

Returning to Flying.

7 days & 7 crashes

After 20 years , my son's had their lives and family's budding and wondered about flying again. When my boys were very young , we built an experimental aircraft. Lancair Super ES all fiberglass with a 350 HP motor. seated 4 and took to flight after 22 months of building in the cabinet shop , which was located in Billings Montana. Flying to Bend Oregon to the annual fly in for Lancairs. (over the Rockies of 14,000 ft. Deciding to be close to family in Florida , I sold the House we and my boys mother designed , the cabinets shop 5000 ft building, auctioned the tools and took our first leg to Omaha, NB. Spending the night there, we continued all the way to West Palm Beach, FL the following day arriving at sunset.

All our belongings, cars ... were being trucked to arrive 2-3 weeks after we arrived. Taking a cab to the Mobile home I had purchased for my mother in Boynton Beach. It was Christmas and I had packed their wrapped gifts and we made the best of a home not lived in. After cleaning up and walking to the small gas station for food , we opened our presents. With my mother returning from a summer in Michigan , I purchased and moved into a small house just down the canal from her , in the mobile home park.

We stayed in Florida for 3 years , and I had flown many times . Flights to Kissimmee to Disney, Titusville to watch a shuttle launch at 9000 ft. (sunup) coastal flights looking for sharks, flights to Key west, Sun n Fun Air show for 2 years. (camping with your aircraft) in Lakeland. Many flights, many memories.

On a flight to Michigan I had gotten stuck on top. (the clouds that is) and had to descend and get under due to low fuel. slowly holding the stick until seeing the wispy white clouds showing an opening and seeing I could duck down , I lowered and powered up and got down under by a few hundred feet and a few hundred above the Appalachian mountains finding the small airport and fueling up we blasted back up and through the clouds and into blue sky's for the remainder of our flight to Flint Michigan.

It was on a flight to Chattanooga TN that I decided to sell the Lancair. Flying at 10000 feet and descending to land only to find the engine off but prop cartwheeling from the wind from descending . Pulling up and attempting a restart I had to tell the boys in the back seat to tighten their belts and prepare to make it to an open hill with a barn in the distance behind. The rest was just trees , between Atlanta and Chattanooga . As I came down to about 500 feet above the ground and prepared for a crash , I remembered one emergency check and repeated the checklist and pushed the aux. fuel pump. With a sudden roar of the motor and the thrust , I pushed the nose level and gained speed over the small clearing and lifted back to a safe altitude and continued to our uneventful landing in Chattanooga for our visit.

There ended my days of flying , so I thought.

March 2021 , My thoughts brought me to thinking it was time to sell our home of 20 years. My kids are adults now. Hum. so sell the 5 bedroom cinderella home and begin new memories. So looking at aircraft I had always liked the design and ability of the Seawind. It was the aircraft I was going to build before

deciding on the Lancair ES.

Contacting the owner in CA , he agreed to a deposit that was time sensitive due to the sale of my home at which time funds would be available. So I sent him 1000 to hold it until my house sold. The buyer's lender delayed the closing by a week and the owner said he had many interested people and would require another 3000 to hold it . The packet of information and pictures he sent me showed a pristine aircraft including a spotless engine. When my house closed on June 23rd I had emailed that all was good to go. He had mentioned that it was urgent to send money to his account as I had before to hold the aircraft. He was persistent to get all the money prior to my arrival and left me with the impression that other parties were clamoring to get it. My flight to California LAX was Friday the 25th arriving at 9:30 Pacific time.

The owner picked me up at LAX and brought me to Brackett Field airport where the aircraft was based. We spent the day getting familiar with the aircraft. Finding out that it had not been flown in two years. The owner had other pilots at the airport that had hangers and made flying their passion. complete with living rooms , and all the other comforts of home in their hangers. The first problem was the brake cylinder on the pilots side was not working . learning that the owner put it in with the hoses reversed. So his hanger buddy came out to troubleshoot it and reverse the lines and bleed the lines. This occurred after starting it and attempting a taxi test. The owner had used my deposits to purchase new main tires and tubes, headsets, Dynon instrument display repair and updating, ADS-B , GPS antenna.

