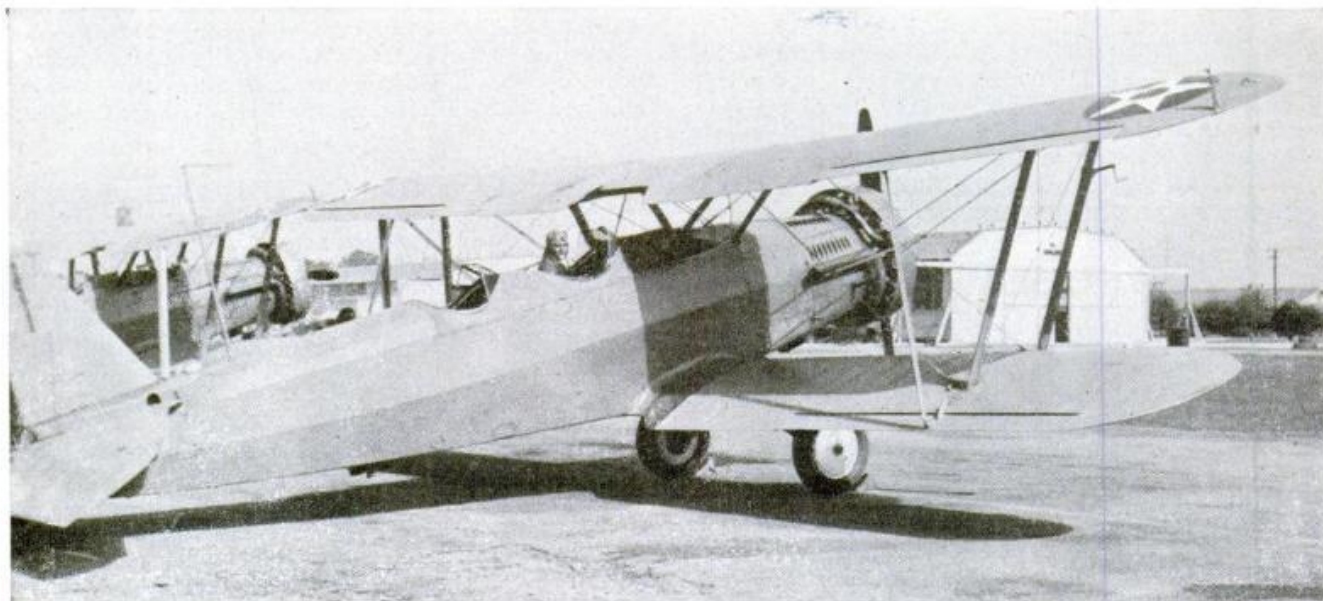


I Learned About Flying From That! NO. 90

By E. F. KINNAIRD

Captain, American Airlines



Author in BT-2 that he cracked up in take-off after landing in a small field. By luck, neither the plane nor the pilot were a washout.

Failure to correct his flight plan started a sequence of events that wound this pilot's plane up in a ball.

WE WERE an eager bunch of cadets. Our graduation at Kelly Field was only two months off and maybe we were all just a little too cocky. I was in the observation section and was flying BT-2s, O-25s and O-38s for cross-country training. They were low but they did get us around.

And now in the early spring of 1939, Lieutenant Ellsworth, my instructor, told our group one afternoon that we were slated for a triangular cross-country the next day. We would take off at Kelly, fly to Dryden and Sweetwater, Tex., and then return to Kelly at night. We were given our take-off times with five-minute separations. I was to leave at 7:30 a.m. We were also given the usual instructions about reporting to the weather office for forecasts, winds aloft and the preparation of our flight plans before take-off.

The next morning I donned my flying togs, checked the weather and completed my flight plan. My estimated time of arrival at Dryden was 9:30. Just before crawling into my BT-2 Lieutenant Ellsworth said that we would be delayed shortly because of patches of ground fog along the intended route. I left my flight plan in the airplane and went back to the operations shack to wait. The weatherman believed that the sun would dissipate the fog in short order. I finally got the all-clear signal and got into the air at 8:30 a.m., circled the field once and started out for my first intended destination, Dryden, Tex.

