

Flying Carpet

The SOUL of an Airplane



Greg Brown

Foreword by Stephen Coonts

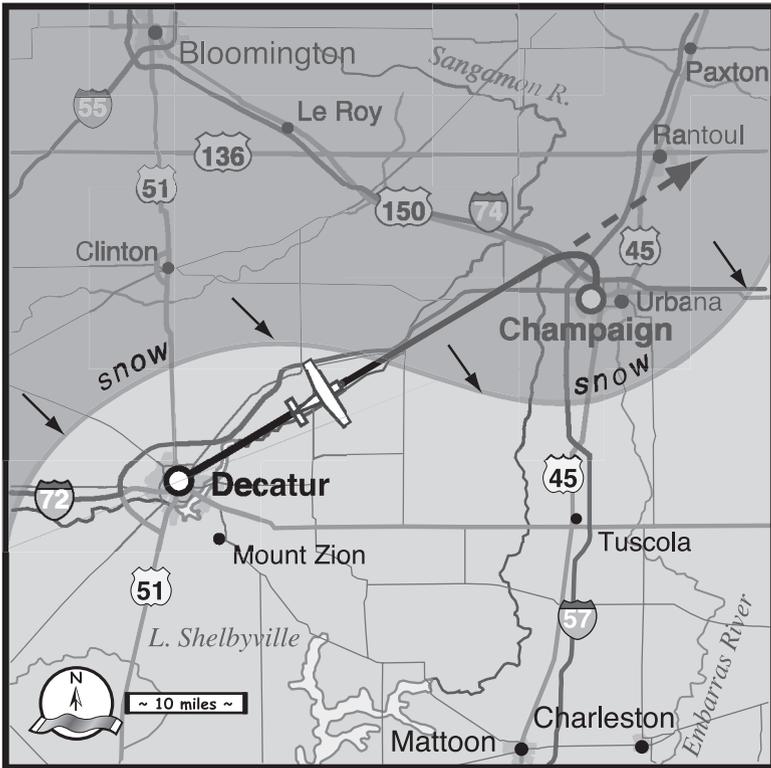
Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	xiii
Foreword	xv
Introduction: The Lure of the Map	xix
Pedigree of a Pilot	1
Some Lessons a Pilot Never Forgets	3
Spring Break!	9
Test-Pilot Territory	19
Alone in the Soup	25
Eclipse: Sun Worshipping in Winnipeg	31
A Bit of an Expert	38
No Fuel and a Dented Wing	42
Journeyman Aviator	49
Coyote Hunting: Small Adventures Under a Big Sky	51
Talking Spirits	58
Powerless: Soaring with Hawks	63
Over the River and Through the Woods . . .	71
Happy Feelings of Progress	77
Bowling Alley Hot Dogs	83
Bad Omen	91
Western Skies	99
New Lives Ahead	101
Race Against No One	107

Lost over Utah	114
Mountains Crowned by Fire	119
Airline Pilot at Age Twenty-Six	125
“Watch Out for the Fountain!”	133
High School Hero	139
Dumb Dads Club	144
Gift of Flight	151
Our Own Flying Carpet	153
A Watchful Eye over the Shoulder	161
Glad I Did the Preflight	167
Just Meeting an Old Friend for Lunch	180
Ghost of Christmas Flights Past	187
Skimming Blue Waters	191
In Pursuit of a Young Person’s Dream	199
Campfires on Distant Shores	205
Journeys Across Time and Sky	211
You’ll Never Make It to Phoenix	213
Convergence: Friends from Separate Worlds	224
Following Railroad Tracks to the Horizon	233
Skies of Our Ancestors: Pilgrimage to Old Rhinebeck	237
<i>L’Aventure au Québec</i>	243
On Dark Nights, Follow the Freeway Home	248
Rock Art Ranch: Flight across the Centuries	254
Best Flying Ever	260

Full Circle	265
Raise the <i>Flying Carpet</i> : Shipwrecks over Arizona	267
Friends in High Places: Flight over Lonely Lands	273
Big Boots to Fill	279
“Why Are You Up Here?”	285
Eight Long Minutes over the Grand Canyon	292
Sky City	301
Best Landing Anyone Ever Made	308
New Beginnings	314

Some Lessons a Pilot Never Forgets



So this must be vertigo, I thought. Nausea circled my gut like the snowflakes orbiting my propeller. I peered out the windshield for landmarks, but snow obscured all but a tiny spot of ground beneath me, even at an altitude of only 1,000 feet. To make matters worse, the navigational radio had obviously failed—how could I possibly have drifted so far off course as it suggested, on a flight of only forty miles?

