

# **International Flights to Mexico**

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The purpose of this ground school is to instruct the membership of Shoreline Flying Club by developing their ability to conduct international flights. Specifically, we want to teach the skills and impart the knowledge necessary to safely and confidently complete a round trip flight from Palo Alto, California to Mulegé and Laguna San Ignacio, Baja California Sur, Mexico.

## **Leaving the U.S.A.**

When flying, on an international flight, from the United States to Mexico you may exit the United States from any American airport but you may only enter Mexico through a Mexican International Airport of Entry (M-AOE).

Before you depart the United States, you should file two DVFR (Defense Visual Flight Rules) flight plans with a United States Flight Service Station (US-FSS). The first flight plan should be from your United States Point of Departure (US-POD) to your M-AOE. The second flight plan should be from your Mexican International Airport of Exit (M-AOX) to your United States International Airport of Entry (US-AOE). We will discuss the need for this second flight plan when we talk about the return flight to the U.S.A. These DVFR flight plans are required by F.A.R. 99. 9 (b) (1) whenever crossing a United States of America, Air Defense Identification Zone (A.D.I.Z.) and leaving or entering American airspace.

The first flight plan should be opened with a US-FSS, as you would any other flight plan. However, this flight plan is different, in that it is never closed. It is similar to the actors in the movie "Star Gate", when they go through the star gate transporter, they just disappear. Similarly, when you cross the border your flight plan just disappears.

As you approach the border you should advise ATC or an US-FSS of the time (plus or minus five minutes) and the place (plus or minus five nautical miles) you will be crossing the A.D.I.Z. and leaving United States airspace. When receiving flight following from ATC this is easy, just tell the controller.

## **Entering Mexico**

There are two ways to enter Mexico. The most desirable would be to use a

Border M-AOE. The other would be to enter Mexico through a M-AOE located in the interior of Mexico. There are two advantages of the border entry over the interior entry. First, if you were to encounter any problems, such as any passenger or aircraft documentation irregularities, it is only a nine minute flight back to the United States. Second, the border is conveniently located approximately halfway between Palo Alto and Mulegé, thus minimizing fuel stops. Additionally, there are two disadvantages of using the interior entry. First, if you were forced to land after crossing the border and before arriving at your M-AOE, you would have entered Mexico illegally. Second, if you were to have any problems once you arrived at your interior M-AOE the required return flight to the United States would be much more costly and time consuming.

Some aircraft do not have the range to fly from KPAO (Palo Alto) to MMLL (Mexicali), a 445 nautical mile flight. For these aircraft, a good argument can be made for the interior entry. However, if you were to choose the interior entry, you would want to make absolutely sure everything is in order before you leave. The route used would be: KPAO (Palo Alto) to KWJF (Lancaster) 250 Nautical miles, breakfast is available early, then KWJF (Lancaster) to MMSF (San Felipe) 268 nautical miles, to enter Mexico and finally MMSF (San Felipe) to MMMG (Mulegé, GGL) 289 nautical miles, to pet some whales.

As soon as you cross the border and enter Mexican airspace you should call the tower of your M-AOE, assuming you have chosen a M-AOE located on the border. If your M-AOE is inland, you should call that tower, indicating you wish permission to land, at least 10 nautical miles out and 20 nautical miles is recommended. The tower will automatically notify aduana y migracion (Customs and Immigrations) for you but you are still responsible to make the request. Therefore, upon your arrival, you should advise the tower you will need Customs and Immigrations.

It is interesting to note that, unlike the United States, you do not need permission to enter or fly in Mexican airspace until after you arrive at your M-AOE. In the United States because of the American A.D.I.Z all aircraft crossing the A.D.I.Z. and entering United States airspace are required to file a DVFR flight plan and give advance notice of both time (plus or minus five minutes) and place (plus or minus five nautical miles) where they will be crossing the A.D.I.Z and entering American air space.

