The Leading Edge
The newsletter of the MIT Soaring Association
July 1999

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Club news

Mark Tuttle

Chief instructor: John Wren has resigned his position as MITSA's chief instructor. John has been instrumental in the standardization of instruction and the promotion of cross-country soaring in the club for well over a decade. John has been involved in nearly every major club decision during that time, including the switch from Schweizer to Blanik trainers and the move from Mansfield to Sterling airports. The club owes a great deal to John for his leadership. Please be sure to say a word of thanks the next time you see John.

New members: Jim Abraham, David Dill, and Bob Kaynor all joined the club in the last month. They have varying amounts of flight experience, but they are all beginning work on their glider ratings. In addition, Dick Ruel, a member of the Greater Boston Soaring Club, joined the club as an associate member. Dick managed to fly the wings off the L-33 one Saturday at the end of June, setting a personal best for himself.

Bob Kaynor says, "I am Associate Director of Planning at MIT and have been with the Institute since 1980. I was educated at Trinity College (Class of '70) in Hartford, Connecticut, Harvard University, and the Episcopal Divinity School, and I currently live in Cambridge. My father, several of his brothers, and their close friends were pilots in WWII, and my first airplane ride was with my father and a couple of his Air Corps buddies in about 1950 (a twin-engine Piper or something similar; I fell asleep in the back seat). Flying on my own has been a dream since childhood, but never went beyond model building and commercial airline travel until I joined MITSA in May.

"Years ago, MITSA had a glider set up in Lobby 10 at MIT (possibly the 1-26), and I've never forgotten that. As time and circumstances now permit, I am actively pursuing my private certificate, although if the old saw reported by Tom Knauff is correct that once you are in your twenties you need one flight for every year of your age before soloing, I'll be aggravating the instructors for some time to come. Some of the instructors who have become familiar with the exclamations emanating from the front seat of the L-23 may find it amusing to learn that I am also an ordained Episcopal priest (active and currently associated with Saint Dunstan's, Dover, Massachusetts). I was ordained in 1978, and have served in a variety of capacities in the Diocese of Massachusetts over that time.

"Interestingly enough, learning to fly gliders is proving to be a valuable source of spiritual enlightenment for me. I believe that, among other things, one of the most important tasks we have in life is to learn to face our fears, and to own them rather than to be owned by them. In my second lesson, after introducing me to a spectacular stall because he thought I 'needed loosening up,' Karl Krueger responded to my predictable exclamation by telling me that, 'He [Jesus Christ] is not going to save you up here. You have to learn how to control the airplane so you can save yourself.' True enough, Padre, and a valuable lesson I will not soon forget. I am grateful to MITSA and its members, past and present, for the opportunity and the fellowship which make this such a rewarding and enriching experience for me now."

Dick Ruel says, "I live in Barrington, New Hampshire, with Sharon, my wife of twenty-seven years. Barrington is off Route 125 near Portsmouth, Durham, and Dover. It can take up to two hours to get to the field on bad days. I have two children, a daughter Stacey, 26, who is a Captain in the Air Force and stationed in Denver, Colorado, and a son Ryan, 23, who just graduated from the University of New Hampshire with a computer science major and is now working for Nortel in Billerica. I am the factory sales manager for Amana Refrigeration, Amana, Iowa, and am responsible for Maine, New Hampshire, and northern Massachusetts. I am a private pilot with single-engine land and glider ratings, and I belong to the Greater Boston Soaring Club, as well as the Skyhaven Flying Club in Rochester, New Hampshire, where I fly their Cessna 172s. When not flying, I also enjoy cycling, motor boating, sailing, canoeing, kayaking, and boat building."

Parachutes: There is now an active parachute operation at the Orange airport, an airport that many club members use as a jumping-off point for long cross-country flights. Please monitor the CTAF for announcements of "jumpers in the air" (but be warned that the operation does not always appear to announce jumps), and please avoid the upwind side of the field when the jumpers are active.

Standard class national contest: Doug Jacobs (DJ), Bob Fletcher (90), and Phil Gaisford (PG) finished second, eighth, and fourteenth in the standard class nationals held in Minden, Nevada, at the end of June. Doug missed first place by a nearly-imperceptible 89 points out of a winning score of 7,216 points, and actually won days four and five. Bob placed second on day four, and Phil placed fourth on day three.

