

All RedStar Mini-Camp

BY Gil Lipaz

Within a couple months after my father, Michael "Pipes" Li-Paz, bought his CJ6, we were headed to our first All Red Star event in Porterville. I was the GIB with zero front seat hours in the Nanchang, we flew there on comfortable seat cushions as neither of us had parachutes, we had never participated in a formal formation clinic before and we were about to spend several days on the ground looking up in incredible envy as the rest of the contingent flew sortie after sortie. It became abundantly clear that while we had some of the required equipment (ok, just the CJ), we were missing the rest, missing the formation ground-school knowledge and missing basic formation training that would make us safe participants at this terrific event.

The following year we vowed to come back as full-fledged Red Star pilots. I was now flying front seat and we were both wearing flight suits bearing Red Star patches and sitting on brand new parachutes. Having had some formation practice during the year, Pipes managed to get some air time with a couple of the brave safety pilots and really improved his skills last year. I was still a novice to formation but was invited to ride as the GIB with several leads and had the pleasure of getting some intense aerobatics training with Spanky. That flight made me a little queasy in the stomach but also made me very comfortable



First Briefing Of The Day!

with the capabilities of the CJ. I believed in its abilities and in its user-friendliness. Thanks Spanky. (Yes, I did crouch down to kiss the ground when we landed, but I had a blast up there!!) I also got a chance to fly the bombing missions with Pipes as my bombardier and had what I claimed to be the closest hit but Hartley "Postal" Postlethwaite decided I had come below the hard deck so he yelled a bunch of foul Navy terms over the radio and sent me away with a DQ. Surely he needs glasses. (He probably knew I was ex Air Force.)

Anyway, I returned from All Red Star determined to spend this past year learning formation and



Attentive Participants

to return as a true participant. This year has been my learning year as I fly as often as I can with the SoCal Tiger Squadron and hope to kick my safety pilot out of my back seat pretty soon! The SoCal pilots are a great bunch of guys and given the good weather down here, we get plenty of opportunities to burn fuel and oil!

We also have gorgeous geography over which to fly from the snow-capped mountains near Santa Barbara to the open waters of the Pacific Ocean to the jewel off our coast, Catalina Island.

Flying formation has been challenging, educational, humbling and fun and the most fun of all was the weekend we called All Red Star Mini Camp. Mini Camp was our version of an organized training weekend in which we had a dozen aircraft descend on KTOA, home base of Craig "Hayzuse" Ekberg for a weekend of ground-school and flight training in preparation for Porterville. The local Ramada motel sits across

the street from the airport and is owned by one of our local pilots, Robin "Hotel" Hou, so most of the guys stayed the night there using the special Red Star discount! Under the direction of "Hayzuse," we brushed up on the Formation Manual, divided the airspace, divided the pilots and flew several sorties each day. The briefings and debriefings made the Torrance fbo look like a military air station. We even

hung an RPA sign on the pilot room door and turned it into Mini Camp HQ. This former US Army Air Force base must have felt a small amount of nostalgia having a dozen radial engines and all this esprit de cor back on its turf. Let's just admit it: We looked damned good!

The first day of Mini Camp coincided with the AOPA Summit which was occurring only a few miles away at Long Beach Airport so following the morning missions we did a large rejoin over the Palos Verdes Peninsula and six planes participated in a low pass

to commence the next day's schedule: Briefings, fuel, pre-flights, sorties and debriefs. And as the day ended and the sun set its beautiful orange over the Pacific, Torrance Municipal returned to its former state of relative quiet. The donut crumbs and cold coffee were cleaned up and the planes departed.



Preflight

no opportunity to fly formation is missed and while I am still a ways from getting my Fast Card, the opportunity to continue to train, to learn, to fly with great pilots, and to make wonderful friendships is most rewarding of all. Fly safe and see you in Porterville.



Organizing Mini Camp took some effort (not everyone likes to return emails in a timely manner or, for that matter, ever!) but was well worth it. We hoped for 4-6 planes and ended up with a dozen, so we are calling it a great success! Not only was it good for training, but it brought together many pilots from the local vicinity

who had not previously flown together and many of whom had never been to All Red Star. The new camaraderie is terrific! Since Mini Camp, there has been a significant increase in training flights among us with smaller groups getting together on weekends or any time we can call in sick from work. Now, even the \$100 hamburger flights have a training component and



Six Ship Flight Descending For AOPA Summit Fly-By

over the Summit crowd. That was a thrill for them and for us but the real highlight was us passing over Fifi, the only flying B-29, as it made its own approach to wow the Summit attendees.

As the first day ended we all checked into our rooms and then carpoled over to the lovely Ekberg homestead where we were wined and dined (and tequilla'd!) by our wonderful host, Hanne Ekberg. The next morning began with a tour of an exquisite car collection housed in one of the Torrance hangars. We salivated over the amazing collection including many models worth much more than our Yaks and Nanchangs. We returned to the HQ room



"Heyzuse" Debriefs Gil Lipaz, Pete Fowler and "Pipes"