

## Chapter 3: The Work Continues . . .

*One can get a proper insight into the practice of flying only by actual flying experiments. . . . The manner in which we have to meet the irregularities of the wind, when soaring in the air, can only be learnt by being in the air itself. . . . The only way which leads us to a quick development in human flight is a systematic and energetic practice in actual flying experiments.*

*Otto Lilienthal, 1896*

Winter winds were blowing predictably strong from west to east across the continental United States as the polar jet stream settled lower and southward from Canada. The polar jet stream is a concern to all pilots, especially those whose missions take them in a westerly direction. Strong headwinds of this kind are of greater concern to those of us who operate light, piston driven aircraft. A seventy knot headwind can double the time required to reach a destination to the west. Such was the case in next series of flights I made in the waning days of winter.

I arrived at the Buffalo Airport at 7:30 am, checked the weather and filed my flight plan to Trenton, New Jersey. The purpose of this trip was to close a grantwriting contract with major human service agency headquartered in New Jersey's capital city of Trenton. This organization had responded to one of our marketing letters sent to nonprofit agencies throughout the United States. I was making this trip on speculation in that no fees or travel expenses were being charged to this prospective client.

After completing the pre flight weather briefing and flight plan filing, I walked across Prior Aviation's parking ramp. Two Zero Yankee had been fueled moments early and was ready to go. This is one of only a few single engine piston airplanes at Prior routinely used for business flying. Most of the other single engine aircraft are used either for pleasure flying or for flight training.

*Perhaps someday*, I muttered to myself as I walked across the ramp to my airplane wondering what it would be like to pilot a sleek business jet. But it wasn't going to happen this day, so I continued walking briskly in the chilling drizzle to my airplane. The weather was marginal. Flying on that day was going to be demanding.

Approaching my fueled and ready airplane, I could see frozen droplets rain on the horizontal stabilizer. I reached up over the leading edge of the wing and felt the roughness of the frozen precipitation. Even though Two Zero Yankee can carry a load of ice while in flight, even a trace amount of frost on the wings can destroy their lift generating capacity.

I asked the ramp crew to return the airplane back to the warm hangar for 30 minutes or so to

melt the frozen water droplets. My other option was to have the airplane chemically de-iced with hot ethylene glycol (anti-freeze) at a cost of about \$150.

I pondered postponing the trip. If I postponed, it would be at least a month before I might get it rescheduled. That was the pressure to go. The pressure to stay was quite literally falling on my head. It was a mixture of snow and rain that already demonstrated its potentially lethal qualities by freezing to the wings. Then again, the precipitation might stop within the next hour or so.

The current and forecasted weather at my planned altitude of 13,000 feet was okay. The only marginal weather was sitting right over Buffalo and spreading out for about 10 miles. The ceiling was 900 feet and visibility was three miles. That was certainly flyable. My was the falling rain and snow mixture. Freezing rain can turn an aircraft into a chunk of non-controllable flying ice in a matter of minutes. Fortunately, such conditions exist only in narrow ribbons of vertical space in the atmosphere, generally several hundred feet or less in thickness. Given sufficient power and quick response, freezing rain can be escaped before too much harm is done. Nonetheless, freezing rain is to be avoided.

As Two Zero Yankee was warming in the hangar, I called Buffalo Departure Control on my handheld radio.

*Hello Departure, this Centurian 4720Y on the ground in Buffalo. Do you guys have a tops report and any reported ice in the climb out?* I asked rather casually. It's easy to be casual with such requests when sitting on the ground along side a warm hangar.

*Nothing yet, break, Continental 1520, did you pick up any ice on the climb out?*

*Just a trace of rime. We broke out at about 12,000 feet. We're in the clear now.*

The precipitation had ended with the hour, so I ordered N4720Y out of the hangar where I had completed the preflight inspection, climbed aboard and prepared to depart. The wings were still wet. I wanted to get moving quickly so that the wind and prop wash could blow them dry.

I was feeling quite relaxed about the planned departure, having received a positive report from a recently departed airliner and a confirmation from ATC that no other icing in the clouds was being reported. Plus, with a light load, I would be able to climb into clear, ice-free skies at 12,000 feet within a matter of minutes. This brief margin of time coupled with excellent de-icing equipment in good working order made my decision to "go" quite easy.