Region One contest: At the Region One contest in Sugarbush, Vermont, Errol Drew (204) and Bill Brine (YN) finished in third and fourth places in the standard class, Steve Sovis (7D) finished seventh in the 15-meter class, and Mark Evans (3S) finished sixth in the sports class. Errol actually won days three and four, and Bill and Mark both finished as high as third on several days. Steve flew in the 15-meter class for the first time in his life, flying his new ASW-20 that he purchased less than a month before the contest.

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For more information about MITSA, you can contact the club by email, visit our web page, or contact Joe Kwasnik, our director of membership listed above.

The Leading Edge is the newsletter of the MIT Soaring Association, Inc. The newsletter is edited by Mark Tuttle, and published every other month (more frequently during the soaring season). The submission deadline is the first of each month. Please send any inquiries or material for publication to Mark Tuttle, 8 Melanie Lane, Arlington, MA 02474; tuttle@crl.dec.com.

Springfield encampment

Steve Glow

The Sterling fair will be held this year on the airport grounds. The fair itself will take place the weekend of September 11-12, but we have been informed that there will be considerable setup taking place the prior weekend of September 4-5. Having the fair on the airport grounds will at best make normal MITSA operations impossible, and at worst subject the club equipment to unnecessary risk.

In an attempt to make the best of the situation, the board is recommending that the club move it's equipment and operations up to Springfield, Vermont, and hold a club encampment over the period of September 4-12. We are planning to start aerotowing the gliders up to Springfield during the week preceding the encampment, and bring everything back the week following it. There will be no MITSA operation at Sterling during this time, so the duty roster assignments for these weekends have been canceled.

During the encampment, both the MITSA tow plane and the Springfield tow plane will be available for aerotowing. As an added bonus, it seems likely that we will have access to a winch that will enable some of us to get the "aerotow only" restriction removed from our tickets near the end of the encampment.

For logistical reasons, it is important that we get a fairly accurate count of who will attend the encampment. I would therefore ask that any interested club member contact Bruce Easom. Bruce will also be checking into the local accommodations and should have some information for interested members.

650 kilometer attempt

Roy Bourgeois

A number of people have asked me to write a short article on the 650 kilometer flight that I attempted on May 15. So, here it goes.

For many years, I attempted very long cross-country flights out of Barre Hiller in the ASW-17. The most successful was a 540 kilometer out-and-return done in 1988. When I stopped flying at Barre and started flying regularly at Franconia, New Hampshire, this kind of flying became more difficult to plan (because you need to be close to home for the organization and support). However, MITSA's purchase of the Cessna 182 tow plane made it attractive again (I couldn't tow behind the old Cessna 150), and I resolved to start trying long cross-countries again this year out of Sterling.

I had twice previously declared 650 kilometer "legal" triangles using Barre, Auburn/Lewiston, Maine, and Sugarbush, Vermont, as turn points. Both attempts failed after encountering difficulty flying through the White Mountains upwind on the second leg. This year I wanted to experiment with doing the Sugarbush leg first and the Maine coast leg last. Thus, I would "trade problems" by having a relatively easy second leg through the mountains downwind but have to deal with the afternoon sea breeze on the last leg. This would ultimately prove to be the undoing of this attempt.

The declared course was Sterling as remote start, Baldassari Brothers sand pit (about three miles south of Sterling) as turn point one, Sugarbush as turn point two, Twitchell (3B5), Maine, as turn point three, and back to Sterling. Total distance was 651 kilometers or about 404 miles. The rationale for the remote start and "three miles to turn point one" is that it gives you the confidence to start very early without risk of landing out in the first 20 miles ("been there, done that"). If you start too early, you take the first turn point photo and your course line is right back over Sterling for your relight.

At different times, I had flown every part of this course, so I was comfortable with it. The question was whether I could "put it all together" on one day. I expected most of the problems to come later in the flight with the sea breeze and a return leg late in the day through the Manchester class B airspace.

The ship was assembled the night before and covered. I planned for an early launch (around 10:45 am), and Terry Wong was nice enough to volunteer as my official observer. We were ready to go by 10:30, but due to some minor "politics," I got the second tow of the morning and launched at 11:10 am. I had estimated time for the flight to be around 7.5 hours, so the launch time wasn't too late.

