

Wings of Carolina PIREP

Club Pilots Attend Potomac Approach Operation Rain Check

By Paul Keller

After a two week delay due to what became, in some parts of the northeast, the biggest snow storm in recorded weather history, three club pilots, Paul Keller, Daniel Roman and Mike Fox, flew the club's N614SP, a Cessna 172SP, up to Northern Virginia to attend Potomac Approach's Operation Rain Check on February 25.

Although Potomac Approach's terminal radar control (TRACON) facility has a Warrenton, Virginia street address, it's physically located in a very new research/residential park several miles east of central Warrenton, in the middle of what is still mostly horse farming country between Warrenton and Manassas, Virginia. It is not on or near the grounds of any airport, and the two preferred airports to fly into for the event were either Manassas (HEF), which is within the Washington, DC ADIZ, or Warrenton (W66), which is outside the ADIZ.

Because of a balky transponder, coupled with the DC ADIZ requirements, just the flight up to this event proved to be a bit of an adventure. The plan had been to fly into HEF on an IFR flight plan. For the instrument-rated, we filed for, and got, V3.FAK.COATT4.HEF. This appears to be the required route for traffic from our area into DC-area airports for which the COATT4 arrival is applicable. Because HEF is a towered field, flying IFR into HEF meets all of the DC ADIZ requirements, provided the IFR flight plan is activated outside of the ADIZ. This makes the DC ADIZ essentially irrelevant. Unfortunately, because of the balky transponder, it didn't quite work out that way.

After about an hour in the air, the transponder return became intermittent, and, because a working transponder is required for entrance into the DC ADIZ, we were denied entry into the ADIZ, and instead chose to divert to Warrenton. It was fortunate with that occurrence that we were flying on an IFR flight plan that had been activated with RDU approach soon after takeoff from TTA. It provided plenty of time to identify the problem with the transponder, try to work out a solution, and, ultimately, provided plenty of warning of the need to divert to a field outside the ADIZ.

Because we landed at W66 instead of our intended HEF, we had to make new ground transportation arrangements. We called HEF to cancel the car we had reserved there and then had to arrange new transportation. The FBO's courtesy car was already booked, so we needed to rent a car. Enterprise may say they pick you up, but they

can't do that on short notice. After the FBO employees helpfully called around we located an Enterprise rental car in nearby Culpeper, VA, about a 20 minute drive away. An FBO employee kindly drove us to the rental office in his personal car, where we picked our Dodge Neon for an \$80 rental for the day with all taxes and fees included, including an extra \$25 charge to drop it off at W66 instead of at the office.

It was a good thing we arrived a few hours early to avoid forecasted high winds and didn't try to time our flight for a tight schedule once we got 1285 to HEF, our planned destination!

After the delays due to the diversion to W66, we ultimately did arrive at Potomac Approach's TRACON in time for the session we were scheduled for. Potomac Approach follows the recent trend of major metropolitan area FAA air traffic facilities, which is to consolidate the metropolitan area radar approach control facilities into fewer, larger facilities. Potomac approach was formed by the merger of the Baltimore, Washington-Dulles, Washington-National and Richmond approach controls. These former approach control airspaces are now the Chesapeake, Shenandoah, Mt. Vernon and James River sectors, respectively, of the new Potomac Approach. As discussed by the air traffic controllers during the presentations prior to the tours of the TRACON radar room, this consolidation improves coordination between controllers in the complex airspace of the DC area. It also enabled Potomac Approach to efficiently take over higher altitude airspace that the local overlying air route traffic control center, Washington Center in their case, no longer wished to control. Some of Potomac Approach's airspace extends to as high as FL230 (23,000 feet) - unusually high for an approach control. In contrast, the primary author (Keller) believes that RDU approach only controls the airspace up to 12,000 feet.

