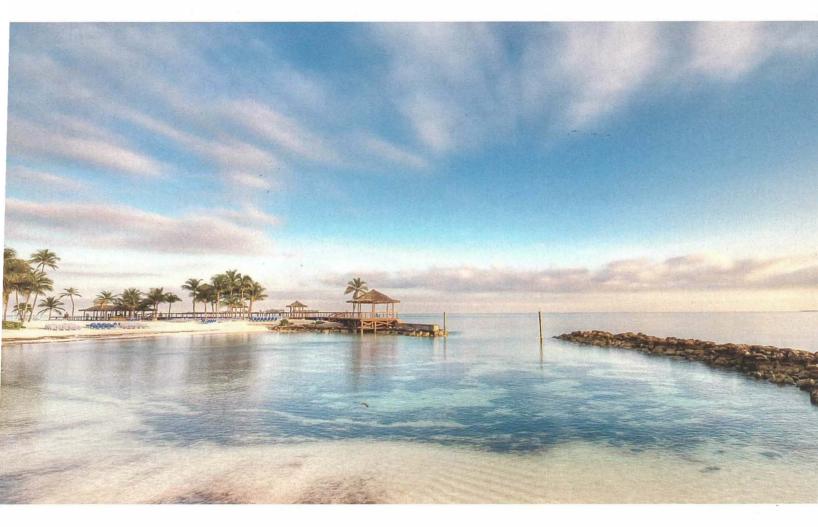


BY J. MAC MCCLELLAN

PILOTS HAVE A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE A BEAUTIFUL ISLAND NATION

THE Bahamas BECKON .



no reason for a pilot to be trapped by a hurricane because there is plenty of warning and it takes so little time to fly out of the islands and away from the storm.

During the winter months some continental weather systems can hold together and bring shots of cool air, rain, and wind to the islands, particularly the northern half of the country. These winter fronts can interrupt the normal easterly trade winds and drop the temperatures out of the usual upper 70s to low 80s for a day or two. South of Eleuthera it's uncommon for continental cold fronts to pack much punch.

The normal FSS phone number, 800-WX-Brief, works across the Bahamas and puts you in contact with the familiar procedures for weather briefing and flight plan filing.

BAHAMAS FLYING RULES

In general the flying rules in the Bahamas mirror those in the United States. A big exception is that no night VFR flying is allowed. That makes sense because most of the Out Island airports have no lighting, or very minimal lighting.

The Bahamas put on hold a requirement for visiting private airplanes to have the new style 406 MHz ELT transmitter. The aviation authorities will review that policy in February of 2015, but I suspect there will be no changes unless and until the FAA makes the new ELTs a requirement.

Airplanes are required to have 12-inch N-numbers, but that is both a Bahamian rule and an FAA requirement for airplanes crossing the border.

I don't think the Bahamians care, but the FAA says you must have a permanent registration for your airplane, not the temporary one issued when you first apply.

You can find places where it says the Bahamas require a radio station license for your airplane, and even a radio telephone operator's permit, but as far as I know those are outdated for private airplanes probably still have my radio operator's permit somewhere because we were all required to get them back when I learn to fly, but I have never had a radio static license for my airplane and don't know they are even still issued for light airplanes. In 25 years of flying to the Bahamas I can tell you nobody has even asked about either document, or any ot airplane or pilot document, for that matter.

CUSTOMS REQUIREMENTS AND FEES

U.S. Customs requires all pilots to file an online eAPIS manifest before departing returning to the country. The eAPIS man fest includes information about your airplane, the pilot, and all passengers, including passport numbers, home addresses, departure and destination po and where you will cross the ADIZ depa ing and re-entering the United States. Customs provides information on how b file eAPIS manifests at *https://eAPIS*. *bp.dhs.gov*. The site is not exactly userriendly, but the help screens can guide ou through it. You need to register first nd get an ID and password and then can ile the manifest.

Though eAPIS is a relatively new equirement for pilots leaving and enterng the country, the system has actually treamlined the process. Now when you rrive at a U.S. airport of entry the cusoms officer has all of your information in ront of him on the computer. There is no dditional paperwork to file, and I have ound overall processing time is quicker and smoother.

If your plans are pretty firm, it's best to le both your outbound and return eAPIS nanifests before you depart the United tates. Online access has improved greatly the Bahamas but is not yet universal, so your manifest for returning is already in here, you're set. The key is to be sure the nanifest is in ahead of expected arrival ime. It's okay to arrive after your expected time, but not before.

