



The ThunderWord

Thunderbird Field EAA Chapter 1217

August 2022

Scottsdale, Arizona

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Greetings from my corner of the hangar! Last month the holes in the Swiss cheese lined up and we ended up not having a meeting. Unfortunately our newsletter distribution got messed up too. Remember you can always go to www.ThunderbirdField.com to download the latest newsletter.

I was ready to get out of the heat and the trip to Oshkosh was welcome relief! The Saturday before the show started there was a nasty thunderstorm passed through with high winds and drenching rain. It looked like the Claw tie down kit was thing to have and not one of those pulled loose even when the ground was wet.

The one thing about Oshkosh is that it is big and a little bit of sensory overload. As the pandemic paranoia died down it was like everyone decided to fly to Oshkosh. There were a lot more planes than the past few years. Where else can you see five B-25 bombers in a row. How about four P-40s or four Rutan Defiants, there was even a Vari Viggen parked with them. There was something for everyone and it took days to think you saw everything. Chapter 1217 member John Davis was a homebuilt judge and would call up and tell me to checkout the Javron Cub on floats or the RV-8 with a HUD system and dual loop fire detection system! It was a ton of walking but it was really fun.

Out of the blue I even separately ran in to two collage buddies. It was kind of an awakening when guys you have known for decades aren't talking about their new type rating or far-flung beach bar, but are talking about retirement and how much fun they are having flying their planes and buying projects! I think I will join their ranks next year.

Every year I come back from Oshkosh motivated to fly more fun stuff and finish a few projects, this year was no exception.

See you around the aerodrome!

Curtis

AUGUST CHAPTER MEETING

The August meeting of Thunderbird Field EAA Chapter 1217 will be held on Thursday, August 18th beginning at 7 pm. The location is the Thunderbird Room in the Scottsdale Airport Terminal building. The address is 15000 North Airport Drive. This month's guest speaker was the brain child of Chapter Vice President Terry Emig. He called up one day and said how would you like Mike Rutledge to talk at the August Chapter meeting? Terry put the pieces together and made it happen.

Michael Rutledge is a 27 active-duty year veteran with almost 12 years enlisted including a 3-year assignment as a Helicopter Rescue Swimmer, followed by 8 years as a Navy SEAL. While at SEAL Team One, he served as an M-60 gunner, Air Operations Specialist, Advanced Training Instructor and Platoon Leading Petty Officer. In 2002, Mike transferred to the U.S. Army to become a Warrant Officer Aviator. Upon graduation from flight school, he was directly assigned to the "Night Stalkers" of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne) where he served for 13 years as an MH-47G pilot. His last military assignment has been serving as the Commander of the West Point Flight Detachment at the United States Military Academy.

Mike is also an accomplished aviation author, consultant, speaker, and airshow pilot

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specializing in vintage WWII aircraft, as well as spending his summers flying crop dusters in Arizona. He is also the President of the Stearman Restorers Association. A huge kudo to Terry Emig for getting this month's speaker lined up.

MIKE RUTLEDGE ON FLYING

Aerial application is a relatively obscure flying profession piloting large, single seat, turbine tailwheel airplanes. Add that attraction to legally strafing the ground low and fast, dozens, if not hundreds of times a day. The catch? It's extremely specialized, and requires the aviator to be half farmer, and half fighter pilot (in that order).

The best part of aviation is that so many diverse corners exist to satisfy every pilot's personality and sense of adventure. I spent a career flying big, black, fire-breathing iron buffaloes, and never thought another form of flying outside the military could fill the void when I left the 160th. It's not landing to the "X" in the middle of the night, nor is it punching the afterburner inverted after dropping hate on a

target, but it's as close as you can get without wearing a military uniform. Crop dusting is the near perfect combination of precision, speed, and adrenaline, with a little freedom and patriotism mixed in. There's no flying more rewarding, or American than directly helping farmers feed the world.

