

HUMAN

AD
Heliprops

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IN YOUR HANDS

The following story was contributed by a reader. He relates an experience that can be easily pictured in your imagination – including the discomfort, anxiety, and dangers. The lessons learned are of interest to anyone who flies passengers in a helicopter.

“This was back in October of 1987. I was flying a Bell 206B on an extended engineering support mission during which I moved technicians to various locations in eastern Nevada and western Utah. This part of the world is largely remote with mountain ridges and peaks, many of which are somewhere around 10,000 feet, but some are higher, near 13,000 feet. Of course, the working locations for these technicians were on the tops of ridgelines and mountains, dictating the need for a helicopter to get them there.

This particular trip was to reposition three technicians from Ely, Nevada to Delta, Utah. This route would cross elevations of about 6,000 to

8,000 feet. I don't remember the exact time and distances but the plan was to depart Ely mid-afternoon and arrive in Delta before dark. It was not a particularly long leg – somewhere around 125 miles – so I didn't have any pressing problem with being able to carry enough fuel. I checked the weather and it was forecast to be OK for this VFR flight. But at this time I was experienced enough to know that mountains created their own weather that could vary considerably from the airports on either side.

We departed Ely and flew through the valley east of Ely.

Then a climb to go over the Schell Creek Range. The climb gradient was relatively gentle. Weather on this western slope was just fine. But as I approached the ridgeline it was apparent that there were some clouds building up over the summit. I continued thinking that there would be enough ceiling and visibility to get over the hump and down the valley towards the Snake Range further to the east. I began seeing snow, and, like lots of stories many other helicopter pilots have told, I had to get lower and slower to be able to remain in visual contact with the



Photo by Sheldon Cohen/Bell Helicopter



ground. My aircraft, by the way, did not have snow baffles. It did though have a particle separator. As I pressed on, the snow got heavier and heavier. I was struggling to see through the heavy snow. I had gotten myself in a spot where if things got any worse I would almost certainly lose visual contact – IMC. I reached a spot that was level enough to make a landing – it was on the top of the ridgeline – and I did just that. I landed with the hope that the snow/clouds would go away and allow me to continue. As it turned out, the weather got worse and the four of us were forced to remain overnight on the top of the Schell Creek Range during a snowfall.

The temperature got pretty cold that night. I think the low was in the 20's. I was dressed well enough to remain comfortable, but my passengers were not. I carried some survival equipment including a small tent, but it was not big enough, nor good enough to shelter us all from the cold. I was concerned that the helicopter systems and battery would get cold-soaked sitting there overnight, so periodically I started the engine and ran it for

a while to warm up the system and the four of us too.

The following morning finally brought an end to the snow, giving a good ceiling and visibility. We all brushed

snow off the aircraft, being particularly careful to clear the engine intakes and down on the transmission deck. I was satisfied that we were clear.

Engine start and checks were normal and we were happy to be ready to go. Pulled power and slid the aircraft off the ridgeline ahead of the blown snow and accelerated in a slight dive down the eastern slope. No more than twenty seconds after takeoff and at about 80 knots, the engine quit without any warning. Poof – it quit instantly. I immediately entered autorotation. Things just seemed to fall into place. My glide angle was good enough to get me to the valley floor, and a road was right there in front of me. The road was clear of obstacles and I made a nice touchdown – across the road without any damage to the aircraft or injury to any of us. (Unfortunately, one of the passengers, who in his haste to exit the cabin and control approaching vehicular traffic, forgot to unplug his mic cord, and had his head snapped back resulting in a fall).

I didn't know then what caused the engine flameout. It could have been something

related to snow that somehow got into the engine. I do know, that the autorotation and touchdown was successful because of all my previous training that prepared me for exactly such an event. The entire descent and touchdown seemed familiar – it was like repeating something I had done many times before.

Back then, before cell phones and GPS we were less capable of knowing our exact location and being able to communicate with anyone to report an emergency. I was on a company flight plan – not an FAA flight plan. But it would not have been until I didn't report from my destination that my company would have begun an effort to find me. My communications then were such that I was fortunate to pass a message about our situation on 121.5 through a commercial airliner. We all thought about that and now have a better system of tracking our aircraft.

Perhaps the most important lesson I learned from the experience was to pay more attention to my passengers. In this case they were not at all prepared with suitable clothing for the cold that we experienced. Now I recognize that I have to do some thinking for my passengers. Often they don't know what to expect, so I have to tell them. My passengers are relying on me for their safety, so it's up to me to see that all of the right things get done, and that they are briefed appropriately."

