

EAA CHAPTER 770

SPRINGFIELD, IL

JANUARY 2022

Welcome to the new Chapter 770 newsletter. I hope to bring you news and updates from the chapter, upcoming flying events, info and more. If you have flying stories, photos etc to include feel free to send them to etf6911@gmail.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS

VMC/IMC Club	January 4	6:30pm	Stellar Aviation
Chapter Meeting	January 20	6:30pm	TBD
EAA AirVenture	July 25-31		KOSH

UPCOMING EAA WEBINARS

Balky Alternator	January 5	7pm	(WINGS)
Ground Reference Manuevers (Practicing Precision Patterns)	January 12	7pm	(WINGS)
Young Eagles Coordinator Orientation	January 18	7pm	
Become a Better Chapter Leader (Presidents/Vice Presidents)	January 20	7pm	
EAA Homebuilder's Week	January 24-28	11:30am-8:15pm	

Register for upcoming webinars at:

www.eaa.org/ea/news-and-publications/ea-webinars

CHEROKEE 180 TRANSCON

BY ERIC FROMM

I had already been threatened by a friend with an imminent upcoming cross country journey from points unknown. My friend was in the market for an aircraft, and he was looking anywhere in the lower 48 for that perfect airplane, and I was going to go with him to fly it back. He definitely wouldn't need my meager flying skills, as he is an accomplished airline and corporate pilot who worked his way up building time instructing, flying skydivers, freight etc, it was more a matter of someone to keep him awake and to tell stupid jokes during a long leg from some far off place, or maybe to serve as a speed alert when he's doing 110kts over the threshold.

He called me from California while he was out there on a trip. "I found a Cherokee 180" he said. "Oh yeah, where's it at"? I asked, expecting maybe a bi state trip home. "French Valley Ca, between San Diego and Los Angeles". It wasn't the distance that had my attention.. it was those mountains, all those mountains between here and there.

Naturally my first reaction was to look at satellite imagery of the foreign, sometimes Martian looking terrain we'd have to traverse across. What kind of emergency landing areas would we have along the way? In my mind if anything went wrong, we'd surely end up like Maj. Bush in Iron Eagle II when he smashes his F-16 against the side of the mountain, because my mind painted an image of nothing but a thousand miles of cliffs and peaks and rocks and hard craggy earth.

Airports were few and far between and those with instrument approaches, if we needed them, were even fewer. I'd be lying if I didn't look through a copy of Controller a few times looking for an equal alternate airplane that I could suggest he look at instead, maybe from Indiana or Iowa or some other nice flatland where we could land anywhere if we needed to if the unfamiliar airplane decided to cop an attitude with us enroute.

He called me back to say he bought it and with other life events going on in the next couple weeks, we'd leave the following weekend to pick it up. Captain Fraid E. Cat (I.E. me), hopped on my PC simulator and flew parts of a few of the legs we'd fly just to get a feel for it, but I knew as decent as the simulators are, they'd only give a vague idea as to how it'd go in the real world.

We airlined it out of St Louis to Los Angeles. I attempted to hide my nerves behind what was probably a very readable phony confident face. I mean let's face it, outside of a couple test flights, neither of us had ever flown this airplane, and although most of my time was in a very similar Warriors and Archers, it was a 1965 Cherokee with the Hershey Bar wing so I knew the flight characteristics would be a little different and what shape was the engine in? Couldn't be that different, but that terrain... that kept crossing my mind.



(my last ride on an MD-80 at the gate in STL)

We discussed the flights ahead while enjoying a Chili's Black Bean Burger in the old C concourse at Lambert in St Louis. He had thoroughly reviewed the possible routes prior and we would be forced to take the southern route back to IL due to the service ceiling on the airplane. The highest minimum enroute altitude along this route would only require us to climb to 11,000msl which this aircraft was capable of, whereas flying further north would require 13,000 and greater, of which we'd need both the performance and oxygen to operate. As a side note, this would be my last ride on the beloved MD-80 (I've always been a fan of the DC-9 family, as an avgeek and airline nerd I was disappointed it wasn't former Ozark/TWA metal, but it was still after all a Mad Dog). We caught our connecting flight to Los Angeles at Dallas Ft Worth Intl. We got split up on the 757. I had an aisle seat with only an occasional view of the night landscape outside. This gave me plenty of time to imagine and exacerbate what lie ahead on this adventure. I sort of felt like some kind of pioneer in a Walter Mitty sort of way, an explorer, but let's be real, man has been flying transcontinentally for nearly a century, people have circumnavigated the world in single engine aircraft, heck even in balloons. People make flights like this all the time, but to me, this was by far the biggest event in my flying experience to this point (and for that matter, since).

The grandness of it all still got pushed aside for apprehension over all that rugged terrain we'd fly over. I kept thinking about how the first day would be filled with nerves, but too late to back out now. I only bought a one way ticket to LAX and probably couldn't afford a last minute airline ride home at this point anyway. As the flight went on I thought to myself, "man we've been flying at 450kts over the ground for a long time now, and even with a tailwind, we'll probably be getting 120-ish at best over the ground in the Piper on the way back. We've probably covered about the same amount of mileage we'll cover tomorrow. We have a lot of flying ahead!

