

## Slovenia - Philipines

**21/10/2015**

The first day took me from Maribor to Bucharest, the smaller executive airport, as planned. Got up at the reasonable hour of 7AM to leave for the airport at 8. She was already out basking in the sun waiting to be ridden over the few clouds scattered in the blue yonder.

The whole flight was basically uneventful other than a few minor issues with the plane. Nothing that can't wait to be fixed by an MRO at final destination.

This, for me at least, test flight mainly had the purpose of finding out what kind of performance I'll be able to get. You can plan all you want but every plane has it's own character. I got the non-GAMI equipped injectors to run the 550 smoothly very near peak on the lean side, which is no problem according to the POH. It gave me a fuel use of 11.5-12 GPH at a TAS of around 160 at FL120. Not bad! This means that all the goals set during pre-planning using 15 GPH are easily achieved by her.

With this knowledge I took the time to figure out the GNS480 and other instruments. The GNS480 is less intuitive then its more recent brothers but its still a solid piece of equipment.

Approach vectored me quite high but nothing a lowered gear and a few extra track miles couldn't solve. I made a nice long landing since I had plenty of runway to do it on.



**23/10/2015**

The plan was to have an early start. In the hotel lobby at 06:00. However, the room I had was very hot even though it wasn't even warm outside. It had to try and sleep with the window open letting all the noise in from the busy street below. I must have struggled to sleep for a long time because I slept right through my alarm. 20 past 6 the receptionist woke me up and I hurried downstairs.

@ the airport I paid the hefty 400 euro bill and soon was on my way. Weather was good and even quite nice as I was just 50ft above an overcast layer on cruise I got a lot of "direct to's " so that cut off some good time.



Unfortunately after landing, there was an issue to confirm whether or not there would be AVGAS at Erzurum. After 3 hours it turned out they "found some in the city" and I was good to go. As I wanted to start there were more issues with the permits and even after starting to taxi it took a full 20 minutes to get airborne.

On top of that I noticed the door wasn't fully closed and in an attempt to get it closed (which works on a 210) things only got worse. Turns out the pressure differential is way greater in the Bonanza. Too much air was flowing out to close it. I slowed the plane to 80 knots (at FL130) and managed to close the lower pin again.



This and the fact it was now soon getting dark made me decide to divert to Sivas for a safe landing. Flying in the dark under MSA with broken cloud cover? Nah.



So I ended up in expensive hotel in Sivas because the town is fully booked for some political campaign event.

Here I am now in the lobby at 5:15 AM waiting for the handling agent to pick me up. Today should be VFR to Erzurum and also on to Teheran and Kuwait. If the permits come through.

But it's Friday (prayer day) and I believe a national holiday in Iran....

## **24/10/2015**

Made it to the lobby nicely on time but as you could read in my previous post nobody showed up. It was clear the agent that dropped me off and agreed to pick me up at 5 AM had a change of heart. Understandably... 40 minutes later a random taxi guy showed up and took me to the airport. After stopping for a car that flipped over in the middle of the long dark deserted road to the airport, we made it well in time for my planned 6:20 departure.

With a bit of language barrier but helped by my 747 captain outfit it became clear to them I was on a private flight and needed to get to the air side. I must say however that the officials are generally quite understanding and helpful, even when you can't communicate with them.

It was darker than I hoped for at sunrise due to the cloud cover so I pushed my flight plan a bit until I could tell the mountains from the clouds, since I was going VFR. The weather was OK at Sivas but there aren't many stations in between. The METARs looked OK so I would give it a go.

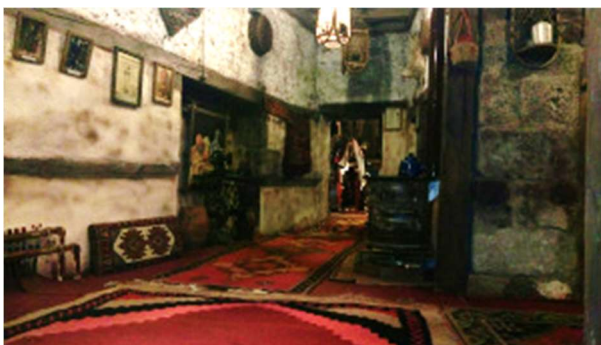
I departed east at mountain top level, 8000 feet and was able to maintain that for a while. Thanks to the GPS695 with terrain I had very good situational awareness and was able to maintain solid VFR maneuvering myself through mountain passes and around their tops.



But about 60 NM out of Erzurum it started to rain and the visibility dropped. I was flying in limit VFR conditions (about 5 KM in rain and 1500 feet above ground) at 7000 to 7500 feet with mountains reaching 8000 easily left and right. The approach to Erzurum is in a narrow valley of about 10 NM wide.



Luckily the weather didn't deteriorate and I was able to continue with room for a 180 degree turn escape at any time. But boy, was I glad to see the runway! After landing it quickly became clear that there had been an unfortunate misunderstanding. There is no AVGAS. I considered MOGAS and even went out to get 40L but in the end I knew that was a dumb idea. No way was I going to put this oily, murky super 95 car fuel that reeked of alcohol into this fine IO550B and fly it in marginal weather towards 13000 feet mountains in Iran. No. No....



So there I was. Stuck in Erzurum. Since landing yesterday morning at 8:30 AM I have been trying to find a solution. The only real solution is trucking in fuel at a cost of 2000 USD. For 60 gallons. Now, 36 hours later I am still in Erzurum trying to pay for this fuel and the truck still has to depart from a place 1100km away. Tomorrow the weather is OK but from Monday on the rain is coming and Allah only

knows how long it will remain like that. So for now I'm not going anywhere....





The good thing from all this was that the young man from Celebi handling (*who kept calling me captain*) was very helpful and we even went for a bite in the evening. To finish off we had a Turkish coffee in a 300 year old coffee house and talked politics and religion.

Tourism here practically doesn't exist so everything is very genuine and you get a good sense of what these people and their culture is like. Strangely enough I did not see any terrorists or radical muslims, go figure! (*this was sarcasm*) Today I spent the whole day in the hotel trying to fix the AVGAS problem to finally go out and try the local meatballs in a stunning looking restaurant. I hope that they can send the fuel tomorrow and with a lot of luck I can still depart in the last hour of light although I highly doubt that.

**26/10/2015**

By 11 AM I was refueling the plane in what I would call typical Belgian weather. Pouring rain that is. Not an easy task too siphoning avgas out of drums in those conditions. Trying to siphon from one of the drums I must have sucked a bit too long or too hard (yeah, run with it... :P) so avgas came in my mouth. That stuff makes you barf and gag instantly. I had never had it enter my body before and let me tell you, I hope it never happens again! After fueling I called my doctor through my assistant and if I were in Belgium it would have meant a hospital visit. But since I was walking and talking and not gagging any more I was "Probably all right". Great. Tip top shape to fly a non-turbo Bonanza over 10 000ft mountains in bad weather.



I had to file IFR at FL150 in order for them to accept me. I couldn't really make it of course but maybe 30 minutes would work when needed. I departed IFR but it wasn't really necessary since there was a break in the weather when I finally got going.

It was getting late to make it to Kuwait though because the flight from Tehran to Kuwait needs to be done IFR. Iran doesn't accept IFR under FL170. For good reason.

Anyway, I was happy to finally hear 300 horses in full gallop again after a long quiet stay. She performed quite well up to 130 and that's what I maintained for a while until ATC asked for my final level (*remember the filed level*). She then told me to go VFR after I said I can't possibly reach 15000 feet. Well ok then, 'VFR' it is. I kept flying at a comfortable terrain clearance level and just avoiding the tallest and darkest clouds, however I could not escape the occasional ice. First some rime and later some clear ice accumulated on the wing. I figured as long as doesn't get any worse I can just continue.



