

THE RITE FLYER

MARTIN AIRFIELD

Curious Distraction Leads to Unintended Consequences

Coming Up ...

Meeting :

Monday , August 10th,
7:00 p.m. Online

Program: Maintenance
discussion,

Board of Directors

August 8th, 7:00 pm

Next Meeting:

September 14th, Online

Chapter Website:

chapters.eaa.org/ea604

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By Ron Urban

We all have a hangar-full of interesting and entertaining stories accumulated during our flying careers, most describing our own direct experiences. A few, however, sometimes with special appeal, are those we've heard from others. The following account describes one of the latter, although I've changed names and places in order to avoid a potential lawsuit.

If you've ever approached a high mountain ridgeline in a light plane, you're probably aware of a number of pressing factors that must be considered if you are to make a successful transition. Weather, of course, is a constant concern inasmuch as your escape routes become more limited due to few canyons and high terrain everywhere you look, and the search for suitable landing spots is always on your mind. On top of that, there are worries about possibly having to carry oxygen if you plan on flying higher than 12,500 MSL for any length of time. Professional mountain pilots constantly remind us not to venture into high country when the winds aloft exceed 30 knots, and to cross an approaching high ridge at a 45-degree angle, in case you have to turn away. It is common knowledge among pilots who regularly fly in the mountains in normally aspirated aircraft that it's absolutely essential to keep the plane's nose pointed above the ridgeline as you approach, since allowing the nose to drop even briefly, will guarantee that the aircraft will recover lost climb ability excruciatingly slowly. Even though you might have trimmed for the proper climb attitude, inadvertently bumping the controls, or light turbulence can cause inadvertent pitch and heading deviations. While you possibly might have adequately considered each of the previous challenges, one factor you probably discounted was the insistent call of nature—the need to attend to certain physiological needs at most inconvenient times.

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Calendar Items to share

Week Days Coffee Club, Martin Field Pilot's Lounge, **Cancelled until further notice**

Fly-outs are sparse due to social distancing and crowd size limitations.



Distraction Leads to Unintended Consequences *continued*

Such was the situation that confronted Harvey Schmidt back in 1978, when he was attempting to fly over the Continental Divide (via Milner Pass, 10,758' msl) just west of Loveland, Colorado in a Piper J-3. Yes—you read that correctly. Now everyone knows that a Piper Cub can't climb high enough to pass over an almost 11,000 foot ridgeline, but Schmidt was game because he was a highly skilled crop duster, comfortable operating an aircraft on the knife edge of its performance, and knew the dangers of ignoring critical information such as density altitude, winds aloft, and stall speeds due to weights and balance. I met Schmidt at his home when I was interviewing pilots for part of a general aviation research project at the University of Colorado. When I asked Schmidt about the wisdom of attempting to cross the Continental Divide in a J-3, during the summer months he replied that he had done so several times before, and so long as one flew early in the cool morning when the winds were calm and density altitude was not such a critical factor, it was quite possible—even in a J-3. Schmidt then related the following story to me, which I now share with you.

Schmidt was hired to ferry a J-3 from the Loveland area on the eastern front range of the Rockies to Steamboat Springs, Colorado (on the western slope), and given his knowledge of the area, plus his years of experience, he was well prepared to venture over some of the highest terrain in the continental U.S. in something not much more powerful than a hang glider. He arrived very early at the Loveland airport, completed his preflight inspection, and must have wondered why the owner failed to tidy up the cabin a bit, since sandwich wrappers, empty plastic cups, and other debris were scattered around the cabin. Nonetheless he departed westbound, just after sunrise. The view must have been absolutely spectacular in the early morning sunlight at his back—14,255 MSL Long's Peak looming majestically near his route, still covered with snow, and an endless expanse of spruce and fir trees leading him ever higher to that tiny crack in the immense wall of the towering Colorado Rockies known as Milner Pass. After about an hour, Schmidt was beginning to approach the ridgeline of the Continental Divide, and although the VSI was barely above zero with the engine properly leaned and at full power, everything was progressing as planned. As he got closer and closer to the crest of the pass, Schmidt reminded himself not to allow the nose of the J-3 to drop below the ridgeline, knowing that doing so would probably ruin his day.