I genuinely appreciate the technical knowledge and responsibility required of the crew every time I board a 737, and sometimes think flying a Lear 55 or Gulfstream V would be a rush. However, I've faced the reality that despite almost three decades of supposed refinement in the military, I'm a knuckle dragger. I could pin on shiny wings, strap on a tie and epaulets every day, but it's not my first choice. You're far more likely to find me happily climbing out of a cockpit, gritty and sweaty, wearing a dirty T-shirt, Carhartts and a pair of boots. The combined decades in the SEAL Teams, and flying special operations helicopters may have produced a diamond too rough to polish. Don't misread my intent; agricultural aviators I've been privileged to hang with are some of the

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RV-15 was always mobbed at Oshkosh

most intellectual and proficient pilots I've ever met. Not to mention a good number have walked away from the heavy iron and shiny corporate ships to fly agriculture. There's just no circumventing the fact that farming, and supporting farmers requires long hours and getting dirty, even if you're flying. My first airplane ride at five years old was in my dad's WWII Stearman off a grass strip, and the hook was pretty much set. From then on, all I ever wanted to do was fly big, powerful tailwheel airplanes for a living. Flying taildraggers is a dying skill set, so the career options are limited. The details of how I traveled the road from there to here, via the ultra-circuitous route, is another story entirely.

AIRVENTURE HAPPY HOUR

It has now been a 24-year tradition of Chapter 1217 members attending the Oshkosh AirVenture Fly-In to get together one evening and compare sightings and stories. This year on the first day of the Fly-In, we had our annual AIRVENTURE HAPPY HOUR AND FISH FRY at WENDT'S ON THE LAKE. It was a well attended event with 26 members and friends showing up. Several of the members that August 2022

showed up had come a long way to be there. Ron Landon came from upstate New York, Don Londholm from Iowa and John Davis made the trek down from Alaska!

OSHKOSH HIGHLIGHTS

RV-15

From the moment it landed Vans latest design had people mobbed around it trying to get a look at what secret innovations the plane had. One of many unique features is the main landing gear that has an internal dampening system to smooth out high descent rate landings and stop them from rebounding the plane. The sales people were always pointing out this was a concept demonstrator. To judge public reaction and there was no date if and when kits might be available. The plane is constructed of a combination of driven and pull rivets and looks to be very well engineered. Cruise speed is 140 kts at 75% power.

Messerschmitt BF-109

There were actually two restored BF 109's in the warbird area. One had the original engine and the other had a Merlin with modified

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Messerschmidt Bf 109 fresh out of restoration shop at Oshkosh

exhaust stacks so it looked like an original engine. One of the two had just come out of a

museum quality restoration and was unbelievably detailed.

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This is the way to move your project. Four F-16s arriving at Williams Gateway Airport

Perlan/Egret

Perlan is the pressurized sailplane that has flown to 77,000 feet setting a world altitude record. The pilots and crew were very eager to tell everything about the glider and share their story. The Egret is a spy plane built by Grob in Germany. It was modified to be used as a towplane for Perlan. It had all sorts of bays for cameras and sensors and could be used for a variety of special ops surveillance missions. The company actually has two of them based at Dennison, Texas. In the towplane mode it flew to the tip of South America and would tow the Perlan up to 55,000 feet where the glider would ride upper altitude mountain waves. It was interesting that when Perlan is in California they tow it with a Pawnee.

Van's Fiftieth Anniversary

Many people have been critical of AirVenture for showcasing the loons and scammers in their airshows and not featuring the real planes people own and fly. This year they went over the top featuring a 50-plane flyover of Vans airplanes. While the flyover was going on two separate formation airshow demonstrations were going on. After that there was a RV-8 single ship airshow performance. Everyone did a great job and it was a great way to honor Van and all the employees that make it happen.

Private F-16 Flies in Mesa

Earlier this summer a Ukrainian Antonov AN-124 landed at Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport and unloaded four, disassembled F-16s recently purchased from Israel by the newly established Top Aces Company F-16 Center of Excellence.

Thanks to this deal, Top Aces is now the first company to offer 4th generation fighters to provide "Red Air" aircraft for the training of US military pilots.

Top Aces signed in 2020 a deal with the Israeli Ministry of Defense for the unprecedented sale of 29 F-16 Netz (Hawk), as they are locally known, which were retired from the Israeli Air Forces at the end of 2016.