Just about an hour into the flight it was time to switch over to Tehran. At least, that was the plan. Ankara called me to confirm my permit number and relay it with Iran. He came back telling me there is no permit with such number. What?! I asked him to check again and plea to enter anyway if they can accept me (*yeah sure.. worth a shot though*). No go. You

cannot enter Tehran FIR.

Well, I can either push on and risk being shot at by Iran or divert to Van 50 NM to the south. Turning back is not an option since they don't have fuel in Erzurum.

Oh well, I kind of expected this to happen and enjoyed the flight to van along beautiful mountains and the approach of the city by the lake in the middle of nowhere.

After a while on the ground I found the problem to be that the flight plan was filed with permit number 9222 and not the correct 9221. A stupid mistake that caused another costly (they charged around 500 EUR) and time consuming delay as it was now dark in Tehran already (*like I said, no IFR under FL150/170*).

I tried not to get frustrated too much and prepare for departure the next day with the AIM office and after collected my stuff and went to a nice hotel for dinner.

**27/10/2015**

I had been looking forward to this flight even before I started this trip. From then I knew getting over the mountains in this country was going to be quite difficult. Last flight proved my suspicions were correct even though I've never been to this country. More than anything else, leaving the mountains behind got me excited about leaving Iran, an otherwise interesting country just like the next.

I like to think it were the preparations I did the day before, but who knows, things just seemed to go smoother this particular morning. To start I had my breakfast and left the hotel in time, getting to the airport nice and early. I planned for a departure at 10AM because they all seemed to have a problem with me being there too early. 2 hours before takeoff time I met with Mr. Amiri after which he seated me in the Iran Air dispatch area while he took care of things. At least here it seemed like I could get a decent briefing. The satellite showed 2 big storms; one moving in to Tehran in about 2 hours and another over Kuwait, slowly moving towards my alternate Shiraz. It looked like I would be in between the worst if I could make my takeoff time. No pressure..

It only took 20 minutes and a cup of tea for Mr. Amiri to return with the happy message I was able to go. Yes!

I did my preflight and prepared the cockpit to go, while waiting for the fuel truck. Once it arrived I tried to explain to them that I had one drum of fuel in the plane and I wanted to uplift that first. Somehow they understood I had an empty drum and wanted to fill it and of course, that's not allowed. After 5 minutes of gestures they seemed to get the point. We cut the tip off a traffic cone and I cleaned the inside, it would serve nicely as a funnel. More gestures sent someone running to an airplane nextdoor to grab a stepladder to put the drum on. We were all set.



During the uplift the guys were so amused and laughing, by this time joined by more ground crew from the plane next to us, we spilled some on the ground. Unfortunately, the fire chief must have spotted this or he was standing there the whole time, I wouldn't have noticed anyway. Again I didn't know what the problem was but now he was in a serious conversation with the bearded guy and threatening to take his badge. I tried asking him what the problem was but he just waved me off disrespectfully. Then he ran off and nothing happened. I called Mr. Amiri to resolve whatever was going on and so he did after 15 more minutes discussing. A cleaning truck showed up and he ordered it to spray the fuel with water. Laughing my ass



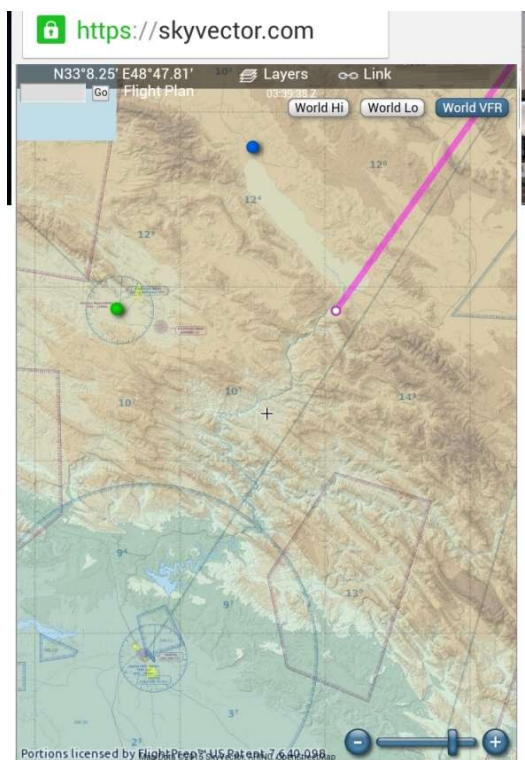
off with a straight face (*in case you're wondering, fuel is hydrophobic*) I decided to just keep quiet and wait it out instead of trying to tell them what they are doing is pointless.

Finally we got to fueling after 30 minutes of playing around. Turns out they are 40L short. Good thing I had that drum or the flight would become very tight, if not impossible! Now I just need to monitor the fuel closely but I should have enough with around 4h15m of fuel (ETE 3:30).

The weather improved much by the time I started the engine and was on my way south. I started off flying VFR at FL105 after leaving the terminal area. As I got closer to the first group of hills the ceiling dropped and the headwind was blowing me back to Tehran, well almost.

After crossing that hill in the last pic I dropped lower and out of radio contact with Tehran. From there it got more and more exciting with lower clouds, rain-wrapped mountains and turbulence, thus resulting in fewer pictures. Every 10 minutes I had a plane relay an 'OPS normal' message to Tehran as he was clearly concerned about my well-being asking this before.

It all boiled down to a mountain pass I deliberately planned my route over. It's the only deep-cut pass in the whole mountain range near Khoramabad. Here it is coming up ahead:



As you see the low clouds are not helping and I only have that tight gorge to fly through. 30 knot winds blowing from the SW made it perfect. I have some experience with this type of flying and I can handle mountain winds. Most important thing is to stay on the windward side of the valley to avoid rotors and clear air turbulence. I slowed down as well to about 100 knots (even though it's not strictly necessary in this tank-like plane) with the gear down to stabilize the aircraft.



Here we go:

All in all the turbulence and up/down-drafts were not too bad.

I was glad to see the descending horizon and the weather getting better slowly:



Eventually the terrain flattened out and I was able to reach Dezful (military base) on the radio. They instructed me to fly around in a 15NM arc and after I proceeded direct to Ahwaz. The weather here was getting worse again but it looked like an overcast layer

above FL100 so I stayed at FL095 in some occasional moderate rain maintaining 'VFR'. The weather maintained like that mostly all the way but ending without any rain and in very hazy conditions. Kuwait cleared me direct to the VOR (at first) saving me precious fuel and over-water time. After a 360 I was cleared to final 12L in Kuwait but I was still 12 NM out and could barely make out the city. They must have laughed (*or the opposite*) when they saw me approaching in big slow S turns trying to find the runway. Another nice landing followed (*sry, it's just true :P*) after which I was frantically looking at the aerodrome chart trying to find my way but in the end it wasn't really that hard .A copilot would be nice though. Maybe next time.



In Kuwait at least they seemed to know what was going on. However I needed to pay in cash again and in local currency which proved to be another challenge



The reception in Kuwait was great and the airport gets some interesting visitors too. The GA ramp, that's oddly also used by FlyDubai, lies right next to the USAF base and also houses a few nice retro jets like an immaculate 727 (*big fan as you know*).

The air was unusually humid due to a day of rare thunderstorms that brought the yearly rain supply 24 hours before. Apparently it was so bad the streets were flooded. The same happened in Yemen that





day. Odd times. In any case, it hits you hard after a smooth (well, considering) 3.5 hour flight in air conditioned luxury.

