

This adventure started the evening of 9/25/2007. An email from Angel Flight West had arrived displaying current available missions. A strong motivation pushed me to investigate further. I jumped on the Angel Flight West website and this was staring me in the face.

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Mission#	Leg	Date	Origin	Destination	#Pass/ Wgt*	Dist.
139418 (Patient)	-1 (open)	9/28/2007 (Friday)	SBP (San Luis Obispo, CA)	OKB (Oceanside, CA)	1 175	203
Illness:			Peritoneum Cancer		Flight Time:arrive 10 am	
139420 (Patient)	-1 (open)	9/28/2007 (Friday)	OKB (Oceanside, CA)	SBP (San Luis Obispo, CA)	1 175	203
Illness:			Peritoneum Cancer		Flight Time:depart 3 pm	
139702 (Patient)	-1 (open)	9/29/2007 (Saturday)	L12 (Redlands, CA)	O70 (Jackson, CA)	1 265	312
Illness:			Chronic rejection from lung transplant		Flight Time:Flexible	

This is just a small snip of the AFW webpage.

Skipping past the weekday missions, I was surprised to find one from Redlands (L12) to Jackson (O70) on the following Saturday. Chronic rejection from lung transplant got my attention. A super coincidence came into play right then. I had just flown Tim from work up to Jackson (O70) for a VMG fly-in about three weeks ago, so I knew the territory. I never had heard of the place before my flight with Tim and now, again, to the same place? I clicked on the 'request' link and a message "**Pilot Request added. Your request has been received. A mission coordinator will be contacting you shortly.**" came back on the website.

The next day Mary Beth from AFW sent me my itinerary. The cover sheet included, Illness: Chronic rejection from lung transplant. How lucky am I to be able to serve Joseph. He cannot talk much beyond a whisper. He has no money for commercial airfare, because he cannot work, and it is not his fault at all, life happens. I called him up on Wednesday night to let him know that he had a ride.

Thursday I went to work and kept an eye on the sky overhead, as well as on the weather websites I use. Everything looked good and the future was forecast to be good for a VFR pilot. Friday blew me away as Corona and Orange County had low overcasts most of the day. NOT good for a VFR pilot. Where did that come from? Saturday worked out however, as there were scattered to broken clouds all over the LA Basin at 4,500 to 6,000 feet.

I did my pre-flight inspection and taxied over to fuel to fill up. Based on the gauges, I would take on 46 gallons. The receipt indicated 51. There was LESS fuel in the tanks than was indicated. I renewed my vows to always remember that the gauges are not accurate.

Leaving Corona with full fuel, I popped over to Redlands at 3,500, well under the cloud bases. The air was rough and jiggly all of the way under those clouds. Then BAM, I hit my head on the ceiling of the airplane. Flying under cumulus clouds will do that to you. I made right traffic for runway 26 at Redlands and landed peacefully. Ahhhh. I taxied up to our designated meeting place, put on 'the hat', and met Joe, his cousin Heather, and his aunt. They all thanked me and made me feel good to be doing this AFW stuff.

After we got the necessary AFW paperwork out of the way, I went into the airport office looking for a fax machine, but no one was around. Heather said she would mail it. Soon it was time to get going. Looking up at the sky (pilots do, all of the time), I was amazed. There were no clouds for 50 miles in any direction. They had all disappeared in under 30 minutes. That was our good luck item # 1.

I contacted SoCal for 'Flight Following' after departure. My 'call sign' changed from Mooney Five Eight Zero Seven Tango (5807T) to Angel Flight Zero Seven Tango after Redlands. It feels good using that call sign.

Our route of flight took us northwest through the Cajon Pass and the air was smooth. That was our good luck item # 2. Once past the mountains, SoCal turned us over to Joshua for flight following. Joshua said we could transition R-2515, the restricted airspace around Edwards AFB if we were above 6,000 feet. That was our good luck item # 3.

The High Desert ride was exceptionally smooth, and the filthy LA Basin air was replaced by beautiful clean air. That was our good luck item # 4. Once up in the Bakersfield and Fresno areas, the whole area was again populated with broken to overcast clouds. But from our vantage point, it was an UNDERCAST, as they were around 6,000 and we were a good 2,000 feet above the whole lot of them. That was our good luck item # 5. I reached for my camera but it had gone into hiding somehow. No pictures for now.

The only bad luck we had, was that we were flying into a 20 to 23 knot headwind for much of our ride to Jackson. Ground speeds of 130 to 140 knots added at least 15 minutes to the trip.

Oops, I forgot to mention the little FAA ATC radar problem. We were cruising through the Bakersfield Approach area of the San Joaquin Valley, listening on 118.8 or 118.9 when the nice air traffic controller started to announce to each pilot, one by one, that "Radar service is terminated due to primary and secondary radar outage" in his area of responsibility. What a bummer. I told Joe that we had to revert to looking out of the windows to discern that we were not about to swap paint with another airplane. We did just fine and I piped in some mp3 music for a while. Further north, we got in touch with Oakland Center and we again had Flight Following. Their radar was working fine.

Five miles out from Jackson, we terminated Flight Following and switched to 122.8. What a mess to listen to. There must be 4 airports in the area all using 122.8. We heard non-stop chatter and none of it was for Jackson. A strong crosswind was blowing us toward the runway but that went unobserved until I rolled out on final. The runway was not in front of us, but way 'over there' at 10 to 11 o'clock. I again turned left to get us 'over there'.

[Note to pilots:] This is the classic situation that can lead to a stall / spin accident. Be sure to keep that turn coordinated with the ball centered. We don't want to read about it in the paper.

