# BRAZIL: THE THIRD TIME

***THE AUTHOR UNDERTAKES HIS THIRD L-39 FLIGHT TO SOUTH AMERICA***

**BY RICHARD "MONGOOSE" HESS**

## INTRODUCTION

Those of you who've read my previous articles know I've moved a dozen military Jet Warbirds to Europe, Africa, and South America over the last seven-years. Prior to writing this article, I delivered the third Aerovodo-chody L-39 *Albatros* to a client in southern Brazil. This article will detail the ten-day adventure in June 2017 of flying 14 legs and 5000 nautical miles.

The customer bought the aircraft in 2016 through JBL Aviation in Ft. Lauderdale. This is the second aircraft Jose Barth Freitas of JBL has helped me sell and export. Barth also runs his own busy maintenance operation in Sorocaba SDCO, just north of Sao Paulo. We would pass through Barth's facility near the end of the mission.

I have to give much credit to Barth's assistant Grazy. She worked tirelessly to process the Department of State export permission and put together the incredibly complex series of required documents from the FAA and Brazil's aviation authority, ANAC.

I also want to thank all the employees at Code One's KGAD location for helping me get the aircraft ready for the ferry. Kathy handled paperwork while Richard, Steve, and Tim worked on the aircraft issues to include a RAT generator that tried to put 40 DC volts into a 28 DC volt system! That alone blew both landing lights and caused numerous issues with the avionics. After three test flights a decision was made to simply replace the RAT and that did the trick.

## DAY ONE

The first day was relatively easy as I flew N39GF solo from Gadsden, Alabama, to Ft. Lauderdale Executive Airport (KFXE). It was a two-hour flight and I only had to do minor deviations for thunderstorms. I trained a Brazilian instructor pilot in the L-39 2.5-years before. Wagner Sobrinho flew to Miami and met me that first day so we could complete our preparations, get the GPS data card updated for South America, and gather all our survival equipment and aeronautical charts.

Mostly we carried iPads and a Surface 3 with Foreflight or Jeppesen Flight Deck Pro as our electronic flight kits. We finished up late in the afternoon and retired early for the night as the next couple of days were planned to be long and busy.

## DAY TWO

Wagner and I met early in the hotel, then drove to Banyan Aviation. We planned for a 0800 departure and had already fueled and serviced the aircraft the afternoon before. All we had to do was preflight the aircraft, get our clearance and takeoff. Colt/World Fuel handled all the fuel, flight plan, and permissions from the US until we entered Brazil three-days later and would send a detailed package early each morning for my review. Once we entered Brazil, we would handle our own planning and filing.

We flew four legs that first day out of the US. Most of the legs averaged between 300- to 400-nm for about 1.5-hrs on each sortie. We flew an easy leg to Exuma (MYEF) in the Bahamas where we quickly refueled and departed again for Providenciales (MBPV) in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

We departed Exuma VFR and picked up our IFR clearance from Miami Center. It was another quick run to Providenciales with beautiful clear skies and a stunning view of turquoise waters surrounding hundreds of small islands. Each of these legs was accomplished without any issue but I had to fly an RNAV approach on all four legs. With only a Garmin 250 XL, a VOR/ILS, and no autopilot, even an approach under visual conditions could be challenging.

Again, we quickly fueled in MBPV and took off for Punta Cana (MDPC) in the Dominican Republic. Some of this day's flying was in a non-radar environment but even when we were "radar contact" the controllers would make you fly a long, involved RNAV track to the final approach. I also was amused again by the FBO at MDPC that has a thatched roof. Just seems so tropical!

Punta Cana is a very busy airport with airliners from all over Europe and the Americas — bringing tourists to vacation on its beautiful beaches. We were efficient in refueling, clearing customs, and filing our last flight plan for the day to Princess Juliana International Airport in St. Martin (TNCM).

San Juan routed us across the south of Puerto Rico but we still had to deviate around a huge thunderstorm covering the western end of the island. However, soon enough we were past the weather and coasted back out over the Caribbean for the final track to St. Martin. We actually arrived around 4 pm and were able to refuel, put the aircraft to bed, and clear customs with much of the afternoon and evening still in front of us.

We stayed at the same hotel as Barth as I used during our last trip. However, we were in for a pleasant surprise as the hotel upgraded us to their "all inclusive" section for the night. Nice rooms, a view of the ocean, and a huge buffet dinner awaited us. This was definitely the way to enjoy the islands!

That night, Grazy and Barth informed us that Brazil would be celebrating a national religious holiday in two-days and there would be a delay clearing customs and getting our clearance to proceed from ANAC. Wagner and I considered all our options and decided to continue to Grantly Adams International Airport in Barbados (TBPB) the next day so we wouldn't have to fly four legs the following day of the holiday.

## DAY THREE

Since we only had to fly one leg this day, we didn't rush to get out of St. Martin. We had a leisurely breakfast and then went to the airport for a 10:00 am departure. We had been tempted to stay an extra day in this wonderful resort but didn't want to make the next day so long and tiring.

Our route took us south past many of the Windward Islands. It was a beautiful view until about halfway to Barbados. This was the hurricane season and a large tropical weather system had stalled just north of Venezuela. Barbados had relatively low ceilings and rain. To add to the workload, the ILS was NOTAMed as unusable as a flight check aircraft was calibrating the system. So, once again I programmed the points for the RNAV approach but was able to use the ILS for guidance on final approach.

After we landed, I wanted to refuel the aircraft. However, the refueling company said because we did "over-the-wing" fueling, we would have to wait until it stopped raining so as to avoid water contamination. I considered this restriction silly as all jet fuel has some water in it and our refueling would not have added even a few ounces of water. Regardless, Wagner and I sat in the FBO pilot lounge for a couple of hours before giving up and heading to the hotel.

As we sat there waiting for the rain to stop, I couldn't help reminiscing about my first time in Barbados in 1983. My wife and I spent a week there at a hotel named Sam Lord's Castle as the island was a haven for a pirates back in the day. We also did a side trip to the Spice Island of Grenada. I then went back as part of the American military invasion force that fall.

It was a bit of a drive to the hotel but the town was quaint and the hotel was quiet. We arranged to get some laundry done, had a nice lunch in the hotel, and found a nearby sports bar that night to have dinner. We went to bed hoping the rain would stop so we could refuel in the morning.

## DAY FOUR

The morning dawned clear and bright. We wanted to get an early start but halfway to the airport Wagner realized he had left something at the hotel so I stayed at the airport to refuel and preflight the aircraft while he went back to the hotel. It all worked out perfectly as we were ready

**The Aerovodochody L-39 *Albatros* has become the world's most popular Jet Warbird with several hundred civil examples operating around the world. The aircraft was photographed being refueled at *Gurupi'*.**