It was apparent that I had spent money on an aircraft that needed updating and because I sent deposits to hold it (past the time sensitive deadline) (which could have been null and void) that I was paying to get it air worthy. He had said it was flight ready. So , not true . The owner mentioned that the hydraulic gauge doesn't work once in a while and to just tap it. He also said to just use the left aux. fuel pump. The one on the right has the button light not working. He also said after asking why the aileron trim was not working, he stated that this is coupled with the Autopilot and it would work when this is activated. When returning from the taxi tests after the brake repair, I had asked why the elevator trim was down and that the indicator was showing its level . He stated that shouldn't happen and brushed it off saying it's again part of the autopilot.

After a long day of commercial flying and review of the Seawind, including lunch at the airport of which he wanted me to pay for his lunch, which I did not. He paid and it was the worst burger , and one bite was enough, he took me to a local hotel for the night.

The following (26th) morning he picked me up at 7 or so after driving from Lucerne Valley (80 miles away) we continued the inspection of the aircraft. The owner informed me that the aircraft logs were gone and that he recreated them to the best of his abilities. He also told me he was not current as a pilot and couldn't check me in the type aircraft and wouldn't go up with me. So I was on my own. After calling tower for taxi clearances , runway fast taxi tests, flap to 20 . I radioed to the tower for a test flight over the airport. Getting cleared for take off , I positioned the aircraft and applied full power and held the center line to 85-90 knots and lifted off the runway and retracted the wheels. Climbing to 500 feet above pattern altitude doing left hand turns staying within the airport's landing pattern. After the first

turn I noticed the nose up without inputs. holding the nose down and keeping speed I set up for landing after the third time around. Setting up on the downwind, base, then final holding the yoke forward kept me busy enough to not get the gear down.

Setting down on the center line the aircraft made a loud bang when hitting the center board and skidded down the runway a couple hundred yards to a stop. Shutting off the engine, realizing my error.

After considerable time (shutting down this runway) we jacked it up with floor jacks and swung the gear down and locked. The right wheel had pinched a hole in the inner tube but held until we pulled it off the runway and back to parking. The owner offered to take me to Aircraft Spruce" to get a new tube and when returning one of his friends helped get it repaired and reinstalled.

After this was done and a few more questions about functions of the Dynon display the hanger buddies all left and the owner said that he just couldn't return the next day and that I was on my own now. Having a sinking feeling that this was it, I had to go .

Calling the tower , getting cleared for take off I left bracket field at 3 pm with a flight plan for Taos NM for the night. This aircraft can cruise 75 % at 175 knots. So 190 MPH could get me there with the winds. I noticed soon after that the nose up problem was getting worse and required my knee with a rag as a pad to keep it in level flight. I got NO answer at Brackett field from the owner regarding why the elevator trim was showing differently than the indicator needle. So I kept my course in climb flying to HEC (vor) and then to PGS (vor) to 40G to TBC (vor)and after about 100 miles and 45 minutes I decided to divert to FMN (Farmington NM) calling tower and getting cleared to land on runway 7 , enter right base It quickly turned to night. Getting my bearings on the Dynon and following the airport beacon I entered the right base and all lights were on and there was no landing light. I called the tower and informed them that I was in the dark. The Dynon also went dim and I had to use my phone light to activate the display to get brighter so I could read my speeds. Turning final I had full pressure on the yoke to hold the nose down and I couldn't see the runway. The runway side lights were on , but this was my first night landing in 20 + years. at about 10 ft and over the threshold I pulled back the power but the aircraft ballooned up and I considered a go around but it was black. The airplane stalled and came down hard and to the left of the runway and into the weeds and bumpy sage grasses. Realizing that the plane was on the ground I pushed in the throttle and kept it from stopping and powered back to the runway and taxied to the ramp . The ground crew were there and secured the aircraft and gave me a courtesy car with directions to the local Fairmont Marriott for the night. I was shaking most of the night from this experience and did eventually get some sleep.

The following morning revealed that the aircraft experienced damage to the tail from sticking the runway as well as the left wing flap. Going through the rough I had apparently struck a runway sign and scared the underside of the flap and the trailing edge separated, opening up the entire length of the flap.

