



Views from a JetProp

Quick Visit to a Great Wonder of the World

by Travis Holland

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Following a week in Europe to offer an intense block of initial and recurrent training, the ancient pyramids of Egypt began to call my name. After a brief Google search I ended up corresponding with Z Aviation, one of two FBOs at the Cairo Airport (HECA). Outside of North America, FBOs are not that common, so I felt blessed to have two competing for my business.

Model of Efficiency...

My traveling companion would be Vincenzo "Enzo" Motolese, an Italian pilot with whom I had been training in N92819, which he has owned since July 2007. Our first leg to Corfu (LGKR) for some en-route fuel was uneventful, but I was reminded immediately of the contrast between flying in the EU and United States. In Europe a "quick turn" means you will be on the ground for more than an hour in the best of circumstances. In Corfu, we parked the plane, waited for the 100 passenger bus to transport the two of us to the terminal, went to the airport office, filled out several forms, and paid the 7.66 Euro landing fee. Then we waited in line 10 minutes behind grouchy stranded airline customers to pay a 25 Euro handling fee. From there we went through security, to the bus, to the plane, where we began our wait for jet fuel. Ten minutes later a van came by and accepted our fuel order with a promise to return, but not before a mandatory coffee break. Fueled with coffee, he eventually returned and fueled us. He then had to drive us to the fuel office to accept payment.

...Compared to Egypt

Only upon our arrival in Cairo did events begin to diverge from my carefully scripted and planned trip. After a standard ILS 05R approach to HECA in hazy but clear conditions, we taxied to the general aviation ramp area, off of taxiway Quebec. *So far so good.* Ground control asked us to hold short of the ramp until a "follow

me" car could guide us to the parking spot. Outside of North America, following those guide cars is mandatory when provided. Two armed security personnel, who were present on the ramp after shut down, reminded us of that fact. Although the gun-toting line personnel did not speak English, or smile, the two did wave their weapons in our direction when speaking in Arabic to the "marshaller" in the car. Needless to say we refrained from making any sudden moves.

After shut down, the marshaller asked us who our handler was, which was a bit of a shock as I expected him to be that person. *Oops.* Fortunately, an airport operations officer saw us taxiing in without a handler and sped over to save the day. A phone call to the actual handler alerted him to our presence, and after 10 long minutes a van showed up to escort us off the ramp area.

We were driven across the airport to the

General Aviation arrival hall. There we saw our call sign and city of origin prominently displayed, along with no others, on a large electronic display board above an airline-sized baggage claim area, complete with carousel. At least 30 airport and security personnel were present, greatly outnumbering our crew of just two. Our handler disappeared with our passports, which was a bit disconcerting. But just 10 minutes later we were cleared into Egypt. Off we went to the handler's office to work out our tourism plans. There we met with our travel agents and Mustafa, who was to be our driver and escort during our time in Cairo.

Vehicular Chaos

We would soon see how important a dedicated Arabic escort would be to life and limb. Traffic was the first surprise in Cairo, and a good lesson in risk management, so appropriate to the theme of this issue. For a city of 25 million, I certainly expected heavy





Built in the 1970's, the hotel was an exact replica of the Wichita Hilton, right down to the beige rotary dial telephones. Even 27 floors above the fray, I could hear a constant cacophony of horns as cars five abreast battled over three lanes on the busy road below.

Ancient Wonder

We found Mustafa waiting in the lobby the following morning, ready to drive us to the Giza Pyramids. About 45 minutes outside of Cairo, past partially-built apartment buildings and patches of shanty-town housing, we arrived at Giza, a poor suburb of the capital. Mustafa took us to see the tour company, where an imposingly large man explained in an odd mixture of English, Italian and German what our tour options were, all involving horses and camels. We could have the small tour, the medium tour or the "very big tour," which of course was the best, and not coincidentally, the highest priced. Enzo quickly grasped the haggling nature of the discussion, leaving me in the dust. A few minutes later we were off on the very big tour for about half the initially quoted price for the medium jaunt. Our guide rode his own horse, while a 10 year old boy led my horse and Enzo's camel into the desert.

traffic, but I was completely unprepared for the vehicular chaos we witnessed. The lines marking the boundary between lanes are used for decoration only, as five lines of traffic pack themselves into a three lane road. The horn is a mandatory safety equipment item, employed much as brake lights are in North America, used to announce the imminent impact with another vehicle. Headlights are never used except when passing; emergency flashers are turned on each time braking is applied for more than a second or two.

In the midst of this madness, local taxis and buses stop anywhere and everywhere to pick up and discharge their occupants, with newly disgorged pedestrians weaving blithely in and out of the moving traffic. In one surreal scene we saw a lone traffic police officer, precariously perched between lanes of a large roundabout, armed only with a whistle. He looked mostly bewildered and was certainly having absolutely no influence on the traffic, all at great risk to his own safety.

