

LANDING in ALASKA's WINDS
39 MPH Reported, 46 MPH Gusting!

I'm not sure what year it was, but the wind was howling out of the east of Unalakleet (UNK). Okay, it does that every year, but this year it was particularly bad while we were flying supplies to the various checkpoints along the Iditarod trail. Wind was reported as 39 gusting to 46 MPH right down runway 09.

I was flying my Cessna 180 into UNK from Shaktoolik with Mark Nordman as my passenger. The wind was so strong that we were nearly hovering over the approach end of the runway. When we finally got on the ground, we taxied to the intersection and feared that if we turned crosswind, that we'd be flipped upside down by the wind. Therefore, I turned slightly to the right and again into the wind. With the flaps down and the engine running, I had Mark get out and steer the tail of the airplane toward the ramp where the fuel pump was located. The wind pushed us all the way to the fuel pump with Mark steering the plane as we moved backwards across the ramp. This procedure worked so well we met other incoming airplanes at the intersection and steered them backwards to the ramp. In addition to me, Bob Elliott, Ken Moon, George Murphy, and Danny Davidson landed in the same way.

Bert called on the radio to announce his arrival time to UNK. We positioned ourselves at the intersection to help him get to the ramp. He was flying his clipped wing Piper Pacer. As he approached the runway about to touch down, a gust of wind violently picked him up as he fought to get on the ground. Three times he nearly landed when he was again thrust upwards until finally he was able to firmly plant the wheels on the runway. By that time however, he was well past the intersection of the runways that would lead to the ramp and the fuel pump. As we ran down the runway to help him back the airplane up, I was thinking ***"Bert, don't try to turn around the wind will surely flip you upside down."*** Right at that time, he came to a complete stop, applied power and spun his clipped winged Piper Pacer 180 degrees and taxied back to the ramp on his own. I was amazed and am sure the short wings of the pacer were a huge advantage in these circumstances.

Upon exiting the airplane Bert who had far more flying hours than most of us, merely said calmly ***"Well, that was exciting."***

Bert Hanson was a good friend, a great pilot and a mentor too many and never seemed to get rattled. He was always the voice of reason and could always find the common ground in any negotiation. Bert was a retired airline pilot from Alaska Airlines. Rest in peace my friend.

Joe Pendergrass,
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