

November 5, 2017 - The Stuart, Florida - Witham Field Air Show,

I have adapted the old saying of, "Who can, does... who cannot teaches" to fit my own personal philosophy toward aviation; "Who can, builds... who cannot, flies". Or, to put it another way: While I assembled much of my Highlander light sport airplane using my own two hands, before needing to return to my business client obligations, thus turning its completion over to the factory folks at **Just Aircraft**, I have always much more enjoyed the results of the project than the "work in progress". (ie: I would rather fly than build.) This is somewhat the case with air shows. I have seen literally dozens of them over the 60+ years of my flying avocation. And many I have flown to using my own airplanes.

These ranged from my attendance at an early one at Washington DC's Dulles International Airport, using my Cessna Skyhawk, to the 1970's air races at the Millville, NJ airport, which had me witness a fatality when two planes collided, and even a very memorable one in which I flew my twin engine Piper Comanche over the Island of Cuba to attend The International Aviation week festivities at Grand Cayman. There I got to see my first Harrier Jet literally stop in mid-air and face the crowd, who were standing on the beach some 100 feet away, with its full armament on display "up close and personal". And while I still enjoying going to air shows, given the opportunity to fly on that particular day, flying will generally win out. This was the dilemma that I was facing this past weekend with the Stuart Air Show, scheduled at Witham Field, which is located just 30 driving minutes from my new home in Tradition, FL.

I elected to fly on the first day of the show, which was a Saturday. I needed to fuel up both the airplane as well as the 30 gallons that I keep in jerry cans back at the hangar. The Collier County airport in Immokolee had the cheapest fuel around and a fairly good restaurant located in the Indian Casino, a short walk from the field. On my return flight I noticed a slight irregularity with my coolant temperature readings so when I returned to my home field I pulled the top cowl only to discover that the overflow reservoir was missing its cap. Apparently somewhere along the way I may not have fully secured same and it had come undone. While not a serious safety item, as it merely holds expanded coolant from the main reservoir, it could siphon off a bit of coolant, which would account for the slightly elevated temperatures. I decided to order a new cap and since I was also needing a replacement fuel pump to rectify some seepage from a seal, I elected to take the plane out of service so that these repairs could be made. That meant that I now had the time to attend Sunday's program.



The main entrance ramp to the show



The Air Forces gigantic C-5A cargo jet



The 4 engine Lockheed JetStar biz-jet

In the '60's it was used as Air Force II for the then Vice-President Lyndon Johnson

One of the first things that I came upon, after entering the show grounds, were the aircraft seen on the previous page. Then I viewed a DC-3 which displayed the American Airlines colors and logo. Back in the mid 1930's the **AA** carrier first began using the Douglas built Model 3 for its passenger service and this particular plane, the **Flagship Detroit** is the oldest flying DC-3 in service today. And it was "open for business".



Not only was the plane available for inspection, with one of its pilots up front giving a bit of its history, but a \$100 bill would buy a flight in this piece of aviation history on the following day.



The F-18 Hornet in its landing configuration



Of course the main reason that people go to an Air Show is to see planes fly and most want to see the jet fighters go through their places. While this particular show did not have the Air Force Thunderbirds or the Navy's Blue Angels on its roster, there were two F-18A Hornets from Shaw Air Force Base, located in my home state of South Carolina, on the flight line which were scheduled to perform. When I lived and flew out of Hilton Head I would often fly over Shaw Field and would view down in amazement as these warbirds went through their take off and landing routines. Today I was going to watch from ground level as they did both high speed passes at over 600 MPH as well as low speed landing approaches with gear and tailhook down and locked. Although their performance lasted for only 20 minutes or so, it alone was worth the \$20 price of admission. And, interesting to note, when they finally completed their demonstration with a final low speed pass, before roaring to altitude for their return to their Sumter, SC base, they flew right over my house and scared both Miriam and the dogs who raced to the back yard to see what all of the commotion was about.

And it was not only the Hornets that we got to see fly.

A bit later in the program we watched, in equal amazement, as a F-16 Viper fighter jet did its thing. It was a close call but the solo performance by that Viper pilot, I believe, had a slight edge. In any case, those who came to see fast and powerful military aircraft do their thing were, surely, not disappointed.

The Stuart Air show, however, was not limited to aerial fighting platforms. There was a WW II encampment area set up where all of the participants were donned in uniforms of the period and bore weapons from the era. Most fascinating to me was the display of armored vehicles from the 1940's. Having been a tank crewman during my "after college military days" (until I realized that my high school typing courses gave me the skills to become my Battalion's company clerk) spiked enough of an interest for me to spend some time viewing these "death coffins" up close. It is said that a tank, in actual battle conditions, has an average life expectancy of less than 30 minutes. The primary reason why I felt a lot safer sitting behind a 1960's manual typewriter than I did sitting behind the business end of a 90mm cannon mounted on my 1961 M-48 Patton medium duty tank (seen in the above photo).



The World War II tanks and half tracks were nowhere as big or powerful but still were impressive on the battlefield. Below and to the right is a picture of me in front of one of those fighting vehicles.



One of the highlights of the day was a WW II battle reenactment in which a dozen airborne parachutists exited a low flying C-46 transport, using replicas of the round style parachutes from the day. They landed near a "bridge" which they were ordered to "take", while the tanks engaged in mock battle with 30 & 50 caliber machine guns a-blazing and their 76 & 90 mm cannons firing. It was quite a show and demonstrated the bravery of those combat veterans who risked all to protect our country from the evils of the day. It was exciting, moving and awe-inspiring.



At most Air Shows patriotism is one of the foremost themes and this was displayed by the following two photos of both A Navy Seal jumper with the American Flag and Army Rangers carrying the Vietnam conflict MIA flag.



And, of course there are always aircraft in flight to observe. Below, left, are 4 AT-6 WW II primary trainers doing some close precision formation flying and afterward "making smoke" while on the ground.



And there were some very impressive performances given by small aircraft like the highly aerobatic Pitts Special, seen on the left, as it flies, literally 6 feet off the ground, under a 20 foot high ribbon at 160 MPH. And below, to the right, is perhaps the most unusual airplane of the show. It is a 1929 Waco Bi-plane which, in addition to its 450 HP radial engine, has strapped to its undercarriage a 3,000 lbs. of thrust General Electric jet.



Another adventurous performance was given by a husband and wife team in their Stearman Bi-plane. The husband flies at various speeds, attitudes and even while inverted, as wife traverses from cockpit to lower wing and then climbs to the upper wing where she is anchored for some very thrilling fly-bys. Hopefully she is fitted with a parachute as well. All in all, it was a day very well spent and if one cannot fly one's self, then watching some very accomplished and professional pilots "strut their stuff" is a very good alternative.

