

FLIGHT-WATCH

VOLUME 266

By: Alan Armstrong, Esq.

JUNE 2014

A FOUR DAY SOJOURN TO CHERRY POINT MARINE CORPS AIR STATION

Preparation to Avoid Embarrassment

The first rule of flying warbirds is not to embarrass yourself. The inveterate warbird pilot will find himself watching the Weather Channel days before departure to get some kind of idea of the weather picture on his departure date. Sometimes he has to depart early. Sometimes he has to depart late. But if you want to make your make your appointment at an airshow, you have to keep an eye on the weather.

Four Dixie Wing aircraft would be participating in the Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station Air Show, the Corsair, the Dauntless, the Zero and the Kate. The arrival date for the Zero and the date was Friday, May 16. On Thursday, a cold front had passed through Atlanta with heavy rain and wind, and it was tracking to the east, in the direction of our destination. The Dauntless had departed earlier in the week, and the Corsair had departed earlier in the day on May 19. Because the forecast called for rain and low ceilings on the morning of May 19, Jack and I opted to brief shortly after noon at the Dixie Wing and then depart with the idea of arriving after the weather had moved through the Carolinas.

My weather briefing had consisted of reviewing FlightAware including METAR reports and Terminal Aerodrome Forecasts (TAFS) for Cherry Point and airports in between such as our fuel stop in Camden, South Carolina. Delaying our departure until after lunch might allow us to fly straight through without getting stuck at an intermediate point waiting for the weather to clear.

Arriving at the Dixie Wing hangar, it was a very windy day with wind out of the west gusting at 18 knots. While we were in the hangar getting the Zero and the Kate ready for departure, we heard a Merlin engine winding up on a go-around. It turns out that Tony Stein was flying the Mustang and the wind was too sporty for him on his landing attempt, and a go-around was his best option.

After the aircraft had been pre-flighted, and our gear then put aboard, Jack and I briefed the flight. According to the winds aloft forecast, higher would be better, so we selected a cruising altitude of 5,500 feet that would give us a pretty good tail wind on a heading of 080 degrees. We agreed that we would get flight following, but would back each other up on an air-to-air frequency. We reviewed the Gamecock MOA northeast of Camden, South Carolina and the restricted area south of Cherry Point. The METAR reports along our route were encouraging. We hoped to arrive at Cherry Point later that afternoon with no need to divert to an airport short of our destination. I would act as lead, Jack would fly as No. 2.

Airborne – the First Leg

Engine start was at 1:57 p.m. and we were airborne ten minutes later. Because of the gusty crosswinds, we elected not to make a section takeoff. Jack would execute a rejoin while I made a left turn to the east. By the time I rolled out on a heading of due east Jack was coming up on my left wing. We had no trouble of getting hold of Atlanta Departure, and we got flight following all the way to Camden, South Carolina. We generally tracked north or northwest of the August TRSA and the Class C airspace of Columbia, South Carolina. The ride was very, very rough. We were getting pretty beaten up by turbulence. One of the amusing things that happened during our flight was as we were 5,500 feet, right where we were supposed to be, some other pilot on an IFR flight plan was at 5,000 feet and complained about two aircraft that came in proximity to him that were in formation. ATC told him that we were supposed to be there and not to worry. About 20 miles out from Camden, we began our descent. We elected to use Runway 24 because of the westerly winds. I remember a fairly strong left

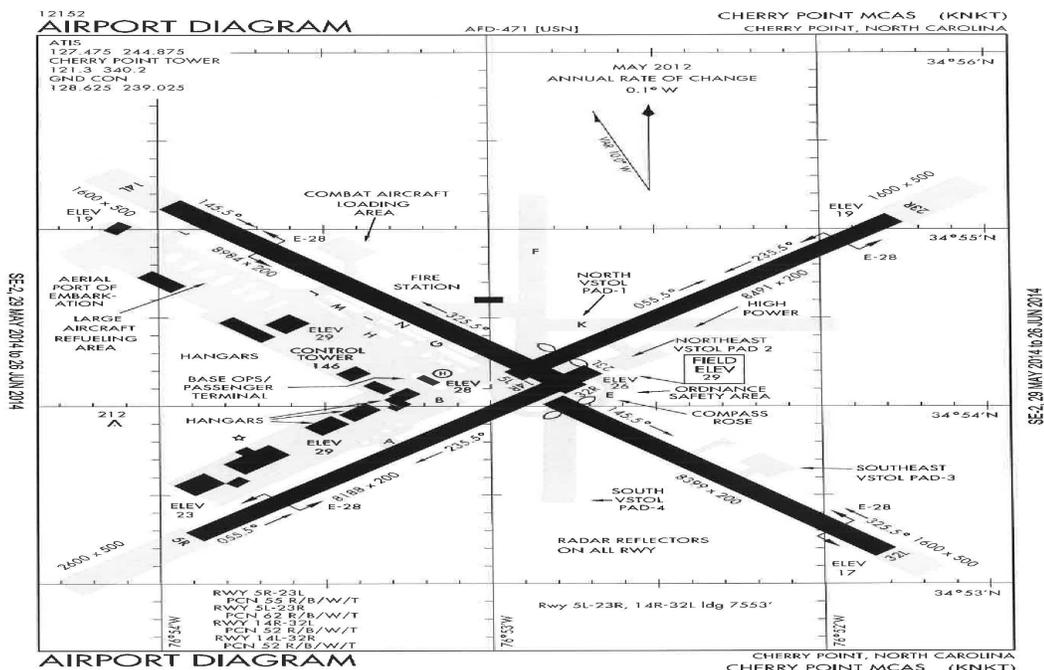
crosswind as we effected our landing. We were down at about 3:40 p.m. After getting some self-serve fuel, we had to get down the road to Cherry Point because a night airshow would start at 6:40 p.m.

