



The Flying Adventures of the PuertoRicoFlyers

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JAZMYNN TRIP



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Jazmynn Trip

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Chapter 1 (Pre-Flight)

From November 21 to December 13, 2008 we took the 1st long trip in N819PR, the Puerto Rico Flyer. We flew it from San Salvador to Brunswick Georgia and back to see Jazmynn, my 1st grandchild. The round trip took a total of 28.5 flight hours over 3 weeks and covered over 3,500NM. Places we stopped included Cozumel and Cancun, Mexico; as well as Key West, Marathon Key, Clearwater and Leesburg Florida. We flew through the airspace of 7 countries. These were El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Belize, Mexico, Cuba and the USA.

I had been preparing to fly my airplane (KIS4 – N819PR) from San Salvador, El Salvador to Brunswick, Georgia for my granddaughters birth scheduled for November 29, 2008. My plan was to depart El Salvador around November 26 in order to be there before the actual birth. My wife, Millie, had already left to be with her mother since November 8th and would meet up with me in Brunswick when I arrived. It was the perfect plan.

My aircraft had been repaired and completely upgraded by the PULSAR factory a few months before and I was working out kinks that always accompany major maintenance. Most kinks had been corrected and a few upgrades had been



N819PR - The Puerto Rico Flyer

started that would be completed well before my November 26 departure date. The upgrades included installing a second communications radio (Icom A-200), connecting a second GPS (Garmin 496) to the autopilot, installing a Kuntzelman red LED aircraft beacon, installing a new cruise propeller (Sensenich Aluminum) and a complete paint job (2003 Harley-Davidson White Pearl Gold).

The GPS wiring had been installed and I was waiting for the GPS to arrive in the mail. The radio had been installed and just needed side-tone adjustments. The aircraft beacon hole had been cut into the fuselage and it was going to be installed as soon as the aircraft paint job had been completed. The paint job was almost finished with final polishing needed before reassembling the aircraft. Everything was going according to plan when on November 18th, my daughter went into labor and Jazmynn Milagros Spires was born.

Now I wanted to head out, but the airplane was in no shape to fly. I talked to the painter and he assured me the paint job would be completed, the airplane reassembled and ready to fly by the 20th. I talked to the electrician and he assured me the beacon would be installed on the 19th. Neither the GPS nor the cruise prop had arrived. The airplane had a loaner propeller on it and I had an older GPS available so, trusting them, I started packing my bags planning the flight.

This would be a 3,000 Nm trip in international airspace with significant over water flying. This also meant learning what was needed for over flight of seven different national airspaces and any landing requirements. On a trip of this distance fuel management is critical so landing within the aircraft's range where reasonably priced fuel is available becomes a big part of the planning. I knew it would take at least 2 days from El Salvador to Georgia so a rest stop had to be planned.

N819PR is certified full IFR to include an autopilot with altitude hold and I am instrument rated, but my instrument currency had long expired. So, to further complicate the planning I have to fly under VFR conditions over a long distance, outside the US where reliable weather information is not easily available. Up to this point the planning had been theoretical but now I had to make actual final decisions and implement them. Taking into account N819PR's range I decided to make a fuel/rest stop somewhere in

the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico. The next day I would fly along the Cuban north coast to the Florida Keys. From there I could fly to Georgia. The one way trip would take about 12 flight hours.

Here is where the INTERNET was so valuable. I had been on the AOPA web page forums for months reading about international flying. A lot more is needed to fly international than to stay within the US. So, months before, I started getting the requirements in order.

If you fly into the US, you have to land at the 1st Customs port of entry you encounter on your flight plan. You have to provide at least 1hr advanced notice of arrival and a Customs aircraft decal (\$27.50) is required. This had to be placed on a specific place on the aircraft. I bought it but since the airplane was being painted, I had it in my airplane Pilot Operating Handbook (POH). A Federal Communications Commission (FCC) radiotelephone permit for me and the airplane is required for any international flight and I had gotten them several months before. All original documents (Airworthiness, Registration, Radio

telephone license, Operating Limitations and Weight/Balance) were in a front pocket in the airplane. Copies of all the documents were also in the airplane POH.

In order to land in Mexico from anywhere outside of Mexico, the airplane needs a Mexican Entry Permit. This costs \$67.00US and was valid for one calendar year. I had to get the permit for 2008. I also needed proof of insurance coverage while within



Mexico. A 406MHz Satellite ELT is required but this was installed in my airplane during the upgrade.

If you fly into Mexico from the US, you have to land at the 1st international airport you encounter on your flight plan. If you fly into Mexico from anywhere in Central America (to include El Salvador) your 1st landing must be in either Tapachula or Cozumel. This meant that Cozumel was the only option I had as a rest/refuel stop in Mexico. So I needed a place to sleep for the night in Cozumel.

One of the persons on the AOPA forum is Rick Gardner from Caribbean Sky Tours and several persons had recommended him for flying into Mexico. I e-mailed him, his wife Pia recommended several hotels in Cancun. I looked up her recommendations on-line, decided on "Hacienda San Miguel" and made reservations.

I wanted to fly just off shore Cuba but in order for a US registered airplane to fly in Cuban sovereign airspace, a special permit is required from the US State Department. I was told this permit is not easy to obtain and everyone recommended I stay at least 15 miles off their coast. This would keep me outside Cuban sovereign airspace so a permit would not be required. This meant I had to be further off shore than I had expected.

Taking these requirements into account and using the AOPA on-line flight planner I chose the following route:

San Salvador (MSSS) to Cozumel, Mexico (MMCZ) – 3.8hrs
Refuel and spend the night.
Cozumel, Mexico (MMCZ) to Key West, Florida (KEYW) – 3.2hrs
Clear Customs and add 15 gallons of fuel.
Key West, Florida (KEYW) to Leesburg, Florida (KLEE) – 2.2hrs
Fuel up.
Leesburg, Florida (KLEE) to St Simons Island, Georgia (KSSI) – 1.2hrs
Arrive in Brunswick, Georgia.

On December 20th, I got notified that the GPS had arrived but I had to get it released from El Salvador Customs. Now that was an experience. I had to pay a total of \$17.00 of taxes to get it out but it took all day (9hrs). So I arrived at Ilopango airport to check the airplane around 5:00pm. I had asked a local aircraft mechanic (Miguel) and one of the PULSAR factory employees (David) to meet me there to check the airplane out. The airplane looked real good with the completed paint job and the new aircraft beacon. So while Miguel and David checked the airplane, I checked the GPS installation and it talked to the autopilot as advertised.

Miguel immediately noticed that the carburetor air inlet filter had not been covered correctly during the painting and was clogged with paint. Luckily for me a friend of mine here had a spare filter and offered it to me. To replace the air filter, the entire cowling has to be removed. This takes 2 persons and it takes a while. I went to get the new filter while they took the cowling off. This was actually a good thing since now he could give the entire firewall forward a better check than if the cowling was still on. When I got back with the filter, Miguel informed me that the left wing fuel vent was clogged. While he replaced the air filter, David worked on the clogged vent.

The left wing fuel drain had a small leak so I decided to replace the drain. We defueled the left wing, which took a while, and replaced the drain. To make sure it would not be a problem, I used a special fuel resistant sealant around the thread. This would take 4hrs to cure.



Ilopango International Airport (MSSS)

By now it was getting dark. When I went to turn the light of the hangar on, nothing happened. It turns out the power company was replacing cables in the area and the hangar would be without power for the next two days. This took a while to finally figure out. So we faced our cars towards the hangar, turned the lights on and continued working.

After the filter was properly installed, Miguel and I closed the cowling but David was still working. David rigged

up some safety wire to a cordless drill then, using it as a drill bit, worked the safety wire up the line. When Miguel blew into the vent hole at the fuel cap, pieces of a small bug flew out. By this time, it was almost 10:00pm. I was tired and ready to go. Miguel told me he would be at the airplane at 7:00am to finish the inspection in daylight. I went home to pack and enter the flight plan into the GPS.

The next day I arrived to Ilopango around 10:00am and Miguel had finished the inspection. I did the most extensive pre-flight in my life. Then I filled up both tanks, did taxi tests and, since everything looked good, I took off to do a complete system check. The flight check went without incident so I landed back at Ilopango to start the trip.



Fueled up and ready to go.

I loaded my baggage, topped up the fuel tank and filed an international flight plan. Then I got a bottle of water, a bag of almonds, a sandwich, two Diet Cokes and put them into a small cooler in the airplane. I sent Mexican authorities in Cozumel my notice of pending arrival and got ready to depart. A friend of mine who was fueling his Apache took a picture of me sitting on the wing just before leaving. I put on my new Revere's Comfort Max life vest with an attached Kannad 406 XS-3 personal locator satellite ELT and closed the door. Then, after calling

ground control, I taxied to Ilopango runway 33 and started the trip. It was 12:10pm, November 21st.

Chapter 2 (Off I go, to Cozumel)

Just as Ilopango tower controller authorized me to enter runway 33 and take off, I realized the months of preparations and planning were over. I took a deep breath, took the runway and aligned myself on the centerline. Pushing the throttle to full power I



Runway 33 - Ilopango

started rolling down the runway quickly picking up speed. When I reached 65KIAS, I pulled the nose up. A few seconds later "Cruiser N819PR" was airborne and the trip was on.

The climb to 7,500ft was uneventful. Soon I arrived at the 1st international checkpoint (SULMA) of the trip, joined airway B500 and El Salvador Control handed me off to Honduras Control. Even though I was on a VFR flight plan, they treated me as

if I was IFR. The skies were severe clear and beautiful. Between waypoints NAGEL and TIRNA mountains reach 12,000ft so I climbed to 11,500ft and flew on.

With the Garmin GPS and the autopilot taking me to Cozumel, I got bored. Luckily I brought a small MP3 player with 3hrs of music to be my in flight entertainment system. I plugged it into my Lightspeed headset and this helped break up the boredom. After passing NAGEL I came back down to 7,500ft until the La Mesa VOR (LMS). Here the Garmin 496 had the autopilot make a beautiful left turn and I was on my way to Belize via airway G521. That was so cool to just sit there and let the airplane navigate for me. Checking my progress I realized I had about 20kts of headwind. The flight was going to take longer than I had anticipated. A quick endurance calculation confirmed I had plenty of fuel, even with the headwind, to make the flight.

After a few miles I encountered some ugly clouds in my path so I deviated to the left and descended to 4500ft for avoidance. The Honduran controller saw this and asked "Cruiser N819PR, do you want to deviate"? Not wanting to sound arrogant by reminding him I was VFR I said yes to which he "authorized" the deviation. All this time the controllers talked in perfect English which really impressed me. When about 55 miles NW of the LMS VOR, Honduran control told me contact Belize Control on 125.5. I changed frequency and tried to call but no answer. After about 10 minutes I still could not get Belize Control so I tried to call Honduras with no luck. I realized I had no communications with Belize Control and was too far from Honduras to talk with them. I was also at the furthest point from land during this flight, about 35Nm. Not wanting to be in foreign airspace without talking to somebody, I made a 180 degree turn and headed back to Honduras.

It took about 10 minutes before I got them on the frequency. When I told them I had no contact with Belize, they realized they had given me the wrong frequency. It should

have been 124.5 not 125.5. I headed back to Belize with the new frequency and soon had radio contact with them. This took an additional 25 minutes of flying I had not planned on. The headwinds had not subsided so I did another endurance check. This confirmed I still had plenty of fuel available. But just to be sure I throttled back to 65% power (max range) knowing it would take a little longer before arriving.

Belize is an English speaking country but the controller had a heavy Caribbean accent. He was hard to understand. I flew with Belize Control without further incident. Upon approaching waypoint AMIDA, Belize Control handed me off to Merida Center and I was in Mexican airspace.

This controller was very busy with lots of traffic which amazed me. I did not think there would be so many aircraft on the radio at the same time. I had been flying for almost 3hrs and still had over one hour left. I trucked along doing about 120KIAS and 108Kts Ground speed.

This too was uneventful until I was about 50 miles from Cozumel where I was handed off to Cozumel approach. I started a slow descent until about 15 miles from Cozumel. There I was handed off to Cozumel tower and was authorized to land behind an American Airlines B757. The approach is off the shoreline with a beautiful view of the island and the city. There were several cruise ships docked there as I made the right turn and made a smooth landing on runway 11.



Approaching Cozumel International Airport



Short Final to Runway 11

Cozumel ground control told me to taxi to the general aviation ramp which I easily found. I was the only aircraft on the ramp. It looked like the entire area was either new or very well maintained. The ramp person guided me to my parking spot and the flight was over. Quite a reception committee was waiting for me. It took 4.3hrs of flying to arrive at Cozumel at an average ground speed of 110Kts. Cruiser N819PR was on the ground in Mexico. I was tired but elated.

As soon as I opened the door and stepped out I was met by an armed Mexican official. He identified himself as a police officer, asked where I departed from and how long I was going to stay in Cozumel. He wrote the information on a note pad and welcomed me to Mexico. A female official then came up and asked if I had any foodstuff. I had totally forgotten about the drinks and food in the cooler up to then. I told her what I had and she told me the drinks and sealed bag of almonds were ok, but not the sandwich.

She told me I could eat it right there or give it to her for disposal. At that point I didn't want the sandwich anyways so I gave it to her and she walked off.

As soon as she walked away two armed soldiers walked up to me. One of them had a medium size dog with him. The 1st soldier asked the same questions as the police officer and he also wrote the answers on a note pad. The soldier with the dog asked me to take out whatever luggage I was going to take with me to the hotel and lay it on the tarmac. I did so and he had the dog go over it. He then told me the dog was going to go into the airplane and to take out anything that the dog might damage. There was nothing that could be damaged, so the dog jumped onto the wing and into the airplane. He sniffed around a bit then jumped back out. This dog was quite a nimble gymnast. Then they welcomed me to Mexico and walked away.

I thought I was over, but no. Another officer came up to me and asked for my passport. This was the Immigration officer and was doing a pre-check of my documents. After a few minutes he told me to make sure to cross Immigration before leaving the airport, a request I thought was odd.

The ramp person loaded my baggage into a van and waited while I secured the airplane for the night. I took anything of value with me just in case. He drove me a short distance to the GA terminal, unloaded my luggage onto an X-ray belt for another check. After that I filled out a Customs Declaration, the officer stamped it and was told to go to a nearby small window. He welcomed me to Mexico. At the small window the Immigration officer who checked my passport on the ramp was waiting. He had me fill out the Immigration form and stamped my passport. When he finished he welcomed me to Mexico and told me I was officially in the country.

The ramp person placed my luggage aside and told me I had to go to a nearby desk to close my flight plan. Here the Dirección General de Aviación Civil (DGAC) the Mexican equivalent to our Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) representative had me fill another form and told me to go back to Customs and Immigration to have them stamp it. Once this was done, I went to another nearby desk which was airport operations. There they checked my paperwork and told me to go to the DGAC Comandancia office on the 2nd floor for the rest of the processing.

At the DGAC Comandancia office they asked me for the Aircraft Mexican Entry Permit, which I did not have. They told me I had to pay for one, which I already knew, so they had me fill out another form for the permit. I paid the \$67.00US for the permit and waited. This took about 1hr until they had the permit completed. It was a good thing I had copies of all my paperwork in the POH and I had it with me. If not, I would have had to go back to the airplane for the documents. Their copy machine was not working so I told them to keep the copies I had. I had heard this was common and that if I didn't have copies they would go to a local store to make copies and this could take an additional 30 minutes to 1hr.

The DGAC Comandancia gave me my 2008 Aircraft Mexican Entry Permit, stamped my paperwork and welcomed me to Mexico. I went back to the original DGAC desk where all the paperwork was checked. Since everything was now in order, they welcomed me to Mexico and said I was cleared to go. The entire process took almost 3hrs. The

general aviation facilities at Cozumel are excellent. They are either new or they maintain them extremely well.

The ramp guy, still with my luggage, showed me where to get a taxi to “Hacienda San Miguel”. He knew exactly where it was and told me the taxi would cost about 45 pesos (\$5.00). When the taxi pulled up, he loaded my bags into the taxi for me. I gave him a \$2.00 tip and he thanked me about 100 times.

The taxi ride was short and I arrived at “Hacienda San Miguel” just after 7:00pm. The girl at the front counter was waiting for me, checked me in quickly and led me to my hotel room. The hotel is quaint and the kind of off the beaten path hotel you see in movies. It only has 10 rooms and a certain Mexican charm to it that I really liked. I will be staying there again and want to bring my wife next time. She would love it.

Once I had taken a shower and changed clothes I realized, I was hungry! It dawned on me that I had not eaten anything since breakfast in San Salvador over 11 hours ago. The front counter attendant recommended a local restaurant called “La Misión” which was a short walk away.



The patio of Hacienda San Miguel

Cozumel at night is alive with activity. People were walking everywhere but it was not crowded. The cruise ships had departed, but stores were still open. Since I was so hungry, the walk felt longer than I wanted. I arrived at “La Misión” and sat down to order. I had red snapper fish made a la Mexican, which was very good. It was also a fairly large serving, which was perfect for my hunger. The best part was the dessert. I had the home made coconut ice cream which was excellent. You could really tell this was not store bought ice cream and probably hand made. I paid the bill, which was about \$12.00USD, walked back to the hotel and went straight to sleep.

Chapter 3 (Cozumel to Key West)

The next day I awoke about 6:30am to the sounds of a far away rooster crowing. With the sounds, the room decoration and the smell of something cooking it felt like I was in a Mexican Hacienda. I got dressed, walked down to the patio and sat down for the included continental breakfast. At the patio you can receive the hotel's wireless internet so I checked the weather and double checked my planned flight as I ate. After breakfast I packed my bags, took them to the front counter and asked them to call a taxi for me. The hotel cost me \$71.00USD and was worth it. I could have spent a lot more for a lot less.



KIS Cruiser N819PR

The taxi arrived quickly and I was back at the Cozumel airport GA terminal around 8:45am. As soon as I walked in I noticed the ramp guy who had helped me the night before was there. He told me his shift is from 10:00am to 10:00pm but he arrived early since he loves working around airplanes. He took my luggage, we went through airport security and I started loading the airplane. There were many different airplanes on the ramp and it was obvious they were quite busy. My KIS cruiser was the talk of the ramp. It seemed like every

pilot there asked what it was and had a comment on the paint job. In the bright Cozumel sun the white pearl gold paint looked incredible. Most persons thought it was a type of Cirrus. After I finished loading the airplane, the ramp guy told me to go back to the DGAC (Mexican FAA) to file my flight plan and they would tell me what steps to take.

At the DGAC desk they had me fill out an international VFR flight plan for "KIS4 Cruiser N819PR". It was just like the one I filled out in El Salvador the day before. Since I kept the old one, I just changed the dates, times and route. I filed:

Type AC: KIS4
Identifier: N819PR

Route:
Cozumel via B879 to NOSAT
NOSAT to VINKA
VINKA via B646 to CANOA
CANOA to FISHOOK
FISHOOK to Key West (KEYW)

The flight should take 3.5hrs with no wind. However, there was a low pressure off the east coast of Florida that was creating strong winds from the north east. Great, this meant another day with strong headwinds slowing me down. With this updated information I planned for a 4hr flight.

The DGAC officer told me to clear Customs at their window. The Customs officer asked me for my paperwork and he stamped it about 5 times. I then went to the Immigration window. After 5 or 6 more stamps between my paperwork and passport, I had cleared Immigration. Now back to the DGAC officer.

The DGAC officer had a copy of the en-route weather for me with the METAR for Havana and Key West. That was something I had not expected. I asked for a fuel truck and he made a radio call. He told me that the truck would take about 20 minutes so I went into the terminal and bought a sandwich. Remembering what happened to the last sandwich, I quickly ate that one.

After about 30 minutes, the fuel truck showed up and it took 33.6 gallons to fill the tanks. The total cost for the fuel was \$104.17USD but they added \$8.31USD as airspace and airport tax. This meant I paid a total of \$3.35USD per gallon of fuel. Since most of the flight had been at 65% power my fuel burn had been 7.8GPH. This would be my power setting for all overwater portions of the trip. Now at 9:30am I was almost ready to take off, or so I thought.

When I drained fuel from the left wing, it was full of water. I use the GATS jar and ½ of the jar was water. When I drained fuel from the right tank, I got the same results. Not good for any flight none the less for such a long overwater flight. This is why I always check the fuel after fueling up. I decided to wait a while to let any more water go to the drain before continuing to take fuel samples. While waiting I informed the DGAC officer of the problem and he immediately called the fuel company. They came back and told



Cozumel Tower

me they had drained and checked the fuel earlier and that everything was ok. I showed them the GATS jar and they could not explain why it had so much water. I kept taking fuel samples and the amount of water slowly came down. It was about 11:00am when I was finally convinced there was no water in my fuel tanks. Now I could finally depart Cozumel to Key West.

Since it was going to be a long flight, I decided to check my in-flight entertainment system the MP3 Player. The battery was almost completely dead. I asked the ramp guy if they had AAA batteries at the terminal and he said no. But he also said he could go to a small store just outside the airport and buy some. I gave him \$10.00 and he raced away. I finished the pre-flight and waited for the batteries. A few minutes later he shows up with a 3 pack of

Duracell AAA batteries. He showed me the receipt for \$5.00 and I told him to keep the change. I put on my life vest and closed the airplane door. Calling Cozumel ground, they cleared me to runway 11 and I taxied away. The ramp guy waved goodbye and I realized I never got his name. It was already 11:30AM.

With power checks completed, I taxied to runway 11 and took off. The airplane took off quickly and I took a left turn to intercept airway B879. As I climbed I got a good look at Cozumel during the day. The island is beautiful, with crystal clear water surrounding it. Almost as if I was looking at a tourism advertisement. I will be back to Cozumel, but with more time to spend.

After about 25 minutes "Cruiser N819PR" was level at 7,500ft. Soon Cozumel handed me off to Merida and "George the Autopilot" took over the flight. The MP3 player was singing in my ear as I flew further and further away from land. This flight would take me further away from land than any time during the trip. There are 106 NM between Cozumel and the west coast of Cuba. That meant that at one point I would be 53 miles from any point of land. That is a lot of water to cross. Having flown many years over water with the US Customs Air Program and with the Civil Air Patrol, I knew it wasn't a big deal. But, you still keep it on the back of your mind so you can react immediately if a situation happens and not waste time deciding the best course of action. I also knew the water temperature was probably in the low 80's so I was not worried about having to spend an extended period of time in the water.

If anybody is contemplating extended overwater flying, I recommend taking some kind of survival training. With Customs I took mandatory survival training every year. They concentrated on water survival so I have a good idea of what to expect. There were a few things I learned about water survival that opened my eyes. The 1st thing is that if you have to ditch, you will probably want to get out of the airplane as soon as possible. That means that if the survival gear isn't strapped to your body you probably won't have it when you leave the airplane. I doubt I will want to go back into a possibly sinking airplane to remove anything once I am out. So if the airplane sinks, that mandatory expensive ELT installed in the airplane will go down with it and the signal will not be picked up by anybody. That is why I carry the personal ELT with GPS capabilities strapped to my life vest.

Another thing is that it is extremely difficult to climb into a life raft in open waters. If you do not continuously practice this, you will probably run out of energy trying to get in and not be able to stay afloat. If you don't believe me, try getting into a play raft in the deep end of a swimming pool. It will open your eyes. Now add wind, waves, adrenaline, passengers and maybe an injury or two and you will see why I fly with my life vest on whenever I will be over water for a significant period of time.

Once close to NOSAT, Merida Center handed me over to Havana Center. The controller was busy with lots of air traffic. He cleared me to waypoint VINKA and I chugged along. Just as I expected I had about 20kts of headwind. The GPS showed I had a ground speed of only 105Kts. It was a good thing I had fresh batteries in my MP3 player. As I flew along I kept checking to see if I could shorten the flight without entering Cuban sovereign air space. At a point between NOSAT and VINKA the GPS showed I could turn right, go to waypoint MAXIM instead of CANOA and still stay outside of Cuban sovereign airspace. So I asked Havana Center for present position direct MAXIM then direct FISHOOK. After a few minutes of waiting he cleared me direct MAXIM, with a warning to remain outside of Cuban sovereign airspace. This meant I could stay about 25 NM off the Cuban coast all the way to just south of Key West. Much better than 50 NM off shore.

As I flew along, the clouds started to build up. I flew around them, then up and down to stay VFR. A light rain started as I maneuvered around the weather. I had to keep descending as the weather closed in. Havana Center told me the weather at Varadero and Havana was VFR while Key West was reporting clear skies. Since I had seen the weather satellite picture before taking off, I knew these were isolated clouds with showers. Even though, I was soon flying at 2,500ft in order to stay VFR. I now wished I had maintained my IFR currency. Oh well. This weather stayed with me for about 45 minutes until I was approaching MAXIM. Just before the waypoint I was in severe clear skies. I climbed to 5,500ft and leveled off just as Havana Center handed me off to Miami Center. Except for the weather and a ground speed of just over 108Kts, "Cruiser 9PR" was doing just fine.



Cumulus clouds along the way



Approaching Key West Runway 9

At about 50 NM from Key West, Miami Center handed me off to Key West approach. After a while they handed me off to Key West tower and I was cleared to land. As I approached Key West, I looked and my ground speed was only 75Kts. A Cirrus was approaching from the east and he was reporting a 212Kt ground speed. The winds were howling at about 40kts right on my nose. This made for a slow straight in but my touchdown was silky smooth. I taxied to US Customs and parked next to the building. I took 3.7 hours from Cozumel to Key West and I was happy to be back in the good old USA. With the

time change, it was now almost 4:30pm.

Clearing Customs in the US is so easy compared to Mexico. After about 30 minutes I had cleared and was calling for a fuel truck. I only took 15 gallons of fuel at Key West since it was \$5.91/gal and this was all I needed to get to Leesburg, Florida (KLEE) where fuel is inexpensive. A quick call to US Flight Service and I had filed my flight plan. I was airborne and on my way after just over one hour on the ground.

Chapter 4 (Cheap Fuel and Grumpy ATC)

As the sun started setting in the west, sounds like a spaghetti western, I flew along the Florida Keys in beautiful weather except for the darned head wind until I took a left turn at Marathon Key. I had “George” the autopilot fly to Marathon Key before heading north so as to stay inside US Sovereign airspace and not penetrate the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). This way I would not be intercepted by a couple of angry US Air Force Fighters that would ruin my day. This was another reason I made sure I had ATC radar advisories and was on a specific squawk.

As I flew north, I was handed off from controller to controller without incident for about 45 minutes. That was until I got close to Fort Myers, Florida. When I was handed off to a particular controller, he seemed to be upset at me. He sternly asked what my type of aircraft was. I told him the designation was KIS4. Now, KIS4 is the official FAA/ICAO designator for my airplane. He asked me again to say type so I answered “Home Built Experimental KIS4”. I guess he didn’t like that because he proceeded to chastise me for not using HBX as my type designator. I politely told him that KIS4 was the official FAA/ICAO designator but I would use HBX if he wanted.

I had flown through 7 different international airspaces, talking to many different controllers without an issue. I had filed all my flight plans as KIS4 and everyone had accepted it, including the US Flight Service Station back in Key West. I know that the official FAA and ICAO designator for my airplane is KIS4. But he did not want me to use it. So, from that point on he called me “Experimental 9PR” which was fine by me. After a while he handed me off to another controller. As soon as I checked in with him he immediately asked me for my type designator, again.

Now, I worked as an Air Traffic Controller with the Puerto Rico Air National Guard for many years. During this time I often worked at the FAA’s San Juan Combined En-route Approach (CERAP) facility. I know controllers sit next to each other and overhear radio transmissions, especially if the transmission is out of the ordinary. I was expecting to be chastised again so I answered:

“N819PR is an experimental homebuilt with a designation of KIS4”.

He then said: “N819PR, I have reset your designator in the system to KIS4. What would you LIKE to be called?”

Holding back a chuckle, I said: “Either Cruiser 9PR or Experimental 9PR is fine with me.”

Then, as if making sure he was being heard, he answered “Roger, CRUISER 9PR maintain VFR. I show no traffic on your route at this time.”

I did not have any problems with my call sign after that.

By now it was starting to get dark so I turned on my instrument light. The Instrument lights on the co-pilot side worked perfect but not the pilot's side. I had no lights for any of my primary instruments. Checking everything I could tell there had to be a broken wire to the pilot side of the instrument panel lights. Luckily, not just by regulation, I always carry several flashlights with me. I pulled one out and lit up my panel. Then I remembered, I had bought an LED Head Beam Flashlight that straps around your head and it was in my flight bag. I put it on and it was wonderful. I had white or red lighting wherever I looked. I used the red light so I wouldn't lose any night vision while seeing all my instruments perfectly. The best part was if I looked down to write something down, it would illuminate the pad so I could read the information when I needed it. I am sold on this tiny miracle and will never fly without one in my flight bag.

Just before 7:00pm I approached Leesburg, Florida (KLEE) for landing and refueling. The tower was just about to close when I called in. As soon as I landed, the tower closed and I was on my own. I needed to taxi to the self service fuel pumps but had no idea where they were or how to get to them. Luckily another pilot was taxiing out after getting fuel and he told me the pumps were next to the tower. That was great but I had never been to Leesburg before and had no idea of how to get to the tower, especially at night. Just before I went to pull out the airport diagram I had in my flight bag, I remembered the Safe Taxi function of my newly installed Garmin 496. I zoomed in and could see where I was on the taxiway and how to get to the tower. I let the GPS guide me and easily found the fuel pumps.

If you ever fly anywhere near Leesburg, you need to get fuel there. On November 22, 2008, I bought 38.6 gallons of 100LL and paid \$2.40 a gallon. That was the same price I had paid for gas in my car just a few weeks before. As soon as I pulled away, another airplane was landing and asked where the fuel pumps were. Now I returned the favor to the arriving pilot. Once again the Garmin 496 SafeTaxi feature assisted me greatly in getting to the runway at an airport I had never been before. It is a great method of confirming your position on the airport as I taxied to the runway for takeoff.

The final leg to St Simons Island (KSSI) was in severe clear and smooth air. When I left Cozumel, the temperature was about 81 degrees. Now as I headed towards Jacksonville Florida the air temperature was around 20 degrees. It was COLD. With "George" flying the airplane, I put on a jacket and flight gloves. There was nobody talking on the radio and I could tell traffic was light. Just south of Jacksonville the controller told me all the airspaces were cold and at my altitude I could go direct to St. Simons if I wanted. I immediately turned and headed that way. The only other aircraft I encountered during this leg was a US Navy P3 practicing night approaches into Jacksonville. It was neat to see him below me do a touch n go as I overflew KJAX at 7,500ft. About this time it dawned on me, I had not eaten anything since breakfast. I looked into the cooler and found the



Jacksonville International Airport

almonds and the Diet Cokes that had been there since leaving El Salvador the day before. So, I had an in-flight snack between KJAX and KSSI just like flying the big airlines.