After landing at your M-AOE, the tower or ground will direct you to the proper parking for international flights. Usually, the Mexican authorities are more informal than their American counter parts. However, there are still five things you will need to do before continuing your trip. They are: (1) fuel the aircraft (2) file a Mexican flight plan and immediately close it, then file a second Mexican flight plan (I will explain this second Mexican flight plan shortly) (3) apply for your Single Entry Authorization (General Declaration, form GCH-40) or your Multiple

Entry Authorization (form DGAC-171) (4) get your visas (form FM1) from Imigracion (Immigration) to legally enter you and your passengers into Mexico and (5) go through aduana (Customs) to legally enter your possessions and your passengers' possessions into Mexico.

### #1 Aircraft Fueling in Mexico

It frequently takes awhile from the time you order the fuel to the time the fuel is actually delivered (it's Mexico). For this reason, you want to request the fuel as soon as you land. It is a good idea to assign someone other than the pilot-in-command the task of ordering the fuel and monitoring its delivery. This is not accomplished over the radio. After parking the aircraft, the second-in-command needs to physically track down the person in charge of fueling and request, in person that the aircraft is fueled (Novembre 9027 Hotel, lleno con cien, por favor). The PIC can start the flight plan filing process while the SIC takes care of the fueling process, thus minimizing the time on the ground.

In Mexico, you will always pay cash for fuel, i.e. you can not use a credit card to pay for aviation fuel. If you want a receipt, and you do want a receipt, be sure to ask for it before they start pumping the fuel. The American dollar is accepted; however exact change is rarely, if ever, available. It is a good idea to carry a good supply of small bills so you are able to pay close to the exact amount. The difference can be considered una propina (a tip). All charges, fees and taxes are calculated in pesos, totaled and then converted to dollars. Remember, the exchange rate always favors the one doing the conversion. It is a good idea to have a small calculator handy so you can keep the process under control.

Aviation oil is not available in Mexico or at least not easily found. Any oil you may need must be brought with you. Always bring extra oil, you will never be sorry.

### #2 Flight Plans in Mexico

Every towered airport in Mexico has an "El Comandante". He's the guy who runs the airport. Flight plans are filed with him and require his approval before you can get airborne. In Mexico, whenever you fly into or out of a towered airport you must file a flight plan. No flight plan is required when flying from a non-towered airport to another non-towered airport. When you fly from a towered airport to a non-towered airport, you will be required to file a flight plan at the towered airport. They will close your flight plan at whatever time you indicate on the flight plan form. They will have no idea if you arrived at your destination or not, they will still close your flight plan. Once you arrive at the non-towered airport you are then free to fly to any other non-towered airport without a flight plan.

When it's time to return to a towered airport, a flight plan will again be required,

but now with a new twist. Since there will be no one at the non-towered airport, with whom you could file the required flight plan, you will fly to the towered airport

without a flight plan. When you have completed your flight and arrive at the towered airport, you will have to file that required flight plan with “El Comandante” for the flight that just took place. That’s right; you file a flight plan after the flight is completed. Then, guess what, since you filed a flight plan for a flight that has already been completed, of course, you will then be required to immediately close it.

Now that you’re back at a towered airport again, you must file a second flight plan for your next leg. So, whenever you fly from a non-towered airport to a towered airport you will, upon arrival, file a flight plan, immediately close it and then file a second flight plan to take you to your next destination. This is the second Mexican flight plan that I earlier promised to explain shortly.

### #3 Single Entry versus Multiple Entry Authorization

To legally fly any aircraft in Mexican airspace you must be given permission by the Mexican government. For General Aviation aircraft this permission comes in two forms, Single and Multiple Entry Authorizations.

The Single Entry Authorization (form GCH-40) is also known as the General Declaration. It will list the aircraft, the pilot in command and all the passengers. As its name suggests, it is good for one entry into and one exit out of Mexico. It costs \$567 pesos or roughly \$53US. The application for this authorization requires the permanent aircraft registration (a copy of the original registration or a temporary pink registration is not acceptable), the airworthiness certificate, proof of acceptable aircraft insurance, notarized permission from the owner or owners to fly the aircraft in Mexico, the aircraft radio station license, the PIC’s pilot and medical certificates and the PIC’s restricted radiotelephone operator permit.

