

## July 29, 2019 - Flight to Lake Wales, but "Please do not bomb my Mosque, insha'Allah" (God willing)

The Lake Wales Municipal Airport lies less than 100 miles to the northwest of my home base at Indiantown; however it is a destination that I have never flown to. There are several reasons for this including the fact that



there is no restaurant on the field as well as a fairly active sky-diving operation which tends to keep one "on their toes" and constantly observant. In addition, as the old New Englander would say, "You can't get there from here". There is a large restricted area between it and my home field that is a gunnery and bombing range for the US Air Force and it is active most days. However there is an alternate route that will keep one outside of this restricted zone if one first flies to Sebring, which is an airport that does have an on-field eatery and is a place that I do frequent regularly. Although it adds about 10 miles to the trip, today I decided to give it a go when I found that fuel at Lake Wales was some 40 cents per gallon cheaper than at other nearby fields. Since I was in the market for about 50 gallons, between my airplane and the jugs that I keep in my hangar, I felt it worth the extra flight beyond my breakfast stop this morning. The \$20 that I would save would more than pay for breakfast and it would give me a chance to land at a new destination. I was in for an added bonus when I called the FAA's Flight Service for a weather briefing and was told that R-2901 was not active today. This meant that I would be able to fly inside this otherwise closed airspace and get to view down on the bombing range from the close up altitude of 1,200 feet.

Now, even after being assured by the FAA briefer that there would be no problem in my flying through this normally active bombing range where F-18's and the like would be swooping down from 24,000 feet at 600+ miles per hour to drop various ordinance on a myriad of targets, I still had my trepidations. This would not have been the first time that I had been given erroneous information by a government agency. Although I would have my ass covered, with regard to an airspace violation, since this conversation had been recorded by the flight briefer, I guess that I would still be the worse for wear if one of those bombs, or even the Super Hornet that was dropping it, happened to hit me. While en-route and prior to reaching the restricted zone I tried giving Miami Center a call to verify what I had been told, as it would be their airspace that I would be flying through. However my low altitude and the Mickey Mouse radio that I have mounted in the Highlander just did not crack it. While Center responded to my call, I was not able to discern what they were saying. So, I just pressed on and was soon flying over the Mac Dill Air Force auxiliary field from which these operations originate. Just below you can see the main East/West runway along with the outbuildings, hangars and such that this field utilizes. I was extremely happy to see absolutely no activity or aircraft movements going on.

A few postings back (June 11, 2018, "It's a War out there") I wrote about coming across a cadre of Forward Air Controllers" who were on a mission of training and certifying student airmen and women for exactly the position that this auxiliary air field is used for... the bombing and strafing of enemy positions without hitting friendly's or civilian structures or personnel. It is up to these Forward Air Controllers to talk to the pilots of these jet fighters and bombers and to instruct them as to where and what their targets are. On the following pages you will see some examples of what they are confronted with in regard to the structures and hardware that they are to hit, and even more importantly, what they are **not to hit**.





This was the view that I had as I approached the simulated Arab town with an airfield, its control tower and various structures and equipment located in and around the enclave. At my relatively slow speed of 90 MPH and my 1,200 foot altitude I could clearly see 3 jet fighter aircraft hidden on the airfield along with several pieces of military vehicles and the airfield's control tower. In the background was the village which had a large and prominent Mosque, a school, many homes and various other civilian, along with some military, buildings.



And here is a close up of "the village". The Mosque, with its 4 minarets are clearly visible at the upper left (highlighted in red) along with a school (highlighted in blue). There are many houses located within the complex along with several trucks and vehicles. At the lower center and right are three larger buildings. Are they civilian or military? This is the conundrum facing the Forward Air Controller. They must give visual cues to the incoming aircraft as what to hit and, more importantly (in today's politically correct world), what to avoid.



So, today was another worthwhile flight. Although the breakfast was pretty routine, the trip following was well worth the time and effort (not to mention the savings in fuel costs). Having a chance to view a typical simulated Arab town along with seeing the challenges to our air warriors in ferreting out the locals from possible ISIS infiltrators was, to say the least, educational. While it would be highly enlightening, being able to view an actual simulated combat scenario taking place at this location, this is something that is probably going to have to be left to the Smithsonian or Discovery channels. But having the ability to overfly, at fairly low altitude, such a complex, as seen directly above, is something that makes having an airplane so enjoyable. A few weeks ago, while flying along the South Florida coastline I came across a school of really large manta rays swimming just yards off shore from the bathers who were probably completely oblivious to their presence. Unfortunately I was not prepared with my phone camera and had to forgo photos. The same was true about a year ago, but at that instance it was a school of sharks that I saw. I have flown over airboat races, 4th of July displays of fireworks and even Woodstock! I have flown above the Empire State Building when I owned a Cessna Skyhawk back in the 1970's and over Cuba, with my Twin Comanche, in the 1990's. I have been able to take my aircraft into the Bahamas and even flown the Virgin Islands and over to Puerto Rico in a rented Cessna. I have been able to view the tallest peaks of the Rockies from my own airplane and land at several airports within them. Because of more restrictive rules and regulations, many of these flights could not be accomplished today. However I feel blessed to have been able to have begun my flying at a time when one could experience much of this country of ours without the obstacles and restrictions that are present now. I suspect that over the next few years things will become even tighter and there will be a time when I will feel that it is just not worth the hassle. Until then I expect to fly every day that I can and, hopefully, still come across new and exciting things to view. Life should be a continual learning and educational experience and my airplane helps me in accomplishing same.