

Nov. 1, 2019 - A tragedy at the Stuart Air Show

One of closest Air Shows to my home in Port Saint Lucie is the one at nearby Witham Field, held in the next town of Stuart each November. In fact, aircraft approaching this field, located just 15 miles to the southeast of my house, often will fly directly over on their final approach to runway 12. I have attended several of these airshows but have landed my Highlander at this airport only one time as they have no on-field restaurant. I had planned on attending tomorrow's, (Saturday Nov. 2nd) events as that is when the night time aerial performances were to take place. Tragically this was not to occur as an accident the day before would cause cancellation of the entire event for this year. In what was the very first fatality in the 30 year history of this Air Show, a local West Palm Beach dermatologist would lose his life while practicing with his personally owned Grumman OV-1 Mohawk Army observation and



attack aircraft. While I never met Dr. Joseph Masessa, I did feature his airplane in a blog article that I did back in May of 2015 about a Static aviation display held at North County Airport (F-45) in the outskirts of West Palm Beach. This was an airport that I once based out of before the tie-down pricing got too prohibitive. While the cause of the accident has yet to be determined, Dr. Masessa was highly qualified in his 1950 era airplane having performed at numerous flying venues. Cell phone video of the crash shows the airplane at about 1000 feet rolling over and then diving almost straight down into the ground. This one will need the NTSB to sort out.



Since the Airshow had been cancelled I instead flew over to nearby Okeechobee, my "milk run" airport of choice for breakfasts. Now, for a bit of aviation nostalgia. Back in the early 50's one of my favorite TV shows was SKY KING, which was about a flying rancher and ad hock lawman who owned a twin engine airplane around which many of his adventures were structured. Schuyler (Sky) King, along with his pretty niece "Penny" and nephew "Clipper" would track down cattle rustlers assorted crooks and other ne're do wells, often using his airplane, which was operated off of the dirt runway of his ranch. While I don't remember a lot of the plot lines of this show I do remember that two things did stand out to me, a 12 or 13 year old boy in the '50's. First, this was my earliest recollection of an airplane being on TV and it probably peaked my interest in aviation as a whole as shortly thereafter I began building balsa wood model aircraft covered in tissue paper and coated in banana oil (aircraft dope). It was also one of the first times that I began to notice girls and niece Penny, along with Mickey Mouse Club's Annette Funicello, peaked my interest in the opposite sex. It is noteworthy that I went on to eventually enjoy the pleasures of both of these pursuits.



The airplane that Sky King owned was a small twin engined model and I had often thought that it was a Beechcraft Model 18, which I will occasionally run across at airports that I visit. Well today that mystery was laid to rest for when I arrived at Okeechobee I saw not only the Beech 18, but its look alike cousin the Lockheed 12. These were planes that were going to be displayed at the Stuart Airshow but were now on "stand by" while the accident was being investigated.



Just above is a photo of the 18 on the Okeechobee ramp with my little highlander visible in the right hand background. And below is a photo of the Lockheed 12A, at the Okeechobee fuel dock. It turns out that neither of these aircraft is the



Sky King **Songbird**. I was told, by the Lockheed owner/pilot that, during the early episodes of the series, Sky "flew" the Cessna T-50, a civilian version of the Army's Cessna AT-17 Bobcat, also known as "The Bamboo Bomber" due to its extensive use of wood in its frame construction. This 5 seat light transport was also used as a training aircraft during WWII to help pilots transition between single to twin engined combat aircraft. After several crashed while filming the show Sky transitioned to the 6 place Cessna 310.

How I could confuse this obvious very small twin with the larger versions displayed above can only be explained that when a kid, **everything** looks larger and more impressive than it is in real life. Case in point... Penny and Annette!