We arrived at LAX around 10 or 11 Pacific time and went straight to the hotel. We got a good bit of rest and woke up the next day with excitement. When we showed up at French Valley airport we met the broker who handed over the keys and showed us to the aircraft.



(our first look at 67W. Looks okay from here... will she get us over those mountains though?)

We gave it the once over and then went to grab a quick lunch before departure. But as any avnerd at an airport does, we quickly got distracted by an open hangar and a black nose sticking out. It was an F4H-1F. A real life almost airworthy civilian Phantom (and a pre F-4 Phantom, Phantom at that!) being restored by a museum. We probably sat and talked with the guys who were rewiring it for at least an hour, and they showed us the helos (OH-34, OH-58) in the museum, and of course we couldn't pass up meeting their arriving Huey gunship that was coming back from a Memorial Day ceremony.



(F4H1 in the hangar being rewired. This aircraft is airworthy and for sale today)

We finally got back to the Piper and job at hand around 2 or 3 in the afternoon their time. A VERY thorough preflight was conducted. We started running the checklists and got 'er fired up. The engine sounded good as we listened with a very cautious ear. We would have to depart French Valley and circle over the field to climb to cruise to get above the San Jacinto mountain range. It was an ominous mountain just to the east of the field a few miles and it was covered in trees and vegetation. We taxied out and did an equally thorough run up. We couldn't find anything to squawk, so I guess we had nothing left to do now but test our fate.



(now enroute out of the over-airport orbits to get to altitude)

"Everything looks good to me, alright with you"? "Lets go" and we departed. The Hershey bar Cherokees love to climb, they'll lift off on their own very easily just above the Vr speed compared to the tapered wing Warriors and Archers I've flown in the past that you have to almost pull off the ground. The one glaring oddity to a 1970s vintage Piper driver inside was the "trim wheel". Instead of the now familiar wheel on the floor, this one was a car window style crank on the ceiling.. I knew I'd reach for the floor accidentally several times before that sunk in, and of course I did, "where's the wheel? Oh yeah". We got light really quickly for the high density altitude we were in and the topped off tanks. She climbed up to 11,000msl in about 3 or 4 orbits over the field.

We were now able to proceed enroute to HEMET intersection, and on to PSP VOR. She flew really nice. Trimmed out it flew very smooth. So far so good. "Man that mountain is pretty close out there, and there sure are a lot of trees" I thought to myself and immediately checked for all greens on the engine instruments for reassurance we wouldn't have to test the tires on unimproved terrain (or the wings against some rigid conifers).



(The Saltan Sea, once the northern point of the Gulf of California)

Once we passed Palm Springs though, the mountains subsided into a very flat desert. Okay, we've got a place to go. We now had time to enjoy the beauty of the scenery and relax a bit. Off to our right the Saltan Sea. This portion of the leg became pretty mundane flying-wise, just sitting at cruise and on a heading, though still amazing with the desert scenery passing below. We'd fly northeast until near the Needles VOR



(sandy desert with only occasional mountains, plenty of emergency landing spots if we need them)

where we'd turn almost due east enroute to Prescott VOR. There the terrain was still much flatter than I expected although more vegetated. As we approached Prescott we experienced some moderate chop. We got bounced around quite a bit, which was good as we were about 2 hours in and getting that afternoon drowsiness caused by the engine droning and bright sun beaming in through the windscreen.



(weird wind patterns and turbulence but some amazing scenery over the Prescott/Sedona AZ area)

The scenery was the most beautiful so far, the red buttes and cliffs of the Sedona area were stunning compared to the cornfields and wind farms I was used to at home. That turned back to dusty desert as we approached Winslow AZ, our first fuel stop. Just before our descent, off to our left, the huge (even from 11,000MSL) Meteor Crater.

I had to double check our altimeter and enroute chart to make sure we hadn't accidentally flown to the moon, there is a



huge crack in the earth, a dry River canyon just to the west of the gaping crater, surely we weren't on earth anymore.

We arrived at Winslow sometime in the early evening. There was still plenty of daylight, must have been about 5 or 6pm. The runway markings were barely visible and I nearly landed short, "land a little longer, that's a threshold and intersecting runway" thanks for catching me! As we taxied in past the old TAT hangar, I was reminded of the this airport had in the history of TWA (my favorite airline) as it was a stop during the Transcontinental and Western days when you'd fly by day and take the train through the night to get from New York to Los Angeles.



(sitting around the watering hole with a new Cirrus friend)



(the sun was getting a little lower creating a beautifully colored sky)

After a quick self serve fuel stop and friendly chat with the Cirrus getting fuel right before us, we got on the airways again. This leg

took us from Winslow along Victor 12 over Albuquerque NM and ultimately to Dumas TX for our overnight. The slowly setting sun easily made this the most beautiful bit of flying I've ever done.

