



Taking Care of Yourself on the “Road”

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Flight Planning and Healthcare Tips for Cross-country Flying

Back in 2013 at this same time of year I penned an article for *FAA Safety Briefing* called “What Would MacGyver Do?” It was in our “Be Prepared” themed edition (www.faa.gov/news/safety_briefing/2013/media/JulAug2013.pdf) — and little did I know at the time how much that article would resonate with you, our readers.

So for this summertime edition of the magazine I have decided to knock off a bit of the dust from that premise and expand on it to give you some tips and insights into ensuring your summer flying is foot-loose and urgent-care free.

Make a Plan, Stick to the Plan

While in the military, I had a commander whose saying so truly encapsulated my entire way of thinking that I made it my own personal mantra. It is the path by which I walk my life: “Make a plan, stick to the plan.”

Now wait! Before you go and accuse me of being inflexible, a good plan has a little contingency built in just in case. Meaning — a good plan has a plan “B,” “C,” and possibly a “C+,” to take into account when little things like weather, engine anomalies, Canada geese, and air traffic wreak havoc on your perfect flying day.

The following are some tips that I have compiled to incorporate into your planning process.

First, when headed cross-country, pick checkpoints you know you can find, and familiarize

yourself with the airports you are headed to. Review the airport hours of operation, diagrams, and any Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs). It never hurts to check in with that FBO to see if anything has changed since the last time you were there that might not have made it to the notice (like the giant pothole that just opened up at the intersection of taxiway Bravo and runway 09). Carefully scrutinize the weather at all points along your route. With all the latest weather forecasting technologies mere tablet taps away, and the wonderful professionals at Flight Service within phone call reach, there is no excuse for not being equipped with the most up-to-date weather before starting your journey.

One of my favorite parts of that MacGyver article was the section titled “MacGyver Gets Rescued” because who doesn’t like a happy ending? The thing is though, the character MacGyver did a lot to invest in his own happy endings. As I wrote back then; “The whole point of surviving is to get rescued and get back home. Whether you choose low-tech or the higher end of the stuff to outfit your survival gear, the best chance of getting back home is by giving search and rescue personnel an idea of where to start.”

This is still very much true. Receiving a weather briefing notwithstanding, filing a flight plan affords you the wonderful opportunity to thoroughly research your intentions. Plotting your plan forces your attention on key, potentially risk-mitigating cal-

culations that might otherwise be overlooked. These calculations include fuel burn rates, prevailing winds, and expected time to destination, for example.

I can't express this enough: a good plan has a backup plan so when you are sorting out your path, make sure you take into account where you would go should the going get rough. Determine exactly how long you are willing to stay airborne when that vicious head-wind determinedly works against you. Work out what you would do should you be forced to initiate a go-around or if that \$100 hamburger suddenly decides not to agree with you (more on that later). Being "in the thick" is no time to quickly have to mentally reconnoiter.

And last, yes, a filed plan is also your insurance that someone will come looking for you should you not show up at the destination when you said you would. Jim Viola, Division Manager for FAA's General Aviation and Commercial Division appeals to GA pilots to file for VFR flight plans as much as possible if only for the flight following aspect. "Someone should know where you were going to fly — let us know where to start looking if you didn't make it to your planned destination."

It is disconcerting that many of the pilots involved in mishaps last year did not file a flight plan prior to their mishap flight.

Pack Smart

As our theme highlights, people fly in all four corners of the United States. You can imagine that

flight dynamics differ a bit between the skies of wild and rural Alaska, and the hot, moisture-soaked air of the Mississippi Delta. Besides seeing to that flight plan, flight preparation should consist of smart

packing. And by that I mean packing for the en route climate *and* the one at your destination. That former part is the one that tends to catch people

the most unprepared. Whereas I fully recognize that when heading to Daytona Beach to escape the cold, one might be more focused on packing swim suits, flip flops, and beach umbrellas, I also know that it is highly unlikely any of these things would serve much good should the flight have to divert to the rural farmlands just outside of Boston — which, incidentally, just experienced its worst winter in history.

In the "MacGyver Carries a Pocket Knife" section of the other article, I mentioned an assortment of things you might want to carry based on locale: sunscreen, sunglasses, and a hat for sunny, arid climates; down parkas, gloves, and thermals for cold weather climes; mosquito netting and bug spray for heavy vegetation; and life vests for areas with a lot of standing or swift-moving water, to name a few.

In addition to the region-specific items, there are some staples you should keep onboard. A small supply of non-perishable food and plenty of water for everyone on board to last for at least three days

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Flight planning goes beyond simply filling out a flight plan.

is a good start. Some sort of waterproof fire-making device, a sturdy multi-tool, a first aid kit, and a locator device round out the list nicely.

Proactive Health

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention inform us to “be proactive, prepared, and protected

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when it comes to your health while you are traveling.” This is good advice for everyone, regardless of the mode of transportation used to get to your destination. Good preparation for ensuring

you stay healthy during your travels includes making sure you are healthy *before* you travel.

Woke up with that tickle in the back of your throat? Maybe today is not the day to fly — at least not until it has passed or until you get it checked out. The last thing you need to deal with is a bout of congestion at 6,000 feet.

It also isn't a good idea to try out that new “Three Mile Island” burger at the local shake shop — complete with twice-fried jalapeños and sriracha mayo — in the short hours before you go fly. Sensible, balanced meals and remaining hydrated are an essential part of flight preparation. “Gut bombs” are probably not.

Ensure your vaccinations and allergy medicines are up-to-date prior to stepping out to your parking patch. Pack a medical kit for yourself and

for any passengers flying with you. Make sure you pack enough of any medications you need, or take a prescription so it can be refilled easily in case you land at “someplace other than expected.” If you end up not feeling well during a flight, DO NOT HESITATE to hail your nearest air traffic controller and let him/her know what is going on with you. There is absolutely no reason to be flying out there sick and “alone.” Let ATC help when things aren't going as planned. This holds true for lost vectors and airworthiness issues as well.

Should you have to make that emergency landing, it is a good idea to bring an insurance card and any additional records (i.e., medical alert pendants/bracelets) that will help medical services quickly determine any extenuating circumstances you might have. This can be anything from an allergy to penicillin or latex, to having metal implants or a pace-maker.

Last, if you wear corrective lenses, a spare pair of glasses or contacts can always come in handy. Have a small reserve of ready cash, too. You'd be surprised just how many rural FBOs don't take American Express.

Postflight

Once you have reached your destination, take a few minutes to review your data and make comparisons against what you estimated before you started on your journey. This includes actual fuel burn rate, oil consumption, groundspeed, airspeed, time to destination, etc. This information can be helpful in future flight planning and can also give you some valuable insight as to how your plane is performing. Then it's time to button 'er up (you packed in those tie-down ropes, right?), log your time, and close out your flight plan — the latter being a crucial step in alerting Flight Service that you are down safe and sound.

One last quote from the MacGyver article (slightly refined) drives my point home: “While you might not be a multi-lingual, globetrotting, physicist/engineer; with a good attitude, some training, a little preparedness, and a few specialty pieces of equipment...” you can make sure your next cross-country trip sticks to the plan. ✈️

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Diet can be something to consider when you're traveling.