

JUST DO IT

Part III

By Ronald Siwik, M.D.

Take off for Thailand was on the avgas in the left tank. After reaching cruise altitude and 58% power, no change could be detected switching to car gas. The SW monsoon obscured Vietnam, the terrain hidden by cloud, but it was a good 3 hour ride in light rain and light chop.

Descending into Bangkok, the most sensual female voices were vectoring us. I later learned that the sound aaahh...has 4 meanings depending on how it is breathed. Another day-light landing in light showers.

The superb FBO hangared and washed the Bonanza. The greetings are a nice gesture of hands pressed together with a slight bow. This is repeated by all women at hotels and restaurants. Fuel was again charged to SkyPlan, the last credit transaction until Spain. Thailand is my favorite stop, with serene and honest citizens, and exotic Asia with modern touches. Tours to River Kwai Bridge and The King and I Palace exceeded expectations.

Lisbon and Bangkok are the 2 places deserving more time.

After 4 days, time to go and stay on schedule.

Subject: Departing Bangkok for Bombay

Ron has had two fantastic days in Bangkok. The weather has been more pleasant and the city is much prettier than DaNang and Manila.

His first day there he took a canal trip thru the city. Homes and business were along the canals on stilts. He also visited the Palace where the King and I was filmed. He said it's im-

possible to describe the opulence.

The next day he did his Bridge over the River Kwai tour. There were five of them plus an English speaking lady tour guide. One couple was from Italy, the other from Norway. A two hour bus ride took them to a cemetery where 6700, mainly French and English POW'S, were buried. They then boarded a boat and their first view of the bridge was from the water. They landed and then took a train over the tracks the POWS had built to a museum and the prison--then a bus ride back to the hotel. It was a great 12 hour day. He's bought the book and will enjoy reading it after having been there.

Sometime this evening (EST) he'll be departing for Bombay, about a nine hour flight, again mainly over water. Nine hours seems very manageable to him after previous 15 hour flights. I believe he's there 3 nights.

To be continued.....

The met folder described monsoon over Bay of Bengal, embedded CB and continued rains over beleaguered Myanmar. The devastated Irrawaddy delta was still off limits to aid workers thanks to the Burmese government.

Cloud was entered soon after takeoff from Bangkok. This was to



be a personal record for IFR on a single flight, 12 out of the 14 hours to Mumbai. The Storm scope activity was widespread, but dissipating after short clusters formed. In the continental US, clusters are more dense and persistent.

Yangon control amended the clearance to a wide Northern detour around the disaster area. Not a welcome request. Fairly good but broken English from Rangoon, and the problem of fuel was discussed. An airliner was asked to relay confirmation. The heavy accent at Rangoon alternated



with the Aussie pilot, the latter ending with: "Okay, I'll tell him, but he's not going to like it."

About that time a hard bump threw off spectacles, headset, and unsecured objects. The oceanic cabinet flipped back on its hinges. Captain Cook's bad mood came to mind, and I did not want to see a MIG off the wingtip.

The coast of Burma was outlined on the Garmins although obscured to vision by cloud. Continuing to negotiate, I got into issues of range and alternates, pleaded "say again," and procrastinated. Burma was slipping by with no fighter on the wing. Sky-Plan was called on the Iridium phone. It was tense but then an airliner called: "Yangon says proceed on course."

Toward dusk the Indian coast appeared on the Garmins. Calcutta control amended the clearance. The replay function was used, cross checking chart with too-rapid speech. After the second amendment I pleaded:

"Sir, I'm alone and this is my first time here. Can you please slow down?"

A kind Air India captain relayed, and the detour was followed.

A piece of dirt on one of the plugs caused roughness near Bangalore. Control was advised, but no precautionary landing needed as it slowly resolved.

The night was black, but no lights below. In India there are no "proceed direct", so all the segments and turns were followed to Bombay.

