

CALLBACK

From NASA's Aviation Safety Reporting System



Issue 389

June 2012



"Get-**HOME**-itis"

This month, *CALLBACK* takes a look at how the urge to press on to one's destination, despite conditions that might otherwise discourage such a decision, can lead to risky behavior and undesirable consequences. Four pilots who let "get-home-itis" cloud their thinking share valuable insights into avoiding this dangerous malady in the following ASRS reports.

"Get-there-itis"

Just as the more common "get-home-itis" can lead to poor decision making, so can the desire to get to a destination other than home. In this case, family commitments pressured a Private Pilot to act against better judgment.

■ *OK, I did it; the dumbest thing I have ever done in my entire life. I busted the MDA on [a GPS approach]. I can't believe I did this. I am now a statistic. At least I'm a live statistic. It was a classic case of "get-there-itis" to the extreme. My wife and I had booked a bed and breakfast and I was blinded by my desire to please her.... I knew the ceilings, as reported by ATIS, were half of what the minimums were on the plates. ATC cleared me for the approach and I went ahead and shot the approach anyway. The ironic thing is that it was probably the best approach I ever shot in my life. That doesn't dismiss the fact that it was also the dumbest decision I probably ever made and I am not short on doing dumb things.*

I am, by nature, a safe and conservative pilot. On this day my brain went dead. I'm pretty sure I know what led me to the bad decision making process. The advance booking pretty much set a deadline that I subconsciously determined I was going to make. The rest is history. I feel like an alcoholic who has just recognized he has a problem. I can only hope this experience shakes the dumbness out of my head for the rest of my life.

Making a Run for It

This Pilot of an Experimental Homebuilt made a correct decision by landing enroute when the weather deteriorated. But then the desire to get home took over and poor judgment got the upper hand.

■ *[I] was cruising at 7,500 feet, enjoying a nice tailwind. There were clouds below at about 3,000 feet, but it was clear, VFR above. I had anticipated staying on top until I got near my destination then finding a hole to get down. A call to Flight Watch, however, told me that wasn't going to happen. It started closing up under me so I found a hole in the deck and wound up landing at an airport about a third of the way along the route. [I] waited on the ground for a couple of hours watching clouds and visibilities on the internet, hoping it would improve. Given the very large, slow moving front over my route and destination I knew if I didn't get home today I would have to wait several days before the weather cleared.*

The visibility seemed good enough (four to five miles) to scud run so I decided to make a run for it. [I] got about two-thirds of the way and it got much worse, perhaps 300 foot ceiling and two miles visibility. Not having any options at this point, I elected to climb and got above the clouds at about 3,500 feet. I had plenty of fuel but was getting short on daylight. My GPS shows some terrain features, so I decided to keep heading directly towards my destination until I reached the Mississippi River which would keep me away from any tall towers in the vicinity. At that point, I descended back down through the deck until I could see the water. I followed the river north for a short while until I recognized a highway that ultimately leads to my destination. I called the Tower and requested Special VFR, which they granted. At that time, I think it was 500 feet and three miles with mist and I landed without incident, 20 minutes before official sunset. [It was] definitely a case of "get-home-itis" and poor judgment. All day I have been thinking how close I really was to not making it.

A Near-Lethal Combination

In a scenario involving a number of adverse factors in addition to a combination of "get-home-itis" and complacency, this Embraer Phenom 100 Flight Crew was fortunate that Air Traffic Control made a great "save."

■ *While on an RNAV approach at night, the Captain and I became disoriented and started to descend to the MDA prior to the Final Approach Fix (FAF). We thought we had*

already passed the FAF, but in reality we had only passed the intersection before the FAF. Four miles from the FAF, Tower notified us of a low altitude alert and told us to immediately climb to the published altitude. We acknowledged the instruction and corrected our altitude. The published altitude for that segment of the approach was 2,000 feet and we had descended to 1,400 feet.

