



Cancel Culture 2020: AirVenture goes - SimVenture comes

A GUEST CONTRIBUTION BY FRIEDHELM STILLE

Ahen last year, due to Corona, the previous economic, professional and private life demanded some reorientation and mass events such as trade fairs were cancelled or postponed, such as the Aero in Friedrichshafen, the most well-known event in aviation circles was also affected: the large fly-in and meeting in Wittman Field, Wisconsin, the AirVenture, also commonly known as Oshkosh, named after the town of the same name

on Lake
Winnebago.

While 2019, the previous year, just marked the 50th anniversary of the AirVenture

celebrated, this biggest event also fell victim to a small virus.

Some of the events were reorganized and took place virtually. However, the big fly-in itself, the mass approach of aircraft of all kinds, the famous Fisk Approach, was cancelled; the event was canceled.

At about this time, the EAA, as the host of the event, NATCA, as the US air traffic controllers' association, and PilotEdge, a provider of virtual ATC services for flight simulators, got together and considered whether and how the fly-in could be implemented virtually.

The airport scenery of Wittman Field, the name of the airfield located on the western shore of Lake Winnebago, was reworked by Pilot Edge especially for this event; the place changed into the typical appearance of a camping site with tents on the park and lawns; instead of cars, airplanes of all kinds: single-engine, twin-engine, high and low-wing, off-the-shelf and homebuilt airplanes; they were lined up close together along Runways 18 and 27.

The author still remembers the exact moment when he activated his simulator, based on X-Plane, with the new scenery for the first time last year in June: From otherwise empty areas, the place with its tents, airplanes and the flagmen really came to life and reminded a bit of Tannkosh, an AirVenture-inspired fly-in in Tannheim, Germany.

The event was a remarkable success. When the real AirVenture around ten thousand aircraft are counted within a week, the fly-in, which lasted a total of twelve hours over four days, saw around 1,000 aircraft movements. After all.

The Fisk Approach

The plan was a virtual fly-in with the goal of recreating the mass approach of aircraft of all types, the famous Fisk Arrival. In this one, all planes will fly east from the south at Green Lake towards the town of Ripon, then follow a railroad line north and head for the small town of Fisk.

Without going into too much detail, such parameters as altitude and speed are observed exactly and the transmissions of the controllers are to be listened to with concentration. In contrast to real or simulated flight radio, the initial call is made by the approach itself, not by the pilot and not by naming the call sign, but by aircraft make, model and color, for example:

Orange Cessna near Fisk, continue north, contact tower on 118.5."

or

"White Baron, turn west, follow Fisk Avenue, contact Tower on 126.6."

These radio messages are not read back, but only confirmed by aileron deflections with a "wobble" of the aircraft:

"Rock your wings if you understand."

The tower then releases the aircraft for landing in the same manner. Here, too, there is no reading back, only the wing skirt.

Runways and their dots: Traffic is everything

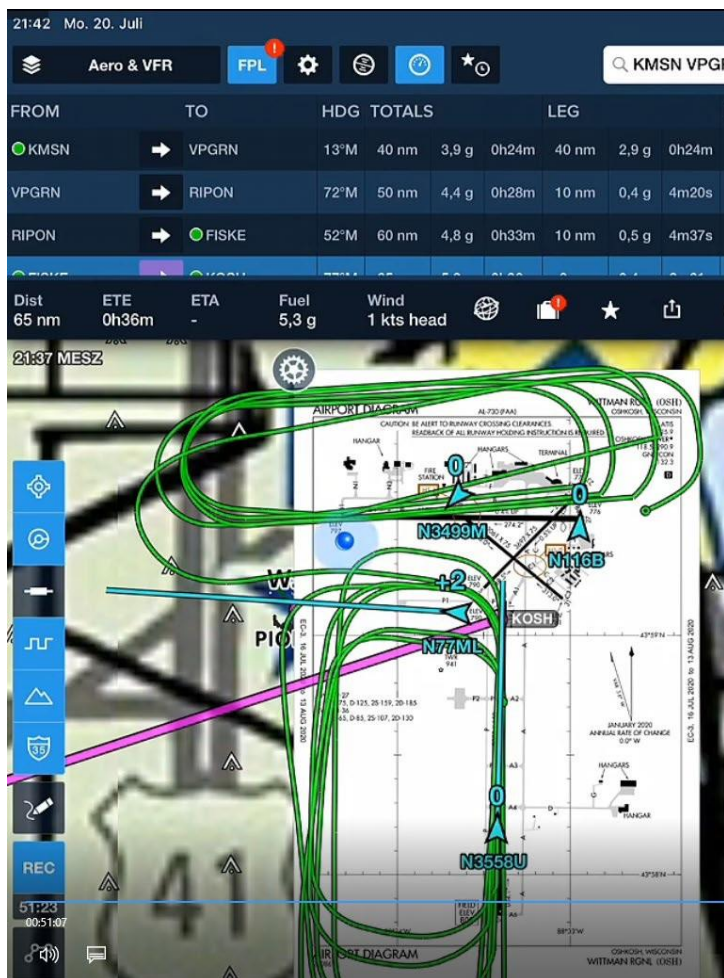
The author, himself a U.S. pilot license holder, participated in the event last year on all four days from the first to the proverbial last minute in a classic Cessna 172.

