

## The Seasoning

### Chapter 4: The Second Day Eastbound

Saturday, July 22. I awoke at 6:30 without an alarm, but with a feeling of purpose, and looked around the bedroom. (Those of you that know me well know that I never wake up at 6:30 during the rest of the year). "I'm in Hays", I thought to myself. I quickly (for me) cleaned up and got dressed for the upcoming day. I was presentable except for the fact that I had left all of my clean shirts hanging on hangers in the back of the plane. OK, this one will have to do until I get to the airport.

Jean and LeRoy were already busy in the kitchen. The coffee was ready, and one of Craig's favorite breakfasts was coming to perfection in the skillet on the stove. I grabbed a coffee and went out to the backyard. It was time for that first cigarette of the day. The air was clean, the trees were green, birds were making sweet music, and I was a happy boy. Everything was so different from my day in, day out, life in southern California, that I truly felt that I was finally on a real vacation. I should have taken a picture right then and there.

Going back inside, I saw that Craig had joined his folks around the breakfast table. I joined them and ate some of Jean's sausage and egg delight. I savored the light hearted family conversation over the breakfast table. A little more coffee, and it was time for us to go.



I could easily write pages about the Berlands and how they welcomed me in to their home for an overnight, but this just might become a novel if I expand on every thought. So, back to the flying story. Craig drove the four of us the two miles back to the Hays airport and pulled right up to 27V. We got there at 9 AM.



Hays terminal building included an Avis counter.

Remember, the one thing that I forgot on the previous afternoon was a clean shirt? I changed when I got to 27V. Jean said she wouldn't look.



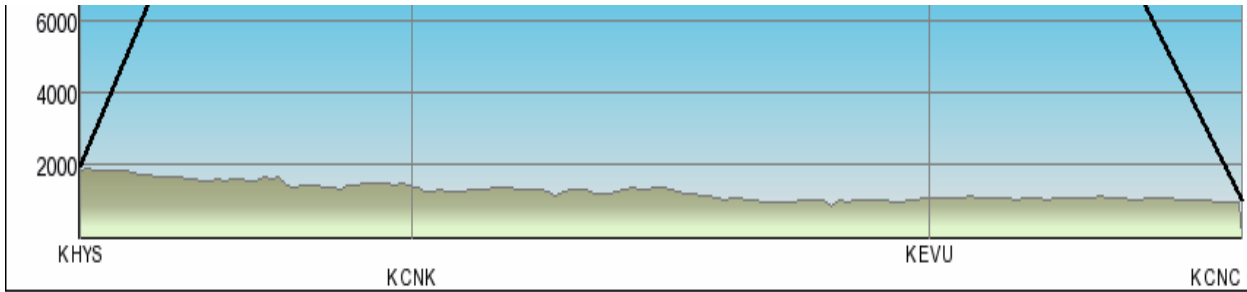
The overcast was just local, and we both have clean shirts.

I did the walk around preflight inspection, Craig loaded our stuff, we got in, and waved goodbye to the Berlands in their car. They turned the key and drove off.

In an airplane you do not just turn the key and go. There were navigation documents to be ordered on my clipboard, the headsets to be connected, the GPS to be installed on the yoke and programmed, the radio frequencies to be dialed in, and the WAC charts to be placed in an accessible place. Then the checklist comes out of its pocket and is faithfully followed all of the way down to 'Engine start'. Then I turned the key. We taxied to the runway and went through the rest of the checklist items. In the summer, we usually do ground ops with the door open for ventilation. The engine run up was clean, the flaps and trim were set, and the door and window were closed, all per the checklist.

It was windy. Airports usually are, but this was Kansas, and it was **windy**. Due to the northerly winds, we departed on runway 34. This confirmed our weather briefing that we would not have favorable tailwinds for this day either. After I climbed a couple of thousand feet and pointed 27V in more or less the correct direction, Hays America was just a pleasant memory.

This flight leg was planned in advance at 302nm, 2 hours and 15 minutes, with no winds aloft, but as luck would have it, it took over 2 ½ hours to complete, due to wind. Fifteen extra minutes means 2 or 3 extra gallons of fuel. If you don't want to land in farmer Jones' cornfield, and make the local papers in an airplane, the wind must **always** be included in the fuel planning process. It was.



There was no reason to climb to 9500', as we did the day before. Look at the terrain profile above (courtesy of Golden Eagle FlightPrep), it starts at 2000' and slopes lower on this flight leg to about 1000'. The high terrain was behind us.



The farm fields conforming to the shape of creeks and rivers.

We ascended to about 5000' and were near the bases of all of those puffy cumulus clouds. I had to weave left and right as we continued climbing to maintain clearance from the clouds, as it would not only be illegal for me to fly into a cloud, it would also be exceedingly stupid to do so. At one point, I had to veer so far to the right that we got close to a restricted area. Then the clouds broke up a bit and we could continue eastward while maintaining a five mile buffer between us and the restricted area. We kept climbing with this out the front window.



They do look formidable.



The Mooney kept climbing and soon we were above all of them.

This turned out to be the day that gave me the idea for the title of this story. After all, “The Seasoning” sounds rather obscure if there is no implied context. More about that later.

Craig was more than willing to handle the flying chores. I worked the radio as we had established contact with Kansas City Center for flight following. We climbed to 7500' and were flying above the cumulus clouds ahead for the next 200 miles. We leveled off and picked up as much speed as we were going to get considering the dang headwinds. Plodding along at around 130 mph is no way to get to point B, but it does give you more time to experience all of the majesty that mother nature can present to the pilot of a personal aircraft. Craig was flying the airplane and I was monitoring the ship's gauges, communicating with ATC on the radio, taking pictures, and loving life. I was, after all, on vacation.