The ILS led to marginal VFR and touchdown on runway 27. The tower requested the first turnoff. Ground sent me down to another active runway entry point with instructions to hold. Then came the order to expedite onto the active and turn off farther down. Beginning this questionable maneuver, the Bonanza was halted short as approaching land-

ing lights looked too close. Air India roared by on roll out and an incident report was filed, requiring my reply at departure. Better paper work than a rear – ending.

After 4 hours of in-processing, delayed for lack of a visa, the hotel looked good at 0130. During the tedious check in I called Rita and asked for \$2000 Western union wire. Fuel was to be cash, US dollars.

Subject: Hassled in Bombay

The first words I heard from Ron after he'd landed in Bombay were, "I've got to get out of here". Flying from Bangkok to Bombay he encountered headwinds and had knots of only 130 the entire way. He also set a record for himself with 10 continuous hours of instrument flying. After taking off, he never saw the ground until he broke out of the clouds landing in Bombay. Burma air traffic control also wanted him to divert far to the north of his course. Ron suspects they were diverting him away from the devastated delta area hit by a typhoon about 6 weeks ago. They're allowing no U.N. or any other kind of aid in there, and it evidently is horrible. He had trouble understanding communications and fortunately an airline pilot interceded and was the intermediary between traffic control and Ron. Anyway, he was finally allowed to continue on his original course. So when he landed he was a bit spent. What ensued was a four hour hassle at the airport with much confusion, much of it brought on because he hadn't gotten an Indian Visa. He was working on it but it hadn't happened (with Ron's experience with the bureaucracy there, I can see why). A pair of terrific young handlers were

there, and Ron said they were extremely kind, patient, and dedicated. Without them, it would have taken much longer. At any rate, because he had no Visa, airport personnel kept his passport and gave him a receipt with instructions to be sure and keep track of it. Of course, the first thing asked for at the Hotel was his passport. They didn't get it. The Bonanza was also sealed--the door was taped shut until he returns the day of departure. And they would only take American dollars for fuel--no check, visa, or even Indian money. So another big hassle sending him cash thru Western Union, and Ron and his driver trying to find a Western Union Office in Bombay. He did have a couple hour tour of the city while looking which sounded very interesting. He said the three-wheeled motorized "auto rickshaws" are like insects surrounding



your car.

Car horns are continually honking and traffic is jammed and congested. He said if there's

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a little opening, it's like a game of chicken to see which rickshaw gets there first. Little rundown, messy kiosks line the streets. When they finally found a Western Union Office, there was some good news. They accepted his passport receipt and didn't require the actual passport--Ron couldn't believe it because they're such rule followers and a passport was required to get the cash. Anyway, the money miraculously appeared, so he can fuel the airplane and depart forever. He says when he sees the Bonanza his heart will melt. It will be a haven for him. 2092W continues to perform flawlessly in every way with no need for any kind of attention.

So-o-o, he'll probably be departing around midnight tonight (Wednesday) EST. It's 9 hours later in Bombay. He'll be flying for about 9 hours across the Indian Ocean to the Arabian Peninsula and will be in the country of Oman for a couple of nights. It's supposed to be like being in Europe--good infrastructure and accommodating--beautiful beaches, too. It all will be most welcome. Since he shortened his stay in India, a couple of days in Cairo has been added, then it's on to Athens for 10 days.

He's well rested and really anxious to be on his way. 9 hours in the bonanza sounds pretty good to him. Hopefully Ron's stay in Oman will be uneventful and my update much shorter.

"Til then.....Rita

Much of my first day was spent getting the cash and processing in. We drove around Mumbai several hours before an excellent man agreed to give me dollars. The law states rupees only via Western Union.

The second day was to be departure, but flight planning took all day. The controllers wanted me to fly via Pakistan. They said nothing below

23,000 feet over the Arabian Sea.

After 14 hours the flight was cleared direct Oman, but fatigue prevented takeoff that night.

A few hours next morning for out-processing and fueling, and good to go.

Departing with relief, it was recalled that half the time in India was spent in administration, the other half sleeping. The world is not flat.

