air Force Base. Pop had indicated that we were to report at the Dixie Wing at 8:00 a.m. the following morning for our flight to Dobbins.

Friday dawned overcast and cloudy. I got my weather briefing via cell phone while driving to Falcon Field. The weather was deteriorating said the briefer. The sooner we got airborne the better. Dobbins was VFR, but there was rain to the northwest over Cartersville moving southeast toward Dobbins.

Arriving a little after 8:00 a.m., the aircraft for the mission all arrayed with SBD, Zero, C-45 and AT-6 in that order. Pop said the AT-6 had 35 gallons in the left tank and 15 in the right tank which appeared to correspond with my visual examination of the fuel tank contents. A quick pre-flight and review of the paperwork indicated the AT-6 was ready for flight. Don Burgess, my back seater, pulled the propeller through while I set up my Garmin 496 GPS and plugged in my headset.

In no time at all, we started engines and began to taxi out for our run ups and departure. Jack Van Ness departed first in the Zero, followed by Jim Buckley in the SBD, me in the AT-6 and finally Pop Wilson and Joe Broker in the C-45. I could see the Zero and SBD in front of me and followed them on a northwesterly heading staying at 2,300 feet to keep well below the floor of the Atlanta Class B Airspace.

As we turned north, I had a visual on the Zero when I saw the SBD cross under me from left to right. I focused on keeping the Zero in sight as I called Atlanta Approach Control for flight following and got a transponder code of 0113. Then, we entered some light rain and I lost sight of everyone. For a couple of minutes we flew through some light rain and then popped out into fairly clear air. I could see the Zero to my right, but the SBD was no where in sight.

I turned right to place the AT-6 on the right wing of the Zero at a distance of a mile or more, cancelled flight following and got on 120.75, the Dobbins Tower frequency. In no time, the Zero was cleared to land with me as number two. The Zero was clearing Runway 29 as I was touching down. About midfield down the runway was taxiway G (Golf), and we made a left turn on taxiway E (Echo) and taxied perhaps a mile to taxiway L (Lima), on the south (Navy) side of the base. We had to go to the Navy side to get our gas.

II.

YOU'VE GOTTA LOVE IT

As we shut down near the gas tank on Taxiway Lima, we realized the SBD was not with us, we were met by Colonel Wood, an Air Force Reserve C-130 pilot and Delta Captain. As I waited to get gas, it began to rain and the ceiling began to come down along with the visibility. It then began to rain in earnest. When it came my turn to get gas, it was really coming down. Don had brought along a poncho which I donned as I topped off the tanks of the AT-6. Climbing around on the wing of a wet airplane requires care. Otherwise, you will end up on the ground. After I got gas in the AT-6 (which took 65 gallons with about 90 gallons being full), I started the engine and called ground control for a clearance to taxi to the display area.

III.

NEWS MEDIA OR REFUGEES?

As I taxied toward the display area, the ceiling came down to 400 feet and the visibility was a mile and one-half. An F-16 Thunderbird was sitting near the departure end of Runway 29. I finally got permission to cross the active runway and taxi to the display area where I had been preceded by the Zero and C-45. After shutdown, Don, Joe and I got the canopy cover secure and clamored aboard a truck all soaking wet. When we arrived at Base Operations, there was a crowd of photographers and media personnel who looked like refugees in the wet weather.

As we made our way through the pouring rain to the building, I saw Travis Reynolds, Michelle and Jeff Green. Jeff



North American T-28

jokingly said he got a photo of me taxiing the AT-6 wearing the poncho. In time, the Dixie Wing group collected its rental car, drove to Hooters for lunch and eventually made our way to the Hyatt Place Hotel where we could get a warm shower and clean, dry room.

IV.

NO BUCKS, NO BUCK ROGERS

Since our Dixie Wing aircraft were not flying in the show but on static display, I was able to catch up with Gene Schayer and John Bierowa who had run the North Georgia Air and Car show in years past. With a troubled American economy and decrease in the air show sponsors, the feeling was military shows are our best bet to generate revenue. They both liked the idea of a low cost Battle of Midway re-enactment. There is increasing pressure on air show producers to get as much bang for the buck as possible.

Our Dixie Wing contingent discussed ways to be more competitive. These discussions developed after the Saturday show was over when we had dinner. We were joined for dinner by Travis Reynolds and Michelle, and the topic of conversation

involved getting affordable pyrotechnics, developing a shorter Pearl Harbor routine and finding sponsors for my Kate and Jack's Zero. Travis and I are going to ICAS in hopes of getting more air show appearances for 2009.

V.

NEW FRIENDS

One of the neat things about flying in air shows is the unique and interesting people one gets to meet along the way. I had noticed on Saturday a pilot across the way who flew in the Army OV-1 Mohawk. The Mohawk was essentially a reconnaissance and intelligence gathering aircraft employed extensively during the Vietnam War. It had, among other things, infrared sensors that could determine the presence of people on the ground by their body temperatures, according to my understanding of the technology at the time. It also had a sophisticated radio package including radar that allowed the aircraft to descend in clouds at night between mountain ranges. The radio package included high frequency, low frequency and VHF frequency radios because of the need of the pilots in the aircraft to communicate with both civilian and military facilities and military personnel on the ground.

On Sunday morning, I met Lt. Col. Chris Foltz. As we struck up a conversation, I learned something quite interesting. His middle name is Chennault. His mother and father named him after Claire Chennault, the leader of the American Volunteer Group/Flying Tigers. Sometimes, it seems like the impact of Claire Chennault in history continues without end.

