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Mirage



***Oil Baron Cowboys:
2008 Convention in Dallas, Texas***
by Jeff Schweitzer

Representing Owners and Pilots of High Performance Single Engine Pressurized Aircraft Worldwide



Unanticipated Adventures: Part I

Travis Holland

Travis Holland provides ferry and training services for PA46 aircraft in the USA, Canada and Europe. You can visit his web site at www.holland.aero.

On a typical flight to Europe, all goes well and I thankfully have nothing to report. Arriving in Austria after a particularly uneventful journey last January, my first-time-crossing copilot remarked that the trip was boring. Nothing puts a bigger smile on my face than exactly that. Of course, flying complex mechanical beasts one fourth the distance around the globe on a schedule means that not every trip can be humdrum. Otherwise we would have no stories to tell or lessons to learn.

Mother Nature

Weather is a primary variable along the route. Each airport offers a unique brand of Mother Nature's fury. Bahamas flying this is definitely not. Heading west across the pond in February 2007, my copilot and I were treated to the incredible and rare



sight of the Greenland ice cap in clear sky conditions. However, the weather reports indicated that we would not be so lucky at our next stop in Goose Bay (CYR). With two runways exceeding 10,000 feet (16/34 and 08/26), Goose Bay has more runways than approach aids. Sporting a single ILS to runway 08, strong winds from the north or south in low conditions require a circling approach.

In Narsarsuaq the weather computer revealed that Goose Bay had 35 knot winds from the north, with snow, and a ceiling of only 600 feet, putting the weather right at circling minimums for the north runway. A phone call to the Canadian flight service briefer predicted a slight improvement to 700 feet, with ceilings of 3000 feet forecast for our arrival. With clear conditions to turn back to, we launched for the three hour flight. We would monitor the Goose weather

with sat-com calls to the FSS enroute. After one hour, Goose Bay was up to 2000 feet ceilings. Approaching the point of no return, two hours enroute, Goose had lifted to 3000 feet ceilings, but still with 35 knot winds right down runway 34. Visibility was 2 miles visibility in blowing snow. With Goose well above minimums and forecast to stay that way, we continued onward, with the intention of flying ILS 08, circling to 34. Once past the point of no return, there are no real alternates. The legal alternates are all poorly equipped, with worse prevailing weather than Goose.

Mean Mother Nature

About 150 miles out, we were able to pick up a scratchy ATIS. I had to listen twice before the information penetrated my skull. The ceilings at 3000 feet and visibility of 2 miles were the same as my sat-com weather updates. The Runway Surface Conditions report, however, left me in shock. While no runways were closed, the scratchy radio seemed to be reporting "Runway 34 center 160 feet *three zero inches* loose snow." I blithely keyed the mike and asked the Goose Bay terminal frequency if there was any chance the north runway might be plowed before our arrival. "No chance" was



the reply, without any hesitation. Not being a local in the Canadian north, I somehow had the crazy thought that 30 inches of snow would close a runway. At my home airport, three inches of snow would NOTAM the runway closed.

Crosswind Possibilities

Well, 30 inches of snow surpasses the hazard of a 35 knot crosswind to an icy runway, even considering the 17 knot

demonstrated crosswind component of the airplane. Therefore, my copilot and I began a discussion of crosswind landing techniques. At least we had the luxury of a straight-in ILS.

About 10 minutes from the airport, we were third inbound for the approach. A few minutes after the first aircraft was handed off to tower, Goose terminal announced that the preceding aircraft had experienced "severe turbulence at 100 AGL on short final." *Alrighty then.* A few minutes after the second aircraft switched to tower frequency, Goose terminal relayed the same message.

My copilot mentioned that whenever he has a landing in very difficult conditions he leaves the autopilot coupled on the approach until the last possible moment, taking advantage of the servos to establish and maintain an adequate crab angle. I was accepting suggestions at this time, and we agreed that he would continue as the flying pilot (hands on controls) and that he would leave the autopilot coupled as long as possible. The turbulence was light to moderate; the autopilot was doing a fine job as we reached the decision height of 200 feet above the ground. But just as we passed decision height, the aircraft pitched up 15 degrees and rolled into a 45 degree left bank, with the autopilot still engaged.

