

“ I, HAVE NEVER BEEN LOST IN AN AIRPLANE ! “

But, I must confess I've been temporarily "misplaced" a time or two.

Back when I was a young Private Pilot, I was building flying time working toward obtaining the coveted Commercial Pilot License so I could begin my career as a "Crop-Duster" Pilot.

One clear cool winter day, I planned a cross-country flight to Paris, Texas. Borrowing an old 170 Cessna from my boss, I readied it for the flight. Cleaning the windshield, checking the oil, tires, and a walk-around pre flight, I loaded up my Sectional charts or maps, used in cross-country flying. Dead-reckoning was the term back in those days when non-instrument rated pilots flew by visually using land marks to navigate.

The old Cessna had all of the instruments of the day; oil pressure, altimeter, gyro compass, airspeed indicator, turn & bank, a two-way radio and the omni direction finder. Of course, most were outdated by this time, but that's what we had. The fuel gages were mechanical, in the end of the wings, inside the cabin. The two gauges showed "full, down to the red zone, or no take off, and empty.

Anyway, after the pre-flight, I got in and cranked up the old 145 hp engine. My brother-in-law had decided that he would accompany me and serve as "navigator". He had flown a many times as a passenger, and was confident he could follow the landmarks and keep a flight course by the charts.

We took off into the cool, clear winter morning and climbed to about 8,000 feet, and headed North.

Everything was going very well, the old Cessna performing as expected, and the "navigator" was keeping us on track. I noticed a few clouds appearing at my altitude, so I began descending to stay below them. As the cloud cover increased, and my altitude got lower, I began to wonder about the "clear" forecast I had gotten before my departure.

Everything began to come together very quickly. The clouds got black, the wind

increased, and it began to rain, as my altitude got lower and lower to maintain eye contact with the ground, I soon found myself at tree-top height and in heavy rain.

I asked my "Navigator" for our last known position so I could turn towards the nearest airport when he replied, "I don't know". Well now, resorting to the old Omni, I tuned into the known frequency for a fix on my location. As the green arc lit up on the instrument, a flash of lightening caused the dial to glow brightly, and then turn black. No Omni! Ok, I tuned the old two-way radio to the nearest airport, figuring I could get a radar fix on my location. Wrong, the old radio was full of static for a few moments, and then went dead. Oh Boy!

No radio, no direction finder, a non-functional "navigator" sitting beside me, things were getting serious fast. By now, the gas gauges were bumping very close to the red zones and, for sure, I didn't want to run out of gas over the Big Thicket, so, as I remembered from ground school, fly a two minute leg triangle. If an airport tower picks you up on radar, that's a "lost" (temporary misplaced) signal. Hopefully, a pilot in the vicinity will come and guide you to the nearest airport. Who was I kidding! No one was going to be out in this weather.

After a few more circles, I saw a small grass strip and I headed in to land. But, to my dismay, there was what looked like a rodeo was being set up on the strip. It was evidently a private strip. But, at the end of the little strip was a pasture that seemed suitable. (Any old port in a storm), so I landed in the mud and water. Taxing up to the fence at the end of the airstrip, I shut down the engine and waited for the rain to stop.

After a while, the rain let up and a fellow drove down to us and ask what was wrong. I replied we were just about out of fuel and needed gas. He stated that they had no gas, but there was an airport about 35-40 miles "that-a-way", pointing northward.

Well, I looked in the gas tanks, and seeing a little gas, we decided to go for it.

Cranking up, we splashed the pasture almost dry on takeoff and proceeded northward. Shortly after takeoff, the rain began again at a steady downpour. Flying at about 500 feet, and after about ten miles of flight, the engine suddenly coughed, sputtered and died. Out of gas!

Looking for anywhere to land, I spotted a little hill that had been logged out and looked like the spot. Making a quick 360 degree turn, I lined up for a dead stick, bumpy landing. As I came in, I had to land over trees at the bottom of the hill, and then go under a power line that crossed the hill, and rolled up hill coming to a stop with the nose of the airplane sticking in a barb wire fence.