I was cleared onto the active runway by the dispassionate sounding tower controller who offers no comment about the safety aspects of the pending flight. This caused me to bite my lower lip, a practice I had become accustomed to doing each time I launch into low clag. Was it apprehension or intensity of thought? After all, this is the moment of decision. Pilots are well aware of the many things that can go wrong in the machines we fly. Most of the time, we have carefully thought out "back doors" that offer quick solutions to even the most dreadful mechanical failures. Single engine operators, like me, have somewhat fewer options, not having the backup power reserve of a second, third, or fourth engine. But, in the event of engine failure, light single engine airplanes can float to a stop at a much slower, leisurely pace than heavier, multi-engine airplanes.

*Centurian 4720Y, cleared for takeoff, runway 23, winds 250 at seven knots.*

Power was added slowly and brakes were released. Reaching 80 knots, I gave a slight tug on

the yoke and the airplane lifted effortlessly into the air. I retracted the landing gear, established a climb attitude, and monitored the airspeed. I shifted my view to the instrument panel as ground contact was lost at 500 feet. I retracted the flaps up, reduced power to 30 inches manifold pressure, and set the prop to 2,600 RPM. Vacuum pressure was in the green and both attitude indicators displayed three bar widths of pitch up attitude. This was confirmed by the rate of climb indicator showing 1,000 feet per minute. The directional gyro was locked on the runway heading of 230 degrees thus confirming a wings level attitude. This checked out with the bouncing magnetic compass above the windscreen. A glance at the turn coordinator also confirmed the wings level attitude. The tower controller bid farewell.

*Centurian 4720Y, contact departure control on 126.15. Have a good flight.*

*Departure, Centurian 4720Y 2,500 feet climbing to 4,000,* I quickly reply without glancing from the instrument panel.

*"Centurian 4720Y, radar contact, turn to 150 degrees on course, climb to 10,000 feet,"* came the almost immediate reply.

I activated the autopilot, twisted the heading bug to 150 degrees, set the altitude hold to 10,000 feet, then began to focus my attention of managing the engine. Managing a large bore, turbocharged engine can be a complicated affair. In this regard, there is a big difference between a professional pilot employed by a third party and a pilot/owner like me. While both exercise good care of their engines, particularly if there is only one powering the aircraft, it is the pilot/owner who has to bear the cost of any engine mismanagement. Remembering that this not your father's engine, a Continental TSIO 520-R is a \$27,000 piece of machinery that has a very short lifespan even under the best of conditions. It doesn't take much mismanagement to turn it into a piece of junk - not to mention a possible loss of the entire craft and the lives of all aboard.

Reaching 10,000 feet, I received a call from Buffalo Departure saying, *Centurian 4720Y, contact Cleveland Center on 124.2, so long.*

*Hello Cleveland, this is Centurian 4720Y, 10,000,* I reply

*Roger, 20Y, Jamestown altimeter is 30.13. Climb and maintain 13,000 feet and say flight conditions.*

*We're still IMC, trace rime ice, ride is smooth, 20Y.*

The part I like best about flying is the emergence into clear sunny skies after long slow climbs through dark, ice filled climbs. This can be an invigorating experience, especially towards the end of long winter when the last sight of sunshine occurred many weeks earlier.

The remainder of the trip into Trenton, New Jersey was about as pleasant as it gets. Sipping hot tea from my ever present thermos and noting a ground speed over nearly 200 knots, thanks to a 30 knot tailwind, made life sweet for me this particular morning. The added groundspeed enabled me to regain the time lost on the ground waiting for the ice to melt.

Landing at the Trenton Airport was routine. I taxied over to there only FBO, parked, left a fuel order at the desk, and requested a taxi to take me into town.

*I called the cab for you. Should be here in about 20 minutes,* said the lady behind the desk. That was fine with me as it gave me time to look around this FBO. To a pilot every FBO is a treasure

house of big boy toys. This one had a neat collection of high quality model airplanes, each selling for over \$150. I spotted a colorful thick wool blanket that would be just perfect for my airplane. It was festooned with images of airplanes, runway diagrams, and hangars. Just what every passenger would want.