The rampie told me I had to get local cash currency to purchase the fuel. However due to the large amount (600 KD / 2000 EUR for 2 barrels (*no not a typo!*)) I could not get enough cash out of the ATM, only 150. I tried to get cash through overcharging at the handler but they also didn't have enough cash at hand, also just 150.

The client and the operator were not able or willing to provide or send cash. In the end I was left with only one option: call mommy. She was able to send 300; so together with my cash and a smallish overcharge I was able to get all the Oryxes (*national symbol*) to pay for the fuel.

By the time I got to refuelling it was a few hours later and dark. Luckily they (Kuwait, Bahrain and the UAE) accepted me IFR on FL110.

With 5 mins to EOBT, full tanks and 120L of AVGAS in the back I was ready to go. I had my suspicion this would be the final flight for me. All the delays and the expensive handling and fuel slashed my budget like the sword slashes fruit in fruit ninja ®™.

Anyhow, 't was a while since I last did a night IFR flight. The green flood lights and yellow lit instruments and the night lighting on the airport create a dreamy atmosphere that calmed me right down after another stressy and delayed 'tech stop'. What a joy to just get going on these trips.

However, soon after taking off with the rolling thunder of the 550 awakening my tiredness behind my comfy ANR headset, the shear risk of this kind of flying hit me. Not that I didn't know what I was getting into, but there is always a big difference between knowing what's coming and actually being in a situation. I think it's called adrenaline.

There I was. Pitch dark outside, in the middle of the Persian Gulf only broken by a bright gigantic flame on an oil rig every now and then. '*Could I make it? At least I can make out the surface there.*' Especially knowing the only engine is loosing some oil (dipping in at only .5 qts in 15 hrs though) gets you on edge. Watch those needles like a hawk. I knew the exact position of temp and pressure to the millimetre, and lucky for me they didn't move. Every bump you think '*Was that the engine? It's so smooth out there...*' And so cutting the blue at 300 km/hour feels like slowly circumnavigating a giant black hole in outer space. Only without the rocket science.



The slowly passing calm voices of American, Australian, British and local air traffic controllers eventually kept me awake after my body adjusted to slightly higher alertness than usual and reminded me the end was approaching. Not that I was longing for it per se, but still.

I couldn't help but feel relieved to see Dubai's glow in the distance and hear and see traffic getting busier. Not much later I got my first aerial view of "the palm" and the skyline with the Burj Kalifa blinking high above it all.

To avoid the busy Dubai airspace I had to route north over the city and descend over the mountains as I came back down to Fujairah. My smartphone didn't want to cooperate and refused to give me the approach plates. The kind man at the other end of the radio briefed me

how to fly the ILS and soon I was established to land on what later would prove to be the final destination.

A row of IL-76TD/MD's and a very rare IL-18 were a nice sight as I taxied the Bonanza in to stand 3 and the 550 (and me!) finally got to rest for the day.



The clerks at the airport didn't hold me very long and soon I was on my way to Dubai to meet a friend and very happy to be in a first world country, but oh so tired! By the time I got to his place I was on the road for 19 hours.

All you can still manage to do then is lift your arm to enjoy a cold beer.

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Break

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**25/11/2015**



After weeks of silence it's time to continue my trip to Manila. For now I'll leave the delay reasons hanging until I can get a clear view on all the facts, but the post on that should prove interesting.

Anyway, after a smooth flight from Brussels and a lengthy delay to find a bed due to a communication error I had a short rest in downtown Deira, which looks like 'little India'.



Today I spent scouring town to look for a GPS tracker and fuel siphon hose. I found neither but I did find some sort of fluid pump that doesn't require me sucking on a hose and looks like it can be attached to a barrel.

After leaving the hotel I went to pick up the airplane key at my friends' house and heard some more good news (*more on that later*)!

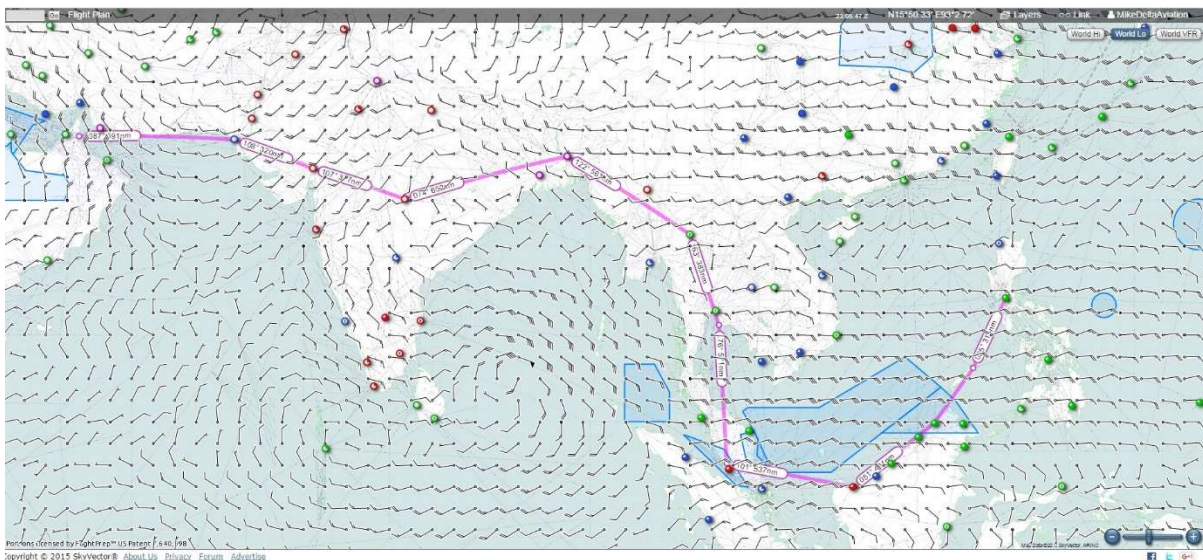
This time I wanted to get to the hotel nice and early so I took a taxi to the hotel in Fujairah around 3.



Tomorrow at 7AM I'll be assisted by a Jetex employee for my departure to Karachi. This leg will be one of two legs with a significant amount of time over water. Good to know I'll have done 50% of the open water flying on the first leg :P Even better is it looks like I have a nice tailwind all the way!

After Karachi I'm flying over to Ahmedabad with the night stop at Nagpur. The weather on these legs is also looking quite good. With a new support team and these conditions the trip is off to a promising start!

Time for some needed rest now, hopefully my next entry will be from an Indian IP!



**25/11/2015**

So, the 'plan' was to get up at 6 and be airborne by 08:30. Right. I got off to a good start again having breakfast and a lengthy checkout, more or less on time.



The FBO front door was closed however, and I had to stand there for 5 minutes waiting for the police officer to show up and let me in.



5 minutes doesn't seem like much, but in aviation it's a stereotype. They say pilots are always late and that's because we face one 5 or 10 minute delay after another, until we are an hour late...

Anyway, Babu from Jetex was waiting there for me and soon enough we were heading out to the airplane around 8. After the refueling and some flight plan issues I was finally good to go 45 minutes later and airborne by 9:15. Byebye UAE!

Flying over the open water during daytime certainly feels more comfortable. At least you can see where the surface is if you need to.

Iran was visible on the left as I cruised along their southern border through the Omani airspace.

It was stunning weather; smooth sailing, not a single cloud except some high scattered cirrus and a 15-20 knot tailwind. What more can I ask for?

Setting the 550 at 20.5/12GPH/2400RPM gave me a nice average ground speed of 175 KTS (324 KM/H) and a safe range.



All I saw in Iran and Pakistan was desert and bare mountains. The coast is barely populated and goes on for hundreds of miles with high dunes marking the end of the continent, again reminding me of Namibia. Only less red. Approach into Karachi went smooth and without any delays or detours. Funny how the air was fairly clear all the way but over Karachi itself it was hazy, almost smoke.

