

# CHRISTMAS 2008



By: The Puerto Rico Flyers  
Galín Hernández & Millie Santiago

# Table of Contents

<u>Table of Contents.....</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Ch 1 – Christmas in Costa Rica.....</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Ch 2 - Change of Plans.....</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Ch 3 - Roatan and Its Charms.....</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>Ch 4 - The Waiting Game.....</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Ch 5 - Roatan to San Pedro Sula.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Ch 6 - Heading Home.....</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>ABBREVIATIONS.....</u>	<u>17</u>

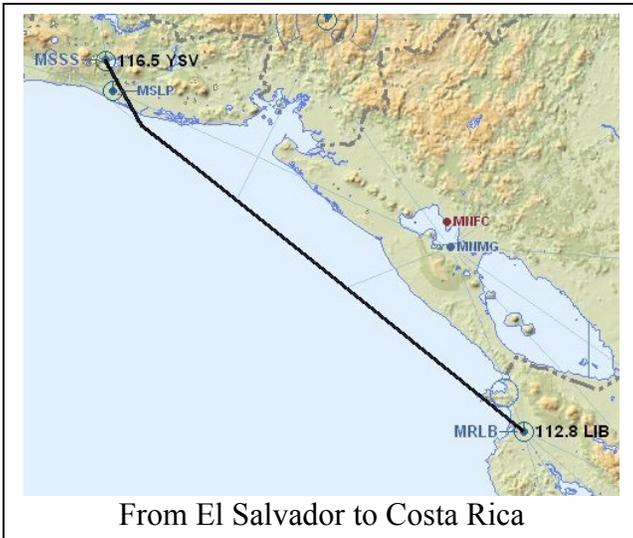
# Ch 1 – Christmas in Costa Rica

It was Christmas of 2008 and it would be the first time we spent it without our daughters and family. We had recently gotten back from meeting our new grand daughter Jazmynn and wasn't able to stay until the holidays. Then I came up with the idea. Let's visit Uncle Orlando in Costa Rica. This was something we've wanted to do for a while.

My uncle is retired and travels to Puerto Rico, Costa Rica and Florida. He married a Costa Rican and they were spending Christmas at their new home with her family. I sent a last minute e-mail to Orlando to see if it was possible to go visit him. He said YES, of course. This all took place on the night of December 22<sup>nd</sup>. So we decided to prepare for our next flight. Millie, being the organized person at the house, started packing the night of the 23<sup>rd</sup> and placed the bags next to the entrance to be loaded in our car. The plan was to head to Ilopango airport as soon as we got out of our early dismissal from work to fly to Costa Rica. Millie went to work the next day all excited expecting to spend Christmas in Costa Rica.

I woke up on December 24<sup>th</sup> about 6:30am, earlier than usual, to start packing my bags for the trip. I was looking forward to the two hours of flying it would take to get to Liberia, Costa Rica (MRLB), seeing my uncle and the adventure it would bring. We had just

flown back to San Salvador, El Salvador (MSSS) from Brunswick Georgia (KSSI) on the 13<sup>th</sup> so this would be a relatively easy flight. I also knew the airplane was in great shape except for the autopilot not working. The many hours of verifying the route and making sure all the paperwork was in order was finally behind me. It was now just put the bags in the car and head out. Or so I thought.



I started my final verifications to have the latest information before leaving the house. The weather satellite showed scattered clouds along the route and MRLB was forecasting VFR weather for the entire week. Sweet! I printed out the flight plan as follows:

MSSS – SEDRO – ANAPO – ARLEN – ELENA – MRLB

I would be flying at 8,500ft which would keep in cool air (natural air conditioning) and where the airplane gives me the best performance. The only thing left was to announce my arrival to Immigrations & Customs at MRLB.

I had a phone number for the MRLB airport authority so I called. The person who answered the phone was very friendly and told me he could take the information right there. I filed for a 3:30L arrival and verified they had 100LL Avgas available even though I would not need it. No sooner had I finished giving him the information he asked where I would be departing to afterwards. When I told him we would be staying a few days at MRLB he told me that there was no overnight ramp space available and that I could not

leave the airplane there. It was the high season and every GA parking spot was already taken. He recommended I fly on to San Jose and park there.

