

## March 7, 2019 - The OFF (*Old Farts of Florida*) fly-in Lunch to Indiantown's Seminole Inn

It always bemuses me that people who live in the mountains will vacation at the sea-shore and those by the beach will go into the highlands for their get-a-ways. But, then, this is what general aviation pilots tend to do as well. Indiantown has a very historic Inn, which once hosted the abdicated King of England, Edward the VIII, who left the throne to marry his twice divorced lover Wallis Simpson (whose Uncle actually built that *Seminole Inn* as a stopping off place for his Seaboard Airline Railroad company). A walk through its formal dining room will find the walls strewn with photos of that event. It also has an excellent casual restaurant which features a wonderful Sunday brunch, which we have attended several times and greatly enjoy. However as a pilot we tend to by-pass places that are local, no matter how good, for a more distant lunch flight.



Today I was going to do the "milk run", a 20 minute flight over to my "old standby", the Okeechobee County Airport. I had something scheduled for that afternoon so I needed a close-by place that was easy to get into (ie: no control tower). As I drove into X-58 (Indiantown Airport) I came across an amazing sight. There were literally airplanes *everywhere!* There were planes to my left, there were planes to my right and there were planes in front of me. The transient parking area, which will normally have 3 or 4 planes tied down, were covered with 10 times that number. In the 8 years that I have been a tenant I have never seen so many planes on this field at one time! In fact, once I got airborne I counted 40 airplanes. Where did they come from and what were they doing there? Before climbing



into my own airplane I decided to inquire. I was told that this was the weekly fly-in of the OFF's, the Old Farts of Florida, who decided to take this particular lunch sojourn over at the Seminole Inn. They even contracted for several vans to make the 2 mile drive over and back for those in attendance. I don't exactly know the age requirements for joining this "elite" group, but I am sure that I would readily qualify. However that would have to be for another day. I waited for a break in the activity and quickly got airborne with a circle of the field at 800 feet in order to capture a photo of the visitors before heading to the northwest toward the Okeechobee airport. Now a word about Okeechobee, the town. It is located just above the large freshwater lake of the same name which provides much of the drinking water to South Florida. It is the governmental seat for the county of the same name and is a very important tourist center, especially in the winter, when snowbirds from all over the northern states bring their RV's by the 10's of thousands to the many camp grounds and RV Parks that surround the lake. In fact I own a lot at one of the condo campgrounds myself and store my 36 foot motor-home on it. It is a delightful small town which is also known for its cattle grazing lands and their cowboys.

To say that Okeechobee is a "one horse" town would do it an injustice. There are, in fact, hundreds of horses in and around the city, and probably thousands in the county. It is famous for its annual rodeo and is on the circuit for some of

the best horsemen and women in the State of Florida. I mention this because on this day, as I entered the Landing Strip Cafe, I found it packed to the brim with people, some wearing Stetson hats of the afore-mentioned cow-person variety.

Apparently Okeechobee just had its rodeo and many were there to acknowledge their Miss Rodeo 2019 along with some of her court.



I only wish that I had thought to ask the ladies to pose for a photo with their large and ornate rodeo belt buckles and cow-girl garb. I didn't want to appear forward but I am sure that they would have been glad to accommodate. I was able to retrieve the local newspaper article showing the parade of horses along with the cattle that they were herding. It is events and festivals such as this that helps make small town America such a special place.



After lunch I wandered out to the airplane ramp where my Highlander was parked. A couple of articles ago (Feb. 1, 2019) I wrote about the Pilatus PC-12 being flight tested for the US Air Force at my hometown airfield. Since then I have come across more and more of these very popular single engine turboprop aircraft which go for about \$5 million a copy. Way outside of the range of my under \$100K Highlander Light Sport. Oh, sure they can carry 4 times the number of people at 3 times the speed of my little airplane, but I am sure that it consumes far more than the 5 gallons of fuel per hour that mine does and is probably not near as much fun to fly. That being said, on this trip over to Okeechobee I found not one, but two of these aircraft parked on the ramp. This town, like many in South Florida, has a great appeal during the winter months, especially from the affluent from northern climes. I guess that another benefit from me living here in Florida is that I don't have to take a 5 million dollar jet-prop airplane to make my daily lunch flights.