



A Mission Never Forgotten

From a Flt Mechanic's View

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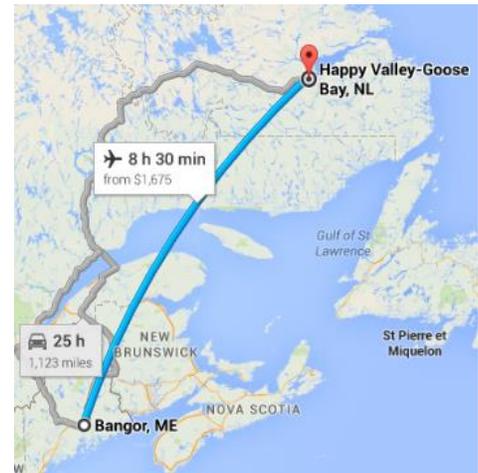
I was serving at Clinton County AFB, time has erased the day and the month but it was in 1966. A cross country mission was scheduled for cargo from various places to various places with the final load from Bangor to Goose Bay, since it was a WORKING trip there were no loadmasters available for the week.

So for our crew it was just Pilot, Co-pilot and myself as flight mechanic. I worked very hard to accomplish all the tasks required of both Flight Mechanic and Load; pre-flight inspection, cargo loading / tie down / form F / post-flight inspection, servicing fuel oil, ADI, etc. The first part of the trip was uneventful, disregarding the "Hurry up, hurry up" attitude of the Pilot on a daily basis, my "Boxcar" was performing well and the hours went by fairly easily, until the Bangor to Goose run.

Briefing called for Thunder storms en route, about an hour out we were approaching a real dandy, lightning everywhere. The pilot elected to penetrate rather than deviate. Well just before we hit the storm we experienced the most frightening event of St Elmo's Fire I have ever experienced. It was totally awesome, mesmerizing, beautiful, and scary. The entire aircraft was enveloped in a blue sheet of electricity, windshield, fuselage, props, wings, everything! I'm sitting there thinking....I hope the flash inhibitors in the fuel tank vents work! Thankfully they did.

So having survived Elmo's efforts to thwart us we now entered the storm, this proved to be even more frightening than St Elmo, we at times were in almost 50-60 degrees bank, nose up/down 15-30 degrees, it was like being on a roller coaster! I forced myself to refrain from giving my opinion of the decision to not deviate.

We survived the storm and landed safely at Goose, I offloaded the cargo, did the post flight, and ordered fuel and oil for the next day's return to...yep...Bangor, with cargo! I was informed there were no trucks available at that time, I would have to use the fuel pits on the outer ramp. So I asked for and got permission to taxi to the fuel pits.



Two ground types arrived with a fuel cart, hooked it up to the pit, and then one of them walked about 60 yards away to the edge of the ramp and stood looking back, (I'm thinking...what the hell...?) then the guy at the pit hooked up the nozzle and I hoisted it up, removed the fuel cap, inserted the nozzle and waited for pressure, finally I said "OK" and the guy at the pit yelled out " OK, TURN IT ON ", I watched the guy over at the edge of the ramp jump down in a pit and suddenly a force of about what seemed to be thousands of pounds of pressure hit the nozzle, I must have had it open a crack because when the pressure hit the damn thing went full open.!



The force was so great it lifted me off the wing, being on my knees I managed to turn my body and was forced down on my back, the nozzle plastered against my chest, shooting a stream of fuel at least thirty feet into the air.!

Since some of it was falling on the guy below he screamed "SHUT IT OFF SHUT IT OFF", thankfully even though the other guy was still in the other pit he heard and closed the valve. I was almost insane with rage, jumped up and was going to throw the damn nozzle down when common sense, and a sense of survival took over and I just stood there glaring at the guy.

Finally after regaining my composure I told them to get me a damn fuel truck, I was not using the pit without a pressure regulator. I got in, started up and called for taxi clearance to the ramp. About twenty minutes after parking by golly a fuel truck showed up. I briefed the driver on the sequence and amount for each tank fueling got underway, for a while, I was thinking " should be enough here", looked and sure enough the aircraft was listing pretty good, reprimanded the operator, went down inside and transferred fuel, finally got fueled up. Was so dang tired by this time that I sacked out on a cot in the locker room at ops.



The next morning in the middle of my pre-flight, the pilot came out and asked how soon? I told him they haven't even brought the cargo out yet. I had almost finished the pre-flight and the pilot showed up again, asked "how soon?" Still no cargo I said. This sort of angered him a little so he stormed back into ops, pretty soon here came the cargo. So I took on the pallets of stuff, and was checking weights, when I discovered the individual weights of the stuff on the pallets exceeded what the total said. So I informed the port to come get the stuff off my aircraft and ensure the weights. They argued some but I won. They came and took it off.

The pilot showed up again, not happy, asked "how soon?", I told him about the mismarked cargo weights, he started getting on my case "hurry the hell up.!", and turned to go, I'm thinking "hold your temper". So finally here came the cargo, repackaged and correct, tied the stuff down, did the form F, and was starting up on the wing with a broom to remove some snow that I didn't have a chance to do earlier.

Here comes the Pilot, this time with the Co-pilot in tow, and asked “what are you doing?”, going to sweep the snow off the wings, “the hell with that it’ll blow off, come on we gotta get outta here.”

So we mount up, start up, taxi out, and start a very loooooong takeoff roll, airspeed was well above vto but nothing was happening, was just going to say “abort” when he pulled the yoke all the way back and miraculously we lifted off, barely cleared the trees and climbed out at about 400 fpm, finally reaching about 5000 ft, with the co-pilot glancing furtively at the Pilot I couldn’t control my temper any longer and proceeded to give a pilot a flight mechanic’s ass chewing that had the co-pilots jaw hanging open and the Pilot sitting quietly and listening.



The rest of the trip home was very quiet and subdued. Upon returning to work the next day I told my chief that I will refuse to ever fly with that Pilot again, and didn’t. I have purposely omitted the Pilot’s name out of respect for those who love him, the co-pilot was Bob Serb.

This was one very rare mission that was bad from the start, but it will be in memory for a long long time, 98 % of all the missions I flew on were great experiences, with some great people, and are equally as memorable.