

March 31, 2016 - Over to Okeechobee Airport for Lunch, with a side order of Cold War Détente and Nostalgia



It is not unusual to come across interesting or unusual aircraft as I do my daily flights in and around Florida, but occasionally they are **really** interesting or unusual. Today I made the short flight over to the Okeechobee County Airport. Parked on the ramp, adjacent to the Landing Strip Cafe's outdoor patio where I was having lunch, was what was obviously a military observation airplane. It looked similar to, but a bit larger than the Cessna L-19 "Bird Dog" scout plane, which was commissioned after WWII and used primarily during the Korean Conflict. I wandered over and found that it's owner/pilot, a Casey Brown, was more than willing to share his story of this unusual airplane. It is a **UTVA-66**, a **STOL** (short take off and landing) aircraft, produced in the former Yugoslavia and first flown in 1966. They were commissioned by the then post-war dictator Marshal Tito and, as an affront to his country's Soviet Union occupier, he had them powered by the U.S.'s Lycoming Company's Model 480 6-cylinder flat engine, rated at 340 hp instead of its Russian counterpart. Only 130 of these aircraft were manufactured and, in the late '90's, eleven of

them were exported to Canada. Apparently 2 or 3 eventually found their way into the US and only this one is currently in airworthy condition. Licensed under the FAA's Experimental Exhibition category, this particular airplane's operations are limited to being flown to air show static displays and occasional maintenance and proficiency flights only. I guess that since it is going to be shown at next week's Sun n' Fun Expo, at nearby Lakeland, with its new military paint job, it qualifies, having been flown here to South Florida from its Michigan base. The airplane was used as a primary trainer, and for low and slow observation (having a stall speed in the mid-forty MPH range) as well as a battlefield air ambulance, capable of carrying up to two stretcher borne passengers, a nurse and the pilot. However it was also capable of light armament including wing mounted machine guns or rockets. The panel is comprised of conventional "steam gauges" and there is a full complement of instrumentation along with all of the necessary avionics for instrument flight. I found it curious that the rudder pedals had a stirrup type of strap fastener to keep one's feet in place.. The machine has fixed leading edge slats, the equivalent of Fowler flaps and drooping ailerons, all of which help to contribute to its STOL performance. Even with an engine almost 3 times more powerful than on my airplane, this machine is not all that much quicker, having a normal cruise speed in the 125 MPH range. It's gross weight is also 3 times mine, topping two tons, making it a real military workhorse. Fuel consumption is in the 12-14 GPH range, giving it a useful range of almost 500 miles.



This UTVA-66 had a very roomy although "busy" cockpit.

"Nose Art, more commonly seen on fighters and bombers



Flying Florida gives me many opportunities to come across situations such as today's. Not only did I have an enjoyable flight and a nice lunch, but I had the chance to experience aviation history up close and personal. All in all, another good day.