Our thanks to a reader for giving us this story, as well as

several valuable lessons to think about. Certainly emergency procedures training and a communications plan are things that must be addressed before they are needed. Some of you work for organizations that attend to the planning, scheduling and funding for transition and recurrent training; as well as the development of the systems for operational communications. Many of you however do not have the luxury of a company behind you to take care of those things. It's your responsibility. It may not be fun and it may cost you some \$ to go out with an instructor and practice autorotations and simulated tail rotor malfunctions; but if you don't, and expect to be able to do the right things when that emergency come along - good luck.

Looking out for the safety and comfort of your passengers, unlike the emergency that may never happen, could be something that you must do on every flight. Passengers may not know the dangers or the right things to do. You must be the one to assure that they know. You must determine what is required for the proper care and handling of your passengers. That may require some assertiveness on your part. Dignitaries, experienced passengers, and your senior company executives may not be so amenable to your briefings or directives. It may not be easy but it must be done. It's your responsibility – their lives are in your hands.



There I Was...

Here are some accounts sent to us by readers.

206L3

"This was at night – 0200. Shift started at 1800 and I'd be on duty till 0600. I was flying one of our 206L3's. Medic was with me. Automobile accident occurred near the intersection of two major highways in a suburban area. No place conveniently close to land for this pickup of the accident victim. We both looked over the proposed landing spot and direction. Looked at it carefully with the night sun from up high and down low. Looking for the traditional obstacles - wires, posts, antennas, etc. Police and Fire Department people on the ground were looking too. It looked OK to us and the folks on the ground said so too. Landed. Loaded. Immediately on takeoff - WIRE! I saw the wire come between the upper wire-cutter and the main rotor disk. I pulled back on the cyclic and collective. Backed away from the wire and climbed straight up. Overtorqued, but that was a small price to pay. We had lots of eyes looking for

wires but we all missed them."

OH-58

"I was to be one of three to do a post-maintenance check flight. A crew chief, me and another pilot who had more experience than me. I preflighted the left side, starting at the tail and moving forward. The other pilot and mech preflighted the right side. They failed to see that the aft tail rotor drive shaft cover was not fastened. (The drive shaft cover has a restraining cable, but the cable does not prevent the cover from warping under the wash from the main and tail rotors.) Started the engine and the tail rotor driveshaft cover flipped open and was struck by the tail rotor blades. Lots of noise. Shut it down."



Preflight Helo

"I took my helicopter to the Service center for painting some scratches at the body, doors and cowling; and to a service bulletin for the engines.

The Service Center is a direct representative of the helicopter manufacturer, highly qualified by them. So far the blades were painted too, we made track and balance flight on the 28th day of the month. Made about four takeoffs and landings to perform the small corrections needed and finally everything ran perfectly. We landed without any news so we decided to wait for the next day (29th) to take the helicopter back to our home base because there was a chance for a flight the next day with the owner. We would wait for confirmation.

That night I was confirmed about the flight, but it was late night. The next morning I called the Service Center to ask to have the helicopter fueled and ready. When I got there the helicopter was spotted out on the ramp. During my preflight I was walking around the helicopter, talking with a fellow pilot, got a phone call from the office asking about the flight I was about to do. There was not anybody at ramp attending the starting other than my fellow pilot who answered me when I shouted ?CLEAR? to start the engines. At 10:00 I took off and turned to my left. I felt a kind of turbulence while I was turning, but it disappeared when I came back to straight and level. I was in contact with the Control Tower. They called asking me to

fly back to my departure point. I ask the reason and the voice answered that it was very important to fly back and to land smooth.

THEN I began to be worried.

After I landed I ask what happened and I was told that the engine I cowling opened and it hit the main rotor blades.

The person who saw it was an electrical technician who was working at he helicopter where my fellow pilot was and he turn his head to see my helicopter in the exact moment the cowling opened and hit the blades. If he would not have seen and reported it, the results could be worse because nobody else notice anything at all As a pilot you must realize that you have the responsibility. I may have done my preflight poorly. But I have no doubt that the Service Center also did not make a satisfactory post flight the day before and a preflight that day. I knew that I was chatting with my fellow pilot and I got a phone call while I was walking around. But I did not work on or fuel the helicopter. One of the fuel filler caps is right there in front of the engine cowling. So the person who added the fuel and the ones who worked on the aircraft could have noticed and fastened the cowling. But the one and only one who has the responsibility



is the pilot.