The alignment came out fine but the altitude and airspeed were both high and the airport was only a quarter mile away. I also remembered that 50-foot drop off at the far end of the runway. I said, "Joe this doesn't look good, we're going around." Power up, wheels up, we had another chance to view the countryside for a few minutes as I went around the landing pattern. The second attempt was right on the money and we landed peacefully. Ahhhh.

Joe jumped out and called Tim, his dad, to pick him up. I went camera hunting and found the camera under Joe's seat. A few minutes later Tim drove up. I purposely had parked right next to the gate in the fence that divides the airplane ramp from the parking lot so it would be a very short walk for them. It was time for pictures.



Joseph Spencer in Jackson, almost home



The airplane's nose points right at Tim's truck

They both thanked me and then they were off for home. I calculated the remaining fuel in the tanks. There were just a few gallons more than half full. But, remember that the gauges are not accurate. There might have actually been a bit less than half. On the face of it, that is not enough to return safely but there are additional considerations. I did not have to go to Redlands on the way back. There would (should) not be a headwind. The airplane would be 442# lighter than it was at Redlands considering Joe, his baggage, and fuel already burned. There are 50 places to get more fuel on the way, if necessary. I would monitor the fuel usage often. I launched around 3:45 with 356 miles to go.

Five miles out I had Flight Following and then a few minutes later I stumbled into a wonderful thermal that boosted my climb rate to 1300 feet a minute. I set the autopilot, slid my seat back, put my hands in my lap,

and enjoyed the view. Reaching 9,500 feet, I pushed the ALT button on the autopilot and watched the airplane's nose come down level and then watched it pick up speed. I saw 178kts (205 MPH) ground speed for a while, thanks to the tailwinds. I had a few more chores to do. 1. Close the cowl flaps. 2. Increase the pitch on the propeller until the tach comes down to 2500 rpm. 3. Twist the mixture knob to bring the fuel flow back from 15 to around 10 gallons per hour. Forgetting that important item could definitely cause the fuel to not make it all of the way to Corona.

The foothills and beautiful rivers smoothed out to become flat farm country and small cities. Unfortunately, the air was too hazy to take pictures in that area. On and on, we (me and my sweetheart (07T)) droned southward nearly two miles high over the San Joaquin. The monotonous sound was only occasionally broken by a controller's voice. For me, it is boring flying on a cross-country trip alone. Even though Joe hardly said anything on the flight up, except to respond to my occasional question, it feels like an entirely better environment having someone in the right seat.

For those of you who picked up on the fact that I have an mp3 player available, earlier in this story, and are wondering why I didn't just turn the music on, let me explain. My PS Engineering PM1000 intercom is the device that sends the music to my headset. It doesn't have the smarts to mute the music when ATC starts talking to me on the radio. So, when I am getting ATC Flight Following, I have the music turned off to prevent additional confusion. There is an elegant solution though. PS Engineering now makes the **PM1000 II** intercom with the automatic music muting logic integrated in the circuitry. I now have one sitting on the desk in my hangar waiting for Deepun to install it. Soon, I'll be stylin'. I still would rather have you flying with me.



Clouds were down there

The undercast was still there when I went through the Fresno and Bakersfield areas. Speak of two perspectives of the same thing will you? They are looking up at gray skies and I am looking down at beautiful white cotton puffer balls interconnected for many, many miles. I checked my fuel.



I could see an entire train

Fresno handed me off to Bakersfield and I congratulated him for having his radar back on-line. The mountains that form the southern end of the San Joaquin also caused the termination of the undercast.

Those mountains are also the reason railroad engineers decided to construct the Tehachapi railroad loop. I have mentioned it before. Here is a picture of it looking east. Those folks on highway 58 don't have a clue what they are missing, assuming that they care in the first place. I checked my fuel.



The Tehachapi railroad loop and highway 58



Mining a hill

I naturally gravitate to taking pictures of airports. Wm J. Fox Field is just a few miles northwest of Lancaster in the high desert area north of the San Gabriel Mountains, which in turn, are north of the LA Basin. I have visited there several times. I checked my fuel.



Wm J. Fox Field

For those of you who might have friends or relatives (I do) in the Lancaster or Quartz Hill areas then moving south to the Palmdale airport, I took these. All shots are looking east.



Palmdale airport



Palmdale airport

Joshua Approach came on and said if he lost me crossing the ridge of the San Gabriel Mountains, to contact SoCal Approach, and he gave me the next frequency, which I dutifully dialed into the standby window of my COM2 radio. Everything worked out smoothly and Joshua was able to give me a normal handoff to SoCal. I was back in the neighborhood again. I could tell. You could tell. The air was filthy. We (ugh) live down there.

I said " Good afternoon SoCal this is Mooney N5807T with you, starting a VFR descent". The controller responded by saying "Mooney N5807T, VFR descent approved, maintain three thousand five hundred". I replied, "Mooney N5807T, descending, restricted to three thousand five hundred".



From the mountains north of Pomona to Corona in 6 minutes and 25 seconds

I pushed the ALT button on the autopilot to release the 'altitude hold' function and I watched the airplane's nose go down to aim directly at Pomona and then I watched us pick up speed. I saw 191kts (220 MPH) ground speed for a while, thanks to gravity. We all wish we had that much horsepower. (New Mooneys do have that much horsepower, and more). (New Mooneys cost half a million).

I sailed across the LA basin in a flash and touched down at Corona with an hour and a half's worth of fuel still in the tanks. I pushed the gal back into her hiding place till next time, proudly put the AFW hat away, and popped a Blue Can. This one's for you, Joseph.