Looking over at my "Navigator", he looked as white as a ghost, completely nerve wracked. I calmly said to him, "Good landing! If looks could kill, I know I would be dead. However, I told my brother-in-law to remain with the airplane, and I would strike out on foot and try to find gas. After walking through the woods a short way, I heard a tractor coming up a rut road toward me, and an old black man stopped and said, "I heard that old engine sputter and quit, so I came looking for the crash.

Assuring him we didn't crash, just landed on that little hill behind me, I ask if that there was anywhere I could get some gas. He told me there was a highway about five miles through the woods, and he would take me on the tractor to a filling station down there.

Well, I rode on back of the tractor, down that rut road for what seemed forever, finally reaching the highway, and then shortly, pulled up in front of the station. Upon going inside, I found a nice lady and her cute daughter running the business. The old black man began telling them that I had crash landed on the little hill back in the woods. I told them that I had run out of gas and had a forced landing, not a crash landing. The lady had a gas can I could borrow, so I bought five gallons of car gas, and the daughter offered to take me back to the plane in her pickup truck, wanting to see the plane. Well, that suited me just fine; I had ridden

that old tractor enough. I thanked the old man for his bringing me to the station, offered him five dollars and we left in her pickup truck.

As we arrived at the plane, I was amazed to see about 15 folks standing around. My brother-in-law had recovered his wits enough to tell of our exploits and had the folks spell bound. I ask several men if they would help get the Cessna out of the fence and turn her around. They soon had the Cessna pointed down hill. I poured the gas in one tank, and announced I was going to attempt a takeoff. Someone said I would never make it. Looking to see who made the statement, I was surprised to see it was my "Navigator". I said, well I'm going to try anyway, and he could ride down to the service station with the girl and maybe catch a bus.

Saying goodbye to the cute girl, and thanking her for her help, I climbed up into the Cessna and cranked up the engine. As I strapped myself in the seat, the passenger door opened and my brother-in-law, shaking his head, said, "What the heck" and climbed aboard.

Holding the brakes and opening the throttle to full bore, getting all the power I could from the little 145, I let off the brakes, surged forward, and headed down hill.

About half way down the hill, I clipped a stump, tearing off the brake line on one gear. Plunging down hill toward the power line and the row of trees were coming up fast. As I rolled under the power line, I jerked full flaps and the Cessna jumped straight up and barley cleared the trees.

Looking over at my brother-in-law, I saw he had his eyes tightly shut in fear. I poked him and said, "perfect takeoff." Again, if looks could kill...

The 30 minute flight to the main airport at the next town was uneventful and I lined up on the concrete runway and landed.

As I rolled to a slow taxing speed, I found I couldn't keep the airplane straight because of the strong North wind, and the damaged brakes, so I rolled off to the side of the runway and stopped. Soon, an airport worker came out in his "follow me" jeep. I

got out and told him of my problem, so he towed the Cessna to a hangar. I hired the airport mechanic to replace the brake line that had been torn off on take off from the hill. My brother-in-law and I decided we would spend the night and proceed the next day on our trip.

The next morning, we caught a cab back to the airport and prepared to fly. After a little conversation, we decided we would just go back home. So, we cranked up, taxied out, and headed home.

After a two hour flight, we arrived back home, and landed, taxied up to the hangar, shut down the engine and got out of the Cessna.

My boss walked out, looked at the Cessna, seemingly satisfied, and asks, "How was your flight"? I replied, oh, we had a really good experience. If looks could kill...

Oldduster~~

Remembering my training if “misplaced”, one should fly a two minute leg triangle.
Repeat over again until an airplane is sent to guide you to an airport.

I knew no one would be out in this weather, flying just above the trees, in a driving rainstorm , over the Big Thicket looking for a “misplaced” pilot. However, keeping my wits, I expanded my triangle flight, getting larger and larger, looking for a landing site,. By now, the gas gauges were nearing the red (no take off) zone and soon things would bet really serious. I had no desire to crash in the trees out of gas.