

ONE MORE EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME - MiG-15 PILOT SEPTEMBER 2016



We were planning a trip to Santa Fe and Taos, and I thought it would be fun to do some flight seeing from the Santa Fe Airport. I Googled the airport, and much to my surprise, there was a place called the Jet Warbird Center that gives flights in military aircraft! Some years ago, I had flown a Czech L-29 Jet trainer, but this company was offering flights in a MIG 15! For those not familiar with this old plane, here is a link that describes it:

<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/mig15.html>

From what I understand, the slow speed characteristics of this jet leave something to be desired. The approach speed of the plane is about 140 knots, which is faster than the cruising speed of the light aircraft I normally fly!

I contacted the operator, and have it set up for the third day we are in Santa Fe. This is what the operator e-mailed me: "The MIG is a handful of airplane and this will be a back seat flight for you. I hope that you are not much over six feet tall and about 215 lbs. We will do about an hour and a half of ground school before the flight. We cannot do landings for you from the back seat...so we will get in two go around traffic patterns...some high speed work and some low speed handling...with a bit of acrobatics if you like". I am so looking forward to this!

Here is a link to a video of the MIG 15 taking off in Santa Fe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwFm3w8Bmf4>

I downloaded the MIG 15 Manual, and saw why Larry (the instructor) wanted me in the back seat. The starting sequence is much more complicated than the one I did in the L-29, as the L-29 is a trainer and the MIG is an actual fighter. I arrived at the airport a little ahead of time, (thank you Neverlost with Hertz), and met with Larry. I told him I had found the cockpit layout, and the limitations of the aircraft.

We discussed what we were going to do in the aircraft, and I had to fill out some paperwork to keep within the FAA regulations.

I met one of his other students, who graciously volunteered to take some photos of me in the aircraft. The first photos I took were of the front and rear cockpit instrumentation.

All of the instruments had been replaced with ones in English format as far as altitude, speed, and rate of climb, as opposed to the Cyrillic original instrumentation. The original instruments were in kilometers and meters instead of in miles and feet.



Front Cockpit



Rear Cockpit (mine)

I climbed in and Larry helped me strap on my parachute and the seat straps. He showed me the red handle that would release all the seat straps at one time. I then asked him where the ripcord was for the parachute (very important), which he also showed me.



Larry started the engine, and we taxied out for takeoff. We had to stay below 200 knots (230 mph) until we reached 10,000 feet. Our rate of climb was absolutely amazing! The light aircraft I fly has a rate of climb of between 500 and 700 feet per minute. The jet was climbing at 4,000 feet per minute! It was a fantastic experience. We leveled off at 16,000 feet, and 400 knots (460 mph). I normally cruise in my light aircraft at 100 knots and 4,500 to 6,500 feet.

He let me fly the aircraft, doing turns and slowing the aircraft down to 150 knots to feel the sluggish response on the controls.

Unfortunately, all good things come to an end, and he told me to level off at 8,000 feet to make our landing approach. This confused me for a second; until I realized the airport's elevation was about 7,000 feet! The airports I fly out of are all near sea level, and the pattern altitudes run between 850 and 1,500 feet.

I set up the approach, and Larry took over and did a touch and go landing, I then set it up for landing again, and Larry landed the jet.

To say this was an experience of a lifetime is an understatement. Kathy told me I was grinning from ear to ear when I got back to the hotel.

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