After landing I got directed to the western end of the airport and parked between the boneyard (*with some interesting stuff (B743/DC10/B1011/...)*) where a whole crew was waiting for me. This must be Jetex :-)



'Handling' went really quick up to the point when I asked for some lunch. Someone was going to grab a burger at McDonalds for me but it took 'a bit' longer than promised (shocker right!). Anyway, the pilot

needs fuel too and I was out of water. I think we all understand the dangers of a hungry and thirsty pilot.

After about an hour and a half on the ground I started up. The lady behind the radio didn't really seem to catch on though and thought I wanted to go park somewhere else. Euhm no, just taxi to the active and takeoff to Ahmedabad please. When she got that I was told they are still coordinating with the Indian military. 10 minutes.

They marshalled me to another parking spot and shut down again, it was taking too long. 30 minutes after originally starting up, I got to start for real. When taxiing they find nothing better to say than "Please expedite". Seriously dude?



The weather was still the same and my heading wasn't much different than before so I could enjoy the same tailwinds and speeds again. I had a nice sunset view over the mangroves as I approached the Indian border.

This border crossing also went without issue. It felt good that things were going so smoothly this time.

Halfway into the flight and calculating my fuel consumption 5 times, I was pretty sure I could make it to Nagpur without stopping. I asked ATC nicely if I could continue on but it was a no-go. Too bad. Not much later I was in complete darkness enjoying the cosy green and orange lights on the panel.



The last hour went pretty uneventful and again the approach was fast with only a small detour to accommodate the faster traffic. During the initial approach I felt quite tired and contemplated on staying the night in Ahmedabad. I can only fly to Dhaka tomorrow anyway so I would have the whole day for a 2 and 4 hour flight.

After landing I was met by the handler once again ready with fuel and to take my flight plan to the office. I had the feeling this would be a quick stop so I manned up and decided to push on to Nagpur.



This time I only needed 120L of fuel to top up so it was over quick. The flightplan and clearance came through 15 minutes later and I was able to start again after 45 minutes. I took off exactly 1 hour after landing and headed into the darkness once again.

This flight is about the same distance

and one straight line. Not much too see outside as the Bonanza powered on towards Nagpur at the same speed as before.

I came overhead the VOR and tracked outbound to do a 45/180 procedure turn and before I knew it my day was done. It did take me about 15 hours though...

We fueled the plane (*yes Jetex crew were waiting again, I can get used to this!*) and handled the flight plan for tomorrow. After a bit of discussing the friendly staff arranged me a visa even though you normally can't get one on arrival. This way I was at least able to go to a hotel and shower opposed to having to sleep in the plane!

Its now past 2AM local here so it's time for bed! Tomorrow will just be one flight out to Dhaka and the day after I can hopefully reach VTBU, a smaller airport south of Bangkok (Rayong). **Over and out!**

**5/12/2015**

Getting behind on the updates now. The past few days have been long except for the Rayong - Kuala Lumpur leg but then I enjoyed my rest (*whatever was left after planning*).

Anyway, this day took me from Dhaka early in the morning. They told me to come to 'Terminal 2, gate 6' the day before but I didn't really find that straight away. I know what those 2 things are, obviously, but even so I wasn't too sure where he meant and I didn't see him anywhere.

I got someone to call him and after standing around for 10 minutes he showed up. This is how delays start...

Luckily the process of getting the stamp and going to the plane was quite straight forward so we were there within 15 minutes. I had hoped they planned ahead and the fuel would be waiting, but it wasn't, and I immediately regretted not refueling the day before.





After some time they showed up and we could finally begin. Until I tried to open the barrel, since they weren't really engaging. Turns out they didn't bring the tool to open a barrel. I don't carry one myself because I assume that people who sell barrels can also open them. Anyway, they had to drive all the way to the fuel farm again to fetch it. That took another 20 minutes and by this time I was nearly an hour late.

The problem with that was, like I said before (*I think*), Thailand only accepts me when I fly during the day (*even IFR*), and I wanted to get 6 hours of flying time to Rayong. If I leave here late and I can't make it to Rayong, I have to fly from Chiang Mai (*after landing*) to VTCT because they don't allow me to park overnight there. So enough to worry about.

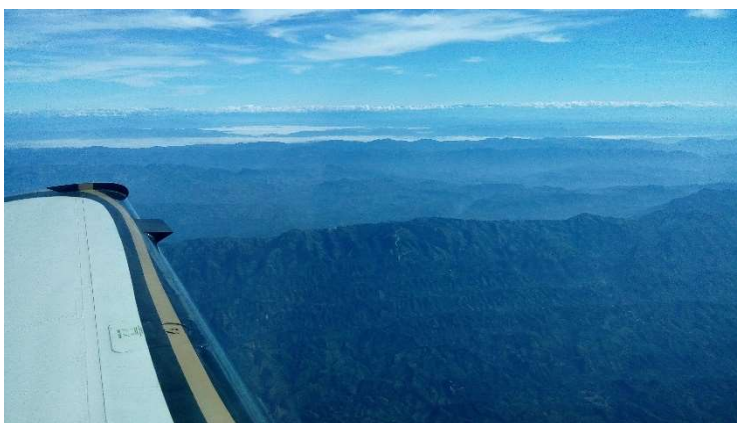


They don't have a pump in Dhaka so after they arrived and we finally opened the drum, we had to use my little plastic Chinese hand pump to get the fuel in. Needless to say, that took a while. As if things weren't going slow enough, the tube from the pump that goes into the barrel suddenly fell off. Some dudes left to search for another hose we could connect to it. However I didn't feel like waiting another 30 minutes and just tilted the barrel a bit and fished for the darn thing until I got it out. For the left tank we used a bucket and funnel to refuel once the barrel was light enough to handle.

After 1 hour and 15 minutes delay I was once again happy to be rolling towards the runway.

Pretty soon after takeoff, I broke the inversion and left most of the moisture and pollution below me, heading southeast into Myanmar.

Because the Thai CAA feared for my safety, I had to make a detour south along the coast to avoid a mountain range there (*weirdly enough in Myanmar*), and then directly east towards Chiang Mai for my thirsty Bonanza, and self.



The weather was much more clear from Myanmar onwards, a nice change from the constant haze and smog that started in Karachi. The downside is that with every degree southwards, the sun got stronger and stronger. I hadn't really required the air con until now. Lucky I even had one. I remember all the liters of sweat I felt running along my back and legs in

Africa. A lot of 210's in Namibia probably still have my sweat stain.

Fortunately I was granted a small shortcut, heading east a bit earlier than planned. A bit inland as I approached the Thai border, a bit of towering cumulus started. Nothing to really write about, just nature's gift to keep me awake (*with turbulence*).

Approaching Chiang Mai under vectoring was a breeze and I ended up doing a visual. I didn't really know what to expect but the airport was very modern. To my surprise they even parked me right at the end of a runway parallel taxiway. I could just start up and practically be on the holding point already :)



Except for me not taking my passport with me so us having to drive back to the plane again to get it, things went very smooth again. Inside the terminal I felt like I was back in civilization. They even had a Starbucks so I didn't pass up the chance to get a choc chip doughnut! This airport also has an AVGAS fuel truck, a nice change from barrels and hand pumps.



Before I knew it I was already 'on the road' again. Weather seemed to have settled down so I could just read my book as the autopilot did its job, just having to switch tanks and check the gauges every now and then.

From the dry land of India I was now over wet rice fields in central Thailand as I approached Bangkok. There didn't seem to be much else below. Then again, Belgium also looks the same in 80% of the country.