Now this was a BIG problem. My Uncle, Orlando, was going to pick us up at the Liberia airport and we were going to stay with him since he has a house close by. If we had to park in San Jose, that meant a 5 hour drive both when we arrived and when we would return. This was something I could not ask Orlando to do. I thanked the airport authority guy and cancelled the arrival. We were not going to Costa Rica this Christmas.

## Ch 2 - Change of Plans

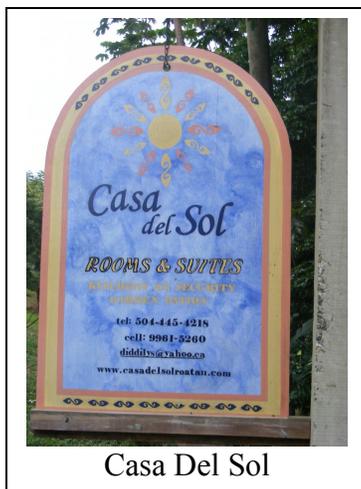
I called Millie and gave her the bad news. I could tell in her voice she was a little disappointed, just as I was. I really wanted to go. While we talked, we started thinking about alternatives. She asked “What about Roatan Island, Honduras?” This was an idea I hadn’t thought of. I told her it was worth a try and I would check to see what it would take to fly there.

A call to the Roatan Airport Authority and I found out there was not a lot needed. Just the regular paperwork, like any other country and a flight plan. They had plenty of space on the ramp for overnight parking and the landing fees were not that much. They do not have 100LL Avgas, but I could refuel in San Pedro Sula (MFLM) on the way back if needed. Since the trip there would only be around 2 hours I carry enough fuel to get there and back. But it would be cutting it close, at least for my comfort. The flight there would be:

MSSS – SULMA – NAGEL – TIRNA – LMS – RUBRO – UTILA - MHRO

Except for the fact that I would have to climb over 12,000ft mountains, the flying part would not be hard. Especially since we had just flown over the same mountain range a few days before when we came back to San Salvador. Now we needed a place to stay for the 3 nights.

I called some friends of ours that visit Roatan often and they recommended a place called Bananarama Dive Resort at the West End. I called but they were completely sold out. They recommended the Mayan Princess, gave me their number and I called. They too were sold out for the holidays. They recommended the Lands End Resort, but it was the same result. Sold out! They gave me an INTERNET site ([www.roatannet.com](http://www.roatannet.com)) that had a lot of hotel contacts. So on-line I went to find a place to stay.



Casa Del Sol

Starting from the top I called the different hotels but with the same results. EVERYTHING was full and nobody had a room for us. I had called 15 different places with no luck and was about to give up when I got through to Casa Del Sol Guest House. Sharon answered the phone and told me they had a room available due to a cancellation for \$65.00/night but it was only available until the 27<sup>th</sup>. This was perfect since that was when we wanted to leave. She told me a taxi ride from the airport to the guest house was about 45 minutes and would cost about \$20.00 for both of us. I booked the room on the spot, hung up and called Millie with the news. We were going to Roatan Island, Honduras for Christmas!

The first thing Millie said was “we had to change everything we packed. we packed for a family visit to include nightlife and now we are going to the beach for three days. THAT’S SO COOL!” I told her I had to re-do the flight profile and that we could pack after she got off work at noon.

Millie arrived just before noon and hurriedly packed her bags. Going to the beach for three days is a lot easier than visiting family. We only packed one small piece of

luggage and two back packs. Flip flops, bathing suits, shorts, T-shirts and sun tan lotion is all we needed. Now we were travelling light. With everything in the car we drove to the Ilopango airport.

We arrived at the airport about 1:15L and loaded the airplane up with our small amount of baggage. I did the pre-flight and the airplane looked as good as it did when we arrived from the United States. I then taxied the airplane to the Aero Club fuel pumps and told the attendant to fill it up all the way while I filed the flight plan. Millie went into the Aero Club to buy some soda's and bottled water for the trip. Around 2:30L we got back in the airplane, taxied to MSSS runway 33 and took off.

