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WHAT IS IT REALLY LIKE TO OWN & OPERATE POTOMAC AIRFIELD ?

WHY SO LONG BETWEEN WRITING MY NEWSLETTERS ?

I do realize it's been months since I released my last ravings. It's not that I haven't written anything; quite the contrary, I've written perhaps a dozen or so newsletters; *my problem is daring to mail them out!*

I know my regular readers include thousands of pilots, airport managers across the USA, and many, many policy officials across fistfuls of Federal agencies. Within those agencies, half cheer me on, half get pissed off, and another half, which are officially pissed off, or at least officially *start* pissed off, quietly cheer me on behind closed doors (So I have been told).

Yes, that makes three halves; which only proves that two halves do not always make a whole; *sometimes it takes three.*

I have also been told my newsletters have been seen on the bulleting boards of small airports in South and Central America.

Therefore, in addition to my 14,000 or so 'legitimate' readers, I must also assume these newsletters get read by a variety of foreign and domestic criminal and terrorist organizations; as well as the intelligence services of both friendly and not so friendly governments.

It's not easy writing for such a broad audience!

WHAT IS IT REALLY LIKE TO OWN POTOMAC AIRFIELD?

Some of you may wonder what it is like owning a small airport in the middle of the strangest airspace in the world, at the tip of domestic national security policy, and the coolest place on earth to base your small private airplane.

Here's my answer: *"Owning and operating Potomac Airfield is like..."*

...It is like being Captain Jack Aubrey of 'Master & Commander,' traveling uncharted and hazardous waters with my hand-picked crew, in our noble ship,' defending Liberty, God and Country, against all threats; seen and unseen,

...It is like being Captain Jack Sparrow, of 'Pirates of the Caribbean,' aboard the hearty and cheerful ship 'Potomac', the ultimate symbol of freedom; supported by a personal network of noble ruffians, relying on our collective wits and initiative, to always do the right thing in the end,

.. It is like being 'Sonny,' from the extraordinary movie "I, Robot," endowed by my Creator to stand guard and undo evil, wherever evil may start to take root,

... It is like being George Washington, writing over 50,000 letters from his tent deep in the battle field, doing everything possible to guide national policy from afar, to move the nation forward while at the same time defending it on the front lines,

...It is like being King Arthur, surrounded by my noble Knights, pursuing noble ideals, for by doing right, we spread honor and dignity wherever we go, by the example of our actions,

...It is like being Hans Solo of 'Star Wars,' just getting by, in love with my beautiful princess, jumping from adventure to adventure, with the bad guys right behind.

In other words, as with all things, life is what you make of it; *it's a gas !!!*

MY LATEST SECURITY MEASURES

I just installed *what appear to be* state of the art, high-intensity Precision Approach Path Indicators (PAPI). Insanely bright, they serve three functions: 1. Approach path guidance, 2. Daytime Visual landmark, and, 3. Automatic laser target designation.

I just figured rather than *maybe* getting and maintaining weapons-lock on airborne targets, which can be anywhere, instead, at Potomac, we simply target every aircraft on final, where we know every aircraft will be. It works every time, *and it is just one less thing that can go wrong.*

IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES

From high atop my odd little perch, it appears General Aviation is being used *more than ever* to actually go somewhere. I note more people At Potomac *starting* flying with the specific intent of immediately buying an airplane for *transportation* than ever before.

In other words, GA is finally delivering its promise as viable transportation. Here's my theory why:

GPS Navigation has made navigation child's play: Instead of relying on VOR 'divining needles,' GPS moving maps make complex navigation trivially simple.

Weather Avoidance using low cost XMRadio weather in the cockpit, finally gives pilots what they've always needed, a reasonably current picture along their route.

GPS Terrain Mapping commonly available on low-cost GPS maps makes 'obstruction avoidance' easy and safe, even IFR.

Alternatives are Becoming Less Desirable An economist would say the 'marginal utility' of flying commercially has gone way down; while the utility of GA is going up, making GA *preferable*; where practical for distance and weather.

Cost Competitive to Driving within certain distances, GA is much faster and not much more expensive than driving.

