

May 3, 2020 - A Vero Beach Airport Lunch Flight, with a Military Escort to boot

Today was one of those beautiful early spring South Florida days which just begged for flying. I accommodated my desire to be in the air and headed for the Indiantown airport. Today was also going to be the official "Phase One" reopening of Florida's restaurants after the Coronavirus isolation of the previous 6 weeks. A phone call to CJ Cannons, at the Vero Beach airport, confirmed that they, indeed, were going to again be open for business. Thirty minutes after takeoff I was taxiing up to the old terminal building ramp, which is located directly in front of their restaurant.



On this, the first day of their re-opening, the restaurant, despite any notification on their website, was absolutely jumping. The new rules restricted seating to 25% of normal capacity and most of the inside booths were already filled. Since it was a delightfully sunny 77 degrees, I opted for one of their outdoor tables, which afforded me a marvelous view of my nearby airplane, the only one on the ramp so far. I decided on a sliced prime rib sandwich, a-jus, with a side of mashed potatoes and a coke. This was a far cry from the made-at-home bagged bagels and cream cheese that I had been bringing for my previous airport "picnics". It was absolutely delightful being able to enjoy a served sit-down meal in a scenic garden setting once again. I hope that this is to be just the beginning of our return to a more normal way of life. I left a 20% tip to help make-up for the absence of recent income for these hard working meal servers.

Prior to my learning that the Cannons Restaurant was again open, today was going to be my typical "milk run" flight, which consisted of an hour circular trip from my home airport north to the St. Lucie nuclear plant and then south along the shoreline to Peanut Island in West Palm Beach before turning west and back toward Indiantown. I decided on maintaining a low level altitude

of 1,000 feet to better enjoy the magnificent view along the Atlantic shoreline and of the large extravagant multi-million dollar homes that dot their landscape. This route would also allow me to enjoy seeing the multitude of small and large pleasure craft that ply the inter-coastal waterway and the offshore Atlantic Ocean. They too were again being allowed to venture forth, as were the beachgoers, swimmers sun-bathers and surfboarders.



This low level route, astride Stuart's Witham Field, required me to contact them for permission to transition through their airport control area. As I came abeam the east side of their field the tower controller gave me a call. "Highlander 122ET, don't be alarmed, but there will be two F-16's passing you at about 200 feet off your left wing at your altitude." I immediately grabbed for my I-phone and swung it to my pilot's window just in time to see these fighter jets meandering past at about 200 knots, or 125 MPH faster than I was currently traveling. Now these aircraft normally will travel two or three times this speed and even faster when they are in afterburner chasing down aircraft that have violated the Presidential TFR (Temporary Flight Restriction) when Trump is in town. Since he was up in Camp David, Maryland this weekend I suspect that they were out exercising their engines and doing the same local sightseeing as was I. While I have been in close flying proximity to military aircraft a couple of times the past you never get used to the thrill of seeing these mighty fighting machines "up close and personal". And then, an instant later, they were gone, probably on the way to their Homestead Florida base, awaiting their next opportunity to go after some poor wayward pilot who did not pay attention to the FAA notification that the President was coming to town.

