



THE CLECO

EAA Chapter 393



*Volume 32, Issue 2
February 2004*

Inside this issue:

Left Eye Dominant	2
Treasurers Report	3
Meeting Notes	4
Board Minutes	5
About Paul's Crash	5
Speaker	10

Notes of Interest:

- **Meeting:** Wednesday February 25th at the Buchanan Field Terminal Building located on John Glenn Drive in Concord and will begin at 7:30PM. Visitors are always welcome.
- **Club Fly-Out:** RV forum March 6th in Corning, see or call Harvard Holmes!
- **Board Meeting:** Next meeting is February 5th at 7:30pm at CCR Terminal. Members are welcome to attend.

Letter from the President

The first month of the new year is already gone and the second is just about history too. I'd like to thank all involved in obtaining our January speaker, Dave Peterson. What a captivating evening! My view of aviation history has taken on a whole new dimension. Unfortunately this aspect of aviation, I'm afraid, shall be with us for quite some time. I just hope none of us become part of it. This speaker is going to be a tuff act to follow so we may need additional time to procure our next speaker.

I've been working away on my right wing spar- planning and sanding the center section taper for splicing the two halves together. It's hard work, but I can see the progress and it's comforting to know that hour-by-hour the plane is that much more closer to being finished. An added special thanks to hangar neighbors Pete Wiebens and Dough Knight for their encouragement.

Remember!!!...pay your chapter membership renewal dues! These dues are due and we need to keep the roster up-to-date.

In conclusion I'd like to say that we've gotten a glimpse of what Spring weather looks like. The days are getting a little longer too. So a new flurry of building and flying are in order.

See you at the general meeting.

Pres. Pete

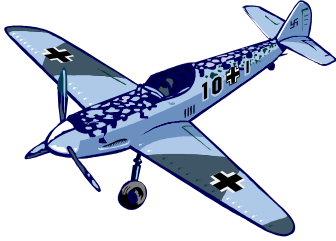
Young Eagles

The Young Eagles program this year will consist of just flying kids for fun. We will sell the famous "VEATCH" franks for the folks who attend. Our goal this year will be to fly at least 250 youngsters. First round for the rally will take place on April 3, 2004 at the Buchanan field. This will be an open house type of an event and everyone will be welcome to come. I will ask the members of Chapter 393 to bring their airplanes and park them in front of the Sterling Aviation building for display to the public. Also, I have asked REACH rescue to put their chopper on display and they have accepted. This could turn out to be a huge event, so I will need all the help I can get. Sterling has given us permission to use their facility and they will display some aircraft. In the meantime, arrangements have been made to fly the Athenian class to Visalia on Feb. 21, 2004. Volunteers have already committed to fly the kids to Visalia. I have received the Jaguar points from Wis. today and pleased to announce that we have 204 points, which convert into dollars when applied to the tuition for the Air Academy. If anyone has candidates for this venture please let me know.

Pat Peters

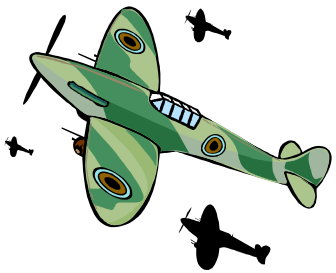
Left Eye Dominant

A short story by Peter Degl'Innocenti



I am left eye dominant. Any pilot or shooter should know which is his dominant eye. The dominant eye leads and focuses on an object while the other eye plays a bit of guard duty by having a wider field of vision away from the object you're looking at.

This is easy to test. To determine which is your dominant eye; look at an object across the room. Now, hold your thumb up at arms length and with both eyes open fix your thumb on the object as if it were the front sight of a .50 caliber machine gun and you are the gunner on a B-17. Now, close your right eye then open it and close the left eye without moving your arm. You will notice that when you close one of your eyes the thumb seems to jump away from your target. The eye you close that causes the thumb to jump is the dominant eye. To shoot down the Me-109 and save your bacon you want to sight down the barrel with your dominant eye open and the other eye closed. I am left eye dominant.