The Second Leg to KNKT

As we departed Camden, we got Shaw Approach, and the hand offs were uneventful as we made our way toward Cherry Point. The Gamecock MOA was not hot, so that was not a problem. One controller tried to dump us telling us to go back to squawking 1200, but he had a change of heart, and we got flight following all the way until the hand off to Cherry Point Approach Control about 20 miles from the airport. Because of concerns of the restricted area to the south of Cherry Point, I was altering course slightly to the northeast to avoid the restricted airspace. In checking in with Cherry Point Approach Control, I told them of my heading change. He said that was not necessary, since the restricted airspace was not hot, and we could proceed directly to the airport. I neglected to mention throughout this flight that our indicated airspeed was about 135 knots, but our ground was about 158 knots. The airplanes were making pretty good time moving down the road.

As we got closer to Cherry Point, ATC kept us fairly high. First, they gave us down to 4,000 feet and then down to 2,700. At some point in our descent, Jack lost me with my green airplane over the terrain. I had to blow some smoke so Jack could find me.

The layout of the Cherry Point Marine Corps Air Station is pretty bizarre. The airport looks like a big X. Runway 32R which is the lower point of the right portion of the X is a companion and Runway 32L which is the left and upper portion of the X. Runway 5R is the lower left portion of the X while Runway 5L is the upper right portion of the X. Please see the airport diagram of KNKT provided herewith. Anyway, Jack and I landed on Runway 32L and taxied in a northwesterly direction for a very long time before we found the area of the ramp where the warbirds were parked. We taxied inbound into the performers' area where we shut down and had the aircraft towed to the static display area. We saw the Aeroshell Team in the performance area along with our Corsair. By the time we arrived at the static display area, we saw the Dauntless. Both the Kate and Zero were parked in the general proximity of the Dauntless. There was an A-4 Skyhawk and some Eastern bloc jet painted in olive drab colors. They appeared to be either demonstration aircraft or flight test aircraft. Larry Kelly's B-25, Panchito, was there as was the striking, red UPF-7 flown by a retired airline captain who was 81 years of age.



The Life of an Airshow Pilot – A Cold Dinner at a Gas Station

After we got our aircraft secured and removed our gear, we met with Wes Stowers and Charlie Kennedy who were manning the Dauntless. In time, a golf cart took us to the hospitality area that was in the base of the control tower. We got our name tags and room assignments and made our way to the Devil Dog Inn. To complete the picture, the Devil Dog Inn marquee is in bright red letters and oriental script. The marquee is pretty interesting. Anyway, we got our showers. Since we had no wheels, we had to walk around the base in search of food. The best thing we could come up with was a couple of cold sandwiches at a gas station. I joked with Jack about the life of an airshow pilot. Sometimes it is not what it is cracked up to be.



“The marquee is pretty interesting.”

We made our way back to the Devil Dog Inn with an understanding that we would meet the next morning at 7:00 a.m. to make our way to McDonald’s for breakfast before being on the Flightline by 8:00 a.m.

Two Days of Static Display

There are worse things than hanging around an airport for two days watching other pilots fly. I tend to roam around the airport with my iphone and take pictures of other pilots and their planes. The UPF-7 flown by the 81 year old retired airline pilot was a virtually perfect airplane. His wife was meticulously waxing the aircraft as I approached. Saturday, I got to spend some time with a retired Marine Corps pilot, Randy Bernard, who took us to dinner at a Japanese Steakhouse that night. It seemed that Jack and I were moving up in the world.

Sunday, I befriended Udo Luetze. Udo is an entrepreneur who engages in business around the world. A native of Germany, he resides in Charlotte, North Carolina. Udo is an amazing photographer. Anyway, he took a picture of the Kate and yours truly and we struck up a conversation. He expressed interest in coming to Falcon Field and taking photographs of the aircraft in our inventory.