Subject: Guess what! He's still in Bombay

For those of you tracking Ron and wondering why it still shows him in Bombay, it's because he is. When he arrived at the airport, his flight plan wasn't accepted because only flights of 23,000' or higher are allowed by India to Oman. Needless to say, there's no general aviation in India. His 72 hour Indian visa was to expire by evening and airport officials were pressing him to leave for somewhere. He'd love that but he had no place expecting him and jail was not part of his itinerary. Sky Plan and his handlers worked on getting permission from Pakistan for a flight there and then on to Oman. They also worked on getting an emergency extension to his Visa, and that is what happened. However, it took 12 hours to get it resolved. It took another 4 hours to get the plane fueled. Ron says if he ever hears anyone criticize the U.S., he won't be able to contain himself. Again, the handlers were magnificent. He sounded calm thru all this.

I hope the next time you hear from me, it will be about Ron's time in Oman.

Rita

Dust reduced visibility

to one mile at Muscat, Oman, requiring the ILS into runway 18. Quick processing got me to the hotel 20 minutes after shutdown.

Oman is a 21st century oasis in 19th century Asia. Seems like the oldest thing you see is from last Christmas. Fueling and meteorology like home. Might be a good vacation destination someday, no hassles. Departure like any US airport.

En route Cairo, the Persian Gulf is skirted, North along the Emirates and Dubai until turning West across Saudi Arabia. At altitude the pulse oximeter was fitted to a finger as usual, and the PO2 checked. Commonly around 70% if above 12,000 feet, the Mountain High cannula was slipped on, the automatic regulator started, and the PO2 observed rising into the high 90s. There is no sensation one way or the other, but good standard procedure. The intermittent flow conserves oxygen and is effective, no bottle refill needed on the trip. Smooth water flying turns to desert thermals. Dust, turbulence and oxygen at 14,000 feet. Need to reduce to maneuvering speed. Smooth again over the Red Sea, fabled Sinai, gulfs of Suez and Aquaba and the Nile, landing runway 5 at Cairo.

Opening the cabin door, the greeting is:

"Sir, can we talk about fuel?"

"Sure"

"You might have to fly to Luxor."



“Okay.”

“We might have 2 drums at \$1500.”

“Okay”

“Cash, US dollars”

“Let me get out and stretch.”

At the hotel we sat in the lobby for awhile while I described the virtues of the check held out to him.

The next day his boss accepted the \$3000 check and fueling from the 55 gallon drums proceeded.

Rotary hand pump, drums on an old pickup bed, rusty channel locks for hose connections and 5 linemen looking on. Tales for the grand children.

Subject: In Cairo today, Crete tomorrow

The last you heard from me, Ron was trying to leave Bombay. The day of departure was another set of delays, ending with sitting at the end of the runway with his engine running for one hour waiting for permission to take off. You can imagine his relief when word finally came he could leave.

His flight to Oman was uneventful. He was 10 minutes at the airport, 10 minutes to his hotel, and that was it. What a welcomed change. One night there, and he left for Cairo, another 9 hour flight. He flew across desert in the Arabian Peninsula, and the dust storms there made visibility hazy up to his altitude of 14,000'. He needed instrument landings at both Oman and Cairo because of the dust. Upon landing in Cairo, he discovered the only way to get 100 octane fuel was to purchase two fuel drums at \$1500 each. I'd say there's no price break from being close to the source. Wow!!! For obvious reasons, he's very anxious to be back in Europe and the flying conve-

niences that will bring.

Tomorrow he flies to Crete. He'll leave the Bonanza there and travel to Athens to meet me on the 25th. Our 46th anniversary is the 23rd, so we will have a slightly delayed celebration, but a very special one. We will be in Athens three days, on the island of Santorini three days, and then to Crete for three more days and then part ways for another couple of weeks. Right now Ron plans to arrive at Portage County Airport, Saturday, July 19th.

The month has flown by for both of us, and I have a confession to make. I've turned my stove on once since Ron's been gone, to make the grandkids mac & cheese. I'm on vacation, too.



Rita

The Heliopolis hotel in Cairo is unsurpassed. Over 5 star. Unforgettable. Cooked to order pasta. Numerous ethnic restaurants under one roof. Staff as attentive as at the Greenbriar.