After 40 minutes of mayhem, Mustafa pulled up to the Nile Hilton, where the car was promptly sniffed by bomb dogs. The check-in desk knew nothing of our arrival. The mystery was solved in a short telephone conversation between

the desk agent and our handler. Never lose your handler's business card. We learned that Mustafa had brought us to the wrong Hilton. Luckily, in Cairo your driver is always nearby, and so he soon drove us a few blocks to the Ramses Hilton.



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The Gauntlet

Several times en-route, numerous folks, in and out of police uniforms, approached us for money. Each time the tour guide would argue with them in Arabic for a minute or so, and they would back off. Once in the area of the pyramids, more folks would come up for various reasons. The tour guide warned us that any involvement with them would result in their demand for money, so we kept our distance. Once, however, during a trek away from the pyramids to gain some perspective for a photo, we did buy a couple of cold drinks from a man who kept cases of Coke on ice, on his donkey, for parched tourists just like us.

The tour guides understood the power of the heat of the sun. They kept us going back and forth between the desert look-outs and the pyramids until we had our fill of the sun and sand, of which there was no shortage. We were ready to terminate our price-fixed journey. No tour of the pyramids is apparently complete until a strong pitch is made to purchase some aromatic oils. But we successfully fought off the urge to succumb to this mercantile opportunity and headed back toward Cairo. Mustafa was set to drop us at the Cairo Bazaar, but we were invited into a huge mosque by a passerby after Mustafa let us out of

his car. He sensed trouble and quickly doubled back to retrieve us. After just 10 minutes in the mosque, the passerby insisted on a \$40 "admission fee" to the mosque, even though mosques charge no such fees. Mustafa came on scene and soon put in place this enterprising, if unscrupulous, mosque tour guide. He

then decided he might best keep us in his sights for the remainder of the afternoon. For evening entertainment, our handler had arranged a dinner cruise on the Nile. As the cruise began, we endured 1970s rock tunes poorly done. I was distressed a bit that I traveled half way around the globe only to find bad casino entertainment. Luckily, after just a few songs, the music turned local. For the next few hours we admired the singing and dancing of Cairo as we exhaustedly reflected on the big day behind us.

Hurry Up and Wait

In the morning, we departed for the airport with Mustafa. We had grown a bit attached to the fellow, but I am sure he was glad to be rid of his clueless charges. The VIP hall at the Cairo airport worked the same way as arrival but in reverse. Again we were the only flight listed on the computer screens, all in the presence of a few dozen security personnel. Once again our passports disappeared, returning shortly thereafter with the proper stamps. In our van going out to the aircraft, we came to complete stop on the ramp, along with a sea of other airport vehicles. Luggage carts, catering trucks and fuel trucks were stopped in front of a sea of security personnel, with no explanation offered. After a couple of moments I gently inquired as to the nature



of the delay and was informed that the President of Iraq was preparing to depart. We would be holding our position until his airplane taxied out in front of us.

That small inconvenience aside, we soon departed Cairo for Crete, Greece. After a Greek quick turn of 75 minutes, we were headed back to Italy to complete our trip. In less than two hours, at FL270, our Egypt trek would be history. At the top of the climb we traded notes on our observations and discussed plans for future trips. But as we entered some alto-cumulus at FL270 my mind went back to the sig-prog chart, which had showed a weak trough line across our route.

Embedded Boomers

The ominous preamble was the signature splattering of super cooled liquid droplets, followed quickly by a windshield obscured with ice. Turbulence was not far behind. I disconnected the autopilot, chopped the power, and dropped the landing gear. By the time the gear extended we were passing

FL 285 on the wings of an impressive updraft, until the altimeter unwound to FL250. Although the turbulence was moderate, the altimeter really told the story. I told center we were deviating. While ATC's initial response predictably was, "you need to ask permission before deviating," I quickly disabused them of that fallacy. I straightened them out with "embedded Charlie Bravo unable, request FL280." As we approached FL280 we were not yet VMC, so I requested FL290. "Negative RVSM" was the comeback. Ignoring that, I then requested FL300. This still did not get us to VMC, but we could see the halo of the sun through the tops. On this leg, 14CFR91.3, which provides for PIC emergency authority to exceed the certified ceiling operating limitation, was sure useful.

After about 10 minutes we crossed the trough and popped out of the clouds to see vertically developed CBs displayed 60 degrees along both sides of our route. The tops were below us from our perch

at FL300, but definitely reached into the high twenties. We stayed high for a few minutes and then descended back down to FL270 and zigzagged across the open water around the cells. The area of CBs extended almost all the way to the Italian shoreline, where the weather finally cleared out. We were able to descend and land in Grottalie, Enzo's home town, on a runway that showed clear signs of some heavy rain shortly before our arrival.

With the airplane safely in the hangar, Enzo drove me to the commercial airport, and I flew off to another European client. Three countries, three pyramids, and one embedded cell made for an exciting JetProp adventure.

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