Fltplan.com offers an excellent eAPIS ervice that takes all of the hassle out of ling. Fltplan.com also covers all of the islands so you can file the required DVFR flight plans online both coming and going. The service has all of the nav and airport data for the islands plus charts. There is an annual fee for the eAPIS service, but Fltplan.com sure makes it simple and is guaranteed accurate.

The FAA requires that you file a DVFR or IFR flight plan and be radar-identified before crossing the ADIZ. Miami Center has good radar and radio coverage over the islands, particularly the western portion, so it's not hard to raise Miami on the radio.

Even though you have filed your eAPIS manifest U.S. Customs still requires that you call the facility at your airport of entry at least one hour in advance of arrival. Phone service is now good over nearly all of the Bahamas so that's not a big problem. Cellphone coverage is growing, but be sure to check with your carrier before leaving to see how to gain access and what it will cost.

Bahamian Customs still uses paper, lots of it. You will need to fill out three copies of the C7 Cruising Permit form, which requires only very basic information. You can download this form at the Bahamas website, or many FBOs on the Florida coast will help you fill them out before departure. One copy of the C7 is your permit to then island hop during your stay. Be sure to show the form to customs before you leave an island and then again when you arrive at the next. It can collect a bunch of stamps. The Bahamas also requires an immigration card for each person arriving.

The U.S. charges an annual customs fee of \$27.50 for a sticker that goes on your airplane. You can order the sticker at *www.CBP.gov* under the "pleasure boats and private flyers" tab at the bottom of the page.

The Bahamas has a fairly new \$50 customs fee per arriving airplane. There can also be fees on multiengine airplanes, or landing or parking fees at a couple of the major airports. Bahamian Customs operates from 9 to 5 local time, so plan your initial arrival and final departure from the islands during those hours. The Bahamas has had an exit tax forever, and that is now up to \$29 per person when you check out with customs before departing the country.

FBOS, FUEL, AND CASH

Fuel is now available at all of the significant airports. And several airports have



full-service FBOs. Even at remote strips you are never more than about 20 minutes of flying from an airport with fuel. Check the Bahamas website for information or the *Pilot's Guide* for phone numbers to call ahead. I have found avgas prices to be very similar to those in the United States. The Bahamas does not tax aviation fuel at the same rates as in the United States so that helps to make up for transportation costs.

Credit cards are now accepted at all but the most remote airports. Bank cards are the most widely accepted. Be sure to call your card company and let them know you are flying to the Bahamas because a charge from the islands can sometimes trigger a card fraud alert.

But it makes sense to take along enough cash to buy fuel and services to fly to a larger island if necessary. The Bahamian dollar exchanges on par with U.S. currency, and after a few days you will probably have Bahamian money mixed in with your supply of cash. Some FBOs will add the departure tax to your fuel bill and put it all on a credit card. But customs accepts only cash, so be sure to have enough just in case.

RETURN AIRPORT OF ENTRY

When flying back from the Caribbean, including the Bahamas, the FAA requires

you to clear customs in south Florida. If you can fly above 23,000 feet, you can go as far north as Wilmington, North Carolina. Fort Pierce is our normal entry point. It's as far north as a low-altitude airplane can go without prior "over flight" approval from customs. And Fort Pierce is_ a general aviation only customs office so airline traffic is not an issue.

In the rest of the country you are expected to stay in your airplane until a customs officer comes out and asks you and your passengers to exit. In Florida it's the opposite. You are expected to take all of your baggage into the customs office for inspection without waiting for direction from an officer.

In the past U.S. customs officers would often ask to see my airplane registration card and pilot documents, but Bahamian officials never did. Since eAPIS has been in effect we have never been asked to see any documents other than our passports. Apparently eAPIS runs a computer check and clears us before we ever arrive so there is no need to see the actual documents.