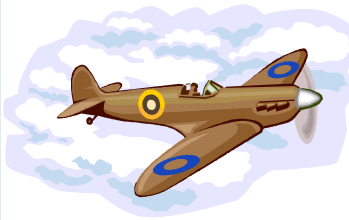
The Holiday Season was just about over. At work I spent many grueling overtime hours doing some of the hardest work of the year. Thanksgiving, Christmas, and now finally New Year's. My wife Jan and I had stayed up until midnight the night before to usher in the new year as we should. It took effort to stay up till midnight, but we managed the better part of a bottle of bubbly. The early morning alarm clock rudely broke our sleep. We both dutifully got up to make the car trip to Burlingame for the big family gathering at my parent's place. Soon we were on the highway and all settled in for the cruise. I am left eye dominant.

"Are you all right to drive, you look pretty tired?" my wife asked.

I was tired, but I knew I'd have to find something to keep my mind occupied to stay alert. "I'll be fine." I responded to keep her at ease; after all that's what I'm supposed to do especially when I'm left eye dominant.

There! Up ahead. I just barely spotted it. "Bogie" at one o'clock! I could feel the ounce of adrenalin kick in as all my senses came alert. This was perfect for keeping me on my toes for the drive. The "Bogie" was the dreaded enemy of any red blooded American fighter pilot, The CHP!!! This was a sneaky one. Low profile lights on top making it hard to spot. He was cruising along about 300 yards ahead in lane number one. So this is about the range at which most air combat took place, I thought to myself. If I wait till a curve in the road, he'll have to cross into my stream of .50 calibers. The trick will be to wait until the right time to squeeze the trigger.

He rounded the next curve and I sent a nice long burst at him. Did I get him? How could I be more certain? I needed a fixed sight to aim with. Luckily a few drops of rain were still beaded on the windshield. All I had to do was pick one keep my head steady, aim, and shoot.



I push my head firmly against the headrest. I pick one precious bead of liquid for my sight- no fair changing my mind on which bead to use- that would be cheating. I could feel my hands start to sweat and grip tighter onto the wheel. Heart rate is up. Now, carefully, very carefully close the right eye. Fix on bead. Align the bead with the target ever so delicately. A little maneuvering within the lane to get the optimum sight picture; slightly right, too much, back left, right, left ...just about ready to squeeze the trig ... WHAP! WHAP! WHAP! The painful strikes on my right arm were accented with the shrill cry of WAKE UP! WAKE UP! WAKE UP!!!!

My jaw drops and my right eye pops open as I turn to my lovely wife with my mouth open and an expression that probably matches the thought running through my mind (what the hell is wrong with you?).

She reads me like a book and answers my unspoken question in a still shrill “You were sleeping!”

“No I wasn’t”.

“Yes you were. Your eyes were closed.”

“No honestly they weren’t.”

“Yes they were. Pull over, I’m driving!”

“Let me explain. If you don’t believe me, then you can take over.”



With the most reassuring voice I could muster I explain the whole fighter pilot fantasy. With a look that only a wife can give to a husband she allowed me to continue flying, I mean DRIVING the car. Needless to say we now have an agreement that I must inform Fighter Command (Jan) before I try racking up any more kill flags for the side of my cockpit. After all, I am left eye dominant.

Oh yeah, I do have another restriction about using the sunroof for looking at airplanes, ducks, and other game birds. But that, as they say, is another story.

Check Six, Peter D.



Treasurer’s Report

Checking Balance: 1543.47

Savings Balance: 2593.30

Total: 4136.77

Are you missing a name tag? Did your name tag melt? Need to pay your Chapter Dues? See Louis Goodell for more information!



Informal Meeting Notes

Wednesday, January 28, 2004

Our speaker was Dave Peterson, a self professed "crash junkie," who enjoys researching and hiking up to old aircraft wrecks. He had a multitude of photos of crash sites and many observations on the causes of crashes and then what happens to the crash site afterwards. He noted that some crash sites are extremely difficult to find, and gave some of the reasons and examples of such sites. Dave recommended a web site for further investigation:

<http://www.aviationarchaeology.com/>

Our treasurer, Louis Goodell, reported that our bank balance was unchanged from the Treasurer's Report in the last Cleco, namely \$1443.85 in the checking account and \$2590.68 in the saving account.