The climb out was uneventful and the air was smooth. By the time we arrived at SULMA, El Salvador Center handed us off to Honduras and we were at our initial cruise altitude of 7,500ft. Since I knew the mountains were high along the route and there were scattered clouds all over, I continued the climb. When we arrived at NAGEL we were already at 13,500ft, well above any mountains along the route. Up here the air is fairly cold so we both had to completely close the air vents to stay comfortable. Even though we were at 13,500ft we were still showing 110Kts IAS. Not bad for a normally aspirated engine. At this rate it would take about 20 minutes to TIRNA, our next check point. With the airplane trimmed out, I had little to do but monitor the instruments, lean the engine for maximum range and chat with Millie. True to form we arrived at TIRNA and descended back to 7,500ft for the rest of the flight.



En Route Clouds

At LMS we took a right turn and headed direct to Roatan Island. Unfortunately we now had a strong headwind as we headed towards Roatan. After a while we were over water and we descended to 5,500ft for the rest of the flight. At this altitude we would have a great view of the water below us and the entire scenery. Skirting around scattered fluffy clouds gave me a great chance to enjoy flying the airplane while Millie watched the scenery. Another 55 minutes and I had the Roatan airport in sight.



Roatan Airport

Checking in with the tower they cleared me to land on runway 06. It is an easy overwater approach with plenty of visibility and operational VASI lights. After 2.2 hours of flying we were on the ground in Roatan. I landed a little long and let the airplane slow down on its own without using brakes. This took me a little past the terminal exit so I had to back track on the runway a little while an Airbus A319 approached to land. Needless to say I got off the runway quickly and parked in front of the international arrival ramp.

We had been through Immigrations & Customs in Mexico so we were expecting something similar here. It was so easy! The processing in the terminal was fast and when I asked about fees they told me they are paid upon departure. They also pointed me to where the nearby GA ramp is and told me to go ahead and secure the airplane there. The entire process from landing, clearing Immigrations & Customs and securing the airplane took just over 1 hour. While I secured the airplane, Millie got a taxi and was waiting for me when I finished. I tied the airplane down and put the cover on it. The cover does not stop rain and the airplane leaks a bit when it rains real hard. To overcome this I have a brown plastic tarp I put under the cover which stops the leak nicely. I knew it would rain a lot so I put the tarp on and secured the airplane. I was very impressed with the way the authorities treated me. They really go out of their way to make GA feel welcome to the island.

The ride to Casa Del Sol was interesting. The taxi driver spoke both Spanish and English so as we rode he gave us a history lesson about Roatan. He was very adamant on how important tourism is to Roatan and how they work very hard in keeping it safe for the tourist. He talked a lot, not giving us a chance to ask questions. The road to West End is not well paved with lots of pot holes and many places where it is just dirt. We bounced around a lot on the way there, but that was part of the adventure. By now the sun had set and it was dark. There are no street lights on the road so we did not get to see much. Just listen to the driver and bounce around.

After about 40 minutes we took a turn and suddenly the road became well lit. Signs pointed to different hotels and guest houses so we knew we were near West End. Casa Del Sol was right there on the left and the driver parked outside. He helped us bring our bag into the guest house and gave us his business card if we needed his services.



Casa Del Sol

## Ch 3 - Roatan and Its Charms

As we entered Casa de Sol, many happy people were heading out. It was a wooden rustic beach house. While going up the stairs we were greeted by a young lady carrying a naked tanned little boy about 2 years old who took us to our room. It was cozy. It had a kitchen with its pots, pans, dishes, silverware, towels, drinking water as well as a small refrigerator for visitors that would like to cook. We paid an extra \$10 to have air



Eagle Ray Bar & Grill

conditioner. This is when we realized we were starving so we asked her where we could go to eat. She told us to walk down the road where we would find many restaurants. As we walked and got closer to the beach, we saw a variety of restaurants along the coast. There was music playing and people all over. You can see the reflection of each restaurant and store lights in the water. You could easily mistake the water as a great big dancing floor. You would hear the ocean waves from time to time that relaxed you. Soon we were sitting at the Eagle Ray Bar & Grill.

This restaurant had its own character. You had to walk quite a distance on a wooden bridge to get to it and climb several flights of stairs as well. It was quite a way from the shore. It would softly rock back and forth when the waves were strong as if you were on a ship. We sat close to where you could look down and see fishes. It brought back memories of a place we use to go back home with the girls in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. We were mesmerized and hungry. So we sat down and a very pleasant waiter came to our table to give us the menu. We had to start with a tropical drink so I asked for a strawberry daiquiri. Surprisingly, my stomach called for seafood. I had fish with mash potatoes. Everything was delicious. We paid our bill and decided to walk around a bit before we headed back to the guest house. After about an hour, we were tired and went back to Casa Del Sol. This is when we took a better look at the room. It was very tropical with very intense colors on the wall. We were happy to be there and have air conditioned. We checked our e-mails and went to sleep. We slept very well.