The company has now finished the restoration and taken one of these jets aloft for the first time. This also marks the first time a 4th generation fighter of any kind has been flown by a private adversary support firm.

The maiden flight originated from Top Aces' newly minted F-16 Center of Excellence at Mesa Gateway Airport. This is where the aggressor firm, which has its main headquarters in Canada, is now making Gateway home for its budding F-16 operations. Ultimately, its fleet of Vipers is set to swell to 29 jets.

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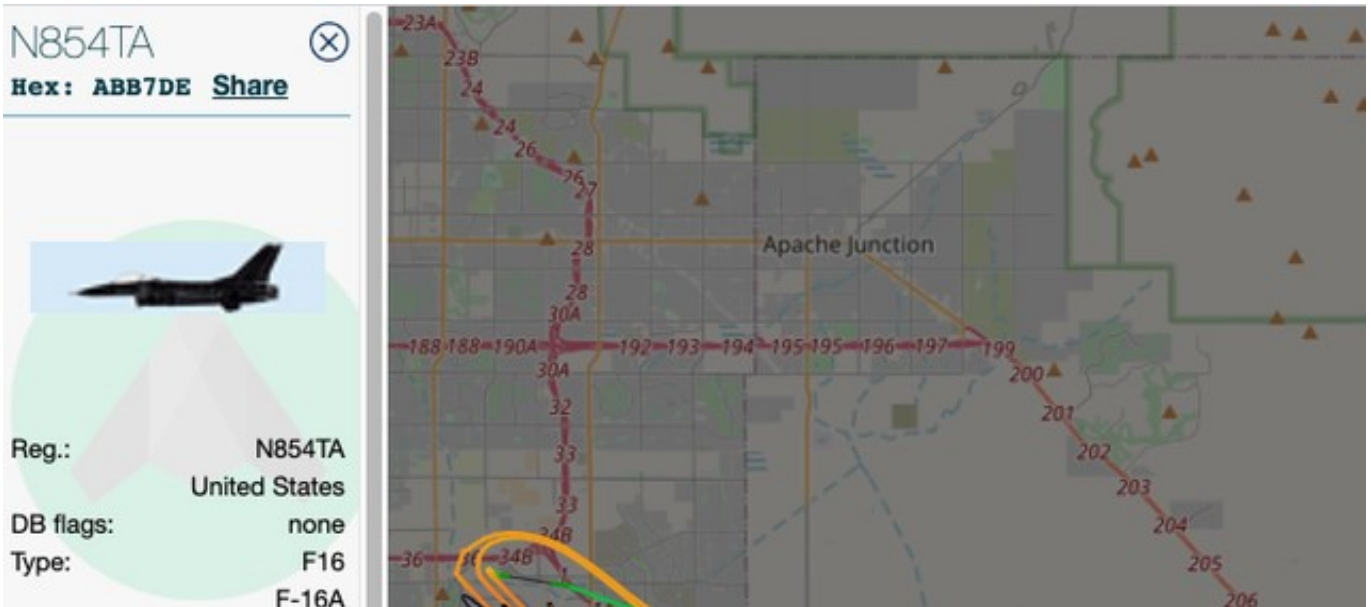


First Civilian F-16 After Restoration

The flight of F-16A 78-0322, which had "Billy Bob" (not his real name) at the controls, lasted roughly an hour and saw the aircraft venture to the east of its home base for a number of checks, before safely returning to Mesa Gateway Airport. The aircraft itself is historic. It took part in Israel's famous attack on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981 and is also a MiG killer.

Top Aces plans to use its private 4th generation fighter fleet to support the

Pentagon's growing demand for adversary air support, acting as advanced aggressors for Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps flight crews. Currently, adversary service providers largely use 3rd generation fighters, some of which are highly upgraded, to mimic more advanced threats at a cheaper cost than using actual 4th generation fighters. Top Aces also operates a fleet of Super Tucannos from its base in Arizona. If you want to follow the flights they are posted on several ADSB tracking sites.



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MISC GOODIES

LONGEZ AND SONEX

Two airplanes for sale at Thunder Ridge air park
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