FAVORITE ISLANDS

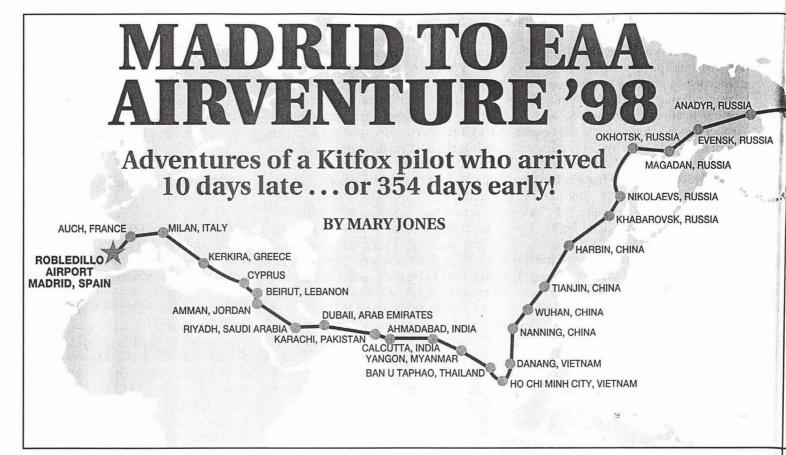
For the past 25 winters Stancie and I have flown to Marsh Harbour Airport and spent time in Hope Town on Elbow Cay. The Marsh Harbour runway used to be a lu short piece of crummy pavement with taxiway. Now the runway is long and smooth, and a control tower has been b and may be commissioned one day. It would be only the third one in the Baha

We enjoy spending time in the Hop Town settlement—the Bahamian term tiny town—and boating around the cay The pink sand is beautiful on the Atlan Ocean side of Elbow Cay, while the Se Abaco offers protection on the west si And the candy-striped light house in H Town is still lit with kerosene, and the giant Fresnel lens rotates under handcrank power.

But many other pilots want the solito of a place like Staniel Cay in the Exumas that's the great thing about flying yourse You can hop over to another island whe ever you want, something nonpilots find very difficult to do. Flying to the Baham a very special treat reserved for pilots an their passengers. Don't miss your chance the adventure. **EAA**

J. Mac McClellan, EAA 747337, has been a pilot for m than 40 years, holds an ATP certificate, and owns a Be craft Baron. To contact Mac, e-mail mac@eaa.org.





Perseverance is defined in Webster's New World Dictionary as "continuing in some effort, course of action, etc. in spite of difficulty." Perhaps Michel Gordillo's photo should be positioned beside the word.

Gordillo, who left Madrid, Spain on June 24, was probably the first person to depart with his aircraft en route to EAA AirVenture '98. He also has the distinction of being the last to arrive. The wheels of Gordillo's Kitfox IV touched down on Runway 18 at Wittman Regional Airport at 11:11 a.m. on Friday, August 14, 1998, ten days after Convention's end.

Climbing out of his aircraft, Gordillo was met by EAA President Tom Poberezny, who welcomed Michel as the "last official arrival for EAA AirVenture '98." Gordillo responded with a smile and said ... "Or perhaps I am the first one to arrive for 1999; I never said which Oshkosh I was coming to!"

That comment drew a round of laughter and applause from the EAA employees, local townspeople and media who had gathered to welcome Michel and his son Carlos to Oshkosh. It also represented a spurt of energy from a very tired man who later confessed, "I tried to open my eyes to realize my dream had come true, but they were already open."

Gordillo faced a number of challenges in making this dream flight; this is a story of his commitment, passion and determination.

"I wanted to fly over places with no one in sight"

Michel Gordillo chose the longer eastern route to the United States for a couple of major reasons — one of which gets to the heart of his undertaking this flight in the first place.

First, Michel, who is currently a cocaptain on Airbus 340s for Iberia Airlines, flew P-3 Orions over the Atlantic as a Spanish Air Force pilot. The anti-submarine aircraft also participated in search and rescue missions; accordingly, he knew first-hand the difficulties associated with rescues in the North Atlantic — the likelihood he might never be found and the certain loss of his airplane. Flying the eastern route, Michel felt his chances for survival were greater as well as the likelihood he'd be able to recover his aircraft, at least in most countries.