Finally, around 9:00pm on Saturday November 22, 2008 I landed on runway 4 at St. Simons Island, Georgia. The entire trip had taken more than 12 flight hours over two days. The funny thing was that as soon as I taxied off runway 4 at KSSI, the engine felt like it was running a little rough. Oh well, I'll get a mechanic to look at it on Monday. I taxied to the tie down area of Golden Isles Aviation (GIA) and shut the airplane down. Stepping out, N819PR never looked better to me.



Golden Isles Aviation FBO

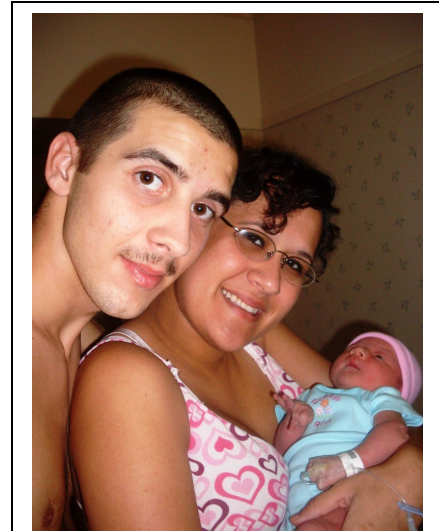
I called my wife to let her know I had arrived and she told me she was on her way. I took my time to tie the airplane down and get most of my "junk" out of it. Then I went to GIA, opened the door and got in out of the cold. Even though GIA closes at 8:00pm they were still open until one last airplane, a Gulfstream G4, was gone. The G4 left a few minutes after I walked in but they let me stay inside their facilities and told me just to make sure the door was locked when I left. Little things like this are what make Golden Isle Aviation my favorite FBO. My wife

arrived about 10 minutes later. Tired but happy, I loaded the car, headed out to see my granddaughter and get a full meal. The 1st part of the trip was over.

Chapter 5 (Family, Friends, Fixing and Flying)

While we drove away from St. Simons Island to get something to eat, it dawned on us that it was 10:30 at night. It was a little late to start looking for a place to eat. We pulled up to several restaurants we enjoyed and all of them were closing down for the night. We were to stay at a cousin's (Maria) house so we called them and they were going to have pizza delivered. Pizza is one of my favorite foods so we drove straight there.

Once we got there the house was full. As soon as I walked in my eldest daughter Iris and Son-in-Law Chris proudly showed me my beautiful granddaughter, Jazmynn Milagros Spires. That day I held Jazmynn for the 1st time. Only those that have grandchildren understand how I felt holding her. But being a guy, the feeling soon wore off and was replaced by my hunger. I hugged and kissed everyone there and proceeded to pig out on pepperoni pizza. Life was good.



Chris, Iris and Jazmynn



Holding Jazmynn for the 1st time

After a while everybody wanted to know about the flight, the airplane, the places I landed and a million other things. We talked about everything while Jazmynn slept, I admired her and time flew by. I finally made it to bed about 4:00am.

The next day Millie and I went to the airplane to get the rest of my "stuff" out of it. Golden Isle Aviation (GIA) had moved the airplane and parked it right in front of the EAA Chapter 905 building. As soon as we got to the airplane several of the chapter members came over to talk. I

spent the next hour proudly showing the airplane off and talking about the trip. One of the members was looking into building a KIS4. He told me the only other KIS4 he had seen was one that had a door incident there the previous year causing it to land hard on the nose wheel severely bending the propeller. It had sat there for over 1 month before being trucked away. I just smiled and told him I was the pilot that had the incident and this was the exact same airplane. When I said this everyone was totally amazed. Nobody had recognized it as the same airplane, even though they had gone over it with a fine toothed comb.

I went over the upgrades and modifications done to the airplane. They were especially impressed with the paint job. From far away the airplane is white. But when you get up

close you realize it is a gold pearl white, the same gold pearl white used on 2003 Harley-Davidson motorcycles. In direct sunlight it shines and glimmers different than any airplane you have ever seen. A lot of questions also came up with the wing tips, especially how it affected performance. I can honestly say I have not seen much of a difference in performance with the wing tips. But with the paint job and the wing tips, the airplane attracts a lot of attention.

The rest of the day was spent resting and recovering from the "jet lag" inherent with long distance travel. I also called a few friends there to let them know I was in town with the airplane. Then back to be with my family and friends.

The next few days were spent enjoying my family and we even took our 2008 family Christmas picture. I also worked on small maintenance issues I ran into on the way up.



2008 Family Christmas Picture

This included coordinating with Kirk Ramsey from Palmetto Aircraft Repair to check on the roughness in the engine when I landed. I also wanted him to do one last oil change with straight mineral oil and install the cruise propeller once it arrived. When I took it in on Wednesday he cleaned and checked the spark plug gaps, changed the oil and ran the engine. He told me there was nothing wrong with the engine and it was running smoothly.

After he finished, I started the airplane up for a quick test flight. While doing the run up, my radio went to stuck mike mode. I tried everything I could but nothing worked. I tried using my newly installed radio #2 with the same results. I had no radio communications. I had to fly back to El Salvador through several international airspaces and over significant amount of ocean. I was not about to do it without communications. Since the problem affected both radios I knew it had to be either the audio selector panel or the wiring. This was totally unacceptable. Now, there is no avionics shop or person at KSSI and the closest recommended place I could get the communications checked is at St. Augustine (KSGJ), Florida. I made plans to fly there the next day with my old trusty Icom A-22 handheld radio.

The next day I arrived at the airport about 6:30am for the flight to St. Augustine. A very cold front had just passed through the night before and the temperature was hovering around 27degrees. I was so happy the original builder (Dave Tate) had installed an electric oil heater so I plugged it in as I did my pre-flight. I nearly froze doing the pre-flight. When I went to start the engine, it turned over very slowly then the battery went dead. When it isn't one thing it is the other. The ramp guys from GIA brought over a battery charger and I went in, out of the cold. After about 1hr, the battery was fully charged and I was ready to go. This time the engine turned over and started quickly. Just before I taxied out, I decided to try the radio one more time. The radios worked perfectly. No stuck mike, no squeal, no nothing.

I tried everything I could to get the radios to fail but they worked fine. I remembered I had done a lot of electrical work to include replacing a burnt out taxi light running the battery down. With the cold temperature and a low battery to start with, it probably caused the audio panel to act up. Once the battery was fully charged, the problem went away. Just to be sure, I took off, flew around the pattern a while, did a few touch n go's and verified that everything was working properly. Good thing Millie had waited for me so I got back in the car and headed back home. Now the only maintenance thing left was to install and balance the new cruise propeller when it arrived. Sensenich propellers told me it would be ready to ship by that Friday so we made plans to install it on Monday.

While waiting for the propeller to arrive I called a good friend of mine who wanted to fly the airplane. Emilio is also a CFI/CFII and an excellent pilot. We decided to do some flying together and I could get my BFR out of the way. So for the next few days I reviewed flight rules, regulations and everything needed for my BFR. I know Emilio will not give me any slack just because we are friends. He has a reputation of giving very thorough check rides, which I like.

On the afternoon of Thursday, December 4th we took off to fly around the Golden Isles of Georgia and do my BFR. After doing steep turns and stalls, we headed to Brunswick Golden Isles airport (KBQK) for some landings. I did the ILS to a normal landing on runway 7 which came out quite nice. I took off was climbing through 2,500ft when Emilio pulled the throttle on me for a simulated engine failure.

This airplane flies so well with the engine out and I had plenty of altitude for landing when he gave me the simulated engine failure. Actually I had so much altitude and airspeed (130KIAS) I extended my down wind in order to land slightly long on the 7,000ft runway. When I turned final Emilio said "You are too far out to make the runway." Knowing he has a lot of hours in Piper, Beech and Cessna's but had never been in an airplane like mine I told him "Do you want to bet a soda on it?" He was smart and said "No, but I think you are way too far anyways." I flew to the runway at 100KIAS maintaining altitude until I knew I had the runway made. I let the airspeed bleed off to 85KIAS and actually had to slip the airplane in order to land on the 1st 1/3 of the runway. The aircraft's performance totally impressed Emilio and he mentioned that would have never been possible in any airplane he had flown before. We KIS owners know this to be a fact. We just need to convince the rest of the aviation world how good an airframe the KIS4 really is.

After that we went to Jekyll Island Airport (09J) where he had me do a short field landing. Once again the landing was right on the money. Another take off and back to St Simons Island (KSSI) we went. As I was about to start the flare for landing on runway 4, Emilio said there were animals on the runway. So I added full power and N819PR climbed right back in the air on a go around. Once up to altitude, another steep turn and he had me landed on runway 16 with about 10Kts of crosswind. Once again the airplane handled like advertised and I made another smooth landing. With this he told me the BFR flight was over and we taxied back to the ramp. He gave me a very complete debriefing which shows his experience as an instructor. He jokingly commented that the airplane handles like a Corvette sports car but I fly it as if it was a Volkswagen sedan. That is an observation I am proud of and will remember for a long time

Now all I needed was for the propeller to arrive and to install it. Another call to Sensenich and they confirmed the propeller was ready to ship and they were waiting for payment. The propeller was the final part the PULSAR factory had to install to complete the repairs. So I now had to wait until the factory made payment for it to be shipped. While waiting for the propeller I made a few more flights in the area with other pilot friends. They all were impressed with the airplane's performance.

More calls to Sensenich and PULSAR seemed to get me nowhere. Finally, the propeller was paid for and shipped. Unfortunately it was now Friday and it takes 2 working days for delivery to Georgia from Pennsylvania. According to UPS, delivery was scheduled for Monday of the next week. Kirk told me as soon as the propeller arrived he would immediately install it so I could get going. Looking at the weather there was a strong cold front headed my way and it would arrive about the same time I had to leave.

On Sunday, Millie left Brunswick to Tampa Florida where we keep our car stored. I would fly there and pick her up on the way back to El Salvador. So, I stayed back waiting for the propeller to arrive.

About 10:30am on Monday December 8th, the UPS truck showed up with my new propeller. Kirk stopped everything he was doing and installed the propeller right there.



The whole family playing UNO

Later that afternoon, I did a test flight and the propeller ran as smooth as silk. The best part was that I now had 145 KIAS at 2,000ft and 65% power. I had gained almost 20 KIAS with 1,200 ft/min climb at sea level. Static RPM's were just over 2,250. The propeller was everything I expected. I still wanted to have the propeller dynamically balanced before I left but it was late in the day and too windy to do it. Another day awaited me. I took advantage and spent more time with my family.

Early the next day Kirk hooked up the equipment for the dynamic balance as I loaded up the airplane for the return trip.

Hooking up the equipment took longer than the actual balancing. The readings indicated that it was balanced so well it did not need any additional balancing. So with this final maintenance completed, Kirk filled out my logbooks and I paid him for his services.

If you are ever near KSSI and need any work done you need to look Kirk Ramsey up. I can do most of the work myself but having another set of eyes do certain things and at the same time check what I have done, gives me a sense of security that is priceless. His work is impeccable and his rates are super reasonable. Do yourself a favor and have Kirk check your airplane if you are in the area.

Now what was left was to have the weather clear up enough for me to take off. The FSS weather briefer reported the ceiling were low until south of Jacksonville Florida. After there, it was typical VFR weather. I had to get south of Jacksonville but KSSI was reporting 600 overcast and boy was it accurate. It was forecast to be 2,000 ft overcast in about 3 hours, but the severe weather was to arrive about the same time. This weather had already spawned tornadoes in Alabama, Mississippi and western Georgia. So I waited, and waited, and waited.

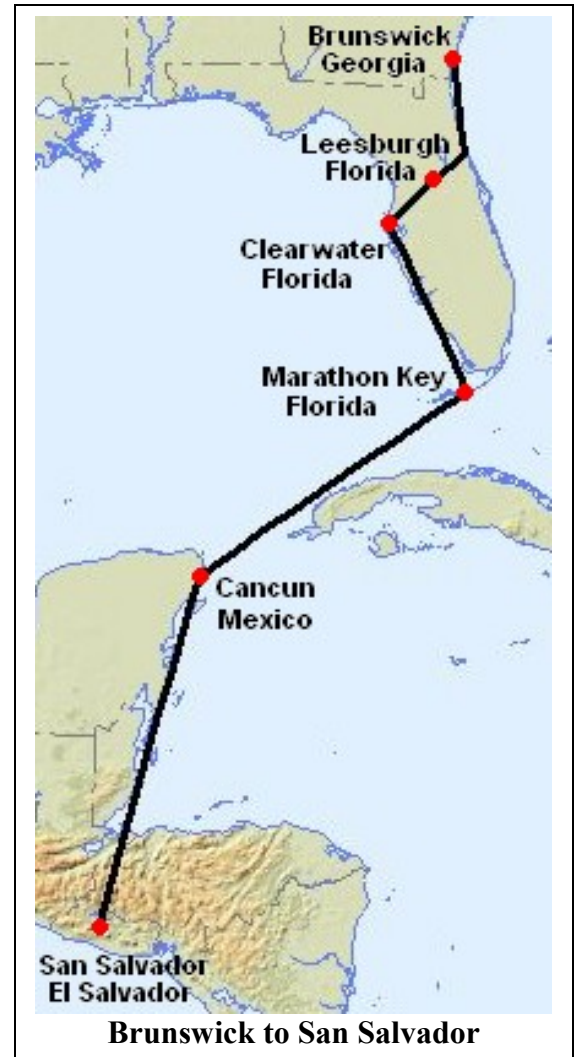
At about 1:00pm I could tell the ceilings were climbing but now the severe weather was getting close. A big line of nasty thunderstorms was headed my way and I could see on the radar image they would be arriving soon. Tornado warnings were being issued for counties to the west. If they arrived before I could leave, I would be stuck for at least another two days. The weather south of Jacksonville was typical VFR with ceiling around 6,000 to 8,000ft. At Leesburg (KLEE), where I was headed for inexpensive fuel, the weather was VFR and forecast to stay that way all day. Tampa Clearwater airpark (KCLW), where I would overnight and pick Millie up, was reporting the same. I had to leave and leave soon. I monitored KSSI's AWOS until it reported 1500 scattered, 2000 overcast. Good enough for me. It was about 2:00pm on Tuesday December 9th, 2008. I jumped into the airplane, taxied to runway 4 and started the return trip to El Salvador.

Chapter 6 (Bad Weather and Bad Comms)

As I climbed in altitude and turned south, I got a better look at the weather situation. The weather to the west looked dark and real bad. Over the ocean to the east it was clear and obviously VFR. To the south it was about halfway in between, not real bad but not real good. Now I was so glad I had subscribed to the XM Weather feature for my Garmin 496 GPS. It clearly showed bad weather about 50 miles to the west but nothing to the south. My plan was to fly along the coastline until I got to Ormond Beach. From there I would head west to Leesburg (KLEE) for inexpensive fuel and finish the day in Clearwater Florida (KCLW). The weather seemed to be good on my path, so I pressed on.

I leveled off at about 1,500ft and had some scattered clouds about 500ft above me. At about 3,000ft the cloud layer looked to be solid. So I flew along at 1,500ft about 5 miles off shore. Within a few minutes my airspeed was showing 150kts and I activated the autopilot. As soon as the autopilot servo kicked in, the airplane started a left hand turn. I deactivated the servo, put the aircraft back on course and tried again. Once again the airplane took an un-commanded left turn. Great, now the autopilot was not working. I would have to hand fly the entire trip back. At least the altitude hold worked.

After a while I was east of Jacksonville Florida (KJAX), still at 1,500ft and I could see the weather clearing up. As the clouds deck got higher I climbed in altitude. By the time I was east of St. Augustine (KSGJ) there were only scattered clouds with no broken or overcast layers. I climbed to 6,500ft and headed towards Ormond Beach (KOMN). By now the radio chatter had increased significantly, mostly with aircraft avoiding the bad weather to the west. Knowing there would be a lot of air traffic around the Ormond Beach VOR (OMN), Cruiser 9PR checked in with ATC for Radar Advisories.



The closer I got to the VOR the more aircraft I could hear on the frequency. At the VOR, I took a right turn and headed towards Leesburg. A few minutes after the turn I noticed the radio had gotten very quiet. A few quick checks and I realized my radio had a stuck mike. When I changed to radio #2, it went to stuck mike with no audio again. The same problem I had in Brunswick was back. Even worse I was flying in an area of fairly heavy air traffic.

I changed the primary radio to an unused frequency and the secondary radio to the last ATC frequency. I could hear the air traffic but as soon as I selected that radio to talk, it went to stuck mike. ATC was calling me but as soon as I selected the radio it again went to stuck mike with no audio. I deselected the radio so that I wouldn't block the frequency for everybody and ATC kept trying to call me.

Since I knew I couldn't respond, I set my transponder to 7700 then after a minute changed it to 7600. ATC came on the radio and asked, if I could hear them to squawk IDENT which I did. We then went through the entire procedure with him asking questions to which I would answer with the IDENT. He had me remain on the frequency as I headed to Leesburg. Suddenly I remembered I had my Icom A-22 handheld transceiver in my bag. I pulled it out, plugged my headphones in and tried calling ATC. Nothing happened. I tried a second time with the same results. On my third try another aircraft called ATC and told him I was trying to call. With that aircraft doing relay, I was able to establish communications with ATC. Apparently my handheld just didn't have enough power to reach ATC, but I could talk to the other aircraft just fine. I confirmed I wanted to continue to Leesburg and land there. About 15 miles out, he sent me to KLEE tower at 119.35. I called the tower on my handheld and got a response. My handheld was strong enough for full communications now that I was close. I got into the pattern and landed at about 4:00pm. The tower controller told me they had been advised by Orlando approach that I would be arriving under NORDO procedures and they had gotten ready to provide me light signals. They were pleasantly surprised when I was able to talk to them with my handheld radio. I have had my handheld radio for almost 15 yrs and had only used it to get weather and initial clearances. This was the 1st time I ever needed to use it in a real situation. I am so glad I have it and carry it with me.

As I taxied, I asked if by any chance there was an avionics shop on the field. Luckily for me Central Florida Avionics & Instruments is at the Leesburg airport. The tower gave me directions to their ramp and as I arrived, a line person was waiting for me. Apparently the tower had called ahead and told them of my situation. Mike Noland from Central Florida Avionics came out and I explained my situation. He told me the problem was probably with the PTT switch and he would check it out for me so I could continue the flight to Clearwater. He told me to go ahead and wait inside the air conditioned office. I went in and looked around the shop. The amount of test equipment there was quite impressive. I could tell this shop does a lot of avionics work.

Before I could even sit down, Mike came back and told me I had a short circuit in the co-pilot PTT line. He could isolate the problem and fix it but it could take several hours. Or he could deactivate the co-pilot PTT line at the intercom panel and I could be on my way within an hour. The only thing that would be affected is that the co-pilot would not be able to transmit until the problem was corrected. I elected for the latter since I wanted to get to Clearwater before dark. He told me it would take a while to figure out which pin to deactivate since he did not have the diagram of my RST-564 intercom. I told him I had the intercom diagram on my laptop and could give it to him on a memory chip, to which he was amazed. That is a huge advantage of flying a homebuilt experimental. I have just about every piece of documentation pertaining to the airplane and have most of it digitized and on the laptop I carry with me. He quickly printed it out and walked off to the airplane while I checked the weather between KLEE and KCLW.

After a while he came back carrying the intercom with him. He told me that he would bench check the intercom just to be sure. It bench checked perfectly and he went back and re-installed the intercom. I walked out with him and he showed me the pin he had deactivated so I could tell whoever was to complete the work. We did a complete radio check with everything working properly. That is when he looked at the rear of the airplane's fuselage and saw the flag stickers I have. His eyes got real big and asked me why I had the Guatemalan, Honduran and Salvadoran flags on it. I told him I was based in El Salvador, had flown the airplane up from there and was on my way back. Slightly in shock, he then asked me if I was based at Ilopango.



Now I was in shock. He not only recognized the flags, he knew the GA airport in El Salvador was named Ilopango. When I said "yes" he told me he had just been there a few weeks before. He goes to Central America once every few months to do avionics work there and visits Ilopango on every trip. He even talked about the aero club restaurant at the airport and how good the food is there. I remembered there had been an American avionics guy at Ilopango a few days before I started the trip. Talk about coincidences. We chatted a little bit about flying in Central America, I paid the bill got back in the airplane and taxied to the fuel pump. After taking a full load of fuel (at \$2.23/gal) I then took off towards Clearwater airpark. Now there two reasons to visit Leesburg, inexpensive fuel and a good avionics shop.

After the communications problems, this part of the flight was completely uneventful, which was fine by me. I could see the bad weather far off to the west and knew it was just a matter of time before it would arrive. After a little over 30 minutes of flight, I aligned myself with runway 16 at KCLW. With a stiff headwind, the landing was short and soft. Over the radio the Clearwater Airpark FBO gave me a spot to park. It was about 6:00pm. I called my wife who was already in the area and she told me one of my good friends (Carlos Montalvo) would be there to pick me up. We have been friends for

over 20 yrs, our wives are super good friends and so are our kids. We would be staying at his house for the night.

While I waited for him to arrive, I pulled out my luggage, secured the airplane and walked into the terminal. The FBO told me there was a \$15.00 per night parking fee, but it would be waived if I took fuel even if I only took a few gallons. I agreed and they put a total of 6.4 gallons of fuel. I paid \$20.16 for the fuel so it was only \$5.16 more than

what I would have paid if I had not fueled up. That meant I paid less than \$1.00/gallon there. Well, at least that is how I like to think of it.



Clearwater Florida (KCLW)

A little while later, Carlos showed up and we went to have dinner. Being in Clearwater, I had to have dinner at the original Hooters restaurant. Besides, I like their wings. Honest! By the time we finished dinner, talked about the things going on in our lives and got to the house it was almost 9:30pm. As we arrived to his house it started raining. I knew this was the beginning of the bad weather system I had been watching and running away from for the last few days. I was at a perfect place where I could wait out the weather. I was on the ground with my wife and very good friends.

Chapter 7 (Clearwater to Cancun via Marathon Key)

The next day I awoke to loud lightning strikes and heavy rain. As I expected the weather system had caught up with me. TORNADOS had touched down further north and east of Tampa causing some major damage. The good thing is that we were getting heavy rains and lightning, but no reports of tornados. All day on the 10th we sat together chit chatting, watching TV and generally enjoying each other's company. During the day, I kept checking the weather to see when we could plan on heading out. According to everything I could see it wouldn't be until at least the next day. So, that night we went to a local restaurant and since the kids didn't want to spend any more time with the "grown ups" Carlos, Zulma, Millie and I went alone. It felt kind of like when we were dating again.

On Thursday, December 11th we awoke to the weather being almost as bad. From Clearwater (KCLW) I was going to fly along Florida's Gulf Coast to Marathon Key (KMTX) in order to fuel up. Then I would fly direct to Cancun Mexico (MMCN) where we would spend the night. But until the weather cleared up a lot more, we were not going anywhere. Even if I had been IFR current I would not have flown, the weather was that bad. So we spent another day with our friends and watched the weather.

I had made arrangements with Pia Gardner (Caribbean Sky Tours) for reservations at a hotel in Cancun and for them to "handle" my arrival. After spending so much time clearing authorities in Cozumel, I didn't want the same hassle in Cancun. Everything was ready, just waiting for the weather to clear up enough to take off.

On Friday, December 12th we woke up to the weather being a little better. Not good enough to fly but much better than the severe thunderstorms of the past 3 days. It was forecast to start clearing up during the afternoon then getting progressively better as the day went on. So we packed our bags, said "good-bye" and headed out to the airport. At about 9am we arrived at the FBO, loaded the airplane and sat around waiting. A few other stranded pilots were there looking at the weather as well as local pilots just passing time. We took advantage of the free time to check e-Mail, make phone calls and watch TV. Everyone was watching the weather and getting updates.

By 11:00 am the 1st IFR pilot decided to take off. The ceilings were still low, but no thunderstorms were in the area. He took off in a Cessna 172 and with the clouds hovering at about 1000 ft, quickly disappeared into the clouds. We waited. I checked the weather again and the briefer told me the weather was VFR south of Sarasota (KSRQ) all the way to Marathon. But between Clearwater and Sarasota, the ceilings were reported low in some areas. So I waited some more.

Around 12:00 noon the weather started breaking up. I could see blue skies, especially to the west over the Gulf of Mexico. This was good since I planned to fly along the Gulf Coast all the way. Another call to FSS and the briefer told me there were spots of low clouds before Sarasota but clear the rest of the way down. Since the ceilings were now at about 2500ft I decided to take off. After a good pre-flight, we climbed in and took off on RWY 34.

I have flown a lot out of KCLW and it is a beautiful place to fly. A lot of air traffic but still beautiful. Since we were just under the Tampa Class B airspace, I flew westbound at 1500 ft until over the water then turned South West on course. The ceilings were about 3000 ft so I stayed at 1500 ft. At that altitude you can appreciate the speed of cruising at 145Kts. Everything flew past us. I have to admit it was quite cool. Just as the briefer had told me, as we approached Sarasota, the ceilings started to climb dramatically. Taking advantage of this I climbed until we were cruising along at 6,500ft. Remembering the grumpy ATC controller the last time I flew in this area, I hesitated to check in. But, I decided to do it anyway. The controller accepted my air file of KIS4 and Cruiser N819PR was headed to El Salvador via Marathon and Cancun.

As we flew along, Millie asked me some questions about the GPS and the radios. This was new because in the 23yrs we have been married and flying together she had never been interested in being anything other than a passenger. I explained a few things about the GPS and walked her through a few basic steps. Having both a Garmin 496 and 296 operating at the same time and with the autopilot not working, I told her the 296 was hers to play and experiment during the rest of the trip. She intently worked the GPS and once in a while asked questions about specific things. She was really interested in the estimated time of arrival (ETA) function. Now she had an idea how much longer the flight would be without having to ask. I also showed her how to enter a frequency into the King KX-155A communication radio. She was real interested in this part too.

Since we were heading southwest, we had a slight headwind but not bad. I knew as soon as we turned more westerly the head wind would pick up. After about 2hrs in the air I turned west south-west near the tip of Florida and closed in on Marathon. Sure enough the ground speed slowed down as we approached Marathon Key. Checking in on UNICOM we set up and landed on RWY 25. It was a short taxi to the fuel pumps to fill the tanks to max capacity.



Marathon Key (KMTH)

While I fueled the airplane, Mille went to the FBO to get something to eat. It was almost 3:00pm and we had not had lunch. When I finished fueling I went to the FBO (Marathon Jet Center) and Millie was not there. It turns out the FBO attendant told her there was a Pizza Hut within walking distance and she went there to get food. While waiting, I checked the weather between Marathon and Cancun. It was VFR with areas of light precipitation on the route. Winds were estimated from the 250 at 20kts. GREAT, another flight with strong headwinds. The briefer also told me that the published radio frequency for Merida Center was inoperative and they were on a different frequency until further notice. Just as I was finishing filing my international flight plan, Millie showed up with two personal pizzas and some chicken wings. We ate them and they tasted so good. She also brought some snacks and drinks to take with us on our way. I had brought some almonds and pistachios for the flight too.

By the time we finished eating and headed out to the airplane it was almost 4:00pm. This would be a long over water flight so I briefed Millie on how to use the life vest and helped her put it on. I made sure she knew how to use the Kannad 406 XS-3 GPS Personal Locator Beacon ELT strapped to her REVERE Comfort Max PFD. We climbed in and headed off towards Cancun. The climb to 8,500 ft was uneventful as we left Marathon. Key West departure soon handed us off to Miami Center as we headed south west leaving the good old USA behind. At check point MAXIM, Miami Center handed us off to Havana Center. The flight was going as planned. While cruising along, I remembered I had bought a new GPX 3847 MP3 player with 2 Gigabytes of memory, dual headset jacks and 15hrs of music. The other one only had about 3hrs of music and I had gotten tired of the same songs over and over again on my way up. I plugged it in and we were soon listening to music over our headsets as we flew along.

Having flown this route on my way up, I thought it would be no big deal to do it going back but I was real worried this time. When I came up, I was by myself. If something happened the only one in trouble would be me. I put myself into the situation and would have to get myself out. But now I was flying far from land with my wife in the airplane. The added responsibility of having her in the airplane with me made me extra vigilant of everything. It seemed like the airplane was making noises I had never heard before. But, everything was normal as we flew along. I can't explain it but I can tell you it is very different flying alone on a segment like this than flying with a loved one.

Everything was going along just fine. A few skirts around some clouds but nothing bad. After a while I asked Havana Center if I could fly present position direct to ANALI, and then to NOSAT staying closer to land just as I did on my way up. This time the controller declined my request and told me to continue on to VINKA as filed. I had heard that they treat November tail numbered aircraft different flying down to Mexico as they do flying up from Mexico. Oh well.

Flying along I had to descend and maneuver around clouds and some rain. I told the controller about this even though I was VFR just to be safe. He told me sometimes they loose radio contact with low flying aircraft in that area and if it happened to contact MERIDA when I was over NOSAT. I gave him an ETA to NOSAT and he gave me the published MERIDA Center frequency in case I lost contact with him. Millie looked at me and asked, "Isn't that the frequency you were told was not working?" I told her yes, but maybe it had been fixed since we took off. Either way we had the other frequency just in case.

Sure enough, after a while I lost radio contact with him as we flew further south west. With a 20kt headwind, we were only doing about 110Kt ground speed. We would take a little longer to arrive but I had plenty of fuel on board. Once again there was a lot of air traffic in the area, especially with overhead airliners. That made me feel better knowing I could always talk to somebody if needed. I also realized that when conversations came over the radio, my music did not cut off as it was supposed to. I asked Millie if hers cut off and she said yes. We have different versions of the Light Speed XL20 headsets and mine needs an external music adaptor while hers doesn't. I guess the adaptor doesn't cut the music out when a radio call comes in. Oh well, when we get to Cancun, I will swap the headsets and the cables to use the other one for flight safety.

As I approached NOSAT, I called Havana with no luck. True to form I had no radio contact with them so I called MERIDA on the frequency Havana gave me. Nothing. I tried again and nothing. I also realized there was no radio traffic on that frequency. Millie asked if we should try the frequency we had been given before leaving Marathon and I said yes. She then dialed in the frequency for me. I selected it and the radio came alive with conversations. This was the correct frequency after all. I tried calling but MERIDA did not answer. After several attempts with no luck I heard another aircraft come on the radio and said "MERIDA center, you have a N819PR trying to contact you. Do you want us to relay?" Soon I was talking to MERIDA center with Call Sign "CACTUS" as a relay. I later found out this is the call sign for US Airways and this flight was inbound to Cancun.



