

July 30, 2014 - Florida's Gulf Coast - Venice to Ft. Myers

I guess that you can say that I have had a connection to Florida since the early 1960's. When I finished up my military training in February of 1962 it was cold and snowing at the Army's tank school in Fort Knox, Ky. Before I headed back to NJ, I decided to take my 1960 Ford Thunderbird convertible and travel even further south. One of my tank crewmen members lived in Americus, GA, and he invited me to spend a few days seeing his little town. I thought that it would also provide a mid-point stopover for my trip to Florida. I had 3 weeks before my next National Guard drill was scheduled and about \$300 in my pocket. Gas was about a quarter a gallon and economy motel rooms went for less \$10 a night, even in the height of the winter season. Besides a cousin of mine owned and operated a hotel just outside of Silver Springs, on Florida's west coast, where I could stay free for a few days. Now these were pre Disney and Sea World days, and Orlando was simply just another small Florida city. The big attractions were the manatees at Silver Springs, the water ski show at Cypress Gardens, the 150 foot high "singing" Bok tower in Lake Wales, and Parrot and Monkey Jungles, in Miami. There were no Interstates, no Florida Turnpike and no GPS to guide me along on my journey. I was 22, single, had a "bitchin'" car, a yearning to explore this winter vacation land and spend some quality time on its beaches. I just loved the west side of the state with its quiet and almost wave free white sand beaches, and I vowed that if ever I would find myself moving to Florida, this is where I wanted to be. However, as fate would have it, when we did finally move to the Sunshine state, in the early '70's it was to the Miami area, where my wife became the HRS director for Florida International University. And today I find myself spending most of my days "just up the road apiece", on the Atlantic side, in West Palm Beach.

But I still love Florida's Gulf coast, and today I decided to take my Highlander over to Venice for breakfast and then making a low flight along the shoreline down to Ft. Myers, before heading back across the state to my base at Indiantown. I figured that this would be about a 3 1/2 hour trip and I could take advantage of the cheap fuel at Ft. Myers which would save me over a buck a gallon compared to gas at my home field. The day was beautiful, with a lot of white puffy clouds and relatively smooth air. However I knew that the afternoon thunderstorms would certainly be rumbling along. One of the features of the Highlander is its ability to let the windows swing up, just below the wing. This allows a degree of outside air to blow by the open window on the pilots side, cooling off the interior. Although it's a little noisy, there is not so much air entering the cockpit that things blow around. It's much like opening the car window while driving down the highway. I did much of my touring today this way. It also makes for better picture taking since there is not the reflection or glare that shooting through the plastic gives. The barrier islands along this side of the state are not any wider than those that I used to see when I flew down along the Jersey coastline, and the homes are stacked right next to each other in both locations. However I think that the Gulf side is so much prettier with its dark green water and pristine white sand beaches. Being able to take a leisurely half day trip by one's aircraft, simply to enjoy the passing scenery and the beauty surrounding one's environment is what makes private flying such an enjoyable pastime



On long high final to Rny. 13 at Venice Beach Apt.



Flying above those wide beaches provided comfort



Approaching the Fort Myers area, where I fueled.



My tanks took 20 of their 23 gallon capacity.