No water on board for these types of "Dawn Patrol" flights. Extensive study shows that the modest performance increase later in the day with water ballast is more than offset by the big climb penalty in the early hours (not to mention avoiding the adrenaline experience of a 1,400 pound launch out of Sterling with a Cessna 182!).

It was a blue day with only a few cumulus clouds to the west of the first leg. Right away the lift was decent (250-350 feet per minute achieved) with tops at 6,000 feet. But the lift was widely spaced with large areas of sink, so I stayed pretty cautious up to Claremont, New Hampshire, where I crossed the river at Mount Ascutney and found the lift a little better there. I am always uncomfortable on the section from Lebanon, New Hampshire, up through Randolph, Vermont, and on to the Sugarbush east ridge. It is difficult, downwind of the mountains with no good place to land. I flew very conservatively until I got onto the east ridge and could see Sugarbush. I then tried to push it and take a quick photo.

Big mistake! Sugarbush is about 1,450 feet and even with 4,000 feet on the clock you are *low*! I got a really good look at the west ridge (boy, no question I was in the photo quadrant!) and didn't get out of Sugarbush and on the second leg until 2:10 pm. I was 45 minutes behind schedule.

The second leg through the mountains is the soaring area I really know best, so I got a bit more aggressive. At Spruce Mountain (half way between Sugarbush and Franconia) I got a good thermal to 7,800 feet and set the computer to get me 1,500 feet on the Franconia ridge. I got to Franconia fast and found good lift on the rocks over the Lafayette ridge. I had planned to take the Crawford Notch route up to Mount Washington (slightly north of course line) but didn't need to. I found a truly tremendous thermal just north of Zealand Notch in the Pemi wilderness that tossed me up to 9,200 feet, and still 55 miles from turn point three, I knew I would make that turn point and more!

Time for a map change to Montreal sectional, then down out of the mountains over the Moria/Wildcat ridge, the Sunday River ridge, and down into the Maine coastal plain. Here is where the trouble began. About 30 miles from the turn point I ran into the sea breeze convergence area — way too far inland. Although it was still a blue day, the area was distinguished by a sustained stretch (about three miles) of 50 foot-per-minute lift coupled with a ten-degree drop in cockpit temperature. My plan had been to use this area to race home on, but this see breeze front was way too far inland. I found a weak thermal in the vicinity of Oxford County airport in Maine, climbed back to 6,100 feet and flew into Twitchell for photo three at 4:15. This was within 15 minutes of my scheduled time for that photo, so I made up half an hour on the second leg.

The sea breeze was howling close to the turn point, and all I could do was fly on to Lewiston and hope that I could find some lift in the industrial area. After a lot of scratching and looking at the long next stretch over Sebago Lake, it was clear that the only option was a landout at Auburn/Lewiston, and that is pretty much what happened. Touchdown was at 4:35 pm about 135 miles from Sterling. Total distance flown on course: 271 miles or 433 kilometers. Time on course: 5.5 hours.

In retrospect, I believe that the flight was "do-able," but, ironically, I picked a day where I should have tried the course the "old way" (counterclockwise). Without a strong northwest wind, the sea breeze penetrated too far inland to make the turn point and get back into good air. The flight was working on schedule. I had made up the delays on the second leg and (on other flights) I have been farther away, later in the day, and made it back. While 135 miles at 4:30 may seem "late and long," it really isn't. The last hour in any full-day flight is spent on final glide. Even if the lift stops at 6:30 pm (and it often works later) you can glide from 7,000 feet for an hour and cover 50-60 miles. The trick is to be patient, slow down as the day ends, and be high at the time the lift is ending. If you don't go too far into the sea breeze (which was what I did) you can go pretty far on a good day and still get back.

Anyway, it was good fun, the retrieve ended at 1:00 am, and yes I'll try it again. My thanks to Terry Wong and to my son (and crew) Daniel.

Almost 300 kilometers

Mark Koepper

The soaring forecast looked fantastic on the morning of Saturday, June 19. It predicted high cloud base and favorable instability. The winds were to be very light, which is a good thing in my view. The local TIBS forecast was not so optimistic about cloud base, but was in agreement on the winds aloft. The day was less than great and turned out to be quite a challenge. Several pilots back at Sterling experienced sled rides that afternoon.

MITSA's president, the skilled Discus pilot, might say that the day featured long glides. My description as a not-so-skilled PW-5 pilot is that the day featured getting low.

