

FRED'S LAST FLIGHT

In one old pilot's reflections there are two bad things that can happen to you and one of them will happen. One day you will walk out to the aircraft knowing it's your last flight. The other bad thing is one day you will walk out to the aircraft and not know it's your last flight. That's the one you want to avoid and sadly, the one Fred did not foresee.

It was a glorious fall day with the sun shining brightly and wisps of white clouds drifting across a deep blue sky. The wind was light to variable and the temperature cool on that fateful day. Undoubtedly, Fred felt good with not a care in the world and I'm sure never saw it coming. It must have been like hitting a brick wall. A beautiful day to fly and one you would suspect nothing would be amiss. Fred must have flown straight in with never a clue to his fate prior to crashing headlong at such a high speed. I'm sure Fred didn't know what hit him. He never knew his mistake. There's always a mistake. Pilot error, more often than not, figures into a last flight, but what a mistake. Fred's last mistake. A flight planning error that was unforeseeable under the circumstances.

An outstanding day to fly with no hint of a problem, a time when there is little or no other traffic in the area and the conditions for flight were perfect. The lure for a great flight was complete. Fred did not file a flight plan and the National Transportation Safety Board was never contacted after the crash to investigate. No need and no autopsy was ordered. It was an accident due to circumstances. No hint of the flyers last thoughts were on record only moments before the end.

Fred's takeoff was neither witnessed nor little noted, but his flying so close to the ground must have raised concern in some quarters. The beautiful weather conditions with full sun caused reflections of trees swaying in the wind which must have been what caught Fred's eye. The reflections appeared close aboard and a perfect place to land. He diverted his flight without thinking with little regard for himself or the safety of others. Fred turned quickly with no time to consider the ramifications of a last second decision.

The sound of the crash was muffled in the neighborhood, but heard throughout the house. Fred was thrown back onto the deck with a tremendous recoil force. The plate glass window did not give, but Fred's neck did. Fred flew headlong into the plate glass window surely breaking his neck with such a force his wings were folded forever.

His flying days were over and it was so quick. Fred was lucky in a gruesome sort of way. He did not have to put up with any debilitating injuries causing him to flop around on the porch before being pounced on by one of the lurking, neighborhood cats who certainly would have recognized the death throes of Fred in distress. I'm sure the cats did not know his name, nor even cared.

Of course Fred may not have been his real name, because I never really knew Fred. Oh, I knew he was a robin with a red breast. Normally, I've not assigned names to birds other than those in a cage, and Fred had never been so confined.

Yes, Fred should be remembered as more than just one of the millions of robins on the face of planet earth. That must narrow the list of robins named Fred down considerably and why I decided to name him Fred. Such tragic consequences for poor Fred. He never knew what hit him.

The take away here is careful flight planning is required and one of the keys to a successful flight. Any flight instructor will tell you a flight plan is a must. You can take that advice to the bank, or where ever, and most pilots will agree. Well, maybe so...