When I reached my cruising altitude I leveled off and switched to my auxiliary gas tanks, pulled out a sectional map and was merrily on my way at 96 m.p.h.—the BT's cruising speed regardless of power. It was a beautiful day, not a cloud in the sky, smooth as glass, not a worry in the world—so thought I. The check points were turning up exactly as they were on the map. Everything was going along so nicely that I didn't bother with the flight plan; just left it in the data case. Neither did I look at the clock. My mind was in a nice pink dreaming daze. Here I was, nearly through training with not the worst grades. The world was just fine, I would be a smiling lieutenant in Uncle Sam's Air Corps in short order.

After a spell of this fat, dumb and happy attitude I decided to take a glance at the flight plan and maybe make a few entries in the log. I even looked at the clock. It indicated 9:30. 9:30! According to the flight plan I was due at Dryden at 9:30. A quick look around the barren terrain didn't show any sign of an airport. Nothing but cacti and mesquite and a dry creek.

I took another look at the flight plan to make sure 9:30 was right. After a few minutes of indecision I decided to proceed on my course until 10 a.m. If at that time Dryden didn't show up I could be fairly sure I'd passed it up and would reverse my course and proceed along the reciprocal until something did show up.

When 10 a.m. showed up, *(Continued on page 82)*

FLIGHT ENGINEERS COURSE *Announcement*

Our Aeronautical Training Division announces its first class for Flight Engineers beginning April 7th. The purpose of this course is two-fold; first to prepare qualified applicants for the new Civil Aeronautics Board Flight Engineer License Test. Second, to give the theoretical training needed to carry on practical work of the Flight Engineer, such as will be expected by the Agencies seeking his services. This class will have the advantage of the experienced personnel and teaching staff of the Pan American Navigation Service.

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I Learned About . . .

(Continued from page 58)

the field didn't. I turned around and flew for an hour. Still no Dryden. Well, the day wasn't so pretty now. My mouth was getting a little dry and my hands a little moist. The perspiration started to bead out on my head. Fact was, it was getting pretty hot.

The only alternative was to spot a town and buzz it, trying to find some identification. When I found a town there was no identification. I couldn't spot a name on the railroad station, water tank or anywhere else, nor did the landmarks resemble any towns on the map. I decided to land in a likely-looking field. I dragged it several times to be sure it was clear of obstacles and herded some grazing sheep out of the middle. It was small but adequate, I thought.

I brought the plane in just above the mesquite trees, hanging it on the prop, dropped it in fairly hard, slammed on the brakes, stopped just short of the end of the field, pulled off my helmet and goggles and breathed a sigh of relief. People and cars came from all directions. I taxied over to the fence next to the road, cut the engine and slipped out of my chute.

Among all the cars that had gathered on the road I noticed a highway patrolman. He walked over and I asked him just what section of Texas was I deep in the heart of. He told me that I was in Rock Springs. I located it on my map, picked up my flight plan and then I realized what a boner I had made. There it was in black and white: "take-off time, 7:30 a.m." I hadn't actually taken off until 8:30 and when 9:30 showed up I was still an hour from my destination.

Could I save myself yet? According to my gas supply I could still make it. Maybe I could get in and they would never

miss me. It was worth a try. I was really in a fog mentally that day. Cadets were not supposed to take off after a forced landing without first notifying Kelly Field. Nevertheless, I asked a few people to keep the sheep out of the field, fired up the old BT-2 and taxied to the downwind side of the field, realizing as I went along how the plane labored through the dry and slightly furrowed ground.

I swung around into the wind, checked the mags and with a last look around and a hearty wave to my audience, I poured on the coal and lumbered down the field, the mesquite trees getting bigger all the time. The tail was up and I tried to ease it off gently but only the tail would come down. The acceleration of a BT-2 is comparable to that of a battleship. I tried again, and then before I realized it the field was gone, no place to stop, so I heaved it off, stalling and shaking like an old wet hen.

It started to mush back to the trees and I eased up on the back pressure a little, trying to give it its head. Too late. A wing went down, the mesquite came up and knocked a sizeable piece out of the left wing. Things happened fast for a few seconds. The next thing I knew, the BT-2 had plowed through about 75 yards of mesquite and scrub trees and was considerably dismantled. I was only shaken up and bruised slightly. But, oh, what a hard-learned lesson.

The story has a happy ending in that both the plane and I could be salvaged. Base Engineering at Kelly decided to repair the tired and sick-looking BT-2. Lieutenant Ellsworth, my patient instructor, helped to save me from being washed out, though he never mentioned it. I made so many inexcusable mistakes on that day that I still can't see how I did it. But I will always remember that the clock is a very fine flight instrument. As for the flight plan, well, I learned about flying from that.

END