The sun was settling for the night slowly when the city of millions appeared in front of me, with some very photogenic clouds around. Oh yes, and jets flying left and right. Soon after passing Bangkok it was time to start the descent, together with the sun. I felt accomplished during the smooth ILS approach in the Rayong sunset. This time I fueled the plane before heading out. They had very cute 50L barrels of AVGAS (*and lucky*

*for me an electric pump*) that you can easily carry in the cabin, so I decided to buy 2. Fuel in Malaysia was going to be a problem. Up to that point I wasn't aware of AVGAS in any place on the island. A problem yet to be tackled. It turned out the barrels were very cheap too, 1.5 USD/litre including the barrel!

Here we didn't even have to pass security. I could have had a bag full of AK47's and no one would notice. Hmmm, maybe I shouldn't advertise.

After settling in the room and a shower it was already late again. No time to go out and explore the beach resort but instead go to the restaurant, send and check the planning and go to bed. No time for blogging :-P



Bangkok. Is there a swan on the roof?

**5/12/2015**

Before I forget the whole trip (*haha, right*) I better write something.

In the hotel I was left with a difficult decision, that was ultimately easily answered by my sense for safety.

The next leg would either be Rayong to Subang direct (630NM) or to Hat Yai (*basically halfway*) and then on to Subang. I determined the safe range to be 650 NM in no wind conditions during the trip.

Tomorrow was going to bring a headwind and there were isolated thunderstorms forecast. You would maybe think that is a no-brainer (stop) but there is more to consider.

The forecast winds were only about 5 to 10 knots and storms, well, they can either be there or not be there. In my experience the weather is usually a bit better than the forecast when it comes to thunderstorms. But as you might know, most of that experience is in Europe and the dry skies of Namibia. This climate however is a different story.

Another thing to consider is obviously the cost implied and time lost when making an extra stop. If I were to go direct to Subang and leave early, I could make it by 10 AM and maybe beat the storms to fly another (4 hour) leg to Kuching (WBGG). That would mean significant



time gain and less costs. On the other hand, if I stop in Hat Yai and loose time there (*1 hour doesn't cut it usually, however Thailand proved to be quicker*), I was probably going to land 2 hours later, at noon, in Subang; meaning the storms would already kick up.

The 650NM 'safe range' I set for myself is exactly what I called it. A safe range. That implies there is quite a big margin on it. In good conditions the range to 45 mins fuel is more like 750 to even 800 NM.

But when you factor in possibilities like storm diversions, flying lower than planned due to icing, ATC delays, delays at destination, unexpected headwinds, etc... the choice is actually simple. Just make a stop, it's worth the cost.

So that's what I communicated to the team and I prepared myself to fly VTBU - VTSS - WMSA the next day.

Departure from Rayong was quite hassle free (*also because it was still a national flight*) so I left more or less on time. It seemed like there were some low and medium stratiform clouds hanging around from dead thunderstorms so no convective activity to be worried about yet. It stayed like that most of the way so I didn't really see much of the ground and didn't take many pictures.



Climbing away from Rayong

After about 2 hours it was already time to prepare for the descent. The weather at the airport was good with some isolated showers reported. There were 2 or 3 thunderstorms in the distance but as far as I could make out the area where the airport must be looked clear apart from the low clouds (still 2-3000ft). Since I was supposed to fly VFR and it's actually fun I accepted the visual for a right downwind.



I came in fast and steep direct to a right base instead, extended the gear and flap at 154 knots in the turn to final and landed smoothly on what looked like another neat airport. I like flying these high performance singles. Makes me wonder what its like to fly a G58, twice the fun?

Refueled and stamped out I got ready again for the final leg to Rayong.



The weather forecast always looks the same here '... CAVOK ... TEMPO BKN030CB TSRA' blabla. Basically saying it's nice weather, just keep a lookout for huge bad-ass thunderstorms. Check.

Before takeoff, the controller tells me to 'Reach FL110 before KARMI'. Easier said than done for me but lets see. I suppose that's on the Malaysian border. That is about 25 NM away so no, unable (usually, climb to cruise takes 25 minutes and 55NM). Good thing I didn't bring a tracker otherwise my family would think something was wrong with it (or me) as I was flying east when I should go south.



My guesstimate worked out pretty good, reaching FL110 1 NM before KARMI. The rest of the flight was pretty much the same as before. Flying through layers of stratus with some cauliflowers left and right. Convection was getting out of bed and having it's coffee.

(no convection here)[/caption]

By the time I reached the busy terminal area of Kuala Lumpur (*I was going for Subang airport, not the big one*) some of the cauliflowers were fully grown. Lucky for me I avoided the worst of it with ease with minor heading changes however, you can't move the airport. As I was on an intercept course for the ILS I went into the clouds but I couldn't really see what it was I was getting into. It wasn't that dark inside and the rain was ok so I figured it wasn't a big deal. As I got halfway down the vertical guidance my airspeed increased and it started raining more intense. I was however still able to maintain stabilized approach as the turbulence kicked me around. Then at about 700 feet I broke the cloud and I saw I just popped out of a maturing storm. Good timing.

Again the crew was waiting for me as I contemplated whether or not to continue to Kuching. I looked back at the approach path as I heard thunder roaring and saw that storm I approached through getting bigger and louder by the minute. I looked south I saw more of the same. It was now about 1 PM so the storms would only be intensifying as they got on with their day. I

decided it's probably wise to stay and fly again in the morning, I was feeling quite tired anyway and could use some rest.

All said and done we made a plan for the next day, fueled the plane and set off to find a hotel. I ended up staying at the Grand Dorsett where I spent much of the afternoon trying to think how to get to WBKK - Kota Kinabalu. At this point we still had no fuel all the way to RPVP. I worked out a plan to fly to WBGB direct (*instead of the closer WBGG*), refuel from my on-board drums and barrels (*totaling 220L now*) and then fly straight to RPVP. It could work but both legs were really stretching my set 'safe range' with all the same concerns as before still valid. I wasn't even sure if I could get stamped out of Malaysia in WBGB. I rather not do this route obviously, especially with this weather. But since it was our only option (I can't turn water into fuel...), I planned accordingly.

A few hours later, after doing the planning and filling flight plans, came the good word that the local handler found and secured a barrel of fuel for me at WBGG. We could fly WMSA - WBGG - WBKK - RPVP after all. That was a relief! Now I could revert to the old planning again... So much for extra rest :P

In the evening I had to get out of the hotel for once so I took the free shuttle to the Pyramid mall and grabbed a bite at, to my surprise, Nandos. A South African chain that brings back some memories from Namibia.

I hit the hay with everything ready to go. If all went well tomorrow, I would be sleeping in Kota Kinabalu. A place on the Malaysian island close to the Philippine border, with only 1 more day to go! Seems like this epic trip is coming to it's conclusion. But it's not over yet!



I wanted to get going early again in order to beat the storms. The plane was ready to go since we fueled the day before. I aimed for brakes release at 8:30 and the actual time was 8:38, so not bad!