Let George Go

With the hope of a stabilized approach completely lost, I disconnected the autopilot and righted the ship before my copilot began to arm wrestle the airplane towards the runway in the strongest crosswind I have ever experienced. With my copilot doing his absolute best to bring the aircraft in, I added a little bit to the flight controls and raced to get reverse thrust engaged as soon as the mains touched the ground, while rolling the ailerons to full left position. We actually landed in one piece.

The winds were so strong that after fueling the truck remained parked in front of us until after our engine start so the JetProp did not get blown across the icy ramp before we had thrust of our own. During our fuel stop I learned that the north runway at Goose Bay



is never plowed during big snow events. The runway is not closed so that ski-equipped planes can land there.

As we taxied out and held short mid-field for a landing aircraft, I said to the copilot, "Let's see how this guy handles those winds." The four engine Turkish Air Force C-130 then proceeded to land in front of us as if there was no wind at all. I do not normally yearn for more than one engine, but the magic of differential power and the skilled Turkish Air Force pilot made the crosswind seem like nothing. That smooth landing by an obvious pro demonstrated clearly the importance of pilot skill and aircraft capability in handling challenging weather conditions.

Pushy Winds

Strong winds do not always come from the side. A recent solo delivery to Denmark had already been delayed one day, and I found myself arriving in Keflavik, Iceland, in the face of an impressive warm front that made for some ominous radar returns. I decided during descent to overnight there. As the handler put the JetProp in the hangar, I mentioned that I wanted to be pulled out at 0730Z for refueling. He replied, "I don't think that is going to happen," and went on to relate that serious winds were forecast. He explained that hangar doors could not be opened with more than 40 knot winds. Several jets had already canceled their planned transits for the next day.

A Cheyenne also on delivery to Europe had landed right behind me and would be sharing the hangar with my airplane. The pilots of that plane and I were prepared to spend a whole extra day in Iceland if the weather developed as forecast. The next morning the winds were 25 to 35 knots. The forecast, however, called for increasing winds through the morning, with gusts up to 65 knots, between 0800Z and 1200Z. But with conditions still below hangar door limitations, I hoped for the best as the Cheyenne pilots and I headed to the airport to see if departure might be possible.

The handler got the hangar doors opened, and we taxied out of the hangar under our own power. We had taxied in the same way, since light aircraft tugs do not exist in Keflavik. I positioned the JetProp on the wet and windy ramp so that we would be aimed directly into the strong wind. I stood in solidarity with the poor fueler, who struggled with filling my tip tanks in the gusty gale. The job was done after 20 minutes of dispensing jet fuel in equal proportions across the ramp and in the tanks. Conditions were so bad that I felt like a scrooge tipping him only \$40, all I had handy, although he seemed happy just to be done with the miserable task and in a hurry to get back to a heated room.

Even Pushier Winds

Keflavik has the cheapest jet fuel in the Northern Hemisphere, and is the only place I have seen outside the United States where fuel is sold in gallons, priced in U.S. dollars and costs less than \$3 per gallon, even with \$115 per barrel oil. With four ILS approaches, two 10,000 foot runways,



cheap Jet A, competent handlers and local time that is UTC year round, Keflavik is my favorite technical stop. But not this time. The handlers had driven across the airport to their comfortable facility, so I had no ride back to the hangar. Getting there with no ride was impossible due to the winds. My perfect technical stop was now a windy trap as my aircraft rocked in the winds. I resolved to get airborne before the situation got worse.

The winds had definitely picked up, and before startup I listened to the ATIS, reporting now 35 to 45 knots, but only 10 degrees crossed to the prevailing runway. I taxied gingerly, like a Cessna 150 pilot in 15 knot winds. As I neared the end of the taxiway, the controller instructed me to "lineup and wait" on Runway 02, followed by a casual, "wind 030 at 50 gusting 55." That caused

some trepidation when making the next taxi turn. I thought of maneuvering a Piper Cub on floats in a moderate wind, and visualized the aileron deflections that would help keep the wings down. With some careful aileron positioning, and with the help of wings heavy with fuel, I maneuvered into position on the runway. My takeoff clearance included a wind check of "030 at 55 gusting 65, peak wind last minute 62 knots." I asked for a delayed takeoff at my discretion (granted) and received a couple more wind checks before the winds seemed to stabilize at 60 knots, plus or minus 5 knots.