The Multiple Entry Authorization (form DGAC-171) is good for unlimited entries into and exits out of Mexico. It is valid until the end of the year in which it was issued. If it was issued in February of 2008 it will expire at the end of December, 2008. This authorization is for the aircraft only, not the pilot. This means, with a Multiple Entry Authorization, if another pilot later takes the same aircraft into Mexico in the same year, they will not have to purchase another entry authorization.

The Multiple Entry Authorization requires all the documentation for the Single Entry Authorization plus two additional requirements. First, you must have an annual insurance policy on the aircraft that does not expire for a minimum of 90

days after the date of the Multiple Entry Authorization application. Second, you must have two copies of the permanent aircraft registration, airworthiness certificate, the aircraft radio station license, the PIC's pilot and medical

certificates and the PIC's restricted radiotelephone operator permit.

The cost of the Single and Multiple Entry Authorizations is the same. Since the only additional requirements are for the annual insurance policy and copies of already required documents, you should always apply for the Multiple Entry Authorization. Just be sure to bring all the copies of the required documents. Copy machines are hard to find on the Mexican side of the border.

There is one other advantage of the Multiple Entry Authorization over the Single Entry. With the Single Entry Authorization the PIC and all their passengers are listed by name. Whomever you enter the country with, you be exiting with. The Multiple Entry Authorization however, because it is good for an unlimited number of entries, does not list either the PIC or any of the passengers. If you wanted to fly down to Mexico and drop off a passenger or trade passengers with another aircraft you could only accomplish that with a Multiple Entry Authorization.

If, at anytime, a Mexican Official helps you by filling out any form or application for you, be very sure to read everything and make sure all the information is recorded correctly. You don't want some other Mexican Official in some other inspection in the interior of Mexico to discover an error in any of your paperwork.

#### #4 Mexican Immigrations (Imigracion)

Each person entering Mexico must obtain a Tourist Visa to legally enter the country. You and all your passengers will be required to go to the Immigration Office and fill out a Tourist Visa Application (form FM1). With the completed application, your valid passport and a nice crisp American twenty dollar bill, they will validate your Tourist Visa Application, give you a copy, stamp your passport and send you on your way. Welcome to Mexico.

(This is repeated intentionally.) If, at anytime, a Mexican Official helps you by filling out any form or application for you, be very sure to read everything to make sure all the information is recorded correctly. You don't want some other Mexican Official in some other inspection in the interior of Mexico to discover an error in any of your paperwork.

#### #5 Mexican Customs (Aduana)

When entering the Terminal or the Customs Area you may see a device that looks a lot like a traffic light. It will have a red and green light with a button.

When the button is pressed either the red light or the green light will illuminate. If the red light illuminates you must stop, your luggage will be inspected. If the green light illuminates you may go, your luggage will not be inspected.

Sometimes the Pilot will be asked to press the button for everyone in the aircraft or each person may be asked to press the button for themselves. Other times, the light device will be off to the side and not used at all. In my recent experiences going into Baja, I have not been required to use the light device at all. As in the United States, thanks to 9-11, everyone is subject to their person or luggage being searched whenever requested by any Customs or Immigrations Official, regardless of the light device.

### **Flying in Mexico**

Flying in Mexico, for the most part, is the same as flying in the United States. There are, however, a few notable differences. Under VFR rules there is no night flight permitted. VFR is defined as 3 miles visibility and a minimum of a 1500 foot ceiling. In Mexico, twelve inch registration (N) numbers are required on all private aircraft. A mode C transponder is required at all times. Transporting firearms or ammunition without a permit is strictly forbidden.

With the exception of four radar centers around large populated areas, there is no VFR flight following in Mexico. It is, therefore, prudent for pilots to fly in groups whenever possible and keep track of themselves for their own safety. There is safety in numbers. This is particularly true when flying anywhere in Baja California, Mexico. Most parts of Baja are extremely desolate and it can quickly become dangerous if you are not properly trained and prepared.