I may have died. Definitely it could have been fatal. I will preflight my helicopter as if I were in a hostile field, because nobody but you are responsible for doing it. It is your life, it is your name, it is your job which must be saved. You may die or worse than that you may kill somebody else."

OH-58

"Started my OH-58 parked out on the grass. It had rained the previous day and the temperature dipped below freezing that night. On adding power to come up to a hover the left skid seemed to be stuck in the grass. I lowered the collective and pulled just enough to get almost light on the skids and moved the pedals left and right several times to make the aircraft yaw. I thought I had moved it enough to break the skids free. As I pulled collective to come up to a hover it started to roll to the left and then broke free. I repositioned over on the ramp, and on setting down noticed the helicopter sat with a slight right wing down. We shut it down and found a big chunk of grass, ice, and dirt was frozen to the aft left skid tube."

YOUR ANSWERS.

In the last issue we asked,

“What is the longest you have flown with a Low Fuel Light illuminated? Tell us about it.”

Because there are few experienced helicopter pilots who have not experienced landing with a low fuel state we received quite a few responses. Here are some of them.

Human AD.

206L

“I was flying a passenger from Dallas to San Antonio. I figured we had enough fuel to get there, but it would be close. The passenger was in a rush to get there. I flew past many places where I could have stopped to get fuel from Waco over Temple, Austin, and New Braunfels. After we passed New Braunfels I really started to get nervous about the fuel state. I was about 15 miles from my San Antonio destination when the fuel low light came on. There was nowhere else closer to get fuel so I continued. I watched that fuel gage go right down to zero. When I came over the fence I was ready to react to the slightest engine burp. I landed safely, but we must not have had much more fuel than what was in the fuel line.”



Medium Twin

“It was me and a mechanic. The leg was from Medellin, Colombia to Panama City,

Panama. This is about 300 miles direct. I checked the weather forecast and it looked like it was going to be OK for this VFR flight. Our actual route was as direct as the terrain and clouds would permit. When we hit the coastline, with GPS help, we went direct rather than follow the longer coastline route. That took us over water for about the last 50 miles.

When we were still more than 20 miles from Panama City we could see a gigantic storm over the mainland of Panama, our destination airport, and stretching out to sea a bit. It appeared that we could get around it to the west and north, so we swung out a bit farther away from destination. I was definitely concerned about fuel now. At about 10 miles from the airport we could see that we were not going to get around the storm, and that we would have to fly through it to get the airport. I turned east, back toward the coastline and the low fuel light came on. The rain was very heavy. Visibility was very low and I had to get down below 500 feet agl to be able to see the water. I requested a Special VFR clearance, and was heading toward the airport. My thinking was that if I had to I would land on the beach. When we did reach the coastline just north of the airport there was no beach! At high tide the trees crowded right up to the water line, and left no room for me to land if I wanted to. The airport is right on the coastline and the

GPS told us we were close. I landed with the light having been on between 5 and 10 minutes. This was a much closer call than I even want to have again. Weather forecasts cannot always be relied upon; and just because there is a coastline doesn't mean that there will be a suitable beach to land on.”



Prior Planning

“About 10 minutes. Cross-country flight conducted without sufficient prior planning. After landing I inserted myself at the head of the fuel line suffering substantial embarrassment and learned a lasting lesson. Preplan, monitor enroute fuel consumption, and never hesitate to divert.”



GPS Help

I have flown with a low fuel light only once. I was picking up a helicopter from the factory to ferry it home to my employer. I had never flown this type of helicopter before, so it was arranged that I fly with a pilot who had flown this route before and who had almost 1,600 hours in this type of helicopter.

We took off in a hurry to avoid some weather that was coming in (mistake #1) and proceeded to fly cross-country at night to our next location (mistake #2). We flew by a major town at about 10:00 p.m. enroute to our stop, and I asked

if we needed to stop and get some fuel (I was unaware of the fuel flow-rate (mistake #3). The other pilot said that all the airports in the area were closed so we couldn't get fuel and then said that we were fine for our fuel-flow and would make it to our destination for the night with no trouble.

About twenty minutes later the pilot said "Now this helicopter isn't like some others you have flown where you only have 5 minutes of time after the low fuel light comes on. In this one you have a full 10 minutes, so don't get too concerned if you see the light come on for a few minutes. I have done it lots of times" (mistake #4).

I gave a muffled "OK I guess," and about ten minutes later the low fuel light flickered and then came on steady. Our GPS showed us just under 10 minutes from our destination.