This was preceded by numerous space runs in order to be able to touch down with pinpoint accuracy in all possible landing configurations.

Pinpoint accuracy is to be taken literally here: In order to be able to manage the high traffic flow at such an airport, not only are several runways active at the same time, but a taxiway is also allowed to profile itself as a third runway (18L/36R). Each runway itself is subdivided into different touchdown zones, so-called dots and squares. What is otherwise an absolute no-go in real flying as well as in the simulator world - the simultaneous use of a runway by several aircraft - is an absolute reality and necessity during the Air/SimVenture and has been approved by the FAA. The author also practiced again the precise holding of altitude and speed (1,800 feet, 90 knots).

for hours until everything really fit - much to the displeasure of his wife. Everything reminded more and more of the real training at the beginning of the flight training.

As July 21, the start of the SimVenture, drew nearer, more and more aircraft fan-dened the pattern and diligently practiced touchdown on the dots and squares and the approach over Ripon and Fisk.



Flight track and other traffic approaching the SimVenture.

2021: AirVenture is coming, SimVenture remains

Due to this success, the virtual event - called SimVenture in reference to the real event - will now be repeated; not as a replacement, but as a complement to this year's AirVenture 2021 in the last week of July; be it as a tune-up for the event, as a serious pre-event training for all those lucky ones who are able to travel by their own plane, or for

the large number of pilots in their flight simulators around the world. All popular simulators are supported, such as the new FS2020 from Microsoft, X-Plane from Lami- nar Research and Prepar3D from Lockheed Martin.

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What remains for me to say? As someone who learned to fly in the U.S. 20 years ago, experienced the shuttle runway at the Space Center in a low-level flyover, camped out next to the plane in Schönhagen and Tannheim, in the midst of other aviators a

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I felt a sense of togetherness without really being able to grasp it, to put it into words. The one who saw the runway lighting at dusk, the colorful flickering lights of the tent lights, accompanied by the sound of the hangar party further ahead at the tower building, suddenly saw himself thanks to a simulator, the appropriate scenery,



You'll never find so many free shade places at the real AirVenture in your life!



View from your own airplane to the air cam- per row. Anyone who has ever been to Oshkosh knows this moment! Finally arrived. Now let's set up the tent, chill some drinks and have a chat with the neighbors ...



of all the other pilots flying in and the awakening of the radio on Fisk Approach transported back to that long ago time.

And even if the aircraft and the world out there on the monitors only exist virtually, it is a very special feeling to know that at the other end of the headset FAA controllers are processing this traffic, your own flight on the sim, with all their experience from many volunteer services at Fisk Approach or Oshkosh Tower.

After almost eight years of PilotEdge (as a paying customer) a few more notes: The service is highly professional and primarily intended for training and training support for real pilots, but also for those simulator pilots with high standards for themselves. The event is not the ideal time to use the newly acquired simulator.

simulator package and learn the basics of flying. Here, too, it is important to read the relevant notam in advance, to familiarize yourself in detail with the approach routes and frequencies, and to keep your eyes and ears open during the actual approach.

If all this is a bit too much for you: Then rather enjoy the countless streams and videos on Youtube and let yourself be inspired by the flying spirit, practice the basic flight maneuvers offline, continue and maybe even take the plunge into real flying. And don't forget: AirVenture 2021 will also take place again, from July 26 to August 1; even though for most of us in Germany an on-site visit will still not be possible due to entry regulations.



Of course, people are also depicted. The details are absolutely amazing! The flag people are animated in the SV2021 scenery and show the arriving and departing pilots the way. This was different last year: There were still static cab routings.

Who now plans to participate virtually in the Fly-In: It starts on Wednesday, the July 16, and continues on Friday and Saturday, ending on Sunday with the four-hour fly-out.