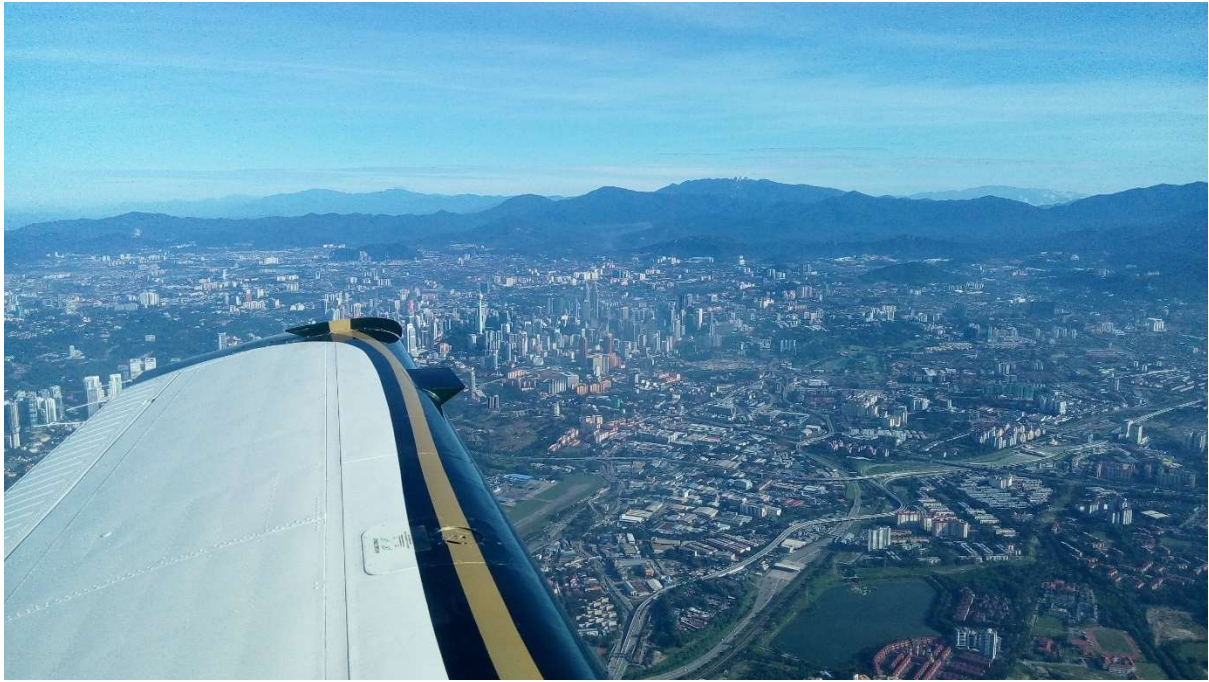
This flight was going to be another long one. Remember how Rayong to Subang was close? Well, this time there are no airports in between to be on the safest side and the flight was actually a

bit longer. All or nothing. Of course, I could always return before the PNR (point of no return), so there's that.

Forecasts were the same as usual but the wind was only going to be about 10 knots head, increasing with altitude.

After holding short of the runway to let 2 ATR's depart and 3 land (thanks...) I turned left heading east immediately after takeoff. I got a beautiful view of Kuala Lumpur and its Petronas Towers. Strangely, they seemed tiny from my office, even from merely 4000ft.





**My Office**

As the heavy Bonanza finally made it to 11000' I realized speed had dropped a bit since flying lower. Logically, I asked to go back down to 9000' and stayed there for the rest of the flight.



Soon after reaching open water, that was going to last for about 4 hours apart from a few islands, I saw the first towering cumulus clouds ahead.

As I got closer it appeared it was a line of cells going in a SW'erly direction, as expected. At this time the cells were not that big yet but i was happy to find a nice hole exactly on my track. Do I have a guardian angel?



Shortly after passing the clouds I heard a 'MAYDAY MAYDAY MAYDAY' on the radio. I couldn't make out the call sign but he seemed to have a fire light in the cockpit and a few minutes later smoke was seen in the cabin. Then he was handed over to some approach frequency and that was that. Good luck friends...

As time went on the cells in the lines became bigger and bigger as I encountered them. The lines were every time about 45 degrees to my nose so sometimes it was a gamble. Should I go left or right around it? On the right I can see what is there but the total distance flown off-track is larger than when deviating to the left (due to the wind). On the left however, because of the lines' orientation, I couldn't always see if I could fly between 2 cells.

At one point I had to once again punch a quickly growing cell between 2 larger ones (*like in Michigan last June*). A bit of shaking, speed increase and some rain but what is truly exciting, what's on the other side? My calculated guess payed off with a nice blue sky with the next line off in the distance. Another line bites the dust!

This went on and on. As I got closer to WBGG - Kuching, the clouds got thicker, more widespread and bigger. The north looked completely shut and in front of me it wasn't too good either, although not as convective.



On approach I had to avoid a big cell just west of the field but once again I was lucky to be in the clear heading north parallel to the runway after passing it. On my 10 o'clock there was now a monster of a storm cell. On my right the weather looked like a grey rainy day back in Europe however not really convective. Thankfully I was able to turn base soon and on the ILS I quickly got through the overcast layer and put her down on the ground. Chocks in after a four and a half hour flight feels good!



As we were getting ready to fuel, in light rain, the big storm that was hanging in the north was approaching us. We decided to wait with fueling and first go to the met office which was on the other side of the airfield (outside).

There I was actually pleasantly surprised to see the whole islands' radar images in real time, more than I was hoping for (*METAR and short TAF to be exact*). It appeared the extreme north of the island (*where my destination was*) was clear of any precipitation. There were small cells in the rest of the country and the biggest ones were in the west and overhead.

As I was looking at the images, the storm came over the airport and the METAR (*current*



*weather situation in textual form*) was updated every time the visibility dropped. They are really on top of their game here! From the radar images I could make out the storms were moving away slowly to the west. The way it looked I would be in the clear by the time we refueled. And so we went on.

The next flight to WBKK - Kota Kinabalu was going to take about 3 and a half hours. Just enough to reach it around (just after, but that's ok) sunset. Shortly after taking off most of the weather was left behind me to the southeast just like expected and it looked like I was in the



clear. I enjoyed my comfortable cruise for half an hour and then I saw some more CB's popping up on the horizon. These must be the cells I saw on radar an hour ago. They were still isolated and indeed, by the time I reached them I had no trouble circumnavigating them. The next storm were situated just over Brunei and as I flew between the 2 cells I had a humbling view of

these natural masterpieces. As the world's biggest vacuum cleaners were sucking in the most hot air from below forming huge pillars that reach up to 40 000 feet and I higher, I felt tiny as I cruised past the wall of condensed moisture twirling towards the edge of space. All this set in a golden light created by a million degrees particle fusing gas ball trying to send it's rays through our thick atmosphere. One can only gaze in awe to the beauty of our majestic nature...

As it was getting darker and the airspace once again busier, I was handed over to Kinabalu approach who delayed my descent to the point where I needed some extra track miles to get her down (well, without extending the gear). It's not rocket science, but every time I feel accomplished after doing a textbook approach to the ILS. By the time I was on final approach



it was now almost completely dark and I was emerged in the typical night flying atmosphere of twinkling lights and lunar reflection, with an odd lightning strike in the distance.

The airport was very neat and I got parked on what seemed to be a terminal especially built for business and small aircraft. It felt like parking a mini airliner at a tiny gate.

On this airport they did not have any AVGAS. Again I got stuck with my fuel barrels that I was unable to open. While the rampies went to look for some kind of tool to open the barrels, I fueled from the 2 plastic 60 liter drums. Dressed in my 747 captain uniform I was sweating like a pig in the hot humidity pumping away like a madman. What the passengers staring at me were thinking I can only guess.