We landed just over 8 ? minutes later. After releasing my white-knuckle hold on the controls I informed the other pilot that we would NOT be doing that again (we still had three days to go), even if it meant stopping for gas every hour. The other pilot (also somewhat shaken) agreed and said: "Now I don't want you to think that I do this all the time or anything."

We did not get low on fuel the rest of the trip, nor have I since. I learned a lot that trip, and agree with the crowd that thinks the only time you have too much fuel is when you are on fire. I put a little extra on whenever I can."



Military Helo

Weekend Reserve cross-country flight for a group of six helicopters. Departed Dallas headed for Ft. Hood. Weather got progressively worse and beyond half way it was below VFR minimums. All six of us managed to get VFR –on-top. The weather continued to deteriorate and destination was bad. We all turned around and headed back home. We could have gone to other places to get fuel, but we didn't. The flight leaders decided to do a "group" GCA approach! We were still VFR-on-top and we could see each other – two flights of three helicopters. I was in the last helicopter and we found ourselves falling behind our flight. Fuel was definitely an issue now. Ironically, we had a loaded fuel bladder in the cargo hold of my helicopter, but there was no way to use the fuel in it. We were vectored around and I could see the helicopters in front of us descending and disappearing into the clouds on the GCA approach. We elected to separate from the flights and circle around for our own separate approach. Before we did, however, we could see the other helicopters climbing up out of the clouds after their missed approaches. We had already been on the low fuel light when we began our single ship GCA approach. We knew we didn't have enough fuel to make a missed approach and go somewhere else or try another approach. We broke out, swung

over to land on a taxiway, shut down an engine, and taxied back on the other. I estimate we had the light on for 15 minutes before landing."



OH-58

"Fuel low light on for 16 minutes with an OH-58D over-water in the Persian Gulf during bad weather. We had a hard time finding the ship."



Robby

"In the Robinson the procedure is to land immediately if the low fuel light comes on. I have been in a situation where I looked, with sweaty palms, for the best place to drop it into the trees while flying over Connecticut. The light came on during cool-down. The reason: I abdicated my responsibility because I was flying with a commercially rated pilot. I'm still flying at the private level. I didn't take enough responsibility for the flight. I'll never let that happen again, nor will I trust someone else's flight planning."



AH-1S

"Yes I have, for about 5 minutes. I was on a cross-country in an AH-1S Cobra. My 2nd Lieutenant Copilot was navigating and lost us on the map. I landed at a small private airfield and asked a ranch hand to show me on the map where we

were. After he caught his breath from laughing so hard, he pointed to a circled R on the map (we were in a Restricted Area). I thanked him and was on my way to Ft. Knox to refuel before heading back to Ft. Campbell. As we approached Ft. Knox the Low Fuel Light illuminated. After refueling, we departed and flew right over one of the vaults (which is also Restricted). We didn't get into trouble over it, mainly because neither one of us told anyone about it after we made it back to Ft. Campbell."



UH-1

"We'd been operating in southern California. This was an unusual mission. There were

five of us on board – all pilots. I was in the back as we departed Palm Springs. We overflew Barstow enroute to our remote destination. As we were passing Barstow I mentioned that we should get some fuel there. The two pilots up front didn't agree. They said we had enough and would get some on the way back. Well I hate to say "I told you so," but sure enough, on the way back, we were low on fuel. The low fuel light came on. We were all focused on the fuel indicator. There were plenty of places where we could have put it down. I kept urging them to "Land here." But they insisted that we were close enough – we could make it, and that if it did flame out they could get it down OK. We landed on the ramp. We were told that we needed to

move to a fuel pit area; but had to have the fuel delivered to us because we didn't have enough to fly the helicopter across the field."



530

On the ground I looked at the fuel gage and told the pilot that we needed more fuel for our destination, which was only 30 miles away. He said we had enough. We did, but just barely. Our route took us over heavily forested areas that had no suitable landing spots. I was sweating the fuel. The gage was on zero. The tower told us to follow the jet on final. We had to tell him that we needed to land immediately, and thank goodness, he let us. The flight manual said the tank hold X gallons,



Photo by Sheldon Cohen/Bell Helicopter

and that's exactly what we added when we filled the tank. I don't know how it didn't flame out.

I was not an inexperienced pilot at this time. I knew better, but I got talked out of it”.