We woke up the next morning to the sound of birds singing and children playing. It was time to get up and go have breakfast. We walked outside and found that the majority of the restaurants and stores were closed. Then it hit us, it was CHRISTMAS DAY! This time we took a good look at the beach during the day time. It was beautiful! The water was crystal clear and I couldn't help but take a few pictures. We noticed that there were a store or two opened as children with Santa hats played with their new toys. We also met a very interesting British



Mille on the beach at West End, Roatan

character who had a restaurant on wheels that had a party going on the night before. You could hear the music playing from the restaurant. Even though it was only 8am, he had a beer in hand and we spoke a bit before we went into one of the stores to buy eggs, bread and mayo. At the guest house we prepared egg salad sandwiches and had orange juice for breakfast. After checking on our messages and calling family to wish them Merry Christmas, it was time to go back out to the beach.

This time, there were more people walking about. There was a long line of children at



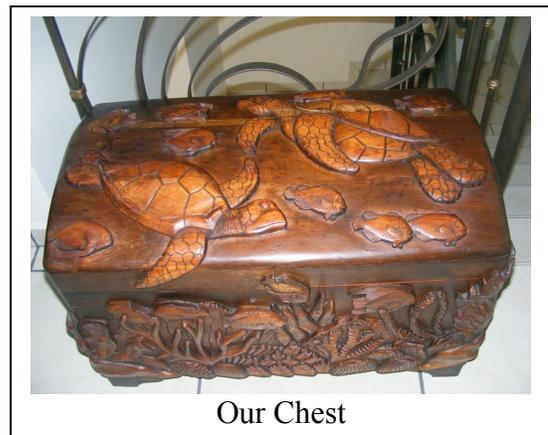
At Mavis & Dixie

what seemed to be a community center receiving toys. They were giggling and having the time of their lives. There's no better joy than to see happiness in a kids face when they receive a gift. From there we continue to walk the street to see all the souvenirs and crafts that the Honduras had to offer. We fell in love with a wooden chest carved with sea animals but were in shock when we heard the price. We asked if they could lower the price and the lady said she would have to talk to her husband. We continued walking and had fun buying gifts for family, friends and ourselves but still had the chest in our minds. We saw other

chests but this specific one was unique and we talked about it over lunch at a place called Mavis & Dixie near the beach. This place was recommended by Sharon from Casa Del Sol and she was right, it was great!

After lunch we walked along the beach, took a swim and sunbathed. I felt at ease swimming because even in the deep end, I could see my feet in the water. Coming from Puerto Rico, these are the kind of beaches I love. Everywhere you looked you saw people doing various activities such as sunbathing, snorkeling, scuba diving, kayaking, walking, biking, shopping, kissing, etc. We then decided to go back to the room to check on our messages to then visit the stores again. We still had to get some souvenirs. By the time we finished it was time for dinner so we left the guest house again to go to the beach. We loved Marvis & Dixie so much that we went back for dinner. We sat what looked like a porch where you can see the beach. With drink in hand, and feeling relaxed, we were enjoying the sound of the waves hitting the shore. We ended the day walking along the beach to head to our room. It was a romantic evening.

The next day was our last full day in Roatan. We would leave early on Saturday to at least have one day to rest. We woke up determined to convince the owner to lower the price of the chest and bring it back with us. We had our breakfast and did our shopping. After that, we had lunch at Shark Cave Pizzeria Gourment to gain strength and head to THE store that had OUR chest. To our surprised, the lady had already spoken to her husband and was willing to sell it to us at a price lower than we had anticipated. Before they changed their minds, we told them to please wrap it up and that we



Our Chest

would return after dinner to pick it up. Off we went to the guest house to get ready for dinner and afterwards pick up OUR chest. The next problem we encountered was that the chest was too heavy to carry to the guest house. It so happens that one of the guys visiting the store offered to take me to the guesthouse but only had room for one person and OUR chest. So Millie left and waited at the guest house. Soon after, we were at the front of Casa De Sol. We thanked the driver and went to our room. It was a long day and we were tired.