Another factor, not mentioned by the controllers, is that the facility consolidation also reduces the FAA's costs. According to the controller, Potomac Approach ranks as the

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Wings of Carolina Flying Club

Sanford Lee County Regional Airport

702 Rod Sullivan Road
Sanford, NC 27330
919-776-2003

<http://www.wingsofcarolina.org>

Club Manager	Jim Bauer	593-8032	776-2003
	jimmydbauer@aol.com		
Director of Maint.	John Hunter	818-7203	776-2003
	airplanehunter@hotmail.com		
Chief Flight Instr.	George Scheer	967-1088	656-5960
	uncqfs@email.unc.edu		
Chief Safety Officer	Dick Kenney	604-6048	545-3040
	rkenney1@nc.rr.com		

Board of Directors

President	Paul Wilder	672-5458	363-4766
	paul.wilder@tls-us.com		
Vice President	Bill Sawyer	669-0655	998-7419
	wsawyer2@nc.rr.com		
Secretary	Barbara Eldredge	403-6183	286-1244
	bde@att.net		
Treasurer	Graham Moore	708-6927	
	gmoore@crownauto.com		
Member-at-Large	Paul Keller	468-9650	515-5952
	keller@unity.ncsu.edu		
Member-at Large	Keith Silva	967-4423	543-8497
	ksilva@us.ibm.com		
Member-at-Large	Jim Carlson	815-2250	
	carlson.jim@verizon.net		

Key Volunteers

Maintenance	Paul Keller	468-9650	515-5952
	keller@unity.ncsu.edu		
IT - Hardware	Eric Wagner	345-4940	
	ewagner@nc.rr.com		
IT - Software	Steve Bockish	847-7691	522-1295
	sbockish@yahoo.com		
Pilot Records	Kay Maltbie	370-9221	523-6544
	kays.key1@verizon.net		
2 nd Sat. Coordinator	Bill Sawyer	669-0655	998-7419
	wsawyer2@nc.rr.com		
Newsletter Editor	Andy Liepins	816-8535	668-2356
	av8npa@earthlink.net		
Asst Treasurer	Dave Derry	319-6998	649-7834
	ncderry@nc.rr.com		
Webmaster	Brian Dale	462-8173	606-0262
	tbdale@gmail.com		
Pilot Supplies	Mark Leydecker	387-1548	260-7015
	tleydecker@nc.rr.com		
Marketing Dir.	Position open		

A word on SOPs

By Barbara Eldredge

There are a lot of trade-offs in life, where on the one hand something that is good for us as individuals may be bad for the collective, or vice versa. Aircraft availability is one of those tradeoffs.

From the Club's perspective we need to have aircraft flying as much as possible. When we come down to the Club on a beautiful day we want the ramp to be empty. There are a lot of fixed costs, such as insurance and loan payments that accrue whether the aircraft flies one hour a month or seventy hours a month. When the aircraft don't fly, we lose money.

But as individuals, it is frustrating when we can't get a airplane when we want it. It would be great to be able to look out the window, say "it's a beautiful day" and be able to go flying. This is 1302 clearly not as easy when the airplanes are booked up well in advance.

Scheduling can be even more frustrating when one aircraft is down for an extended period for maintenance and repairs. Such time periods require patience and consideration from everyone. Club SOPs exist to try to make scheduling fair. Here is a reminder of relevant SOPs that can help with the scheduling process.

SOP 5. b. *A Member may not schedule more than one weekend a month. (A weekend is defined as any consecutive eight-hour period from Friday at 1600 until Sunday at 1800.)*

This means that scheduling airplane for all day Saturday or all day Sunday is considered scheduling it for the weekend. Scheduling it for 7.5 hours does not count as scheduling it for a weekend, but repeatedly doing that is not going to win anyone the Considerate Member of the Year Award! Note that SOP 5c) says you can schedule an additional weekend if the aircraft has not been booked by the noon on the previous Sunday.

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Upcoming Regional Airshows

May 6&7	Langley AFB AirPower Over Hampton Roads
May 6&7	Florence, SC May Fly Air Show
May 10	Pope AFB-Ft. Bragg Open House
May 13&14	MCAS New River Airshow
May 20&21	Andrews AFB DoD Joint Services Open House

Wings of Carolina NOTAMS and Notes

- Okay! Now that's more like it! Craig Thomas and John Hawkins found their member numbers and got \$10 off their dues. Remember to look for yours in this month's edition of Flying News. Email av8npa@earthlink.net by May 15 to claim \$10 off your next club dues.

Lightly Loaded

What about Me... Now?

by Carl Dowdy

If you are a student pilot today, count yourself as a blessed individual. Truly. There will never be another period in your lifetime as a pilot when you will be as loved.

