

October 24, 2012 - Fort Pierce, FL & The TIKI
(along with a little Nukie and a Big Blow)

Well, the presidential debates were finally over and the skies over southern Florida were again opened to general aviation. I used this new found freedom to head out to my airport to make the short 50 mile flight toward the coast and the St. Lucie County airport. However this morning I would be fighting the effects from a Hurricane poised just off of Bermuda, which was producing very strong on shore winds and heavy surf. While flying at my 1200 foot altitude along the shoreline I did not especially feel those 20+ MPH winds since they were fairly constant. Landing, in this big blow, would be another story.

It is always an eye opener when I fly, at low altitude, along the south Florida coastline. It is utterly amazing the number of large upscale homes that I find beneath my wing. It just goes to show what a wonderful country we live in where everyone is capable of reaching their maximum potential in life. And it is also great that having a small aircraft allows me to see what the average person never gets to see...the wonder of America up close and personal. Morning flights are especially gratifying. The sun comes up over the ocean's horizon and the shadows cast from the objects below add a lot of depth to my earth view below. The air is generally pretty still during the morning hours, thus giving a smooth and gentle ride. Often my return flight is not quite as mundane.

Today's flight would take me very close to Florida Power & Lights St. Lucie Nuclear Generating Plant. This brought back some fond memories as I did a lot of infra-red imaging of that plant's various components when I operated my non-destructive testing business. Nuclear power plants tend not to question fee charges too closely when they are down for refueling or extended maintenance. Their main goal is to get back on line as quickly as possible and scheduling of their inspections is more important than the cost. I would generally get from \$2 to \$3 thousand a day when I worked in nuclear plants. Great gigs, and I managed to find work at 18 of the country's pressurized water reactor plants and 3 boiling water reactor plants. And, yes, I did get my fair share of radiation exposure, but that is another story for another day.

The St. Lucie county airport is a fairly busy small town controlled airport with a friendly tower staff. It is home to a flight training facility, so there is always a lot of activity in and around the Tiki Lounge. This "on the field" restaurant has recently undergone a complete renovation which gives it a bright airy appearance with large picture windows offering a nice view of the active runway. It is opened for both breakfast and lunch and gets quite busy during the afternoon when a lot of student pilots and their instructors stop in for lunch. I generally don't handle breakfast very well before mid-morning, so my 10 AM arrival was perfectly timed. After my meal I was anxious to get back in the air and away from the coastline as the winds continued to pick up measurably. My return flight was only 26 minutes, or half of the outbound flight due to the wind situation. And landing at Indiantown was an adventure, because of a strong cross wind component. But with 6,000 feet of grass runway, there was plenty of opportunity for me to correct, line-up and grease it on.



The Florida coastline just south of Fort Pierce



FP&L's St. Lucie Nuclear Generating Power Plant



The twin reactor buildings where I once worked



Breakfast at the Tiki with my plane just outside