That night I checked the weather satellite preparing for the next days flight. There were a series of heavy rainstorms from the East tracking westbound. Having flown many years in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean I knew these typical weather systems was highly predictable. Each band was separated by about 50-60 miles from the next one. Between each band of heavy rainstorms were bands of very good VFR weather. The series of bad weather bands were moving Westbound at about 20MPH. This meant that there would be gaps of very good and very bad weather for the next few days. If I took off just before a band of bad weather arrived and flew at about 120Kts I could arrive to San Pedro Sula airport just as the weather was clearing up. I estimated at about 6:00am the weather should get bad for about 3hrs then clearing up. So if we left the hotel early in the morning, good weather would be all along our route while we were airborne. So at about 11:00pm on the 26<sup>th</sup>, I finally got to sleep confident of my plan.

## Ch 4 - The Waiting Game

We woke up the next day about 6:00am with mixed emotions. We were happy to have spent Christmas in such a beautiful place but at the same time missed our family. Even when we headed back home, our family was still miles away from us but this quickly changed when we were getting our bags ready to hit the road.

We brought our luggage down from the room and set it down on the first floor of Casa Del Sol. It had been raining off and on all night long as I expected so the ground was saturated with water. I went back up and brought the chest down. Man it looked huge with all the packaging material wrapped around it. I didn't say anything to Millie but I wasn't real sure it would fit in the airplane. If it wouldn't, we would either have to pay a lot of money to ship it or hope the shop owner would take it back. Fat chance of that happening! So while Millie waited next to the luggage, I walked off to get a taxi down at the beach.

The first taxi I found was a small sub-compact car and I didn't think the chest would fit so I waited until a bigger taxi passed by. This one looked big enough so I hailed it down and went back to the guesthouse. When the driver saw the chest he told me it would be no problem in getting it in, but not in the trunk. It took a little bit of wrestling until he got it into the back seat. Since it took almost the entire seat, Millie and I squeezed into the front seat together and we drove off to the airport.

We drove on for about 40 minutes this way with the rain steadily coming down. Not heavily but a continuous rain. According to what I had seen on the satellite images, the rain was supposed to stop, the weather clear up before the rain started again. I was hoping it would rain while we were in the terminal doing paperwork so we could take off soon after we were finished. But the rain continued to come down as we drove to the airport. Of course, as we pulled up to the airport the rain stopped and the skies cleared up. It looked like my timing was off and I was on the wrong cycle. There wasn't a cloud in the sky now.

We entered the terminal and asked how to get to our airplane. I identified myself as the pilot of the little airplane on the ramp and the people manning security let me through. As I walked to the airplane I realized the cover had moved and the tarp was missing. With the winds, the heavy rains and the missing tarp I immediately knew the airplane was wet inside. Looking around I could not find the tarp so I figured someone had "borrowed" it and forgot to bring it back. So much for airport security!

As I started the pre-flight, a TACA Airlines A319 landed and taxied to the parking ramp offloading the passengers. Just before I finished I noticed a person walking from the A319 towards the airplane in full airline uniform. As he approached I realized he had the four stripes of the airplane Captain. He walked right up, introduced himself as the Captain of the A319 and wanted to know a little about the airplane. We talked about the



airplane's performance, equipment and how it handled. He was amazed at how well equipped the panel was and that it was full IFR. He told me he had not flown a small airplane in a long time and was real interested in starting back up with GA. After a little while he said good bye and walked to the A319 to depart. It felt real good when he got to the top of the stairs, looked back and waved to me just before the door closed on the airplane. A few minutes later it taxied away and took off. I think he will be getting back into GA flying soon.



Next I went back to the terminal and carried the luggage to the airplane. I tell you everyone was looking as I carried the huge chest thru security and out to the ramp. I bet several persons had a good laugh watching me try to do the seemingly impossible. Get this huge chest into this small airplane.

The first thing I loaded into the airplane was the chest. Man was it a tight fit, but I got it into the back seat. I used both sets of seat belts to secure the locker and made sure it would not move. After it was in, the rest of the luggage was easy. Everything looked good except that I could see that bad weather was inbound from the West. I hoped I could get the rest of the paperwork completed and we could take off before the weather set in. While completing the pre-flight, an airport authority truck pulled up and asked to my surprise if I was missing a brown plastic tarp. When I said yes he reached into the truck and gave me my tarp. He told me the previous security guard had found it a few feet behind the airplane right after a strong gust of wind and had secured it. I thanked him and put the cover back on in case it started raining again even though I knew it would not stop all the water. I had to eat my words about airport security and honesty.

