

The Alameda Aero Club Newsletter

February 2006

New Flight Instructor

On Tuesday, January 24th, club member Jim Turner met with FAA inspector Howard Manning for his initial Flight Instructor check ride. After two months of delay, due to the unavailability of a suitable complex aircraft, the planets aligned. Jim passed the ride with ease and his next challenge is getting used to putting the initials CFI after his name! As fate would have it, Jim's check ride came exactly four years to the date after my initial Flight Instructor check ride.

Congratulations Jim! And kudos for hanging in there, even when it seemed like an aircraft would never become available.

John Ewing, CFII

President's Corner

Flights of Fancy

It's a grim day out as I write this, IFR, and I'll bet there's icing in those clouds: a fine day to stay on the ground. It's also a day for fantasy flying. Most of us have a list of places we'd like to fly, and probably Sectional and WAC charts to drool over. Here's my personal list

Ferndale Airfield (53U), Big Fork, Montana. I've planned this trip three times. Weather and other circumstances always got in the way. The most disappointing was several years ago. At 5:00 a.m. local, my wife, Roxanne, and I were in the clubhouse packed and the airplane pre-flighted. The day promised to be brilliantly clear.

The weather briefers were not so accommodating: a front moving into Washington and Oregon. Ceilings east of the Cascades in Oregon dropping rapidly, 4000 feet initially, 2000 feet a half hour later. Clouds piling up near Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. A few calls later to Flight Service later, I had visions of spending several nights in a motel near Spokane waiting for clearing weather.

We left the clubhouse around 9:00 a.m. on a beautiful day having scrubbed the flight. It hurt because family was waiting for us. My niece was graduating from high school. It also hurt with the realization that ten hours of good weather was all we needed. Since

then, I've driven around Ferndale several times. The field is turf, but acceptable, 3500 x 60 feet. Between two ridges, a piece of cake.

Santa Catalina (AVX). I've flown into the LA area several times, but never to Catalina. Here's where I'd like to hear from a member who's done it. Years ago, I lived in the LA area for several years as a starving, non-tenured junior faculty drudge at UCLA. Santa Catalina seemed a world apart from the grim realities of the LA area. Be glad we live up here.

Shelter Cove (0Q5). People tell me that this is a fun flight behind the 'Redwood Curtain.' They also say that there's a great place to stay right off the runway. One of these days, I'll do it.

I'm sure you all have personal lists, let's make a point of making a memorable flight in 2006.

Board Meeting, February 8. You're all welcome to the Board of Directors meeting on Wednesday, February 8, at 7:00 p.m. We meet in the back room of McGrath's Irish Pub, 1539 Lincoln Avenue in Alameda. We talk about the present and future of the Club; you're all invited.

Steve Bevitt, President

No Power Flight

It was a beautiful September day in 2002, sky clear, unlimited visibility and moderate temperature. I was in the frustrating state of being a confident solo pilot but not perfect enough to take the check ride. I quickly pre-flighted the 172 and taxied to 27R. Run-up check ... controls free and clear...fuel on...Carb Heat...1900 RPM...gauges good...magnetos checked...ammeter check...1000 RPM...radios...etc...etc. Now to nail those power-on stalls and s-turns that had been dogging me.

One smooth takeoff and one quick hop over the Berkeley hills and ready to practice. After about half hour of power-ons, turns and just flying, time return to OAK. I dialed ATIS and noticed the radios were really scratchy. I had seen that before and did the usual fix, cycle the radios. Still no ATIS. A few more knob twists and headset checks later, I realized my radios were completely dead! I had to land at busy Oakland and no way to talk or hear the controllers. An in-flight emergency! Two words sum up the first few seconds: complete panic.