*Add this to my fuel bill*, I instructed the lady behind the desk.

I ambled down the hallway to the door where the taxi cab would eventually arrive. There I spotted a corporate pilot leaning against the wall. I asked if he was waiting for cab. Responding negatively, he said that he was waiting for a limo to drive him up to Hartford, CT. He volunteered that his company was repositioning him to take a flight out of Hartford.

I have always envied corporate pilots. In my mind, they are the quarterbacks of aviation that fly the most beautiful airplanes in the world. They do not have to hang out in busy passenger terminals and mingle with crowds of boarding passengers. Instead, they travel with the most elite of the business, political, and professional world. Their's is a life of style in my mind.

My cab arrived and I was whisked downtown to Trenton to meet with my client precisely on schedule.

I returned to the airport at about 3pm for the next leg of my trip down to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The skies were still sunny and a gentle breeze was blowing across the ramp. The planned trip, covering 980 nautical miles, without headwinds would require nearly six hours to complete. Such was not the case on this day. Flight Service reported winds from the west at all altitudes to be at least 60 knots. This would make the trip nearly nine hours long! I had been up since 6am, already flown over an hour, completed a three hour business meeting, and was looking at another nine hours of flying which would have another hour added to it by an enroute fuel stop. By my calculations, I would not sleep this day until at least one o'clock in the morning.

I filed for Baton Rouge direct, not realizing that this routing would take me directly over lots of prohibited airspace protecting the presidential retreat at Camp David and other sensitive facilities in the Washington D.C. area. Flight Service accepted my requested plan anyway.

I preflighted the airplane, listened to the recorded airport briefing (ATIS) and taxied to the active runway. I punched "BTR," the three letter identifier for Baton Rouge, into the GPS, and called for my clearance. I received a quick reply.

*Centurian 4720Y is cleared to Bravo, Tango, Romeo. Fly runway heading, radar vectors Modene, Victor 474 to join Victor 143 Montebello, direct destination. Climb 10,000 feet, expect 16,000 feet in one zero minutes, departure frequency is 123.8, squawk 3367.*

This all came to me without so much as a pencil in hand. Afterall, flying direct generally results in a very short, easy to memorize clearance like, *Centurian 4720Y is cleared to Baton Rouge as filed. Climb to 10,000 and expect 16,000 in ten. Departure frequency is 123.8. Squawk 3367.*

I was again caught unprepared for the full route clearance and had to ask for it to be repeated. This is very poor airmanship, I thought to myself. Once I received the clearance, I had to again dig out the charts and locate the required fixes and airways. Once done, I entered all the fixes into the GPS, completed the check list, and called ready for departure. Looking at the chart I could see why this

convoluted routing was necessary. My approved course took me well north of Baltimore and Washington, DC, far away from the prohibited airspace over Camp David and Washington, DC. It also affirmed why flying under instrument flight rules (IFR) was so much simpler than flying under Visual Flight Rules (VFR). Under the latter, the pilot is responsible for remaining clear of obstacles and prohibited airspace. ATC takes care of all that when flying IFR. The first thing I noted in the climb out was the accuracy of the winds aloft forecast. The ground was passing under me at a mere 65 knots even though the indicated airspeed in the climb was 115 knots. At this rate, GPS flight computer reported that it would take me fifteen hours to reach Baton Rouge! I knew that the ground speed would pick up considerably once we leveled off, but still . . . this could be a very long day and night. I was still feeling quite good and certainly invigorated by the beautiful weather, so I decided to motor on for while until I could find a suitable enroute overnight stop. My Baton Rouge appointment scheduled for 1pm the next day so there was no pressing need to complete the trip in one day.

Running one's own business keeps the mind always focused on profits and losses. One way to maximize profits is to control expenses. And one expense that I like to avoid is overnight stays in hotels. In this particular trip, however, an overnight stay in Baton Rouge had been built into the trip cost. Thus, an overnight stay somewhere enroute really added nothing to the deal. What did add considerably to the deal was the three to four additional flying hours necessitated by the headwinds. While there are various ways of calculating the hourly cost of flying, ranging in the Cessna 210 from about \$50 for fuel costs alone up to about \$170 when factoring all fixed and variable costs including insurance, maintenance, hangar, and depreciation. Picking a number in the middle, say \$100 per hour, the headwinds were going to cost me \$300 to \$400. Thus, my plan was to land soon, spend the night, and hope for less intense headwinds the next morning.