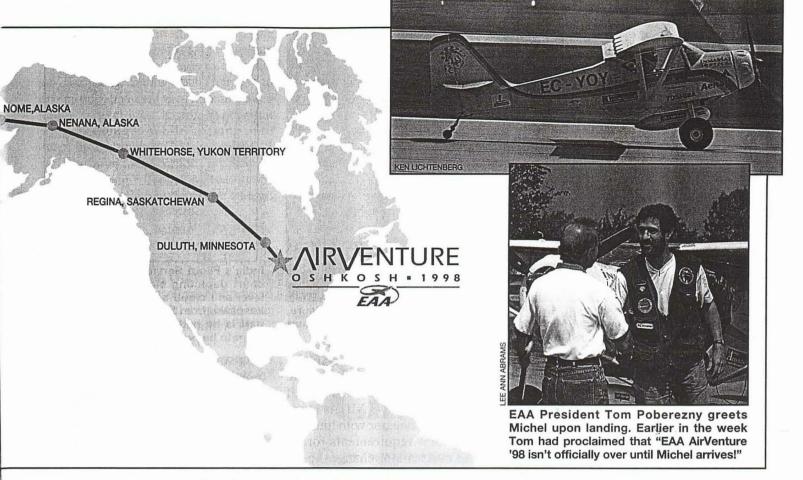
More important to Michel, however, was the opportunity to view places in the world he otherwise might not see. He explains, "I wanted to fly over places where there would be huge zones with no one in sight, to see land as it is before civilization, pristine areas. We will not always have those places again."

Forty-three-year-old Michel also had the feeling this was the time for an adventure of this nature. "I am getting older, but I still have some strength and energy and the ability to survive if I should go down in water or in the desert. Two years from now I might be unable to make such a flight." Those views reflect part of the philosophy of life of this adventurer — to live in the moment.

In addition, by flying the eastern route, a major portion of Michel's flight would be over Russia. He'd sought and received permission to file an IFR flight plan, allowing him to fly the trip in the shortest length and time possible. Unfortunately, a week before Michel's departure, Russia changed the rules, creating all manner of problems ... but, we're getting ahead of our story.

A Lover of Flight

Michel Gordillo has been "a lover of flight" since he was seven years old. At that age he bought his first airplane magazine — about model aircraft. He started building models, a hobby he still enjoys, and dreamed of



one day building a "big airplane."

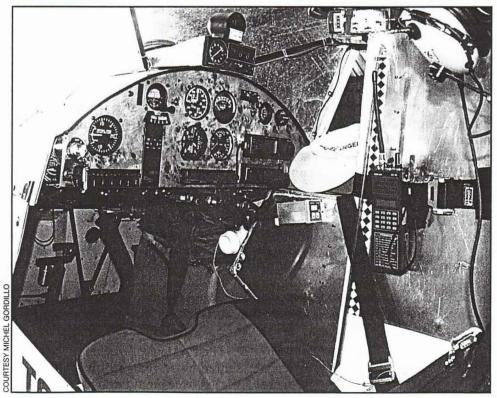
Although Michel was born in Douala, Cameroon, which explains his French first name, his family moved to Spain when he was 12 years old, and he has lived there since. Building your own aircraft in Spain, though, has not always been an easy undertaking. The regulations for building a private aircraft were quite strict — the builder was required to test the aircraft to destruction, which basically meant building the same aircraft two or three times to go through the administrative procedure. About 10 years ago the Spanish government reviewed U.S. and French regulations for homebuilt aircraft and eased their requirements. However, Spanish regulations still limit homebuilt aircraft to no more than two seats and no more than a 180 hp engine.

When Michel decided to build an airplane, he settled on the Kitfox for a number of reasons: It's a proven aircraft; the kit has been built by a number of people; and it would allow

The crowded cabin of the Kitfox, with the right seat fuel tank and floor fuel tank, which combined with the 26 gallon wing tanks extended the aircraft's range to 16 hours. Unfortunately, the seat fuel tank had to be left at Khabarovsk, Russia to make room for the required navigator. The floor tank, which served as a jerry can at times, was left in Nome, Alaska. him to fly the way he likes — "to do things you cannot do in an airliner; to fly with the door open, to land in a field, to fly on skis or floats."

Michel spent approximately four years and 1,220 hours building his airplane, but even before he began building, the idea of flying the airplane to Oshkosh was developing. He says, "Always, I had a flight like this in mind, to fly over the countryside and see beautiful places. Besides, anyone who builds their own airplane and knows about EAA dreams of flying it to Oshkosh one day."

