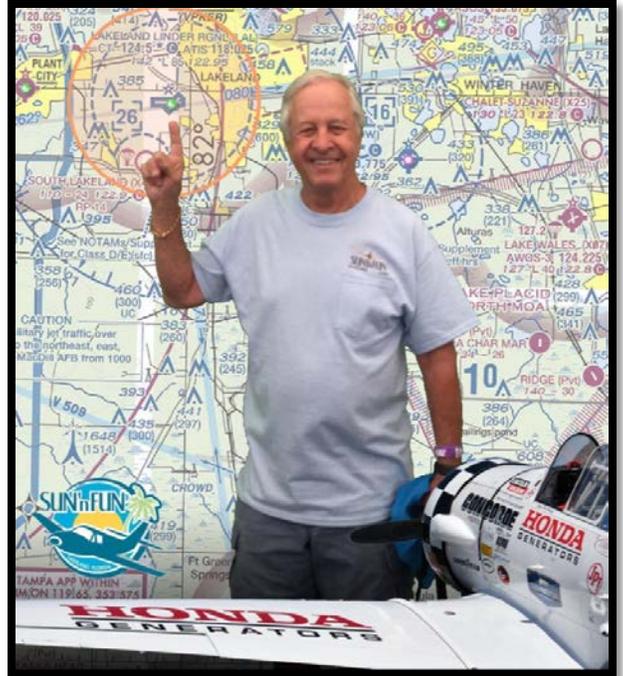


## April 3, 2019 - Lakeland and the Sun n' Fun International Aviation Exhibition

One of the annual aviation events that I do try to go to is the week long Lakeland, FL. Sun n' Fun show. It is probably second only to the EAA Oshkosh Air Venture in size, scope and attendance. I especially enjoy going on a day when the night time air show is scheduled as the aircraft that fly that evening will be illuminated with all sorts of LED lighting, pyrotechnics and special effects that are quite spectacular. However this means that I will have to drive the 250 mile round trip since my current pilot license no longer allows for night flights. An early morning departure will have me back home by midnight. One of the first things that I do is to go over to the Just Aircraft Exhibit to see any new projects that have been added since I purchased and built my Light Sport airplane kit from them a dozen years ago. However on my way over to their display area I passed the Honda generator booth where they were taking digital pictures of anyone who wished to pose. I decided that I would stand in front of one of their green screens which brought up a sectional map of the Linder Field, the airport where the show was being held. I had no sooner posed than the picture showed up on my I-phone. The marvels of modern technology on display.



The Just Aircraft Co. had no less than 6 aircraft there, either at the booth or on the flight line. I am always interested in seeing how this little company, which started about 15 years ago as a two man operation has continued to grow in what has become a very competitive marketplace. They now are on target to deliver about a hundred units a year, either ready to assembly kits or fully completed aircraft. Their display booth area



included a new landing gear treatment for their SuperStol which gives a bit better wing stability while making tight turns on the ground by adding a coil spring to the lower portion of the pneumatic nitrogen filled strut. In addition there was an amphibian float mounted model on display. While I have seen these before in photos, this was my first opportunity to get up to one close and personal. While not something that I have need for, in areas of the country where lakes are abundant it sure would make sense. I suspect that in Alaska and Minnesota, this would be an essential add on to any aircraft used to transport people and/or equipment into the back country. Years ago, when living in New Jersey, I had taken a few seaplane lessons on the Hackensack River but decided that this was something that I probably was never going to use in real life. Down here in Florida, there are many lakes in the center portion of the State, especially in and around Orlando, but except for the fun of having a water capable machine, I still don't think that this is something that would be in great demand, at least by me.



Before the afternoon Air Show began I took care of some shopping chores. I always use this show to pick up a couple cases of aviation oil, which will cover me for the year, until the next show. I also purchase one of their current T-shirts, which is affirmation that I have attended the event, and usually one extravagant item. This year it was a high capacity alternator for my Highlander. The original factory unit only produces a 15 amp power source, not hardly enough for the normal electronics but woefully insufficient for the draw of the electric water pump that I have added for my liquid cooled cylinder heads. This replacement will put out 3 times that amount and will keep the battery fully charged while operating everything that I have on the airplane, including night time navigation and daytime wingtip strobe lights. The normal price for this item is \$697 plus shipping from the manufacturer in Australia, (at least \$75 and more likely \$100). They had one for my engine model there at the Rotec Company booth at a show price of \$500 and I was given a free red company logo hat in the process, which complimented the blue cap that I got with my purchase from the Phillips Oil distributor.



I have mentioned that my very first airplane was a 1946 Ercoupe two place nose wheel craft with a cruise speed of about 90 MPH, which is just a bit slower than what I fly today. What made it unique was that it had no rudder pedal configuration, only a single floor brake, and a steering wheel. You literally drove it off and back on the ground, much like a car. It was loads of fun, but it only held



2 people. I went on to larger and faster 4 person airplanes and then to a 6 place twin with twice the speed and 3 times the range. About 20 years ago the US Postal service came out with a series of stamps honoring general aviation and, lo and behold, one actually featured an aerial photo of a Ercoupe flying in the Grand Canyon, and its "N" registration number was exactly 100 off from mine. I have the stamp, mounted in a USPS issued frame with that photo which I happened to find for sale at my Hilton Head Post office. Now, **that's** coincidence.