Now the short trip to Greece..... meeting Rita.

Ten days of bliss, the Greek islands are romance. It is said that a year here adds 10 years to one's life.

Subject: Greece was great

Hi again,

As luck would have it, a fluent

English speaking chauffeur drove Ron from Athens International Airport to our hotel. How fortunate for us. We spent two fascinating days with him as our tour guide in and around Athens. The Acropolis, the Roman built Temple of Zeus, and the first modern Olympic Stadium of 1896 were all visited, as well as the Temple of Poseidon far south of the city overlooking the Aegean. As we drove past the Parliament Building and the Presidential Palace, we chuckled as Peter said, “Bush and Papoulias, Blah, Blah, Blah, Blah!”

The second day we traveled out of the city, across the deep, narrow Corinthian Canal connecting the Aegean and Ionian Seas, to the ancient city of Corinth where St. Paul visited. As we walked across the same stones St. Paul had traversed, we could hear soft chanting from two religious services being

observed under the shade of cedar trees. What a memorable stop! We then drove along the coastal road of the Aegean Sea and felt like we were in California traveling highway 1. It was beautiful. We visited the 3500 year old ruins of the city of Mycenae and the Palace and grave site of Agamemnon. Peter kept us very busy. His cell phone was

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ringing constantly with requests from clients. One call was from a young Israeli with a Russian girlfriend to impress, upset because his \$50,000/night suite was not available. Mama Mia is opening there, and members of the cast had reserved it. He had to settle for a \$10,000 suite.

Now we were ready for the quiet of Santorini Island, an hour commercial flight south. There we did nothing and loved it--reading, napping, sunning, eating, sitting on our deck and taking in the incredible view of the ocean from high atop the island. As an olive, feta cheese and tomato lover, I was in heaven. I lived on Greek Salads with locally grown vegetables. No butter was served with bread, just pureed olives--does it get any better than that? Not for me. Ron managed to find all versions of spaghetti, and tried them all.

Now we headed even further south to the extremely mountainous island of Crete. It's around 100 miles long, and again we had a driver, George, who spoke good English that drove us from one end of the island to the other. The highways were excellent, and again the views were of the olive orchards on the slopes of the mountains on one side of the road and the Mediterranean on the other. It's a lovely country. The 400 year old Venetian built city of Chania was like being in an ancient European city. We visited the ruins of the 5000 year old Minoan Temple of Knossos and museum of artifacts found there. They had used trees for the columns of the palace, and covered them with a plaster and then painted them. Our guide said they were more stable in earthquakes than all stone columns. When I asked him how long since they'd had an earthquake, he said it had been about two weeks. If they weren't a 6 or 7 they didn't pay much attention to them. There were very few stoplights

in cities on Crete which made for interesting driving. Gas was \$9.00 a gallon everywhere (Athens and Santorini, too) so maybe we shouldn't complain. The Euro has really hurt the tourist business. Mainly Europeans travel there now, not nearly as many Americans because the dollar is so weak. We had 95 degree days, but always a breeze. In ten days we never saw a cloud. The sun is very intense.

So, on Saturday, July 5th, I returned to Athens for my flight home, and Ron headed for an 8 hour flight to Majorca off the coast of Spain (he was there when Nadal, a Majorcan, won Wimbledon and he heard some of the celebrating). At this stop he set a record for time from landing to his hotel--30 minutes--they didn't even want to see his passport. Ah-h-h, European soil!! Ron says he feels like he's now in the suburbs!!!! However, when he returned to the airport for his flight to Portugal, the plane had been fueled without his presence. One tip tank was completely full, and the other empty. It's very fortunate it didn't tip sideways from the weight. Ron and an employee headed into town and purchased a big container, tubes, and other siphoning equipment. They removed fuel from the tip and put it where it should be. So, the adventure continues.