About six months before the Kitfox was completed, Michel started thinking about the flight in earnest, gathering information about flying through various countries, preparing



SPORT AVIATION 75



EAA President Tom Poberezny, left, visits with Michel's wife and sons, Marie-laure, Miguel and Carlos as they await Michel's arrival from Nome, Alaska. Daughters Lorena (3) and Anaelle (2) remained in Spain.

charts, and getting permissions. Along the way, he enlisted many sponsors, including his employer, Iberia Airlines, Inmarsat, Toshiba, Olympus, Air BP (British Petroleum), Aviasport, SkyStar Aircraft and Jeppesen, to name a few. Through the Internet, he also made the acquaintance of Don Pearsall, editor of the Kitfox newsletter, who would become a vital ally. Pearsall established a website for the flight which he updated daily, including entries from Michel's journal — entries which quickly become riveting reading.

"The flying was the easy part"

Michel described the 15 days before his departure as "crazy." "My Rotax 912 engine developed a shaking problem, and it became evident we would have to take the engine out of the aircraft. The people at Aviasport, the local Rotax distributor, worked with me until 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning every day. Then we'd be back at 8:00 a.m. Finally, on Saturday, June 20, we got the engine running smoothly, put it back in the airplane, and I made a short 10 minute hop to test it. The next day, June 21, was the meeting of all EAA members in Spain, and they were waiting for me. At 6:00 a.m. I departed for the two-hour flight to that convention. I had been scheduled to leave on my flight on Sunday, but I was too tired and had too many things to complete."

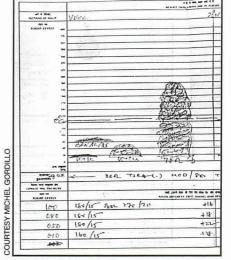
In the midst of those engine problems, Michel was notified the Russians had reversed their position and were 76 OCTOBER 1998 now denying his IFR flight plan. Instead, he would be required to file VFR flight plans, have proof of arrangement for fuel at all his stops and also take a navigator with him.

Russia's new requirements forced Michel to make major changes to his flight path. Originally he planned to fly across eastern Europe, to Moscow and then to Anadyr on the Bering Strait. With the addition of a 132-liter fuel tank (approximately 35 gallons) in the right seat, Michel hoped to fly at least one leg of 1,000 nautical miles. Now, that plan had to be scrapped, and Michel made the decision to approach from China in order to fly the shortest route through Russia. With help from members of the Russian Aero Club, he was able to make arrangements for fuel at the airports at which he would now stop; a navigator/escort would be waiting when he arrived at his first stop in Russia.

Upon lifting off from the Robledillo, Spain airport on June 24, Michel and his Kitfox EC-YOY could begin to enjoy the prize for which he had been striving. He experienced for the first time a sensation that would be duplicated time and time again during his flight. Michel explains, "The flying quickly became the easy part. That is when I could rest and enjoy what I have planned to do."

"... money really does talk"

The first legs of Michel's flight presented no serious problems, despite flights over mountainous terrain and



India's Flight Service actually draws a chart depicting cloud levels, freezing level and cloud conditions. Certainly a keepsake from Michel's trip, but the bad part is he had to wait an hour for the chart to be prepared!

long stretches over water as his route took him from Spain through France, Italy, Greece, on to Cyprus and then his first landing in the Middle East in Beirut, Lebanon. The Kitfox cruised happily at 70 knots, and Michel enjoyed the beautiful sights he anticipated.

In the Middle East, however, Michel's problems multiplied rapidly. The aircraft's performance, and his own, began to suffer as 100-degree heat became a constant companion. He quickly learned the area is "not only environmentally unfriendly, but also politically unfriendly as well, with armed guards at nearly every stop." Michel also learned "money really does talk."

In Beirut, Michel had a decision to make. Crossing over Israel would be the shortest route; however, if he had a problem and had to put down, his flight would be over. "Once Israel stamps my passport, my flight would be canceled as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan will not allow you to enter their airspace if you have landed in Israel. So I did a long trip around, flying across Syria and landing at Amman, Jordan."

A typical day for Michel began early and ended late, with the greatest difficulties being getting through customs, obtaining clearances and weather briefings. The end of each day was similar — landing at his destination, bargaining to refuel his aircraft (someone offering to "help" typically meant the exchange of at least a \$100 bill), and then finally collapsing to write in his journal, communicate with his family and grab a few hours of sleep.