There are other considerations when making unscheduled overnight stops. One, of course, is the availability of hotel space. Another is the ground transportation requirements to get from the airport to the hotel and back. I keep an airport directory on the airplane that provides lots of useful information about such things.

Looking at my routing and after reviewing the directory, it appeared that Lynchburg, VA would make a good overnight stopping place. I called their FBO by radio and asked if hotel accommodations tonight would be any problem.

*No problem,* said lady manning the FBO desk at Lynchburg.

I called Washington Center and advised them of my requested destination change, which they granted immediately. Destination changes are easy for ATC in this computer age. They simply amend my flight plan as requested, then issue a new clearance.

It was late afternoon when I landed at Lynchburg. A line serviceman directed me to the tie-down area, then pointed me in the direction of the FBO office. I registered, issued a fuel order, and requested assistance in securing a hotel room for the night. This was all taken care of in a matter of minutes. Before long a van arrived from the Lynchburg Comfort Inn to take me and two other private pilots into their facilities. A conversation among we three passengers quickly ensued. The other two pilots were trying to get to Williamsport, PA, but icing and low visibility discouraged them from pressing

on.

*Did they close the Williamport Airport, I asked.*

*No. We just didn't feel comfortable flying into their forecasted weather conditions.*

When learning that they were flying a Piper Commanche, with no de-icing equipment, I quickly concurred with their decision. Years of hard flying made me somewhat complacent about forging ahead in the face of adverse weather forecasts. N4720Y was one of the few single engine aircraft having onboard weather radar, storm scope, and certified for flight into known icing conditions. I am a bit more conservative when talking with pilots of traditional general aviation aircraft. On the same token, I realize that it is equally important that I not become overconfident with the ability of N4720Y to adverse weather conditions. Overconfidence in aviation is a sure-fire predictor of tragedy.

Morning came all too soon. I showered and dressed for the 5:15am ride back to the airport. Joining me on the ride back to the airport were two airline pilots who asked if I was going with them to Pittsburgh. I replied that I was heading down to Baton Rouge in my own airplane, at which time the van driver chimes in.

*Gosh, I'd love to be able to hop in my own airplane and fly to whatever distant city I want to go.* This statement gave me pause. It was then that I realized how fortunate I was.

We arrived at the FBO at 5:30am. It was open but nobody was scheduled to come in until 6am. I resented having to give up this extra 30 minutes to settle up my fuel bill. I decided to go ahead and preflight the aircraft and, if necessary, leave my AMEX credit card number on a piece of paper. I walked back into the office with my empty thermos hoping to find a source of hot water. This, with a couple of tea bags, was all I needed to maintain my necessary caffeine fix for upcoming early morning flight. As hoped, an FBO employee arrived several minutes before 6am. She was able to run an imprint of my card, so I was now on my way.

After a short conversation with the Leesburg Flight Service which included a weather briefing and a filed flight plan, I walked over to the airplane. It was still dark but the moon was full. There was no activity on the Lynchburg Municipal Airport. The control tower was not scheduled to open for another 30 minutes. I could depart anyway by simply announcing my intentions on the CTAF frequency.

Ordinarily, taxing at night on a strange airport can be more challenging than the takeoff. This task, however, is made much easier with the help of the GPS moving map. By scaling the screen down to 1,000 feet, the airplane can be easily seen on the airport diagram. Ah, the marvels of modern technology, I thought. A network of twenty five satellites orbiting 25,000 miles above the earth were directing my roll safely along a narrow taxiway to the runway of choice.

I made the necessary radio calls, checked the published departure procedure, and launched in the still early morning darkness. I could see the shadow outline of rising terrain immediately north of the airport which explains why the published departure procedure instructs pilots to remain on the runway heading until reaching 3,000 feet before turning on course. The sky was clear and the lights below twinkled in the midst of overlying ground haze. The air was silky smooth through the climb to 10,000 feet. With the autopilot in charge of things, I sat back and, again, marveled at the good fortune I had

acknowledged on the earlier van ride to the airport.