The greatest danger does not lie in surviving a forced landing, as there are hundreds of miles of hard sandy beach the entire length of Baja. The greatest danger is surviving after a safely executed forced landing. After a perfectly executed forced landing, if no one knows you were forced to land, no one can come and get you. Lacking a large quantity of fresh water, you won't last very long.

Because Baja has so many desolate areas, over which we will be flying, it is very important that we all participate in the "Buddy System".

### **The "Buddy System"**

The Buddy System is a very simple common sense program whereby all the participating aircraft provide flight following for each other. Following are a few simple rules which, if implemented, will make flight in these desolate areas much safer.

Each pilot should pick another pilot as their Buddy. The job of a Buddy Pilot is to watch out for and keep track of their Buddy. This makes it less likely for someone to fall between the cracks. When choosing a Buddy Pilot it is best to select the pilot of an aircraft that has similar performance characteristics as your aircraft. This will help keep the paired aircraft reasonably close to each other in flight.

The fingers frequency (123.45 MHz), so called because you can easily remember it by holding up your hand and counting your fingers, must be monitored at all times while flying in Mexican airspace. This frequency is not to be used in the United States. The air to air frequencies in the United States are 122.75 MHz and 122.85 MHz.

After crossing the border and entering Mexico, listen on the fingers frequency while climbing out until you arrive at your cruising altitude. This will give you enough time to develop a feeling for who is on and what is going on the frequency. Once you are level at your cruising altitude, call in, identify yourself and give your present position. When two aircraft are at altitude their maximum range of communication can be surprisingly great, i.e. two aircraft cruising at 9,500 feet can communicate with each other over a distance greater than 265 miles.

With eight aircraft monitoring the fingers frequency and periodically reporting in, all will reap the benefits. If one aircraft were to have a problem, they could report in with their position (using GPS derived coordinates) and what they were planning to do. If they were forced to land, the closest aircraft could fly to that location and would relay their needs to the other aircraft. This will greatly decrease the time required for rescue and even make it possible to accomplish the same day. (This would be a convenient time to have a portable handheld transceiver.)

It is an excellent idea for each aircraft crew to practice emergency procedures. One pilot would be in charge of flying the aircraft while the other determines their position, reports it and confirms that their position has been received by requesting a read back. In more than thirty years of flying in Mexico I have never had to use these procedures for real but it always gives me a great sense of security knowing they are available.

One or two other notes with regard to safety, because Baja is so desolate if you were to have an emergency requiring an off airport landing the higher you are the safer you are. Altitude will give you more time to communicate your problem to other aircraft. Probably more importantly, the higher you are the more choices of landing sites you will be given, maybe safer sites.

We will be flying from MMSF (San Felipe) to MMMG (Mulegé, GGL). Do not fly direct; it will take you a good distance off shore. It will cost you a small amount

of time but it will be much safer if you stay within gliding distance of land. Fly South from MMSF (San Felipe), tracking direct to Pardones, then direct to Bahia de los Angeles and finally direct to MMMG (Mulegé) or just follow the shoreline.

### **Navigating in Mexico**

It should be obvious to everyone that navigating in Mexico should be the same as anywhere else in the world. However, there are a couple of things that are worth mentioning.

First of all, it is a very good idea to bring along a portable GPS receiver, a handheld transceiver and a couple of sets of new batteries for each of them. If you were ever forced to land, both would come in very handy, especially the transceiver.

Second, there are six VOR-DME's and one VOR the total length of Baja California. In my experience, all the important navigation aids have always been very reliable. However, there is one with which I have experienced intermittent outages SRL (Santa Rosalia VOR-DME). This is not a problem as we are only permitted to fly Day VFR in Baja. In fact, the easiest way to navigate to Mulegé is simply keep the water on your left, the land on your right and land when you see the first thing that's green.