Michel's take off from Amman presented his first real aircraft problem. Despite having adjusted the pitch of the propeller the day before, the airplane wouldn't climb, and he was forced to do an emergency landing. As he returned to the airport, he heard the Amman Tower controller yelling, "Kitfox YOY, what are you doing?" While hanging onto what little altitude he had he replied, "I am returning to the airport; my aircraft is not climbing." Repitching the aircraft improved his climb performance enough to depart the area.

From Amman, Michel flew nearly nine hours over the desert to Riyadh, Saudia Arabia, then on to Dubai on the coast of the Persian Gulf — the only route possible because Iran had refused him permission to fly through their air space or to land in their country.

On July 4, as we here in the United States celebrated our independence and looked forward to the start of EAA AirVenture '98, Michel Gordillo was being held captive, in a monetary sense, in Dubai. He must pay additional "fees" or be denied permission to enter the Dubai airport to reach his aircraft. He describes his frustration in his journal, "I feel free when I am flying. I can take care of everything flight related, but I cannot overcome the political and administrative problems. But it is interesting to realize most of these problems don't exist if you are willing to pay."

Before the day was over, Michel agreed to the additional fees and was granted clearance, but it was too late to reach Karachi, Pakistan before nightfall.

Karachi, too, was a web of fees. After two days of haggling with authorities in both Pakistan and India, Michel finally departed for Ahmadabad, India, with a warning from the Pakistani's . . . "Our fees are nothing compared to what you'll find in Calcutta!" Unfortunately, that warning proved to be true, with the added complication of uncooperative air traffic controllers "who seem to think they rule the world."

Departing India, Michel was cleared by authorities in Myanmar (formerly Burma) to fly directly to Mandalay in the north of that country, but the Indian controller insisted he fly to Yangon (formerly Rangoon) instead — a flight of about 500 miles over water. Michel attempted to resist, but decided the better plan was to agree, and then just fly to Mandalay instead, giving false position reports. "I know my Kitfox is really a stealth aircraft," he joked. That plan failed, however, when weather forced him to Yangon anyway. As he approached the city, the sun had set and it was growing dark quickly.

Landing after dark for the Kitfox with no lights was a new experience. As the Yangon controller called for Kitfox YOY to declare five miles, then two miles, then one mile, Michel responded. As he approached the airport, the runway lights created a glare on his windshield, forcing him to stick his head outside the aircraft to see. With a small flashlight illuminating his airspeed indicator, he set the airplane on the runway. But with no lights, the controller could not see him and frantically called, "YOY, where are you?" Michel replied, "I have landed, but I have a small problem with my lights." Fortunately, Michel says, the controller never asked what his problem was, "or I would have had to say, 'My problem is, I have no lights.""

From Myanmar, Michel hoped to fly across Laos and Vietnam into China. After ignoring five previous permission requests, Laos finally responded that he must request clearance through diplomatic channels, a process that could





Though Michel had plenty of trials throughout the flight, he did enjoy spectacular scenery along the way. These are mountains in the north of East Siberia, between Magadan and Evensk.

take a week. Michel decided he could fly around the country faster; instead he'd fly across Thailand and up the Vietnam coastline, avoiding Laotian and Cambodian airspace, but adding nearly 2,000 miles to his trip — and more adventure than even he anticipated!

"Upon landing, I am surrounded by 15 armed military personnel"

After landing at Ban U Taphao in Thailand, Michel's next destination was Ho Chi Minh City. On July 16, he filed a flight plan into Vietnam and received approval — "and everywhere, approval of flight plan means you have clearance."

But, apparently not to the Vietnamese.

Michel reports all seemed normal on his flight through Vietnamese airspace, with regular position reports acknowledged and accepted. His first indication of trouble came as he turned downwind for Ho Chi Minh airport. "The controller said to me, 'What is your fuel endurance? Can you fly to U Taphao?' I told him 'No, I only have three hours of fuel,' so he cleared me to land. But upon landing and taxiing to the ramp, I am surrounded by police and military personnel who say to me, 'What are you doing here?' I tell them I have landed like my flight plan indicated. They reply, 'No, you have landed here without permission.""

Over the next several hours, Michel was interrogated about his flight, his passport was taken from him and he was escorted to a hotel and told to stay there. Not being one to always follow orders, Michel instead phoned the Spanish Embassy and told them of his fate. They advised him to leave the hotel, get some money and take a taxi to the Embassy. Later he learned the police returned to his hotel for him — for what reason he doesn't know.