The lineman had taken pictures and called the FAA. which required me to call immediately . After a lengthy explanation of landing in the dark without a landing light and wiping out a couple runway lights and a runway length sign , the FAA was satisfied with my explanation. and having a satisfactory flight

without busting any airspace parameters on the way to Farmington NM

Behind the FBO (fixed base operator) was a Certified Aircraft repair hangar and the mechanic gave me a spot inside to do the repairs. Riveting the flap and finding the trim tab servo on the tail elevator was pulled out from the servo. This caused the tremendous pressure to hold the nose down because it was stuck holding it up with the force of the wind. Upon further inspection found it was installed incorrectly from the construction of the aircraft. The threaded rod was only 5/16" on one side of the clevis and an inch on the other. So the Mechanic was kind enough to take me to a hardware store and get a longer rod and put it into the servo correctly and test it. These repairs took 3 days to do along with other issues that were recommended to me by the CM.

So it was early , my plan was to go north along the western slope of the Rockies to avoid the approaching front that was from Taos NM to Chicago and east was not the way to get over the mountains. Heading north from Farmington and 25 minutes into the climb I was into a bit of rain and a small squall but managed to squeak through an opening and remain in VFR flight rules. Going north following the rivers and highways . The aircraft performed smooth and almost hands off with auto pilot on. There seemed to be a needed impute of the left aileron. The left wing aileron trim tab servo was stuck slightly up. The previous owner said this trim only works with the autopilot on. (well that is bull) so turning east after a long 2 hour flight up the western slope I had realized that the nose wanted to pitch up again. and it was getting worse. Holding again the yoke forward with my knee and a rag to help the pressure I continued to O'neal NB . After 5 hours or more of flying and coming into the non-towered airport I announced that I was going to enter a down wind and announced all the way to final. Holding the nose down and getting over the threshold the airplane pitched up and ballooned immediately, So I applied full power to keep it from stalling more than 10 feet over the runway and to the left. I managed to pitch nose down and skipping crisscrossing the runway and through the grass I climbed to a safe altitude. The airport manager called on the radio and asked if I was Ok then it went quiet. I was on my own . Flying around to set up for final and fighting the nose up pressure. Upon getting to the runway the aircraft lifted again without any imputes and this time I applied pressure and bounced it off the runway and over a couple runway lights that got wrapped around the landing gear. So after the third attempt and the exact thing happening I forced it to the ground with higher speed and firm pressure on the yoke when it popped up and forced it to the ground and off into the grasses and eventually back onto the runway and taxied to an awaiting golf cart and an airport manager and wife team that got me to calm down from shaking. The same problem all the way trying to land this plane.

So getting another spot in a hanger and a courtesy car , I headed to the Hotel 6 for the night in this small AG town. Returning the next day to find the servo trim motor was again broken but this time shattered apart. Calling the manufacturer they conveyed that this servo was not the proper one for this trim. It was suggested that the Plane manufacturer upgrade it to the new one but it was not done. So I ordered one for overnight delivery. I spent 3 days here also doing repairs. Finding that the weight and balance of the design caused me to be out of aft CG after flying and burning off fuel. So some ballast was needed to continue my journey home to northern Lower Michigan. Getting sand at the local ACE store I transferred it into 1 gal zip lock bags and placed them in the bow of the aircraft boat and this put the CG in the middle of the envelope for the entire flight. I was only 170 lbs. and that was the minimum weight for the

pilot. Putting in the new servo was a bit difficult due to the access plate being off-set of the screws to remove it. So I had to drill small holes in the horizontal stab to insert a straight screwdriver into and guide with my fingers in this very small space. Getting them out was easy compared to installing the new one. balancing the screw after inserting into the hole and finding the whole to get it into to screw it down. After a few hours , it was done. Needed to have connectors for each colored wire. With 2 white wires left to go into a white and a gray I tried it out and it worked perfectly. The folks at and the airport were most helpful with tools and food. The last two nights I was able to sleep in the small terminal room that had a couple beds for tired pilots. also a lounge room. Getting up early each day to the sunrise and making coffee for the morning regulars who stop by and share stories. This is also the base for AG pilots that do spraying.