Runway 30 at Cancun

After a while, we were close enough that I could talk to MERIDA Center directly and thanked CACTUS for the help. MERIDA handed me off to Cancun approach and I was cleared behind a Boeing 737, a Cessna Caravan and an ATR-42 into Cancun. Checking in with Cancun Tower we landed straight in to RWY 30 at about 6:30pm Mexico time. The long overwater portion of the flight was over and we were in Mexico. As I taxied to the FBO, ground control welcomed me to Cancun on behalf of Caribbean Flight Tours. We were marshaled in front of the ASUR FBO and met by several persons. One of them had all the paperwork ready and we cleared Immigration and Customs very quickly. In less than 1hr we were on the shuttle headed for the Courtyard Marriott Airport Hotel. We arrived at about 7:30pm and checked in to the hotel.

This is a typical Marriott which included a king size bed, but no INTERNET access unless you pay \$15.00 a day. After taking a shower we went to get something to eat. The hotel restaurant is good but expensive. Oh well, I guess it is Cancun for a reason. After dinner I went to the business center to check the weather forecast and look at



Diana and Jazmynn

satellite pictures for the flight the next day. Everything looked good with Ilopango forecasting clear skies all day. While I was doing that, Millie checked her e-Mail and our VONAGE telephone voice mail. I then overheard a disturbing voice mail message. Our younger daughter Diana had been in a bad car accident while we flew between Marathon and Cancun.

Diana had left 4 messages on our voicemail, all of them crying hysterically and pleading for us to call her. It sounded like she was ok but we did not know for sure. We immediately called her from the hotel room with no answer.

We kept trying until she finally answered her phone still crying. She was not injured, but her car was totaled. The other driver was not injured either. She explained it had been her fault since she had hit the other car. We calmed her down, explained that everything would work out and that the important thing was that she was not hurt. The car can be replaced.

After about ½ hr on the phone (What a bill this would be) we hung up and tried to go to sleep. After that it took me a while even though it was after 11:00pm. Who cared! My daughter was ok and I was spending the night with my wife in Cancun. I would just file for a later departure than I had originally planned and arrive in El Salvador a little later.

Chapter 8 (All the way home)

We woke up on Saturday the 13th fairly rested and looking forward to the final leg of our trip. We were still worried about Diana and the situation with her car so while having breakfast we called her. This time she was calm and had resigned herself to the fact her car was totaled. She got a little emotional and almost cried as we talked since her car had been in the family for almost 10yrs. She remembered when we first bought it and how she got her 1st driving lesson in it. But a car is a car and something that can be replaced. We were just relieved nothing happened to her. While Millie finished breakfast, I checked the weather and verified the flight plan. There were low ceilings in the area and some thunderstorms forecast for the afternoon. I knew we needed to be on our way before the storms moved in. Areas of low clouds were forecast along our planned route but satellite images showed these would be isolated and without much vertical height. The weather at Ilopango was forecast to be clear with visibility over 10 miles. Just your typical weather for Ilopango during December. On long cross country flight, you will encounter different weather along the route. You have to be prepared to deal with whatever you find along the way.

Around 9:00am we checked out of the hotel. Our bill was over \$300.00. The room was only \$75.00 but the dinner, breakfast and two long international telephone calls ran the total up a lot more than we had expected. At least we would not need to pay to get to the airport since the hotel had free airport shuttle. It was a quick ride to the airport and soon we were in the FBO area. They had all my paperwork ready which was quite nice. I told them I would need to fuel up and the FBO guy had to explain the procedure at Cancun to me.



Cancun, Mexico (MMCN) FBO

First you have to get a number from a machine that was on the ramp outside the FBO. This meant going through security. So I loaded our luggage on to the security belt and went through. Now, I had my right knee replaced several years ago due to an old basketball injury, so I set off every metal detector I try to cross. This means I get a personal search by security personnel everywhere. So, after being properly searched, I got to the machine and took a number. Next to the machine was a display telling what number was being serviced. I had number 27 and it was

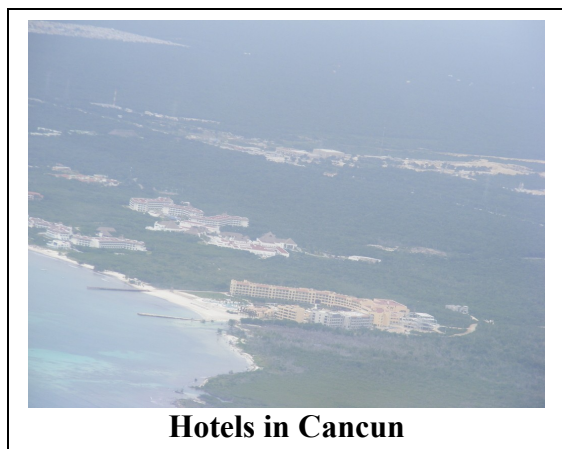
on number 4. It would be a while before the fuel truck would show up. As I waited the FBO guy motioned for me to come back into the terminal. I had to file the paperwork for departure and he would walk me through the process. Back into the terminal I went. I had Millie go out, sit with our luggage and wait for the fuel truck to arrive.

Once again I got to enjoy the privilege of doing Mexican paperwork in order to depart. Multiple offices with many different forms are required in order to depart. The FBO guy had most of the documents ready for me but I still had to complete several of them. One of the forms I requested was the Mexican Multiple Entry permit for 2009. I know I will be flying through Mexico during 2009 so I decided to get it right there. Unfortunately the letter stated I can only enter Mexico from El Salvador. The officer told me I needed another letter if I wanted to enter from the US and each letter costs \$67.00. I showed him my existing letter that shows arrivals from both the US and El Salvador to which he told me that letter was in error. Not wanting to argue with him, I called Rich Gardner (Caribbean Sky Tours) to see what could be done, but only got a voice mail. I left him a message hoping he would get back to me before departing. After this I went back to the FBO area and the airplane. Once again I was searched as I tried to get to the ramp area. Millie was still waiting with the luggage and the number being served was still on 4. I asked if it was being used and they told me yes, but the AV Gas truck had broken down and they were waiting for a replacement to arrive. So, more waiting. At least the weather didn't look to be getting any worse while the ceilings looked to be about 6,000 ft.

As we waited I looked for our airplane but could not see it. The ramp was full. There were at least five big G4 Gulfstreams, several Citation jets, Beech jets and who knows how many King Airs but mine was no where to be seen. I figured they probably had it parked in the back so not to embarrass them, it being so out of place. When one of the ramp workers passed by, I asked about my airplane N819PR. He said "Oh yes, the one with the parrot on the tail. It is right there" He knew exactly which one it was and it was parked right in front of me between two big private jets. It was so small compared to the others I had not seen it. Laughing, I asked if I could go ahead and pre-flight it while waiting for fuel. He said they could bring it to me but I preferred doing it where it was. They brought our luggage so I loaded the airplane and did the pre-flight. After I finished I remembered the music and headset issue so I switched the headsets.

Now the intercom jacks on our airplane are below the seats between the legs. It is a little difficult to get to so I have some extender cables that make it a lot easier. Since the music adapter has a built in extender, the headset I had been using did not need one. But Millie's headset needs an extender cable, so I plugged my headset with the music adapter into the co-pilot seat and Millie's headset with our old extender into my side. Just about then the fuel truck showed up and I filled her up. It took 35 gallons of fuel which was about what I expected. After waiting about 10 minutes, I checked for water contamination and found none. Excellent! Millie and I pulled the plane out a little, climbed in and started her up.

A quick call to ground followed by a short taxi to runway 30 and we were off. It was about 11:30 am. As I climbed out keeping below the clouds Millie remembered about our digital camera which was in a small bag the back seat area. She quickly took it out and began taking pictures. I tease Millie and call her



“The Paparazzi” because she is always taking pictures of everything she sees. She just laughed and kept taking pictures. Cancun is beautiful but with the low clouds there wasn’t much she could take pictures of. But she managed to take pictures of several huge hotels and incredible beaches as we climbed and headed south.

After about 1hr of flying the clouds were gone so I climbed to 8,500 ft and set up cruise flight. The music was playing and every time a radio call came through it cut out just as it was supposed to on my headset. I checked in with Belize Center noticing there was a lot of radio chatter. There were many airplanes flying up and down the Belize coast on this Saturday. We sat back and talked about Diana, the trip so far and things we needed to do once we got back home. While overflying Belize City in beautiful weather, we took turns taking pictures. I was impressed with an island off the coast of Belize that looked



just like a pork chop, so that is what I called it “Pork Chop Island”. The winds were not as bad as I had expected with just about 5kts of headwind. At this rate we would be in El Salvador slightly ahead of schedule and with a larger fuel reserve. Millie pulled out the pistachios and almonds we had and we ate them while drinking Diet Coke and water. A regular in flight snack, just like when we fly back home on a commercial airline. On this day we were not mere tourists. We were international travelers. This is one reason I love flying and the adventure it brings.

Soon we were approaching Guatemalan airspace and Belize handed me off. Millie now had control of her GPS as well as setting in frequencies on the radios. My Garmin 496 kept telling me it was not receiving any XM signal but I was expecting that. I checked on the new frequency but no one answered. I tried a second time but still no answer. I then realized the radios were very quiet with absolutely no chatter. Oh, no! My radios had gone to stuck mike again.

Why this was happening was beyond me. I knew the co-pilot PTT was completely disconnected so that could not be the problem unless it had somehow connected itself. Knowing this to be impossible I started to troubleshoot the problem as I flew along. Since the autopilot was not working, it was a little difficult doing this while flying the airplane. I kept reminding myself “FLY THE AIRPLANE FIRST, figure out the problem second”.

The only thing I could think was that it was either the audio panel, one of the intercom jacks or one of the headsets was causing the problem. Central Florida Avionics had checked the audio panel back in Leesburg and it was working fine. Besides, if that was the problem I sure couldn’t fix it 8,500 ft in the air as I flew along. If it was my intercom jack, maybe I could use the jack on Millie’s side to communicate until we landed. I unplugged my headset from the adapter and asked Millie to plug it into the jack under her seat. She did it but nothing happened. So the intercom jacks seemed to be OK. All this time, I kept wandering off course as I did the troubleshooting while Millie stayed quiet. I was super busy and slightly concerned trying to do so many things while staying safe in the air. My next thought was that maybe a headset is causing the problem. I

decided to plug Millie's headset (my old one) back into the jack under my seat. Knowing I had to eliminate as many possible points of failure I decided to unplug the old extender cable on my side. As soon as I pulled, it came apart in my hand. Immediately the radios came out of stuck mike and I had full communications again. This made total sense.

The old extender cable was frayed and normal vibrations caused it to short out forcing any selected radio to transmit. It had not been a problem while plugged into the co-pilot side since the transmit capability was disconnected back at Leesburg. But when I moved the extender to the pilot side, I moved the problem over as well. I was so angry but at the same time happy to know I had found the actual problem and it was fixed for good. I showed Millie the cable and explained to her what I just did. She just said "I knew you were busy and working hard so I just shut up, and stayed out of your way". With that I had to laugh making me forget my initial anger.



Clouds and Mountains over Honduras



Millie the Co-Pilot

Once on the new frequency, we overflew Puerto Barrios, Guatemala and turned on our final heading to Ilopango. Here some of the mountains rise to over 12,000 ft so I started the slow climb to 12,500 ft. As we flew on I could see a scattered cloud deck just below us. I could see spots of ground below but to the right a solid layer of clouds covered the mountains. I have to admit it was an incredible sight. Some mountain peaks rose up through the cloud layer looking like islands on a vast white ocean.

Millie took some spectacular shots of the

scenery as we flew along. Knowing she never gets to be in the pictures, I took a picture of her with her sunglasses and headset flying along in the co-pilot seat.

We flew along for about 35 minutes at this altitude seeing patches of ground below as we closed in on El Salvador. I noticed that the clouds ahead and below looked strange. We were approaching the border between Honduras and El Salvador when I realized all the clouds stopped right at the border. I had never seen anything like this before. There was almost a straight line where there were no clouds of any kind. This line seemed to exactly follow the border between the two countries. It was as if the clouds did not have ATC clearance to enter El Salvador. We took more pictures as we



Straight line of clouds

flew over the area. As soon as we passed the cloud line, we were handed off to El Salvador control in completely clear weather.

We descended from 12,500 ft to 8,500 ft as I set up for landing. I had to maneuver a little in order to lose enough altitude without shock cooling the engine or gaining too much airspeed. With the “before landing” check list complete, I changed over to Ilopango tower and we were cleared to enter a left downwind for runway 33. While I set up for landing Millie took more pictures and even a short video of us turning base to final for runway 33 at Ilopango. At about 2:30pm on Saturday, December 13, 2008 we landed at Ilopango airport in San Salvador, El Salvador. The final flight leg of the trip was over.



Clouds stopping at the border



Short final to Ilopango Runway

I taxied and parked the airplane on the International ramp to clear Immigration and Customs. After Mexico, entering El Salvador was a breeze. After that, Millie went to the aero club to rest while I taxied the airplane to the hangar. I got to the hangar where our friend Tom Strezishar was waiting to drive us home. We parked the airplane in the hangar, moved the luggage from the plane to his car and drove to the aero club to pick Millie up. During the three weeks, we flew the Puerto Rico Flyer (Cruiser N819PR) through 7 different international airspaces, traveled more than 3,500 miles in over 28

hrs of flight time. We were home.

As we drove away, I could not help looking back in awe at that little airplane with such a sense of pride that is hard to explain. She was the most amazing machine in the world to me and I was so proud to own it. I silently thanked Rich Trickel for designing her, Dave Tate for building her and PULSAR for bringing her back to life. No matter what happens in the future, I feel I have been truly blessed by God for giving me the privilege to have experienced such an adventure with Millie at my side.

The Jazmynn trip was over.



The Puerto Rico Flyers; Millie, Galin and Cruiser 9PR

ABBREVIATIONS

100LL	100 Octane-Low Lead, Aviation Gasoline
ADIZ	Air Defense Identification Zone
AOPA	Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association
ASUR	Aeropuertos del Sur
ATC	Air Traffic Control
AV Gas	Aviation Gasoline
BFR	Bi-Annual Flight Review
CERAP	Combined En Route Approach (Air Traffic Control Facility)
CFI	Certificated Flight Instructor
CFII	Certificated Flight Instructor - Instrument
DGAC	Dirección General de Aviación Civil (Mexican FAA)
EAA	Experimental Aircraft Association
ELT	Emergency Locator Transmitter
ETA	Estimated Time of Arrival
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FBO	Fixed Base Operator
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
FSS	Flight Service Station
GA	General Aviation
GIA	Golden Isles Aviation
GPS	Global Positioning System
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
IFR	Instrument Flight Rules
ILS	Instrument Landing System
KIAS	Knots, Indicated Air Speed
KTS	Nautical Miles (Knots) per Hour
LED	Light Emitting Diode
METAR	Meteorological Aviation Report
MHz	Megahertz
NM	Nautical Miles (Knots)
NORDO	Non Operational Radio
POH	Pilot's Operating Handbook
PTT	Push to Talk
RPM	Revolutions per Minute
UPS	United Parcel Service
USD	United States Dollar
VFR	Visual Flight Rules
VOR	VHF Omni-directional Radio Range

CHRISTMAS 2008



By: The Puerto Rico Flyers
Galin Hernandez & Millie Santiago

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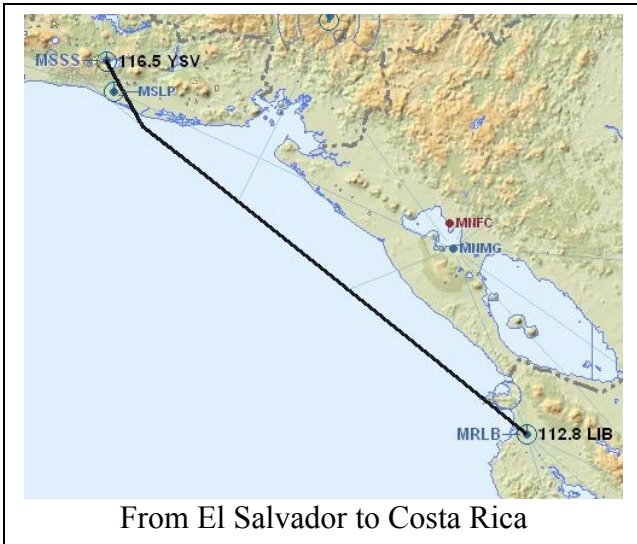
Ch 1 – Christmas in Costa Rica

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 22nd. So we decided to prepare for our next flight. Millie, being the organized person at the house, started packing the night of the 23rd 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 24th 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 13th 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

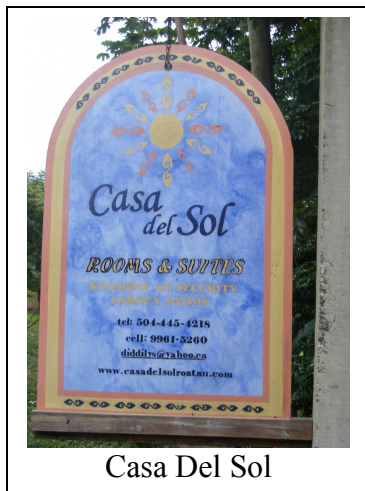
I called Millie and gave her the bad news. I could tell in her voice she was a little disappointed, just as I was. I really wanted to go. While we talked, we started thinking about alternatives. She asked “What about Roatan Island, Honduras?” This was an idea I hadn’t thought of. I told her it was worth 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 (MHLM) 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) 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 27th. 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 26th, 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



TACA-A319

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.



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 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.

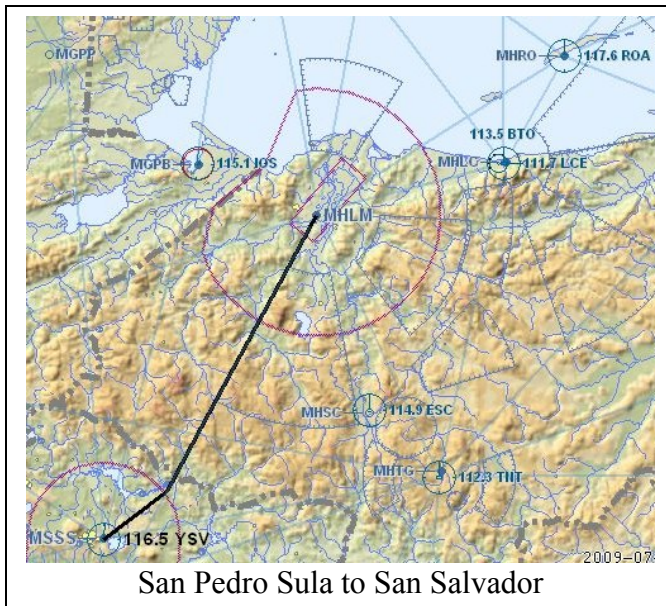
The terminal was full since several commercial flights had arrived and were getting ready to depart. I found the ATM machines and took out, what I thought was about \$100.00 in local currency. The terminal had a food court so I got in line at the Wendy's hamburger stand and ordered three hamburger meals. 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 27th 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 1st 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

THANKSGIVING 2009

Planning the trip

Thanksgiving 2009 was fast approaching and I knew this would be the last chance I might get to take a long flight within Central America. Knowing Millie wanted to go somewhere interesting, I decided it was time to take a long flight somewhere. Now a good friend of mine, Willie Jimenez, had invited us to visit him in Panama many times. This was perfect because I hadn't seen Willie in a long time, we would have to fly over Nicaragua and Costa Rica to get there and Millie had never seen the Panama Canal. The flight would be a long one but with the new long-range fuel tanks in the airplane we could easily make it nonstop. This meant I wouldn't have to land somewhere, clear customs and immigrations get back in the plane takeoff then clear customs and immigrations again when we arrived in Panama.

When I told Millie about the trip she immediately said yes. She too wanted to see Willie and his wife Carmen Gloria. I told her how long the trip was to be, about seven hours in the airplane, but it didn't bother her at all. So I called Willie, told him of our plan and he immediately offered to arrange for our arrival in Panama. The only thing left was to pack our luggage, file our flight plan and go. So I started planning the flight.

The flight would take us from San Salvador El Salvador, over Managua Nicaragua, just north of San Jose Costa Rica, over the northern shore of Panama then down into Panama City. According to my plan it would take six hours with no winds but I knew the winds were normally from the Southeast so it would take a little longer. I sent an e-mail to my friend Milton Martinez and told him of my plan so he could file the necessary paperwork for the over flights. I use MiltAir Aviation services every chance I get since he does a great job and knows exactly what needs to be done.

I told Millie to pack only one piece of luggage since we were to have a full load of fuel and the airplane would be heavy. This would be the first time that all 92 gallons of fuel would be in the tanks. With Millie, 92 gallons of fuel, myself and our luggage we would be just under maximum gross weight. It would be the first time I would actually feel how the plane handled at that weight.

On Wednesday, November 22 2009, we got up early and arrived at the airplane about six the morning. It was still dark as we loaded the airplane and made sure everything was secured in its proper position. As the sun came up I was just finishing loading the airplane while paparazzi Millie took pictures of everything. I finished the pre-flight about

7:00 the morning, we pulled the plane out of the hangar, closed the hangar with our truck inside and taxied over to the fuel pumps. I told the attendant to fill in all the way up while I went over file my flight plan. You should have seen the look on his face when I told him it would take about 90 gallons of fuel.

I filed a simple IFR flight plan. It was funny to see the flight service person's face when I told him I had 11 hours of fuel on board. With the flight plan filed, I walked over and started checking the airplane one last time. By now the Aero-club restaurant was open. Millie bought a couple of bottles of water and a diet coke for the flight. We brought our cooler that had sandwiches, some Gatorade and some peanuts. I checked the fuel to make sure it contained no water and being happy with the results; we strapped in and started the engine. The actual trip had started.

Heading out

When I checked in with ground control, they gave me an amended IFR Clearance. The clearance had me doing the "La Palma" departure once airborne. I had practiced that particular departure a few weeks earlier while doing an IFR proficiency check ride and it isn't too hard. It starts with a right turn soon after takeoff from runway 33, take a heading of 140° then intercept and track the YSV VOR 090° radial out bound. At the 7 mile point I had to be at least 7000 feet in the air. At 15 miles from Ilopango I should make a left turn while climbing to at least 8000 feet. This would not be a problem especially in VFR conditions. The departure requires me to climb to 11,000 feet prior to checkpoint ONGOS which I knew was going to be hard to do. ONGOS is fairly close to Ilopango and at max gross weight the plane would have a hard time climbing that high in such a short time. I accepted the flight plan, did my run ups and we took off.

I was out bound on the 090° radial and about 12 miles from the VOR when air traffic control asked me if I was going to the 15 mile point. The way he asked I knew something was not right. I took a look at my departure plate and realized that for the ONGOS transition I had to make a right turn at the 10 mile point instead of a left turn at the 15. If I took a right turn at the 15 mile point at 8000 feet I would come dangerously close to a large volcano known as Chichontepeque. This was the very same volcano a TACA airline 737 had crashed into about 10 years before killing everybody aboard. I told air traffic control I was making a left turn at that point and would close into 10 miles. He told me that if I was VFR I could continue direct to ONGOS visually from the current position. I accepted telling him I had the volcano in sight and headed straight to the ONGOS checkpoint. This taught me a lesson. Even if I know what the procedure is, I need to review it carefully before actually flying it.

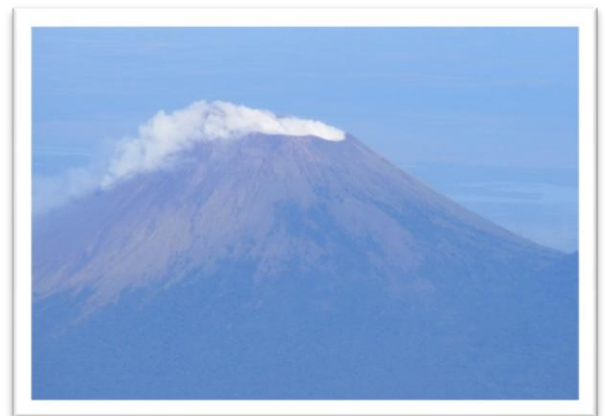
By now it was about eight in the morning. With six hours of flying ahead of us we should arrive into Panama City around two in the afternoon. This meant we would arrive just before the worst time for thunderstorm activity in Panama City. I had no forecast for the winds along the route but I had added an extra half-hour to my estimate arrival time just in case the headwinds were strong. Besides, I had 4 extra hours of fuel on board so I was not worried.

We settled back and watched the altitude slowly climb as we headed towards ONGOS checkpoint. Just before I got to ONGOS I knew we would not be at 11,000 feet as required by the flight plan. Since the airplane was heavy it was barely climbing at 500 ft./m. The worst part was that we were only doing an airspeed of 80 kts so the engine was starting to run a little hot. This meant I had to increase my airspeed but that would slow my climb rate. I reluctantly increase my airspeed watched the engine run a little bit cooler while my vertical speed dropped to 250 ft./m. When we reached ONGOS we were only at 9000 feet. Once again the air traffic control told me to continue VFR until reaching 11,000 feet. About 5 miles after passing ONGOS, we reached 11,000 feet and continued IFR. Soon afterwards El Salvador control handed us off to Nicaragua control.

Enroute to Panama City

We flew along enjoying the scenery since there wasn't a cloud in the sky anywhere to be seen. This was also the first time we used our new Light Speed Zulu active noise reducing headset. They were working beautifully. Our airplane is very noisy but with these headsets it was quieter than my car. The best part is that with Bluetooth capability. I can listen to music without any wires being connected to it. Millie could listen to her music while I listened to mine. Whenever air traffic control called, the music would be muted until the conversation was over.

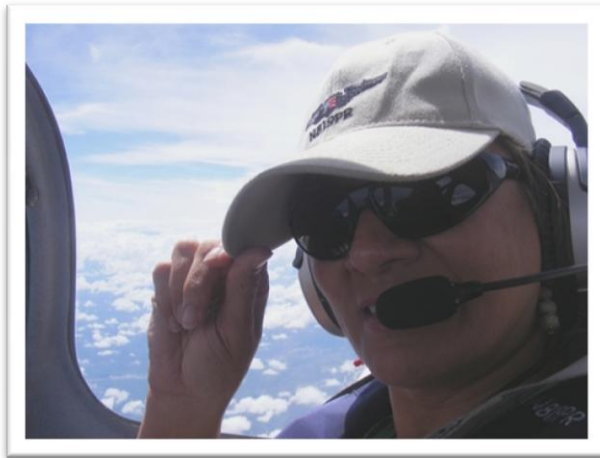
About 50 miles before Managua we spotted a volcano about 3000 feet below and a few miles to the left of us. As we got closer we could see that the volcano had smoke flowing down one of its sides. As we got closer Millie pulled out the camera and started taking pictures. Since she was on the right side of the airplane and the volcano was to our left the closer we got, the harder it became for her to get a good picture. So when we got close it I took the camera, snapped a few pictures and gave it back to her. This is easy to do



when your airplane as an autopilot connected to a GPS. It turned out to be one of the best pictures I have ever taken while flying.

After passing Managua we were supposed to climb to 15,000 feet in order to stay IFR. This is because we were going to be far from the radio stations that air traffic controllers use to communicate until the next checkpoint. The next checkpoint is over 150 miles away which meant I would be flying for over an hour above 15,000 feet. But to fly at 15,000 feet for that long I need supplemental oxygen which we don't have in our airplane. The highest I would feel comfortable flying for that long without oxygen would be 13,000 feet. So I had filed to fly this portion VFR then, when at Puerto Limon Costa Rica, I would pick up the IFR flight plan again until landing in Panama City.

After about 4 hours of flying we were somewhere over Costa Rica when we realized we were hungry. Millie pulled out the sandwiches we had packed, handed me one and I ate it. She did not want to eat or drink anything, but did take a little bit of water. I drank



some Gatorade and finished off the sandwich. Up to this point the flight was going pretty smooth except for the takeoff portion. So we talked, listen to music, watched the scenery and tried to be as comfortable as we could. By this point the clouds were starting to build up a little, but we were still in very clear weather.

Approaching Puerto Limon we could see in the distance a lot of clouds. At Puerto Limon we picked up our IFR clearance and headed on to Panama. Still at 11,000 feet

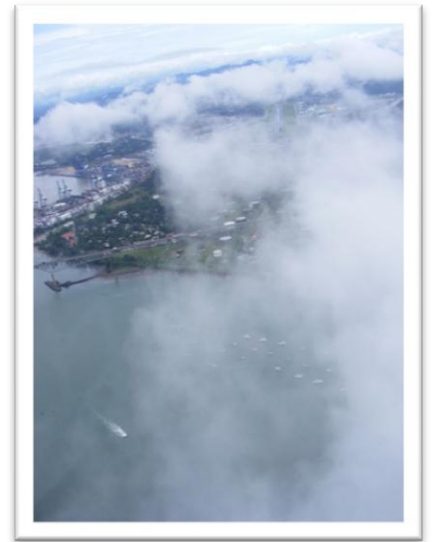
we flew along over the ocean as we headed towards a large amount of clouds.

Checking with air traffic control they told me the weather in Panama City was completely IFR. I knew it would be challenging to do the approach into Manuel Gelabert airport (MPMG) which was our final destination in Panama.

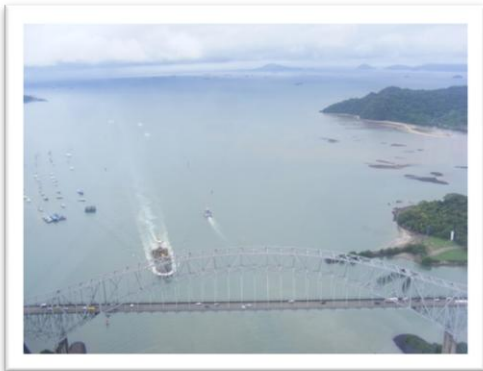
Before we even got to the North coast of Panama we were in solid IFR conditions and it was raining. My total concentration was now on flying and navigating on the route since I knew there were mountains all around me. The rain was probably falling lightly but since we were doing about 140 Kts it was hitting the front of the airplane pretty hard. At 140 Kts it seemed like we were in a hurricane. I was so happy the airplane has an autopilot slaved to the IFR GPS which decreased my workload significantly.

As we got closer to Panama City Air traffic control continued to bring me lower. Soon we were at 4000 feet, yet I could see nothing outside but clouds. The controller handed me off to approach and he gave me vectors to final. Still not being able to see anything but

clouds I followed his direction and after a few minutes we were at 2000 feet. He told me he could not bring me any lower until I had the airport in sight. I knew I was on final and the airport was in front of me somewhere, but I couldn't see it. I was still in solid IFR conditions. When he called that the airport was 5 miles on my nose I could see the clouds starting to break up a little. The approach to MPMG is a little bit difficult because on the north end of the runway there are mountains that climb up very quickly. On both sides of the runway there is also high terrain. At about 2 miles out I could finally see the runway between some of the clouds. I told him I had the runway in sight and he handed me off to the tower frequency. As soon as I called Manuel Gelabert tower he cleared me to land straight in. Once I got below 2000 feet there were no clouds and I was in complete VFR conditions, but I was still too high. But by now I was very close to the airport and still at 2000 feet so I knew it would be very hard to land.