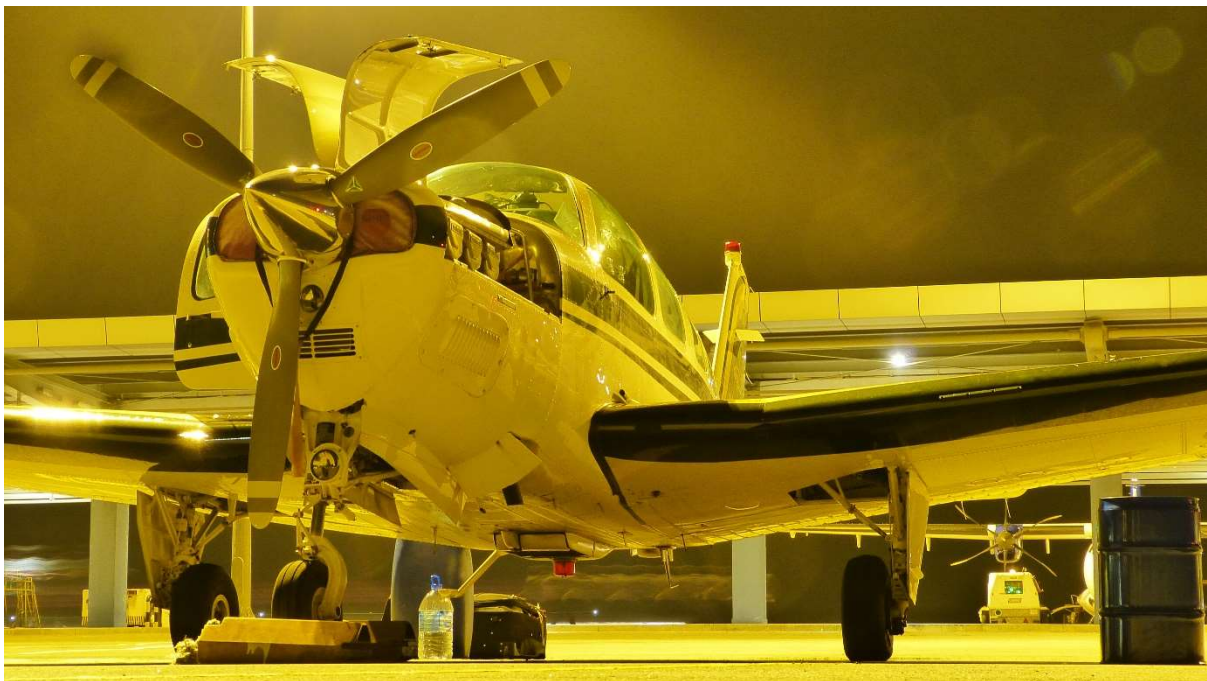


A while later the rampies arrived with a big metal bar and we managed to open one 50 liter drum and finished fueling.

By the time I got to the hotel it was already getting late again but I really wanted to get out of the hotel this time. Surely this close to the ocean I must be able to find some nice fresh fish. And I did. On the quay was one 'restaurant' after the other. A large party tent with some plastic chairs and tables and a grill. Perfect. I ordered a fish that looked tasty and a big crayfish with some rice. Just what I was looking for.

Back at the hotel I needn't look at the weather cause like I said before, it's always the same. I just looked over, filled out and sent the flight plans to the handler for the next day.

At that time I realised it; I have now approximately 13000 km behind me, crossed a quarter of the world and tomorrow, it would be over...



I slept well and woke up in time to a nice blue sky. A thunderstorm had just passed Kota Kinabalu and left the streets clean and shiny.

While the handler was taking my flightplan to the briefing office (nice service), I did my preflight inspection. All ready to go, he met me at the plane just to tell me ATC was still waiting on the Philippines to give me the OK to cross the border.

30 minutes and a few ATR departures and arrivals later, I was all good to go. Taxi and departure were done without any delays this time and I was soon cruising to my intermediate stop of Puerto Princesa. Technically an unnecessary stop but I was told by the client customs wanted to inspect the plane there.

Shortly after taking off the 4095m high Mount Kinabalu quickly dominated the view, towering above me. It's located right in the Kinabalu (world heritage) national park.

2 Islands later I entered the country containing my destination. But not before I did one more takeoff in this fine lady. One green lush island with stunning white beaches followed the other.



Nice beach there on the other side!

I could swear I was looking at heaven (*at least for a while*) when passing a small banana shaped island with a white sandy beach in the hollow and lush forest on the other side. A morning swim was almost worth a ditching but I opted against it in the end :-)



The flight was only 2 hrs and 30 minutes. Soon after passing the first mountain range in Palawan I started a slow descent to come down lean and fast. There is not that much traffic so I was able to fly straight to a left hand base. I made it nice and short still buzzing along at 150 knots a few miles from the field. Throwing out the gear and first stage of flaps is like a parking brake and as I turned short final I

selected full flaps. 2 minutes later I was on my parking stand on the north end of the apron.

I calculated I could reach Manila without refuel but alas the ordered, but still sealed, barrel of fuel could not be refunded. So we filled her up under the cool shade of my multi-functional umbrella and put the rest in the empty barrels I was carrying. Surely the client will be able to use it later on a remote island somewhere.

Just as I wanted to depart again the tower was unable to give me clearance and asked me to call her. Turns out that Manila does not accept IFR flights below 180 knots (*I'm flying about 135 KIAS*). VFR traffic is only allowed in during 2 time slots per day, one in the morning and one in the late afternoon. The next one was at 4 PM and it was now almost noon. The flight

there is 2 hours so I decided on brakes release at 1:45 PM.

I went to wait in the VIP area but I was chased out after an hour due to some statesman passing through later. Half an hour of a boring wait later I gladly went to sit under my greenhouse windshield to depart again. It was getting really hot outside already but the Bonanza didn't really seem to bother much.

For the very last time I heard the engine roar to full power again, right on time. The scenery was pretty much the same and so was the weather. The line of convective weather was left behind me somewhere in the south and nothing seemed to initiate in my vicinity.



Strange isolated line of clouds



On the way I had some trouble receiving the approach frequencies around me because of my low altitude. In this case I usually make some blind transmissions every 15 minutes or so. When flying in areas like this (*limited coverage*) it's always a good idea to ask for your next frequency before you leave the range of your last station. Alternate between blind transmissions on both frequencies until the next

frequency is able to pick you up. If you hear another aircraft, note the call sign and try to get it to relay a position report for you (*and return the favor when someone asks you*).

Manila approach picked me up quite early and for about 45 minutes I got to listen to what seemed to be a very busy airspace. I was guided down in steps and about 30 NM out I was order to do a 360, one of many to come it turned out. After completion I was cleared down to 'traffic altitude'. I had no idea what that was and I tried to ask but either he didn't hear me (*3 times*) or he was too busy to be bothered with small traffic. Logic defines that altitude to be circuit altitude so I just descended to 1000ft and was soon very close to the airport when