So Off I was to go on my next leg to MI. The manager Al and Nattily were very busy and I didn't want to bother them anymore as I had made good friends with them as they were EAA builders and came from Virgin Galactic as engineers, and prior to that Blue origin. So I taxied out to the runway and powered off the runway and soon found that using the new trim tab was not working and that it wanted to pitch up again and it was very hard to hold it. I went to pattern altitude and came around for an immediate landing. I forced it down and bounced hard again to the left and bent the left landing gear aluminum leg. Going hard on the left landing scrapped the brake cylinder while on the runway and I came back to it limping to a stop. An AG pilot brought out the tug and we pushed it back into the hanger. It was suggested that I fly home and leave it. leave it for a display to the entrance to the airport.

After looking at the trim, I had put the gray wire on the wrong terminal. So it was flipped. What I thought was up was actually down. The indicator on the instrument panel was reversed. I didn't want to bother anyone for a second opinion.

So now what. I said I wanted to pull it off and get it bent back. The airport manager brought me a jack and tools and after its removal I loaded it into the courtesy car and headed out to find a metal shop. Passing a John Deere dealer I went in and got directions just around the corner. They removed the tire and brake and took the leg over to the large hydraulic brake and straightened it. Bringing it back and putting it all back together that afternoon and went to my little room in the terminal for the night.

Awaking the next morning early with the sun shining into the large windows facing the runways , I rewarmed some coffee and sat down. Eager to be going with all things repaired again and checked by Al, I headed over to the hanger. Passing the hanger where they stayed until their new modular home was built (on the airport grounds) and not wanting to wake anyone I opened the hanger door and attempted to push the Seawind out. Getting a few feet I decided to just fire it up and get going. Taxied out to the runway and with full power lifted eastward into the morning sun. All things were normal. the takeoff, climb, and when getting into cruise at 7500 feet , the plane performed with finger touch control on the trims. Auto pilot was hands off, with a slight lift on the yoke to compensate for the non working left aileron servo motor. The trim was slightly stuck in the up position.

Flying across the eastern side of Nebraska , South Dakota, Just south of St Paul MN, and over Escanaba Michigan in the Upper Peninsula and on to School craft Airport in Manistique.

Within 5 miles of landing I noticed a clunk sound off and behind me and realized the left main gear came down on its own. Looking over at the hydraulic pressure gauge it was not registering any pressure. Also watching the fuel gauge on the right side running down to 5 gallons and the left side registered 35 gallons. Apparently the fuel is not flowing in the left side according to the gauge. Getting close to the airport I announced my intentions and asked if there was anyone there to help see if the gear was down. Entering a left downwind and slowing the right main landing came down on its own and I had 2 green lights. Now just give me the nose. I cycled the gear switch but nothing happened. The gauge was at zero pressure. Turning left to base and to my surprise the engine sputtered as if to stop and after leveling out on base it ran normal. Then on the turn to final it sputtered again, the fuel was flowing away from the boost pump. So leveling out on final I had the engine running with less than 4 gallons of fuel, both main gear down and the nose gear still not down.

With all the work done to keep this plane within the envelope of CG, it flared without popping up and I landed it with both mains and held it off as long as I could and then the nose hit and the plane skidded down the runway a few hundred yards to a stop at the edge of the pavement but well before the end of the runway. Lifting the canopy and getting out, there was minimal damage to the gear door and the nose skin, all repairable.

So, looking back at the terminal about a half mile away, I hiked back over the brush and small lumps and ruts on this hot day. Getting there and seeing no one was there, but doors open for pilots I went in and pondered what to do. My cell phone was turned off due to non-payment (maxed card). I had made a payment on Thursday but this was the 4th of July holiday weekend. Looking through the entry door, I could see a motel across Route 2. Walking over, I met the nicest couple from Traverse City that just purchased it. He lent me his phone, which I asked my son in Boyne City to come up with his card so I could get fuel. The motel owner was nice enough to take me down the road to a TSC (tractor supply) store to get a couple quarts of hydraulic oil. Getting back, his office was lit up with folks checking in and out. I thanked him for taking time out when he clearly didn't have time to do so. As I turned, the Michigan State Police with sirens, flashers came flying by, entered the airport, onto the runway and out to the crippled plane. Turning back I thanked him again and said this is my cue, got to go. It was the excitement of the day for Manistique.

