

DIXIE CZECH'S

A Story of Czechoslovakian Airplanes

in the

Mississippi Delta

Like the ever-popular, beautiful, country-western stars, the Dixie Chicks; the Dixie Czech's Autumn L-39 fly-in/formation clinic at GWO was a unique and outstanding aviation event which promises to be enhanced and have growth in the future.

When Dick Schmidt of Boca Raton, FL, came to Greenwood, MS, (GWO) for the annual 'The Airmen' Formation Clinic (May 1999) in his Aero Vodochody L-39 Albatross, he was joined by several other L-39's who all had a great time, coupled with intense learning.

Schmidt contacted Vernon Ricks, perennial organizer of the GWO Clinic, shortly afterward, reflected the cumulative desires of the L-39 pilots to have an exclusive L-39 event, and a plan was enacted for the 'all (L-39) jet' formation clinic at GWO in Autumn of 1999.

The dates of October 20, 21, 22, 23, 1999, were set for the clinic with participants urged to arrive on Tuesday, October 19th, so that they would all be ready to begin the course at 8:30 A.M. on Wednesday, the first full day.

Each participant was to have provided copies of all his airman and airplane documents along with his individual desires and skill level, prior to his attendance. Also, each participant was required to have a 'safety pilot' on board with him at all times. The participant's registration fee funded the room and meals for a safety pilot for him, as well as the pilot's own meals.

Dick Schmidt constructed a list of L-39 owners and contacted them by both mail and telephone.

Dick answered many, many questions, as did Ricks, from the L-39 pilots. The hard work by Schmidt paid off with a great deal of interest and 22 advance registrations to attend by the L-39 owners. There were actually 14 airplanes that attended.

Vernon Ricks is a bright-eyed, white haired, 60-ish, bear-of-a-man who is cordial and seems to have the patience of Job with the pilots. Ricks has conducted these types of events many, many times and has long-time jet experience. Ricks gave the area and safety briefings, along with the formation ground school. Ricks' formation teachings are in strict accordance with F.A.S.T. guidelines, procedures, and concepts.

Ricks' formation and acrobatic instruction is done in a unique way that commands attention and participation, but is simple to comprehend and absorb. The formation candidates had the classic hangar-floor-walk-through, a Ricks trade mark, to be certain that each pilot understood 'what to do' before he was near a flying airplane.

The jet flying syllabus at GWO was a very slightly modified version of the U. S. Navy T-2 Buckeye training program and was provided by Bert Zeller of Lauderdale, MS. The program consisted of a minimum of 2 single-ship flights to evaluate the pilot, then a minimum of 2 two-ship formation flights. Then followed a minimum of 4 four-ship flights, with each flight giving ample opportunity to modify the curricula for a given pilot to strengthen any needed area in the student's training path. Each safety pilot actually entered written, signed comment on each sortie so that the candidate and any successor safety, or check, pilots would all know the training results at any point.

The local FBO, Kimmel Aviation, hosted the event with deeply discounted fuel pricing, free use of their facilities, line personnel that were very familiar with the L-39, and the FBO providing two of the evening meals.

At Dick Schmidt's earlier suggestion, the FBO ramp was organized into 'colored' lanes with numbered parking spots. Each airplane maintained the same parking spot throughout the event.

Again, at Schmidt's suggestion, refueling was accomplished by the pilot placing a colored streamer on his pitot tube. The FBO fuelled the mains, then placed the streamer on the pilot's cockpit entry step to indicate the fuelling had been accomplished.

The FBO maintained a running account so that there was only one fuel settlement for each pilot. The FBO trucks were cruising the flight line after each sortie, so there was no loss of training time due to lack of fuel on airplanes. The airplanes were fueled during the pilot's debriefing sessions and at the end of each flying day.

Valley Ricks, Secretary/Treasurer of The Airmen, Inc. attended to the registrations, food, and contributed her general good spirit and attitude. Valley kept several brands of soft drinks; coffee; bottled water; plentiful, varied snacks; light over-the-counter medications; and a good assortment of fruit and sandwiches continuously available for all involved during every day of the event.