I declared a 309 kilometer task with the start point and finish point being the stone church where Route 140 crosses the reservoir three miles southeast of Sterling. The declared turn point was the covered bridge at Woodstock, Vermont. My intention was to be the first to claim the speed record for 300 kilometer out-and-return in the PW-5 class. My personal and not-so-lofty goal was to do the flight in under five hours.

I took off about 11:30 and climbed to cloud base at about 5,000 feet. Flying over to the church, I made a start just before noon at 4,500 feet. That meant I had to finish above 1,300 feet. Since I needed more than that to land back at Sterling I wished to be 1,000 feet higher at that point. This was a wish, which would recur through the day.

Heading out on course, I expected cloud base to go up as I went northwest and the day got warmer. Ten miles from Jaffrey, it appeared that I was high enough to get across a gap in the clouds. Persistent sink in the blue hole put me at 2,000 feet five miles southeast of Jaffrey (elevation around 1,000 feet). I could not see the airfield and I needed 30:1 to get there with no pattern at all. Not me. I picked an adequate hay field and found zero sink along a ridge that suddenly seemed quite high. I could not sustain on the ridge and shifted a half mile or so to set up for the field. My flight log recorded just over 1,400 feet as I started to climb just on the other side of that field. It took over half an hour to get to 6,000 feet, the high point so far.

On the radio I could hear several pilots discussing really great conditions north of Sugarbush with good clouds and consistent climbs to 7,000 feet. I was hopeful that things would get better, and in fact did get a very good climb a few miles north of Keene to 7,000 feet. The GPS log shows about five knots on average for that climb, and I pressed on with optimism. Not much over half way to Claremont, I was below 3,000 feet again seeing only decaying clouds and willing to take anything I could get. Mount Ascutney promised good lift but did not deliver. Finally, a couple of miles north of Ascutney I found another good thermal. Cloud base here was only 5,500 feet, but for three thermals in a row I climbed at four knots or more without getting critically low. The easy going into and out of the turn point left me feeling that I would complete the task even though I had no chance of doing it in under five hours.

Crossing the river back into New Hampshire, I was again out of the area with good clouds. I had the Lebanon tower frequency selected when I found a ragged cloud which seemed to be coalescing, climbed to 6,000 feet, and continued onward south of Claremont.

The turning point in the flight came when, once again below 3,000 feet, I headed for Keene rather than Mount Monadnock. There is a good field just south of the mountain but I was tired and not up for rock polishing, possibly ending in a long trailer retrieve. I mentally gave up at that point and felt that I was almost certain to land at Keene. It turns out after wasting another half hour at Keene I did climb to 6,000 feet. Then another thermal. But it really was too late at that point and I found nothing further. With 16 miles left to finish at the church, I was at 2,800 feet. I landed at Gardner around 6:30 after a hard fought 275 kilometers.

New gliders: Peter Vickery now owns a half share in a PW-5 with John Wren. Peter bought his share in the glider from Steve Sovis, who is now the owner of an ASW-20.

Region One

Mark Evans

After many years of working my way up the competition ladder, including a third-place finish at Springfield, Vermont, I made an about face and finished sixth out of seven at Sugarbush. (I was able to finish ahead of Dave Ellis of Cambridge Aero.) I made a tactical mistake on day one or two by finishing early. Rain to the north was moving in the direction of the next turn point at Stowe. I was afraid that returning north would be a certain land out, so I returned to the field and settled for a reduced score. Everyone else made it all the way around. Later in the week, poor lift returning to Sugarbush from the north turned the flight into a low ridge mission. The day before this, flying along the ridge had been successful, but on this day, the ridge gods were not with me. I passed the Moretown bump about 150 feet below the top, much higher than the day before. I hugged the ridge heading south to Scragg, losing more altitude than anticipated. Rounding Scragg required a westerly track toward the middle of the valley. The plan was to slope soar the southwesterly face of Scragg mountain to get enough height to make a rolling finish similar to day three. Instead, I was so low on the ridge that there was little or no lift to be had. I saw Great Lakes Carbon, the safety field, but I identified it too late and passed by without enough altitude to make a safe 180-degree right turn for a landing. Still with the runway in sight, I flew on trying to find some lift, but the runway eventually rose above the horizon, and any hope of a finish was lost. With no choice left, I made a right-hand turn into a farmer's field just 0.8 miles from the finish gate. The distance to the airport for a rolling finish was less than 0.2 miles away, but thirty-foot trees separated the land-out field from the airport. Remember that a rolling finish only requires landing on the airport.