While we were hanging around the airshow for two days, Jack and I were contemplating our return trip to Atlanta. Sunday night, the weather in Atlanta would be pretty rough with thunderstorms and rain showers. Besides, due to the volume of traffic at the airport, there was no way we would get out in time on Sunday evening to get back to Atlanta before dark. While we were getting our weather briefing at Operations on Sunday, someone made a comment about the airport being shut down at 8:00 a.m. on Monday morning for a FOD (foreign object debris) walk. With all the AV-8 Harrier aircraft based at the station, one could see that the Marines would take extra special care to ensure that the runways, taxiways and ramp areas were free of debris. So, Jack and I opted for a sunrise departure on Monday morning.



Udo Luetze PHOTOGRAPHIC ART

Monday's Sunrise Departure

Jack and I agreed to meet at 6:00 a.m. on Monday morning. I was awake around 4:55 a.m. checking weather on FlightAware. The weather in Atlanta would be low IFR until around noon. Thankfully, the weather at Cherry Point would be VFR. The forecast weather at Camden was not completely encouraging. By 8:00 o'clock in the morning, the best we would hope for at Camden was six miles of visibility with broken clouds at 1500. We did not want to get caught on top of a cloud deck. Anyway, we opted to effect our departure at 0700 and if the weather deteriorated along our route, we would land short of Camden and wait for the weather to improve.

Turnabout is fair play, and Jack agreed to lead the flight from Cherry Point to Camden. We started engines at 6:58 a.m. and were airborne by 7:05. Our departure runway was Runway 32R which was a fairly short distance from the static display area. Because the runway was wide, we effect a section (formation) take-off. The tower allowed us to accomplished our run-ups on the runway. With run-ups complete, Jack gave the windup signal to go to 2,000 rpm. Then, he gave me the head nod, and we were rolling down the runway and we climbed up together on a northwesterly heading. In no time at all, we were climbing up to 4,500 feet. The air was fairly cool. Each time Jack would check in on a new frequency, I would say "two" on the ATC frequency to let Jack know I was aboard. We landed at Camden at 8:35 a.m.

Hurry Up and Wait

As we gassed up our aircraft at Camden, we took a look at the weather. Falcon Field was 300 feet broken with a half mile visibility. We borrowed the airport courtesy car and drove into town and had some breakfast. I had no idea what was in store for me when we returned to the airport.

Frank Schumpert and the Full Scale Focke-Wulf

Returning to the airport, I got to spend some time with Frank Schumpert. Frank is building a full scale Focke-Wulf FW-190 replica in his aircraft repair facility at the Camden airport. Frank's aircraft has a DC-3 Pratt & Whitney R-1830 engine with a DC-3 propeller. The fuselage is made of 4130 chrome molly steel and the wings are made of wood. Then, Frank told me about another Focke-Wulf replica he had built for Bob Russell. He had John Koenig show me Bob Russell's Focke-Wulf. The aircraft is of all aluminum construction and has a Russian Ash Engine with a four bladed propeller. Frank explained that the Focke-Wulf aircraft were built from plans made available by Macelle Juracha. Frank also told me about Wendall Hall in Cheraw, South Carolina who has a Corsair and maintains a DC-3. Going back to the Focke-Wulf, Bob Russell's Focke-Wulf is generally silver in color with the German crosses on the wings. It is a very imposing aircraft. It has P-63 brakes, and the oil cooler appears below the underside of the left wing. It looks like a bear of an airplane.

Making Our Way Home at Last

As we looked at the weather, Jack and I felt that by the time we arrived at Falcon Field an hour and a half later, it would be VFR. The weather was not improving as quickly as the forecast had indicated. However, the weather south of Atlanta south was generally better than the weather in Atlanta. So, we reasoned that as a worst case scenario, we could deviate somewhat to the south if that was what we had to do to get closer to home. As it turns out, the weather did come up and improve while we were en route. On the way home, Jack was talking to Columbia Approach. Somehow, the controller thought Jack was flying a Cessna. So the controller told a Learjet descending out of nine thousand feet to look for a Cessna. The response of the Learjet pilot was classic:

“First, there's two of them. Second, they definitely aren't Cessnas.”

We shut down at 2:41 p.m., nearly two hours after our departure from Camden, South Carolina.

Even though our appearance at Cherry Point was only as static aircraft, still, moving these aircraft around the skies, avoiding weather, dealing with weather and avoiding restricted airspace and other challenges is still great sport. It also allows one to meet some really interesting people.



CONTACT INFO:

Phone: 770-451-0313

Fax: 770-451-0317

Email: alan@alanarmstronglaw.com

Please contact us at aaparalegal@comcast.net to be removed from the FlightWatch Email List



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