There were several causal factors for this event: 1.) It was a long duty day. We had already flown roughly eight hours during the course of the day and this was our fourth leg and last leg home. It was dark and we were tired for sure. 2.) During the final leg to our destination, ATC gave us multiple route changes, speed assignments, vectors and a last minute change to the arrival. There was insufficient time to properly configure and brief the approach and corresponding altitudes. 3.) There was some anxiety about getting below the clouds because there are some unique runway conditions currently at this airport. The first 2,000 feet of the runway were unusable due to routine maintenance and we wanted to make sure we identified the runway early so we could visually verify the new touchdown point. 4.) The morning and afternoon thunderstorms in the vicinity challenged us during the course of the day and they left behind pockets of moderate precipitation and turbulence for the arrival. We had to keep clear of the weather cells and keep up with rapidly changing ATC instructions. 5.) Nourishment. We had each eaten a scant breakfast, taken a late lunch, and completely skipped dinner due to flight requirements. I made several comments that I was ready to get down so I could find a place to get something to eat.

Looking back on this event, I am most grateful to the safeguards placed within the ATC system. Had we not received the low altitude alert, the history of this particular flight could have been much worse. As the day progressed during long flight legs in rough weather I began to slowly lose my focus and attention to fine detail. Admittedly I was spent. I was safe within legal duty and rest limits, but the anxiety of the trip the night before coupled with the long duty day, dulled my senses and allowed me to slip into a near-lethal combination of “get-home-itis” and complacency.

I can see now a few variables I could change to prevent this from happening again in the future. First, advise ATC that we need delay vectors to prepare properly for the approach. I know that is a wildly unpopular choice in a very crowded and busy airspace, however it could have afforded us the opportunity to brief and prepare for the approach. Secondly, make sure that I take a moment to get some nourishment before I embark on a full day of flying. Third, make sure

I confirm that the other pilot is fully briefed and ready to commence the approach. Finally, make sure that I get proper rest the night before I embark on a long day of flying.

Never Again

Inspired by a sobering encounter with airframe icing, this C172 pilot’s list of actions that “should have” been taken is a good lesson plan on how to avoid the pitfalls of “get-home-itis.”

■ We decided to take off VFR and see if we could make it through in VFR conditions. Once airborne, were able to see that the weather was deteriorating so we started to file an IFR flight plan. It was not completed however, before I flew the aircraft into IMC.... Approximately two minutes after receiving the IFR clearance, I noticed that ice was beginning to form on our leading edges and our windshield as well. We informed Center that we had ice building and needed to change our destination to the closest airport. We were cleared to [a nearby airport], but upon hearing from Center that the weather there was misting, I...deviated without clearance from the assigned heading and altitude to get out of the clouds and precipitation. The report of mist made me think that the safest alternative was to fly back the way that we had come and to descend out of the clouds immediately. Once we had turned around we were out of IMC and landed safely at [another airport]. We stayed the rest of that evening as well as the next day and night, waiting for the weather to improve.

I did many things wrong: I should have planned better to avoid getting into this situation. I should have turned around immediately before entering IMC. My biggest problem was my eagerness to get home. Also, we knew that behind this poor weather the ceilings were much higher and there was no precipitation. This made me think that if we could just break through we could make it the rest of the way VFR. In retrospect, I also should have informed ATC of my intentions, however at the time I thought it more important to get out of the poor situation that we were in. My lack of experience in icing conditions contributed to my poor decisions, I was not sure how quickly it was forming or just how much was enough to put us into a situation that would make it impossible to maintain altitude. I am very thankful to have made it out of this situation safely. One of the worst attitudes to have in these situations is “get-there-itis,” something I have been taught from the beginning of my flight training. I experienced first-hand why operational pitfalls are preached to flight students. I learned a lot from this experience and I will never again get into a situation like this with such a poor plan.

ASRS Alerts Issued in April 2012	
Subject of Alert	No. of Alerts
Aircraft or Aircraft Equipment	2
Airport Facility or Procedure	4
ATC Equipment or Procedure	3
TOTAL	9

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 A Monthly Safety Bulletin from
**The NASA
 Aviation Safety
 Reporting System**
 P.O. Box 189,
 Moffett Field, CA
 94035-0189
<http://asrs.arc.nasa.gov>

April 2012 Report Intake	
Air Carrier/Air Taxi Pilots	3271
General Aviation Pilots	1023
Controllers	821
Cabin	263
Mechanics	163
Dispatcher	58
Military/Other	35
TOTAL	5634