Nearly a week of diplomatic negotiations, and intercession by the Federal Aviation Administration, the Airline Pilots Association, news media and others eventually resulted in Michel being granted permission to depart Vietnam. But again just before leaving, Michel was interviewed one more time by three officials whom he describes as "... the good, the bad and the ugly." They again attempted to make him sign a statement admitting he landed without permission. He refused but was allowed to proceed to Da Nang and then onto Nanning, China, "leaving the dust of Vietnam behind."

"I see the whole thing as if from the outside, like a movie, a long movie"

As Michel approached China, he saw some of the most spectacular scenery of his whole trip . . . "coastal



Alexander Markovich, the Russian navigator, agreed to hold the floor fuel tank on his lap, with his luggage on top in order to extend the aircraft's range. Coca-Cola® bottles filled with fuel were also packed behind Alexander's head. This additional fuel extended the aircraft's range to just under eight hours — a far cry from the 16 hours the seat fuel tank provided!



Refueling in flight from the Coke[®] bottles. Alexander pumped fuel from the soda bottles into the tank on his lap, which was connected to the fuel system at the gascolator. The pair landed at Anadyr with just 1.2 gallons remaining.

mountains like shark's teeth sticking out of the water." But weather didn't cooperate during his time flying over China. Of the 30-some hours he spent in flight over that country, only about two hours were VFR conditions where he could enjoy the scenery.

On July 28, as most of us anticipated the opening day of EAA AirVenture '98, Michel fliew to Tianjin, China amid thunderstorms. Reflecting on his flight thus far, he remembers thinking, "What am I really doing so far from home. I see the whole thing from the outside. It is like a movie. A long movie."

Upon arriving in Tianjin, Michel hopped a ride on a "pirate bus" to Beijing to obtain his visa to enter Russia. Without the visa, Michel would not get clearance for his flight plan, and the only way to get the visa was to go to the Russian embassy in Beijing. Failure to meet the flight plan he had filed would mean further delays and the likelihood he wouldn't get to Oshkosh before the end of the Convention. But, there was still hope.

That hope, however, began to fade the next day when Michel was denied permission to make his first landing in Russia at Khabarosvk, ostensibly because of bad weather. Michel doubts that weather was the real problem. Finally on July 31, he was able to continue his flight into Khabarovsk to find TWO navigators waiting for him. Which one to choose? By the way, the cost for the navigator was \$2,366.00!

"With all my sadness, I had to unload and leave the seat fuel tank behind"

Long distance flyers would likely agree their greatest consolation is their extended range fuel tank. Michel Gordillo is no different. The 35-gallon fuel tank sitting in his right seat had become a friend to him, extending his range to nearly 16 hours, giving him the ability to fly long distances without fuel stops. Something that was certainly a plus in the "fee ridden" Middle East, China and Russia.

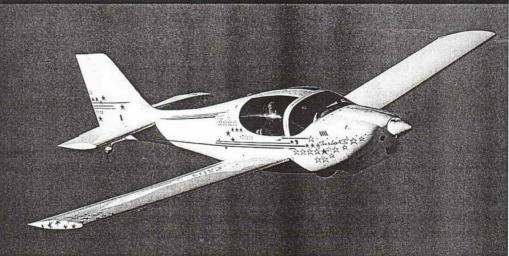
When he arrived in Khabarovsk, however, this friend would have to stay behind to make room for the navigator, Alexander Markovich. Michel mourned its loss. "I tried to attach the seat tank underneath the fuselage, but I really do not like the installation. I think it is not safe, so I will have to leave it here. ...It has been my friend all the trip. Has supported everything, never argued. I will miss it."

Before their trip across Russia was over, however, Alexander and Michel would become friends, too.

The loss of the seat fuel tank reduced the Kitfox's range to just under six hours, but more than one leg of Michel and Alexander's flight across Russia would be over six hours in length. To give them added range, Alexander agreed to hold a small fuel tank in his lap — along with his luggage. Two liter Coca-Cola® bottles filled with fuel were packed behind Alexander's head. As needed, he transferred the fuel from the bottles into the tank during the flight, probably not an FAA-approved refueling measure, but they don't have jurisdiction!