I still had a long way to travel. The direct routing to Baton Rouge would take me over western Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama, about 750 miles in all. And the high westerly winds I had experienced yesterday were still a factor. My appointment in Baton Rouge was at 1pm, actually 2pm by my watch which was set to eastern standard time. This gave me an extra hour. Given the current winds, my estimated time enroute, as automatically calculated by the GPS, would be a little over five hours. This was a substantial improvement over yesterday's estimated travel time of seven hours. The winds at my altitude had subsided to about 40 knots directly on the nose. The resultant flight time savings of two hours more than offset the out of pocket costs of last night's stay in Lynchburg. Life was good.

It was still dark as I motored smoothly westward. I had selected 10,000 feet as a cruising altitude to minimize the impact of upper level winds which generally increase with altitude. The moon was full and the air was crystal clear. I reached for and slowly cracked open my thermos of tea using a technique that I had learned much earlier in my flying career. Very slow turns of thermos top were necessary to allow the pressure inside the thermos to equalize with the lower atmospheric pressure at the higher altitude I was flying. The first time I did this was on a flight from Buffalo to New York. I had climbed to 15,000 feet and quickly opened the thermos. The boiling tea literally exploded, popping the twist cap off like a champagne cork, spewing scalding tea all over the cabin including the instrument panel, headliner, and worse . . . me. My hands, face, and neck were stung by the scalding tea. This was one of the few minutes ever that my attention turned fully away from flying the airplane.

What happened, was my immediate thought? I had always been taught to expect the unexpected when flying, but an exploding thermos was something else again. As I thought about it, it occurred to me that the boiling temperature of water decreases with increasing altitude. So the hot tea that I prepared prior to takeoff was still at the sub-boiling temperature of around 200 degrees. At 15,000 feet, water boils at a temperature somewhere below 200 degrees. Thus, I opened what was, in fact, a conventional pressure cooker. This explained why the top blew off violently as I quickly loosened it. Hmm. . . . live and learn.

Back to the flight to Baton Rouge. I savored the hot tea as I always do on early morning flights. The rising terrain ahead was beginning to lighten as the sun to my back slowly crept over the eastern horizon. The weather was calling for a bright, sunny day which I welcomed eagerly after my recent series of harsh winter flights. Anticipating the pending appearance of the southern range of the Appalachian Mountains that forms the border of North Carolina and Tennessee, I switched one of the GPS's eight optional data blocks to report the minimum safe altitude for the sector I was flying. This is a neat feature that is built into this remarkable database of information. It showed that as long as I was at least 6,000 feet above sea level I would safely clear all obstacles along my route, including mountain peaks. Soon this data box jumped to 8,000 feet, then 9,000. From this, I could tell that the mountain range ahead was quickly approaching. This was easily confirmed by simply looking out the window.

The Smoky Mountains soon appeared in all their early morning splendor. The highest peak was along the ridge was Roan Mountain, standing over 6,000 feet high. The remarkably clear skies

enabled me to see the entire ridge of this chain from the south to the distant horizon to the north. A string of radio antennas were visible along the entire ridge. Winding roads, hiking trails, and fire breaks traversed the entire area. With my binoculars I could see cabins and a few cars. I had flown over this ridge many times before, but never this low and in such clear weather. It was really quite spectacular.

Off the left wing I saw Ashville, NC, the furniture capital of the world. A few minutes earlier I spotted Greensboro, NC and quickly recalled a late night precautionary landing I made to that airport several months earlier. That particular night produced one of the very few mechanical problems I had ever encountered in flight. I had been on a flight home from Charleston, SC where I had been giving a talk before a large group of professional fundraisers. I had been away for several days and was anxious to get home. The climb out from Charleston signaled the first sign of a possible problem. Having flown N4720Y for over 1,200 hours, I knew every sound and vibration this two year old engine and twenty one year old airframe could produce.

