

January 29, 2018

On January 27, 2018, at approximately 11:00 am, Bev Weintraub and I departed separately from Meriden-Markham Airport (KMMK) to Oxford Airport (81B), Oxford, ME, 190 NM northeast. The purpose of the flight was to drop off a Cessna 170 at Oxford's maintenance shop and to return the same day to KMMK using N9673W, a Piper PA28-140 Cherokee.

Prior to the flight, we used a combination of the National Weather Service cell phone aviation app, AOPA Flight Planner and ForeFlight to gather current weather and NOTAM information for our route of flight. Generally, weather conditions along the route of flight were reported to be VFR with local marginal to IFR at Hartford-Brainard (KHFD) and Bradley-Windsor Locks (KBDL) airports. The adverse conditions were determined to be a minimal factor based on local knowledge and experience, and those airports were reporting VFR at the time of departure. The only weather-related concern was the forecast winds aloft, which were 42 to 45 knots from 230° at 3,000' and at 6,000'. Preflight of the airplanes was normal and both airplanes were fueled to capacity prior to takeoff. The Cessna took off first, with Phil as PIC, with the Cherokee following, with Bev as PIC.

The flight to 81B was at 5,500'. Flight time for both airplanes was slightly less than 1.5 hours. Prior to departure for the return trip from 81B, we divided responsibilities to check the weather and to check the remaining fuel and determined there was a sufficient supply for the return trip plus reserves in the Cherokee. Takeoff was normal. However, the airplane felt heavy and climb performance seemed less than expected. OAT was in the mid-30s.

I climbed to 4,500', which is an appropriate altitude for that direction of flight and a minimum safe altitude to clear obstacles along that part of the route. The course was a straight line from 81B to KMMK. GPS ground speeds were checked frequently throughout the return flight. Because a direct flight to KMMK was entered into the GPS, the ETE and distance remaining were constantly updated, which made it easy to calculate fuel remaining vs. fuel needed to complete the planned leg. As PIC, I was confident that a fuel load of 36 gallons, with an average ground speed of 68 to 73 knots and a fuel consumption rate of 8 gallons per hour, would leave us with about 6 gallons of fuel upon landing at KMMK.

After passing the Manchester, NH, class C airspace, I descended to 3,500' looking for less headwind. The ride became a bit bumpier and the ground speed did not change appreciably. Prior to takeoff, I had determined that using all the fuel from the right tank would give us extra insurance that we would have maximum fuel available for maneuvering in the pattern at our destination. Just prior to passing Worcester, MA, the fuel pressure gauge began to flicker. I waited, and as the engine began to falter, I switched to the left fuel tank.

Just south of the Connecticut border, I initiated another descent to 2,500', again looking for smoother air and less headwind. The air was smoother and we gained a couple of knots' ground speed. About 10 NM northeast of KHFD, I contacted the tower giving our position and requesting to pass through their airspace en route to KMMK. We noted that the needle on the left fuel gauge was bouncing around below the 10-gallon mark. Bev suggested that we could stop at KHFD to get a few gallons of fuel, but I

had confidence in my calculations and was loath to pay \$6.70-plus per gallon for fuel. I elected to push on.

At 10 NM northeast of KMMK, I announced our position from the airport after getting the AWOS. There were two aircraft in the area that I took note of, and Runway 18 was the active runway. At 5 NM miles, I announced our position and declared that I was planning a straight-in approach to Runway 18. About 2.5 NM, the fuel pressure gauge faltered. I had the fuel pump on Bev and I were looking for a place to land, but we were over the city of Meriden and did not have many options. I continued toward the airport, made a call to the FBO and announced our situation. I maintained 2,500' as the airplane decelerated to best glide speed. It became clear we weren't to make it the runway, and after a brief conversation with Bev, I chose to head toward Hanover Pond thinking a water landing would be our best bet. Other options were an athletic field with power lines and a highway with heavy traffic.

Bev prepared the airplane for a water landing, popping the safety latch and opening the door. The airplane immediately lost what felt like 40' to 50', and it became clear that wasn't going to happen. I radioed KMMK's FBO telling them that we were not going to make the airport and asking them to alert emergency responders that we would need assistance. We were aimed at the crowns of a pair of 60' trees. I dove the airplane slightly to avoid the treetops and hoped to pass between the trunks. The airplane continued to descend when the nose wheel snagged a chain-link fence that was 4' to 5' high and the airplane decelerated rapidly. When the airplane came to rest on the ground, Bev climbed out through the open door, slid down the front of the right wing a few feet from the wingtip, walked a short distance away and lay down on the ground. I was struggling to get through the door when I saw an off-duty EMT, who had witnessed the accident, hovering over me telling me to stop moving until an EMT team arrived. Other off duty EMTs ran to assist Bev.

[REDACTED]

Philip F. Cianciolo

ATP [REDACTED]

Feb 3, 2018