Right about here I could have called out "Craig, we're not in Kansas anymore", but thoughts like that usually come later, not in real time. There was too much going on, ahead, to the sides of us, and even below, to even think of being reflective at the moment. This was real life, not a movie. We had crossed the state line from NE Kansas into SE Nebraska. Then just 15 minutes later, Wham-Bam, we were in NW Missouri as we crossed this sleeping bend in the Mighty MO.



The Missouri River near Rock Port MO

Bam, another 26 minutes put us into the SW corner of Iowa. That gave us just 55nm or less than a half of an hour to go to our fuel stop at Chariton, Iowa. The clouds started to seem smaller and farther apart. The headwind didn't let up any though. Farms, farm towns, and more farms were just about all there was to see broken only by the occasional local river or creek. We just toolled along.



A small city in that region, the clouds were dissipating.

Fifteen minutes later it was time to start coming down. My GPS “knows” how high we are, the destination airport’s elevation, how far we are from our destination, and how fast we are going. It constantly displays how many feet per minute we need to use as a descent rate to get down comfortably and in time. When the display reads around 500 feet per minute, it is time to point the nose down. 500’/min. is a comfortable rate to descend. It is fun to finally see the airspeed indicator pointing at a higher number.



The Chariton airport is 1050' msl, courtesy of flightprep.com and Navinfo.org.

Craig found the airport first and said “See, over there, just past the highway”. I took over and planted the Mooney in Iowa with a hefty thud. The only times I ever pull off a ‘greaser’ is when no one is around.



I pulled up to the fuel pump, Craig filled her up, and we both went into the pilot’s lounge for some water and another ‘power bar’, thanks to Bonnie. Yes, they have a restroom and yes, I went out for a smoke (several actually), and yes, Craig got a new weather briefing from Flight Service. It wasn’t rosy but it seemed doable.

Here’s some pictures at Chariton:



Our comfort station with air conditioning



Clouds seem benign now that we're on the ground.



Where's Ed? – Where's the Mooney? – The clouds are building again.



I'm serious, dammit!



Oh, he left his water bottle, he'll be back

All silliness aside, we climbed aboard for our last east bound leg, to Milwaukee. Things had changed. Between the weather briefing and what we saw out the window, we knew we were not going to climb above them this time. This was not scud running, as we had plenty of altitude, but we were doomed to stay beneath them for the next 270nm/310 miles. These were bumpy miles as flying under cumulus usually is. I don't like bumpy flying but at least Craig was doing the work. It started to rain. Five minutes later it quit. Fifteen minutes later, it did it again. I thought about not having flown in the rain ever, except when I was a student pilot in 1989, but I wasn't flying. I was a passenger Craig was the man. I took some pictures of rain on the windows. They didn't come out. All grey with no distinction.

Maybe some 45 minutes after we took off, as we were passing over Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Chicago Center vectored us some 20 miles north of our flight plan to avoid thunder storms ahead. The bumps, the rain, the thunder storm avoidance, were all happening in real time and there is no 'pause' button on the airplane. It all worked out with plenty of clearance, but this leads me up to why I chose to call this story "The Seasoning".

I have now gone through four phases in my piloting experience. The student pilot. The certificated (but still fresh) pilot. The experienced pilot and now this. I now consider myself a 'seasoned' pilot after having gone through much of Mother Nature's spectacles. It truly is a constant learning experience, even though Craig was doing hands on.

By now, we all want to get to the end of this chapter, so here we go. I must have been jittery after all of this, because after taking two great pictures of the Mississippi River with some 'stupid' light blinking on my camera, it dawned on me to take the lens cap off. I did get two more.



The Mississippi River out the left side.



The Mississippi River out the right side

Ninety miles to go. Nautical that is, 103 for the ground pounders. The conversion factor, for those that care, is  $1\text{nm} = 1.15\text{miles}$ . I was getting excited.

The dairy farms and the red barns, and silos were looking so good. My home state. My roots. It had been so, so long since I had seen Wisconsin, and never from my Mooney. When we got to about twenty miles out from the Timmerman Airport, we got ATIS and then I contacted the tower. The winds had just changed, the ATIS information was instantly obsolete, and we learned that we were now to land on runway 15 right. As always, Craig found the airport first. I emailed Craig for some of his memories of that approach, and this is what he remembered.

Craig's email: "I spotted the control tower and then the runway. I said I would put you on a short base.....gave you the plane at 165 knots, 1000 ft and short final....so what's new. You announced to the tower we were fast and low and asked for a turn out to reduce speed. The runway was 15 right and we could only see one runway....you asked the tower if we were on 15 R. They said yes...you asked if it was the only paved runway.....they said yes. I was smiling the whole way."

I planted a Mooney in Wisconsin and after some excursions that deviated from the center line of the runway, 27V was once again, under control. Tapping the brakes slowed us down to 5 mph but only time would slow down my heart rate. Nope, we're not in Kansas anymore.

I taxied up to Gran Aire, the FBO at KMWC, and we got out on the stable platform of mother earth once again. A very polite young man chocked the tires and asked if we would like some fuel. Affirmative, we said, and so 27V got refueled again. Notice the care here. The wing is covered so that the fuel cap does not scratch the paint, and he holds his left hand just so, so the fuel hose does not rub on the paint. Excellent job! The best I've seen.



Fueling at Gran-Aire at KMWC



Front door with airplane in the reflection



Craig is off to Oshkosh in his rental car under relentless clouds.

My Brother and his family arrived a short while later and promptly volunteered to unload the airplane. I did appreciate it as I felt like I had a pretty long day.



My brother Fred standing behind his son Nick are unloading my bags while Maria looks so much the part of the supervisor.



Now, she's supervising me!

They took me to their home on the north side of Milwaukee. We started to talk about countless things and of course, it was time for a beer.