Check regularly for details on the actual event at SimVenture 2021 - PilotEdge. net; there are often still last-minute changes of a technical nature.

And as an appetizer, here is the trailer for this year's event: <https://youtu.be/Z-VejH4YwrE>:

Welcome to the Show!

Interview with Keith Smith, founder of PilotEdge, about SimVenture.

The author joined Keith Smith, founder of PilotEdge, on a virtual



Shady Place in Oshkosh and asked the entrepreneur about the concept.

When did PilotEdge first decide to do SimVenture?

It was a recurring discussion over several years. Before 2020, I voted not to pursue the idea because of a myriad of technical and operational reasons. The self-generated pressure to "get it right" was very real. Like all pilots, AirVenture was very close to our hearts. It is no easy feat to recreate such an event.

Anyway, the beginning of the pandemic led to the cancellation of AirVenture

2020, and so we took another look at it. If there was ever a year to do the thing ... it was 2020.

I had a long conversation with Kevin Meyers (our social media and marketing coordinator), who was very involved with SV2020. The conversation went something like this, "Well, first you'd have to look at this problem ... which could probably be solved this way and that way but then there's another problem which I guess you could solve this way or that way ..." That's how it went.

Finally, we had a long list of problems and possible solutions.

With all these things in mind, Kevin arranged test runs with a couple of by our controllers and a small group of pilots. The

prototype event went well, and so we decided to implement it.

While the idea of trying it had been in the back of my mind for years, it was Kevin's initiative, the help of scenery developers, and a small pool of pilots who helped test it that really made a difference.

What followed was a lot of technical development to make the "wing rocks," the color and model of the aircraft, and a lot of other goodies recognizable on the radar screen. There was also a lot of work in developing the aircraft displays on a very tight time frame. This was a three-

Hmm ... I wonder if Hertz still has rental cars?



to four-week sprint with countless 18-hour days. We finished with half a day to spare. The [Ford] TriMotor was added at the very last minute, thanks to a tremendous effort by two pilots who flew it throughout the show.

As for the timing, the work started about four to five months before the event, if memory serves. After the prototype went well, we approached EAA and then NATCA to see their interest in working with us. The rest is history.

When did PilotEdge decide to launch SimVenture 2021?

About 20 minutes into the first day of SimVenture 2020, it was kind of a sure thing.

How much time did the PilotEdge team put into preparing SimVenture 2021?

Hundreds of hours by countless people, and the work continues every day.

Just like last year, real FAA pilots will be working the SimVenture traffic. Will these controllers also handle the real air traffic of the AirVenture taking place at the end of July?

The rostering process has yet to be finalized. Due to the timing of SimVenture and AirVenture, it is unclear if those working the show's traffic [AirVenture],

We have ensured the availability of countless pilots who have ~~worked~~ at the [AirVenture] show.

How many FAA pilots will be on duty at SimVenture 2021?

Roster planning is still to be completed, but we hope to have Fisk Approach and separate departure/approach controllers for each runway. Last year departure/approach was combined, but there were different controllers for each runway.

Will the PE team also work on the front line on the radio or in the background?

In terms of SimVenture, they monitor and assist in the background, as the NATCA pilots do not have extensive experience with the PE system as a whole. There are simulation-specific peculiarities that do not exist in the real world. We are fully aware that the involvement of experienced AirVenture pilots is a godsend for the event, especially since so many of our participants have actually flown the AirVenture.

Will regular PE ATC service continue to be available at times when SimVenture is online?

Of course! We remain committed to the 15x7 schedule, but SimVenture is such a unique experience; we strongly encourage our community to enjoy the event.

Will PE be there in person at the real AirVenture?

We are often on site as part of our support of the EAA Pilot Proficiency Center. Due to COVID limitations (especially the split headset issue in the simulator center), it was decided to continue with simulator sceneries without ATC support; therefore, it is unlikely that we will be there this year.

Was there a significant increase in requests related to SimVenture 2020? Was there also a significant increase in [paid] subscriptions?

There really have been a few new subscriptions as a result of people engaging with PilotEdge as part of SimVenture. I'm not sure if this has offset the cost of bringing all this about, but we've always considered this a valuable effort, as I think the spirit of AirVenture was captured very well during SimVenture 2020.

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About the Author:

Friedhelm Stille learned to fly in the USA in Texas and Florida. He has been flying simulators since 2013 and has been a PilotEdge member since then. He also works as an engineer on duty at the German Air Traffic Control and holds instructor and examiner licenses.

39 Jahre engagierter Journalismus aus der Sicht des eigenen Cockpits



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