No matter how hard I tried to lose altitude and slow the airplane down I just couldn't get it done. By the time I reached the threshold I was still doing about 130 Kts and in no position to land. I told the controller I was going to a go around and set up for a normal landing. I pulled up, made a left turn and got into the normal traffic pattern for landing. While I was maneuvering, Millie took pictures. She took a great picture of a large ship entering the Panama Canal under the Americas Bridge. On this second try the landing was normal and although the runway was wet from all the rain we landed without incident.



As soon as we taxied off the runway, ground control directed us to park next to the FBO hangar. Now this was odd because I had not requested FBO service, but I parked there anyways. As soon as I got out a person from the FBO came out and started to help me. He took me into the FBO to fill out paperwork. Willie was there waiting and told the person that I was not using the FBO facilities. After a few seconds of talking back and forth, they gave me my paperwork and told me to move the airplane to another side of the airport which I did. There we cleared immigration and customs, closed the flight plan and took everything out of the airplane. I wound up parking the plane near the control tower.

Thanksgiving Day in Panama City

By the time I finished Millie and Willie were waiting for me outside the terminal with the luggage in the car ready to go. It had taken 6 1/2 hours of flying to get there which meant the headwinds had been about what I had planned for. During the entire time I had eaten one sandwich, drank a little bit of Gatorade and one Diet Coke so I was hungry. Willie took us to his apartment to drop off our luggage and join his wife Carmen Gloria. Right after we dropped off our luggage we headed out for lunch. They took us to



a place called “Lenas y Carbon” that was on the waterfront. We ate while looking at some real nice boats. I don't know if the food was delicious or that I was so hungry I didn't care. We didn't do much for the rest of the day, just talked and caught up with old times. After lunch we went back to their apartment.

Willie's apartment is on the 12th floor of a building overlooking Panama City. From his living room there is an incredible view of the entire skyline. You could see the airport where we had landed, the ships getting ready to enter the Panama Canal and all the buildings. The weather was still pretty bad and it was cloudy but anything below us was very clear. Willie told us that the weather had been really bad with thunderstorms everywhere up to about one hour before we landed. It was still raining but you could tell that the weather was clearing up. Within a few hours night had fallen and the view from the apartment was spectacular. Since it had completely cleared up you could see all the lights of the ships in the harbor waiting to enter the Panama Canal. The temperature had also cooled down so much that you did not need air conditioning. As a matter of fact it was a little bit cold so we had to close the windows.

By now it was late; we were tired and I just wanted to go to bed. Willie's apartment is set up so he has a guest bedroom which simulates a separate apartment. This makes it so that anybody who visits has a little bit of privacy. It's really well set up. So we both took baths, got in bed and went to sleep.

The next morning I woke up and went out of the bedroom. Carmen Gloria was already in the kitchen preparing breakfast. The four of us sat around the table eating, talking, enjoying the company and looking out over a spectacular view of Panama City. The weather was perfect. There was not a cloud in the sky to be seen. Of course I had selected to arrive on the worst possible day, the day before. From the breakfast table we could see the airport I had landed in with airplanes taking off and landing. They were

actually many small private planes landing and taking off from the airport. I could tell that Panama has an active general aviation community.

After breakfast I needed to go to the airport to take some things out of the airplane I had forgotten. So we all got in the car and headed to the airport. The ride was very short since it was close by. They waited at the car while I got a ride out to the airplane. There I took out my charts my portable GPS and a few of the things that I would need to plan my flight back to El Salvador. I even got one of the Panama "FAA" employees help me put a Panama Flag sticker on the airplane just before I closed her up. Now I have all the flags of Central America on the airplane.



Once I had everything I needed, we got back in the car and headed out to do some Thanksgiving shopping. Willie and I just walked around while Millie and Carmen Gloria bought a few things. The dinner that night would include some of Willie's friends who we had not met. As we drove around Willie showed us some of the sights and some of the interesting things of Panamanian Culture. We had lunch at the local mall which was full of people. Panama City is a very modern city and it actually reminded me a little bit of Chicago. The traffic was really bad but I expected that.

By the time we realized it was getting late and we had to get ready for dinner. The cost of living in Panama is very low so Willie has a maid working for him part-time. She was almost finished with preparing the Thanksgiving dinner when we arrived back to the apartment. We all started getting ready for the dinner with Millie taking a bath and me looking into how the weather would be on Saturday for our flight back. It looked like the weather would be similar to the weather when we arrived. They were forecasting lots of rain, clouds and thunderstorm activity. With this in mind I decided we would take off early the morning before the weather got really bad. Like always, the flight would be in the worst weather.

When Millie was out of the bathroom it was my turn. I showered and got ready for dinner. By the time I'd finished and came out of the room I could hear the guests had already arrived. I walked out and join them with Millie already being in the group. One couple was the parents of Willie's daughter-in-law while the other couple was from Puerto Rico like us. The entire conversation centered on the fact we had flown our small airplane there. They wanted to know everything about the trip. They asked about how big was the airplane, how long it had taken, what the weather was like and 1 million other questions. They could not believe we had done this. I explained we had flown our airplane to other places and this was just another adventure for us. Millie gave them her

perspective as a passenger and how much she enjoyed it. We wound up talking about the flight and other flights we had done for the longest time. They were so interested in the situations we have encountered during our many flights. We were still talking when the food was served and we sat down for dinner. We talked about everything, enjoyed each other's company and ate dinner. With such good food, conversation and everything else by the time we realized it was almost midnight. Soon afterwards they said goodbye, wished us luck on our return trip and left. Once again we were tired and went straight to bed falling asleep immediately.

The Sights of Panama

We got up on Friday morning to another beautiful day with no clouds in the sky. Once again we had a great breakfast while enjoying the scenery through the apartment windows. Since this was going to be our last full day in Panama, Willie wanted to show us around. The first place he took us was to Gamboa, that has a resort with a beautiful golf course and huge clubhouse. In order to get there we drove along the side of the Panama Canal. There Willie told us about the area's history. We could see lots of ships going through the canal as we drove along. Before long it was time for lunch. One of the things I had told Willie was that I wanted to have lunch at the canal so he made reservations at the Miraflores locks restaurant.

When we arrived at the locks the place was full of tourist. We had to do a long line to get in after climbing some very steep stairs. We got in and took the elevators to the restaurant on the 2nd floor. I had been there before so it was no big deal to me but it was



Millie's first time. From the restaurant you have a great view of the canal locks and the ships go right by you as they transit the canal. Millie could not help herself, took the camera out and started taking pictures. I sat down ordered something to drink and headed to the buffet line. Off in the distance I could see two large cruise ships in the canal heading our way. I knew this was going to be an impressive sight as they transited the locks right in front of us.

Seeing the locks operate gives an idea of the magnitude of the engineering miracle the Panama Canal really is. Especially when you realize that it was built in 1913, there are

no pumps at all and everything works due to rainwater and gravity. It took almost an hour for the two ships to go through the canal in front of us with Millie taking lots of pictures. By the time they were through I had finished lunch but Millie had not started so she went to the buffet and sat down to eat. While she was eating she looked down to the lower canal area and saw some friends of ours from the U.S. Embassy in El Salvador. We called out to them and they waved back. It turns out a group from the embassy had also come to Panama for Thanksgiving but they had come via commercial airline while we flew our own plane. Lunch took about 3 hours while we just enjoying the company and watched other ships go through locks.

When we were good and ready we paid the bill and left the restaurant to finish our tour. Just outside the restaurant was one of the highly ornate busses common in Panama.



Millie thought it was so cool I took a picture of her in front of it. Then Willie took us all over Panama City explaining its history and showing us many of the sites. It was especially interesting going to the older sections of Panama City and seeing houses from the early part of the 19th century. All in all, it was a great history lesson. Going to Gamboa, having lunch at the canal and visiting the old city had taken all day. By the time we finished the sun was setting and it was time to go

home. Since we had eaten lunch so late and had eaten so much we were not hungry when it was dinner time. We ate a little bit of the leftovers from the Thanksgiving dinner and just relaxed. We were actually very tired from running around Panama City all day. I knew we had a long day ahead of us so I excused myself early and went to bed.

Heading Back

The next day I woke up early to check the weather and to do the final preparations for the return flight. Just like I expected the weather had turned bad and it was raining. Just like the arriving flight it would be hard IFR between Panama City and Puerto Limon Costa Rica then very clear VFR for the rest of the flight. Once again Carmen Gloria had a great breakfast for us as soon as we came out of the room. We finished the early breakfast, loaded our luggage into the car, said goodbye to Carmen Gloria and Willie drove us to the airport. We are really fortunate to have them as friends.

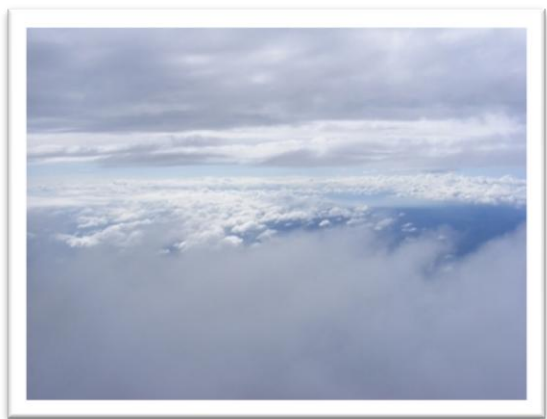
At the airport we dropped our luggage off at the terminal so Millie could go through security while I went to file the flight plan. As part of the flight plan procedure I had to

pay the landing fees, arrival fees and all the other things that are charged to a private airplane. But they were not that bad, I had expected a lot more. I also called for fuel and they told me it should arrive while I did the preflight. The preflight was very uneventful and just like they said the fuel truck showed up quickly. I had them fill the tanks all the way to 92 gallons just to be on the safe side. Once they finished I completed my preflight which included draining some fuel from the tanks to make sure it had no



water. I got in the airplane and taxied over to the main terminal building where Millie was waiting. Once I made sure that all the paperwork was complete and everything was set, we loaded the luggage in to the plane and strapped it down. Millie got into the plane put on her seat belt and closed her door while I did a final walk around. It was raining very lightly and the clouds were about 3000 feet so I knew we would have no problem departing.

Waving goodbye to Willie, who was still waiting just outside the fence, I started the engine up. A call to clearance delivery got us our IFR flight plan and we taxied out. While we taxied I checked everything to make sure it was working correctly and they were. Soon I was cleared to the tower frequency got takeoff authorization and we were airborne. Within a few minutes of takeoff we were handed off to center and entered hard IFR conditions just like I had expected. Even though the airplane was heavy we climbed easily to our initial altitude of 6000 feet. By now it was about eight in the morning which meant we were basically on schedule to arrive in San Salvador at about two in the afternoon. We stayed at 6000 feet as we headed north in order to burn fuel for our eventual climb to 12,000 feet. Just like our inbound flight I could see nothing outside the windshield and made sure that I was right on the route. Once again it was so nice to



have an autopilot slaved to the GPS reducing my workload. With our headphones playing music we settled down for the long trip home. As we flew along we commented on how lucky we were to have friends like Willie and Carmen Gloria in such beautiful place like Panama.

Just after crossing the North shore of Panama heading towards Costa Rica, we started our climb to 12,000 feet. Here the clouds were breaking up and we were in and out of the VFR conditions. A few

turns around some nasty looking thunderstorms and by the time we reached Puerto Limon we were in complete VFR conditions. At Puerto Limon we canceled IFR flight plan, climbed to 12,500 and continued VFR to Managua, Nicaragua. As we overflew Costa Rica the clouds below us looked like small balls of cotton. Glancing at the ground I could tell we had a good tailwind pushing us along. A look at the ground speed indicated on the GPS confirmed I had a slight tailwind. At this rate we would be there almost a ½ hour early. There really isn't a lot to do when you are cruising along in the airplane from one point to the other. An occasional call to air traffic control is about all you have to do especially when the autopilot is flying the airplane for you. You just monitor the systems to make sure they are doing what you want.

We had been in the air about three hours when Millie suddenly said “I have to pee real bad”. Now this was a problem. We have a very small airplane and there's no way to go to a bathroom. As a matter of fact we do not even have a bathroom in the airplane. So here we are, somewhere over Costa Rica, we don't have permission to land and my wife has to pee real bad. I asked her do you really have to go or can you wait to which she gave me a dirty look and said “I have to go now”!

I carry portable urinals in the airplane but they're not really designed for women to use. As a matter of fact a guy would have a hard time using one of them in such a small airplane. There's no place to stand up so no matter what happens you have to do, whatever is you have to do, without getting up from the seat. The good thing is that these portable urinal are designed to immediately gel so there is zero chance of spillage into the airplane. The hard part is getting the pee into the urinal. It's quite obvious that a woman's body is very different from a man's body so I knew it was going to be extremely difficult for her. I told her to reach into my flight bag and pull one of them out.

When she pulled it out she looked at me and said “There is no way I can go to the bathroom in this”. I told her that was the only thing we had and we could not land for at least another hour. Again she gave me a real dirty look and said “I guess I'll just have to do it right here”. I have to admit it was really hard for me not to laugh as she wiggled around and tried to pee into the portable urinal without getting up off her seat. I looked away so as not completely embarrass her more than she already was. I honestly don't know how she did it but to my surprise, and extreme relief, she actually did it. She then closed the urinal, sealed it and put it in the trash bag. I don't think I could have done it as well as she did. I have a newly found respect for my wife as a flyer after this.

Back in El Salvador

About an hour later we checked in with Nicaragua control. At this point we came down to 12,000 feet and continued IFR from that point on. The controller was very helpful and asked me if I wanted to go from my present position direct to ONGOS intersection which of course I did. This would shave off a little time from our flight while taking us almost the entire length of Lake Nicaragua and Lake Managua. These are the largest lakes in Central America and among some of the largest lakes in the world. From 12,000 feet you could tell how big the lake is when there is a point that you can't see the shores.

Now it had been about five hours of flying and we were hungry. So pulled out the sandwiches Carmen Gloria had made for us back in Panama. I drank a little bit of Gatorade, not wanting to drink too much especially after Millie's incident. As you can imagine, Millie didn't want to drink anything at all but I convinced her to drink a little bit which she did. I told her we were approaching ONGOS intersection, would be in Salvadoran airspace and landing soon. Since we were on an IFR flight plan when we checked in with El Salvador control they cleared us direct to the Comalapa VOR in order to do the approach into Ilopango. We were in clear VFR conditions and I wanted to land. A couple of calls later I just canceled IFR and headed VFR straight to Ilopango.

No sooner had I cancelled IFR when a loud squeal came over my headset. It was so loud I ripped the headset off since it hurt my ears. Now, without my headset and with such a noisy airplane there was no way I could hear the radio. So I turned the noise reduction feature off and put them back on. I tried turning the feature on and off but the loud squeal came right back. I tried this several times with no luck so I just left the noise reduction feature turned off. Now I could really appreciate the active noise reduction function of the headset. Although I could hear the radio, it wasn't as comfortable as with the feature working. Millie asked me what had happened and when I told her she insisted we swap headsets. She knew it was more important for me to hear the radio calls than for her to do it. Anyways, since we were close to landing she would only have them on for a short while. As soon as I get to the house I will send them off for repair. I could not go back to flying without active noise reduction headsets even though I had flown my entire career without them. I had gotten spoiled with the new headsets.



A few minutes later I was in a position where I could do a straight in approach to landing at Ilopango. But once again I was too high while too close to the airport. Keeping you high in altitude is just air traffic control's way of maintaining safety in mountainous areas. So once again just like back in Panama, no matter how hard I tried I could not lose all the altitude and airspeed by the time I was on

final. Since no one else was in the traffic pattern I told the tower I would do a 360° turn before landing. This gave Millie a great chance to take pictures of the area as I maneuvered. When I came out of the 360° turn I was lined up almost perfectly for landing on runway 33. We touched down after just over five and half hours of flight. We had a good tailwind after all.

After landing we taxied to the international ramp to clear customs and immigration. Since it had been over 5 1/2 hours of flying we were hungry and ready to get home. I let Millie go to the Aero club restaurant while I taxied the airplane to the hangar. It took about 45 minutes to unload the airplane and load our stuff into the truck. Then I drove to the restaurant and sat down for lunch. A few of my pilot friends were there and they were curious about the flight. We talked while I ate lunch but I was ready to go home. Saying goodbye to them we got in the truck and drove home.

Thanksgiving Day 2009 had been another great adventure for us with our airplane. We had gotten to overfly the Central American countries we had not done yet and spent great time with our friends Willie and Carmen Gloria. Millie had been able to see the Panama Canal and we have met some new friends. It had taken us 12 hours of actual flying in four days. These are adventures and stories we will never forget. Once again we had been flyers not tourists.

2010 Puerto Rico Fly-In

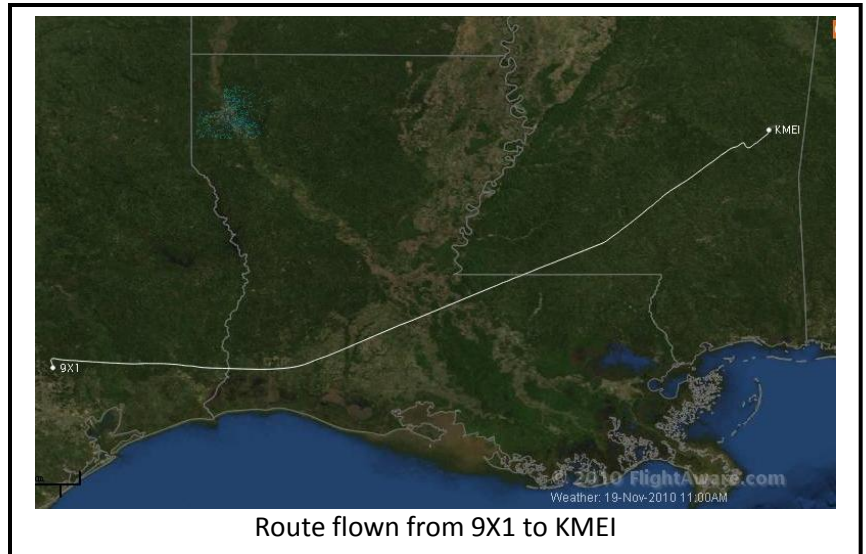


Written by Galin Hernandez & Millie Santiago
Photos by Millie Santiago
Flight tracking information by Flightaware.com
Maps by Google.com

Heading to Aquadilla, PR

It had been a while since we had a flying adventure so we figured it was time for another one. Galin had been talking with several other pilots wanting to help the general aviation community in Puerto Rico. Besides, he had 5 weeks of vacation time and we could get away from cold weather for a while. That's when we decided to take our airplane on a trip to the Caribbean and back for the holidays.

So on November 19th, 2010 we started the trip to Puerto Rico with a flight from Houston, Texas (9X1) to Meridian, Mississippi (KMEI). The weather wasn't exactly perfect with low clouds all over the area but once airborne IFR, Houston Center cleared us to 8,000ft and we were above the clouds. From that point on we settled down to a nice smooth flight. At one point the controller handed us off to another control facility and Galin made his initial call by mumbling something, but saying our tail number very clearly. Millie looked at Galin and asked, "What was that all about?" That's when he said he didn't catch the name of the new control facility and used an old trick until he could figure out who he was talking to. The controller, probably thought there had been some interference, ignored the mumble and chatted away. We started laughing and couldn't stop for the longest time.



After about 3 hours of flying we descended through the clouds as we approached Meridian. There were a lot of airplanes talking away on the approach and tower frequencies procedures as we did a GPS approach to runway 04. We broke out of the clouds at about 4,000ft aligned with runway 04, landed and taxied to the FBO ramp. As we pulled in to the ramp we saw they were parking us along side two US Navy F-18 fighters. Unfortunately they taxied out before we could get out of the airplane and take pictures. A few minutes later a US Navy T-45 Goshawk taxied up and parked next to us. It was so cool. Then it hit us. We were at an airport



Parked next to a US Navy T-45 Goshawk at KMEI



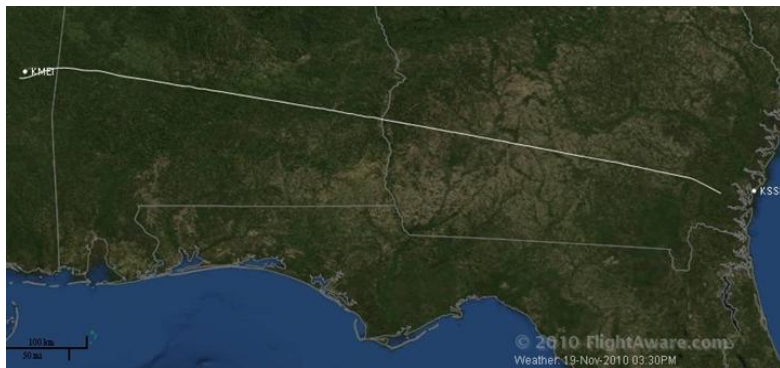
Millie reflected in the Meridian Aviation FBO door.

that military pilots use for training flights. As usual, no sooner had we parked people come up to the plane wanting to take a closer look and asking all kinds of questions about it.

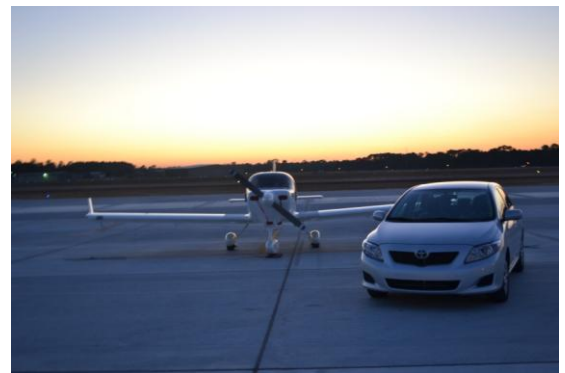
Once inside the nicely kept FBO we were welcomed by the lady running it. She told us to help ourselves to the free lunch available there. We had pizza and ice cream then Galin went outside and fueled the plane up. While there we talked to several student and instructor pilots from the Navy, Marines and Air Force. They were interested in knowing about the airplane and our travels. Having retired from the Air Force, Galin couldn't resist joining a couple of Air Force pilots there in poking fun at the Navy and Marine claiming real pilots fly for the Air

Force. Just typical inter-service rivalry fun. While Galin filed a flight plan, Millie walked around the area taking pictures. After about 2hrs there, we were ready to head out but knew we would stop here on our way back.

The next leg from Meridian, Mississippi to St. Simons Island, Georgia (KSSI) took just under 3 hours in perfect weather. We had filed GPS direct so we got there just as the sun was setting. Our rental car was waiting for us



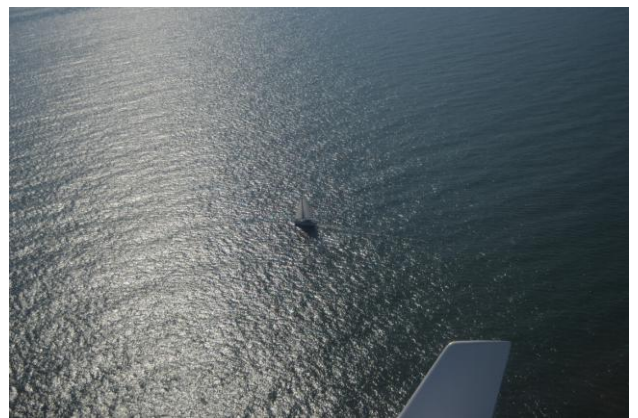
Route flown from KMEI to KSSI



On the Golden Isles Aviation Ramp

parked inside the airport fence making it easy for us to get our luggage into the car and go to the hotel to rest. We were too tired to visit our daughter Diana in Savannah, GA that evening so we decided to rest for the night. The next day we surprised her at the Bohemian Hotel where she works. We had lunch there and the food was exquisite. During the next few days we visited her several times at work. While at the hotel we took pictures from the rooftop bar where you get a view of Savannah's river walk. During our visit, Diana gave us our Christmas presents. Galin got a Peanuts comic strip book which he wanted for a long time since the one he original had was lost and I got some gorgeous earrings.

Over the next few days Galin went flying with some of his friends. One of them is a well known orthopedic surgeon with his own airplane. This is when Galin came back in love with the new iPad with aviation applications. The other friend is an Instructor Pilot who is also an instructor at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC). During this time Galin took advantage and completed a Biennial Flight Review even though it wasn't due for another few months. He also went to his doctor for a check-up getting a clean bill of health. This fulfilled some requirements he wouldn't have to worry about for a while. We took time to inspect our house there and do all the things we wanted to do in Georgia. During these days we also took a few flights around the Golden Isles to see the area and take pictures from the air. We took pictures of many things as we flew including a large sailboat just off the coast.

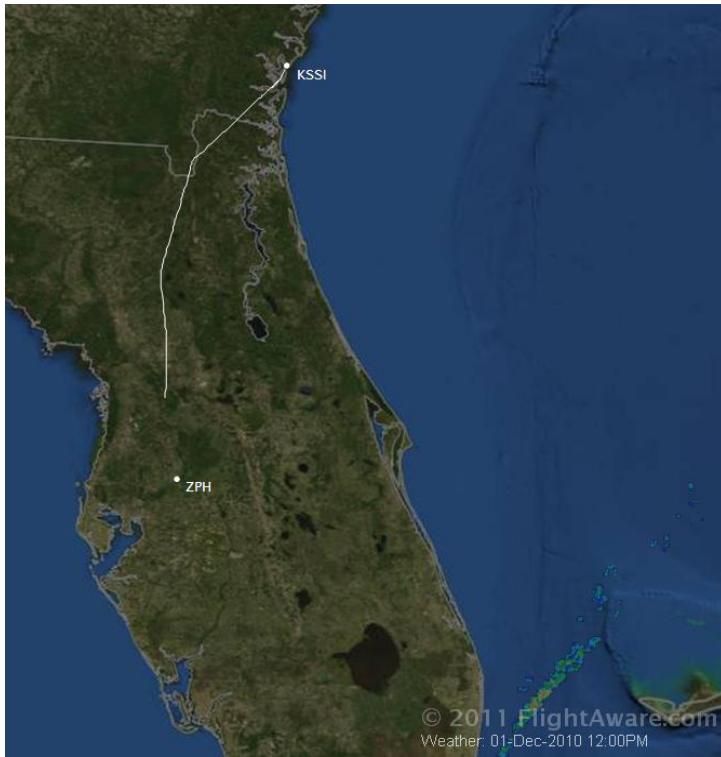


Sailboat off the Golden Isles of Georgia

On our last Sunday there we decided to fly over to Baxley, Georgia (KBHC) and fill up the airplane since fuel there was only \$3.75 a gallon. It was a nice short flight there and we quickly had the airplane full of fuel. When we tried to start the airplane, the engine would not turn on. The airplane battery had been giving us problems for several months but we didn't want to buy a new one. Now we were stuck at Baxley and there was nobody there. We made a few calls and the airport manager said he would have the local mechanic drive out to help us. About 20 minutes later he showed up. Galin explained the problem and asked him to give the battery a boost charge. As we waited for the battery to charge up we chatted about airplanes, our trip to Puerto Rico and hung out in the FBO office. About 15 minutes later the battery seemed charged up so we paid him for his time, got back into the airplane and it started right up. We taxied out and had another uneventful flight back.

Now it was time to head out to Florida. We flew there because a 1½ hr flight beats a 4 to 5 hour drive. Besides we were heading to Puerto Rico anyway. On December 1st we landed in Zephyrhills, Florida (KZPH). The next

day we went back to the airport to get some things from the airplane. While we were there, sky divers were everywhere, planes were fueling up, and a banner towing plane was picking up and dropping banners close to where we were. It was one busy airport so Millie took her camera out and clicked away.



Route taken from KSSI to KZPH



Zephyrhills, FL (KZPH) flight activity

Having had the problem with the battery at Baxley and with $\frac{1}{2}$ our trip still ahead of us we decided to cave in and buy a new battery. Besides this one was already 9yrs old. A few days later the new battery arrived to the hotel we were staying so Galin went to the airport to install it. Even though it was the same battery the top part was slightly different so the existing aluminum bracket holding the battery in place would not work. A quick trip to

Lowe's, a \$2.50 mini hacksaw, some trimming of the bracket and the battery was firmly in place. When we tested the battery, the engine started up faster than it had ever done in the 3yrs we have had it. Go figure! Then we took the old battery to Advance Auto and gave it to them for disposal. They tested it and told us it was in bad shape, something we already knew. At least we wouldn't have to worry about a weak battery anymore.

After spending several days in the Tampa Bay area, sharing time with long time friends and inspecting our apartment, it was time to head out. On December 9th we filed our IFR flight plan and took off towards Tamiami, Florida (KTSMB). On the way there the autopilot failed and Galin had to disengage it. The weather was fine until we got just past Sarasota, Florida. From there, and as expected, the clouds closed in on us and it was raining. We got bumped around a lot while the controllers changed our flight route three times. When we got close we were vectored for the visual approach into Tamiami but we could not see the airport because of the low clouds. So we were then sent out over the ocean to execute a GPS approach until low enough that we broke out of the clouds and we landed. Galin said this had been one of the most difficult flights he has ever made due to the combination of poor weather, in flight changes to our route and the autopilot failure. Of course things fail when you need them most.



Route flown from KZPH to KTSMB

At Tamiami we met up with Anthony Pereira who would fly down to Puerto Rico in his Flight Design CTLS Light Sport Airplane (N179CT). Anthony is part owner of Premiere One Aviation and not only sells Light Sport planes but owns one too. The CTLS doesn't have the range or speed as ours so he planned on stopping in Exuma (MYEF) and Providenciales (MBPV) while we would fly non-stop. Anthony would be going VFR at 9,500ft while we would be IFR at 11,000ft. He would leave two hours before us so both airplanes would arrive in Puerto Rico at about the same time. We briefed the route, the weather, frequencies, alternate plans and what to expect on the flight down. After a few hours of talking, trying to cover everything possible and looking over both airplanes and having lunch, we got back into the airplane for the short 15min flight to Homestead, FL (X51).