Next I went to the airport authority office to file the flight plan and pay the fees. The fees were extremely reasonable and much less than I had expected. As I was finishing the final payment, it started raining and raining real hard. Within a few minutes it was raining so hard the airport was under IFR rules. Then it got worse. The rain and lightning picked up and the airport completely shut down. No flights in or out. I checked the satellite weather there and it looked like this band would take about 1 hour to pass. Then it would take another 2 hours until the next band arrived. Since everything was complete, I filed to depart in 3 hours and went into the terminal.

Millie was waiting nervously and asked about the weather. I told her it would be a while before we took off and we just needed to wait it out. She recommended we wait at the gate instead of the general terminal which seemed a good idea to me. So as the rain came down hard, we went through security and sat down at the gate area. I watched a little bit of television while Millie played Solitaire on her laptop. Then we went to the cafeteria there and had a small brunch. After about 1 hour, the rain slowed down and then came to a stop. The weather cleared up and within 10 minutes the airport was in beautiful VFR weather. Millie asked if we were going to depart and I said no. We would wait and give the weather time to move on before leaving. It would be about another 2 hours before we would take off. So we waited some more. While we waited we checked out the airport store and the cafeteria. It is not a big airport so we checked the things out more than once as we waited.

## Ch 5 - Roatan to San Pedro Sula

For about 2 more hours we waited at the airport terminal in Roatan. The weather was beautiful. Airplanes were taking off and landing on a regular basis while we sat there. Every once in a while I would go out and look at the weather to the East. Finally I could see some clouds on the horizon. This was a good sign since satellite pictures showed another large rain band was headed our way. I told Millie we might be leaving soon but would wait a little longer. I could tell she was real happy about this.

Another 30 minutes later I looked and the clouds were getting closer. I could tell they were bringing lots of rain with some bad weather. With this I checked the satellite again and updated my flight plan to San Pedro Sula (MHLM) with La Ceiba (MHLC) as an alternate. The weather at San Pedro Sula was solid IFR but forecast to be VFR by the time we arrived. La Ceiba was VFR and forecast to stay that way for several hours. With this in mind, we walked out to the airplane and started to strap in for the return flight.

As we were starting the engine I saw a Beech King Air land and taxi to the terminal. It dropped off some passengers and taxied back out for takeoff. A few minutes later I was on the radio with ground control and activating my flight plan. I was cleared to taxi to the runway for takeoff and got ready for takeoff. As we were taxied away, we looked at the back seat to see the chest comfortably strapped. We were so happy to have bought such a beautiful piece of furniture that will remind us of our trip to Roatan. When I called the tower I heard the already airborne King Air calling out a right turn to the West. I immediately recognized the call sign N350EB and the voice on the radio as one of my friends, Arturo Solei, from El Salvador. I took the runway and took off waiting for a proper time to talk to him direct. Unfortunately N350EB changed frequency before I could call him but I was soon told to also change frequency.

As soon as I changed frequency and checked in with Honduras Center, Arturo called me on the radio. I told him I had just taken off from Roatan and was headed to El Salvador. He had just dropped off some passengers at Roatan and was headed back to San Salvador too. He was at 15,000ft, a lot higher than I would be, and told me that the weather was beautiful up there. I told him I was going to stop at San Pedro Sula for fuel and would see him later that day. He then said goodbye and changed frequency soon afterwards. The flight to San Pedro Sula was uneventful. At 4,500ft the skies were clear with a few puffy clouds here and there. This was just as I expected based on the satellite photos.

About 1 hour later, while approaching San Pedro Sula, I could see lots of clouds ahead of me. The weather was just starting to clear up there but there were some low clouds still hanging out in the area. San Pedro Sula was reporting marginal VFR conditions with some low clouds in the area. I slowed down a bit to



Approaching San Pedro Sula

give the weather a little more time to clear up before we actually arrived. After calling tower, I made a few turns around some clouds and there was San Pedro Sula airport right in front of me. With no traffic in the air and only a few clouds, I was cleared to land on Runway 25. A few minutes later, at about 12:00noon we were on the ground looking for the fuel pumps.