This may sound like a bad Region One contest for me, but the fact is that it was a great time. We flew five out of six days, had lots to eat, old friends to see, and new ones to meet. I highly recommend that everyone join in the fun next year. Win or lose, a bad week in Vermont is better than a good week at work.

Beginners might be well-advised to avoid final glides that leave you selecting a strange New England field at the last minute, but the field that Mark landed in is well-known to experienced Sugarbush pilots like Mark. —Editor

MITSA Juniors

Peter Vickery

The MITSA Juniors have now been working around the field, on Saturdays, for the past two months. Initial tasks involved the morning "pull out" of the gliders from the parking area and retrieval of training gliders following landings. Not being familiar with airport or aircraft operations, their early perceptions of safety were not always in line with general practice. We have attempted to impress upon them the consequences of various actions and have explained what is required. No doubt, there will be lapses of concentration in the future — hopefully minor in nature — and it would be greatly appreciated if such lapses could be pointed out directly to them as they occur. It would also benefit me greatly if you could let me know of them in due course, since I won't be there at all times. I can then make a note of the circumstances and determine if any patterns are emerging and take the necessary corrective action.

Training flights for the Juniors have been taking place on Wednesday evenings for the past three weeks. Towing has been completed by Ian Clark and the instructor for the first week was John Wren and, in subsequent weeks, it has been Roy Bourgeois. On Matt Tadry's third tow of his life, he completed the take off and tow unassisted, which Roy claims as a record during his time as an instructor.

Al Gold donated a PC glider simulator package for the MITSA Juniors to use, but now we need a PC to run it. If you have a PC that you would be willing to donate to the Juniors, please let me know at "peter@elision.com."

We are also looking for a few adult volunteers to help out with the Juniors, not necessarily MITSA members. If you know anyone who might be willing to volunteer some time on Wednesday evenings, please contact me, Joe Kwasnik, or John Wren.

Date	DO	Instructor	AM Tow	PM Tow
6/26	Nordman	Krueger	Clark	Easom
6/27	Sovis	Rosenberg	Poduje	Friedman
7/3	Watson	Wren	Gammon	Hollister
7/4	Tsillas	Rosenberg	Clark	Easom
7/5	Vickery	Krueger	Pugh	Easom
7/10	Wong	Gaisford	Clark	Fletcher
7/11	Brine	Krueger	Friedman	Gammon
7/17	Watson	Krueger	Hollister	Pugh
7/18	Blieden	Rosenberg	Poduje	Clark
7/24	Emken	Johnson	Gammon	Fletcher
7/25	Farrington	Gaisford	Friedman	Easom
7/31	Drew	Baxa	Hollister	Pugh
8/1	Gold	Rosenberg	Poduje	Clark
8/7	Koepper	Wren	Gamon	Fletcher
8/8	Loraditch	Gaisford	Friedman	Easom
8/14	Kwasnik	Johnson	Hollister	Pugh
8/15	Nordman	Krueger	Poduje	Clark
8/21	Rossoni	Gaisford	Gammon	Fletcher
8/22	Tsillas	Johnson	Friedman	Easom
8/28	Timpson	Baxa	Holllister	Pugh
8/29	Vickery	Rosenberg	Poduje	Clark
9/18	Drew	Krueger	Gammon	Friedman
9/19	Farrington	Baxa	Hollister	Pugh
9/25	Koepper	Gaisford	Poduje	Clark
9/26	Gold	Rosenberg	Easom	Fletcher
10/2	Kwasnik	Wren	Gammon	Friedman
10/3	Loraditch	Johnson	Poduje	Hollister

Minutes of the Board of Directors

Walt Hollister

The minutes on this page have been edited for publication in the newsletter. —Editor

June 10, 1999

Directors present: All board members except Phil Gaisford were present. Peter Vickery and John Wren were also present.