The next day we went back to Tamiami to finalize details for the flight to Puerto Rico. While in Tamiami, we also saw a long time friend, retired Puerto Rico Air National Guard Lt. Col Julio Rodriguez-Butler, who we



Carlos Rosaly, LtCol Julio Rodriguez-Butler & Galin at the Runway Café, Tamiami Airport



Vinny Tirado, Carlos Rosaly & Galin at the Wings over Miami Air Museum, Tamiami Airport

hadn't seen in about 19 years. There was a lot of catching up to do. While having lunch with Julio, we met two Puerto Rican aviation icons Carlos Rosaly and Vinny Tirado. Carlos is a retired airline pilot who flew for CaribAir and later Eastern Airlines while Vinny is retired from US Customs and runs the "Wings over Miami" aviation museum. We got a great private tour of the museum; saw the vintage airplanes they are restoring along with a dose of some South Florida aviation history. Eventually we had to say fair-well since it was time for the next leg of our trip.

We got up early on the morning of December 11th and headed to the Homestead airport for what we would be our longest non-stop flight yet. Galin loaded our luggage into the plane, fueled up and paid our FBO fees while Millie took pictures. There was plenty of activity going on including a hot air balloon and some ultra lights flying around. Millie was amazed on how the balloon actually lands, like a controlled crash. She asked herself if she would ever fly in a balloon like that one and silently decided against it, at least for now.

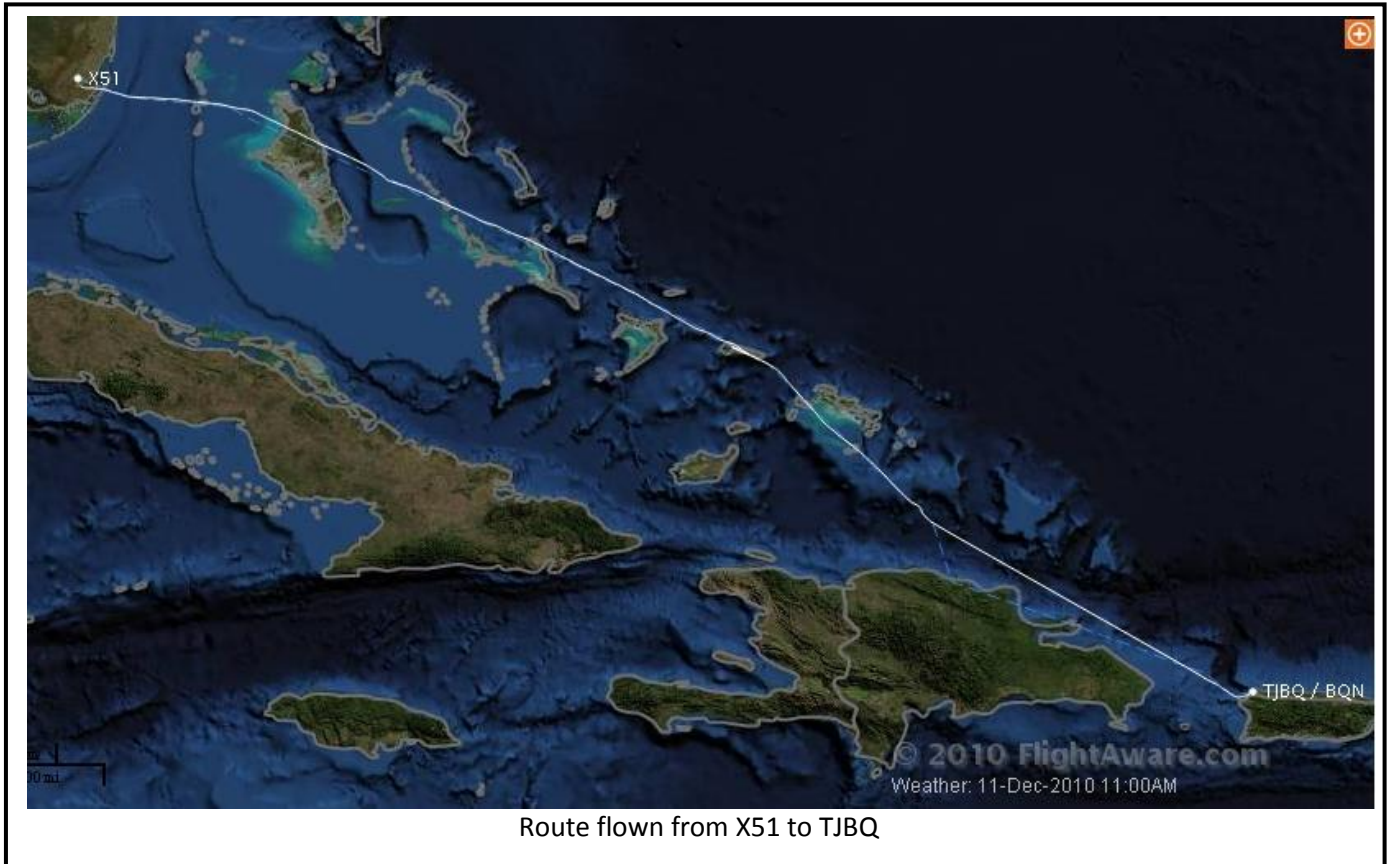


Hot Air Balloon and Ultra-light aircraft at Homestead, FL (X51)

A call to a Flight Service briefer and our next IFR flight plan was on file. Galin had finished everything so around 8:45AM we started our flight towards Aguadilla, Puerto Rico (TJBQ). The weather was beautiful so we took off visually and picked up our IFR clearance to 11,000ft from Miami departure once airborne. When we were several miles east of the Florida coast we were handed off to Nassau approach and got cleared direct to

Gran Turk (GTK). That would cut several minutes off our total flight time which was looking to be about 6 1/2hrs total without headwinds.

After about 2hrs of flying we heard Anthony checking in on the radio (N179CT) as he departed Exuma. We were behind him but flying faster than he was so we were catching up. From there on we kept in touch on a



frequency we had briefed the day before. It was fun updating each other on where we were, how far we were from one point and how fast we were going. Both of us were experiencing around 15Kts headwinds even though he was at 9,500ft. A few hours later Anthony landed at Providenciales while we continued on. About 1hr later he was airborne again but now we were slightly ahead of him just passing Gran Turk Island.

From Gran Turk we turned south towards Puerto Plata (PTA) in the Dominican Republic. Before we got there Santo Domingo Center let us fly direct to checkpoint KOBET then to KATOK for a handoff to San Juan Center. Good, another few minutes were taken off our flight time. We wanted both airplanes to land in Puerto Rico at the same time but now this was not going to happen. We were already ahead of him and were flying along faster. Besides Anthony might arrive after US Customs closes which meant he would have to continue on towards San Juan to clear Customs. Galin had so much time available during this flight he was able to troubleshoot the autopilot and figured out how to make it work when it fails. Now he can pass the information to the factory so it doesn't happen. Until then, we can at least get it back to work when it fails in flight.

Once at checkpoint KATOK we were handed off to San Juan Center. It had been almost 13yrs since we had last flown in San Juan Center's airspace and it felt great coming home. Just for practice Galin requested the GPS approach to Runway 8 at Borinquen (TJBQ) and started the decent. San Juan approach asked what maximum speed we could maintain in the descent since there was a Dash-7 aircraft behind us and he needed to maintain 140Kts in the approach. Galin told him we could maintain 140Ktss also until final and he requested we do so. We could have done a lot more in the descent but didn't want to push in to the airplane's yellow arc. We sure didn't want to wait for him to land before we did.

After almost 7hrs en-route, in which Millie watched two in flight movies, we landed into Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. Since it was later than expected we asked the tower to advise US Customs that Anthony was running late and

to please wait for him. Anthony landed about 30 minutes after we did, thankfully with Customs still waiting for him.



Gerry & Galin just after we landed

When we pulled up to the Western Aviation FBO ramp, our friend Gerry Giles was waiting for us. Gerry runs the aviation museum in Aguadilla and has the same mindset Galin and Anthony have, to get youth interested in aviation. Gerry helped us unload the airplane then invited us to a typical Puerto Rican Christmas party that night. So we went to the hotel and got ready to party. Even though we can be party animals we were so exhausted after such a long day that our eye lids were heavy during the party. We did enjoy ourselves a lot eating great food and seeing several of our old Ramey friends including some of our daughter's teachers. But we wanted to rest so we politely excused ourselves and went back to the hotel to sleep. It was great to finally arrive at our intended destination.

The next day Galin and Anthony flew both planes to an aviation activity at Humacao (X63) while Millie stayed behind to share time with family. Even though she wanted to go, she needed a break from flying. When Galin came back he told her that as soon as he parked the plane in Humacao, people came to see it and loved the PR flag and the parrot on the tail. Several persons told Galin that they had read about the airplane on the INTERNET and wanted to see it in person. That was amazing to us. Galin was impressed with some remote control airplanes and helicopters flown by young adults. He also met some interesting people including Charles Peterson who is working to keep General Aviation interest alive in Puerto Rico.

It was now time to work on our "To Do" list. Our top errand was to get new birth certificates for the family, which took us three days, but we finally got them. We also took some time and went sight seeing through the towns of Aguadilla, Aguada, Rincon and Añasco. We ate all the foods that you can only get in our island. Galin also visited his old job with the US Custom's Flying Mofongo Brothers and showed the airplane off.

There was one day that Galin and Anthony took off towards to Isla Grande (TJIG) but due to bad weather they ended up in Mayaguez all day. They had lunch at a "guagua" which is a van converted to a food stands serving typical Puerto Rican food along the road. They made the best of it by flying each others airplanes. At the end of the day, we were happy to enjoy the day even though we didn't do it together.



Our airplane at Humacao, PR (X63)

Later that week we went to the San Juan Metropolitan area and visited family. In Bayamon we visited with Millie's Mom. We wanted to meet up with Galin's brother but it didn't work out. We visited the Silver Wings Aviation Academy with Anthony getting to know their staff at the Isla Grande Airport (TJIG). For this trip we

drove and it took forever. This is when we realized how much more convenient it is to fly over large traffic jams instead of being stuck in the middle. The next time we visit San Juan, we will definitely fly.

That Saturday Galin flew to Isla Grande to participate in an open house sponsored by Silver Wings Aviation Academy. While Anthony gave orientation flights in the CTLS, Galin had our airplane on static display for the persons that participated. The idea was to raise awareness of general aviation and to show the different types of aircraft that are available.

The main topic was the fact we had flown these aircraft from Florida to Puerto Rico and were going to fly them back. Many of the persons were amazed with this feat, especially that we had first flown from Houston to Florida and then to Puerto Rico. It had not occurred to them that a general aviation airplane can be used for that kind of trip and that it would be quite an adventure. Since we made the trip using two different methods, (Anthony went VFR and made two stops while we flew IFR non-stop) it showed that anybody can do it with proper planning. While there, we generated a lot of interest in making the trip an annual event so others that want to do a trip like this have a mechanism to accomplishing it. So now we are thinking about planning another trip like this during December 2011 and see what kind of interest it generates.



N819PR and N179CT at the Silver Wings Aviation Ramp



Galin & Jimmy Pesquera at Isla Grande

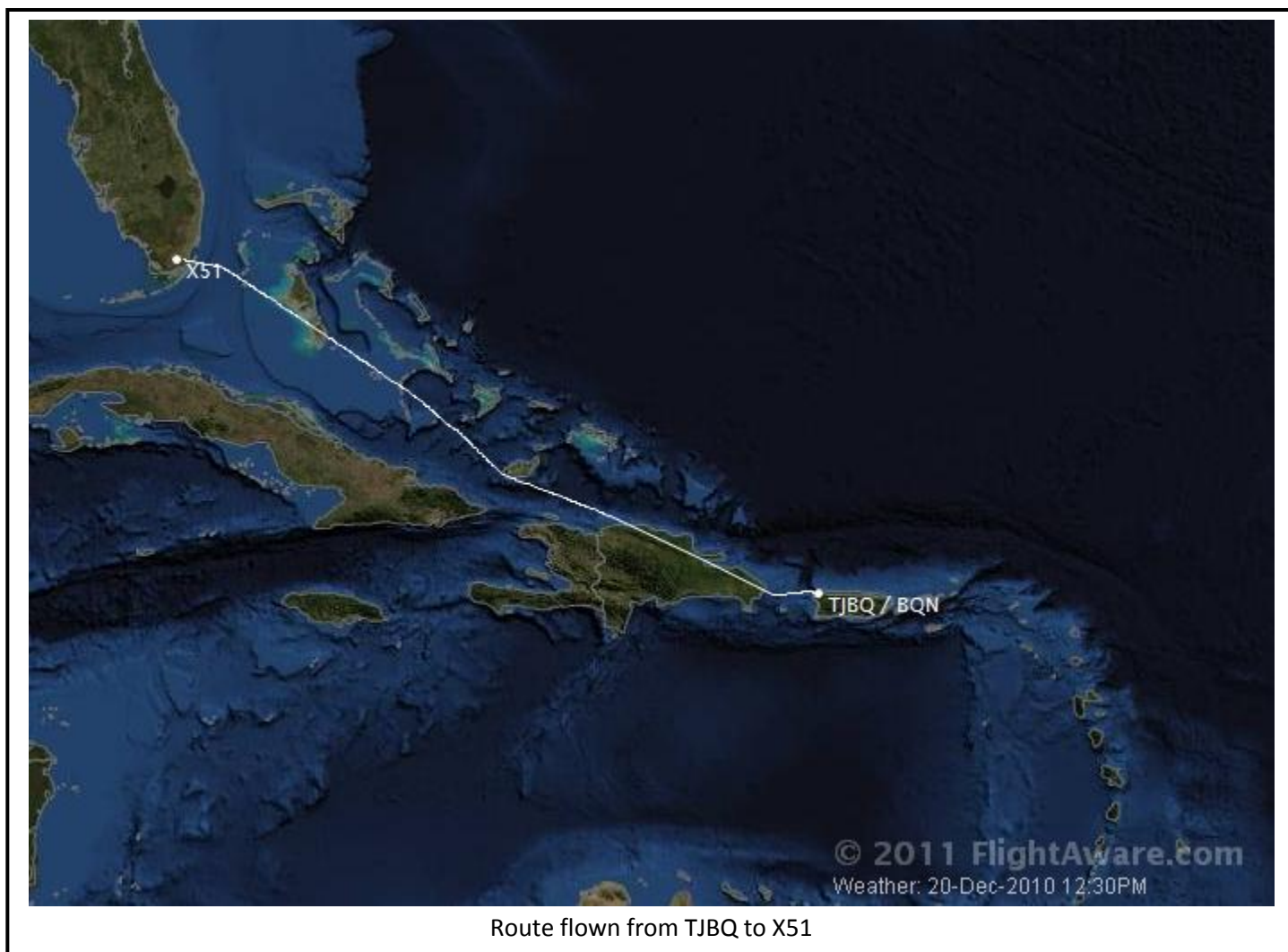
During this open house, Galin also got to spend time with his very good friend, retired United Airlines Captain Jimmy Pesquera, who he had not seen in many years. Galin & Jimmy worked together in the Puerto Rico Air National guard for many years and played Basketball together. Jimmy, as everyone else who attended the open house, was impressed on how technologically advanced our airplane was. Galin got to see the beautiful Citation Jet that Jimmy now flies as a “part time” job for fun and to keep him busy. Now this is the way to fly!

Finally, with our errands complete, we enjoyed our last day in Puerto Rico during this trip visiting with family members we had not seen. During our last full day we took a 2½ hour photo flight around the island. We flew along the coastline at 1,000ft

over water. We got permission to fly at 500ft just off the San Juan shoreline until east of the San Juan International airport (TJSJ). While off shore Salinas, we circled over several persons riding jet skies near a small island as they excitedly waved to us. This flight gave us a great last look at Puerto Rico from the air. Now it came time to head back to Houston and home with our first leg from Puerto Rico to Florida.

HEADING BACK TO HOUSTON

The plan was to leave Puerto Rico around 9:00am after clearing US Department of Agriculture, fueling up the plane and paying the FBO bill. Unfortunately, the weather wasn't cooperating. It was raining at TJBQ with the worse weather in a line running southwest to northeast. It wasn't extremely bad, just a large area of clouds between 3,000 and 8,000ft with lots of rain. Along our planned route the weather was poor until about 50 miles



to the northwest. After that it was fine. With this information Galin filed a IFR flight plan for a 10:30am departure, 1½ hrs later than what we wanted. We still had to load our suitcases and baggage into the airplane but we didn't want the inside of the airplane to get wet while doing it, so we decided to wait for the rain to stop. While waiting, the local A&P Mechanic, Jose Lopez, told us to pull the airplane into his hangar and load it there. We took this offer, loaded it, fueled it up and were soon ready to go. By the time we taxied out from the FBO it was already 10:45am, a lot later than we had originally planned. Then, with our engine running, we waited on the runway at intersection ALPHA while ATC looked for our flight plan. After about 20 minutes they finally found it so on December 20th, 2010 we left Puerto Rico on our way back. We were already late and with the expected headwind this meant arriving into Homestead a lot later than anticipated.

Since the airplane was loaded up with fuel and baggage, we were heavy. When we got close to checkpoint KATOK we were only at about 4,000ft and climbing at about 750ft per minute. San Juan Center told us that we needed to be at 10,000ft at checkpoint KATOK or Santo Domingo Center would not accept us into their airspace. We told them we could not do that so they changed our route to checkpoint ANTEX about 50 miles to the south of where we were. This meant we would stay in the bad weather a lot longer than expected while adding another 15 minutes to our already late arrival. When we got to ANTEX we were in and out of the clouds

at 8,000ft and got handed off to Santo Domingo Center. At least from ANTEX they cleared us direct to Puerto Plata (MDPP) then to checkpoint RETAK where we would be back on our original course in Haitian airspace.

When we got to RETAK, we could not contact Port Au Prince Center on the radio. However, we also heard several other airplanes calling with no answer. After about 10 minutes an Air Surinam airliner started relaying radio calls from several of us to Port Au Prince Center. By the time we got our communications relayed to them we were already at checkpoint ALBEE and were handed off to Miami Center. From there we flew to Great Inagua Island (MYIG) then turned on route A315 towards Florida. It was absolutely beautiful to fly over all the islands as we headed northwest while the headwinds were not as bad as we expected. About 5½ hrs after takeoff Millie had to pee badly. So she wound up using the portable urinal while airborne just south of the Island of Stella Maris in the Bahamas. At least this time it was a little easier since this was the second time she has used it in flight.

As we approached the Florida coast we had been airborne for about 6½ hrs when the controller asked how much endurance we had left. He probably thought we were low on fuel and needed priority handling. A quick check verified we still had about 2-3hrs of fuel to which the controller asked "What kind of airplane is that?" Galin laughed and told him we could carry about 11hrs of fuel onboard but only brought 9hrs on this flight to which he was amazed.

Seven hours and forty five minutes later, our longest non stop flight ever, we landed at Homestead's airport. The sun was already setting and it was a lot colder than Puerto Rico. This is when Millie captured the moment with her camera.



Sunset over the Homestead, FL ramp

When we turned on our cell phones there was a text message from Anthony welcoming us to Florida. He had kept an eye on us through Flight Aware and knew we had arrived. We secured the airplane, got our rental and called Millie's uncle to see what he was up to. He invited us to his house to eat some pork chops with rice & beans. It was delicious. There we not only saw her uncle, some of her aunt's siblings and a cousin she hadn't seen in a long time. It was peaceful and nice to know about the family that she hadn't seen for a long time. Unfortunately the exhaustion of flying got to us quickly. We said our goodbyes and went to the hotel. We took our showers and went straight to bed because we were headed back home the next morning.

Our THANKS go out to the many persons and businesses that we encountered during this trip. We especially want to thank the following:

Meridian Aviation, Key Field, Meridian Mississippi
Southern Wings and Training, Malcom McKinnon Airport, St. Simons Island, Georgia
Golden Isles Aviation, Malcom McKinnon Airport, St. Simons Island, Georgia
Zephyrhills Aviation, Zephyrhills Airport, Zephyrhills, Florida
Premier One Aviation, Tamiami Airport, Miami, Florida
Silver Wings Aviation Academy, Isla Grande Airport, San Juan, Puerto Rico
Western Aviation, Rafael Hernandez Airport, Aguadilla, Puerto Rico
Puerto Rico Sport Aviation Federation, Humacao Airport, Humacao, Puerto Rico
Ramey AFB Museum, Rafael Hernandez Airport, Aguadilla, Puerto Rico
Homestead Executive Jet Center, Homestead General Airport, Homestead Florida
Wings over Miami Museum, Tamiami Airport, Miami, Florida

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ATC	Air Traffic Control
FBO	Fixed Base Operator
GPS	Global Positioning System
IFR	Instrument Flying Rules
Kts	Nautical Miles per Hour
Nm	Nautical Mile
VFR	Visual Flight Rules
Yellow Arc	Airspeed at which the airplane should only be operated in smooth air

2011 Holiday Trip

100th Anniversary of Flight in Puerto Rico

Starting the trip

After we completed a trip from Houston Texas to Puerto Rico in our airplane as part of our 2010 holiday vacation, we decided we would do it again in 2011. During the trip we became friends with Anthony Perea, another pilot based in Miami Florida who joined us in his airplane during the trip and also wanted to make the trip again. So in July, 2011 we started planning the trip back to Puerto Rico.

We had initially decided to start the trip on December 9th and return to Miami on December 18th but this quickly changed. While doing some research on the Internet I found that the first documented



flight of an airplane in Puerto Rico occurred on December 1, 1911. This meant that December 1, 2011 would be the 100th anniversary of powered flight in Puerto Rico. Further research indicated that there was nothing planned to commemorate this important event. Once Anthony and I talked about this we decided to change the dates to coincide with this important date.

Anthony quickly started contacting people in Puerto Rico to have some kind of commemorative event during the time of our trip. The Puerto Rico Sport Aviation Federation

and the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico, School of Aeronautics both became very active with the idea of a commemorative event during the week we were going to be there. During the trip planning I also researched and compiled information about the beginnings of aviation in Puerto Rico. At Millie's insistence I made a presentation in both English and Spanish with the information I found and posted it to our web

page. With this in mind I decided to depart Houston just after Thanksgiving to be in Puerto Rico by December 1st, 2011. Millie did not have a lot of vacation time available so she would meet me at Jacksonville after I returned from Puerto Rico and we would visit our daughter Diana in Savannah, Georgia.

FlightAware > Live Flight Tracker > N819PR > 25-Nov-2011 > 9X1-1R8

Classic Earth View Aviation Sectional

N819PR
(registration) (photos)
HERNANDEZ GALIN
RAMEY PR

Alert Me

Aircraft TRI-R KIS TR-4 Cruiser (piston-single) (KIS4/G - [track](#) or [photos](#))
Origin North Houston Business (9X1 - [track](#) or [info](#))
Destination Bay Minette Muni (1R8 - [track](#) or [info](#))
[Other flights between these airports](#)
Route DAS LCH ([Decode](#))
Date Friday, November 25 2011
Duration 3 hours
Status **Landed over a week ago.** ([track log & graph](#)) [Google EARTH](#)
Distance Direct: 391 nm Planned: 452 Flown: 397 nm

	Scheduled	Actual/Estimated
Departure	08:00 CST	07:41 CST
Arrival	10:52 CST	10:46 CST
Speed	130 kts	
Altitude	7,000 feet	

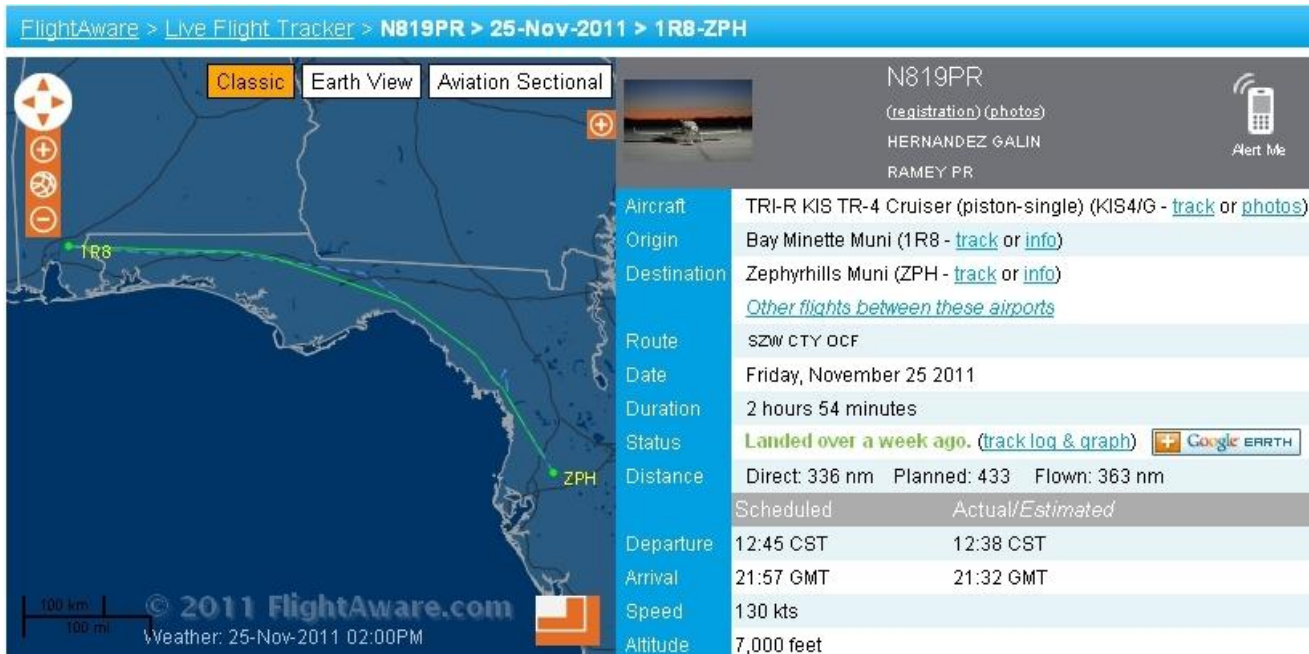
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Weather: 25-Nov-2011 09:30AM



On Friday, November 25 I departed Houston, TX (9X1) to Bay Minette, AL (1R8) at 07:45L. It was hard IFR (fog) so I got my IFR clearance on the telephone and headed out. I entered the clouds at about 1000' but once I got above 2500' it was CAVU. I continued IFR although I could have easily gone VFR on top. The clouds stayed thick below me until just past New Orleans where the weather was beautiful. The rest of the flight was uneventful. 3:05hrs later, I approached Bay Minette and did the GPS-8 with one quick trip around the hold to keep current. Fuel was \$4.35/gal so I put as much fuel as I could. I thought about putting fuel in the tires, but

couldn't figure out how to get it from the tires to the engine afterwards. I borrowed the courtesy car and got a quick lunch. Once again the "Girls of Bay Minette" did a great job getting me what was needed for an easy turn around.

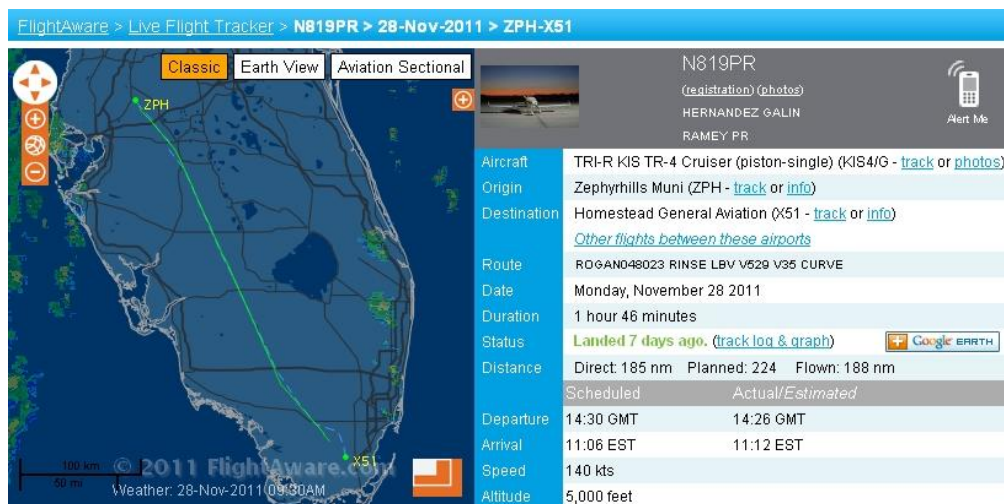
After that, I departed VFR towards Zephyrhills, FL (KZPH) and picked up my IFR clearance in the air. Except for a stiff headwind all the way and a small divert for a few build ups around Ocala, it was another uneventful flight (that is a GOOD thing). At around 16:40L I arrived at Zephyrhills, FL after 2:54Hr of flying. I did the GPS-22 into Zephyrhills and landed with two ultralights and a Mooney holding for takeoff while two jump airplanes (Twin Otters) landed on runway 36. Just like always, the skies around Zephyrhills airport was full of sky divers and airplanes. You gotta keep your head outside the airplane around here. I am always amazed at the number of sky divers that are always here. So, 5:59Hr of flight time today. Now a nice dinner (I am STARVING) and time to rest for the night.



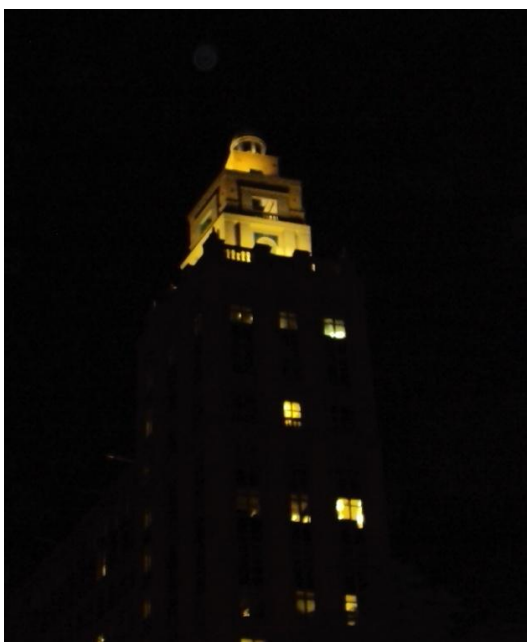
Arriving in to the Miami area

I flew from Zephyrhills (KZPH) to Homestead General (X51) on Nov 28th departing VFR around 09:30L with an IFR GPS direct flight plan on file. But once airborne they amended the route from KZPH - HALLR - LBV - V529 - WORPP - X51. Luckily it was VFR and "Otto pilot" was working well so I was able to reprogram the GPS with ease.

Just after WORPP they cleared me to descend to 2000' and direct X51. As I got lower the controller started calling out a lot of VFR traffic. He was vectoring me right through the Dade-Collier training area and airplanes were all around. I decided to cancel IFR and finished the flight VFR landing around 11:15L. The rental car was waiting for me at Homestead Jet Center and after tying the airplane down I was off to Premier One Aviation at Tamiami airport (KTMB).



