



Airfreddy's Flying Stories

Stories That **All Pilots** Can Learn From

Story # 15: From I Can't / To I Am An Ace

I AM AN ACE: This brings me to another story I have about Barbie who at one point in time tried to quit but I didn't allow her to. This is a great inspirational story about someone who thought she was a failure and did everything wrong. The truth is she did everything right as she was supposed to but didn't figure it out until later on.

As a result of this I did come up with a short map reading / pilotage and dead reckoning lesson for some students who have a problem with maps. Since this story I have incorporated some of it into my cross country flight training but have done this lesson many times by itself.

As you already know I am totally against using new state of the art Gps units until after you have completed your instrument rating with nothing. They distract you from your number one job "FLYING THE AIRPLANE" You should have confidence in your flying and be able to get from point A to point B with a compass and a watch no problem.

Yes they are nice to have but as my little saying goes again "if you are trained to fly with nothing, when you lose everything you are going to be right at home" when you are trained with this stuff you become dependant on it; I don't care what anyone says. Remember my story about my crosswind landings? It took me over 300 Hours until my brain registered what I was supposed to do in the plane.

This same thing is true for all this high tech navigation stuff. If you are on your first and second dual cross country and the Gps is on, are you really focusing on your map reading skills and pilotage skills? You may look at your map from time to time and say; “yeah I am here”, then your eyes automatically go back to the GPS. See your brain will work like water sometimes. It will follow the path of least resistance. The Gps is the path of least resistance because it makes things so simple.

Unless it is off all the time you are not going to really get the map light bulbs coming on, and until you go out and get a little lost on your own it is really not going to register. Pilots have been trained without this stuff for 80 years and they all turned out fine.

Back to Barbie, Barbie was scheduled to do her first solo cross country from Falcon Field in Mesa Arizona to Wickenburg Arizona. She met with me and we went over her flight plan. Her flight plan was filed with flight service and she had pre-flighted the plane. She was ready to go.

First of all we will talk about the cross country itself. As with all my cross countries with my students, I have a reason to send them to different places. For the first solo cross country I try to keep it easy but allow some difficulty. Remember this is a learning process so it is my job to make sure you learn everything from real life experiences. In this book I am giving you real stories from real students so you can learn.

This cross country is pretty simple, but this story can prove that things can go wrong and you don't even realize it. Wickenburg is west of Phoenix and the route of flight from Falcon Field is that you takeoff from Falcon and turn to the west, then you catch one of the canals just northwest of the field and follow it to Scottsdale, Arizona and then up to Deer Valley airport. After Deer Valley you head on out to Wickenburg. This sounds pretty easy ha?

Ok, so Barbie was ready to go. I signed her logbook, medical and went over everything with her and off she went. After she took off I went off on another flight as I usually do and got back to the office. She was not due to be back for about another hour and a half so I went to lunch or something.

When I got back I called flight service to check on her. The briefer said "she had a little problem, she just landed at Wickenburg". So I talked to the briefer about it. He said "oh she was great, she got a little lost, flew past Wickenburg about 20 miles and then got in touch with us and she asked for help so we located her and vectored her back to Wickenburg. She just landed there to get fuel. Good job teaching her".

So I didn't think much of it and called the Wickenburg airport. The person there said she just took off. I just said ok and expected her back in an hour at most. The hour went by and she wasn't back, so I called flight service again. I think I got the same briefer. He said "she got lost again, she is on with Phoenix approach now and just a few miles from home" I told the briefer I would call him back and go thru everything with him after I talked to her.

She got back and I went out to meet her. The only words she said to me were "DON'T TALK TO ME, I AM NEVER FLYING AGAIN". I tried to say something and she said "FREDERICK I AM GOING HOME LEAVE ME ALONE". I knew this was a time not to argue with a woman. So I let her go.

She didn't even let me tell her how flight service said she did exactly what she was supposed to do. I let her go and then it was time to figure out exactly what happened.

So I called flight service back and talked to the briefer and they tracked her entire flight. The problem started about two minutes after takeoff. Remember this was a long time ago, about 1994 or so, and I was also learning. Barbie knew to follow the

canal and it didn't even dawn on me that there were two canals. I knew there were two but didn't think about the other one.

The canal on the west side of Falcon Field splits by the river on the west side of the airport. She took off runway 22, so she was headed basically southwest. The wrong canal was on her right side right after she took off, so she just followed it, right into Phoenix Sky Harbor airport.

She took off and started to follow the wrong canal and then tried to contact Scottsdale airport. The controllers there figured out she was not where she thought she was, so they asked her to identify and then told her to contact Phoenix. She then told the controller she was a student pilot and was a little lost and asked for help. The controller cleared his frequency and only talked to her.

The controller vectored her back out to where she was supposed to be. Then she was a little flustered and ended up flying past Wickenburg. When she realized she was lost, she called flight service and they located her and got her back on track. She then landed at Wickenburg and got fuel.

On the way back the exact same thing happened, instead of following the wrong canal, she followed the wrong road. Back into Phoenix airspace she went. Scottsdale tower handed her off to Phoenix where the controller cleared the frequency again and got her back to Falcon Field.