I still remember it like it was yesterday. To begin with, you have an instructor whose sole purpose is to mold you into what it is you want to become: a pilot. Their calm approach to your anxious moments, their simple presence in the cockpit creates a buffer of protection from the outside world and from yourself.

Indeed, the entire aviation community seems to be available and willing to serve your needs. The FAA has online resources. AOPA and the Air Safety Foundation have endless online material. Just by signing up, you can have access to aviation weather and flight planning services such as ADDS and DTC. Imagine my surprise when AOPA's Flight Training magazine offered me six free issues. Free, just for me! Every mail order business suddenly wanted to make sure I knew that they were there to help and had anything I needed in order to guarantee my success.

It seems everything was geared towards me, the budding pilot. Sporty's had DVDs that would guide me effortlessly toward complete mastery of written exam questions, practical test standards, and beyond. Their catalogs continue to arrive with such frequency and regularity that I've come to believe that flight-hours-per-year is far too coarse a measurement for me. I now measure my flying by flight-hours-per-catalog, which is a much smaller and easier number to keep up with.

And then there are all the new toys! The first item to be considered was a headset. Short of passing my checkride, the highlight of my training was picking a headset. Soloing is not when you really become a pilot. It's when you put on your first headset. I waited a long time for that mint green rascal. But the choices! Endless options for headsets, plotters, E6Bs, both manual and electronic, kneeboards, lap

desks, logbooks, and flight bags. Every pilot supply house had all the variations I could possibly imagine, all tailored to what I, the person they most wanted to serve, might need. I counted four different flight planning forms just in what I accidentally managed to collect.

And training material! Kershner, Gleim, ASA, Sporty's, and King. An almost overwhelming array of manuals, study guides, and video series! It's nearly impossible not to become a 1360 little cocky with everyone wanting your attention.

But then something a little bit sad happened. I became a pilot.

I don't know exactly how I fell out of favor with all the friends that I had made while I was a student. Sure, I still get the catalogs and the magazines. But, it's just not the same these days. All the fun stuff isn't geared toward me anymore. It's for the fortunate few, the students. Now I find myself wandering through the catalog equivalent of the deodorant section of Wal-Mart, the "Pilot Supplies." Stuff like fuel strainers, airsick bags, and pitot covers. Where's the fun in that, I ask you? Oh, how I wish I could go back. I had friends and they cared.

As a student pilot, you now have the attention of the entire aviation world. All eyes are on you and all focus is on your success. Enjoy it. Because someday you'll pass your written exam using the Gleim Private Pilot Study Guide. You will practice your maneuvers to the practical test standards as explained in Kershner's Student Pilot's Flight Manual. You'll memorize Part 61 and Part 91 in ASA's version of this year's Federal Aviation Regulations and Aeronautical Information Manual. And, you'll leave the warm embrace reserved only for the beloved, the student. Then, along with the excitement and pride that comes from hearing the examiner say "Congratulations", you'll experience the depression that follows as you are weaned from the loving arms of your instructor and the attention of your "friends". And I'm sorry for us all.

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To give better access to the 172s so that more people can fly them on the weekend, the Board has restricted 614SP to three hour blocks of time on Saturday and Sunday.

SOP 6. Scheduling Abuses: *Members are requested not to speculate on aircraft usage and should not schedule unless each period is fully intended to be flown.* Unfortunately, the tighter the schedule gets, the more tempting it is to schedule "in case I need it," which contributes to making the schedule even tighter. Please resist the temptation to "hoard" the limited resource.

SOP 8. No-Shows: *When a Member is late taking a scheduled aircraft, and has not informed anyone of the delay, the following guidelines apply. If the aircraft is scheduled for three hours or less, and that Member is more than 30*

minutes late, it will be assumed that she/he is not going to use the scheduled time, and another Member may schedule and use the aircraft. If the scheduled time is more than three hours, after a 30 minute lateness, the aircraft may be operated in the local area... for one additional hour, at which time it will be assumed that the original scheduling Member's reservation is not going to be used.

This SOP means you can't just schedule an airplane for a day, and expect it to still be there if you show up late. If you are not there and haven't communicated your status, someone else can take the aircraft and remove you from the schedule. Remember, if an airplane sits on the ground when it could be flying, the Club loses out.