San Pedro Sula Honduras is a fairly large airport with a new terminal. The GA fuel pumps are located at the old terminal area so it was easy to find. I had already called the Honduras Flying Club the day before and told them I would be landing for fuel. We pulled up to the old terminal, shut the engine down and got out. I was in the process of calling the contact number I had been provided when a large pick up truck pulled up and the driver asked if I was Galin Hernandez. I said yes and he told me he his name was Ruben and he was there to assist me on behalf of the Flying Club while I was there. Now this was great. He showed me where the pumps are and let Millie sit in his office while I taxied the airplane to the pump to fill it up.

The fuel attendant quickly showed up and, since 100LL was only \$3.25/gal, I told him to fill the airplane up. He told me it was no problem but that they were having problems with the credit card machine and I would have to pay in cash. No problem I thought until he told me it had to be paid in Lempira, the Honduran currency. A quick calculation revealed I did not have enough Lempira to cover the approximate \$100.00 it would cost. Ruben told me he would drive me to the terminal where there were several ATM machines. At the same time I could get some lunch and file a flight plan for the final leg. So I grabbed the airplane book, jumped into the pick up truck and we drove off to the nearby terminal.

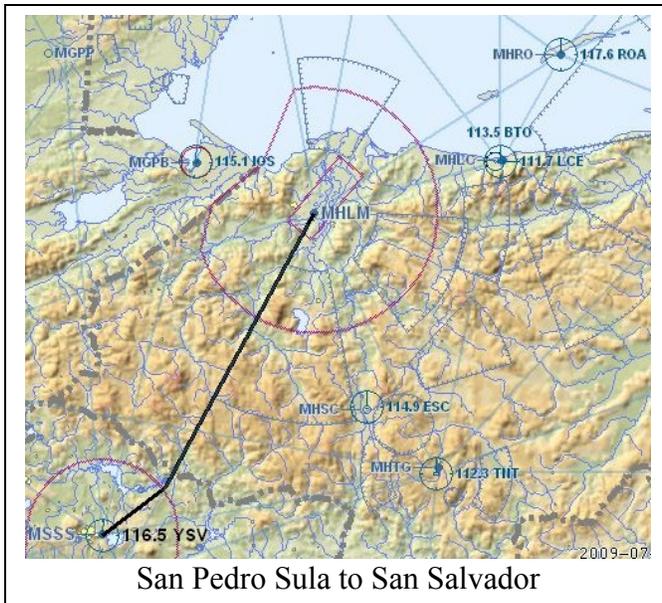
The terminal was full since several commercial flights had arrived and were getting ready to depart. I found the ATM machines and took out, what I thought was about \$100.00 in local currency. The terminal had a food court so I got in line at the Wendy's hamburger stand and ordered three hamburger meals. While I was waiting, Ruben took the information I gave him and walked off to file the flight plan for me. By the time I had my three meals Ruben was back with the paperwork showing I had filed a flight plan. The filing cost was just under \$5.00 which was fine by me. We got back into the pickup truck and drove back to the airplane.

I dropped off one of the lunches at the Flying Club office so Millie could eat while Ruben and I went to the airplane. When we arrived to the airplane the fueling was complete. I was just about to check the fuel when a Cessna 182 pulled up to the pumps. He wanted to get fuel but I was in the way. So we towed the airplane a little and let him pull up to the pumps. When I went to pay the fuel attendant he charged me only ½ of what I thought it would be. It turns out I miscalculated the exchange rate and had taken out \$300.00 instead of \$100.00. Now I had about \$200.00 in Honduran currency with no way to change it back. I wanted to give Ruben a tip, but not \$100.00 worth. So I gave him a \$20.00 tip to which he thanked me over and over again. A few minutes later Millie came out and we got back in the airplane for the final leg. We had been on the ground just over 1hour. Not bad!