Suppressing some pangs of fear, I advanced the throttle and kept the aircraft on the ground until airspeed reached 105 KIAS (groundspeed was still under 50). I then pulled the airplane away from the runway to avoid being smashed back down in a horizontal wind shear gust. The plane was being rocked quite a bit; I just held on with a rough airspeed target of Vy plus 30 knots (140 KIAS). The plane climbed like a JetProp should into the snarling cloud bases, which soon gave way to an old-fashioned heavy rainstorm reminiscent of the U.S. northwest. All the anti-ice equipment was on, and I was sneaking some glances at the wing for contamination, when I broke out to pure VMC at 6,500 feet.

Yeah, Steady as a Rock

The four minutes since takeoff had seemed like an eternity but the ordeal was over. I took a deep breath and told departure control that the Cheyenne behind me might like to know the tops were at 6,500 feet with smooth air and clear skies above. I settled into the four hour flight to Denmark with 100 knot quartering tailwinds as the sweat dried onto my body. The flight sped by uneventfully, and soon I was shooting the mandated ILS approach in sky clear conditions in Roskilde, Denmark. The winds of Keflavik were just a memory, but for me this was far too much adventure for a North Atlantic crossing. I flew home commercial from Denmark, with no regrets of sitting in the back relaxing while another pilot worked up front. I arrived home just in time to celebrate my wife's birthday.





Unexpected Adventures: Part II

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It Was, Possibly, a Dark and Stormy Night

The trip should have begun like all the others. I was to deliver a plane from Spokane to Europe, and then spend a couple weeks training some of my regular clients before returning home.

A few gremlins, however, raised their ugly heads well prior to departure. A domestic trip a week earlier had ended in the destruction of my laptop following a gate check. Gone with the laptop were my trip notes, flight plans and 300-page North Atlantic crossing manual developed on my previous trips.

Also missing were my meticulously-downloaded AIP files for all of Europe. The AIP is the official document that outlines the procedures for flying in the airspace of each country. Initially, loss of these data did not cause any concern; I had flown throughout Europe all summer and did not expect anything new. Wow, was I in for a surprise.

Sleep Deprivation

With none of my usual documentation in hand to prepare for the trip, I got right down to work on the first night after traveling by airline to Spokane, Washington. For each leg I would need flight plans, weather briefing packages, airport briefing packages, catering, hotel reservations and ground handling arrangements to ensure that my copilot-client enjoyed a seamless flight.

Day one would take us from Spokane to Grand Forks, North Dakota for fuel, to Michigan to visit the client's family, and then on to Ottawa, Canada, for a short overnight.

Since the customer's internal clock was still on Europe time, and the stop in Michigan would add to an already full day, we agreed to start our adventure with a

0520 departure from the hotel. We did not part ways in the hotel lobby until 10 pm the previous night, so I worked into the wee hours finalizing flight details. My wakeup call at 0440 ensured that sleep deprivation would be a factor right from the start. Before taking my short rest, I watched a low pressure the size of Kansas move over Canada towards our north Atlantic route, causing a low rumbling of concern. I forgot to make hotel reservations for Ottawa.

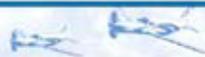
So from Grand Forks, I made a phone call to request my usual hotel in Ottawa with minimal notice. Later, a cursory phone call from Michigan to confirm revealed a fully booked hotel. Luckily, I had sent the hotel manager a nice Christmas package of canned salmon eight months earlier. I agreed to pay double the normal room price for a suite, and the first hitch of the journey was solved.