Pat Peters described some of his plans for Young Eagles activities, including- A flight of Young Eagles from the Athenian School down to Visalia to see their rebuilt aircraft engine fired up for the first time in a test cell at Ly-Con. This is scheduled for February 21, 2004.- A Youth Rally and Open House, to be held on April 3rd, 2004. He would like to fly Young Eagles and have some aircraft on display ~ sort of a small airport appreciation day, but limited to what we and Sterling Aviation can manage. He will see if Stu Bowers (from MDPA) can arrange for some "classic aircraft" (like Harvard's Mooney just became, as it turned 38!).

Bill Call noted that Eagle Engines in Redmond was a source of engines ~ talk to him if you are in the market for one. Golden West occurs this year on June 18, 19, 20.

Guy Jones would like to bring Al Haynes to talk. Al is the United DC-10 pilot who managed to bring a DC-10 to a controlled crash after all the hydraulic systems were damaged by a blown engine. Al has excellent points to make about emergency situations and emergency response team preparedness. Guy would like to involve the community emergency staff and other audiences, e.g., the state office of Emergency Preparedness and the county Sheriff's office. Al's speaker fee is \$775, which is orders of magnitude less than he could command ~ he wants to keep the fee low as his contribution to aviation.

INTRODUCTIONS:

Duane Allen reported that the Concord City Council lit into Mark DeSaulnier pretty heavily when Mark came to the City Council meeting to explain his plans to study alternative uses of the Buchanan Field airport. He has a video of the meeting on CD. Duane also bought a half interest in a Cessna TR182 to have something to fly while he rebuilds the interior of his Cardinal. He notes that the TR182 is faster and higher than the Cardinal.

Peter Degl'Innocenti is working on splicing the wing spars on this replica P-40.

Bill Call has been working on the overhead air ducts for his Lancair ES, with help from Fred Egli.

Bob Belshe has received a new prop which is an electrically operated constant speed composite prop. He will be installing it and testing it soon.

Fred Egli helped Bob pick up the propeller. He is waiting on his medical and has at least 3 months to wait.

Rich Henne went on an Angel Flight with Bob Tucknott. He has done little flying in the past 25 years and would be interested in doing more.

Harvard Holmes asked if there was anyone who could coordinate the fly-out on Saturday as he would be gone, but there were no responders ~ the opinion being that the weather would be poor. [Naturally, the weather was great!]

Don Baldwin continues to work on his Sonex.

Pete Mitchell noted that Winnie Hull had been in an auto accident two weeks ago and was now able to have visitors.

Ray Nilson is working on his RV-9A. He is installing a Subaru 6 cylinder engine that puts out about 220 HP at maximum RPM, but will likely deliver only 165 to 170 HP at the maximum allowable propeller RPM. He will do an EIS

for the engine instruments. He had to change the cowling to fit the Subaru engine, so he traded at Vans for an O-360 cowling. He is now working on the canopy frame.

Ron Robinson is enjoying his Glasair I RG. It has had a recent oil change, and he went flying this afternoon!

Phil Jenkins is changing the cowl on his Glasair I RG. This involves changing the air intake to get more ram effect on the induction. Quite a bit of work, Phil!

Pat Peters has re-ordered his engine mount from Australia, after they shipped the wrong one. His Warrior had the engine sent up to Redding for an overhaul after a recent ground loop when one of the main wheels locked up. It should be back around the first of March.

Jim Veatch is working on his Kitfox Series 7 and making good progress. By April, he should be ready to put the fabric on.

Tony Tiritilli has a Cherokee 235, and has also been working on Gloria Martin's Cherokee 180 to sell it after she passed away. It sold last Sunday afternoon. Tony has a friend at Livermore with an engine from a VariEze for sale. It is a 235 AC1, with 107 HP. Tony has an attraction to the GP-4 design by George Pereira, but he is still looking for the right situation [- I guess the attraction is not yet fatal.]



Informal Board Minutes

Friday, February 6, 2004

Pat Peters thinks that 10 to 15 students from the Athenian High School will want to make the trip down to Visalia for their engine startup on Feb 21. Pat and Tracy are looking for seats to go down there. He also has another group that wants us to fly Young Eagles.

