

## WHAT GOES AROUND, COMES AROUND

Walking out to my car I looked up at the sky. (Isn't it so easy to pick out the pilots in a crowd? They're the ones who always have their heads bent back, looking up at the sky. Perhaps because of the sound of a distant engine high above, or perhaps because of what the wind is doing on the ground, or maybe because of the quality of the light. But for whatever the reason, pilots are always looking skyward, when they are ground bound.)

In this particular situation I was heading to my car to make a trip to the other side of the state to pick up my son. I had planned on flying, but the briefer had said, in very definite terms: "VFR NOT RECOMMENDED". So now it meant I was going to spend the better part of a day in my car. Looking at the sky I couldn't help but think: "What was the briefer talking about?" He had said VFR flight was not recommended because of AIRMETS for moderate turbulence, mountain obscuration, and IFR conditions. But the wind wasn't blowing, and the skies were clear.

I had run my "PAVE" (Pilot, Aircraft, enVironment, External Pressures) checklist and had checked off several items. I, as pilot, had one minor item. I was current, and healthy, but I was a bit tired after a long hard week with close to 30 hours already logged for the past six days. The airplane portion caused concern. My IFR certified Cardinal was in for it's annual inspection and my PA-12 isn't IFR certified. Although I've been in some pretty rough turbulence, if I had my druthers I'd rather not expose my old bones to a rough ride, and my airplane is only a few years younger than I, so if it had a vote, it would probably make the vote unanimous. The environment, next on the list, was questionable if I was to believe the briefer. (More on that in a moment.) As for the external pressures, my son was coming home for spring break, so although a short flight was preferable to a long car ride, it wasn't a "got to – got to!" flight.

There were enough check marks on the PAVE checklist to indicate a "No Go". And since I subscribe to the philosophy that there might be old pilots (Yikes, some might say I fit that category), and there might be bold pilots, there are no old, bold pilots, so thus I had decided to drive rather than to fly.

But darn it! Looking at the sky, it sure didn't look like the forecast was anywhere near accurate today. If only there had been some PIREPS to aid in my decision. When I had asked the briefer if there were any PIREPS for my route, he had responded that there were none. It got me to thinking about why, when we most want, or would like a PIREP to confirm (or refute) a forecast, there are none. The three hour drive ahead of me would give me plenty of time to think about this, especially as I climbed up through the Berkshire Hills on the Massachusetts Turnpike and didn't see even the slightest bit of mist enshrouding the higher peaks.

Standing at the top of my list of possibilities of why pilots do not file PIREPS was the thought that many pilots do not file PIREPS for the simple reason that they either don't know how to file one, or they do not know who to file it with. If we look in the AIM for guidance, (under 7-1-21 Pilot Weather Reports) it might appear a little bit intimidating as

to all the information that should be reported, and the form and order the report should take. I think that sometimes the reason pilots don't file PIREPS is because they've looked in the AIM and it makes it appear as if the process is much more difficult than it really is.

And what a shame that is. For PIREPS are one of the greatest tools we have in determining what is actually going on with the weather. It's not telling us what some inanimate computer model has "thought" would happen. It's not telling us what some highly educated and experienced meteorologist has contemplated might happen. (I don't know whom to believe less, a meteorologist, or a politician) A PIREP tells us exactly what is happening, where it is happening, and when it happened.

Let's take a look at what's involved with filing a PIREP, whom we should file it with, and what should be included in the report. It's really quite easy and simple. Remember that the important thing is that we are all helping each other by filing them.

Let's begin with whom we should file our report with. At the top of the list is EFAS, more commonly known as "Flight Watch". You can reach them on 122.0 virtually anytime you are above 5000' MSL. You can also file a report with any ATC facility, be it Tower, TRACON (approach control), ARTCC (Center), or any FSS (Flight Service Station). Why you could even file a PIREP by telephone, calling flight service after you have landed.

If we look in the AIM we see that there is a long list of things that should be reported, and the order in which they should be reported. The important thing to remember here is that you *do not* have to report all those things, and even if you don't use the suggested order, the person taking the report will organize it for you.

What the AIM says is this: start with the nearest VOR or Airport, then the time (either Zulu time, or "minutes ago"), altitude and aircraft type. (Another way of thinking of this is: Where [three dimensionally], When, and Who.) This information is important because it gives relevance to the report.

Next, the AIM requests, cloud type, coverage and height, followed by visibility and any restrictions to visibility such as haze, smoke or dust. Then it asks for precipitation type and intensity, the temperature, the wind direction and speed, followed by turbulence, and icing, and any remarks. Or more simply said: What is happening weather wise.

WOW! That's daunting. One might think that all those things have to be reported. But the fact of the matter is that they DON'T. It doesn't mean that you have to try and spin your whiz wheel, trying to figure out what the winds aloft are doing, while barely being able to hold on to the thing as you get bounced all over the cockpit by the turbulence. It doesn't mean that you have to fly up to the bases of the clouds to be able to report their altitude.

What IS important are the four W s: Where; When; and Who, and then only What you are experiencing. Remember, the purpose of these reports is to aid other pilots in making their go/no-go decisions, or formulating an alternative plan of action. (It is also one of the

best aids the meteorologists have in assessing what the weather is really doing.) So a simple report such as: "Down in the Hungabottom valley, the wind at Broken Tailspring Field was blowing over 20 knots out of the southwest" might be the real deciding factor for some pilot planning on heading there for that mega-dollar burger.

I can't encourage all of you in strong enough terms to not being shy when it comes to filing a PIREP. Even if you are of an anti-authority mentality (as I sometimes find myself) there is one rule we can't escape. What goes around, comes around! If you find yourself wishing there had only been a PIREP to help you make your go/no-go decision, ask yourself: "When was the last time I filed one?"

If we want to get them, we are also going to have to give them, even if it is only to say: "Cub November One Charlie Echo (N1CE), over the jewel intersection at 2000 feet, it's CAVU and the ride is smooooth!" If we all started doing this more often we'd really know when there are: Blue Skies and Tailwinds!

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