Sterling Airport: Carl Johnson and Steve Glow reported on the most recent meeting of the Sterling Airport Association. It appears that there is little that can be done to save the airport without purchasing the land which is up for sale. Some people in the town apparently want it for a new school, and have proposed building a soccer field on it for starters. A town vote is expected in October. There was considerable brainstorming about possible ways to take ownership of the land to keep it as an airport. The major problem is that current income from airport operations is insufficient to support the cost of ownership. Carl Johnson offered to contact Lee Marzke who recently participated in the salvation of another soaring site that faced a similar fate. Because there is the chance that we could receive thirty days notice of the airport closing, there was a discussion of other feasible soaring sites in our vicinity. Several members offered to scout out nearby airports, but it was agreed that we should consult with GBSC before making any contingency plans.

Flight operations: GBSC has been providing some tows to MITSA, as long as their own grid has not been backed up. MITSA members who want to be towed by GBSC have to fill out the GBSC membership form. The forms are necessary in order to be covered under each organization's insurance policy.

The Sterling Fair in September will essentially close the airport for the two weekends surrounding Labor Day. While not yet confirmed, there is tentative planning for MITSA to go to Springfield, Vermont, with the opportunity for cable launches.

Maintenance: Jim Emken reported that the insurance has made an initial payment based on an estimate for the prop repair and engine overhaul on the tow plane. After overhaul, it will require a 15-hour break-in period before towing. It should be back on line in two to four weeks. Four of the five gliders have received their annuals. The 1-34 should be derigged and rigged. Peter Vickery will organize a rework of the 1-34 trailer.

Communications: It was observed that with better communications more members would be aware of and participate in the completion of odd jobs which support our operation. It was decided that the duty officer should send a brief email report of the weekend activity to MITSA members. It should include a listing of odd jobs completed and jobs still needing attention. Case in point was the camping trailer which has been sitting idle. After some repairs by Peter Vickery, it will now be used to store items formerly cluttering up the MITSA office, making it possible to tidy up the office. Golf cart status is another item that should be reported. It was noted by Ian Clark that a new golf cart will be needed before the start of the soaring season next year. Many of the golf cart problems can be solved by charging the battery or filling the gas tank, which all duty officers should be checked out on.

MITSA Juniors: Peter Vickery gave a detailed progress report on the MITSA Juniors program. The Juniors have been working at the field for two months and flying Wednesday evenings for the last three weeks. Peter would like to get more grown-ups involved to provide additional adult supervision.

Minutes of the Board of Directors

Walt Hollister

July 8, 1999

Directors present: All board members except Carl Johnson and Joe Kwasnik were present. Peter Vickery was also present.

Maintenance: Jim Emken gave a detailed update on the progress of the tow plane engine repair. In addition to the expected repair, mechanics found corrosion on the piston pins, cam shaft, and tappets, plus cracked counterweights and starter casing which required replacement. The insurance has already paid an installment based on the estimate for the prop repair and engine overhaul. Jim is negotiating with the insurance company about what portion of the additional cost they will cover. The engine is expected to be delivered and installed by the end of next week. After the fifteen-hour break-in period it should be ready for towing on the July 24-25 weekend. N117BB is scheduled for its annual in two weeks.

Springfield encampment: The dates for the encampment at Springfield, Vermont, are September 4 through 12. The plan is to move the gliders during the weeks before and after the encampment weekends. Sterling airport will be closed to flight operations for the weekend of September 11-12 to host the Sterling Fair. The board recommends that private owners remove their trailers from the airport during this period since workers from the Fair might move them. Brush-clearing preparations for the fair were already underway in the MITSA glider parking area last weekend. Bruce Easom will be the contact person for the encampment, and people should contact Bruce with the dates they plan to attend. It is likely that there will be winch or auto launch training available near the end of the encampment, so members should contact Bruce to express their interest in this training. We will use the Springfield tow plane, with the MITSA plane for backup and retrieves. John Wren will look into the lodging available in the area.

MITSA Juniors: Peter Vickery gave an update on the MITSA Juniors program. The three most active juniors have had from seven to nine flights already.

Full throttle

Mark Tuttle

This has nothing to do with soaring, but it does have something to do with making decisions under stress, and how training helped me keep my options open.