All of the navigation methods can be used on this trip. It can actually be fun to practice pilotage and dead reckoning along with dusting off your ADF or Loran skills. It will help pass the time as this is a long cross country. If you're really good (and old) you can shot the sun and practice your celestial navigation skills. Of course, GPS will be the easiest, most accurate and probably the most used on our trip.

Mexico does not publish Terminal, Sectional or World Aeronautical Charts. The lower half of the Los Angeles, Sectional Aeronautical Chart in combination with the CH-22 World Aeronautical Chart, are the charts generally used. The best chart for any Baja trip is the GH-22 Baja California, Mexico, Supplemental World Aeronautical Chart. All of these are available at the pilot shop. Be sure to check well ahead of time so that they can order them for you if they are out of stock.

If any of you are planning to go on any side trips or want to try the mainland route home "The Club" has a couple of copies of "Airports of Mexico" by Arnold Senterfitts, that you can take a look at before you go. This is a must have book if you plan to do much flying in Mexico.

### **Over Flying a Mexican Controlled Airport**

Anytime you over fly a Mexican towered airport you are required to report in on

the tower frequency and give a position report. In Mexico, over flying is defined as anytime you are within 25 nautical miles of the airport at any altitude below flight level 180. A position report consists of: (1) a radio call sign (2) the type of aircraft (3) your present position and altitude (4) your departure point (5) your destination and (6) your estimated time of arrival. This is an example of a position report: San Felipe Tower, Cessna November 9027 Hotel, Cessna one-seven-two, one-eight miles Northwest San Felipe, seven thousand five hundred feet, departed Mexicali, landing Mulegé, three hours, over. This should be spoken slowly and clearly.

English is the required international aviation language, however not everyone in Mexico speaks English perfectly. Some of the controllers speak English quite well, others struggle with their English skills and still others understand English well but have difficulty speaking it without a heavy accent. I have found if you run into a controller who is still struggling with their English, it really helps if you speak slowly, distinctly and stick to the position reporting format (see example above). Avoid any complex or detailed ideas or thoughts. All they are expecting is the information given in the position report and nothing more. If you feel you are not communicating with them, repeat the position report information again, slowly and distinctly. This is the reason to say “Cessna one – seven – two, one eight miles Northwest San Felipe” instead of “we’re a white and green Cessna one seventy two, eighteen miles Northwest of San Felipe”.

On occasion, they will understand everything you say but because of a heavy accent on their part, you may have difficulty understanding them. You will just have to say “say again, please” and listen carefully.

### **Uncontrolled Airports in Mexico**

All uncontrolled airports in Mexico use 122.8 as the airport frequency.

Because of the United States’ insatiable appetite for drugs and the people who smuggle them, when landing at some non-towered airports in Mexico, you may be greeted by a contingency of the Mexican Army.

It will consist of several young soldiers commanded by a ranking soldier. They are there to discourage drug smugglers from plying their trade and only want to see that you have entered their country legally. They maybe be armed with automatic weapons and may surround your aircraft. They probably will not speak any English.

The ranking soldier will approach the aircraft and will want to see your General Declaration or Multiple Entry Authorization and possibly other aircraft documents and/or Visas and Passports. He may also want to see what and

who you are transporting in your aircraft. This is all normal and should not be feared, unless you are smuggling drugs. Once they have established that you are a good guy, they will retreat.

In some cases, town may be a long walk from this uncontrolled airport. If you can befriend the soldiers in conversation, sometimes a ride into town will be offered by them. This could be a good chance to learn a little about Mexican culture and the local people. In my experience, I have found Mexicans to be

extremely friendly and more than willing to help. Even if you can't speak any Spanish, any attempt to communicate will usually be rewarded in some manner. This is a part of our trip which can be very interesting and rewarding. Expand your horizons, don't be bashful, and give it a try.

I have been told recently the Army is now concentrating their efforts more on drug trafficking by boat and sea than by General Aviation aircraft. Consequently, you may never get to see a contingency of the Mexican Army.

