

CALLBACK

From NASA's Aviation Safety Reporting System



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Forced To Land, Forced to Leave



Even with good pre-flight planning, pilots may encounter some unusual problems in-flight. Just accomplishing a take-off can be challenging, as a First Officer can attest in this account of multiple bird strikes and the subsequent aircraft logbook omission.

■ *Upon rotation, we experienced numerous birdstrikes on the aircraft. A burning smell was noted through the air conditioning system. The Captain decided to return to the airport and have the aircraft inspected. We requested the airport emergency equipment to be on hand. Upon inspection, a total of 25 separate bird strikes were noted, including at least one into each engine's fan section.*

We were inundated with unending clerical duties and phone calls. In the course of notifying all persons involved (Company, ATC, fire department, and passengers), a logbook entry of the bird strike was never made.

The flight crew gets an A+ for handling the airborne emergency. However, the maintenance personnel, who had to account for their time and the parts used in the repair job, would have appreciated a pilot's write-up to sign off.

Feeling a Little Drained?

Next, an easily-overlooked pre-flight item will no doubt be added to this general aviation reporter's checklist.

■ *Pre-flight completed. Both fuel tanks full. Five hours of fuel on board for a planned three-hour flight. Two hours and forty minutes into the flight, the engine lost power. Performed all phases of restart procedure without success. Made an uneventful landing at an unattended airport.*

Subsequent inspection revealed: both fuel tanks empty, with blue-green 100LL fuel stains originating at both fuel caps and covering wings, flaps, fuselage and empennage. The [older style lift-the-lever-and-twist] fuel caps were properly installed, but the neoprene cap seals had shrunk and were not sealing, causing the fuel siphoning from the tanks. These seals had been replaced within the past 2-3 years.

Prior to this event, the airplane spent 30 days tied down, outside, in a dry climate at 7,600 feet MSL, when nighttime temperature fell below 0° F. Dry conditions and cold soak caused the seals to shrink, resulting in fuel loss.

Newer screw-on caps similar to those on most automobiles may be available to replace the older ones on many aircraft models. A mechanic can provide specific guidance.

Impromptu Camping

Pilots who plan a flying-camping trip this summer might take a lesson from our next reporter, and be prepared for alternate accommodations.

■ *I estimated that we had just under one hour of fuel remaining, and as it was getting dark and I was completely unfamiliar with the mountainous terrain, I decided not to fly on. I landed at ABC, a public-use airport. The only telephone available connected us to the lodge, which also operated the FBO. We told the desk clerk that we could simply camp overnight and buy fuel in the morning. The desk clerk said OK. We parked on a corner of the ramp, pitched a tent under the wing, and went to sleep.*

Around midnight, we were awakened by an armed man in a "Special Police" uniform, who declared, "Leave immediately or I will arrest you for trespassing and you will spend the night in jail." We told him everything noted above, but he was adamant: leave or spend the night in jail.

I estimated that I had enough fuel to make it, although certainly not enough for legal night VFR flight. Faced with the alternative of going to jail, I decided to depart. It was a pitch black, moonless night. Although clear and with about 10 miles visibility, there were no lights visible and there was no discernible horizon. I climbed above the MOCA, flew on instruments for about 20 miles to the nearest airport, and landed. The FBO there pumped 21.6 gallons of fuel into my tanks, which have 22.5 gallons usable.

My mistake was in allowing myself to be forced, even by an armed guard, into making a flight which was against my better judgement, probably beyond my capabilities, unsafe, and illegal. It was only luck that it turned out all right.

I was able to reach the manager of the FBO later. He said that the "special police" had no authority to order a pilot to take off from the airport and that he would make certain the police knew this in the future so they would never do this to another pilot.

Even a night in jail is preferable to a nighttime forced landing in the mountains, where no one knows where to start a search-and-rescue effort. ▲

ASRS Recently Issued Alerts On...
Confusing taxiway signage at a Colorado airport
False OM signals on two intersecting Ohio approach paths
Oxygen masks interfering with communications on a B-757
Inaccurate velocities on an Illinois windshear alert system
Lack of ECAM fault message for an A300 autofuel procedure

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April 1997 Report Intake	
Air Carrier Pilots	1894
General Aviation Pilots	776
Controllers	82
Cabin/Mechanics/Military/Other	31
TOTAL	2783

On Track of The Paper Trail



Although we live in the computer age, paper sometimes still rules in the cockpit. In the following reports, a piece of paper was all that stood between our reporters and the wrong aircraft.

■ *Aircraft at the gate. During pre-flight and walk-around, I noticed the aircraft already fueled, and mail and bags in the process of being loaded. The Captain performed first-flight-of-the-day systems checks, and we did checklists. Pushed back from the gate, and flew to XYZ without incident. Upon arrival, we were informed that we had flown the wrong aircraft. I had not reviewed the paperwork, as it was the Captain's leg to fly.*

Everything was done properly, except verifying that the fleet number on the release matched the fleet number at the gate. Station personnel had positioned the wrong aircraft at the gate and were in the process of loading it for departure when we arrived.

In the future, I will review all paperwork prior to departure.

The next reporter did review the paperwork in the logbook, but failed to detect one glaring inconsistency:

■ *I boarded the same aircraft that I had flown into ABC the night before. I verified that the overnight check had been signed off, and recorded the necessary items of our morning flight. I should have noted the big red numbers*

of another aircraft on the cover of the logbook and the name of another Captain on the previous page, but I did not. I was too focused on "routine."

In the words of another ASRS reporter, "The aircraft logbook was meant to be more than just a cockpit paperweight."

Something Old... Something New

In the next report, an old paper chart set a general aviation instructor pilot on the wrong path.

■ *After departure, I climbed into the overlying Class B airspace before contacting Departure Control for flight following. I was with a student who had planned the routing on an old chart. I used that sectional to determine the airspace limits, without checking the date. The old sectional chart that did not have the Class B airspace depicted.*

Lessons learned: do NOT keep old charts, even for flight planning, and do not trust others to have current materials.

This instructor set a rather poor example for the student. It appears that they both learned to carry "something new"—current charts—on future flights. ▲

Confused, Bothered and Bewildered (By MELs)

Many pilots continue to be confused by their companies' MELs (Minimum Equipment Lists), for example, which items can be deferred by the flight crew by applying a sticker or paper placard—and which items cannot be deferred at all. A First Officer reports that, in one case, the confusion was not cleared up until after the fact.

■ *Just prior to pushback, the forward entry door light came on. The Captain called maintenance, who advised him that the door light could be crew-placarded. I rechecked the door to ensure it was properly closed; it was also checked from the exterior by ground personnel. After takeoff, we examined the MEL, and discovered that the door light was not a crew-placard item.*

Another First Officer also learned too late the importance of consulting the MEL before take-off.

■ *Inbound equipment arrived late. About 5 minutes before pushback time, I discovered that my right armrest was stuck in the UP position. I attempted to free it, but no luck. I contacted maintenance and asked them to bring something to lubricate the mechanism. A mechanic did so, but to no avail. We figured we could just go with it in the UP position. It did not occur to us to look it up in the MEL, as it did not seem to be a safety-of-flight item.*

Upon our arrival, we were told that the armrest is a no-go item. The continuing flight was cancelled due to this fact, since no spare seat or replacement part was immediately available. The Captain and I were both amazed that something as simple and innocuous as an armrest would be considered a no-go item. In the future, I will check the MEL for any item, no matter how seemingly insignificant. ▲