Well, how about **this** coincidence. While I was admiring a similar beautiful looking Ercoupe, there at the show, a woman with two teenage girls in tow came up to me. One of the girls asked if I knew anything about the plane that I was admiring. "Only that I used to own one", I replied. One of the girls proudly retorted, "Well, my great grandfather helped to design it". It turned out that her great grandfather, Fred Weick was an aeronautical engineer and aviation pioneer who did a lot of work on that unique landing gear for the Ercoupe as it had to take the side torque and stress of landing without benefit of a rudder to straighten out its crab into the wind. He also helped to design a proper propeller for its rather underpowered 65 HP engine. The young lady's mother showed me a photo of *her* grandfather, Fred, which she had on her phone, which with its air drop app, let me transfer it directly to my I-phone. Just another example of what makes flying such an unique and interesting avocation... meeting people who have an special story to tell and who are willing to do so with other pilots, aircraft owners and airplane enthusiasts.



One of the main events of these aviation expositions is the spectacular air show. They will generally have a parachutist drop with a large US flag accompanied by the National Anthem followed with a flyover of Warbirds. While I was a day too early for the featured performers, the Navy's Blue Angels, there was one advance F-18



*Hornet* which was there to scout out the terrain and landmarks for the next day's performance, and I was lucky enough to catch this picture of him taking off with a WWII B-25 Mitchell Bomber of the Doolittle Raiders sitting in the foreground. While I would have loved to have seen **The Blues** in action, I was going to have to be content with this afternoon's and the evening's shows instead.



I opted for the premium seating which put me right in front of the main flight platform with its show announcers and speaker system and with direct viewing of the flight line and field's control tower. In the above photo you can see one of the performance jets taxiing toward the departure end of the runway for take-off. In the picture just below you can see the fly-by of the Mitchell B-25 bomber which helped to dissuade the morale and



confidence of the Japanese when these aircraft were able to fly non-stop to Toyko and drop their considerable bomb load upon that city, despite the fact that many did not have the fuel to return to their home bases. This followed the US and Allies dropping of 2.7 million tons of bombs on Germany with these planes, prior to turning their attention on the Pacific Theater. For his effort in accomplishing the near impossible, Jimmy Doolittle was promoted to General and a movie, "Thirty Seconds over Toyko" commemorated that momentous event for history. I got an opportunity to fly in the larger, 4 engine B-24 last year while it was touring in Hilton Head and posted an article about that flight on November 4th, 2018. One day I would like to complete the "hat trick" ( I had previously flown in the B-17 in upstate South Carolina- Oct. 12, 2010) by taking a ride in the B-25 as well.



While taking photos of aircraft in flight, especially with an I-phone, is a bit challenging, I was able to capture a few photos that are worthy of presentation. Above is the ubiquitous C-47, the military version of the DC-3. This was primarily a cargo, troop and ambulance carrier and did not have any weaponry aboard, although it was heavily armored as compared to its civilian version. It was also a favored airplane for field grade officers to travel upon and was also used to transport USO show people who would entertain the troops. During my freshman college days I worked for a CPA who actually flew the C-47 over the Himalayan Mountains "Burma Hump" delivering supplies to the Chinese forces during the latter years of WW-II. Yup, I'm that old!

Below is the North American P-51 Mustang, one of the more prolific of the WW-II fighter aircraft, and used to provide fighter support for the B-17 long range bombers. Its Packard V-23 "Merlin" engine produced 1,700 horse power with speeds of over 400 MPH. Today there are less than 170 of these aircraft in "airworthy condition" and still flying, and at my home airport there is a maintenance and repair shop that works ONLY on the P-51! These are always an Air Show favorite with its deep throated engine roar and its highly maneuverable aerobatic gyrations. This was the only shot that I was able to get as it flew over the crowd.





However, to me, the most awesome of the jet fighters at the Show was the F-16 "Viper" used by the Air Force in Desert Storm in 1991. With speeds in excess of 1,500 MPH it is one scary *mother* and it would be the first airplane that I would encounter should I ever violate the Presidential TFR restricted airspace when Trump is down at his Mar-A-Largo "Winter White House". I have a photo of it taking off over a group of Cessnas; a picture of it making a low high speed pass over the crowd; and a photo of it accompanying a WW-II Douglas AD-1 Skyraider in what is called a Legacy Flight, bringing together fighter aircraft from two distinct era's, and some half a century apart.

All in all, it was a good day. Beautiful early spring weather, great performances, a spectacular evening air show and time spent doing what I enjoy most... being around pilots and their airplanes. Can't wait 'til next year!