Walking back over and through the terminal I sat on the picnic table until they saw me and returned. Going through the questions of, am I ok. anyone else. I explained what happened and I had a couple of quarts of hydraulic oil to get the gear up and aircraft off the runway. Riding in the police car to the plane, the male officer grabbed the nose and lifted it as I pulled the gear down. Filled the reservoir with a quart almost and getting the engine started they followed me to the terminal fuel up area. Shutting down and waiting for my son to arrive (3 hour drive) :(. Well the State police did call the FAA and once again I was on the police phone talking to them explaining what had occurred.

My son Weston arrived with all the kids, mom was working. They really enjoyed sitting in the airplane and asking questions and seeing other small planes come in and park across from us. they had never been in an airplane before and wanted to go for a ride which I quickly said was not a good idea, mom would not approve. and neither did I. But we did get pictures and had fun while I filled it up. Opening

the right wing inboard tank , I realized the fuel was full. but the gauge showed it with 4 gallons. The left inboard tank that (as the fuel gauge read was supposed to have 35 gal) it was flipped. The gauge was opposite of what the fuel was. That's why it sort of sputtered when turning left. Why was the tank not flowing? All switches were on and aux fuel pumps were on , except that the right switch was on but no indicator back light was on. Did this pump fail? I had been told they flow together. only the outboard tip tanks needed to be pumped.

So I fueled the remaining tank and felt bad that I had asked a busy father to pack up and head north to rescue his dad. Which without hesitation he did.

As they waited off and on the grass next to the terminal I started the plane and taxied to the runway. They watched as I blasted off into the sky and I proceeded to climb to an altitude of 7500 feet to make my journey across Lake Michigan by way of Beaver Island and on to Charlevoix. Reminding myself that I agreed with the FAA that I leave the gear down to be sure of a good landing in Boyne City.

It was July 3rd. President Biden was in Traverse City and the surrounding area including my destination at Boyne city airport. The TFR was lifted before leaving and I was clear to go. Traverse city TFR was still in effect.

Climbing to 5500 feet and seeming to have a bit of difficulty any higher I decided to head out over the water. Boyne City was a 25min. flight, I was going to be there way before my son and kids. After getting to the northern edge of the island , the engine started sputtering, then it was good, then sputtered again, by then I had passed over the island and was out over the water again. Then it sputtered , almost stopped, and I was attempting to keep it running by adjusting the mixture and throttle, but it stopped. and then I smelled burnt something coming into the cockpit. Realizing the island was closer I turned north in an attempt to get to the southern edge but quickly realized I would not make it. By then I was gliding down out of 5000 feet and I had to set it up for landing. Keep it at 90 MPH. I wanted flaps to help so I pressed the button and nothing. I looked at the hydraulic gauge and it was not registering any pressure at all. What was going on , I had just filled it. The pump must be out. so no flaps. and the gear is down. This will be my first water landing.

The sun was low on the horizon to my left and I could see the glitter of the sun on the water. Looking back at the panel and seeing my speed as steady and keeping the angle of descent I glanced back over the water and realized I could judge my altitude with the glittering of the sun over the small ripple of the water. Time seemed to slow and I was transfixed on the beauty of the sun over the water and keeping my eye on the water and the glide I could see it coming and it was close, a few more seconds and it was really close. The ripples were bigger and I could see I was less than 20 feet or so. I pulled up on the yoke to flare and stall.

Then the gear caught the water and the plane went forward and with a big splash went nose down vertically and into the water past the canopy . I was looking under the surface for a brief second. then It popped back up and onto the bottom upright. I had not hit anything, nothing broken, the aircraft seemed undamaged. Shutting off all switches ,I lifted the canopy in its upright position and sat there looking at the sun . It's a boat , I'll float somewhere and someone will find me.

Remembering to send out the distress call I turned the masters back on and set the transponder code to 7700 and called on the radio , silence. The big lake was calm . I sat there on the edge of the cockpit and it was ok, I'm all right. someone will find me..