While there, Anthony Perea let me fly his Flight Design CTLS from KTMB to Fort Lauderdale (KFXE). This LSA flies very well, although the landing flare is different from what I am used to but no big deal. We took the route along South Beach at 500ft with a great view of Miami. I was flying from the right seat so I couldn't get any photos. Oh well, maybe next time. While at KFXE we went to Banyan aviation and I purchased the charts and maps I needed to fly down the Bahamas chain.



We flew back and landed at KTMB just after sunset. This gave me another chance to practice the different landing flare on the CTLS. After that I went to Anthony's house for dinner and we briefed the next leg of the trip.

While having dinner, I got a call from another pilot friend (Oswaldo Seda) to inform me that he would arrive into Miami on the 29th around 4:00pm and would be joining us on the trip. This was good news to us. The more the merrier. By the time we got everything done it was past 12:00 midnight. Time flies when you are having fun. Then off to sleep and rest for the night.

The next day I preloaded the airplane with the "trinkets and cargo" we would use during the different commemorative activities. My Customs sticker finally arrived which now gave me the option of stopping half way to Puerto Rico and rest instead of making the long flight in one shot. Now it's time

to rest and get ready to head out on Thursday for the legs 4 and 5. If all goes well, we expect to arrive into San Juan (TJIG) around 17:00L, just in time for the start of the commemorative activities.


After picking up Oswaldo at the Miami airport, all three of us had an early dinner (Pollo Tropical) and started planning for the next day of flying at Anthony's apartment. While going over all the paperwork and documents we realized that Oswaldo had brought a passport card not his actual passport. Since the card is not valid for air travel we decided I would fly IFR direct and not have to clear US Customs upon arrival. Anthony doesn't have the range to do this so he would make two stops on the way. Anthony planned on a 06:00L departure with stops in Exhuma (MYEF) and Providenciales (MBPV) before arriving into Isla Grande (TJIG) around 16:30L. So we would arrive into TJIG at about the same time, I would depart at 08:00L. Even though we wanted to get to bed early, it was late before each one of us actually got to sleep that night.

Flying from Florida to Puerto Rico

It seemed that I had just gotten to sleep when it was 04:00L and the alarm went off. Anthony and Oswaldo were already up; we had packed everything already so it didn't take long to head out to the airport. Anthony went to Tamiami (KTMB) while Oswaldo and I headed to a McDonalds for breakfast. We made a stop at a Walgreens and picked up some Beef Jerky, some Trail Mix, a small box of granola bars, 2 bottles of water and 1 bottle of Diet Coke. These would be our snack(s) for the approximate 7hr it would take us. Once at Homestead General (X51) we loaded the airplane with our few bags, pulled it to the fuel pumps and added enough fuel for 9 hrs of flying. Around 06:45L I received a text message from Anthony letting me know he was airborne and on his way.

Once at Homestead Executive Jet Center I called Flight Service Station, got a standard weather brief and filed for an IFR flight departing at 08:15L. Knowing some international controllers don't like having

FlightAware > Live Flight Tracker > N819PR > 30-Nov-2011 > X51-TJIG



N819PR
(registration) (photos)
HERNANDEZ GALIN
RAMEY PR
Alert Me

Aircraft	TRI-R KIS TR-4 Cruiser (piston-single) (KIS4/G - track or photos)
Origin	Homestead General Aviation (X51 - track or info)
Destination	Ribas Dominicci (TJIG / SIG - track or info) Other flights between these airports
Route	EONNS FOWEE ZQA A555 BTLE L463 PTA A636 BQN
Date	Wednesday, November 30 2011
Duration	6 hours 26 minutes
Status	Landed 5 days ago. (track log & graph)
Distance	Direct: 909 nm Planned: 1,092 Flown: 937 nm
Departure	08:15 EST
Arrival	16:20 AST
Speed	130 kts
Altitude	7,000 feet

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Weather: 30-Nov-2011 11:00AM

you off an air route I filed X51-EONNS-FOWEE-ZQA-A555-BTLE-L463-PTA-A636-BQN-TJIG. I figured I can file this and once airborne ask for direct. About 08:10L we climbed in the airplane and taxied to runway 36 for takeoff. As we taxied to runway 36, we noticed the traffic pattern was full of

students practicing Touch-n-go's. It would take a little time to get airborne with that many of them in the pattern. We finally got a break and got airborne around 08:30L and headed south east in beautiful VFR weather.

After takeoff I called Miami departure and we were cleared radar vectors to EONNS then as filed which was perfect. I set up a 500'/min climb to our requested altitude of 7000' and the GPS showed we were doing 110Kt ground speed in the climb which meant we had a slight tail wind. A few minutes later as we approached EONNS, we were handed off to Miami Center. When I checked in with Center, the controller asked if I wanted to go GPS direct to checkpoint INDEE on A555. Since INDEE is just before Providenciales and would cut out about 25min of flight time, I accepted. A quick reprogram of the G430 and "Otto" pilot made the turn direct to INDEE intersection. Now I could sit back, monitor the instruments and enjoy the flight.

The weather was beautiful with a few clouds here and there as we flew along. We flew in and out of cloud layers for about 1hr with some light rain once in a while. I turned on my Bluetooth MP3 player and listened to some good music. Oswaldo and I talked about different things as we were handed off from one controller to another. We tried calling Anthony on our pre briefed frequency (123.45) but he did not answer. Hopefully he was on the ground getting fuel at MYEF and would be on frequency soon.

Checking my ETA, I realized we had about a 4Kt tailwind, very unusual for an easterly heading in the Caribbean. I pulled up the winds aloft on my Garmin 496 and it showed the 6,000' winds at 120 degrees at 5kts. It also showed that at 9,000' the winds were 140 degrees at 15Kts. So I asked for 9,000ft to which the controller approved and we climbed up. When we got to 9,000' and settled down the GPS showed us doing 153Kt ground speed even though we were still doing 142KTAS. We now had an 11Kt tailwind which made our ETA at 16:01L, almost 30 minutes sooner. Good news for such a long flight.

After a while we heard Anthony check in and soon were talking with him. We told him about the winds at 9,000' so he climbed to 9,500. It is nice having other airplanes on the same route providing PIREPS. As we flew along, at one point the controller gave me a frequency and told me to contact Miami on that frequency in 50 minutes. I had to ask several times he meant 50 minutes to which he confirmed. He told me that at 9,000' we would lose radio contact for about that amount of time and he would be waiting for us on the new frequency as we got closer to INDEE. Anthony was ahead of us and told me had been given the same instructions. He could not talk with Miami from where he was and was waiting to get closer to call them. At least we could talk to each other and I still had radio communications with Miami. This meant we could radio relay information if needed. Sure enough after a while we lost Miami Center but could hear Anthony talking with them on the new frequency. During this time I got hungry so we ate some of the beef jerky, granola bars and some trail mix. We sipped small amounts of water during the flight to keep hydrated without running into "bladder" problems along the way.

After about 30 minutes Anthony landed in Providenciales so we lost communications with him. At about the 55 minute point we got communications with Miami center back as we approached INDEE.



We now had radio contact with Miami Center, but no XM satellite signal. This meant we would be without airborne weather information until the same area on our way back.

From INDEE we flew to BUTLR and "Otto" turned us onto L463 on our way to Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. Soon we were overflying Providenciales but had not heard Anthony check in. This meant we would arrive into TJIG well before he did. I just hope he had not had a problem there and would be airborne soon. Just after Providenciales, Miami Center amended our flight to SEKAR intersection, PTA

then as filed. We arrived at SEKAR and were handed off to Santo Domingo Center just as Anthony was departing Providenciales. We were ahead of him and flying about 30kts faster. So much for arriving into TJIG at the same time.

Once Anthony had leveled off, we checked our ETA's into TJIG. His ETA was 17:15L while ours was 16:08L. Santo Domingo Center cleared us direct KOBET intersection which would cut out about another 10 minutes of flight time since we were now showing 158kt ground speed, a 16kt tailwind. Having a tailwind the entire trip is very rare on an easterly flight in the Caribbean. The weather had closed in and now we were in thick clouds in IMC conditions. The last satellite images had shown the clouds here were thick but with very little convective activity. With only very light turbulence and some rain we continued.



Once at KOBET we were handed off to Punta Cana Approach. This controller was busy handling a lot of airplanes. At one point he cleared me to do an approach into Punta Cana Airport, obviously confusing me with another airplane. I told him we were heading towards TJIG not Punta Cana and he apologized for the mistake. That just goes to show controllers are humans too. As we approached PIXAR intersection, Punta Cana approach told me to contact San Juan Center, provide an ETA to KATOK intersection and return to his frequency since his land line with San Juan was down.

Just before we arrived at KATOK we broke out into CAVU conditions and we were handed off to San Juan center.

The flight into TJIG was uneventful. We flew north of Desecheo Island and Aguadilla as we descended. I drank a little of the Diet Coke as we got within 30 minutes of landing. Just north of

Arecibo at 2,000' we were vectored to the north for a while since there was VFR traffic at our same altitude but opposite direction. When we reached Dorado, I was cleared to contact TJIG tower. The tower told us to report when at the Levittown water tank then to report the west shore of San Juan bay. After that we were cleared to land behind a Vieques Air Link Caravan on base to final.

We landed into TJIG at 16:02L after 6:30 minutes of flying, taxied to the Inter-American University ramp and shut down. Around 17:30L, Anthony arrived and after clearing Customs, he parked next to us on the ramp. After showing both airplanes off, we checked into the hotel and went to dinner at a local restaurant. We had to be at the airport at 06:00L the next morning so we went straight back to the hotel for the night. The flight to Puerto Rico was over.

The 100th anniversary of Powered flight in Puerto Rico

On December 1, 2011 we got up early, checked out of the hotel and took a taxi to the airport arriving just before 06:00L. The Inter-American University parked several of their airplanes next to ours making the area a static display of general aviation airplanes. We had a CTLS (Light Sport), my KIS Cruiser (Experimental), a Piper Archer (Basic GA), Piper Arrow (Complex GA) and a Piper Seminole (Multi Engine GA). I had put together a presentation about the beginning of powered flight in Puerto Rico and was pleasantly surprised to find the University had made it the centerpiece of their commemoration display. A reporter, Susan Soltero, from the live local Univision Television morning show did her show from the hangar and interviewed both Anthony and myself about the 100th Anniversary of flight and our flight down. She even gave part of her broadcast while sitting inside the CTLS.



My airplane had reached the 50hr oil change point so after the TV broadcast was over; they let me do the oil change inside the Inter American University Hangar. It took me a lot longer than usual to



change the oil since I had to stop every few minutes to talk to students and people that came by as part of the commemoration. I was even able to change out some of the SCAT aircraft tubing with new tubing. The 1hr oil change took me almost 4hrs, but it was worth it clearing up misconceptions about experimental airplanes. After I finished, the 4 Inter American A&P's that were working in the hangar came over to look at the airplane. I asked them to look the engine compartment over to see if they found anything questionable. All 4 of them told me it was the 1st time they had been able to really look over an experimental airplane and

commented that it looked to be in excellent condition. They told me it completely changed their opinion about experimental airplanes and now understand why they are becoming so popular.

Anthony and Oswaldo had put all our baggage in my airplane and departed to the Mayaguez airport (TJMZ) our base for the rest of our time in Puerto Rico while I finished the maintenance. I then took 45 gallons of fuel at \$6.19/gal (OUCH!) and headed out to TJMZ.

The Isla Grand departure is breathtaking. At 500' after liftoff you make a climbing left turn over the Condado beach area that is lined with expensive hotels until over the beach. Then you continue the climb (west bound in this case) just off shore Old San Juan passing El Morro castle off your left wing at 1,000ft. It is a spectacular view of the 500+ yr old city with unbelievable visibility of the area in typical beautiful weather. The San Juan Class "C" airspace starts at 1,200' and extends to just before Dorado, so you stay at 1,000' for a good while. I then climbed to 2,500' enjoying the flight to Mayaguez landing about 1hr after Anthony and Oswald had. While at the Mayaguez airport Anthony and I were interviewed by a local radio station about the 100th anniversary, the flight from Florida to Puerto Rico and many questions about general aviation. Even though we were told the interview would be about 15 minutes, it lasted for over 45 minutes and would have continued except that the radio show ran out of time. We told the interviewer about the December 3rd commemoration activities and the December 10th Sport Aviation fly-in at Humacao airport to which she said she would continue the interview on the 10th.

All three of us picked up our rental cars at the airport and headed our separate ways for the night. I had reservations at a small local hotel in Aguadilla (La Cima) and checked in about 21:00L. It had been another long, but fun day.

Flying around Puerto Rico – Part 1

On December 2nd Anthony and I took a quick flight from Mayaguez to Arecibo (TJAB) to meet up with Ariel Acevedo, a mutual friend. Ariel is an LSA/Ultra-light CFI who is working hard to revive the Arecibo airport. We landed just after 12:00 noon and he met us there with several of his students, a few GA pilots and some people from the local community. The CTLS was a big hit with everyone wanting to know more about it. While Anthony talked about the CTLS and general aviation I went to meet the airport manager Ramon "Pito" Vargas. As soon as we were introduced he said, "I know you. We grew up and went to High school together." What a coincidence. It had been more than 30yrs since we had last seen each other. So we caught up on "old times" and he gave me a tour of the airport and talked to me about his efforts to bring the airport back to life. It is becoming a very nice airport, well maintained with several important upgrades to include a new taxiway. Ariel had talked to him about my airplane, not knowing we grew up together, so I promised to visit Arecibo again before we left so "Pito" could see it.

After having a nice dinner there, Anthony and I departed to TJMZ. On our way to TJMZ we overflew the Arecibo Observatory which has the largest radio-telescope in the world. As I flew around it



Anthony took some great aerial photos of the telescope. The telescope is 1,000ft in diameter and we joked that if needed, we could land inside. It would be difficult for me but “no problem” in the CTLS.

The next day, December 3, 2011 all 3 of us met at Mayaguez to spend the day at Isla Grande airport and participate in the 100th Anniversary of Powered Flight in Puerto Rico event. Anthony was going to provide “demo” flights of the CTLS so he had one of his instructor pilots join us. Since I had 2 extra seats in my airplane, Anthony’s

sister and husband also joined us. The flight to Isla Grand was uneventful and we landed just after 09:30L. The airplanes were part of the static display except that the CTLS was parked a little away to ease the “demo” flight activities.

Anthony set up his banners and exhibition while I walked around a “museum” the Inter American University had set up for the day. While looking at the memorabilia the Aeronautical Dean of Faculty for the University, Jorge Calaf, asked me if I would be the keynote speaker for the event. He wanted me to speak about the beginning of powered flight in Puerto Rico based on the presentation I had put together. This kind of caught me by surprise but I agreed. They set up my laptop in their small conference room and the small room quickly filled up with people. The presentation is only about 30 minutes long and went well. After the presentation, Dean Calaf asked me to cut the “ceremonial ribbon” officially opening the day’s activities.



This was something I never expected and was so honored to do it. I think Dean Calaf waited for the last minute to ask me so I couldn’t back out from doing it.

After that a lot of attendees came up to me to talk about aviation history in Puerto Rico. Some of the persons there had been flying for over 50yrs and had so much information to provide. I proposed to them to collect all these stories and memorabilia and start a “Museum of Puerto Rican Aviation” name it after Felix Rigau Carrera (the father of Puerto Rican aviation) before they are lost forever. Dean

Calaf committed the University to spearhead this effort with a lot of people volunteering to help. I hope this becomes a reality real soon.



We were also asked by EAA Young Eagles Explorer Post 6901 to attend their meeting the next day so all their members could see our airplanes which we quickly agreed to. The rest of the day was spent milling around and “hangar flying” with everyone there until about 16:00L when the activities ended. Around 17:00L, the four of us climbed into the airplane and we returned to Mayaguez.

Flying around Puerto Rico – Part 2

The next day, December 4, 2011, Oswaldo and I arrived to Mayaguez airport around 08:00L for the flight to Isla Grande. Anthony had already left since he was taking the instructor to San Juan International for his commercial flight back to Miami. After another uneventful flight, we landed into TJIG around 09:30L and waited at the Million Air FBO for the EAA Explorers to arrive. They arrived



around 10:00L and quickly set up. A group of them were to be flying while the other group took ground school. Then they would switch activities with the flying group doing ground school while the ground group flew. The Explorers were so enthusiastic about aviation and asked so many questions about the airplanes. The one issue they were most interested in was my iPad with Foreflight so we talked about how I use it for aviation. We especially covered emergency action checklist since they needed ground training on this issue for their qualifications. While we talked a good friend of mine, Jaime Pesquera, arrived for

lunch. Since he is a retired United Airlines Captain, he talked to them about emergency action checklists and their importance in aviation. They really appreciated us taking time to talk to them about it and gave me one of their Post 6901 patch for my flight jacket.

After the Explorer meeting, Jaime and I went to lunch at “El Hamburger” while Oswaldo and Anthony walked around Old San Juan. Around 15:00L we arrived back to the airport and got ready to head back. Anthony headed straight back to Mayaguez while Oswaldo and I decided to fly around the Island. I requested an eastbound departure from TJIG with the low level off shore transition through San Juan International airspace at 500ft. We took off, leveled off at 500ft and slowly flew along the coast while Oswaldo took pictures and videos. With the temperature at 75 degrees and little cloud cover, the view was spectacular. After exiting San Juan airspace we continued sightseeing along the

coast. We flew over the Fajardo lighthouse, the El Conquistador hotel, the old Roosevelt Roads Naval Air Station, the Palmas del Mar resort, the Humacao airport, Coffin Island and many other sights getting a view of Puerto Rico few persons have seen. It took just under 3hrs to complete the flight and we landed into TJMZ just before sunset. There were several others at the airport watching a local pilot doing a test flight on an ultra-light. After we secured the airplane, we talked with the pilots and everyone looked at the other airplanes there before we left well after sunset. The next day was “rest” day, which I spent it doing laundry and visiting with family members. I also took the day to catch up on writing about the trip after so much had happened.



On Tuesday we returned to Isla Grande in the CTLS so Anthony could meet with executives from the University. I took advantage of this and was able to get some “stick time” on several of their flight simulators. They have a large number of simulators and are working on getting a 3 axis full motion flight simulator. If they get one, maybe sometime in the future I can get some time in it. On the flight back we decided to practice different landings in the CTLS. Anthony and I did landings with every flap setting on the CTLs both in Aguadilla (TJBQ) and Mayaguez. We did this while large aircraft were sequenced in to land on the runway. At one point we had a Martinair Cargo DC-10 land in front of us while a Cessna 182 landed behind us. This time we landed in TJMZ just after sunset. The next day we were flying to St. Kitts and Nevis so after dinner, I went straight to the hotel.

Flying to the Caribbean Island of Nevis

Anthony and I met at the Mayaguez airport around 07:00L for the flight to Nevis. He was already filling the tanks with 15 gallons of MoGas when I arrived, which would be enough to fly us there and almost get us back. Anthony had filed the outbound and inbound EAPIS report as well as advance

notice of arrival back to TJBQ for later that afternoon. After a quick check of the weather, severe VFR, we put our life vests on, climbed in and took off. Anthony would take photos and talk on the radio while I flew from the right seat. He checked in with San Juan Center for flight follow and activated our VFR flight plan to Nevis with San Juan FSS.

Just a few small clouds were in our path at 7,500ft until we got to the east part of Puerto Rico. There we had to pick our way around some clouds until just past St. Croix where the clouds dissipated. We could hear all the air traffic in the area as we flew in



a direct line from St. Croix to Saba Island. Since we were headed eastbound, we had a stiff 15Kt headwind as we flew along. Once near Saba, Anthony took some pictures and we turned right towards GABAR intersection. There we were handed off to Bradshaw Tower (St. Kitts) and started our descent into Nevis. After crossing the runway centerline, we were handed off to Nevis Tower and were quickly cleared to land. Anthony decided he wanted to do the landing and I completely forgot to take a video of it.

Once on the ground we taxied and parked next to the tower. While there, Anthony placed a sticker of St. Kitts/Nevis on the airplane's tail to show another country he has flown to. We were met by a very friendly airport worker who asked if we had the required paperwork with us. We didn't have any prepared but went in to the terminal to complete it. After having our passports stamped, proof we were there, we went to the tower and closed our flight plan. Anthony asked if they would pass the information to San Juan FSS to which they said yes. So, with this in mind we got a taxi to take us in to Charlestown.

We were early for the lunch meeting Anthony had scheduled so we walked around Charlestown taking pictures and buying some "required" souvenirs. At about 12:00L we took another taxi to "Sunshine's Bar & Restaurant" on the beach. There we had a nice relaxing lunch with one of his friends while enjoying the warm weather. This time went by entirely too fast and soon we had to get back.



We were back at the airport by 14:00L and Anthony got the airplane ready. He added another 10galons of fuel just to be safe and we paid our bills. The government fees were reasonable (\$30.00) but the gas (\$7.50/Gal) was a bit high. At least we didn't have to buy too much fuel there. A quick file of an International flight plan and we were off.



As we climbed to 8,500ft we were handed off to Bradshaw Tower, then to San Juan center as we got close to GABAR intersection. While we approached GABAR, an American Airlines flight took off from Bradshaw and quickly overtook us. They held him at 6,000ft until we both had crossed GABAR then he was cleared to 36,000ft, just a little higher than us. From GABAR we turned left back towards St. Croix with a 8Kt tailwind. When we got over St. Croix I took some pictures and video of the island. From there we headed direct to TJBQ and landed just past 16:00L. Clearing US

Customs there was a breeze. We completed the required paperwork while they looked the airplane and its contents over. It only took us about 45 minutes to clear Customs and be on our way back to Mayaguez. We landed just after sunset, tied down the airplane and this flight was over. But when Anthony called to close our flight plan the FSS controller told us we had never closed our VFR flight plan to Nevis. He told us they had to call the Nevis Tower to make sure we had landed safely since they were about to launch search and rescue. Anthony told him that the tower assured us they would close it but apparently did not. Well next time we will close directly with FSS to make sure things don't fall through the cracks.

Final flights in Puerto Rico

The next few days were spent doing short local flights to different airports and just being tourists in Puerto Rico. By now we started to look at the weather forecasts for our planned departure on



Sunday. A weak front was moving through Texas and was forecast to be in the Caribbean on Sunday. We needed to keep an eye on it since it could affect our plans. In the mean time we got ready for the Saturday activities at Humacao (X64) airport with the Puerto Rico Sport Aviation Federation.

When I woke up on Saturday December 10th the weather was horrible. It was raining very hard and NOAA had issued a flash flood warning for Puerto Rico. It seemed that we would have to cancel the trip to Humacao. We decided to go to the airport anyways and hope the weather would clear up. By about 10:00L

the weather had cleared up nicely and the three of us (Anthony, Oswaldo and I) decided to take off. There were lots of clouds over the south part of the island so we stayed at 1,500ft over the ocean which kept us clear of clouds and mountains. It only takes about 20 minutes to fly there so we both arrived at about the same time. Anthony made a low approach over the airport while Oswaldo and I



came in behind him, landed first and waited for him to land. A few minutes after he landed we taxied to the activity area and shut down. The Inter American University had two airplanes there in addition to a Cirrus, a Yak, several ultra lights and a gyro copter. It wasn't full but enough people had already arrived to make the day interesting.

We spent time looking at the other airplanes, showing our airplanes off and hangar flying but with one eye on the weather. Since we were planning to head out to Florida the next day we did not want to get stuck there due to weather. So after about 2hrs we decided to head back to Mayaguez. Anthony and Oswaldo took off in the CTLS direct to Mayaguez while I took off towards Aguadilla to fuel up.

The winds were about 20Kts from the east so I was doing about 150Kt ground speed as I flew along. When I made the base to final turn at TJBQ my ground speed dropped. When I finally got to the runway I was showing 35Kt ground speed as I touched down. Needless to say it was a very smooth landing on the 11,000ft runway. A stop at Western Aviation Service Company (WASCO) and I took 51 gallons of AvGas at \$4.99/gal. WASCO has the cheapest fuel in the Caribbean and it is all full service. Besides, they do a good job in making you feel welcome while there. There was a lot of low clouds in the area so I took a CHARLIE intersection departure (4,500ft available), made a right turn out and departed to Mayaguez. Another smooth landing (winds were from the east at 18Kts) and I was back at TJMZ. This would be the last landing in Puerto Rico on this trip so I did as much as I could to get the airplane ready for the flight to Inagua Island in the Bahamas. Now it was time to have dinner, get to the hotel, file my EAPIS, file my advanced notice of arrival into KTMB and get ready for the long return flight.

Back to Florida via Inagua, Bahamas

04:00L comes real early, especially when you are excited about the long distance international flight that lies ahead of you. I had prepared just about everything for the trip and had loaded the airplane as much as I could the day before so I paid the hotel bill and headed out to the airport. It was so early on a Sunday that I knew there would not be a lot of breakfast options for me. Luckily McDonalds is open 24hr/day near the Mayaguez airport and I had breakfast there. While there I called Flight Service and got a good weather briefing for the flight from Mayaguez, Puerto Rico (TJMZ) to Inagua, Bahamas (MYIG).



The weather was forecast to be VFR around Puerto Rico and for most of the route with some marginal VFR around Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic (MDPP) and the MYIG area. I would be going IFR with plenty of fuel but Anthony had to go VFR and would be a little tight on fuel so this was a bit concerning. I filed an international IFR flight plan from TJMZ – KATOK – A636 – ZIN – MYIG at 6,000ft. It would take me 3hrs en-route and I had 10hrs of fuel onboard with Providenciales (MBPV) as my alternate.

After finishing the briefing and breakfast I arrived at the Mayaguez airport just as the sun rose. I found Anthony already there

fueling up his airplane. As he finished I loaded my final pieces of luggage in the airplane and we discussed flight options. Once again I had some Granola Bars, Trail mix, a bottle of water and a bottle of Diet Coke for the flight. We decided that I would arrive into MYIG about 30 minutes before he would so I could provide a good weather report. That way if he had to divert towards MBPV, he could do so without wasting time or fuel. Since I am about 25Kts faster, we decided that Anthony would depart at 06:30L and I would take off at 07:30L. Once again we would communicate with each other on 123.45 as our “company” frequency.

As we were finishing our flight briefing and pre-flight checks a cousin of mine, who I had not seen in years, showed up bringing some local candies for us to take on the flight. He loves aviation and if everything goes well hopes to get his pilot license soon. We thanked him several times for such a nice gesture and guaranteed him we would be back to visit. Anthony’s sister and brother in law also showed up to say good bye so we took some final photographs in Puerto Rico. At about 06:30L, Anthony took off towards MYIG in his CTLS while I stayed back and chatted with our family members. I wanted to get airborne quickly but had to wait to comply with our plan so that hour felt like a long time. But it eventually arrived and I took off VFR just after 07:30L.



A quick call to San Juan center and my IFR flight plan was activated. San Juan center asked me what my service ceiling was to which I answered it is 21,000ft but I sure didn’t want to go that high. The controller advised me that I needed to be at a minimum of 10,000ft or Santo Domingo center would not accept me IFR into their airspace at KATOK intersection. I remembered that last year I had the same situation and since I had plenty of time for the climb I accepted 10,000ft as my new altitude.

Just after this conversation ended, Anthony called me on 123.45 since he heard me on the frequency. He was already with Santo Domingo center VFR at 6,500ft slightly east of my position and was cruising along with about a 5Kt headwind. We chatted on the radio until I got to 10,000ft. At that altitude I had a 4Kt tailwind so he decided to climb and take advantage of the winds aloft. When he

got to 10,500ft he didn’t have any head or tailwind so he continued on at that altitude. Just before KATOK, I checked in with Santo Domingo and headed towards MYIG on A636. Just like the weather briefer had told me, I was in and out of clouds all along the route at my altitude



but with no convective activity. I picked up a little turbulence once in a while but nothing of any concern. After about 1:30 minutes of flying I passed Puerto Plata just off shore while Anthony passed it just over land. I had caught up with him and was pulling away towards MYIG with about 30Kts more groundspeed.

At checkpoint RETAK, Santo Domingo handed me off to Port-A-Prince center. Just like last year, I could not make radio contact with Port-A-Prince center so an American Airlines aircraft relayed the information. Port-A-Prince asked for an ETA to checkpoint ALBEE and told me to contact Miami center when I got there. Anthony heard this on the radio so he was prepared to do the same when it was his turn to contact Port-A-Prince center. At ALBEE intersection I called Miami center and was cleared direct MYIG. When I was about 50 miles out I was given a pilots discretion descent to 3000ft and headed down.



I flew in and out of scattered cloud layers as I descended to 3,000ft. At about 20 miles from MYIG the clouds had all but cleared up and it was beautiful VFR weather from that point on. I radioed this information to Anthony and told him he would have no problem arriving VFR into Inagua. So after just under 3hrs of flight I entered a left downwind and landed at Inagua, Bahamas. Anthony had just started his descent and was about 30 minutes behind.

I was the only airplane on the airport so as I shut the airplane down I was greeted by the Bahamian Customs and Immigration officers. I didn't need any fuel so I went into their office and they gave me the required paperwork to fill out. As I finished the paperwork Anthony arrived into the traffic pattern, landed and walked in to the office. We were now the only two airplanes at the airport and with the 1hr change in local time it was just after 09:30L on a sunny Sunday morning.

From MYIG to KTMB

With all the paperwork completed Anthony requested fuel, walked to the airplane and waited. The fuel truck showed up after about 10 minutes but did not start fueling Anthony's airplane. Anthony walked back to me and told me that he was being charged a \$40.00 overtime fee because it was now past 10:00am on a Sunday. This was not what he had been told the day before when he called ahead. Anthony told the fueller he was assured there were no fees and that they were open from 06:00L to 16:00L. Although the fuel was \$7.50/gal he only needed 16 total gallons so the total cost would be \$160.00. Anthony decided he would rather fly to Providenciales, 20 minutes away, and fuel there instead of paying the additional fee. When he said this, the fueller told him since he had not been informed of the \$40.00 fee he would waive it to which Anthony agreed and the fueling started. When the left wing was full Anthony was told it had taken 21 gallons of fuel. This is impossible since the wing only holds 16 gallons and he still had about 5 gallons in it when he landed. It turns out the fueller had forgot to re-set the counter from the previous airplane he had fueled before he started fueling Anthony's airplane which accounted for the difference. With the discrepancy corrected, the fueling was quickly completed.



Now we were about 1 1/2hr ahead of our overall schedule. Not wanting to have problems with US Customs at Tamiami, we called and provided them a 15:30L arrival into KTMB. It is nice that there is a free telephone at Inagua that has several of the US Customs offices in Florida on speed dial. We made sure we got the initials of the Customs Officer that took our information just in case. After this we filed international flight plans, Anthony filed VFR while I filed IFR. I filed MYIG - ZIN – A315 – ALBEE - JUNUR – FOWEE – KTMB at 10,000ft. Anthony took off about 10:45L while I waited at Inagua eating some of the granola bars and trail mix. Around 11:30L I took off VFR, activated my IFR flight plan and headed towards Tamiami, Florida.



