



# OPA-LOCKA'S PROPLINERS

LOCATED VERY NEAR MIAMI, THIS AIRFIELD IS ONE OF AMERICA'S LAST PROPLINER BASTIONS

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Located just eleven-miles north of downtown Miami, Miami-Opa Locka Executive Airport (OPF) traces its roots back to the mid-1920s when aviation pioneer Glenn Curtiss founded the City of Opa-Locka. The airport became Naval Air Station Miami and was an important training base during WWII. Reverting to civilian ownership in the early 1960s, the field was renamed Opa-Locka Airport and, for a short time in the mid-1960s, it was ranked as the busiest airport in the world!

Today OPF is one of five airports operated by the Miami-Dade Aviation Department, which explains the 2014 name change to Miami-Opa Locka Executive Airport. The airport is also home to Coast Guard Air Station Miami.

I first visited OPF in 2004 shortly after Carlos Gomez began the restoration of Douglas DC-7B N836D and was fascinated by the large collection of Propliners and the laid back atmosphere of the airport. Since then, I've made many trips to OPF and have witnessed numerous

changes. The Miami-Dade Aviation Department aggressively markets the airport as the premier Miami gateway for corporate aircraft and the airport hosts Signature Flight Support, Orion Jet Center, and Fontainebleau Aviation. All three FBOs cater to high-end corporate jet customers and, in an effort to spruce up the airport's image, the airport authority has overseen the removal of most of the stored and derelict Propliners. In addition to the stored aircraft, there was a major aircraft scrapping operation going



Opa-Locka is one of the very few places on earth where one can see a Douglas C-118A come to life. With a satisfying burst of smoke from #3, N70BF needs just to have Pan American titles and a blue Pan Am "meatball" on the tail and the photo could have been taken 60-years ago.



C-131F N345GS in the middle of a #1 engine change during February. The plane had been a mosquito sprayer for a dozen years as N8149H before being retired in 2010.



Three Convairs and a Douglas C-118A on the Florida Air Transport ramp.



N70BF coming in for a low pass over sensor equipment on the runway at Dade-Collier Training and Transition Airport during the initial testing of the big Doug's spray dispersant system. This deserted airport is 35-mi west of Miami in the Everglades and was a perfect location for the testing.



Carrying new Conquest Air titles, C-131B N145GT prepares to depart on the first of two daily round-trips to The Bahamas. This was Conquest's first Convair and had been stored on the field for several years prior to entering service.



After arriving at OPF in late August 2016, C-131F N343GS underwent a complete overhaul before entering service with Conquest on 24 February of this year. The Convair is named *Uriel* in memory of Uriel Bristol, who was killed in the crash of CV340 N153JR on 15 March 2012 in San Juan, Puerto Rico.



FAC DC-3 N271SE receives work on its #2 at OPF. Although the Gooney carries prominent Florida Air Cargo titles, it still has the basic color scheme from its days with Missionary Flights International.

## FLORIDA AIR TRANSPORT (FAT)

Founded in 1982 as a Part 125 on-demand cargo operator, FAT is a subsidiary of Aero Group Holdings, LLC and specializes in aerial dispersant services for emergency oil spill response under Part 125 and 137. The company currently bases DC-6A (C-118B) N70BF at OPF and DC-4 N460WA at Castle Airport near Merced, California. FAT began aerial dispersant services during the summer of 2012 with the Merced-based DC-4 followed shortly by the DC-6A at OPF in early 2013. N406WA had been operated by ARDCO for many years as a fire-bomber before being acquired by FAT in 2010 and converted to a dispersant sprayer a year later. N70BF saw service with a number of US and Mexican operators after being retired by the US Navy. FAT acquired the DC-6A in 2000 and it was used as a freighter prior to being converted to a dispersant sprayer in 2012. Prior to entering the aerial dispersant business, the company operated an assortment of DC-4, DC-6, and DC-7 aircraft on Part 125 cargo charters around the Caribbean and continental United States. With corporate offices in nearby Miami Lakes, Marc

on in the southeastern corner of the airport with retired jetliners arriving on a regular basis to be scrapped. Aircraft ranged in size from DC-9s to B-747s and it was sad to see them shutting down their engines for the final time. The scrapper is now gone and the only stored Propliners I saw during my most recent visit were three Ukrainian Antonov An 12s and a Convair CV580. Airport development also includes non-aviation uses and recently a number of buildings dating back to WWII were torn down to make way for the construction of a 900,000-sq-ft distribution center for *Amazon.com*.

While most of the stored Propliners

are gone, OPF is still home to six companies operating an assortment of vintage Propliners and is a must stop on the itinerary for any serious propliner enthusiast visiting the Miami area. While visitors are not free to roam the ramps as they were in the past, OPF is not the fortress that MIA has become and most operators are friendly and will allow escorted ramp visits if they're not too busy. Current Propliner operators on the field include Florida Air Transport (FAT); Conquest Air Cargo (CAC); Florida Air Cargo (FAC); Miami Air Lease/Charterlines; Atlantic Air Cargo (AAC); and TMF Aircraft.