If you think someone is abusing the schedule, contact them. If you don't get a satisfactory resolution, contact a Board member.

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third busiest approach control in the US in terms of annual number of flights handled, behind only New York and Southern California Approach.

Potomac Approach was activated in 2003, and has an impressive, modern facility. The radar room itself is round, 200 feet in diameter, with the outer wall lined with controller radar displays. Currently, 43 radar display stations are installed. There is room for up to 58 radar displays. Supervisory stations are placed in two concentric rings inside. In contrast, RDU Approach's radar room, up until a recent remodeling, was probably smaller than the club's multi-purpose room, and had perhaps just a half-dozen radar displays.

The pictures the author has seen of the Potomac Approach radar room, with the room well-lit and empty of people, are not representative of the appearance of the radar room in operation. Those pictures of an empty, well-lit radar room were most likely taken late in the construction phase of the facility, or during initial startup testing. The operational facility we saw was dark as a cave, and full of people talking. When we were there, on a Saturday afternoon, perhaps one-third of the radar consoles were manned.

The radar displays themselves are modern, and look like large computer monitor displays. No radar sweeps are visible on these screens, since the modern radar displays presumably display a radar picture which is a composite of the radar pictures generated from several radar systems. Potomac Approach can obtain its radar information from five short range and two long range radars.

For electrical power, Potomac Approach has redundant incoming power circuits from the local power grid, and twice the backup power generation capacity in comparison to what might be required at any given time. The entire building is on an uninterruptable power supply.

A part of the presentations made in the conference room, outside of the TRACON tour itself, included a seminar on Washington, DC ADIZ procedures. This presentation

concentrated on local VFR ADIZ operations. A brochure, describing DC ADIZ operations, some ADIZ terminology, and conveniently providing relevant clearance delivery telephone numbers, was provided. A copy of this brochure has been posted on the club's flight briefing area bulletin board. A notable point made by one of the Potomac Approach controllers talking on this subject was that if inbound into the DC ADIZ, it's best to not wait until the last minute to call ATC to meet the entry requirements. Many of the ADIZ busts occur when pilots wait until the last minute to call in. It's much better to do as we did - contact ATC well outside the ADIZ. Although the controllers do not care for the ADIZ anymore than the GA pilot audience at this event, those attending this event were reminded by the controllers that the DC-area radar picture is now being watched by a large number of people outside of ATC, and those include military air defense types. Many of those get quite nervous when they see unidentified air traffic approaching the ADIZ.

In the end, although we found the tour of the TRACON radar room itself to be disappointing, mainly owing to the lack of technical knowledge of our particular tour guide, this was overall a worthwhile trip. For those who missed this trip, there was some discussion of holding another tour for those not able to attend the February tour. It's probably possible to sign up for e-mail alerts on faasafety.gov, with the notification criteria enlarged to events within a 300 nautical mile radius, to get an e-mail notification from the FAA of another such event at Potomac TRACON for those who'd be interested in seeing Potomac Approach's facility.

Written with contributions from Mike Fox and Daniel Roman

New Members, Ratings and Solos will return next month!

Member Meetings

Membership meetings (Pizza Nights) are held on the 2nd Wednesday of every "even" month. Meetings begin at 6:30 PM and include free pizza, a business meeting, and a program of interest to pilots. The next meeting date is 6/14. In addition to club members, these meetings are open to local and prospective pilots who may have interest in the club – the more the merrier!

Board meetings routinely occur on the second Tuesday of each month from 6:30-9 PM. Board meetings are held in the Wings of Carolina Flight Center. All members are welcome and are encouraged to attend. Occasionally there will be a change in meeting date. Please keep an eye on your e-mail for any additional meetings

Second Saturday Cookouts occur at the hangar on the second Saturday of each month, 11:30 am-2:00 pm. Members and guests can buy lunch for \$5 for adults (>12) and \$3.00 for children (6 - 11).

If you know someone who may be interested in joining the club, please bring them along with you! It's a great opportunity for them to meet some of the members & learn more about the club.

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Editor: Andy Liepins

Contributions to the newsletter are always welcome & should be e-mailed to the editor at av8npa@earthlink.net