

From: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED] (FAA)
Subject: [REDACTED] email as requested
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[REDACTED]

Most of the trauma has worn off by now and I wanted to give you the report you requested on 549PS in Cuthbert, GA.

I don't believe there was a single cause but rather a chain, which I'll try to outline.

I was aware of the weather system several days in advance that would affect my flight this past friday evening, and while I was scheduled to pick up one of my children in Birmingham upon arrival, I asked my mother to do so instead, so my only time pressure was a preference to get home to help take care of two children before bed with my wife out of town. That left me time to stop as needed on the way. I also noticed that the majority of the weather was past.

There was precipitation with two storms I was monitoring very carefully, one smaller cell in the south central alabama and one larger cell in south central georgia. There was light rain in between and I sought to fly over the rain and through, or descend in a window if needed and use judgement to stop or continue, with more than enough fuel for a variety of outcomes.

I had to fly higher than I wanted to avoid the clouds, over 11k when I'm more comfortable below 10k, When i crested the clouds I was looking forward to finding a window and a safer elevation under mostly 5k ceilings but at that time my cylinder head temp gauge showed a warning. I was running 5200 rpm vs 5500 normal at my throttle setting but did not suspect carb ice (not then or any time until my CFI and I were discussing the incident) because the carb is above the engine and my mechanic showed me how it is naturally heated. But I believe pulling cabin heat to stay warm at high altitude took heat from the carb. I simply thought it was a function of flying too high which i was fixing. Obviously a turn back to tallahassee or even just under the weather would have been preferable.

In either event at this time I contacted Montgomery, who handed me to Cairns / Dothan, whereupon I stated I needed to find a landing spot due to an overheating engine. After bried discussion I agreed it was an emergency. I also needed to go through the cloud layer, which I thought could bring icing risk but it did not. I have 30 hours foggie time and several IFR lessons but stated I was VFR. As noted I have about 60 hours in type of aircraft and about 170 total. Anyhow I thought descent might cool the engine which it did to a degree, below red threshold despite not addressing the root cause.

Breaking below the ceiling I spoke to cairns about eufaula being low IFR and lower chattahoochee (25J) a better option. He vectored me east and at this point i was more concerned with engine heat / smoke smell than my landing checklist - frequency, fuel pump, landing light and also nav lights at this time.

As I approached 25J I also wondered if my cabin was low on oxygen due to low venting from being cold above - because I was not thinking as clearly as normal.

I also had 3 different displays showing 3 different airport locations and i simply needed runway lights but i was on Cairns frequency instead of 25J, so my runway light clicks did nothing. When i called ATC later to notify them I was ok he actually remembered the clicking, but i know ATC are not pilots. I could have obviously looked up the frequency but was focused on flying rather than foreflight, and tried to plug it into my garmin but without nav lights the button was not lit up. All easy fixes under normal conditions but less so with low venting, clicking for runway lights, engine warnings, checking RPM, altitude, losing ATC, occasional stall warnings, and searching for the beacon.

AtC cut out at 1700 msl, that may have gotten me through had he stayed. It almost certainly would have.

I thought I was parallel the runway, which I was, and saw the beacon and decided to return to the beacon to do a line up and try the lights again and get organized from the other side of the runway. (it turns out the lights were 6 clicks anyway, i tried 5 and 3).

As I was returning to the beacon I was too low and slow and a tall set of trees created the incident you saw. I believe I was going 50kts max, losing altitude because climbing without greater rpm generated a stall. In fact I was increasingly ok to climb in warmer, denser air but I did not know this. Branches further slowed me to help create the miracle of what was effectively a hard drop to the forest floor.

I hope this helps.

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[REDACTED]