On March 28th there will be an Aerobatic Class "SWAN" at Marysville. Jerry Quint will be there selling hot dogs.

On April 3rd, Pat is hoping to have a big open house at Sterling Aviation. The airport will provide stanchions and rope to control the crowd. We will fly Young Eagles. Pat will try to get the Chamber of Commerce involved, and other service clubs.

Tracy Peters has been teaching a high school class in Richmond in robotics on Tues, Wed, and Thursdays.

Pat would like to get "EAA Chapter 393" hats for YE pilots, and to sell to other members.

Evaluation of last meeting: the speaker was good! Guy is still working on a speaker for this month's meeting. Suggestions were made to have some of the members talk about their building experiences. Don Baldwin, Bob Rudolph, Ray Nilson, Phil Jenkins (new Cowl), Duane Allen (new panel), Pete Wiebens (new panel), or Will Whitaker (tower controller). We might also get Keith Freitas or "KC" to talk about the ground marker progress or other controller topics.

Harvard Holmes noted that it was not too early to plan for next years Holiday Party. Pat Peters volunteered to check with MDPA for dates.

'About Paul's Crash' by Paul M. Gahlinger

From Dec 19 to Jan 18, I flew from Salt Lake City to Peru and most of the way back. It was a wonderful trip, and really a delight in my spiffed up '75 RG. I had spent the fall putting on VGs, Roy Sobchuk's mods, and a bunch of new instruments including the Garmin 430. I was very well equipped-perhaps over-equipped, as I brought almost enough tools to do a field overhaul. On the international flight plans, I was able to confidently check the survival boxes for Marine, Jungle, and Desert (the only remaining one is Polar).

Overall, the trip was fantastic. I discovered quite a few things, however, that might be of interest in those planning a South American light. First off, as a proud member of AOPA I am disappointed to report that their information is way out of date and caused more trouble than it avoided. Contact the Civil Aviation office in each country. Just a fax from them recognizing your flight will be enough to

[About Paul's Crash] continued

grease the wheels when you land. I was very surprised to discover the lack of familiarity in those airports with small aircraft. Most had NO experience with how to handle one. Aviation gas was rarely available, and I ended up putting car gas in most of the time, which was a real nuisance. The bureaucratic procedures chewed up countless hours, even though all got smoothed out in the end and I made a lot of friends.

Without getting into too long a story, I thought you might be interested in the end of the flight:

On the morning of Jan 18, I planned to fly from David, Panama, to Guatemala City. I got an official weather report, which showed clear weather with just a few scattered clouds along the route, and filed a VFR flight plan to Guatemala City along the established air routes (mostly G436). Everything looked good.

My passenger, Molly, and I took off from David just after 11 AM. Shortly afterward, we crossed the border into Costa Rica. I'd always been curious about this country and both of us would like to visit some day. It is a model of Central American development. The government actually did away with the military, saying it had no need for a military force, and just uses police for security. It just seems like a well-managed country and many Americans have bought property there, pushing coastal real estate prices to levels comparable to California.

From the air, this is obvious-much of the coast is developed with modern housing.

Then we were over Nicaragua, with its vast southern lake. At 10,500 feet, the country slipped by slowly. Then, for a long time, we were over water about 20 miles off the coast, and Molly seemed more anxious than usual. I tried to reassure her about flying. Did you know, I told her, that every year more people are killed by donkeys than in aircraft accidents? It is true. Of course, there are a lot more donkeys than airplanes.

We passed almost directly over a huge, smoking volcano and I banked the airplane to get some great photos. I had hundreds of really good pictures from this trip and looked forward to getting prints made.

Next was Honduras, and then El Salvador. I gazed down at the country, now studded with low-lying clouds, and thought of the terrible years of their civil war. I had been really affected by the film *Salvador*, a movie by Oliver Stone with James Woods acting as a war journalist. The film depicted a lot of real events, especially the murder of 4 American nuns, and seemed to capture the terror of the war. Even now, El Salvador brings to mind the savagery of the death squads. How much those people down there have suffered, I thought, and wondered if they could put those years behind them.