Chris has a very interesting history.



L-39 Albatross



KC-135



F-16 Falcon

He joined the Army and flew as a pilot. He then made his way to the Army National Guard. Then, he transferred to the Air Force and flies the C-130 Hercules in the Air Force. He is based at Hurlburt Field where some of the secret and special purpose aircraft are maintained by the Air Force in Florida.

Chris gave me a tour of the OV-1 Mohawk. Climbing aboard the aircraft is like scaling a ladder. There is an arm that you mount with your right foot. Then you place your left foot in the cavity of the fuselage, and then you climb aboard the aircraft with your right knee into the left seat of the aircraft. The aircraft is equipped with Martin-Baker ejection seats, and the ejection handles are quite prominent as one sits in the cockpit. The cockpit is arrayed with radios both directly in front of you and on the side console. There are switches all about the cockpit including on an eyebrow panel above your head. I took a number of photographs of the Mohawk's cockpit, because I thought it was such a very interesting environment. On the right side is a large display, but since Chris was not available at the time, I did not have a chance to ask him about whether it is an infrared display or a radar display.

I also got to meet the lady who flew to Dobbins with Chris in the right seat of the aircraft. Her name is Cindy Hayes, and she works in Gainesville, GA as a veteran's benefits counselor. When I got to speak with Cindy, she made it clear to me that she wants to help veterans and would answer any questions I might have about things of that nature.

At lunch, Chris and I had a chance to talk about his flying career and the fact that when he retires, he has a standing offer to engage in some interesting flying activi-

ties in the Middle East. Apparently, personnel with his qualifications can earn as much as \$18,000 per month working as contract employees either for the United States government or for corporations that serve our government. Perhaps, when Chris retires from the Air Force, he will find his way to the Middle East engaged as a contract pilot in the service of the United States government.

I made several attempts to locate Col. Manny Haldopoulos. Manny Haldopoulos is a pilot who flies out of Warner Robbins Air Force Base, and we talked about the Battle of Midway being performed at the Warner Robbins Air Force Base Air Show in April 2009. Just as the performance of the Thunderbirds was concluded and I was sitting aboard the AT-6 preparing to start my engine, Manny showed up. He said he was giving thought to the Battle of Midway air battle reenactment being featured at the Warner Robbins Air Force Base Air Show this upcoming year. Interestingly, it may be possible for the pyrotechnics involved in the show to be conducted by military personnel. This would save on our Battle of Midway budget.



L-39 Albatross

VI.

THE FLIGHT HOME

After the Thunderbirds flew, our aircraft had been enveloped in people as they made their way away from the displays on the tarmac. I approached one of the enlisted men about getting airborne. He told me he could get me out anytime I was ready. I told him I was ready right now. We then pushed the AT-6 back away from the crowd to an area of tarmac that was unoccupied. I started the engine, got clearance from ground control to taxi, and taxied to Runway 29. After some time, I was finally given a clearance to depart Runway 29 on a westbound heading. After departing Dobbins Air Force Base and changing to an approach control frequency, the frequency was too congested to get flight following. I made my way VFR around the northwest perimeter of the Class B airspace and arrived over Falcon Field hearing both Jack in his Zero and Pop and Joe in the C-45 calling in on the unicom frequency behind me. In no time at all, I was on the ground and taxiing in to the Dixie Wing hangar when the Zero landed behind me. Shortly afterwards, the C-45 landed, and Jack and I held on an area of tarmac on the north side of the airport while the C-45 crossed in front of us, so that it could arrive at the hangar first. We had discussed before our departure from Dobbins that the C-45 needed to go in the back of the hangar which explains why Jack and I made way for that aircraft.



Cindy Hays and Chris Foltz

Just when we thought our day was over, we realized that the hangar had to be emptied and restacked. Only two aircraft did not have to be removed from the hangar, my Kate and the Soko (a Soviet block fighter trainer). For about one hour, we played airplane rodeo pulling aircraft out of the hangar, staging them on the tarmac, and then putting some of the larger aircraft in first with the smaller aircraft last. We were all tired and wanted to go home, but this task had to be taken care of. Then, after the AT-6 was installed in the hangar along with the other aircraft, I had to wipe down the windshield, the cowling and the leading edges of the aircraft to remove the bugs and oil residue from the flight. By the time I was ready to drive home, it was nearly 7:30 p.m. It had been a long day and a long weekend.



View of OV-1 Mohawk's instrument panel from the pilot's seat



Aft view of the OV-1



The Thunderbirds in the diamond formation



Cockpit tours of the AT-6

VII.

REFLECTIONS ON THE 2008 DOBBINS AIR FORCE BASE SHOW

The things that stand out in my mind about the Dobbins Air Force Base Show of 2008 was the fact that we appeared to reach some consensus about how to advance the interest of our aircraft for the upcoming air show season both in terms of pyrotechnics and the Battle of Midway aerial script, and I got to spend some time with Col. Manny Haldopoulos who appears to be interested in the Battle of Midway act for the Warner Robbins Air Force Base Air Show in the upcoming season. If you are involved in flying these aircraft on the air show circuit, you are always trying to make a sale. If the aircraft do not fly, then they do not pay their way, and you have to take the money out of your own pocket. That is a significant incentive to push your aircraft to air show producers and promoters.

It was also interesting and fun to make new friends in the form of Chris Foltz and Cindy Hayes who, like so many of us on the air show circuit, share the love of flying.



The Thunderbirds



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

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