

## Lying Down in Green Pastures

### Flight Log Report #21

by Pat Epps



**Top to bottom: Clark Harrison preflights his Cherokee 140; the Cherokee at rest in Greenland.**

**One of business aviation's most prominent and accomplished members, Pat Epps founded Epps Aviation in Atlanta and found the fabled "Lost Squadron" buried deep in the Greenland ice cap.**

IT WAS JULY 7, 1988, and were we en route in a Navajo to Baffin Island, Canada, from Kulusuk, Greenland. We were at 12,000 feet, about 20 miles off the coast, the sky above was crystal clear and the undercast 3,000-4,000 feet below lay smooth as far as the eye could see. It was very quiet except for the throb of the engines. Then a familiar voice came over the radio.

"Does anyone read 55 November?"

"Clark," I said, surprised, "is that you?"

"Pat, is that you?"

I was amazed. Clark Harrison, then 64 years old, was flying solo in his Cherokee 140 from Atlanta to Germany. A hazardous adventure, to be sure, but he'd been meeting and besting adversity for much of his life. One of his life's defining moments came on Nov. 16, 1944. That's when a German sniper put Clark in a wheelchair for life.

Years later, Clark was chairman of the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners and thus my landlord until he left politics. Only then did I get the word that he wanted to fly. Some time later I saw a paraplegic customer on my ramp wheeling to his Piper Cherokee. I was impressed with his mobility and ability. After that our flight school started a program to teach paraplegics to fly, Clark among them.

Immediately after getting his private license, Clark bought a 1969 Cherokee 140 and it wasn't long before he was heading to San Diego and back, retracing the flight he made as a patient in 1945 on board a C-47 from San Diego to Atlanta Naval Air Station.

A while later, he called to ask, "What do you think about me flying solo to Alaska?"

I made the trip in a Cessna 170 and then in a Bonanza and enjoyed the experiences thoroughly.

"Clark, that's a great idea!" I answered. "How old are you?"

"Sixty. Why do you ask?"

"If you make it, you have a great story. If you don't make it, I still think you've done a great deal with your life."

He made the trip all by himself and had the time of his life.

But there was more to come. In the spring of 1988, he called again.

"Pat, I'm planning to fly my Cherokee to Germany this summer. What do you think?"

Obviously, he was going regardless, so I said, "Clark, that'll be great." At the time I was heading an expedition looking for a squadron of P-38s and B-17s buried somewhere in the Greenland ice cap. (Yes, we found them.) So I invited Clark to drop in to see us at Kulusuk.

One of our instructors gave him a lot of instrument instruction. Even though Clark did not get an instrument rating, he was fairly proficient on the gauges.

During our weeks on the ice, we heard nothing from Clark. But then his voice came over the speaker.

"I'm at 3,000 feet over the water. My ADF doesn't work. My transponder doesn't work. I've got one hour of gas, and I don't know where I am."

"Clark, you're in a mess!"

I called the Air Force controllers, but they didn't have him on radar.

Then he radioed, "I see the water breaking over the rocks. I've got the coast." There was a 60-knot surface wind out of the south.

"Clark, take up a magnetic heading of 130 degrees and climb to 7,000 feet. You'll have to hope you get to the ice cap before you run out of gas."

There is 90-degree magnetic variance in the area and the 130-degree heading should give him a true track of about 90 degrees and be the quickest way to the ice cap. I had been across Greenland a half dozen times and had never seen a level place to land other than four airports and the ice cap.

"OK," he responded.

At that point we studied a sectional chart of the area and to our horror discovered an 8,000-foot-high ridge in his path. I'd sent my friend into a mountain.

"Clark, do you read?"

Nothing. An hour and a half later, we landed at Frobisher and headed straight for the Flight Service Station.

That's when we learned that Clark had crashed, but had survived and was OK! On Saturday night, I went to Hartsfield Airport in Atlanta and was there to meet Clark as he rolled up the jetway. "Clark, what happened?"

"I did just what you said. Climbed to 7,000 feet on a 130-degree heading. I figured it was the end so I wrote my wife a note and put it on the right seat. The engine sputtered as it ran out of gas, and I started down. I began the 23rd Psalm.

"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." I came out of the clouds and saw a green pasture. "He leadeth me beside the still waters." I saw a lake. I circled down and put it in the pasture by the lake. Ran into a ditch, knocked the nose gear back, and came to a jarring stop. When I came to, I heard a noise and a Gulfstream III buzzed me. Within an hour, a helicopter showed up and took me to Sonde."

The Air Force put a GIII at the ready at Sondrestrom AFB awaiting an ELT signal. When Clark crashed, his ELT went off, the Gulfstream launched and was circling over Clark five minutes later; he was only 40 miles northwest of Sonde! A helicopter picked up Clark and his wheelchair. After an overnight hospital stay, he hitched a ride on a C-141 to McGuire AFB, in New Jersey, then caught a [Delta Air Lines](#) flight out of Philadelphia to Atlanta.

Clark lived another year and thoroughly enjoyed relating his tale. Before he headed west, he smiled and told me he was getting a Comanche with long-range tanks. For his next flight to Germany, he planned to go nonstop.

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