I cycled through all the doomsday scenarios and realized the plane was still flying. I checked the other systems and turned towards Oakland. I couldn't remember the radio failure transponder code, 7700 or 7600. After frantically searching my kneepad and thumbing through my FAR/AIM book, I guessed 7600. The tower would pick up my transponder and shoot their light guns, or so I hoped. Light gun signals! More frantic searching for the colors and flashes to look for followed. I planned to enter the pattern on the 45 and prayed traffic would be light. As I flew by the coliseum, I saw a game in progress. A fresh wave of panic hit me. Here I was an Indian flying a small plane, no radio contact, flying by a crowded stadium one year after 9/11. I scanned the horizon expecting an F-16 screaming towards me or maybe a missile! No time to search for intercept procedures.

I turned downwind and couldn't see lights from the tower. Turning to base I looked down the runway. A plane ready to take off suddenly turned off the runway. So, someone had seen me. Final approach was perfect and a few seconds later, I was on terra firma. The FAA guy with a citation for some FAR violation can't be far, I thought. Luckily, FAA didn't show.

In the post flight analysis, I found to my surprise that the tower did not get my transponder signals at all. I had lost all electrical power. So, what did I learn? Pay careful attention during pre-flight, especially the run-up. I might have caught an ammeter discharge reading. Memorize light gun signals, intercept procedures, and the transponder codes. Ask to see light gun signals. It was valuable learning---I was glad I experienced it. I was even more glad to be back on the ground in one piece.

Praveen Krishnan

Mayday, Mayday!

We've all seen the movie, usually late at night when you can't sleep. There is a crisis in mid air and the pilot grabs the mic and says with a sense of urgency (but not panic, that wouldn't be suave), "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday!" What is meant by "Mayday!"? Why is a pilot in distress saying the name of a socialist/communist workers holiday? I found that May Day, the first of May became associated with the radical workers movement, oddly enough in the United States, after a long history as a pagan holiday. It was a workers strike for an eight hour work day that began on May 1, 1886. It ended three days

later in Chicago's infamous Haymarket Riot after which May Day became linked to anarchists and radical workers.

Mayday the distress call and May Day the holiday had no connection. Mayday is an appropriation of the French phrase "m'aidez" (or possibly 'm'aider'), meaning roughly "help me." This was only stranger because if it's French then it's not very good French. The more proper term would be 'Venez m'aider' which is 'Come to render help to me,' long and weighty in a crisis. A French speaker would be more likely to say 'Aidez-Moi!' or 'Au Secours!' in an emergency, both of which more directly mean "Help me/us!"

This new information still didn't answer why in an emergency pilots are directed to repeat a badly mistranslated command, in oddly phrased French. I began to imagine some American traveler to France in the early days of aviation. At one of the many flying demonstrations taking place in the years after the Wright brothers, an early airshow spectator could have heard a French aviator yell "M'Aidez!" just before one of the numerous crashes that happened back then (the stress of the situation caused the French aviator to forget his grammar). Later, when that aviation enthusiast was flying back in America, they yelled "Mayday!" when there was an imminent catastrophe. The local newspaper reported it and from there it just caught on.

My mistranslation theory was off the mark. In 1923 the senior radio officer at Croydon Airport in London, Fredrick Stanley Mockford, was asked to think of a standard radio call sign. Something catchy, something easily understood by both pilots in the air and ground crews in an emergency. Much of the traffic in those days was between Croydon and Le Bourget Airport near Paris. Mockford proposed Mayday since it was close to the French 'M'Aidez' and was an English word unlikely to be confused for something else. The call sign was adopted by the International Radio Telegraph Convention in Washington D.C. in 1927. It is now the international distress call signaling "grave and imminent danger". The less urgent call is "Pan-Pan", once again from French for "breakdown." If you ever feel like reenacting that late night movie you saw it might be better to do it at home, not in the air. Making a false Mayday call is a serious offense with fines and possible jail time. Please don't be thinking about all this if you ever do have to make a Mayday call. You should be thinking about the emergency procedures you've been taught. Hopefully, you will never have to.

Mike McQuate