The bright orange/brown ground glowed as we climbed out with bright blue sky and some high cirrostratus. We were basically following interstate 40, which replaced Route 66 (a bucket list trip of mine some day) and this only made me want to see it from the ground even more. Ancient buttes and prehistoric volcanoes appeared



(prehistoric volcanoes and buttes in New Mexico)

more and more as we flew into New Mexico.. the sky even more blue reflected the golden ground with some small cumulus clouds appearing creating virga. It was magical. I'm glad I wasn't flying this leg, I was intoxicated by the scenery here.



(the virga looked pretty benign but had some pretty strong downdrafts associated with it)

But we were quickly knocked out of the trance when we flew under a downdraft containing virga. It was just a small downdraft, we couldn't maintain altitude and at best we could only get about 100fpm descent with power and back pressure. It only lasted a few seconds before we were able to climb back up to cruise and continue on. The sun was setting hard at this point as we crossed Albuquerque, and got a vector away from an arriving Southwest 737 going into ABQ. The setting sun behind us made it easy to spot the strobes on the arriving traffic, no factor. As with a lot of flying it goes from extremely exciting to highly mundane (don't get me wrong though , always more fun than being on the ground).

As night fell, we were finally to the very flat and level plains of eastern New Mexico and the Texas panhandle although we couldn't see the ground through the darkness. There were hundreds of wind farms or other structures giving us a sense of horizon though as their flashing red lights gave us an idea of the ground and horizon. By this point as we approached Dumas TX, it had been a long day. Our biological clocks had quit working by that point and we didn't pay a ton of attention to the time we left Winslow, but we had about 7 or 8 hours under our lap belt by this point. Even if you'd rather be flying, at some point, you're looking to log a little time with two pillows and a blanket.



(Dumas TX FBO/terminal)

Day 2 would begin with clear Texas skies and more confidence in the airplane. She got us all the way here over the hard part. Now we fly over flatlands and just wait for the clock to carry us

home. We departed Dumas to see very sandy silty dirt embedded with fields of irrigation machines making lush green circles as far as the eye could see. I have no idea of what crop they were growing but they were everywhere.



(near the TX/ OK border trimmed out straight and level)

Crossing into Oklahoma and passing the mostly dry riverbed of the Cimmaron River, we started to get above a congesting layer of small cumulus followed by more stratiform clouds until we were on top of a layer crossing into Kansas.



(Cimmaron River)

The airplane was performing great (though I dared not say anything until she was home sleeping in her new hangar).



(overcast had filled in below south of Wichita KS)

The next fuel/lunch stop would see us land at Iola KS. This was the first and only IFR conditions we had the entire trip. We had to shoot the RNAV to runway 19 to get under the layer but the bases were around 2000AGL so we were able to cancel IFR and continue the approach to Allen County VFR once we got below the cloud deck. We found a Sonic drive in for a quick lunch and trip into downtown Iola in the courtesy car and quickly went back to press on.



(Iola KS)

By this point the old Cherokee had gone through a little oil so we wanted to get a couple quarts to stash in the baggage compartment. Unfortunately they were out of oil at Allen Co, the

weather came up a bit so we strapped in and hopped over VFR to Ft Scott KS about 20NM to the East, just a minor delay to our ETA at SPI. After a precautionary second restroom visit at Ft Scott we pointed the nose towards SPI trying to make it the rest of the way home, playing it by ear if we could make it all the way to SPI, or if we'd stop at IJX for fuel.

Out of Ft Scott we set up at probably 3500ft and continued NE bound over Lake of the Ozarks and south of Whiteman AFB. The skies got a little darker and the convection started picking up as we approached Jefferson City MO. We decided to pick up flight following as we noticed some lightning about 10NM off our left wing. We could see the rain shafts and steered clear of them as we continued on. We passed the areas of precip at about Louisiana MO to just mid level overcast.



(The Mississippi River at Louisiana MO)

We must have gotten a lot of rain here at home over the past few days as the Mississippi and Illinois rivers were well above flood stage and every field out there had standing water. The course deviations led us to decide to go for IJX for fuel just to be safe. IJX was my home field.

As we approached it felt like we had finally made it home. I sorta felt like Lindbergh arriving in Paris! We were met by what had to be at least a million souls celebrating our arrival. Of course unlike Lindy, we were met by mayflies instead of Parisians, and they

had no respect for the aircraft or crew's personal space. A few of them even decided to sneak aboard for a ride on our quick and final leg home.



(almost home, sitting at Jacksonville IL)

We had another welcoming committee of family and friends awaiting us and our stowaway mayfly friends at the hangar. We approached runway 31 and requested to fly over and let the airplane wave to everyone below. It was an uneventful (albeit greaser) landing and taxi to the Charlie ramp. We looked at each other when we shut 'er down and both said something to the effect of "wow, we pulled it off". I am grateful for the experience I gained on this trip, and the adventure it was and so glad I was invited along.

I've done some neat things in and around airplanes and other lifting craft over the years, refueling A-7s over Iowa, flying in open door Hueys, open cockpit Pietenpoles (Thanks Ed), gliders, hot air balloons, and I know many of you have far more experience and adventures under your belts than I, like flying into Oshkosh or Sun N Fun, taildraggers, seaplanes, aerobatics, all experiences I hope to some day have, and I'm sure you can relate, this trip was one of those experiences in aviation you'll always remember. Just another of many examples of what makes flying so great!