By the time we arrived at the border of El Salvador and Guatemala, it was after 4 PM and the clouds below had gathered into a solid layer. San Salvador approach handed me off to Guatemala City approach. For the whole trip from Panama, we have had an altimeter setting of about 29.10. Now, Guatemala City reported they have us on radar, the airport has good weather and an altimeter setting of 30.90. That seemed odd to me, and I asked for a confirmation. A moment later, he responded with the same setting. I checked my Garmin 430, which is certified for VLOC. Its altitude reading showed about a 1,000 ft lower than that on my altimeter. Something was wrong here.

It is not unusual to have a slight discrepancy-airport altimeter settings are only updated every so often and therefore can be slightly inaccurate. But 1,000 ft. is far too much. I checked my portable GPS, and it showed the same altitude as the Garmin 430. I called Approach again and once more asked to confirm the altimeter setting. The controller again stated the altimeter setting, this time he repeated it twice, pausing after each number, in a clearly exasperated voice. It was the third time I asked for it, and he probably was annoyed. We were now less than 30 miles from Guatemala City and I was anxious to begin our descent.

The solid cloud layer seemed to be at about 9,000 ft, and I wanted to get below. The controller asked if we had the airport in sight and I said no, we were still above the cloud layer. We could clearly see the great volcanos north of Guatemala City, poking above the sea of cloud, but nothing of the land we were over. At this point, we were at PINOS, a DME navigational point signifying the boundary of the Guatemala City airport controlled airspace. My approach plates showed that the procedure was to descend to 9,000 and then 7,000. That would put us right through the cloud layer. I radioed Control to ask for the MDA, the Minimum Descent Altitude, for our location. He responded 8,000 ft., and I replied that we were descending to 8,000 ft, which was acknowledged. Molly seemed very worried about the clouds, which puzzled me since we had often flown through clouds. I showed her the chart: "Look," I said, "there are mountains here but mostly around 5,000 to 6,000 feet, and the highest is here, at 7,300 feet. We'll be fine, and in any case, we are on radar and on an established airway." She tensed up as we entered the clouds. For me, I like real instrument conditions. I focused on the instruments and guided the airplane toward the airport as the dense cloud closed around us, waiting to break out and see the city below.

We were 23 miles from the airport, at 120 knots and I expected at any moment to be given further clearance to descend. Suddenly the

[About Paul's Crash] continued

cloud became very dark and before I could register what was happening, I caught a glimpse of trees and we flew right into a mountain. This is what happened in the next two seconds:

The left wing hit a tree, or something, with a gnashing crunch and the airplane immediately spun toward the left, then flipped over, tumbled on to its back, and flipped again repeatedly with a sound of crunching metal and a roar of engine and a weird shredding sound as the propeller bit through the brush. Everything occurred too quickly for any conscious reaction. I felt my body shaken like a rag doll. My only thought was curiosity-so this is what it is to die? I wondered what the actual death blow would be. How will that feel? Instantly, there was an unmistakable sense-a voice? a thought?-I don't know, just that I had a definite message. There was somebody telling me that I was not going to die now, because my life work was yet ahead of me. And then abruptly everything was quiet. Molly and I were sitting upright, at about a 40 degree angle, in a completely destroyed airplane. Instantly Molly asked me if I was all right, if I was hurt. I said no. She said, "We have to get out. Get out now!"

The wing and door on my side had been torn off and I was exposed to the snapped tree branches and foliage of the jungle. We were on a steep slope, the nose of the airplane pointing upward, and around us was a mess of broken trees and vines, ferns and leaves. Molly clambered over me and I helped her get out, and then unbuckled my seatbelt and climbed out. Molly wanted to get as far away as possible, thinking the airplane would explode, but I said, "Don't worry, that just happens in the movies." The only sound was of the gyros spinning. I crawled back to the cockpit and shut off the ignition and master switches. The altimeter read 8,100 ft. I found my handheld radio on the floor, and unhooked the portable GPS from where it was hanging on the control column. These I took back to where Molly was sitting, about 20 feet away.