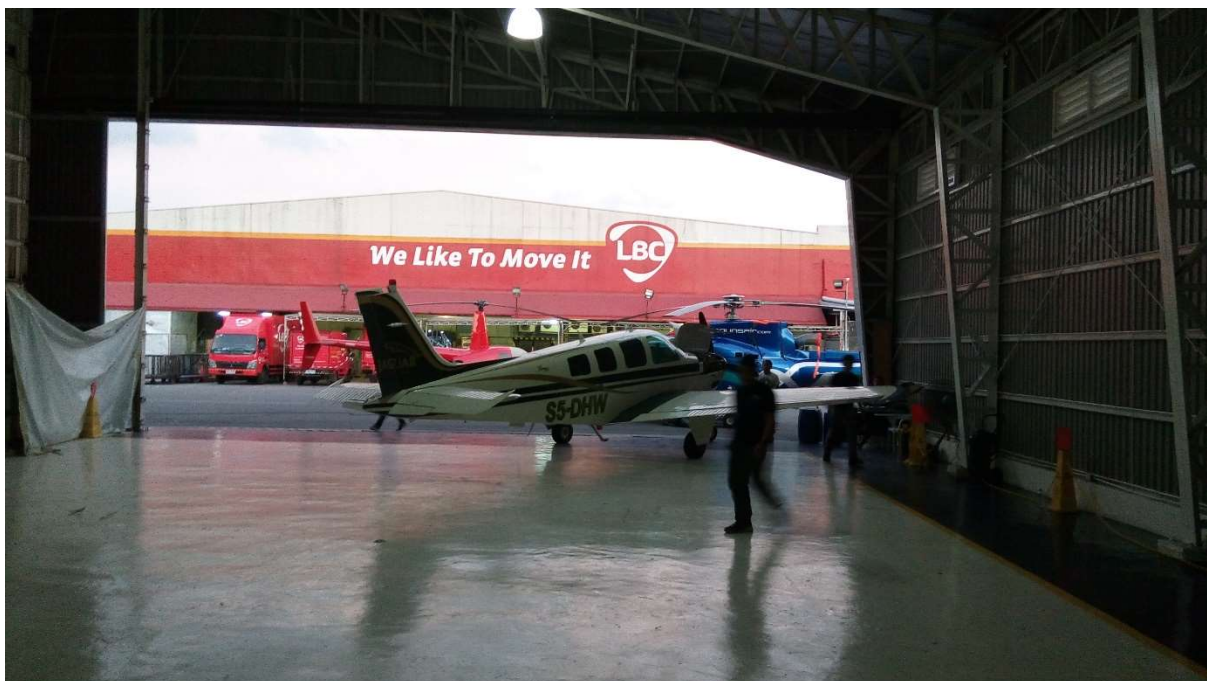


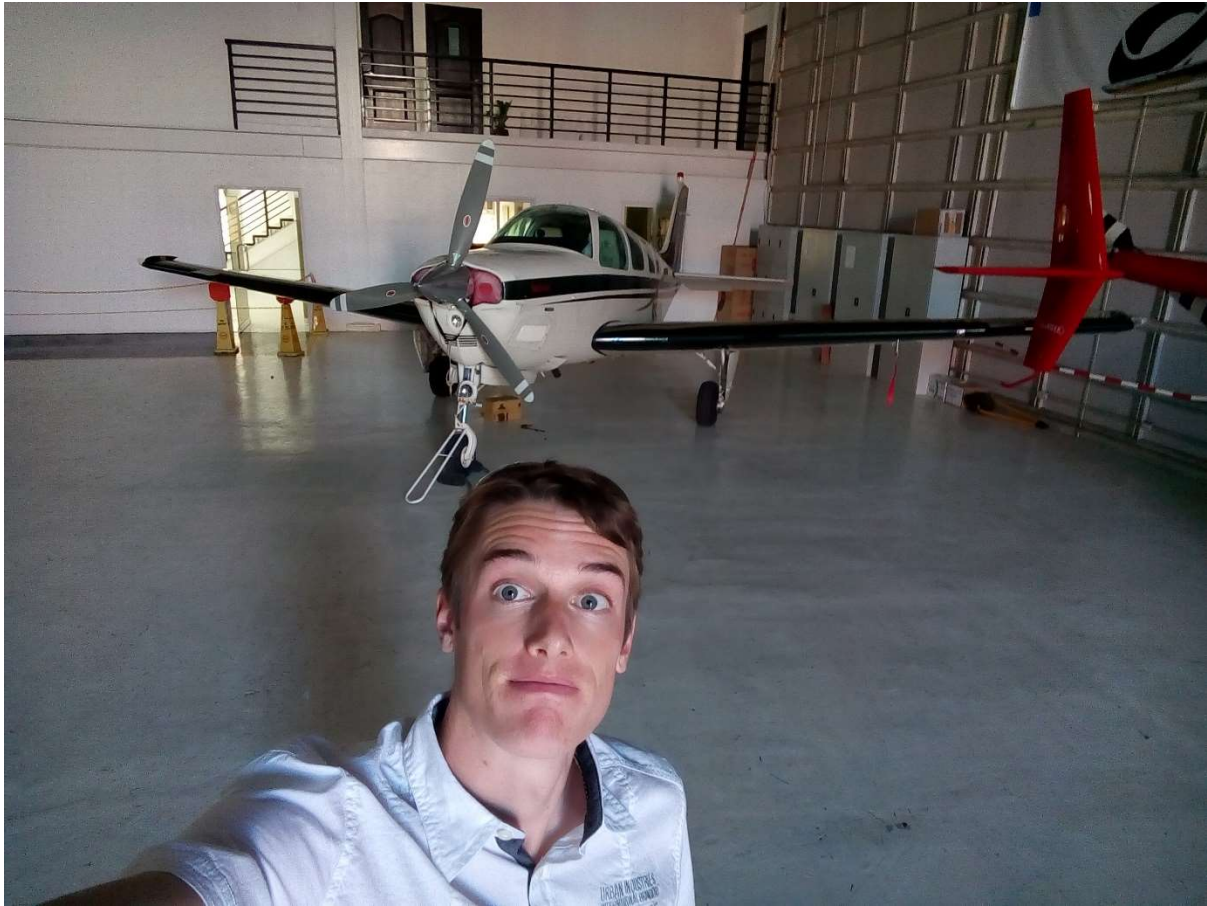
approach told me to 'switch to tower for monitoring'. Monitoring? I called tower and again I didn't receive any clear instruction on what to do, what runway to land, what sequence I had or where the other traffic was. Now I was really close to the airport and I can't press 'pause' like in flight sim, so I opted to start doing 360 on a right base position for the main runway. One airliner after another landed as I was circling and circling. I tried to get an EAT (expected approach time) like a boss, but she just told me (and other traffic) to keep holding. Indefinitely, I suppose. About 20 minutes later I was suddenly cleared to 'cross the runway' so I guess I was going to land on the small runway. I flew over the threshold of the main runway onto downwind for the small one and was told to 'hold' there once more. 2 orbits later I could proceed to base and hold there. Wow, this is quite a non-standard circuit. After one hold I was cleared to land and told to expedite. I came in fast and low, slowing down right at the end and stopping very short to vacate.

Up to now I thought I was going to the south of the airport (*as was agreed*) so I turned right per instructions until I came face to face with an A320. Ground told me to hold as they coordinated with Philjets. Soon after I was told to turn right again and taxi back to where I came from only to find myself in a line of 5 aircraft. I felt like a big boy holding to takeoff at New York. It took about another 20 minutes to cross the runway and finally taxi through the 'delta gate' into a narrow taxiway (more like a street). On every corner there was a marshaller. 3 guys later I reached my final destination, the Philjets hangar. The prop wound down and the gyros slowly came to rest. Here I am.

It's over.

They put the plane inside and I removed everything I could find from the interior. All the documents were handed over and I reported the small snags. After collecting and packing all my stuff it was time to say goodbye and go to the hotel.





I spent the night with the agent I ended up organizing most of the trip with and who was my direct contact. We went to a French bar where they served, to my surprise, many Belgian beers including my favorite (Omer!).

The next day we also spent together to figure out all the receipts and do the final inspection. I booked my ticket home for the next afternoon.

Before I realized it was in a huge 777 reflecting back on this epic trip. Not many people get to do this and even though I had my troubles I was given the opportunity.

The Bonanza and especially the magnificent IO-550, the best piston in the world, took me 14250 km crossing 3 continents in roughly 60 hours. At this point I had more than enough time in single pistons but a trip like this I could do a few times a year and still enjoy it. There is something about flying you cannot capture with words. This trip made the world seem very small and even though I did not get to spend much time on the ground I did see some amazing things. Never forget that people around the world, be it in Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India or any other country, all want the same.

To be happy, to be safe and to help his fellow man. In 2016 try to remember the good in people and be positive.

Chase your dream and treat others as you want to be treated, and good things will come to you.

I hope you enjoyed this trip report and I look forward to writing many more. When I get back from the UAE I will process my videos and post them one at a time. Be sure to check in every now and then.

Thank you for reading and see you all on the next one!



*Maribor, Slovenia -> Manila, Philippines 14250 km Flight time 60 hrs 20 mins*