The evening meals were robust with ham or chicken, steak, catfish, and beef brisket or Bar-B-Que' d ribs, with all the appropriate trimmings for each, being the cuisine for the respective four nights of the clinic. There was great camaraderie among all the attendees at each evening meal while many new friendships were formed.

There were six different practice areas radiating, spoke-like, Westward from GWO. There were two spare formation practice areas, and two dedicated aerobatic, or ACM (air combat maneuvering) areas, one due North, and the other due South of GWO. Each practice area was about 50 nm away, over an airport, and was clearly delineated on a briefing guide with its identifier, heading and distance to it, discrete communication frequency, etc. There were three Initial Points (IP's) for return flight coordination with the GWO Control Tower. Each flight had VFR flight following to and from each practice area by the Memphis Air Traffic Control Center. The combination of these factors provided very positive separation and safety for all flights during the event.

Each participant, pilot, safety pilot, etc. had his own 3" X 12" magnetic name plate that was used to 'pair' pilots/safety pilots in each practice area for each sortie on two large, magnetic, scheduling boards. At a glance, anyone could tell who was where, doing what, at any given moment. There were no individual sorties by solo pilots during the 4 day training portion of the event. Aerobatic competency (solo flight) was offered by Ricks on Friday and Saturday by appointment. The aerobatic safety brief was widely attended on Thursday night.

John McAvoy of Czech Jets of Hollister, CA, was present for the event and gave a very enlightening presentation on the L-39 ejection system on Friday night.

4 Rudy Beaver of International Jets of Gadsden, AL, sent a service truck with two technicians and made them available for the entire event. International Jets brought a tow bar, several spare wheels and tires, other fast moving parts, plus the intimate 'know-how' of their Director of Maintenance, Joe Siska. Rudy Beaver, having been meeting with the Government all along the way, gave a very informative presentation on Saturday about the 'state of the ATF import ban' on Eastern Bloc turbine powered airplanes.

By Saturday noon, many candidates who had been nearly ready for F.A.S.T. Wingman formation ratings before coming to GWO, along with two, new F.A.S.T. Leaders had been rated. The Leader candidates joined 'four ships' on 'four ships' in the rating check rides. This was a first in U.S. Civil jet airplane operations.

This event provided approximately 16-20 hours of solid formation practice flight for those who needed it, and by the last day, each pilot seemed to be empowered with a new confidence in himself and his airplane that did not exist prior to the event.

Several people interested in owning L-39's came to the event including; Deep Damie of Washington, DC, with Chris Reed of Charlotte, NC. Most interestingly, Pierre Mauroy learned of the event on the internet and travelled from France with his wife to participate. All prospective owners attended formation and aerobatic/ACM briefings, class room lectures, and festivities just like the regular attendees with each prospect being offered cockpit briefings and rides.

In attendance;

SAFETY PILOTS		L-39 PILOTS	
Bob Bowen	Memphis, TN	Tim Brutsche	Augusta, MI
Mark Chamlis	Tallahassee, FL	Gabe Ehrenstein	Boca Raton, FL
Richard Drake	Tuscaloosa, AL	Lee Gilbert	Jersey Shore, PA
Michael Eberhardt	Meridian, MS	Chris Grigoriou	Glastonbury, CT
Peter Fraser	Lee, MA	Bruce Holecek	Naples, FL
Jim Goolsby	Crescent City, FL	Skip Holm	Calabasas, CA
Randy Hatchell	Timmons ville, SC	Angelo Lagonia	Cordova, TN
Scott Patterson	Selina, AL	Stu Lamb	Stuart, FL
Kim Pruyne	Washington, MA	Kevin Mahaney	Bangor, ME
Tommy Rose	Hickory, MS	David Mills	Moline, IL
Mark Shelley	Jacksonville, FL	John Murphy	Chesterfield, MO
Allan Tinnes	Lamar, CO	Esper Petersen	Gurnee, IL
Ray Ward	Seabrook, SC	Dick Schmidt	Boca Raton, FL
Bert Zeller	Lauderdale, MS	Dan Sullivan	Medina, MN
		Scott Sweet	Naples, FL
		Toby Tyler	Greenville, SC