We checked ourselves for injuries. Molly was remarkably unhurt. I had a deep gash on my left arm, a few other minor cuts, and my left leg ached, making it difficult to walk. But overall, these were minor. The airplane wings and tail had been torn off and crumpled, with parts in the trees up to a hundred yards away. A beautiful blanket Molly had bought in Cusco was hanging high in a tree. There were pieces of wreckage and luggage strewn everywhere. I saw my black, hard-shell suitcase, an expensive, especially durable unit that I had bought just for this trip. It was torn in half. I turned on the radio and could hear Guatemala Approach asking for my position, but they evidently could not hear me easily, as the broadcast power was too weak. I switched to the emergency frequency, 121.5, but the squeal of the Emergency Locator Transmitter of the aircraft drowned out all other sounds. At least that was working well.

Finally, Approach understood we had crashed and I gave them precise coordinates from the GPS. Molly begged me to do something about my left arm. I asked her to find a shirt and tear it into strips. She did, and bound my arm. Then we sat there, slightly stunned, and I assured Molly again that the airplane would not blow up. It was quiet, and we could see about 100 feet in the fog, which seemed to be lifting.

In Guatemala on our flight south, a month ago, night had come at about 5:45 PM. Now I was worried that unless help came soon, we might have to spend the night in the jungle. I asked Molly to try to collect some important things. For her, oddly, the most important were her finger puppets, about 100 of which she had glued to the inside frame around the cockpit. I recognized immediately that things of psychological value were as important, or even more, than the more practical things. All of them had been torn off and scattered, but she found them not far away. Only one remained attached in its original position: the angel.

It was difficult for me to move, and I thought only that we had to get down, off the peak of the mountain. We were still in cloud cover, and it was unlikely that rescuers would be able to find us.

Molly said she heard shouts. I couldn't hear anything at first, and we both yelled back. The shouts came closer. About 40 minutes after the crash, a man appeared, hacking his way through the jungle toward us with a machete. When he saw us, he immediately cried out to Jesus that he had witnessed a miracle. He made us both kneel as he placed a hand on each of our heads and cried to God in thanks for showing him this miracle. When we got up, he said his name was José Maria. He had been working in his coffee field lower on the slope when he heard the crash. He was sure there could be no survivors. He looked at us, and the remains of the aircraft, in sheer disbelief.

Before José would take us down, he wanted to collect some things. He asked if he could have some ballpoint pens he found. I told him to take anything he wanted. My ocean survival equipment was strewn nearby, and he pulled out my new, bright orange floater survival coat, and asked if he could have it. I said, please, take whatever you want. It is yours. Please help us down the mountain. He could not have been more than about 5 ft tall, but was very lean and muscular. About 30 feet away, he found my heavy duffel bag, intact, and I was stunned when he hoisted it onto his shoulders, then added Molly's suitcase, and with his free arm, began to hack a path along the steep slope of the mountain.

After a painful half hour or so of edging our way down the slope, we came to a rough track. He told us to wait and disappeared for a

[About Paul's Crash] continued

while, then came back with a young boy and 2 donkeys. He tied the bags on one and asked me to ride the other. Although I was dizzy and nauseated from the loss of blood, there was no way I was going to get on that donkey. First off, the small, scrawny animal could probably have hardly supported me. And secondly, I'd already used up my luck for the day. If I missed dying in a plane crash, I surely wasn't going to get killed by some donkey.

We slowly made our way down the mountain. My radio crackled and I caught requests of whether we could see the helicopters. We couldn't; they were above the clouds. But we could hear them, and whenever they got close I reported it. Finally, we came to a dirt road, and a pickup came up with perhaps a dozen people in it. Those in the cab jumped in the back, and Molly and I were put in front. We drove down along the winding red dirt road to a village in the valley with a flat soccer field. There was a helicopter, the blades still whirring, in the field. At least 500 people crowded the field, sitting up on hillside, and we felt like movie stars walking to the helicopter.

At first, I couldn't believe they were going to transport us in those conditions. Rugged mountains and solid cloud seemed far too dangerous. But the helicopter pilot was relaxed and evidently an old hand at this. He said only, in English, "You must be a damned good pilot to have survived that." Good has nothing to do with it, I replied.