### **Exiting Mexico**

All flights exiting Mexico must do so from a Mexican Airport of exit, i.e. an international airport. All Mexican airports of entry (M-AOE's) are also Mexican Airports of Exit (MAOX's).

When a General Aviation aircraft exits Mexico, the pilot in command is required to turn in the Single Entry Authorization (General Declaration). If you have been issued a Multiple Entry Authorization (form DGAC-171), you will show it and then retain it for the next flight to Mexico. Additionally, the pilot and all the passengers are required to turn in their visas (form FM1).

A Mexican International Flight Plan is required whenever an aircraft exits Mexico. This is filed in the same way all other Mexican flight plans are filed. This flight plan, like its American counterpart, is also never closed; it just disappears when you cross the border.

### **Entering the USA**

All aircraft entering the United States of America and crossing the Air Defense Identification Zone (A.D.I.Z.) are required to do four things. They are: (1) Notify the United States Customs and Immigrations Service at least one hour in advance of their arrival. It is extremely important to observe this one hour minimum notice time rule. The United States Customs and Immigrations Service take this rule very seriously and you can get in some pretty deep water if you don't. The fine for knowingly violating this rule is \$5,000 for the first

offence. (2) File a DVFR flight plan. This is the second DVFR Flight Plan referred to in the third paragraph of this article. (3) Open that second DVFR flight plan (4) Notify a US-FSS, an approach control or a radar center of the time (plus or minus five minutes) and the place (plus or minus five nautical miles) where you will be crossing the A.D.I.Z and entering American airspace.

### # 1 Notifying Customs and Immigrations

Every morning, the San Diego FSS checks for all DVFR flight plans filed for that day and notifies Customs and Immigrations of their planned arrival. This meets

the requirement of at least one hour prior notice. Once the one hour notice has been given only a thirty minute notice is required to modify the arrival time as long as it is modified later not earlier. You may modify it earlier but the requirement for a one hour minimum advanced notice would still apply. The lesson to learn is: always file for a time that is earlier than you ever expect to arrive. Then you may modify your arrival time, with just a thirty minute advanced notice, to be more accurate on the day you do arrive.

Most of the US-AOE's, located near the border, are staffed by the U. S. Customs and Immigrations Service through the nearest land border crossing station. Because General Aviation aircraft pilots and passengers represent such a small fraction of their traffic, they typically don't keep full time personnel at the small General Aviation airports. They need the one hour notice so they can get their personnel to the airport from the land border crossing station before you arrive. Calexico, California is an exception to this rule, as they have a full time staff; however the one hour notification is still required.

### # 2 Filing a DVFR Flight Plan

It can be difficult to contact a US-FSS by radio when you are more than a thirty to forty minute flight south of the border. Thus, with the minimum one hour Customs and Immigrations notification requirement, there is a need to file a DVFR flight Plan with a US-FSS before you leave the United States. An extremely important advantage of filing before you leave the United States is, if you fail to cross the border and re-enter the United States, as filed, for any reason, the United States Government will take notice and start to ask questions on your behalf.

Since the advent of the cell phone, you are now able to call a US-FSS from your M-AOX before you exit Mexico. You will be able to confirm your previously filed DVFR flight plan or file one if one has not already been filed and give the minimum one hour advanced notification. You can also request a full weather briefing. Cell phones seem to work quite well in Mexico of late, however, keep the call short as international calls are not cheap.

A method I use frequently is to land at Mexicali and use it as my M-AOX. You will, of course, still file that second DVFR Flight Plan before you leave the United States because of the protection it affords. When approaching Mexicali from the South and before you land, call the San Diego FSS on the radio and confirm your previously filed DVFR flight plan or file one, if one has not been already been filed. You can then notify Flight Service of your exact crossing time and request Customs and Immigrations notification, thus meeting the one hour advanced notification requirement. When you are finished at Mexicali with Mexican Customs and Immigrations, aircraft fueling and flight planning, you can control your border crossing time exactly by controlling your departure time from Mexicali. It is a 14 nautical mile, nine minute flight, from Mexicali, Baja California Norte, Mexico to Calexico, California, United States of America.