When I spoke to him this morning, he was on a clunky, noisy city busy returning from a visit to the Explorers' Museum in Lisbon. He has a day trip to the Lady of Fatima Shrine tomorrow. Sunday he heads out into the Atlantic for the Azores. He's definitely on the home stretch. He continues to journal and take pictures.

Sorry I've been so long winded, but it's been awhile. Ron and I had

a wonderful few days and he IS ready to be home. (July 19th is the planned arrival at Portage).

I'll close with this thought from a brochure in our Athens' hotel.

"Happy are those who like Ulysses have finished a beautiful journey....."

My beautiful journey has ended, but Ron's continues.

Rita

Peter in Athens and George on Crete each drove us in a black S class Mercedes. The inside story is heard this way. The cell phone calls received by these men from Russian oligarchs are a treat to hear from his end. When Peter in his Armani suit says "Don't worry, I've seen plenty of presidents", we smile. He is not fazed by the rich and famous.

Rita returns home on Delta and I continue to Palma de Majorca. The



Spanish island is average, but after the Aegean anyplace is a letdown. Now the 2 nights rest plan is in effect. No more consecutive flying days, even at the expense of changing permits. Strolling the boulevards and seeing the harbor is enjoyable.

A blundering lineman named Alfonso fueled the Bonanza without aircrew presence. Fortunately the left tip tank didn't hit the ground filled to 115 gallons. Other tanks had random par-

tial amounts. The apologetic current duty lineman said the trucks could not de-fuel. So we went to the mall and bought garden hoses and garbage cans, charged to Alfonso. Gas was re-arranged while my new friend and I speculated on Alfonso's future.

The flying is definitely less exotic in Europe. The Iberian peninsula is highly developed. Spain looks prosperous from the Bonanza.

The handler in Lisbon complained about tardiness, but the fuel epic wasn't mentioned. A line of Cessna trainers meant piston maintenance availability, so oil change, plugs, wash and general inspection by an A&P was scheduled.

There was a train ride to the countryside to visit Fatima. Bus trips are easy in Lisbon, seeing museums and historical data on the famed explorers departing here. Next trip, several more days in this prime area.

Crossing the Atlantic is easy after the vast Pacific. The Azores are quiet now that jets fly direct, but in the piston airline days it was busy. St John, Newfoundland was cloudy as expected, but by now the IFR procedures were sharp.

Checking into the Delta hotel, I called room service for a bottle of their best champagne. The attendant, knowing only one occupant, asked:

"A whole bottle?"

"Yes."

A nice feeling of accomplishment, like graduation day, sipping fine wine and looking out at North America.

Subject: Home in four days!!!!

Ron had a nine hour flight yesterday from the Azores to St. John, Newfoundland. It's interesting how our perspective has changed. Now a nine hour flight doesn't seem like a long one, where as before this trip a four or five hour flight seemed long. He's now only three time zones away,

it's no longer necessary to dial 011, and his Euros are gone. All are good signs of his closeness to home. Tomorrow is a flight from St. John to Montreal, then home on Saturday. He will have been gone 8 weeks this Friday, the 18th. It has gone quickly for both of us, but I must say we're looking forward to our morning coffee time together. It's been my loneliest time of day, although we've had frequent phone conversations during that time.

Steve and his family have been visiting from Tucson and will be here when Ron arrives. So will Mary and her family. We'll be at the hangar around 2:00 this Saturday, Ron's estimated time of arrival. If any of you want to help us in welcoming him home, we'd love it. We'll have sandwiches and sodas, and LOTS OF RED, WHITE, AND BLUE. PLEASE JOIN US. If there's a significant change in his arrival time, I'll send a quick email. Otherwise, this is my last.

Ron and I have really enjoyed receiving emails from you. We thank you for your interest and have absolutely loved sharing this trip with you. There's a website called Earthrounders. There have only been some 70 previous flights such as this--solo, in a single engine plane, around the world. One more name can now be added to the short list.

Some final words from Ron with apologies to Walter Scott and Louise Sacci.

*Breathes there not a pilot who
Dreams of flying his airplane to
Lands and oceans far and new
With islands green and latitudes blue*

Acknowledgments

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