Now I mentioned that Schmidt was a crop duster pilot,

and as such he was used to long hours in ag planes with precious little time on the ground to reload his applicator tanks and then head out again to smite nasty crop diseases and swarms of insects. This means that answering nature's call after morning coffee required him to carry a portable urinal aboard the Piper Pawnee so that he could easily attend to his physiological needs while flying en route to and from the farmlands just east of Loveland. Given the pressures of his line of work, Schmidt knew that when he was airborne and had to respond to nature's insistent demands, the next best thing to an airliner's lavatory was the portable urinal sitting alongside him. What possibly could be better?

As he drew closer to the Continental Divide, Schmidt was probably mesmerized by the view in front of him. Here was the magnificence of the Rocky Mountains unfolding before him, spruce forests stretching as far as the eye could see and brilliantly white snow fields scattered just ahead and barely a hundred feet below. As he approached ever closer, the J-3 struggled to climb at a pitch angle very close to a stall, but still allowed him to safely clear the trees at the top of Milner Pass. Things would work out just fine, just so long as he maintained his current flight profile.

Annoyingly, at this point Schmidt discovered that his earlier-consumed morning coffee demanded to be evacuated—in fact, he was becoming really uncomfortable. He initially thought he could wait until crossing that rapidly approaching ridgeline, but the discomfort was getting to be too intense. As he reached for that ever-reliable portable urinal, it suddenly struck him like a clap of thunder that the answer to his relief was not sitting within his reach in the front seat of the J-3, but rather on the floor of the Pawnee parked at the Loveland airport. He had forgotten to load the urinal in the J-3 before the flight, and now he was facing a personal emergency.

Painfully uncomfortable with the repurposed water of his morning coffee, Schmidt frantically started searching for other containers in the unkempt cabin—an empty coffee cup, stray thermos bottle, soda can—anything to use as a substitute for the missing urinal. At last he spied an empty plastic bread bag that the owner of the aircraft had left in the front seat of the J-3, and to his relief, he would have just enough time to take care of business before reaching the ridge summit, at this point less than a mile away, and perhaps a few dozen feet beneath him. One can almost share his sense of relief as he began to fill the bread bag with the source of his original discomfort, while ensuring that the nose of the J-3

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EAA 604 Minutes, July 13, 2020

The meeting was called to order at 7:09 p.m. using Zoom Meetings due to Covid-19 and the Stay Home Stay Safe order from our Governor. Don Gibbard took attendance and we had 11 members at the online meeting and one guest.

The Minutes from our June meeting were summarized by our Secretary, Don Gibbard. There was no discussion. A motion was made that we accept the minutes. It was seconded and the motion carried.

The Treasurer's Report was given by Ron Urban. Our bank account is solvent, and we only had one expense of \$10.00 for our Non-Profit State renewal. There was no income for the month. At the May meeting there were 19 paid members. A motion was made and seconded that we accept the Treasurer's report. The motion carried.

Board Meeting Report: The Executive Board met on July 12th. It was decided that we needed to cancel the 2020 Young Eagle event due to the ever changing requirements of Covid-19. Bill gave a report on the pedal planes restoration. Norm Stiles has finished the refurb and added some upgrade in the process. They look better than new. Thanks Norm! Bill moved the Chapter Documents into a filing cabinet donated by the Urbans. It is in our designated storage area at the airport

Old Business: Matt H gave a report on his project and said he was mostly finished with the fuselage and is picking up the finish kit in August.

Bill H. reported on the DART program and noted that 2500 face masks were sent by FEMA via the postal service for Aviation Support groups.

Gorge Aviation has started the Saturday Hamburger feed. Don Gibbard will check on times and conditions and send an update.

New Business: No new business. The rest of the meeting was spent sharing our stories of "Near Misses" in flight or on ground.

Respectfully submitted,
Don Gibbard, Secretary

The discussion theme for Monday night is "Pilot Maintenance: Experimental vs. Certified" How much do you do yourself? What has been your experience? Any concerns about flying on a pilot fix?