Once with Miami center, Anthony and I were back up on 123.45 talking to each other. Once again I had a 5 kt tail wind and my ETA to Tamiami was now 16:30L. This meant I would arrive 1hr before US Customs was expecting me so I throttled back until the GPS was showing an ETA of 15:00L. I figured that a 1/2hr early arrival would not be a big deal for them and I would even use less fuel on this leg of the trip. Anthony and I talked on the frequency, passed information to each other on the weather conditions and what kind of winds we were experiencing as we flew along. Once I got to ALBEE intersection, I was cleared direct JUNUR with the FOWEE FIVE arrival into Tamiami. A quick

programming of the GPS and “Otto” pilot turned me towards JUNUR. With this shortcut my ETA was 14:30L again, a full hour before Customs was expecting me. I didn’t want to throttle back any more so I resigned myself to arrive when I arrived. After just under 3:00hrs of flight, I was handed off to Miami approach and started a visual approach into Tamiami. The weather was VFR so I had the airport in sight early and was handed off to Tamiami tower. The tower cleared me to land on runway 9L and after 3:30 minutes of flying I was back in the USA.

I taxied over to US Customs and shut down in front of their office taking my time to walk in. When I did they commented that I was early but it was obviously not a big deal. The officers provided the paperwork and asked me to bring all the baggage into the office for inspection. Now my airplane was the “cargo” bird for the trip so I had all my luggage and some of Anthony’s stuff too. When I was on my third trip with a full baggage cart, the officer told me I didn’t have to bring the rest of the baggage in since he could inspect the airplane with what was left in it. Anthony arrived after about 30 minutes



later and he was also asked to bring in all his baggage to clear customs. It took us about 1 1/2hr between clearing customs, putting all the baggage back into the airplane and taxiing to the Premier One Aviation office ramp area.

Once at the ramp I secured the airplane and got my baggage out while Anthony taxied to his hangar. He returned just as I was finishing so we loaded my luggage into his car and went for dinner. We took our time at dinner then went to his apartment after a long day of travel. By about 21:00L I was in bed since I wanted to be in Jacksonville, Florida the next day. We were both tired but happy having completed a trip to Puerto Rico in our airplanes a second time.

Heading North

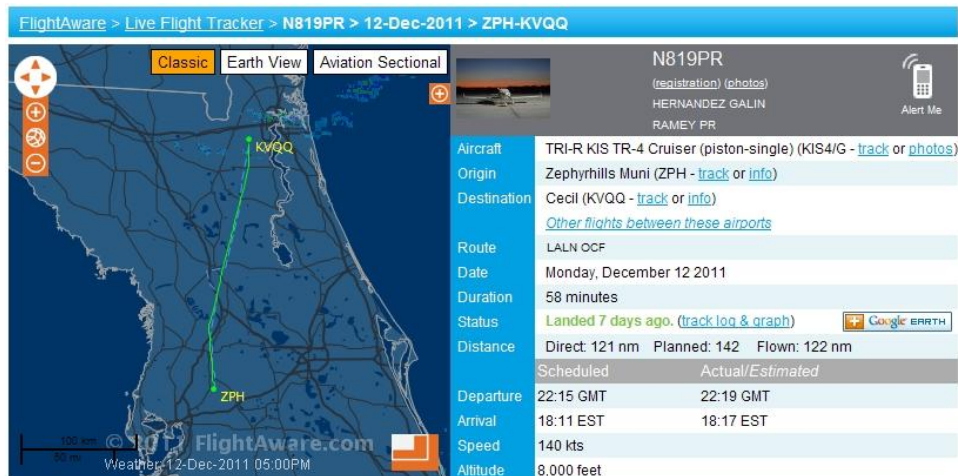
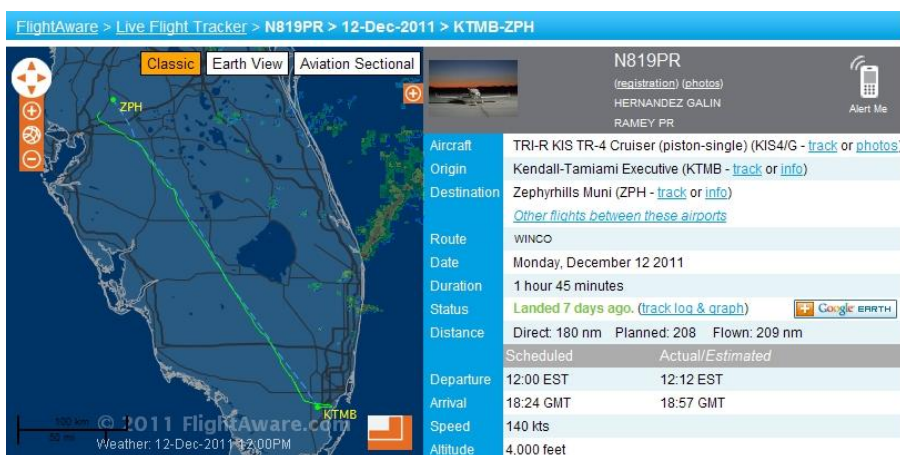
I woke up early on the 12th ready to start heading back home. My wife Millie was flying commercial into Jacksonville, Florida where I would meet up with her and spend the night with my Uncle at his house. With this plan in mind I got to the airport about 09:00L and loaded the airplane. A cold front had passed through the northern part of Florida so the general area was IFR with low ceilings and light rain. Zephyrhills was showing light IFR and forecast to be marginal VFR after 14:00L so I decided to wait a little before departing. Since I still had over 3hrs of fuel left, and the flight would be under 2hrs, I didn't fuel up at Tamiami. I filed IFR GPS direct to KZPH at 4,000ft. About 12:00L I said goodbye to Anthony, thanked him for all his help, got in the airplane and taxied out.

The departure was in nice VFR weather, but since I had to transit all of Miami's class "B" airspace, the controller kept me at 2,000ft until I was well over the Everglades headed north on the WINCO departure. When cleared to climb I realized that 4,000ft would put me inside the clouds for probably the entire trip. I asked for 8,000ft and the controller stepped me up over a period of about 45 minutes.

At that altitude I was VFR on top with a broken layer at about 6,000ft. Once near KZPH I did the GPS approach into runway 4 and landed just after 14:00L.

At KZPH I took just over 75 gallons of fuel which meant I still had 17 gallons left from when I fueled up in Puerto Rico. I was getting some pretty good gas mileage from the Lycoming engine. The weather at Cecil Field (KVQQ) was still IFR with ceilings at 500ft and light rain. It was forecast to be 1000ft broken with visibility 6 miles and light mist after 18:00L so I decided to wait and have lunch there.

Again I filed GPS direct for the 1hr flight. Then I had lunch (Domino's Pizza) with a local flight



instructor who was just hanging out at the FBO. At around 17:30L it was already starting to get dark as I got in the airplane and took off towards Jacksonville, Florida.

Passing through 2,00ft I entered the clouds as I climbed to 8,000ft for the flight. The controller gave me an updated routing which I entered into the GPS while "Otto" pilot flew. By the time I leveled

out I was night time and I was still in the clouds. As I approached Cecil Field, the weather was 800 broken with 6 miles visibility and light rain. This was only 340ft above the minimums so I knew it would be a challenge. The good thing is that runway 36R at KVQQ is over 12,500ft long so I would have plenty of time to land. The ILS was out of service so I requested the GPS-36R approach. After about 45minutes, I was cleared for the GPS-36R approach into KVQQ. I descended and was handed off to the tower for landing.

I finally broke out of the clouds at about 750ft with the long well lit runway ever so slightly to my left. I mistakenly landed where I was supposed to on the runway because now I had a super long taxi to the FBO. At one point I asked the tower how much further I had to the exit to which he chuckled and said, "Oh, about another 4,500ft. Do you want to take off and fly there?" Since I was the only aircraft there I just continued on. At about 19:00L I parked in front of the FBO and shut the airplane down. By the time I got the airplane secured and the baggage out, Mille arrived with my Uncle. We loaded the luggage into his car and headed out for dinner and some rest.

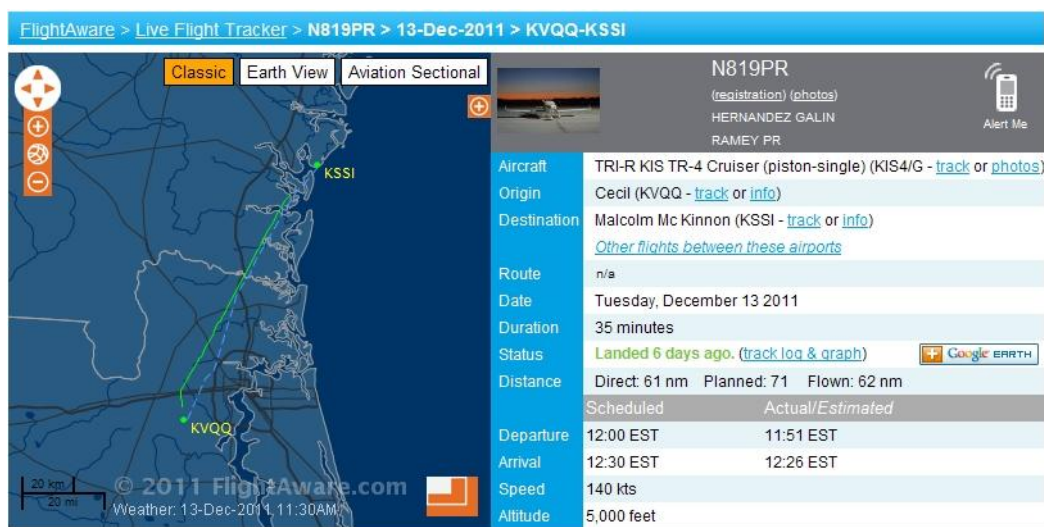


Spending Time in Georgia

The next day we were back at the airplane about 11:00L and got her ready for the flight to St. Simons Island, Georgia (KSSI). While there I gpt a visit from Jaime Pesquera Jr. He was waiting for the weather to clear up so he could do his 1st solo flight. It was too bad I couldn't be there to celebrate this with him. The weather at Cecil Field was not real bad with broken clouds at 1,000ft and light mist. KSSI was reporting 900 broken but visibility over 10 miles. The

weather at St. Simons was forecast to clear up after 12:00L so at about 11:45L we took off IFR direct to KSSI. The flight would only be short so we wound up cruising at 4,00ft. By the time we got to KSSI the weather over the airport was clear but we could see the thick clouds about 10 miles off shore. I

requested the GPS-4 but cancelled early and landed in beautiful VFR weather just after 12:30L. We secured the airplane, got our rental car and headed out to Savannah Georgia to visit our Daughter. We would stay with her until Monday the 19th when we would head back home to Houston, Texas.



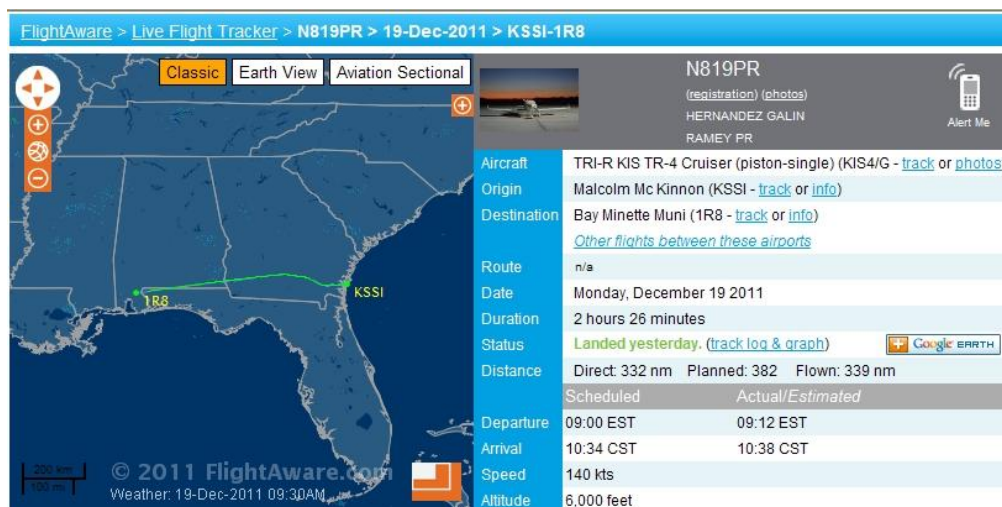
While there Jose Ortiz and his wife Christine flew their airplane to the St Simons Island airport. Jose is also from Puerto Rico and they wanted to join us in their airplane during our trip but could not get off work during our timeframe. So they decided to do the trip on their own and we met for lunch.

During lunch we talked about what he could expect and what we had done during our trip. I told him that during a trip like this not everything goes according to plan. The most important thing was to be flexible and resourceful to overcome any situation that comes up. Most of all, take advantage of the situations that come up, turn them into fun un-planned things that they will remember forever because during this trip they are travelers not tourists.



Homeward Bound

As Monday December 19th approached I kept an eye on the weather between Savannah Georgia and Houston Texas. We wanted to stay a few extra days but we had to be back in Houston by Friday, December 23rd. A cold front was approaching Houston from the west bringing with it some bad weather so if we stayed we could get stuck for several days until the front passed through. On Sunday, December 18th I checked and the Houston forecast for December 19th was for marginal VFR with the weather becoming hard IFR after 18:00L. With this information we decided to depart early on the 19th to arrive into Houston before 15:00L.



We got up real early on Monday the 19th and headed from Savannah, Georgia to St. Simons Island for the final two legs of the trip. It didn't take long to load the airplane and file my IFR flight plan. Once again I filed GPS direct from St. Simons Island (KSSI) to Bay Minette Alabama (1R8). Although I could make the flight without stopping, I

wanted to take advantage that fuel at Bay Minette (1R8) was \$4.35/gal and I wanted to fuel up there. With everything looking well, we taxied out and were airborne in beautiful VFR conditions around 09:00L.

Once with Jacksonville Center we were cleared as filed to Bay Minette at 6,000ft. We settled in for a smooth flight until we received an amended routing from ATC. One of the Military Operating Areas

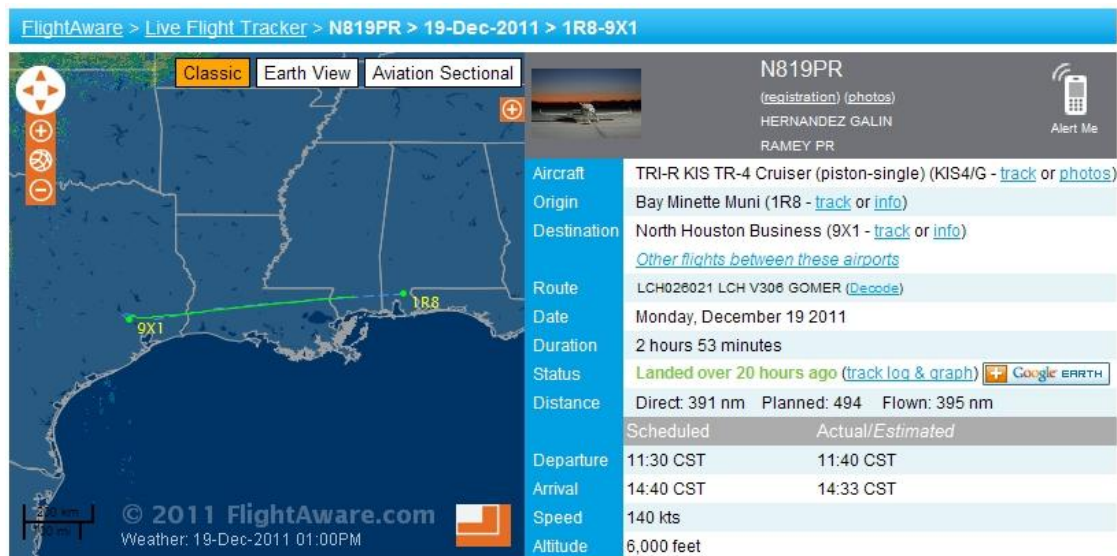
was going hot and ATC routed me around it. As we flew along I checked the weather at Houston and the forecast had not changed. The front was a little stronger than before but was still forecast to arrive around 18:00L. With a slight headwind, our ground speed was lower than I had anticipated so we would arrive into 1R8 later than I had planned. With this in mind and that we had water and snacks for the flight, we decided to do a quick turn and depart as soon as we fueled up without having lunch there. The actual flight was uneventful and at about 10:15L I was cleared for the visual approach in to Bay Minette landing just after 10:30L.

The Final Leg

When we pulled up to the self service fuel pumps one of the line “girls” came up to us and said the self service pumps were not working but they would provide full service for the same price of self service. This is one of the reasons I always try to stop at Bay Minette if I am in the general area. They go out of their way to provide excellent service no matter what size airplane you arrive in. As the line “girl” fueled the airplane, I filed the final IFR flight plan GPS direct 1R8 – 9X1 at 6,000ft.

We were airborne just before 11:30L and checked in with Mobile approach. Soon after checking in we were cleared direct 9X1 as filed. As we flew on, we could see the high level clouds that precede an approaching front. Constant checking of XM weather showed the front had passed San Antonio, Texas and was already close to Houston. Even with the slight headwind we should arrive just before the front. The weather had already gone from VFR to marginal VFR at Houston Intercontinental (KIAH) which is just 10 miles south of 9X1. Our airport does not have an instrument approach so I started considering alternate options. I decided that if I could not get into 9X1, I would divert into David Wayne Hooks (KDWH) which is close by, has several instrument approaches and a nice long runway.

When we got to the Texas - Louisiana border we were in and out of clouds and we could see it was getting worse. The weather did not show any convective activity until well past Houston but low clouds everywhere else. After a while we were in solid IMC



conditions but no turbulence of any kind. Of course as soon as this happened Houston Center amended my clearance direct DAS – V306 – GOMER which required me to enter several intersections in to the G430W. The good thing was that “Otto” pilot was doing the flying so I could hunt down the intersections needed to fly V306 on my iPad with Foreflight and program them into the G430W. As we approached DAS, the approach controller cleared us direct 9X1 with a pilot discretion descent to 3,000ft. Oh well, I got good practice using the iPad and programming the G430W while in actual IMC conditions.

I set up a slow descent which brought my ground speed up a little while still in the clouds. At one point the controller asked about the airplane designator (KIS4) since he had never seen it. Nobody else was on the frequency so we talked about the airplane and its performance. He himself has a Mooney and was impressed with the speed I was showing. He has also flown his Mooney to 9X1 several times and we decided that the next time he flew there we would have coffee together.

Just before we entered Houston Class "B" airspace we were handed off to Houston approach. By now the weather at KIAH was 2,000ft broken with visibility 6 miles. We were still flying directly towards 9X1 at 3,000ft but since there are 2,000ft towers in the area the controller could only let us down to 2,300ft. Even at 2,300ft we were still in the clouds so he turned us north and set us up to approach 9X1 from the north east. In this area the clouds were a little higher and I soon started to see the ground. A few minutes later the clouds were above us and we could see KIAH in the distant.

There was a little mist falling but soon I could see 9X1 just ahead of us so I called the airport in sight, cancelled IFR and entered the left downwind for runway 17. Winds at KIAH were from 140 at 19Kts gusting to 22 and not much different as I turned to final. With this strong headwind my ground speed was around 50kts as we touched down just after 14:30L. We put the airplane into the hangar, didn't unload the airplane and headed straight out for a late lunch. We took our time at lunch and watched the weather slowly worsen. By 19:00L thunderstorms with heavy rains had arrived but we were safely resting at home.

So after 24 days of traveling and just over 39hrs of flying, the trips was over. I wonder where our next flying adventure will take us.

2012 Almost Holiday Trip



Story and photos by Galin Hernandez & Millie Santiago

2012 Almost Holiday Trip

During December 2012 my biennial flight review (BFR) was drawing near and I would not be qualified to continue flying until I completed it. Since my airplane was undergoing the panel upgrade, I borrowed my friend Oswaldo (Oz) Seda's RV-9A for the flying part of the BFR. The RV-9A performs and handles closer to my KIS4 airplane than the Cessna 150 I could have used. So with that in mind on December 17th I took my BFR at David Wayne Hooks (KDWH) airport which included several night crosswind landings. This meant I could join the 3rd annual Florida to Puerto Rico fly-In scheduled for the next week.

On December 22nd, Oz decided he wanted to join the Puerto Rico fly in and wanted to do it in his RV-9A. Since he doesn't have that many hours in an RV-9A he asked me to accompany him on the trip. Of course I said yes since I prefer flying in a general aviation airplane than going commercial. Now Oz was working on his instrument rating so I could be his "safety pilot" while he does the flying under simulated instrument conditions. Since I am instrument rated I can file/fly IFR if needed until we are in visual conditions then he can take over from there. Or at least that was the plan.



Oz's RV-9A airplane N281MC

On December 25th, Christmas Day, I spent the night at Oz's house so we could depart the next day to Miami Florida and meet up with the other guys making the trip and head to Puerto Rico on the 28th. The 26th we departed Porter (9X1) on an IFR flight plan around 9:30am to Bay Minette, Alabama (1R8). It would take us about 3hrs to get there where we would have lunch, get fuel before continuing on to Florida. We had a strong tailwind the entire flight and arrived ½ hour earlier than planned. Even though we had a strong crosswind, the landing at Bay Minette was so smooth that Oz didn't even realize we were on the ground.

Once at Bay Minette we found out that the FAA would not get the permanent registration for the airplane (he bought it just three weeks earlier) in time for us to stop in the Bahamas on our way to Puerto Rico. Besides, there was some bad weather across the entire central Florida area so we opted to divert to St. Simons Island, GA (KSSI) where they were forecasting clear weather. We would leave the airplane in a hangar and finish the trip via commercial airline.

We left 1R8 to KSSI around 2:30, again on an IFR flight plan. Just like before we had a strong tailwind and for a while we were doing 190Kts ground speed. We arrived at KSSI around

5:45pm and cancelled IFR while still about 15miles away since there were no clouds and we could already see the airport. Since the winds were so strong we overflew KSSI and the wind sock seemed to indicate a landing on runway 34 was best. Oz didn't feel comfortable landing the airplane with strong winds so he asked me to do the landing from the right seat.

As we descended to runway 34 it was clear the winds were too strong from the left to land so I aborted. The UNICOM operator reported the winds from 260 at 13Kts gusting to 23Kts so I opted to try landing on runway 22. Once aligned with runway 22 I didn't need a lot of crosswind correction and I mentioned to OZ that this approach felt right. When the VASI lights showed us on the glideslope I started the descent. The final descent was smooth and uneventful, until we got to about 50ft.

Suddenly I felt the airplane drop out from under me as if we were being shoved down at an extremely fast rate. I pushed the throttle forward to abort, but it was too late. All I remember is the airplane impacting the ground hard and sliding down the runway until veering off to the left. When the airplane came to a stop I saw a small fire in front left side of the engine compartment and knew we had to get out. I tried to open the cockpit but I had a dislocated finger on my left hand (I was flying from the right seat) so I couldn't work the cockpit latch. I wound up using my right hand to open the cockpit but it took a few extra seconds to do it. We got out of the airplane and walked away from the airplane as the fire grew in intensity. By the



After the accident

time the firefighters arrived the airplane was engulfed in flames and wound up being completely destroyed. We were lucky we got out and didn't get trapped in the airplane as it burnt.

Although we actually walked away from the crash we were taken to the hospital and checked out to make sure there were no internal injuries. I did fracture 3 Lumbar in my back in addition to my dislocated finger. Oz only got a slight scratch on his head. The next day we

went to the airport and saw the charred remains of this beautiful airplane. [We also found that the local TV station put pictures of the wreckage on their web page.](#)

The NTSB and FAA investigators both speculated we had gotten caught in an unavoidable and severe downdraft just as we crossed the runway perimeter fence. We were tracking the runway so close to the centerline that, although we impacted 80ft short on the displaced threshold, we slid between the runway end indicator lights (REIL) without touching any of them. The fact we

slid straight down the runway for another 300ft was more evidence I was tracking the centerline correctly during the approach. They also told me that by examining how the propeller wound up after the impact and the position of the throttle, this supported my statement to them that I was trying to abort the landing when we hit. The FAA decided there would be no enforcement action taken against me for the accident.

Needless to say I did not make it to the Puerto Rico fly in, but Oz did. A few days after the accident, he flew commercial to Puerto Rico and spent the holidays with his family. I spent my holidays with my family in Brunswick Georgia still shaken up by what had happened. It happened so fast.

Three weeks later, back in Houston, CFII Mason Pearsall took me up in his Beech Musketeer to do some touch-n-go. I admit I had never been as scared in an airplane as we approached to make that first landing. The second landing wasn't as bad and by the third landing I felt much better. The next day we took his Beech Travel Air (Twin engine) and did some air work to include a few landings. So, I didn't get to complete the 2012 Florida to Puerto Rico Fly-In but thankfully I am alive to finish my airplane instrument panel and make the 2013 Fly-In.



Beech Musketeer N2329W

4th Annual Florida to Puerto Rico Fly-In

December 2013



Story and Photos by: Millie Santiago & Galin Hernandez

4th Annual Florida to Puerto Rico Fly-In

Having flown from Florida to Puerto Rico three times before, Anthony and Galin had started planning the 4th annual Fly in during August 2013 so by October there were 6 airplanes that were to join in. Three were coming from Florida, one from Georgia, one from New York and one from Canada. During those months they coordinated activities with FBOs from different islands and other agencies. By mid-November everything was falling into place. The final plan was to meet up in Tamiami, Florida (KTMB) on December 12th for flight briefings and paperwork verification then depart for Puerto Rico on, yes, Friday the 13th. Everyone was looking forward to the Fly In but different crews with different schedules makes planning a challenge. The good thing is that by flying via General Aviation, we can be very flexible with our plans.

On this trip one of the crews, Hai and Rick in their Glassair Sportsman, were planning to depart upstate New York on December 9th, make one fuel stop before arriving in to Flagler County (KXFL) for the night. Then we would fly to Tamiami together on the 10th. Once there, we would meet up with Josue and David, in a Grumman Traveler, and Anthony with his Cirrus SR20 for a December 13th departure. Ivan, in his RV10 from Canada, was already in South Florida but had to be back by the 13th so he would depart KTMB on the 9th and return on the 13th. Another crew, Bill and Patricia in their Beechcraft Bonanza, would depart Georgia on the 13th, spend the night in Providenciales (MBPV) and meet up with us in Puerto Rico on the 14th. With these different requirements in mind, multiple telephone calls and e-mails were made during the preceding weeks to make sure everyone had all the different paperwork requirements in order. But even the best laid plans don't always work out.



Hai & Rick at KXFL

On December 9th Hai and Rick called and told us that, even though they were at their hangar, the airport was snowed in and they could not depart. They were hoping that the snow would melt or the snow got cleared so they could leave the next day. The next day the snow was cleared from the runway but the taxiway from their hangar to the runway was still covered in snow so they still could not depart. Finally, on the 11th they were able to depart towards KXFL with the temperature at 13 degrees. When they arrived in to KXFL, about 6:15pm, the temperature was 52 degrees.

After they arrived, we went over the next day's flight plan which was to depart by 10:30am, fly to LaBelle Municipal Airport (X14), fuel up and arrive in to KTMB around 2:00pm. We would go IFR while they would go VFR. With the flights planned, we all went to dinner at Highjackers (the Flagler Airport Restaurant) then we took them to the hotel.

The next day we picked them up at the hotel about 9:30am, filed our respective flight plans and departed KXFL about 11:00am. The flight was uneventful, until we got closer to X14. The weather had closed in and there was a solid layer of clouds below us. We were IFR so Galin requested the GPS approach into runway 14 and soon we were in the clouds. The approach was smooth and we finally broke out of the clouds around 900ft with the airport about 4 miles ahead of us. We didn't hear Hai or Rick so we assumed they were behind us as we pulled up to the fuel pumps. Once we had fueled up we went into the FBO to wait for them.

After waiting a while, they hadn't landed so we checked Flight Aware and saw they had diverted to Vero Beach. About 1/2hr later they called us to tell us they were at Vero Beach with an auxiliary fuel tank transfer pump problem and a local mechanic was looking at the problem. They hoped to get it corrected fairly quickly. By now the weather at LaBelle was clearing up slowly but during the pre-flight Galin noticed that one of the main airplane tires was balding more than he felt comfortable with. It so happened that there was a mechanic at the FBO so we took the plane to his hangar. Luckily he had a new tire and quickly replaced it. Then, just before we were to depart LaBelle, Hai called that the transfer pump problem was fixed and they would soon depart. This meant we had both resolved our problems at the same time and were heading to Tamiami. As luck would have it, we both arrived into Tamiami around 4:00pm with Anthony there waiting for us.



Replacing the tire at X14

After securing the airplanes, Anthony took us to see his beautiful new Cirrus Airplane. By now the sun was setting, the temperature was about 70 degrees and we were able to take pictures of our airplanes parked next to each other. Anthony took us all to dinner where we talked about the next days' flight. We would meet the next day at the Tamiami FBO. The plan was that Anthony along with Hai & Rick would leave around 6:45am. Josue and David were going to depart North Perry Florida around 6:00am and meet up with them in the Bahamas (MYEF). From there they would re-fuel at Providenciales, make the flight to Aguadilla (TJBQ), clear US Customs, re-fuel and make the final leg to Mayaguez (TJMZ). It was going to be a long day of flying. They were going to fly VFR while we would leave Tamiami around 8:30am but IFR direct to TJBQ. Bill and Pat would depart Georgia around 8:00am, stop in



Anthony's Cirrus

in Ft. Pierce Florida for fuel, continue on to Providenciales for the night then meet up with us in Puerto Rico the next day. So that night we made all the flight plans and filed all necessary paperwork. It was almost time to start the Caribbean trip.

The next day, Friday the 13th, we were awake by 4:30am and got to the FBO around 6:00am. Anthony, as well as Hai and Rick, were already putting their luggage inside their planes and taking care of the last details of their flight. Everyone put on their life vests since we would be over water for long periods of time. Hai and Rick's airplane, as is Josue and David's, is slower than Anthony's Cirrus but they had all made prior arrangements to fly together. So they coordinated stops in Exuma, Providenciales and Aguadilla anyway. They finally left a little after 7am while we left around 8:30am.



Pre-dawn Pre-flight

The flight was uneventful as we headed towards Puerto Rico at 11,000ft. We chatted, ate sandwiches and snacks as we flew along. Every so often we would talk to someone from the group on the radio to see where they were. During this time we talked to Josue and David who were also airborne and on their way to Puerto Rico. Unfortunately we had a strong

headwind so it would take longer to arrive than what we had planned. The good thing was that we were able to contact Ivan as he returned to Tamiami from the US Virgin Island in his RV10. He provided us with a pilot report of the weather in the Puerto Rico area while we gave him a report on the weather in Tamiami. This worked out very well for all of us.