This takeoff produced an almost imperceptible hiccup sound from the engine. It caught my attention immediately. I listened carefully; it did it again. Then it went away. I motored on cautiously without hearing any more hiccups. About an hour later, there it was again. It was night and I soon be flying into declining weather. My route would take me over the Appalachian chain of mountains bordering North Carolina, Tennessee and up into West Virginia. This was no place to be at night, in IMC, with an uncertain engine.

I then did something for which I was later severely admonished by my trusted flying mentor and friend (and highly skilled aircraft mechanic), Lou Nalbene. I began to troubleshoot the problem by alternatively switching off one of the two magnetos. As any student pilot knows, the magnetos energize the spark plugs. Having two magnetos is another example of the redundancy of systems built into all modern aircraft. By switching one magneto system off, I could tell if the other was working properly. Alternately switching mags can quickly identify the culprit if one is failing or has failed. This switching did, indeed, reveal that the left magneto was failing. About every two or three seconds it produced a noticeable "miss" in the engine. I suspected the trouble mag could fail entirely at any moment so I quickly switched back to both magnetos and made a radio call to Atlanta Center. I knew one mag was bad, if I lost the other, we would turn immediately into a glider. And gliders do not do well at night. I alerted ATC of my problem.

*Atlanta Center, Centurian 4720Y requesting clearance into Greensboro.*

*Roger, Centurian 20Y. Do you have a problem?*

*Ah . . . we're experiencing an intermittent engine problem and need to make a precautionary landin.," I replied.*

*Centurian 4720Y, are you declaring an emergency?*

*Negative, Center, I just need to get down to check this thing out.*

*Roger, Centurian 20Y, you are cleared to Greensboro Airport, direct. Contact Greensboro Approach Control on 134.22.*

*Greensboro Approach, this is Centurian 4720Y, inbound for landing, no delay please.*

*Hello, Centurian 4720Y, Atlanta Center has informed of us of your problem. You are*

*cleared to land, runway 22, winds two five zero at six. Do you require any assistance?*

This *Do you require any assistance* is standard ATC phraseology that translates into, *Do you want to us roll the crash equipment?* I had come to know what that phrase really meant some number of years ago when I had my one and only real in-flight emergency with my family aboard over Watertown, NY. But that's another story for later on.

*Negative, 20Y*, I replied.

The landing at Greensboro was routine in all respects. The only problem was that it was late and the mechanics had already left for the day. My suspected magneto problem was confirmed the next morning when the Greenboro mechanic reported that the left magneto was toast. I ordered the necessary repairs and was back off to Buffalo by noon.

Earlier I reported that Lou Nalbore thoroughly admonished me for switching back and forth between magnetos in flight while troubleshooting the problem. He informed me that such practice in a normally aspirated engine is not a problem. In a turbocharged airplane like mine, switching to an inoperative magneto could result in a rapid accumulation of unburned fuel in the exhaust system leading to the turbocharger. Switching back to the good magneto would ignite this unburned fuel, quite likely blowing the turbocharger and much of the exhaust system right out of the bottom of the airplane! The burning exhaust would then scorch the fuel lines leading to the engine and the airframe resulting in an in-flight fire. Fortunately, in my case, the bad magneto was still producing enough spark to prevent this tragic situation from happening to me. Hmmm . . . live and learn, I thought to myself. Curiously, I have come to say this a lot in my flying career.

Back to the trip south to Baton Rouge.

Crossing the Appalachian Mountains in the Eastern U.S. is equivalent to crossing the Continental Divide in the west. The rugged mountainous terrain soon gave way to the rolling flat plains of Georgia and eventually Alabama and Louisiana. The ground cover and vegetation turned from brown to green as I was entering the still growing season of the souther climate. I glanced at the outside temperature probe. It was reporting a few degrees above freezing at this altitude. Normally, this would not have captured my attention, however, this was the first time in weeks that I could turn my attention from the ever present risk of icing. Again, I thought to myself, life is good.

I crossed into the northeast corner of Alabama with about two and one-half hours to go to my destination. The sun was now high in the sky and I could feel its heat on my face. I felt myself slipping into a very, very relaxed state of mind. It was like those moments just before you fall into an afternoon nap. I had been up since 4:30am and the urge to sleep began to creep in. It was almost silent in the cockpit. The dron of the engine and the rush of the wind over the wings seemed to fade away. Hmmm . . . it can't get any better than this, I said to myself. I was also quite well aware of the insidious nature of fatigue. I had been traveling hard over the past several weeks. Coupled with the stress of some unexpected staffing turnover in my office, I was beginning to feel the need to slow down. I was also feeling the need to sit up and pay attention to my flying.

