

# Safety Corner

## Expecting the Unexpected

By Dave McClurkin

One of the areas that we cover on pilot certificate practical tests is “Emergency Equipment and Survival Gear.” To “fill the square” I usually ask a question such as “What additional equipment would you want to have in the aircraft in the event of having to ditch in the ocean?” The applicant will often respond that life vests, signaling devices and even a radio would be important. After asking the applicant how he or she would feel about bobbing around in the ocean for hours or days they usually allow that a life raft which contained food and water would also come in handy! To be fair, I haven’t given the applicant much time to think about what they would need for an over-water mission. But, how would you fare if the question was for a local flight on a hot summer day?

About ten years ago a Cessna from another flight school crashed in our south practice area. They were practicing an emergency approach and the engine didn’t produce power for the go around. The student and instructor survived with injuries. Even though the aircraft was on fire and sending up a nice plume of smoke it took several hours to locate and extricate the survivors from the crash site – even though the instructor had a cell phone and made an immediate call to OUN tower. It’s amazing that an area that looks well populated from the air with quick and easy road access becomes totally devoid of civilization when you’re down in the weeds!

So, the scenario above has just happened to you. You’ve gone out for a one-hour flight in the local practice area in the mid-afternoon on a hot summer day. Things didn’t go quite as planned and now you and your aircraft are in a field. Nothing and nobody is in sight. You’ve gotten out of the airplane but you note that your left hand and wrist really hurts and one ankle is swelling up very quickly.

In the air-conditioned comfort of the terminal it’s easy to talk about what you’d LIKE to have if you KNEW you were going to crash – water, food, shelter, cell phone, signaling device, hand held radio, first aid kit, etc. In the typical training situation, what items from the above list would you REALLY have? If this scenario happened to me in my personal airplane I could answer that yes I’ve got all of this stuff and more. In fact I might be disappointed if I was rescued too quickly before having a chance to use all my neat stuff! But what if this happened to me in an OU airplane? My answer is that I’d have a cell phone and maybe a half bottle of water. Is this sufficient under these circumstances? If I’m not bleeding profusely, probably yes. When the rescuers arrive I’m going to be sun burned, dehydrated and hungry, but I will have survived.

Do you want more in the way of survival equipment for a local flight? Do you need more? Who should provide this equipment – the OU Aviation department, or the individual pilot? We’ve made up a few survival kits for cross country flights. Do you know what’s in the kits? Are there any items from these kits that should be on all flights (think about the bleeding scenario)? In the era of risk management there are no hard and fast “correct” answers to these questions. But at the very least we need to think about this “what-if.” If you get a minute send me an email (or make an input to the suggestion box) about what is a “must have” or “nice to have” when sitting in field, looking up at the clear, blue sky on a hot summer day.

A final thought – the most important tool for survival is a **clear head and the will to survive**. One thing that delayed the rescue of the Cessna flight was the instructor reported she was south of Westheimer and east of the river. Initial search efforts were east of the river. In reality the crash site was south of the airport and west of the river. I was in the practice area and terminated a check ride to participate in the initial impromptu search effort. I learned a bit about the risks of impromptu search efforts when the student suddenly asked, “What’s that?” I looked up to see that we were nose to nose with a C-130 (also searching), less than a mile away! But, that can be the subject of another Safety Corner article.