In the meantime, we were listening to music and talking to different air traffic controllers. After around 5 hours of flight, Millie started getting cramps. We realized the sun had been hitting her directly the entire flight and she was dehydrated. The right side of her headphone was very hot so she started sipping a little bit of water and stretching out. We placed a towel to cover her window and opened the vents so she could cool off. After about 30 minutes, she felt a lot better. Soon afterwards we passed Providenciales and heard that Anthony was landing. After this we couldn't contact anyone from the group for updates on how the headwinds were affecting their flights. We continued on ahead as planned, landing into Aguadilla around 4:30pm. Once at the COPECA FBO we took off our life vest, went to the bathroom and started fueling the airplane. Since we were behind schedule, and the car rental

counter closes at 4:30pm, we tried calling the car rental place to confirm we would arrive late but had no luck.



Arriving in to TJMZ

While at TJBQ we got a call from Bill Wallace. He told us that while doing the engine run up at Ft. Pierce, they had an exhaust manifold failure with his Bonanza and had to abort the flight. The airplane was grounded in Ft. Pierce, they had rented a car and were headed back to Georgia. Because of this failure they wouldn't make it to Puerto Rico. We were saddened with the news but glad that they were safe.

Right about then we realized that we hadn't heard from anyone of the group since passing Providenciales almost 3 hours ago.

Wondering if they had decided to spend the night in Provo we tried to call with no luck. So without knowing what the rest of the group was doing we departed to our final destination, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. As we approached the Mayaguez airport, Galin talked to one of the guys waiting for us and told him about the car rental. He confirmed that they were still waiting for us. After almost 8hrs of traveling, we landed at Mayaguez around 6:30pm. There was a welcoming committee waiting for us at the airport holding a big sign saying "Bienvenidos"! It was a wonderful sight and, at least for a while, we forgot how tired we were.

After saying our "Hellos" and thanking them for welcoming us, we went straight to the car rental counter to get our car. Galin's cell phone battery was dead so we started charging it checking to see if someone of the group had left us a message letting us know what their plan was but didn't have any message. We picked up our rental and told the counter attendant what we knew about the others. She changed their reservations so they could pick up their car the next day since she had to close the counter for the night.

About 1 hour later, Galin got a phone call from Anthony who had just cleared US Customs in Aguadilla and was getting fuel. He told us that Josue and David had also cleared Customs and would soon be on their way to Mayaguez. Hai & Rick were approaching Aguadilla and should be on the ground soon. This meant that all the airplanes in the group had safely arrived into Puerto Rico. Josue and David



Pedro, our host while in TJMZ

arrived in Mayaguez around 7pm. Since the taxi lights were out our host in Mayaguez, Pedro got in his car and led them to their parking spot. When Hai & Rick finally cleared Customs, Anthony called us to let us know that they were on their way to Mayaguez. Anthony got to Mayaguez around 8pm and ½



After arriving in to TJMZ

hour later Hai and Rick landed. Since Pedro had left to get food for the welcoming party, Galin used a flashlight and led them towards the parking spots. Once all the airplanes were parked, we walked into Pedro's hangar to the smell of fresh pizza. This was great since we were all starving, especially those of us who hadn't eaten anything since around noon. Even though it was much later than planned, there were still a lot of people waiting at the airport for us.

After eating, it hit us that we were super tired and needed a well-deserved break. So we decided to change the schedule and rest the next day instead of making the trip to Old San Juan. The car rental counter was already closed so our hosts made sure

everybody had transportation back and forth to their different hotels. At about 10:30pm we left the airport back to Aguadilla where we had hotel reservations to get some much needed rest. It had been a very long day of flying.

The next day (Saturday, Dember 14, 2013) we got up around 8am for breakfast at one of our favorite places called "La Borinqueña". Then we headed back to the Mayaguez airport to pick up the rest of our stuff and organize everything in the airplane. On our way there we noticed that the rental car was giving us some problems so we decided to change it for another car. When we got there, we heard that everyone else had already picked up their cars and had left about 30 minutes before we arrived. The only one there from the group was Anthony and some local pilots who had flown in from other airports to greet us. We talked to the people there for a while as we unloaded our airplane. We decided to be at the Mayaguez Airport the next day (Sunday) at 9:00am for the trip to San Juan. So just after 2:00pm we headed back to the hotel for some rest and relaxation. By now the temperature was in the mid 80's with a wonderful tropical breeze.

The next day we got to the Mayaguez Airport around 8:30am for the flight to San Juan. Everybody departed around 9:30, VFR in fairly clear weather. But as we got closer to San Juan (TJIG) clouds and rain started closing in. At one point we had to divert slightly over water to maintain VFR conditions. But, once we passed Dorado, the weather cleared up a little and we arrived into a rainy and dreary San Juan without incident. After we secured the airplanes we got two taxis' since there were 10 of us, to take us to El Morro fortress. By the time we got to El Morro, the weather had cleared up nicely.



Landing at TJIG to visit
Old San Juan & the video

Once we entered the fortress, one of the Park Rangers walked with us around part of the fortress and explained some of its history. We also realized there was going to be a special event reenacting some of the training Spanish Soldiers in the 1600's would have undergone. This included shooting a cannon as well as some muskets. We enjoyed the show, took pictures with the "Spanish Soldiers" and walked around El Morro taking lots of pictures. After visiting the fort, we went to lunch at "El Patio de Sam." From there we walked around Old San Juan visiting the Cathedral, The entry door to San Juan (La Puerta

de San Juan) then to the Pigeon Park (El Parque de las Palomas). While at the pigeon park, David



Feeding the Pigeons

decided to get some pigeon food and placed it on his hands, on top of his head and threw it where we were. The pigeons were all over him and it was so funny we took a video of it. To our surprised, even though he had pigeons on and all around him, he wasn't pooped once. But someone that was minding his own business away from the pigeons was pooped, guess who? Yes, Galin. Go figure.

From there we continued walking around Old San Juan and taking pictures. When we got to the Cruise ship docks, we got two van taxis again and returned to the Isla Grande Airport. We left Isla Grande around 4:30pm landing in Mayaguez about

1/2hr later. [Rick made a great video of the trip](#). Once at Mayaguez, we decided to do the "Around the Island" flight tour the next day. So we decided to meet at the Mayaguez airport the next day at 9am.

On Monday, December 16th, we arrived at the Mayaguez Airport about 9am where Galin gave a flight briefing on how to do an "Around the Island" tour at 500ft. The airspace around San Juan is heavily congested with tall mountains a few miles to the north. San Juan has several specific VFR routes that are used to transition their airspace. Galin and Anthony had already done the tour so they didn't go.

While waiting for the airplanes to return from the tour, Galin noticed that the airplane's other tire was also going bare. So Galin called a local mechanic he knew who recommended a mechanic to replace the tire. Galin ordered the tire on line with a 2 day delivery to the mechanic's hangar and asked him to call us when it got there. About 2:00pm Hai & Rick landed having completed the tour. They told us that Josue & David had decided to land at the Vieques Island airport



San Juan Area Flight Briefing



Relaxing at Crashboat

for lunch. This was great news knowing they were taking advantage of being in the Caribbean to visit other airports and explore aviation in the Caribbean. At about 2:30pm we went to lunch with Hai & Rick to another one of our favorite local restaurants. After dinner, we coordinated spending the next day at Crashboat Beach in Aguadilla which has been ranked in several major travel magazines as one of the top 10 beaches in the world so we had to visit.

Early the next day just after breakfast, we got a call from Hai & Rick that they were headed to Crashboat. While at the beach, Galin's sister Iris joined us for the day. We took pictures, went in the water, ate chicken shishkabob (pinchos), Cod Fish Fritters (bacalaitos) and had some great conversation. It was a very relaxing day because we knew that the next days we would be island hopping to St. Thomas and St. Eustatius. At night we met and had dinner with our uncle at a new restaurant called "Chef Movil". The food and service was great so we recommended it to everyone.

On Wednesday, December 18th we arrived at the Mayaguez airport very early to be airborne by 8:30am towards St. Thomas. By 9:00am the four airplanes were airborne VFR towards St Thomas. Unfortunately there was some low clouds and rain along the south side of Puerto Rico so we would up diverting further away from land than we wanted. The airplanes that flew along the north side of Puerto Rico had no problems with the weather so they were already on the ground when we arrived about 10:00am. From the airport we took a taxi to downtown Charlotte Amalie and walked around the streets just sightseeing. Since we had eaten breakfast early, by 11:00am we were already hungry. Galin had spent time in St. Thomas so he knew some good local restaurants. He took us to Cuzzin's Restaurant where we had eaten many years earlier with our then very young daughters. We were pleasantly surprised that it still exists and that it was in the same place. Everyone had their lunch and soon after decided it was best to go on a tour. Josue and David decided they would return to Puerto Rico early and didn't join us on the St. Thomas tour. We got a tour van that took us around the island seeing the beauty of St. Thomas. At around 3pm we headed back to the airport for the return flight to Puerto Rico. From St. Thomas we couldn't fly directly to Mayaguez since we had to clear Customs in Aguadilla and also get fuel for the next day's trip to St. Eustatius.



At the St Thomas Airport

After clearing Customs and arriving into Mayaguez, we were informed that Josue & David had messed up by not clearing Customs at all. Josue informed us that he already called them to let them know and was waiting for a phone call from them. He was nervous not knowing what the penalty might be. Galin, having been a Customs Agent for 22yrs, explained what the procedures and penalties might be and to wait for the Inspector to call him. After that we left to have dinner with Galin's cousin, Gerardo and his wife Maria. To our surprised, Jose and David showed up at the same restaurant so they joined us and we had a good time. We left the restaurant fairly early since we had to be back at the airport by 6:00am to be airborne towards St. Eustatius by 7:00am.



Pedro and his family joined us

We awoke on Thursday, December 19th about 4:30am arriving at the Mayaguez airport about 5:30 in the morning. As the others arrived Galin did the pre-flight and filed an IFR flight plan to St. Eustatius (TNCE). Pedro, our host while in Mayaguez, would join us on the trip with his family in his Cessna 172. So on this trip there would be 13 persons in 5 airplanes. We wanted to be airborne by 6:30am since it was further away than St. Thomas and were expecting strong headwinds. We also wanted to be the first crew to arrive in to St. Eustatius in order to provide the other pilots good weather reports along the way. This was important since St. Eustatius did not have aviation fuel and neither Pedro's Cessna nor Josue's Grumman could make the complete round trip

flight especially if the headwinds were too strong. Additionally, we could enjoy St. Eustatius and be back in Mayaguez before nightfall. But like most plans it didn't work out that way and we didn't get airborne until around 7:30am.

We had a strong headwind so it took us almost 2 ½ hours to arrive. When we approached to land at St. Eustatius the winds were very strong from the left and the mountain just left of the runway touchdown



Approaching the “Statia” airport

zone created an area of turbulent winds. Because of these factors, we landed slightly long and with a slightly higher airspeed. With the strong winds our landing roll was quite short and we were soon at the St. Eustatius airport ramp. Once on the ground, Galin briefed the other pilots about landing there and they all arrived without incident.

Once we had all arrived we were received by the Lt. Governor of St. Eustatius, the St. Eustatius minister of tourism and several other government officials. Also

waiting for us were a local TV News Crew and a reporter from the local newspaper both covering our arrival to their island which they call Statia. Anthony and Galin were both interviewed for TV and we were all given a tote bag with Statia souvenirs. We quickly cleared

their Customs and Immigrations to find that the Tourism Office had a van waiting to take us on a tour of the island. St. Eustatius is a very small island (barely 8 square miles) with just under 4,000 inhabitants, is part of the Dutch Antilles so it took about 1 hour to see the entire island. One of the places we visited was Fort Oranje that for years protected the St. Eustatius waterfront.



At Ft. Oranje

During the 1700’s St. Eustatius was a center of arms and ammunition selling and sold to anyone willing to pay. It was one of the few places from which the rebellious British Thirteen Colonies of North America could obtain weapons.

This good relationship between St. Eustatius and the United States resulted in the noted "First Salute" of 16 November, 1776. On that day the Commander of Ft. Oranje returned the salute fire of the visiting American warship Andrew Doria.

In 1939 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt visited St. Eustatius and presented a plaque commemorating the event.

The People we met during the tour were very friendly and we took lots of pictures before heading out to the Papaya Restaurant for lunch. Lunch was a slightly different buffet in which they weigh the food and charge you according to weight. That was new to many of us in the group. After lunch it was time to go to the airport for our return flight.

Once at the airport, Galin provided Pedro 20 gallons of fuel for his C-172 and an additional 10 gallons to Josue for his Traveler. We had anticipated this and had filled our airplane with the 92 gallons maximum fuel it can carry. With the amount of fuel we had used, and the 30 gallons we took out, we still had plenty of fuel to make the



The “Statia” welcoming committee



With our “Statia” tour guide

flight with IFR reserves. Because of this it took a bit longer to take off from the island, leaving around 4:00pm. The flight to Aguadilla was uneventful arriving about 5:00pm to clear Customs and fueled up. The US Customs Inspector had a long chat with Josue and David about not having cleared Customs the day before, but decided not to give them any penalty just a warning. They got real lucky since it could have been much worse.

Galin stayed in Aguadilla since the mechanic had received the new tire and he wanted to do some night currency flights. Because of this Millie went with Anthony and his family in his new Cirrus. This meant that Millie got to get a ride in the Cirrus before Galin did. After arriving in Mayaguez, Millie returned to Aguadilla, picked Galin up at the airport and we went to the hotel to rest. It had been another long day of flying.

On Friday, December 20th we were finally able to sleep in, the first time since the trip had started. After breakfast Millie took Galin to the Aguadilla Airport and, when the new tire was installed, he flew the airplane back to Mayaguez. After that we went back to the hotel just to do nothing. It was great.



Mayaguez Airport Fly-In

The pilots at the Mayaguez airport, with support of other pilots in Puerto Rico, decided to sponsor a Christmas Fly In. So on Saturday it was PARTY TIME Puerto Rican style with roast pork (lechón asado), music, dancing and good company. It started at noon but since Galin was the DJ, we got there earlier. More than 100 persons, pilots and their families, showed up. For the first time in a long time the Mayaguez Airport was alive with airplanes and activity. People flew in everything from ultra-lights to a Cessna 421 and even several helicopters from different airports in Puerto Rico to have some fun. During the Fly-In the pilots from our group introduced themselves

and talk about their planes, the trip and their experiences. Most of the people that showed up wanted to see the airplanes that came to visit PR and talk to the pilots. Several persons got orientation rides in different airplanes and helicopters. It was a little after sunset by the time everyone started heading home. Everyone said they had a good time during the Fly-In.



Mayaguez Airport Fly-In



Preparing to leave Puerto Rico

Finally Sunday December 22nd arrived and 3 of the airplanes would head back to Florida. They were at the airport at around 6:30am, completed the pre-flights and said their goodbyes. Everyone was happy to now have new pilot friends that they will keep in contact. One by one the three departed but Josue and David, in the Grumman Traveler, had to come back because of a maintenance issue. They left the airplane in Mayaguez so a local mechanic could later fix it. They would return to Florida on a Commercial flight then come back to Puerto Rico once it was fixed. The flight back was a bit quicker since they had a good tailwind all the way back. Overall, everyone was happy with the trip and David is even planning to join us next year with his wife

and in his airplane. We planned to spend a few more days in Puerto Rico visiting friends and family we couldn't visit while the others were here so we stayed behind.

The next few days were spent with friends and family and just generally hung out in Puerto Rico. On December 29th, we went to the beach to spend our "last day" at Crashboat with several family members. During the day, and since Galin's brother Joe enjoys doing Stand Up Paddle Boarding (SUP), Millie decided to try it. Now this was so funny. When she first got on the board, on her knees she started trembling from the effort. But it wasn't so much her body but her big Puerto Rican butt that was wiggling. She never stood up but was persistent trying it over and over again. With the waves, it was more difficult and I think she lost like 5 pounds while Joe was quickly on his board. We also met up with several other family members that we hadn't seen in a very long time. Afterwards we went to the Airport to secure our large luggage pieces for the next day's flight. Since we were returning IFR direct to the US we advised US Agriculture of our intentions so they could inspect the airplane before departure.



Millie at Crashboat

When we got up early in the morning of December 30th to check the weather, there was a large band of very bad thunderstorms stalled right in the middle of our projected flight plan between Florida and the Bahamas. The weather was such that it was best to wait for it to clear so we canceled the flight even though it wasn't forecast to clear for several days. This meant we were stuck in the Caribbean for a few more days. Oh the horror! So we went to the airport, spoke to Agriculture to let them know our change of plans and that we would try to leave on the 2nd.



New Year's Eve with family

The next day was New Year's eve and it was overwhelming when we got multiple invitations from family and friends to celebrate the New Year's with them. So we went to Aguada to spend New Year's with Galin's cousin Gerry and his wife. During the party

Galin got to see several other cousins, some of which he hadn't seen in over 40 years. We met each of their families so there was good company, great food and nice fireworks. We had a wonderful time and left after midnight.

January 1st, 2014 was a lazy day so we just hung out while Galin monitored the weather. Since the weather seemed to be clearing up, and we already had the US Agriculture inspection set up, we made plans to leave PR the next day.

Gerry and his wife Maria had offered to pick us up and they got to the apt at around 7am on January 2nd. We arrived at the airport and started loading the airplane for the long flight. The Agriculture inspector was already waiting for us and he cleared us for the flight. After the preflight was complete and our IFR flight plan was on file, we took pictures, said our goodbyes and got in the plane for the flight



Just before departing TJMZ

to Tamiami getting airborne around 8:30am. The weather was severe clear with the temperature at about 85 degrees. We had fun with a towel that Galin put on his head looking like a Arab then putting it up like a curtain on his window to cover him from the sun. With the good tailwind we had, the flight took only 5:50 minutes.



Galin in the shade

We got to the Air Sal FBO in Tamiami at around 1:30 happy to be there. We had thought of just getting fuel and continuing on but were too tired to keep going. Anthony was there in minutes and took us to go eat at Five Guys Burgers and fries. From there we headed to his apt to just chill while Galin started working on the next day's flight plan. At around 7pm we got hungry and walked around stopping at a Peruvian restaurant for some rotisserie chicken with cilantro rice and fried yucca before we got back to the apartment.

Galin checked the weather and saw there was a strong cold front heading towards North Florida bringing with it high winds. We knew we had to be back in Flagler soon since we didn't have very warm clothes in our luggage. With this in mind we went to bed at around 10pm.

On January 3rd, 2013 we left Anthony's apartment for the airport around 7:30 in the morning. After paying the FBO fees, fueling up and filing our IFR flight plan, we were airborne just before 9am. We flew to Flagler seeing several other planes on our way there. Due to headwinds, it took almost 2 ½ hours on what should have taken 2hrs without the winds. To make things worse, clouds had moved in and Flagler airport had gone IFR with ceilings reported at 900 and visibility of 6 miles. We shot the GPS approach and once under 900ft, we broke out with the airport almost straight ahead of us. When we got there and we tried to start our car, it had a dead battery and wouldn't start. With the temperature about 45 degrees, we put the car battery on a trickle charger and went to have lunch at Hijacker's Restaurant.

After lunch we tried to start the car again with no luck. So Galin took the airplane battery out, connected it to the car and we got the engine started. Once we did that, we put the airplane into the hangar and headed home. The plan was to sleep in the next day for as long as we could. We were happy to make the trip and have so much fun with other aviators but at the end of the day, there's no place like HOME. Now we start planning our next flying adventure.



Flying IFR on our way back to KXFL

The flight crews were:

N819PR – Galin Hernandez, Millie Santiago

N555GQ – Anthony Perea

N307HL – Hai Longworth, Rick Longworth

N9659L – Josue Tirado, David Kristoferson

N3101V – Bill Wallace, Pat Wallace

C-GMDV - Ivan Kristensen

More photos of the trip are available at:

<http://s1175.photobucket.com/user/Puertoricoflyer/library/4th%20Annual%20Puerto%20Rico%20Fly%20In?sort=6&page=1>

2014 El Salvador Trip



Story and photos by:
Galin Hernandez & Millie Santiago

2014 El Salvador Trip

We were stationed at the US Embassy in El Salvador for 3 ½ years made great friends, visited many places and enjoyed ourselves so much we call it our second home. After we left in 2010 we had been trying to return but something would always come up that changed our plans. So, having been invited to the 2014 Ilopango Air Show we decided it was time to finally return and visit. We were looking forward to visiting since several good friends would be performing during the show, including Dondi Pesquera whom we had not seen in more than 20 years. We also decided that instead of taking a commercial airline, we would fly our airplane “Blanquita” there.



The trip would take us over Mexico, Belize, Guatemala and Honduras before arriving in to El Salvador so we needed to coordinate overflight and landing permits with these countries. We contacted one of our good friends, Milton Martinez, and he took care of all the arrangements. We would leave home on January 17th, spend the night in Cozumel, Mexico arriving in to El Salvador on January 18th. We would return after the Air Show, which was scheduled for January 25 and 26.



Approaching Marathon Airport

On January 17th, we got in our plane around 9am in Flagler, Florida for the 1st leg of our trip which would take us to Marathon Key, Florida. Here we would take a short rest and eat lunch before heading out to Cozumel, Mexico. The IFR flight from Flagler to Marathon was nice and easy 2 ½ but the flight to Cozumel was a different story.

When Galin turned the engine on in Marathon, he felt that the plane was acting different but during the run up everything was fine. The flight to Cozumel would take about 3 hour, mostly over water about 25 miles off shore from Cuba. We were about ½ way between the tip of Cuba and Mexico (about 50 miles off shore) when all of a sudden the Electronic Flight Information System (EFIS) low battery voltage alarm came on. It took a few seconds for Galin to realize that the alternator was no longer powering the airplane and it was running only with battery power.

This was a big problem since the airplane relies on electricity to run most of the instruments. The engine's electronic magnetos, which need electrical power, thankfully have their own internal generators so they don't need the alternator providing power to keep the engine running. Galin tried re-setting the alternator and voltage regulator circuits to see if that corrected the problem but it didn't work. The airplane systems were still draining the battery at about 18 amps.

With nowhere to make a precautionary landing Galin started turning off all electronics except the bare minimums needed. This included the audio panel intercom so now we couldn't talk to each other. Once all the unnecessary electrical equipment was turned off, the battery was only discharging at 4 amps. This meant that at this rate the battery would last over 6hrs, more than enough for the 1hr remaining to Cozumel. Galin knew the plane would easily make Cozumel, he started hearing strange noises and felt odd things with the airplane even though, except for the battery still being discharged, all the airplane's instrument indications were normal. It didn't help that we were ½ way between Mexico and Cuba, over water and about 50 miles from any strip of land.

As we approached Mexico, Galin advised Air Traffic Control (ATC) about the situation. He requested a precautionary deviation into Cancun instead of continuing on to Cozumel, which the controller approved. Once the Mexican coast came in sight, it seemed that all the strange noises went away and the airplane felt normal again. Galin realized that we weren't in any danger and that the plane would easily make it to Cozumel, so he advised ATC that we would continue on to Cozumel instead of landing in to Cancun. We approached Cozumel in beautiful weather and were cleared to land about 15 minutes later.

When we taxied to our parking spot and got out, we saw a person working on an airplane right next to where we were parked so we asked if he was a mechanic. He pleasantly said yes and



On the ground in Cozumel

said he would be happy to help us. He told us to clear Immigration and Customs while he finished the airplane he was working on. It took us just over one hour to clear everything then Galin went back to the airplane. The mechanic was there waiting on the ramp. They quickly had the cowls off and started trying to find the problem. Since Galin had advised ATC about the situation and had requested a deviation, the local Mexican DGAC inspector (equivalent to our FAA FSDO inspector) arrived to see what had happened. It was a little before 6pm when they found out the problem was just a blown fuse in the alternator

circuit. The mechanic would get the part and would meet us back at the airport the next day around 7am. We were very happy to realize it was not a serious problem.

We took a taxi to a small hotel called La Casona Real and had dinner at a local spot called Woody's. The food was excellent and we listened to some musicians providing live music while we ate. The hotel was comfortable and their internet connection was excellent. We knew we would stay here on our flight back to the US.

The next day we were at the airport bright and early and the mechanic was there waiting for us. After putting everything back together Galin did a ground check and everything worked perfectly. With the problem corrected, Galin requested fuel and started the outbound paperwork. This included explaining to the DGAC inspector what they had found with the airplane and how it was corrected. The inspector was pleased with the results and wished us a

good trip. So by 10:30am, and with a full load of fuel, we were in the airplane going through the check list confirming everything was working properly before departing. A few minutes later we were airborne on the IFR leg towards El Salvador.

Our initial climb was to 8,000 feet as we flew past Belize towards Guatemala. Just before overflying Puerto Barrios, Guatemala we were cleared to 12,000 feet the minimum altitude needed to clear the mountains between Honduras and El Salvador. All through the flight, we were above a broken deck of clouds until we saw the beautiful tall green mountains. We knew then we were approaching our 2nd home. Once we contacted El Salvador approach the controller recognized Galin's voice and welcomed us back to El Salvador. It was sweet to know that we hadn't been forgotten even after many years. A few minutes later we were cleared for the VOR approach to runway 15 and the Ilopango airport quickly came in to view.



Left downwind for landing at MSSS



At Ilopango with friends

As soon as we landed and parked the airplane at the international ramp we saw a small welcome committee waiting for us. Many of Galin's pilot friends were there to help us so we didn't have to worry about our luggage, the rental car or the hangar because all was done for us. We felt so loved and happy to be there. After getting up to date with everyone and having lunch at the airport, it was time to go to the hotel. One of our good friends was there to help us get to the hotel since there was road construction going on and we had to take a route we weren't familiar with.

Once at the hotel we realized how tired and hungry we were. It is so nice to be within walking distance to "La Zona Rosa". While walking we noticed several

changes but recognized where we were heading. We ended up at "La Hola de Beto" and had a wonderful dinner. Once we got back, we started sending messages to our friends so that we can meet with them. This way we can manage our time here and see all we wanted to see. We were glad to be back in El Salvador. The rest of the week was spent visiting with old friends and doing some minor maintenance on the airplane.

On Friday we met up with Dondi Pesquera who we had not seen on over 20yrs. We talked about old times, how our different family members were doing and what future plans were. Dondi took Galin over to his airplane (Jet Provost Trainer) and they went over different aircraft systems as well as aircraft performance. Dondi will be participating in the Cozumel Airshow during May 2014. Since Galin has flown between El Salvador and Cozumel they did some basic



With Dondi Pesquera

flight planning to verify the flight route and distance. Saturday was the first day of the airshow so Galin went, enjoying the show along many local pilot friends. Galin was pleasantly surprised

and honored when he found the El Salvador Aeroclub had placed a picture of him with “Blanquita” on their aviation wall of fame alongside many important Central American aviators.



On the Wall of Fame

On Sunday we spent the day at the airshow with front row seats in the Aeroclub facilities with the performers milling around. It was fun but bittersweet knowing we would be leaving the next day on our way back home. The weather was forecast to be beautiful all the way to Cozumel so Galin decided we would make the flight VFR to enjoy the view. So early Monday morning our friend Dr. Sandoval picked us up at the hotel and took us to the airport arriving around 8am.

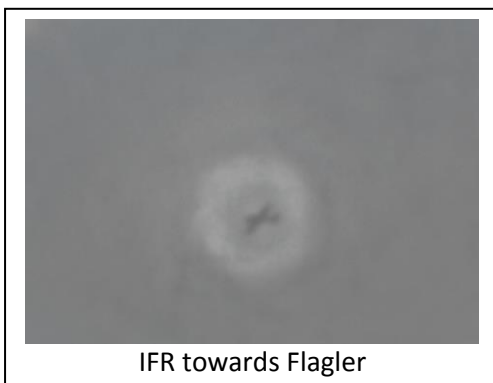
Once at the airport, we loaded the airplane with our luggage and taxied to the international ramp for our exit inspection.

Galin filed a VFR flight plan to Cozumel which meant we would climb to 11,500ft as we headed east over the mountains of Honduras. After Puerto Barrios Guatemala we would descend to 9,500ft until we arrived 3 1/2hrs later in Cozumel. By 9:30am everything was complete and we departed El Salvador. The flight was uneventful and we landed in Cozumel on schedule. Once again it took just over 1 hour to clear Immigration, Customs and their FAA, but we were back in the hotel by 3:00pm ready to take a break.

After settling in and resting a bit, we headed out to walk around downtown Cozumel and have dinner. After dinner we returned to the Hotel to plan for the return flight. Using the Hotel’s INTERNET connection Galin made our US Customs advance notice of arrival and the Eapis notification. So early on the morning of January 28th, we took a taxi back to the airport, fueled up the airplane and by 10:30 we were airborne. Once again the flight was uneventful and with a nice tailwind we arrived in to Key West about 1:30pm.



At US Customs in Key West

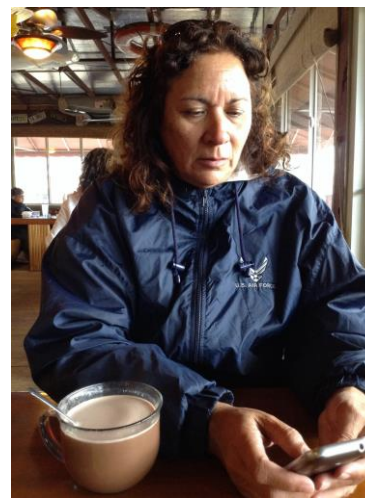


IFR towards Flagler

Clearing US Customs was a breeze, especially after how long it takes to do the same in Mexico. It was such a smooth and quick process that we were airborne IFR back home within one half hour. By the time we were just north of Pahokee, Florida the clouds started to close in and soon we were in and out of IFR conditions at 7,000ft.

When we were about 50 miles from Flagler and as we were cleared to 5,000ft, Galin felt the engine start to run rough. He tried different adjustments but the engine roughness would

not clear up. After a few minutes, and some more adjustments, the engine roughness seemed to clear up so Galin stopped moving the controls. With the engine running smooth again we approached Flagler airport and were soon cleared to land. When Galin reduced the power to start the landing, the engine started running rough for few seconds but then quickly cleared up again. We landed without incident and taxied back to our hanger. Galin decided to suspend further flying until he consults with a mechanic and they can work to correct the problem. The airplane needs to have the annual condition inspection done in March so the airplane won't be grounded a long time. In the meantime, we were glad to be home even though the temperature was very cold compared to the warmth of the Florida Keys, El Salvador and Mexico.



Back in Flagler