On Monday August 2, as those of us enjoying EAA AirVenture '98 begin to look forward to its end, Michel accepted the fact that he would not make Convention, even by airline. His wife, Marie-laure, two sons, Miguel

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Lest you have any doubts, Michel truly enjoys flying. Here he and Carlos are flying along a river bed between Fairbanks and the Northwest Territory. Along the way they spotted moose and bear.

and Carlos, and his website friend Don Pearsall, whom he had yet to meet in person, were waiting for him in Oshkosh. He closed his journal for the day by writing . . . "Now, first of all, I want to see my family and friends at Oshkosh. I would like to get there with the Kitfox, but I know I have done everything I could, and I also know the game is not over."

The plan now was for Michel to continue his flight to Nome, Alaska, and then catch an airliner to Oshkosh to meet with his family.

"It was instantaneous... moderate to severe icing and heavy engine vibrations with almost total loss of power"

On their last leg across Russia, Michel and Alexander experienced the worst icing of the entire trip as they approached the coastal town of Anadyr, Michel's planned lift off point for Nome, Alaska. Climbing through 9,000 feet to get over a cloud layer and clear the mountains below, the Kitfox refused to climb anymore. As Michel and Alexander turn toward Anadyr, they had no choice but to fly through clouds which were now reaching their level. As they entered the first cloud, the icing was instantaneous.

"Alexander tried to secure himself; it looked like it was the end. I started an immediate descent and began throttling the engine back and forth to get the ice to depart the prop. Then I saw the clear ice forming on the struts and leading edge. Not nice to see."

Fortunately, Michel's throttling did get the ice to depart the prop, which stopped the violent engine shaking, but the ice on the struts and the wings never left the aircraft during the remainder of the flight. After seven and a half hours, the pair landed at Anadyr, having pushed their estimated eighthour fuel range to the limit.

There, the two new friends parted company. Alexander thanked Michel for the opportunity to see his country like he'd never seen it before.

"Dear engine, you can stop now if you want!"

Leaving Anadyr, Michel was again the sole occupant of Kitfox EC YOY. Having experienced cold unlike ever before on his previous flight, Michel put on every piece of clothing he had and headed out over the Bering Strait. But, he never saw that stretch of water as the area was covered by clouds.

Flying at around 9,000 feet, Michel attempted to take a photo of his GPS unit as he crossed the 180-degree meridian. Thirty miles out, he spotted the Alaskan coastline and began to relax. He knew then even if a problem developed, he'd be rescued by Americans — a feeling he didn't have while still in Russian waters. About 12 miles from the coast of Alaska, Michel really relaxed. "I say to my engine, 'dear engine, you can stop now if you want. I can glide across."

His joy was intense. "I remember thinking, I got it. I got what I worked hard for. I feel sadness for not being able to fly my Kitfox to Oshkosh during the meeting. But I am also happy to still keep my Kitfox, and know Vietnam did not stop me. I have fully gotten the goal. Of course, I will fly to Oshkosh, but this time with my son Carlos as navigator. I want to show him the joy and adventure of flying. Also the hard moments and the intense ones. My dreams, my fears, my life!"



Michel, Carlos and the Kitfox IV in front of EAA AirVenture '98 arch, with the Oshkosh Tower in the background — landmarks to prove they really did get here!

Epilogue — "My dream became true"

After visiting with his family for two days, Michel and son Carlos returned to Nome to continue the flight. Their route took them to Nenana, Alaska, Whitehorse, Yukon, Regina, Saskatchewan, Duluth, Minnesota and finally his goal - Oshkosh on Friday, August 14, 1998. Having logged 230plus hours of flight over 16,000 nautical miles in 52 days, Michel reflected on his accomplishment, "I was dreaming since long ago about a flight into Oshkosh with my homebuilt aircraft. That dream was very long and had plenty of wonderful stories, incredible sights, a lot of adventure, many good guys and some not so good. But I was afraid to open my eyes, thinking I'd see my bedroom. But, my eyes were not closed. It was magic. My dream came true!"

What kept him pushing toward his goal, especially after he knew he wouldn't make AirVenture '98 in his airplane? Michel says, "I wanted to teach people if you want something you have to fight for it until you can fight no more."

That, I suppose, is the essence of perseverance.

Editor's Note: Michel left Oshkosh on Saturday, August 15, flying his Kitfox to Palwaukee Airport outside Chicago where it was crated and shipped home to Madrid via cargo airliner ... to enjoy more local adventures.