So you are probably wondering what happened with Barbie ha? I waited until my instincts said the time was right. About a week later I called her house. I just left a message and said "Are you ready to learn from your mistakes? "

I knew she was sitting there listening to the answering machine and about 2 minutes later she called me back and said "I was just so scared". I told her what the briefer from flight service said and she said "really"?. So we scheduled a flight the next day or so and I started putting a new supplemental lesson together.

I didn't let her plan anything at all. I didn't let her use a plotter or an e6b. This lesson was as basic as it could be. She came in and I sat on the ground with her just for a few minutes. I pointed out two things; the grid lines on the map are: North, South, East and West, then I went over simply calculating time and distance in her head. The only other thing I pointed out was a VOR compass Rose, the diameter of which is about 10 miles. So I had her put her fingers up against the compass rose for the VOR. The natural distance between her thumb and pointer finger is about 10 miles. The only other things she was allowed to use was a watch, hobbs meter and the compass.

Remember when I scared you with mentioning math a while back well here it is....

If you are going 60 knots, how many miles are you going to go in one minute? Yes the answer is one mile. Now if you are going 120 knots how far are you going to go in one minute? Yes you are going to go two miles. And if you are going 90 knots how far are you going to go in one minute? Yes about 1 ½ miles.

The 152 cruises at about 95, so I told her to just use 90 in her head. So, if you had to go 10 miles how long is it going to take you? About 7 minutes. So I had her base everything on 10 miles and 7 minutes.

Up we went and she had no idea where we were going and neither did I. I figured we would go around the entire Phoenix valley using the compass, watch and a map. One thing I try and get in students brain is the fact that the maps are extremely accurate, everything is there you just have to look for it.

I started randomly pointing out places on the map. What direction do you need to fly and how long is it going to take us? The first two points or so she was a little shaky but once she started getting the hang of it she just said, "this is pretty easy".

At one point she was over her checkpoint and couldn't see it and she said "I know it is here I just can't see it". OK "so what do you do, slow down and circle". "Yup" This is such a simple thing that so many people miss. You are on the left side of the airplane. If you are even slightly left of course you will not see your spot, you know it is there so just do a quick 360 and you will probably find it.

Barbie stared getting every point I gave her. I then scheduled a solo flight for her. When she arrived at the airport, I just marked a bunch of points on the map and said "go to all these spots".

Off she went and about an hour later she came back after she found them all with no problem. So it was time for the long solo cross country. I asked her if she was ready to go for it, she was and we scheduled the cross country.

That morning she showed up early checked everything, filed her flight plan and off she went. This time she went from Mesa to Yuma, Blithe and back to Falcon Field. I still send every one of my students on this flight. This is relatively easy cross country but it has a lot of different features and it is a great confidence builder for the student. It has just about everything you can think of and there are nice roads to follow. I send people on this cross country because it has a great combination of different stuff. Yuma is a military base and there is restricted airspace on both sides of you going there. The flight service station is different than the one used for the other flights. Blithe is an uncontrolled airport and can get a little on the cross wind side. For the trip back you would follow I 10, but it is a long enough leg so you can learn about yourself getting tired and then you have to go around Phoenix class B airspace to get back home.

This flight is the student's first real world flight. Everything is unfamiliar but not so different that it would fluster her. So off she went. About two hours later I contacted flight service. She had made it to Yuma, closed the first flight plan and opened the second leg. I called back later and she had just left Blythe.

I don't remember if it was my day off or I just didn't have any other flights but I was home and I called Flight Service one more time and she had made it back to Falcon Field. I waited a little while to give her time to get the plane tied down.

It was now time to call her. I dialed the number and she answered "ACE FLYING" and I just started laughing. She had not one problem and the cross country was a piece of cake for her. She thanked me for not letting her quit!

Now I am sure that she could get in a plane 10 years from now with a map and a watch and get wherever she wants.

Now I want to flip this situation around a little bit so you can think and I am going to go full state of the art here. Let's just say that Barbie was doing her training in a new Cirrus with the G-1000 cockpit. She was allowed to use the GPS for all her solo cross countries and she completed them with absolutely no problems. She got her certificate.

About a month later she decides to go meet Ken in San Diego. She loads the three kids in the plane and off they go. I am putting the kids in here because this will turn out to be a HUGE distraction. She gets out about 100 miles out over the desert when without any warning the entire G-1000 Panel goes off and the circuit breaker pops. She has a serious problem; the G-1000 Panel won't come back on. She has lost everything.

Now I am not going to speculate here because we don't know how she was trained and how much she was trained without all of this stuff. I have one answer for this "I am sure it was not enough"!

The other thing I want you to think about is how much of a distraction will the children be when this happens? Those of you who are parents can probably guess.

So, I will just ask you and you can think about it; which Barbie would you rather be in this situation? We can say that both of them are in the brand new Cirrus.

1: Barbie who was trained to fly and navigate with nothing and learned from some Huge Mistakes during her training?

2: Barbie who did everything perfectly during her training using the GPS systems?

Believe it or not I have seen and been flying with people who have nice state of the art stuff and they don't even carry maps with them. They say "I don't need it."



Airfreddy.Com