Monster Low

After an uneventful arrival in Ottawa

followed by a late dinner, I retired to my hotel room for the most important planning of the trip: crossing the North Atlantic via Narsarsuaq, Greenland, one of the most hazardous transit airports in the Western world. The monster low pressure system had hit the east coast of Canada and was moving right into our path. While the low was weakening, the system still posed a formidable obstacle. I flight planned Ottawa to Goose Bay to Narsarsuaq to Keflavik. Fortunately, I was able to prepare from scratch all the flight plans from my aging memory. But my replacement laptop contained none of my contact data for the trip. After scrounging up the correct number, well past 1 am local time in Ottawa (5 am Iceland time), I sent a fax to Iceland requesting hotel accommodations before crashing for a few hours of sleep.

A morning taxi detour in a desperate search for coffee revealed a ghost town of shops closed at 5:30 am on a Sunday morning. I carried on to Goose Bay with



minimal sleep and no coffee. Our quick turn in Goose Bay was busy. We donned our stifling survival suits, assembled the survival kit, and armed the life raft. I briefed the customer on ditching and egress procedures should we need to get wet. The nasty low pressure was now right over Narsarsuaq, but the weather was still above minimums. With a strong tailwind, a bad omen for southwest Greenland weather, we would reach the point of no return about 40 minutes from Greenland's coast. I kept the option of turning back to Goose Bay open as late as possible.

Zero Zero

A weather check at the half-way point showed no deterioration, but a "few" clouds at 800 feet, well below the 1400 foot minimum for the instrument approach should that become a ceiling. Even a few clouds situated between you and the runway on final approach can lead to a missed approach.



At the point of no return, a final weather check on the sat-com showed the few clouds now down to 400 feet, with the ceiling a reasonable 3500 broken above. Although the decision to carry on seemed reasonable, the hairs were up on the back of my neck.

We flew a constant descent profile that led us directly into the final approach from flight level 270, and as advertised, we descended through the broken layer and saw the runway at about 3200 feet and six miles out. (see photo on next page)

The real surprise was on the walk to the general aviation terminal after shut down. *Less than ten minutes after landing, I watched in shock as clouds settled over runway's end, bringing ceiling and visibility to zero.* My heart pounded as I began to think how the situation would

be different had we been successful in our search for coffee that morning.

None of the options would have been particularly attractive. We could have missed the approach and held to wait for improving conditions, virtually ensuring our inability to make the alternate 300 nm distant. Or could we have made a quick decision to head for the alternate while we still had some fuel, knowing that we were fully committed with no further options available. Or worse still, we could have flown my emergency approach, dropping into the fjord only to find zero zero conditions inside the fjord, with granite on all sides.

I resolved to be much more respectful of "few" clouds in the future. Weather risk in a land of few alternates and low fuel is dramatically different than flying where both are abundant. In many ways, flying in remote mountainous terrain is as risky as crossing the Atlantic. Only a few months after my flight, similar conditions would claim a JetProp in Sitka, Alaska, with fatal results.

More Hot Water

Bad weather is by no means the only way to get into hot water flying airplanes. Later in the same trip, I arrived in southern Italy by airline for a couple days of flying. I still lacked the AIP for Europe.

Continuing the saga of luggage woes, I learned that my checked bags had decided to tour Rome and would not be having the pleasure of my company for the next portion of this trip. While my bags were lost, I did manage to find my JetProp owner, who informed me that we would be making an overnight trip to Istanbul, Turkey. We would return to claim my lost luggage the next day.

That all sounded fine to me. On the walk to the general aviation terminal the pilot mentioned that he filed a flight plan to Croatia for some cheap jet fuel. He asked if I would mind running the flight plan to Istanbul. Happy to comply with a reasonable request, I opened the laptop in the GA terminal and found some airways across Greece that fit our needs. Already I was useful, and we had not even been together one hour. In congratulating myself, I completely missed an important clue.

Clueless About PPR

Following a quick hop across the Adriatic Sea for a top off with JetA in Dubrovnik, we were en-route to Istanbul. Approaching the FIR boundary to Turkey we were handed off to Ankara Radar, which immediately requested our PPR number to enter Turkish airspace. I looked over at my co-pilot, who conveniently said he did not comprehend the radio call.

I quickly transmitted a "stand by" while I set about translating "Prior Permission Required" to my hapless copilot. I soon realized that absolutely no arrangements had been made for our trip, meaning we definitely had no PPR number to convey to the controller. We had enough fuel, however, to go back to Dubrovnik.

