

Letter to FAA

Federal Aviation Administration,
Washington, D.C.

Gentlemen:

I was asked to make a written statement concerning certain events that occurred yesterday. First of all, I would like to thank that very nice FAA man who took my student pilot's license and told me I wouldn't need it any more. I guess that means that you're giving me my full-fledged pilot's license. You should watch that fellow though, after I told him all of this he seemed quite nervous and his hand was shaking.

Anyway, here is what happened. The weather had been kind of bad since last week, when I soloed. But on the day in question I was not about to let low ceilings and visibility and a slight freezing drizzle, deter me from another exciting experience at the controls of an airplane. I was pretty proud of my accomplishment, and I had invited my neighbor to go with me since I planned to fly to a town about two hundred miles away where I knew of an excellent restaurant that served absolutely wonderful charbroiled steaks and the greatest martinis.

On the way to the airport my neighbor was a little concerned about the weather but I assured him once again about the steaks and martinis that we would soon be enjoying and he seemed much happier. When we arrived at the airport the freezing drizzle had stopped, as I already knew from my ground school meteorology it would. There were only a few snowflakes. I checked the weather and I was assured that it was solid IFR. I was delighted. But when I talked to the local operator I found out that my regular airplane, a Piper J-3 Cub, was down for repairs. You could imagine my disappointment. Just then a friendly, intelligent line boy suggested that I take another airplane, which I immediately saw was very sleek and looked much easier to fly. I think that he called it an Aztec C, also made by Piper. It didn't have a tail wheel, but I didn't say anything because I was in a hurry. Oh yes, it had a spare engine for some reason.

We climbed in and I began looking for an ignition switch. Now, I don't want to get anyone in trouble, but it shouldn't be necessary to get the airplane manual just to find out how to start an airplane. That's ridiculous. I never saw so many dials and needles and knobs, handles and switches. As we both know, confidentially, they have simplified this in the J-3 Cub. I forgot to mention that I did file a flight plan, and those people were so nice. When I told them I was flying an Aztec they said it was all right to go direct via Victor-435, a local superhighway, all the way. These fellows deserve a lot of credit. They told me a lot of other things too, but everybody has problems with red tape. The take-off was one of my best and I carefully left the pattern just the way the book says it should be done. The tower operator told me to contact Departure Control Radar but that seemed kind of silly since I knew where I was going.

There must have been some kind of emergency because, all of a sudden, a lot of airline pilots began yelling at the same time and made such a racket that I just turned off the radio. You'd think that those professionals would be better trained. Anyway, I climbed up into a few little flat clouds, cumulus type, at three hundred feet, but Highway 435 was right under me and, since I knew it was straight east to the town where we were going to have drinks and dinner, I just went on up into the solid overcast. After all, it was snowing so hard by now that it was a waste of time to watch the ground. This was a bad thing to do, I realized. My neighbor undoubtedly wanted to see the scenery, especially the mountains all around us, but everybody has to be disappointed sometime and we pilots have to make the best of it, don't we?

It was pretty smooth flying and, except for the ice that seemed to be forming here and there, especially on the windshield, there wasn't much to see. I will say that I handled the controls quite easily for a pilot with only six hours. My computer and pencils fell out of my shirt pocket once in a while but these phenomenon sometime occur I am told. I don't expect you to believe this, but my pocket watch was standing straight up on its chain. That was pretty funny and I asked my neighbor to look but he just kept staring straight ahead with sort of a glassy look in his eyes and I figured that he was afraid of height like all non-pilots are. By the way, something was wrong with the altimeter, it kept winding and unwinding all the time.

Finally, I decided we had flown about long enough to be where we were going, since I had worked it out on the computer. I am a whiz at that computer, but something must have gone wrong with it since when I came down to look for the airport there wasn't anything there except mountains. These weather people sure had been wrong, too. It was real marginal conditions with a ceiling of about one hundred feet. You just can't trust anybody in this business except yourself, right? Why, there were even thunderstorms going on with occasional bolts of lightning. I decided that my neighbor should see how beautiful it was and the way it seemed to turn that fog all yellow, but I guess he was asleep, having gotten over his fear of height, and I didn't want to wake him up.

Anyway, just then an emergency occurred because the engine quit. It really didn't worry me since I had just read the manual and I knew right where the other ignition switch was. I just fired up the other engine and we kept right on going. This business of having two engines is really a safety factor. If one quits the other is right there ready to go. Maybe all airplanes should have two engines. You might look into this. As pilot in command, I take my responsibilities very seriously.

It was apparent that I would have to go down lower and keep a sharp eye in such bad weather. I was glad my neighbor was asleep because it was pretty dark under the clouds and if it hadn't been for the lightning flashes it would have been hard to navigate. Also, it was hard to read road signs through the ice on the windshield. Several cars ran off the road when we passed and you can sure see what they mean about flying being a lot safer than driving. To make a long story short, I finally spotted an airport that I knew right away was pretty close to town and, since we were already late for cocktails and dinner, I decided to land there.

It was an Air Force Base so I knew it had plenty of runway and I could already see a lot of colored lights flashing in the control tower so I knew that we were welcome. Somebody had told me that you could always talk to these military people on the international emergency frequency so I tried it but you wouldn't believe the language that I heard. These people ought to be straightened out by somebody and I would like to complain as a taxpayer. Evidently they were expecting somebody to come in and land because they kept talking about some g-d--stupid-son-of-a-b- up in that fog. I wanted to be helpful so I landed on the ramp to be out of the way in case that other fellow needed the runway. A lot of people came running out waving at us. It was pretty evident that they had never seen an Aztec C before. One fellow, some general with a pretty nasty temper, was real mad about something. I tried to explain to him in a reasonable manner that I didn't think the tower operator should be swearing at that guy up there, but his face was so red that I think he must have a drinking problem.

Well, that's about all. I caught a bus back home because the weather really got bad, but my neighbor stayed at the hospital there. He can't make a statement yet because he's still not awake. Poor fellow, he must have the flu, or something. Let me know if you need anything else, and please send my new license airmail, special delivery.

Very, truly yours,

<deleted to protect the guilty>