At the airport, a number of military and other officials were waiting to see us, including the Director of Civil Aviation of Guatemala, Manuel Maldonado. He was extraordinarily efficient and kind. Never mind about the airplane, he said, the first thing is to take you to a hospital. I told him that I just had minor injuries and had no intention of sitting for hours in some emergency room, as would typically happen in a U.S. hospital in a major city. He assured me that he was taking us to the best hospital and would see to it that we were treated quickly. My arm was X-rayed, which fortunately showed no fractures, and a surgeon was called because of the depth of the wound. I watched as he pulled out leaves and twigs from deep inside the muscle. My arm was numb but I did a quick neurological check and was relieved that no major nerves had been severed. Meanwhile, Mr. Maldonado took Molly to the Westin Hotel, and came back for me, an hour later, to take me there as well.

Oddly enough, neither Molly nor I felt especially traumatized. Somehow, it all just felt natural, as if the entire experience was meant to be, and even was intended for some beneficial purpose. It was the oddest feeling, and I still feel that way. I had no sense of fright whatsoever, or trauma, and I eventually slept well without any dreams of the airplane. When I undressed, I was surprised to discover leaves and other bits of foliage inside my shirt, underneath my underwear, and even inside my shoes. How could that have happened? I mentioned it to Molly, and she said that she had also found leaves underneath her bra. There is only one way I could think of explaining it: the tremendous force of the impact had somehow caused our clothing to balloon up and the leaves to enter. But inside my snugly tied shoes? And under my underwear and her bra, inside our outer clothes? Maybe some of the engineers in CFO have some ideas?

The next day, we went to the airport and Molly was able to get a quick flight back home on Continental Airlines. I continued on to the civil aviation administrative center. I filled out some forms, gave an account of the flight three or four times to various police, military, and civilian officials, and wrote out a report. Then I went with the helicopter pilot, a military photographer, and a police inspector back to the crash site. It was an odd group. They talked about previous crashes and were frankly incredulous that I had survived with such minimal injuries. The policeman was not very talkative, however. His job was to determine if drugs were involved, since Guatemala is a common transshipment route from South America. No doubt, he didn't want to become too friendly just yet.

We landed once more at the soccer field. A pickup truck was waiting and drove us up the road as close as possible to the crash site. The driver pointed happily at his sunshade, to which was attached the red control gust lock from my airplane. Clearly, they had already been there.

When we got to the place where José had hacked his way through the jungle, there was now a very well tamped down trail. Evidently, a lot of people had come through here recently. We climbed easily up to the crash site.

There were perhaps 30 people already there. Children were playing on the fuselage and sitting in the seat pushing on the controls. My first reaction was to warn them about the danger of cutting themselves on the sharp jagged metal. Then I realized how silly that was. These were toughened farm kids, and they looked at me, limping and with my arm in a sling, with curiosity and sympathy. The whole site was picked clean, without a single item left that wasn't welded to the airplane. I noticed that even the battery and ELT were gone. All that was left was the forward fuselage and its instrument panel. The inspector and pilot cursed and scowled about the village thieves.

But I had a recollection of being a child on the farm where I grew up. Once a year or so, there would be a car crash on the highway near our farm. After the ambulance had come and gone, we kids would go to the wreckage and poke around, taking anything that seemed interesting or portable—hubcaps, the spare tire, a beach radio, dice hanging from the rearview mirror, the mirror itself if we could pry it off. We didn't think we were stealing anything. It was more like finding something serendipitous. Eventually, a tow truck would take the wreckage and we would keep, trade, or lose interest in our loot, and the thought never crossed our minds that these things might have

[About Paul's Crash] continued

been of value to someone. Now, some villager has my camera, someone has my iPod, my computer equipment, CD player, survival gear, tool box, clothing, gifts from Peru, all my medical equipment including an otoscope and ophthalmoscope, and much, much more. I had stuffed the airplane full with everything I could think of, and now it was all gone. No doubt, it was dispersed among the people who live near that mountain. They are welcome to it. My only hope is that they figure out how to use the iPod.