Fully expecting to be turned around right then and there, I improvised a bit: "Ankara, we have spoken to company dispatch and they do not have any PPR number available." I was surprised and a little concerned when the response came back on a simple "roger."

Forty-five minutes later we were landing at Istanbul International (LTBA). Ground control gave us taxi clearance, and then ominously instructed us to contact our handler to "work out your permit problems." I acknowledged with a sinking feeling, knowing of course that we had no handler.



We taxied into an eerily quiet GA ramp and parked between a G-3 and a G-4. Nobody was around. Exiting the aircraft, a fuel truck drove up. I was sure this was because we were about to be unceremoniously thrown out of the country, so I asked for full tanks and spent the next 15 minutes servicing the aircraft.

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Unexpected Adventures: Part II

(continued)

Signs of (Prison) Life

Fully fueled and paid, no other signs of life materialized so we walked the 50 yards over to the GA terminal. We knocked on the locked ramp-side door, which was promptly opened by a Turkish policeman. After we entered the building, I noticed with some concern that the door closing behind us had no door knob.

In the two minutes that followed, security personnel came out of every door and hallway. We were surrounded by no less than 20 Turkish policemen, who we would quickly learn spoke no English at all. However, being fluent in point and gesture, I followed their instructions and we took a seat. I began to have visions of growing a scruffy beard in a Turkish prison while subsisting on couscous.

I used my customer's cell phone and called back to the FBO at my home airport, conveniently 10 hours earlier by time zone. Reception was quite good. A friend answered the phone, and I asked him to look up handlers in Istanbul on the Internet in hopes of finding someone who could help us out of this jam.

After a few long minutes he came back with a local contact number. I thankfully copied down the lifeline and called up. I did not recognize the language of the gal who answered the phone, but after repeating my call sign several times, she asked how she could be of assistance. I stated that I had just landed Istanbul and needed a handler. She then identified herself as the airport authority and said "yes you do <click>" and hung up on me.

I got up to speak with the security officer in charge and was in no uncertain gestures told to sit down immediately. At this point we had been the object of curiosity for the Turkish security forces for about forty minutes. I was getting worried and running out of ideas.

I attempted one final phone call to the FBO that I so often frequent in Ottawa. Fortunately, I recognized the voice on the other end of the line. I briefly explained my situation and asked for a little help researching the international Acu-Kwik, which I knew to be tethered to a table in the weather room.

Soon I had two other phone numbers with

which to save our lives. A call to the first was answered with an English "hello?", which was a good start. I explained we needed a handler for LTBA. When asked when we intended to arrive, I sheepishly replied that we were already here. Just seconds later a man appeared with a cordless phone. Our handler had been in the building the whole time!

A few hundred Euros later, our permit problems were temporarily forgotten, our passports supplemented with a crew visa for the night, and hotel and dinner reservations made. Turkish prison had been narrowly avoided.

Eurocontrol

At the hotel that evening, I logged on to the Eurocontrol website and read the AIP. While my client had made the same trip without incident several years earlier, he had been in a German-registered airplane. However, unlike EU-registered aircraft, N-registered airplanes need a five-business-day advance notice and prior permission to enter Turkish airspace. My failure to have and read the AIP before the trip nearly ended in an international incident.

Prior to departing the next day, we were briefly delayed as we had not obtained PPR to leave via Turkish airspace. Is

there another way out other than through Turkish airspace? Our handler made the problem go away with more Euros. We were warned by our handler that the call sign was now on a Turkish black list. Normally we could receive same-day PPR from our handler's company, but we would now need the full five business days to visit with that aircraft in the future.

Preparation

**Preparation
is the key to
successful
travel.**

This visit to Turkey had enough lack of planning to end in terrible failure. Only a fortuitous phone call to Ottawa and a handler in the building saved us from catastrophe. Yes, the trip was planned by another, and sprung upon me just moments before we were to depart. But I was PIC and can offer no excuse for failing to brief the entry and handling requirements for a new destination. I will not allow that to happen again. Lesson learned. ●