I turned the cabin heat off, opened on of the air vents, and cranked up the flow of oxygen I had been inhaling. Huntsville, Alabama was passing under my left wing. This triggered an immediate

recollection of one of the very best weekends of my life that occurred the previous year. Huntsville is the home of U.S. Space Camp, an organization operated by NASA. It is also the location of the Marshall Space Flight Center where all shuttle launches are controlled once leaving the pad in Florida. All in all, Huntsville is a neat place for aviators to visit.

Huntsville did, indeed, spark fond memories. My ten year old daughter, Erica, and I flew to Huntsville last June to attend their three day parent/child space camp program. Erica is every bit her father's child. She is at home in my airplane as she is on her bicycle. She was, in fact, piloting the airplane from the left front seat during that five hour flight from Buffalo to Huntsville. A couple of pillows were required for her to over the panel. And despite the fact that I am her proud father, I can say that Erica was able to hold heading and altitude as well as any adult student I've had with less than five hours of in-light instruction! I like to think that the apple does not fall far from the tree.

Ahhh, such fond memories, but back to the task at hand. Approaching Baton Rouge was routine in all respects except for the deep southern accent of the Houston Center controller handling my flight. I was switched over to Baton Rouge Approach Control, then Baton Rouge tower for landing. The 76 degree outside temperature quickly infiltrated the cockpit as I opened my window on the landing roll out. Exiting the airplane after five hours of flying is always a joy, but this was a special exit. It was February and it was summer. Life is good.

I arrived in time to borrow a crew car and get a quick lunch at the local restaurant. I then met my client, Sister Michaeline, a Catholic nun serving as superintendent of the Baton Rouge Catholic School System. She greeted me in full traditional habit. White robes and all.

Returning to the airport, I hit the vending machines for a couple of sandwiches and several bottles of water to take back with me on my return flight to Buffalo. The anticipated west to east flow of winds that would hasten my return were, indeed, welcomed.

I had to pause, though, for a minute to assess where I had been, what I had done, and where I was going. I had already been awake since 4:45am and had flown five hours. I had completed a three hour business meeting and was looking at a six hour flight back to Buffalo. That is a very long day. I could take an enroute overnight stop, but I had a morning meeting scheduled the next day in Cooperstown, NY.

I decided to go ahead a file a flight plan, Buffalo direct, then assess my condition while enroute. I figured I might be able to catch a piece of the jetstream by climbing up to flight level 210 or 21,000 feet. And that I did. My ground speed soared to 230 kts which for my little bird was like having jet propulsion. The forecast weather back to Buffalo was good, all except for Youngstown, Ohio north. There I would find cold, ice filled, overcast skies up to about 15,000. The only problem that would produce would be on the descent into Buffalo. So what else is new, I thought? Buffalo is situated at the end of a 200 mile long ice cube called Lake Erie. Cold air flows coming down from Canada pick up moisture from the Great Lakes that result in nearly constant grey skies over Upstate New York communities from November to May.

As expected, the descent into Buffalo, through multiple cloud layers down to 4,000 feet produced light to moderate accumulations of ice. I descended at 1,500 feet per minute, a rather quick

pace even for me, but without passengers and their potential for unresolvable ear problems, this would keep the accumulation of ice to a minimum. I found clear skies below 4,000 feet. The landing into Buffalo was routine. Despite nature's push, it was still a very long day and I was happy to be home . . . . cold, but home anyway. It was now 1am. I had been going for nearly 22 hours straight.

Arriving home, I tossed my coat on the kitchen chair, went upstairs and gave Erica a hug and kiss, petted Britty and Molly, our two Golden Retrievers who were in our bed along side Jo. They were still fast asleep. Some watch dogs, I thought. I gave Jo a quick squeeze, then fell fast, fast asleep after setting my alarm for a 7am wakeup for another trip planned the next morning.