The villagers left the panel alone, perhaps because the instruments looked too foreign and useless and perhaps because it seemed too difficult to extract them. Those instruments are worth about \$60,000. The engine itself is also likely to be salvageable, another \$20,000. As I looked around the site, especially from the helicopter as we circled, I could see both my extraordinary bad and good luck. Bad, because this was the highest peak in the region. As the helicopter pilot said, if we had been just 10 meters higher or 20 meters to the side, we would have missed it. What he didn't say, is that had we been any lower, we would be dead. I could see that the jungle acted as a sort of net. All those tangles of vines and dense trees slowed and spun the airplane around, absorbing the impact. Like a bullet-proof vest, which stops a bullet by entangling it in microscopic fibers and disperses its energy. The jungle saved us.

The inspector already had a preliminary report for me. Clearly, the airtraffic controller had given me an incorrect altimeter setting and moreover, directed me, on radar, to descend into terrain. There would be an investigation. The week before, a new government had taken over in Guatemala. Normally, when this happens, the top officials of the Civil Aviation office, along with other heads of departments, are all replaced with friends of the new President. Fortunately for me, he said, this new government did not seem like it was going to make such changes. Mr. Maldonado was very highly regarded and had extensive experience; he would see to it that the entire incident was properly dealt with.

That night, I stayed alone in the hotel, thinking about the significance of the crash. It seemed to happen almost instantaneously. We were going about 140 mph. That is 205 feet per second. The cloud was so thick I could barely see the end of the wing. Let's say, the maximum visibility was maybe 50 or 60 feet to see even the vague darkness of a mountain. That meant I had less than a third of a second between the time that the light entered my eye and we impacted the mountain. The standard brain evoked potential is P300, 300 milliseconds. In other words, by the time my brain saw the mountain, we had already impacted it. Of course, what happens is that the brain automatically takes this into account.

Everything we see, actually took place some time ago, and we correct for this so that things seem to happen in real time. In fact, everything we sense is actually just memory, reconstructed after the fact. Everything that happened in those 2 seconds—the dark gloom of the mountain, the smashing trees and ripping metal, the spinning and tumbling, the voice telling me that death is not at hand—all that was a reconstruction, and the truth is that everything that happened was over before I even realized it.

An airplane accident is undeservedly dramatic. It is no different from a car accident, or any other kind of accident, like falling off a horse. Everybody who learned of our accident seemed to think that it was some sort of miracle that we survived. I probably wouldn't have got this reaction if I'd been in a crash in a moto-taxi in Lima, or been thrown from a horse riding in the mountains near Cusco. Of course, it was a miracle, in the sense that a miracle is an extremely unlikely event that seems connected to a greater spirit. There is no question in my mind that this occurred on some spiritual level, and that is why I have no regrets about it, or even any sense of trauma. I've been more upset last month, when someone stole my shampoo from my gym locker.

That seemed outrageous. This event, the loss of my beautiful airplane, just seems like it is another step in an unfolding plan.

Perhaps, some day, I'll get another airplane. Maybe another Cardinal (it would be my third). For now, I guess I'll be renting.

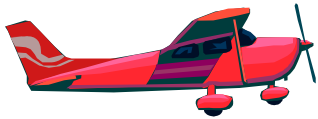
Thank you all for a wonderful club, the best aviation camaraderie I've had in 30 years of flying. May you all be safe (and remember, air traffic controllers are just human, and may make mistakes).

Paul M. Gahlinger, formerly '75 RG, N277TV

{Paul Gahlinger is an AME, has written several books and flew his first Cardinal from Santa Cruz to South Africa. That book is very interesting, I have a copy I bought from him when he was at the Concord CFO fly-in in Oct. 2003. Duane Allen}

This Months Speaker

This months speaker will be Stu Bowers. He is a local CFII and will be going over the requirements for a biennial flight review. So come on down, it will prove to be a very informational session!



Vacation with your Airplane



Roche Harbor Skyways San Juan Island, Washington

5 minute walk to Roche Harbor Resort

Sleeps 6, complete kitchen, 2 full bathrooms

Available December 1, 2003

Winter Rates (Nov-Mar) \$105/night, 3 night minimum

Summer Rates (Apr-Oct) to be announced

Call Linda or Tony Tiritilli

925-674-1001

E-mail: roche2727@yahoo.com

EAA CHAPTER 393

P.O. Box 272725
Concord, CA 94527-2725
E-Mail: nle@393.org



The Leader In Recreational Aviation

We are on the web!
<http://www.eaa393.org>