I took off from Lawrence about four o'clock one afternoon in a Piper Cherokee for a flight up the coast to Rockland, Maine. The air was perfectly smooth, and I immediately climbed to 9,500 feet. Sitting high above the afternoon haze along the coast, the visibility must have been thirty miles, and the view of the mountains on the left and ocean on the right was great. It was going to be one of those flights of a lifetime. As I passed over the New Brunswick Naval Air Station, I nosed the plane over to begin my descent into Rockland, and enjoyed the added speed of the gentle downhill roll to the ocean-side airport. Nearing Rockland, I pulled the throttle back to begin reducing speed, and the throttle nearly came off in my hand.

Wow. That was a shock. The throttle lever flopped back and forth like a dead fish, making no change to the engine speed, leaving the engine stuck at almost full power. I continued descending to the airport for a few seconds wondering if this had really happened to me. I tried feeling behind the front panel for a few seconds to see if there was an obvious disconnection between the throttle and the cable going to the engine, but I wasn't sure what I was feeling. I turned away from the airport and tried to climb. I needed to think. The hair started to rise on the back of my neck. How was I going to land this airplane at that tiny little airport with the throttle stuck at full power? I needed to think about this.

Suddenly a voice sounded in my head, saying, "What are your options?" I started to realized that I was climbing well, which still came as a bit of a surprise to me even though I knew the engine was running at close to full power. I started to realized that there was really no need to land at Rockland, since I had plenty of fuel to get back to Lawrence where there was a long runway, and since there were actually four or five airports between me and Lawrence with even longer runways. I started to calm down when I realized that I had lots and lots of options open to me, so I decided to climb as high as I could climb, head back to Lawrence, and think about whether it would be possible to land using the mixture to control the engine speed instead of the throttle. I figured it might help to get some advice, so I called up Brunswick approach to see if anyone there could help me out. He handed me off to Portland approach, who sobered me up a bit by asking for the number of souls on board and fuel remaining after I explained my problem to him.

The Portland controller turned out to be a great guy, talking to me the whole way, offering every airport and every procedure that came to his mind as we flew. He informed me that our frequency was dedicated to our conversation, so we wouldn't be interrupted by other pilots and could speak normally, and that he was trying to locate a mechanic to advise us. We started talking about the options available to us. It came down to having a few controls over the engine speed (using carburetor heat, switching to a single magneto, and the leaning the mixture would all reduce the engine speed to some degree) and having a number of long runways available. The controller even found a pilot departing Portland in an airplane similar to mine, and that pilot did a few experiments for us to see how much the carburetor heat and single magneto would reduce the engine speed. Not much, which is what I expected. It all came down to using the mixture control.

My initial plan was to return to Lawrence and try to land on the long runway there, but there would be a slight crosswind there, and the controller pointed out that the wind was oriented directly down the runway at Pease near Lawrence. Pease has a two-mile runway, so I eventually came around to landing there. I arrived over the airport at 10,500 feet, and started a gentle, circling descent over the airport. Now that I had an airport underneath me, an airport that would be trivial to land on if the power went out, I started to practice a bit. By the time I had descended to the altitude for a normal pattern, the increased air density had driven the engine speed up to nearly red-line, and I was buzzing around the airport at 120 knots compared to my normal landing speed of nearly 70 knots, but practice had given me a good idea of how gentle you had to be with the mixture control to reduce engine speed without killing the engine. It turned out that you could reduce airspeed to normal landing pattern speed with the mixture, although I did make the engine cough by pulling the mixture too much one time, and fly a normal pattern. As I crossed the runway threshold, I pulled the mixture one last time, the engine stopped, and we touched down. It turned out to be a decent short-field landing, with over a mile and a half of runway in front of me as I rolled silently to the first taxiway and turned off the runway. I secured the plane and looked up to see a battalion of fire trucks, ambulances, and airport vehicles rushing toward me with lights flashing. That was impressive.

In hindsight, what felt like an emergency in the air was really a rather benign event, but I'm glad that my first so-called emergency was so benign and in such good weather. It makes me feel better about myself as a pilot to realize that I'd been trained well enough to cope when things go wrong. I'd always wondered about that. In addition to training, there were other factors. It helped tremendously to have a good controller to talk with in the air. I think my glider training helped, because I wasn't overly concerned about just turning off the engine over an airport and landing without an engine if that was my only option, although I really didn't want to do that. And I think that all my reading helped, because I had just finished reading a few articles earlier in the week analyzing pilot behavior contributing to turning accidents into serious accidents. The biggest disappointment was that after all that flying, I couldn't log it as a cross-country flight, because I didn't get to touch down at Rockland.