

2012 Almost Holiday Trip



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During December 2012 my biennial flight review (BFR) was drawing near and I would not be qualified to continue flying until I completed it. Since my airplane was undergoing the panel upgrade, I borrowed my friend Oswaldo (Oz) Seda's RV-9A for the flying part of the BFR. The RV-9A performs and handles closer to my KIS4 airplane than the Cessna 150 I could have used. So with that in mind on December 17th I took my BFR at David Wayne Hooks (KDWH) airport which included several night crosswind landings. This meant I could join the 3rd annual Florida to Puerto Rico fly-In scheduled for the next week.

On December 22nd, Oz decided he wanted to join the Puerto Rico fly in and wanted to do it in his RV-9A. Since he doesn't have that many hours in an RV-9A he asked me to accompany him on the trip. Of course I said yes since I prefer flying in a



Oz's RV-9A airplane N281MC

general aviation airplane than going commercial. Now Oz was working on his instrument rating so I could be his "safety pilot" while he does the flying under simulated instrument conditions. Since I am instrument rated I can file/fly IFR if needed until we are in visual conditions then he can take over from there. Or at least that was the plan.

On December 25th, Christmas Day, I spent the night at Oz's house so we could depart the next day to Miami Florida and meet up with the other guys making the trip and head to Puerto Rico on the 28th. The 26th we departed Porter (9X1) on an IFR flight plan around 9:30am to Bay Minette, Alabama (1R8). It would take us about 3hrs to get there where we would have lunch, get fuel before continuing on to Florida. We had a strong tailwind the entire flight and arrived ½ hour earlier than planned. Even though we had a strong crosswind, the landing at Bay Minette was so smooth that Oz didn't even realize we were on the ground.

Once at Bay Minette we found out that the FAA would not get the permanent registration for the airplane (he bought it just three weeks earlier) in time for us to stop in the Bahamas on our way to Puerto Rico. Besides, there was some bad weather across the entire central Florida area so we opted to divert to St. Simons Island, GA (KSSI) where they were forecasting clear weather. We would leave the airplane in a hangar and finish the trip via commercial airline.

We left 1R8 to KSSI around 2:30, again on an IFR flight plan. Just like before we had a strong tailwind and for a while we were doing 190Kts ground speed. We arrived at KSSI around

5:45pm and cancelled IFR while still about 15miles away since there were no clouds and we could already see the airport. Since the winds were so strong we overflew KSSI and the wind sock seemed to indicate a landing on runway 34 was best. Oz didn't feel comfortable landing the airplane with strong winds so he asked me to do the landing from the right seat.

As we descended to runway 34 it was clear the winds were too strong from the left to land so I aborted. The UNICOM operator reported the winds from 260 at 13Kts gusting to 23Kts so I opted to try landing on runway 22. Once aligned with runway 22 I didn't need a lot of crosswind correction and I mentioned to OZ that this approach felt right. When the VASI lights showed us on the glideslope I started the descent. The final descent was smooth and uneventful, until we got to about 50ft.

Suddenly I felt the airplane drop out from under me as if we were being shoved down at an extremely fast rate. I pushed the throttle forward to abort, but it was too late. All I remember is the airplane impacting the ground hard and sliding down the runway until veering off to the left. When the airplane came to a stop I saw a small fire in front left side of the engine compartment and knew we had to get out. I tried to open the cockpit but I had a dislocated finger on my left hand (I was flying from the right seat) so I couldn't work the cockpit latch. I wound up using my right hand to open the cockpit but it took a few extra seconds to do it. We got out of the airplane and walked away from the airplane as the fire grew in intensity. By the



After the accident

time the firefighters arrived the airplane was engulfed in flames and wound up being completely destroyed. We were lucky we got out and didn't get trapped in the airplane as it burnt.

Although we actually walked away from the crash we were taken to the hospital and checked out to make sure there were no internal injuries. I did fracture 3 Lumbar in my back in addition to my dislocated finger. Oz only got a slight scratch on his head. The next day we

went to the airport and saw the charred remains of this beautiful airplane. [We also found that the local TV station put pictures of the wreckage on their web page.](#)

The NTSB and FAA investigators both speculated we had gotten caught in an unavoidable and severe downdraft just as we crossed the runway perimeter fence. We were tracking the runway so close to the centerline that, although we impacted 80ft short on the displaced threshold, we slid between the runway end indicator lights (REIL) without touching any of them. The fact we

slid straight down the runway for another 300ft was more evidence I was tracking the centerline correctly during the approach. They also told me that by examining how the propeller wound up after the impact and the position of the throttle, this supported my statement to them that I was trying to abort the landing when we hit. The FAA decided there would be no enforcement action taken against me for the accident.

Needless to say I did not make it to the Puerto Rico fly in, but Oz did. A few days after the accident, he flew commercial to Puerto Rico and spent the holidays with his family. I spent my holidays with my family in Brunswick Georgia still shaken up by what had happened. It happened so fast.

Three weeks later, back in Houston, CFII Mason Pearsall took me up in his Beech Musketeer to do some touch-n-go. I admit I had never been as scared in an airplane as we approached to make that first landing. The second landing wasn't as bad and by the third landing I felt much better. The next day we took his Beech Travel Air (Twin engine) and did some air work to include a few landings. So, I didn't get to complete the 2012 Florida to Puerto Rico Fly-In but thankfully I am alive to finish my airplane instrument panel and make the 2013 Fly-In.



Beech Musketeer N2329W