Looking in the back seat , there was a small amount of water coming in. Taking the seat back off I could see I needed to bail water. I remember having a small plastic container and started bailing , keeping a pace and being methodical about it to stay ahead of it. It was a long time or I felt like it, as I was pitching water. I realized I couldn't keep up. It was coming faster and faster. Looking into the rear it was filling up. It was going down by the tail. looking around , what to get, what to leave. I had cargo shorts on with Velcro and I put my phone on one side and my wallet on the other , too much going on and I forgot I had 1 gallon zip lock bags I could have protected my phone , wallet could have dried out. would have been fine. thinking about swimming in the lake I tested the seat back for the floatation and it was my life vest at this point. I cannot swim with shoes on so I took them off. As the back filled, the cock pit filled up and the nose came back down level and I was standing on the edge of the fuselage and holding onto the canopy to steady myself. With it sinking lower I decided to jump off the edge and onto the wing root and steady myself onto the motor cowling. jumping over and holding the seat back with my left hand , balancing waist deep in water and pushing onto the cowling to stand up. By this time the left wing was under water and this wing was out at the tip. I looked around and thought of the Titanic seeing all my stuff floating out over the big body of water. My shoes (upright) , hat, the landing light , new headsets, kind of eerie.

So it was going lower and the bottom of the motor was touching the water and I was chest high with water. I leaped to get my right hand to the top of the cowling to get a grip and hug and pull me to the top of the motor. Jumping was difficult with the seat back clenched and being so deep in water on the wing fairing. I made it kicking and inching up and onto the very top of the roundness of the engine cowling. My core body was out of the water and it felt good. The water was beginning to feel cold. As the engine was now going under I inched my way along the neck and once again was out of the water for a bit. then It too was going under and the plane was going nose down. My only choice was to scoot with the seat back and get my chest up and onto the horizontal stabilizer and hold onto the extended vertical stab. so with my right hand I grabbed the vertical stab and wormed up and once again I was out of the water except for my legs. Putting my head down after looking around and resting with my head down realizing I might not make it. The sun was setting and it was red and I saw no one around. did they hear my call, i don't know. Resting and remaining calm as I could I thought of my kids what we have been through in our lives , They are now married and Weston has a Son and is a father to 2 girls and a boy. My oldest son Stacy is expecting a girl Delihla in a few weeks. Will I ever see them again. What will they think if this , i thought stupid thing I did. I'm at fault for believing I could fix this and get home, I just wanted to go home.

Lifting my head and not wanting to see that I was still alone , I looked straight ahead and off on the horizon I could see the big US Coast guard boat coming . I couldn't believe it , they were coming. I would be OK . Looking back and seeing the plane was at quite an angle down and I could let go of the seat back now , I pushed off with my feet and scooted up onto the horizontal stab that was out of the water . Now I was all out and kneeling and waving and filled with relief that just cannot be explained. It's a corner

and a turn from despair and sadness to joy and relief. It was a long time before they reached the crash site. I was 40 miles off the coast of Charlevoix and several miles south of the Beaver islands.

From the time of the distress call and the ELT going off , it was no more than an hour. When they got closer and the sun was on the horizon the noise of the second rescue came circling overhead. The Coastguard from Traverse City was also dispatched. Since the boat beat them , they get credit for the rescue. Leaning forward and standing on what was the only thing out of the water I jumped to the hand that was extended and I was pulled aboard.

Going inside with a blanket and a check by the medic , they turned the boat around to get pictures and the plane flipped over and only the tip of the vertical stab. was sticking out. It was that close , I would have been in the water and after 10-15 minutes hypothermia would set in.

It was a long 35 to 40 minutes back to the waiting ambulance . That meant that they were on their way to get me in 10 minutes or less.

Sitting there with a hot blanket or two was very nice. My wet shorts and shirt kept me shivering. Relaxed now and warm, the police got my statement and lent his phone after dialing the number. I told my son Weston what had happened and that I'd be at the Charlevoix hospital. they were just passing on the Mack Bridge and it would be a couple hours for them to get there.

Getting paper clothes , I waited at 1 am out front of this small hospital for them. I wondered about the day. flying all the way from a disaster in O'neal NB and a nose landing at Schoolcraft and almost dying. Let alone the episodes in NM and CA. It was over. I'm alive. and I'm home.