## Ch 6 - Heading Home

Just after 1:00pm on December 27<sup>th</sup> 2008, we were cleared to runway 07 at San Pedro Sula for take off. We were on our final leg back home to San Salvador. The weather was completely VFR with just a few clouds in the skies. Ilopango was reporting VFR weather with only scattered clouds at 12,000ft. A few minutes later we were at 5,500ft talking to Honduras Center and climbing. I had filed:

MHLM – TIRNA – NAGEL – SULMA – MSSS



And it would take about 1.5 hrs but included flying over mountainous terrain. I would fly above 10,000ft between TIRNA and NAGEL on the way back. As I climbed I realized the clouds from the weather system were slightly in front of me but breaking up slowly. Just before arriving at TIRNA I was already at 10,000ft but there were many clouds at that altitude. So I continued to climb as I weaved around the clouds. The more I weaved, the more the clouds seemed to move around me. At about 14,000ft I cleared the scattered cloud deck and could go direct to check point NAGEL. Since I had done so many weaves, I had already arrived at NAGEL. Looking

ahead I could see the clouds were dissipating and the skies were clear. Honduras center transferred me to El Salvador center and I started my descent into Ilopango.

Just as it happened on our way back from Cancun a few weeks earlier, I was very high in altitude as I approached Ilopango for landing. Once again I had to make several turns in order to have enough loose altitude without shock cooling the engine on the way down. The skies were completely clear as I contacted Ilopango tower and set up to land. I was cleared to enter the downwind to runway 33 and after just over 1hr and 45 minutes; we landed on runway 33 at Ilopango airport.

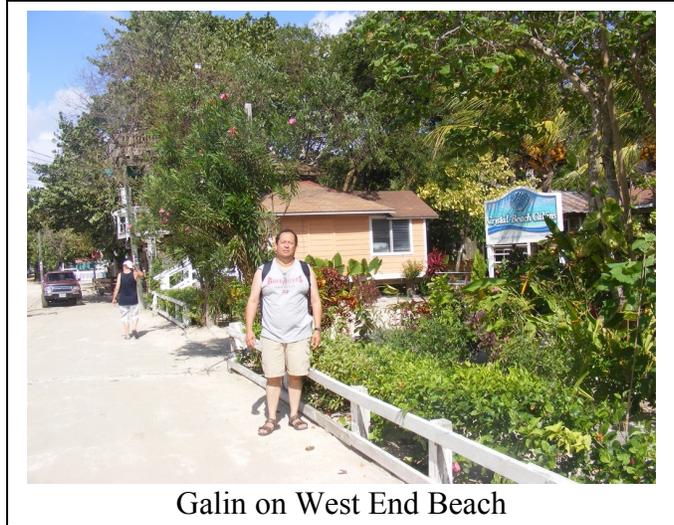
A quick stop at Customs & Immigrations and we were on our way to the hanger. We parked the airplane, unloaded our baggage and secured it. The chest was the hardest thing to get out and it took a little help from Millie to do it. But, it fit quite nicely into our truck. It is going to look nice in our house.

Since it was now about 3:00pm and we were hungry, we stopped at the Aero Club restaurant for a real meal. One of my good pilot friend, Ricardo Viaud, was there having a cup of coffee and we sat with him. As we chatted he told me that Arturo Solei had mentioned he had talked to me on the radio on his way back from Roatan and that I would be arriving soon. After the great meal there, we got back into the car and headed home.

Millie and I had spent Christmas on a great flying adventure. But it had carried mixed emotions for us. We had spent every Christmas with our daughters since 1987 but this was the 1<sup>st</sup> time we had been without them. We missed them terribly during the holiday and wished they could have accompanied us but understood they had their own adult lives to live. Having flown to Roatan in our airplane and spending Christmas there at the last moment had been a wonderful adventure. Something we knew our daughters would applaud and be happy for. I wonder what our next flying adventure will be.



Millie Enjoying Roatan



Galin on West End Beach

## ABBREVIATIONS

100LL	100 Octane-Low Lead, Aviation Gasoline
ATC	Air Traffic Control
AV Gas	Aviation Gasoline
ETA	Estimated Time of Arrival
FBO	Fixed Base Operator
GA	General Aviation
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
IFR	Instrument Flight Rules
ILS	Instrument Landing System
KIAS	Knots, Indicated Air Speed
KTS	Nautical Miles (Knots) per Hour
METAR	Meteorological Aviation Report
MHz	Megahertz
NM	Nautical Miles (Knots)
POH	Pilot's Operating Handbook
RPM	Revolutions per Minute
TACA	Transporte Aereo del Continente Americano
USD	United States Dollar
VFR	Visual Flight Rules
VOR	Very High Frequency Omni-directional Radio Range
VASI	Visual Approach Slope Indicator