Using Mexicali as your M-AOX has several advantages. First, it will make it much easier to accurately predict your A.D.I.Z. crossing time. Second, aviation fuel is much cheaper in Mexico. Third, given the choice, it is always better to use a border M-AOE or M-AOX.

### **Choosing a US-AOE**

On our return trip to Palo Alto, we will be traveling north from Mulegé, Baja California Sur. Depending on the range and routing of your aircraft, you will be exiting Mexico from either San Felipe, Baja California Norte; Mexicali, Baja California Norte or even Guaymas, Sonora. In all three cases, you have three US-AOE's to choose from Brown Field, San Diego, Calexico, California and Yuma, Arizona.

If you enter the United States of America in a state, in which you are a resident, you are only allowed to bring in one liter of alcohol per person. Whereas, if you enter the United States of America in a state in which you are not a resident you are allowed to bring in sixty (60) liters of alcohol per person.

These rules are spelled out in CFR 19 Part 148 and effectively say if you enter the United States in a state where the alcohol is going to be consumed you are restricted to one liter per passenger. If not, the limit is sixty (60) liters per passenger. They assume that you are going to consume the alcohol in your own home (your residency).

This may influence your choice of a US-AOE. Yuma, Arizona is 46 nm miles East of Calexico. When flying from MMSF (San Felipe) to KPAO (Palo Alto), choosing Yuma instead of Calexico will cost you an additional 29 nm of flight. Whether you choose Brown Field, San Diego, California, Calexico, California or Yuma, Arizona as your US-AOE, the entry procedure will be the same.

**# 3 / # 4 Opening Your DVFR Flight Plan / Updating A.D.I.Z. Crossing Time**

Typically, if you cross the border under VFR rules you will use a US-FSS to open your DVFR Flight Plan and give the required A.D.I.Z. crossing notification. Communication with an Approach Control or Center would normally be reserved for those acting under IFR rules.

After departing your M-AOX and before you cross the border, you should contact a US-FSS on their designated frequency, identify yourself, request they open your previously filed International DVFR Flight Plan and give them an update on your A.D.I.Z. crossing time and place. They will respond by opening your DVFR

Flight Plan and issuing you a discrete transponder code. This will usually be some variation of the VFR code 1200, i.e. 1201, 1202, 1203, 1204, 1205 or 1206.

### **Closing your DVFR Flight Plan**

It is a good idea to close your International DVFR flight plan prior to landing at your US-AOE. This is easily done with Flight Service since you will be in radio contact with them when you arrive in American airspace. Once in the United States and after closing your flight plan, you can switch frequencies; announce your intentions on the Common Traffic Advisory Frequency or call the tower and land.

This border crossing process means that you will be contacting a US-FSS, opening an International DVFR flight plan, requesting, receiving and squawking an international transponder code, announcing your estimated A.D.I.Z. crossing time, announcing your actual A.D.I.Z. crossing and finally closing that same flight plan all within two or three minutes. It pays to be prepared.

Crossing the border from Mexico into the United States is not difficult if you are informed, organized and if you plan ahead. It can become difficult, when you have to do several things in a short period of time and you haven't done your homework.

### **Arriving at your US-AOE**

It will help the Customs and Immigrations Agents and speed your re-entry process into the United States if you fill out a Private Aircraft Enforcement System Arrival Report (form CPB178) before landing at your US-AOE. This form is quite simple and asks you to write down basic aircraft, pilot and passenger information. This can be done in a few minutes any time on the way up from Mulegé. Most importantly, you will come across as a knowledgeable and informed pilot with the Customs and Immigrations Agents that control the ease with which you will re-enter the United States. Just like ATC, the service you

receive can be improved if you come across as an intelligent person who has done their homework and proceeds as a professional.