In other words, Ye Olde *Economics, Convenience, and Market Forces* are finally delivering the promise. *Imagine that!*

THE PLAN COMES TOGETHER
For years FAA has been frantic about forecast increased airspace congestion, increased workload, and the skies darkening from all the small jets rolling off so many factory floors. *It's amazing how a variety of well-coordinated inter-agency government actions have stepped in to relieve those pressures!*

Aviation security programs, combined with lottery-like flight connections, have almost succeeded in making people want to avoid flying commercially entirely. New security programs should also render business jets almost useless. Add some massively destructive Federal fiscal policy, *and presto, the airspace congestion goes away! Clever, eh?*

MY SFRA/ADIZ/FRZ COMMENTS
DC's new airspace is called the "Special Flight Rules Area" (SFRA). Just try to pronounce that: *"srrfra?"*

"I'd like to file a "sffrra" flightplan."

"A what?"

"A sffrrraa flight plan"

"Notify secret service, and alert air defense, I think that pilot is either under duress, or has something seriously wrong with them"

Why can't government agencies ever come up with pronounceable names; something more cheerful, more descriptive, *and easier to pronounce*, like 'ABA', for 'Aviation Blasting Area?'

OBJECTIVES ONE LAST TIME
Okay folks, follow me through on this, one last time: To normal humans Washington DC's airspace makes no sense at all; so it falls to me to give you some kind of seemingly-rational explanation:

Washington DC is where the Federal Government does whatever it is that the Federal government does. *Under certain conditions that can make the time of day a matter of national security.*

The outer 30 mile ADIZ/SFRA airspace around Washington DC establishes positive radio contact with every radar blip within 30 miles of the nation's capital; and through the tortuous flight-planning process, collects and tags each radar blip

with a unique data tag; allowing Air Traffic Control (ATC) to yell at any specific aircraft, if needed, or all of them, should the need arise.

Even if a pilot flightplans as "Santa Claus" flying his "Reindeer," at least a controller can still say *"Santa, I need you to turn 30 degrees left to avoid getting your arse shot down."*

That's why the 'SFFRRRA' does not need any authentication, any old flight plan information will do; because it really doesn't matter what goes into the SFRA flight plan, so long as every radar blip has a unique radar tag making it individually 'addressable' by ATC over an open radio channel.

Although the data in the SFRA may be meaningless, should an innocent pilot start to drift toward 'unspeakable' things downtown, or in an emergency, SFRA communications remain useful.

THOUGHT DU JOUR – A good friend from a 3-letter agency (with considerable experience in these matters), once said to me, *"Why not just require the pilot make a blind call to ATC, and get a reply, to establish the necessary open comms channel?"*

PILOT "N12345 is off Potomac"
ATC "N12345, roger"

PILOT "N6789, whino, inbound"
ATC "N6789, roger"

The 15 mile inner FRZ provides two things: It is the final safety buffer around 'unspeakable things downtown;' and it allows proportional response to any unknown intruder.

In the spirit of customer service, the whole idea is to defend a target downtown, while avoiding shooting down Mom, Dad and the Kids.

THOUGHT – Wouldn't it be nice if 'unspeakable things downtown' were openly-declared? Not *specified*, merely *declared*. (Maybe I'm doing that right now, because no one else can?). Then the very-small airspace safety-buffer necessary, well inside the Class B (which already establishes comms), *might even allow the rest of this to stand down?*

To make the purpose of that airspace very clear to everyone, I'd suggest a simple notam: *"Get Shot Down Here"*

ON A MORE PERSONAL NOTE
I am facing a domestic crisis. When our children were very small they were like adorable human pets, we could just bundle them up and go anywhere anytime we wanted; including our beach house.

For years, Ben and Jake were then home-schooled by my *Episcopalian Goddess*, my intrepid wife, Kelley.

Now, to better prepare them for a life of unavoidable institutional tomfoolery, and bureaucratic misery, starting this fall, both will be in private school.

This change will impose significantly higher financial overhead; and more egregious, *our beach schedule will become bound to their school's schedule.*

In other words, our children are becoming increasingly costly, *and perhaps even more important, they are becoming inconvenient.*

I have suggested to Kelley that perhaps we should re-consider this whole 'parenthood' thing, to see if it still makes sense.

SNEEZING SEASON IS HERE
Washington DC is covered in pollen, fouling my cell phone use. To avoid sneers from using some corny sound whenever I get a message, and because I always miss 'vibrate,' I've set my cellphone to 'sneeze' gently, whenever I get a message.

The problem comes during pollen season: Whenever anyone sneezes, I grab for my phone.

"Aaachoo"

"Oh wait, that's for me"

Life can get so complicated...

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*Until next time,
Cheers!*

David Wartofsky, Potomac Airfield