Cessna 182

“I had a friend who had a Cessna 182. I had given him some flight instruction in the past. His Cessna had a leak in the left wing cell. He asked me to help him change it out. Since the fuel cells were old, it was a good time to replace the right wing cell too. The only fuel we had was what we drained out of the two fuel cells. There was no fuel on the field. We strained the old fuel - which was only about 10 gallons, and put it all in the left wing. We thought that would be enough to fly to a nearby field where we could top it off. We cranked it up and shut it down to check for leaks. We burned of a bit of fuel for that. Cranked it up again and took off. The owner was flying. He made a lazy turn away from our destination – which got my attention. I would have turned the other way – the shortest way to where we would refuel. I knew we were going to be very close on fuel and didn't want to waste any of what we had. We eventually got headed in the right direction. As

we approached the field I was puckering – fuel was way low. Instead of entering a quick pattern to final, he overflew the field and began to enter a “normal” traffic pattern. As we were turning final the engine sputtered. I pushed the throttle forward and the engine quit. My friend let loose of the controls and said “You got it.” The terrain beneath and in front of us was as good as you can get for a forced landing off the airport, so there was some comfort in that. As I lowered the flaps for the forced landing the engine came back to life and ran for a few seconds – just enough to allow a bit of a climb and assure us of making the runway. Then it quit for sure. I lowered the flaps all the way and landed on the runway.”



R-22

“I hold a helicopter as well as a commercial multi engine fixed wing license...I wanted to

do a cross country from Camarillo to Las Vegas...I brought along a CFI as a copilot. The aircraft was a R-22Beta.

We did three refuels...one at Las Vegas, and two at Daggett. On our way back to CMA we flew off course to look at Dodger Stadium...I checked the fuel level and noticed we had 10 gallons to get home. The wind must have changed or we spent too much time sightseeing or both. Later we were passing Van Nuys along 101 Freeway...we had less than 4 gallons left.

I wanted to refuel...but demurred to the CFI who said we would be on the ground for a half-hour with the refueling. At that point and time we had been flying for over 8 hours ...GETHOMEITIS. We were in sight of our home base... listened for the ATIS and called the tower when the IDIOT LIGHT (low fuel light) went on. The traffic was busy with everyone coming home and a lot of



fixed wing touch-and-go's. The tower asked us to hold two miles east. Tick...tick...tick. At that time we should have called for an emergency landing low fuel. My eyes were staring at the IDIOT LIGHT and fuel gage.

We thought we would have to make an emergency landing in an empty parking lot or onion field.

The CFI was counting the minutes...tick...tick.

I slowly (25mph) flew toward the field...without tower approval. We finally got clearance to land. We dropped down to 400 feet. I looked at every empty spot on the way in. When we were over the airport we dropped down to hover taxi in the event the engine would flame out. We landed two very stressed pilots.

We should have refueled at Van Nuys. We could have killed ourselves and possibly others.

When I do any hangar talk I always tell this story...and how dumb...dumb I was. The R-22 Emergency Procedure says that when the low fuel light comes on there is approximately one gallon of useable fuel...the engine may run out of fuel after five minutes at cruise power. I was the PIC...I should have refueled at Van Nuys...I should have called for an emergency landing...low fuel."



OH-58A

This was near Yakima, Washington. There was a big exercise underway. I was the

Maintenance Officer for a Cav Troop. One of our OH-58's had a problem and was set down in a field as a precaution. We got the info on the precautionary landing, and a Mechanic and I got into another OH-58 and

minute flight. Soon after take-off the low fuel light came on. I knew the prudent thing to do was to land and have fuel delivered to me. The road I was following had plenty of spots where I could land close to the



Photo by Sheldon Cohen/Bell Helicopter

flew to the downed aircraft. We were quickly able to determine that the fix could not be done in the field; but the aircraft could be flown, one time, to maintenance. I swapped my aircraft with the downed crew. The commander was impressed that we were able to get one of his crews back into the air so quickly. Our preflight was minimal, and I really didn't check the fuel gage. I started it up and took off to go back to our base area. It would be about a 20-

road, and convenient for a fuel truck. There was no real urgency to getting this aircraft back, but I had that internal drive to complete the mission and contribute to the success of the entire exercise. The mechanic asked me if we had enough fuel to get back home. I confidently replied "Yes, of course." By the way, weather was not a problem. It was clear and lots of visibility. The low fuel light continued to raise my anxiety, but my stupid pride overrode

my better judgment and made me keep going. I certainly didn't want to get laughed at by my peers if I had to make a landing and wait for fuel to be brought to me. Besides, the terrain was gently rolling with mostly grassy fields. I could set it down just about anywhere. And even if I did have a flame out I was certain that I could handle the autorotation.