After landing, you still will not have legally entered the United States. For this reason, you must taxi directly to the Customs and Immigrations area without stopping. There will be signs and/or Agents that will direct you to a holding area from which no one may leave until you are directed otherwise. **Warning: You may not leave this area for any reason until given permission by an authorized Customs and Border Protection Agent.**

While waiting for Customs and Immigrations, it is a good time to organize all your required documents (form CPB178, passports, pilot and medical certificate,

restricted radiotelephone operator permit, permanent registration, airworthiness certificate, aircraft radio station license, etc.). Please refer to the "Required Documents" for a complete list. Make sure you have the exterior identification plaque on your aircraft, they will look for it. If you have any prohibited food, eat it now, as you will not be allowed to bring it into the United States.

If your aircraft has a current Customs and Border Protection Aircraft User Fee Decal there will be no charges or fees to pay. If your aircraft does not have a current User Fee Decal you will have to pay the annual fee of (\$25) twenty five dollars. Payment can be made by credit card or cash. As with the Mexican Multiple Entry Authorization, this decal is valid until the end of the year in which it was issued.

If you do have to purchase a User Fee Decal, please do not apply it to the exterior of the aircraft fuselage. When you return to Palo Alto, give the decal to me. I will laminate it and put it back in the aircraft with the airworthiness certificate, the registration and the aircraft radio station license.

As of January 2007, passports are the only form of proof of citizenship officially accepted by United States Customs and Border protection. If you don't presently hold a valid passport, be sure to apply for one several months in advance of your planned trip to Mexico. This can be done at the Palo Alto Main Post Office located just down the street from the Palo Alto airport. On January 18, 2008, the Passport Agent at the Palo Alto Main Post Office told me the passport fee was \$67 and it was currently taking approximately five to six weeks to receive a passport. For an additional fee of \$60 you can speed up the delivery time to two to three weeks.

It is illegal for any United States Customs and Border Protection Official to deny a citizen of the United States of America entrance into the United States. This

means, if you are a United States citizen and do not have a passport, they may not prevent you from entering the United States. However, you are required to prove you are an American citizen. The rub is, if you don't have a valid passport to prove your citizenship, the process of determining your citizenship can be a lengthy, time consuming and expensive one.

An Agent will approach you at your aircraft and will ask you a series of questions. They are generally pleased if you hand them a completed form CPB178. This means their job will be easier. After inspecting the aircraft, examining the pilot's, the passenger's and the aircraft's documents and finding them all in order, they will send you on your way. Welcome back to the United States of America.

As a closing note, I would like to recommend that you make up a folder that is dedicated to all the documents, forms and papers required for the trip. This will make life much easier for you before, during and after the trip. During the trip

you will be collecting not only all the required documents but also fuel receipts and other expense receipts which will be needed at the end to calculate each passenger's share. It is very convenient to have subcategories within your folder so that expense items, legal documents or procedural information, etc. can be easily and quickly accessed when required.

There is one last thing that I have so far failed to mention. The information contained in this ground school represents the strict interpretation of the laws governing international flight. However, I must also tell you, with regard to the requirement for the aircraft to have a Federal Communication Commission Radio Station License and the Pilot in Command to hold a 4<sup>th</sup> class restricted radiotelephone operator permit, in practice you do not need them. In thirty years of flying across many borders I have never been asked to produce them. I suspect the FAA is not concerned about the enforcement of FCC regulations. I, also suspect that the FCC is not concerned because they do not have the necessary presence to effectively enforce the regulations. There is no connection between airports and the Federal Communication Commission.

If you are pedantic like me, you can purchase the 4<sup>th</sup> class restricted radio-telephone operator permit from the FCC on their website. The cost when last checked was \$75 and it is good for life. In the past it was free. If you plan to ever fly commercially for a living it is required when you fly internationally and they do check under those conditions. If you own an aircraft likewise you can purchase a radio station license from the Federal Communication Commission.

Good luck and I will look forward to you joining us on one of these spectacular trips to Baja California, Mexico to pet the California Gray Whale.

Gordon Matthews, President  
Shoreline Flying Club, LLC

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