It was almost Christmas, and I was a young University of Illinois student transporting precious parts for my Suzuki X-6. One of the hottest small motorcycles of its day, the X-6 was also notorious for its temperamental transmission. Sure enough, after just a few rides to impress my new girlfriend, I'd been forced to disassemble it for overhaul. The nearest dealer was in Decatur, so each discovery of another worn-out component meant another eighty-mile round trip to replace it. Today was a big day, because after months of waiting, the major transmission parts had finally arrived. To celebrate I decided to make the pickup by airplane.

"There's a storm system approaching from the northwest," said the weather briefer that morning prior to my departure, "but we don't expect it here before suppertime."

"No problem," I said. "I'll be back by early afternoon." I flew to Decatur under clear skies, hitched a ride to the motorcycle dealership, and collected a bagful of gears and shafts. Then I headed for the Decatur airport restaurant to savor its infamous double-decker burger slathered with peanut butter and Bermuda onions. On the way, however, I noticed hazy clouds materializing. *Was that a snowflake?*

Forgetting food, I phoned flight service, only to learn that the weather system was advancing far more quickly than forecast.¹ "Get out right now and you'll be okay," said the briefer. "The weather's approaching from the northwest. Going east you should reach Champaign well ahead of it."

By the time I finished my preflight inspection of the plane, the cloud ceiling was slate gray, and light snow was falling. Quickly, I took to the air. As expected, the weather rapidly improved. To my surprise, however, it soon began

¹ Flight service stations provide weather and operational information to pilots, along with processing and monitoring flight plans.

deteriorating again. Not being trained for flight by cockpit instruments alone, I descended lower and lower to keep the ground in sight.

Now I was getting nervous. Turbulence increasingly unsettled me, and the nose of my airplane pointed at a crazy angle far different than the course I was tracking over the ground. This dramatic crab angle (named for the sidewise movement of the crustacean) indicated powerful winds trying to blow me off course. Worse yet, flight visibility was diminishing in snow, though for a short time better weather could be seen off my wing to the south.

Ominously, the words of my former flight instructor filled my head. "Never enter precipitation you can't see through to the other side," Bob had often warned me.

No pilot ever forgets that flight instructor who first delivers the secrets of flight. Usually primary instructors are remembered with reverence, and their faces reappear at appropriate times to chastise us about mistakes we are about to make. Unfortunately, those words are rarely heeded until afterward.

On recent flights, Bob's apparition had largely stopped admonishing me. I took that to mean that with four years of generally safe flying experience I had a pretty good handle on my limitations. But now here was that pesky Bob, whispering in my ear again. Brushing him off, I continued toward Champaign.

Knowing I couldn't be far from home, I tuned in the recorded weather. "Ceiling indefinite 1,500 feet," it said, "visibility four miles in snow." If the clouds descended below 1,000 feet above ground, or the visibility diminished below three miles, I would no longer be legal to land. How could this weather system be beating me to Champaign? *Ugh, that snow swirling around the propeller is making me dizzy.*

Looking at my single navigational instrument, I noticed the needle pegged to the right instead of centered where it



Flying Carpet *The SOUL of an Airplane*

Witness the making of a pilot

The days of freewheeling aerial adventure are not over

FLYING CARPET is the captivating inside story of the making of a pilot. Journey life's skies with Greg Brown as he matures from fledgling to seasoned aviator, encountering aerial adventure and colorful characters all along the way. Sweat with him through harrowing flights, learn by his triumphs and mistakes, and join his young family growing up aloft. This book goes beyond traditional flying stories — learn what it takes to conquer the nagging fears faced by every pilot when attempting to master this most revered and challenging of human endeavors. Above all, *Flying Carpet* conveys the joy and boundless freedom of being a pilot, pursuing like our aerial ancestors the irresistible lure of the map. Whether you fly from an armchair or a pilot seat, *Flying Carpet* is one ride not to be missed.

"If [Greg Brown] can't inspire you to join us in the sky, no one can."

— Stephen Coonts,
best-selling author and
pilot [from the foreword]

"Quite marvelous...a journey of life and flying that contains some of the most fetching words yet penned about a father-son relationship..."

— Rich Karlgaard,
Publisher, *Forbes*

"You don't have to be a pilot, or even a frequent-flyer, to soar with Greg Brown in *Flying Carpet*."

— Nina Bell Allen, Former
Assistant Managing Editor,
Reader's Digest



Aviation Supplies & Academics, Inc.
7005 132nd Place SE | Newcastle, Washington 98059
www.asa2fly.com | 1-800-ASA-2-FLY



PNR ASA-FLY-CARPET

ISBN 978-1-56027-622-7



9 781560 276227

5 1 9 9 5