Limited Extension of Relief for Certain Persons and Operations During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Public Health Emergency

The FAA's regulations contain several training, recent experience, testing, and checking requirements that persons must comply with prior to exercising their airman or crewmember privileges. The FAA's regulations also contain duration requirements, such as those pertaining to medical certificates, the validity of knowledge tests, and general procedures for completing a practical test. Persons continue to have difficulty complying with several of the FAA's requirements because of the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 public health emergency, including the continuation of social distancing guidelines to prevent transmission of the virus. As a result, "lapses" in qualifications, which occur on the last day of each month, will affect an additional cohort of regulated parties at the end of each month even as stay-at-home advisories are lifted and replaced with State and local directives for phased recovery and routine activities resume. The regulatory relief provided in this final rule will amend the Relief for Certain Persons and Operations during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) final rule (SFAR 118) ([85 FR 26326](#)) that was issued on April 30, 2020. This amendment will enable the continuity of aviation operations that are critical during the COVID-19 public health emergency and the recovery, including operations that support essential services and flights that support response efforts. In addition, the SFAR contains regulatory relief for persons who are unable to satisfy certain requirements to prevent those persons from enduring unnecessary economic burdens due to circumstances related to the public health emergency that are outside of their control. The FAA notes that, except for one instance related to the extension of medical certificates, no extension of relief has been granted to airmen who were eligible for relief in SFAR 118. The FAA also notes that, in this final rule, it is not expanding every area of relief provided in original SFAR 118. Although this amended SFAR will remain effective through March 31, 2021, that date does not reflect the duration for every provision. As a result, airman, operators, and air agencies should review the eligibility, conditions, and duration of the SFAR carefully to ensure compliance.

Chapter Meeting Online

Our August Chapter meeting will be held as an online Zoom meeting on Monday August 10th starting at 7:00 p.m. You will receive an invitation to join the meeting from Ron Urban. There will be a link to the online meeting you can use with a computer, smartphone, tablet with video capabilities. If you do not have a camera on your computer you can still join online but you will need a microphone in order to join the conversation.

The second option is to dial in with any phone. There is a toll free number with the meeting ID and password in the line. If you can launch the call from your email, the link will in put all the necessary information. If you dial it directly from a phone you will need to follow the prompts for meeting ID and meeting Password.

Keep your email invitation handy as you login since it contains all the information you need to succeed.

If you have not used Zoom before, the link will prompt you to download the Zoom App. Follow the install directions.



August Fly-out Opportunity

Treepport Wings & Wheels Drive in or Fly-In

8/22 - Pancake breakfast 0800-1000, food vendors from 1000-1500, games raffle tickets, prizes. 1800 Pilots potluck dinner. 2000 Bonfire and refreshments at campsite. 8/23 - 0700-0800 Doughnuts and Coffee. ID22—Treepport

If you have ideas of other places to go please share.

Distraction *Continued*

pointed safely above the ridgeline.

Things appeared to be going well until Schmidt discovered to his dismay that the substitute receptacle contained several ventilation holes, and that urine was beginning to pour from those openings onto his charts, seat, and clothes. Desperately searching for someplace to put the leaky bag, Schmidt momentarily allowed his attention



drift away from flying the plane, and the nose dipped below the ridgeline, meaning that the aircraft was no longer climbing. When Schmidt finally looked out the windshield, he discovered to his horror that he was well below the ridgeline, heading straight

for the spruce trees. Although he resumed the proper pitch attitude, the J-3 lacked sufficient climb power to avoid hitting the spruces, and since his airspeed was just above a stall, even gentle turns were out of the question. At this point, the only option available to Schmidt was to mush the aircraft into the rapidly approaching trees, and hope for the best. Fortunately, because his airspeed was very low, the plane settled into the trees without resulting in total destruction or even injury to the pilot. Schmidt was able to free himself from the cabin, and walk away to report his misfortune.



What are the take-aways from this event? First of all, breaking the chain of events at any link would have resulted in a different outcome for Schmidt. Items such as using a very detailed pre-flight checklist that included accounting for the portable urinal, postponing morning coffee, or even delivering the aircraft on a flatbed trailer probably would have produced an intact aircraft. But foremost, the best lesson to be learned here is: "Always fly the aircraft first", regardless of any external distractions. It would have been far better if Schmidt had chosen to soil his clothing and continue monitoring his flight at the critical time than what actually transpired. There's a bit of a lesson here for us all.