I made a straight-in approach and no-hover landing at the fuel point. They added 70 gallons into a tank that held 71.5 gallons."



Schweizer 300

"During my instrument training in a Schweizer 300C my instructor and I were cleared for a practice ILS approach at Stewart International in New York. While passing the final approach fix, ATC had us abort the approach due to a Citation on 10 mile final. Feeling pretty good about the previous approaches, I was rewarded with a nice 25 nm VFR flight back home. With the sun to our backs it was hard to notice the low fuel light was illuminated. But after triple checking the fuel gage with my instructor, we both realized that we had committed one of the Cardinal sins! While being so consumed with getting in one more approach we never took the fuel into consideration. I've read many stories about fuel exhaustion and wondered how someone could get into such a situation. Now

I'm actually the author of one! The trip back was quite uneventful. We had plenty of forced landing areas, and even enough fuel to land on the dolly. Looking back now, trying to make it back was the wrong decision. As with any other of these low fuel light stories, pride took over and the embarrassing thought of explaining it afterward kept us going. I know it's a proud feeling to be a pilot. But at times it's pride that can take that away.



206L

"1981 Spring time in the Gulf of Mexico. 100 to 110 miles south of the Louisiana coast line. I was going to pick up 4 passengers and for navigation I had time, distance, heading (no Loran-C). As my time was expiring a squall line prohibited further flight to the south. I decided to turn around and find a platform to land on and wait out the weather. As I made my 180-degree turn another squall line was right in front of me. I flew northeast for a while trying to get around the weather – no landing areas in sight. Time went by and my fuel low light came on. The two squall lines were merging and I wound up flying at translational lift just 5 to 10 feet above the water. The rain was so heavy I could barely see the tips of the rotor. After 15 minutes into the low fuel light I inflated the floats and continued my search for a place to land. I found a deserted platform and hovered

up the leg and landed on top with about 17 to 18 minutes into my fuel low light. After the storm passed I managed to contact another company aircraft and had him relay my predicament. Single aircraft platform and no fuel to go anyplace. I spent the night, and the next day a boat came with fuel. After several hours of climbing up and down with 5 gallon cans of fuel, I finally had enough to fly to a fuel platform. The weather in the Gulf of Mexico can change in no time. From that time on I made up my mind that the only time you had too much fuel was when you were on fire."



R-22

"Never. I don't. Robinson states in a R-22 if the low fuel light comes on you have 5 minutes of flite time left. I don't trust the fuel gages or light so I always top the tanks and know what fuel is needed for whatever flite I do. What is so hard about doing something that can save your ship or your life?"



As we mentioned at the beginning of this article, we estimate that there are few experienced helicopter pilots who can claim that they have never landed with the fuel low light illuminated. Landing with the fuel low light illuminated is not however an admission that many make with pride; and most who have done so have an

“I’ll never do something like that again” comment at the conclusion of their stories. From these and other oral responses we received several themes seem to repeat themselves.

“*I got talked out of it*” is one of them. Often it was the junior pilot who was influenced by someone he considered to be senior/more experienced and therefore correct; and then both were frightened by almost running out of fuel.

“*It wasn’t what I expected.*”

Ah yes - the winds were greater than forecast, or there was a storm that I had to fly around, or I had to wait for a Special VFR clearance, or it took longer to complete my mission before I could head back for fuel, etc, etc.

“*Sheer stupidity.*” I knew it

would be tight when we took off, but I was in a hurry and didn’t want to wait for fuel. This is a helicopter, if fuel gets tight I can set it down anywhere. We flew past several places where we could land and refuel but didn’t. My boss changed his destination and I was not assertive enough to tell him that I would have to return for more fuel. I didn’t want to land short of destination and have to call the office to get them to bring fuel out to me.

In addition to these recurring themes there are two other items of note that come out of these low fuel stories. There seems to be a great reluctance amongst helicopter pilots to (1) Declare an emergency, or to (2) Land short of destination.

Somehow these actions are connected to a weird sort of “Death before Dishonor” mentality. Apparently declaring an emergency, or landing short of destination are not considered to be viable options even in an emergent situation. Perhaps the thinking is that these would lead to too much embarrassment, or be an admission of cowardice.

We submit that suffering a flameout after failing to declare an emergency, or after failing to land short of destination is guaranteed to be embarrassing, if you are fortunate to live through it.



