



HAND-HELD RADIOS and OTHER EMERGENCY GEAR

When I first came out here I bought a hand-held nav-com radio (Sporty's A-300, used for \$250. Yes, I like it). The principal reason was to use it for communicating with students during a first solo. I also told myself I would use it if I ever had a radio failure. Well, I finally had one, sort of.

A couple weeks ago I was flying our 150 and the transmitter had failed. The following sequence of events is a story of how stupid I can really be. I hope some people can take a lesson from this. The rest of you will just have to settle for a good laugh.

We had been flying around locally and decided to go to Aurora (IL) for some landings. We found out the radio had died when Aurora started talking about "carrier only". No problem; we just broke it off and went back to Naper (Aero Club). No tower at Naper Aero, so no radio really needed.

First stupidity - I had the hand-held with me, but didn't remember that I had it so I didn't use it. Pretty dumb. I had recently moved it from my big flight case (which I don't usually carry on local VFR flights) to my double headset case, which I always have with me. If I had thought it through, we could have continued the lesson as planned.

Since the 150 was in need of the recurring inspection for the nut plate AD anyway, we decided to fly it up to Dupage and have JA fix the radio and do the nut plate inspection. Dupage has a tower, but by now I had thought of my hand-held so we had it covered, right? I would just plug my headset into the hand-held, using the adapter cord I remembered having bought two years ago, and we would be on our way.

Second stupidity - I couldn't find the adapter cord. I'm sure it was in my big flight case, which was in my car, but I couldn't find the cord. OK, at least I have the radio itself, so we'll go.

I taxi out, announce my departure on multicom using the hand-held, and take off. Dupage is only about 10 miles away, so I listen to the ATIS and call them as soon as I leave the Naper Aero pattern. That's where the next round of stupidity begins.

Stupidity #3 - I have never used the hand-held in a plane before, so I don't know that you can't hold the radio by your head and fly the plane. It is very awkward. And if you lay it down on the seat, you can't hear the tower when they call you with traffic advisories, sequencing, landing clearance, etc.

But traffic is light (10 o'clock at night) and the controller is understanding, so I get through it all. At home I decide to get all this hand-held stuff together and make it work. That's when I found out I was almost a victim of

Stupidity No. 4 - The batteries in the hand-held were all but dead. I'm very lucky they lasted long enough to get into Dupage.



I finally found the headset adapter cord in my OTHER headset case (I have four headsets, but only routinely take the two better ones to the airport). I changed the batteries and tried it with the headset for the first time. I still found keying the transmitter using the button on the side of the hand-held to be awkward. Upon reading the manual for the hand-held (when all else fails, read the instructions!) I discovered it would key using a remote push-to-talk switch. I dug one of them out, but it wouldn't key. After fiddling around I found I hadn't pushed the mic plug into the hand-held all the way. Now it works.

Can you imagine going through all this if you had a **real** emergency, like radio failure while IFR? You would be lost, cited by the FAA, or dead before you got it all worked out in the air. And I STILL haven't tried it in a plane yet, but I will soon. I'm confident I can hook it up OK now, but I don't know where I would put the hand-held in the plane. It should be upright for the radio to work best, and should be wedged some place to prevent bouncing around in turbulence. Since I am a "renter" (flying club) I can't create a permanent mounting bracket. Maybe just stuck between the seats will work.

There are several morals to this story, and they apply to all emergency equipment, not just hand-held radios. When you get a new piece of emergency equipment, be sure to try it out for its intended purpose **in the environment** that will likely be at hand in the event of a real emergency. I had tried my hand-held on the ramp and told myself how great it worked. Things were a lot different in the airplane. And be sure to try all the accessories; know how they work and where they are. Keep the accessories with the basic unit. Carry extra batteries.

Specifically with respect to hand-held radios; get the adapters and switches necessary to use a headset with remote push-to-talk. The radio is not useful in the plane without those accessories (unless you have a copilot). By the way, even with weak batteries it seemed to transmit through the metal skin of the plane OK. An external antenna was not required. And when a controller is especially helpful, say "thanks". Once on the ramp at Dupage, I used the last of my dying batteries to thank the tower controller for her patience with my sporadic communications. Her reply was "no problem; happens to us all the time". Learn about your equipment. Then maybe it won't be you the next time.

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