



RVator's Log

Newsletter of the Twin Cities RV Builder's Group

Shop Notes

- Doug

September 2025

In this issue

Special: Miracle on Hatfield Lake

* * * * *

Upcoming Events

**TC RV Builders Fall Fly-In
and Picnic**

**Saturday, Sept, 13, Noon
Details page 8**

* * * * *

**Minnesota Wing
Van's Air Force**

**Pres: Doug Weiler, 651-398-
1184, dcw@mnwing.org**

**Sec/Treas: Bernie Weiss
612-845-6178**

www.mnwing.org

"Miracle on Hatfield Lake"

It's Thursday morning, July 17 and as I drive out to my hangar at Lake Elmo, I thought... "What a great morning to go flying.!" We do get a couple super, duper days each year and this was one of them... clear and calm. I try and fire up the RV a couple times a week. Maybe do a couple instrument approaches or test my mettle with some steep turns and stalls. Got to stay in the game and practice makes perfect (or at least slightly better than average.)



I'm rolling the airplane out of the hangar when a voicemail pops up on my phone. "This is Officer Halsted from the New Richmond Wisconsin police department. Could you please call me back." Hmm.... what is this? I haven't been to New Richmond in months. Don't know of any outstanding tickets or any serious crimes I have committed there. I know... it's one of those scams! Some shady person in eastern Europe asking for a donation to the local police association. I blew it off for a few minutes but then I thought maybe I'll call the number and see what plays out.

So I call back and yes, it is the New Richmond dispatcher and he transfers me to Officer Halsted. She asks, "Do you know a Nancy Burkholder?" Whoa! The alarm bells go off in my brain! "Yes, I do." "Well, there has been an accident at

the airport. Nancy is OK, but she asked me to call you. She's right here and wants to talk to you."

Nancy gets on the line and tells me, "Doug, I'm OK, but I'm all wet and my airplane's in the lake."

"Oh my gosh!!! Just hang in there. I'm on the way!!" I put the airplane back in the hangar, jump in the car, plug in the New Richmond police station in my phone map, and speed out of 21D.



A perfect morning to fly

Twenty minutes later, I arrive at the station and am escorted to a side office and introduced to Officer Halsted and there is Nancy, wet and a little bedraggled but basically OK. We talk for a while as I try and get the sequence of events that led to this. We finally clear everything with Officer Halsted and we're free to go back to the airport.



KRNH looking to the northwest

Driving back to RNH, Nancy tells me the story of overrunning runway 22 and flipping upside down into Lake Hatfield. I am so thankful she is relatively uninjured (a couple scraps on her arm.) In fact, the more she tells me the more incredulous I become at her amazing escape. More on that later. We drive into the airport and turn into the north hangar area just as airport manager Mike Demulling and his team are pulling Nancy's airplane along the grass runway and up to the hangars. A couple police officers are still there, and we gather up some of Nancy's belongings which they pulled out of the airplane and put them in my trunk.

N69NB (nicknamed "Athena") looked pretty rough. One wingtip is bent, weeds stuck in the rudder, prop slightly out of whack, canopy broken. All

things considered, I suppose it is not quite as bad as I would have imagined. The airplane is secured in RV-10 owner Pete Salisbury's hangar and Nancy and I begin the drive back to her home at Sky Harbor airpark in Webster, MN.

*Let's pause my part of the story for a moment and hear from airport manager **Mike Demulling** who wrote this for the New Richmond airport newsletter:*

July 17th. Seven fifteen AM. I'm sitting at my desk in the business aviation terminal working away. Ring, ring. "Airport Manager." "Mike, it's Monte in hangar 10 dash 2. I have a soaking wet pilot here who said she just went off the end of runway 22 into Hatfield Lake. Nobody else was onboard. EMS is en route." "Thanks Monte. I'm on my way."

We had our own Sully experience on a clear and slightly coolish Thursday morning in mid-July. It was an absolute miracle this was not a fatal accident. MIR-A-CLE. A Minnesota based pilot who was stopping by New Richmond for



fuel, attempted a landing on the airport's secondary runway, known as runway 22 near the south end of the airport. The Van's RV-6, two seat experimental aircraft skidded off the end of a fairly slick, completely dew-covered grass runway. The aircraft ended up inverted in the water of Hatfield Lake.

The RV-6 has a canopy that tilts forward for aircraft entry and egress. You can do the math. It's going to be tough to exit when the aircraft is inverted, filling with water, and sinking rapidly.

After checking on the 72-year-old pilot and verifying there were somehow, someway, only very minor injuries, I headed to the departure end of runway 22 and started working the problem. NRPD was on scene and NRFD & Rescue was en route.



I notified the FAA Great Lakes Ops Center who got the NTSB on the blower with us, and we got to work. After sending the NTSB investigator the first couple of photos of the accident scene, he fired back "Was the pilot some sort of escape artist?" The twelve foot Alumacraft rowboat local pilot and hangar owner Bob Perkins donated to the airport nearly twenty years ago was wrangled from the seaplane ramp area and was put to sea with a couple of fire fighters to stop a minor fuel leak and work on securing the aircraft.

After a slew of photos were sent to the FAA and NTSB, the airport received permission to pluck the aircraft from the deep slightly after ten AM. Using a combination of airport equipment, fire department personnel, and a couple of tow trucks from Jerry's Towing, we were able to maneuver the aircraft towards the extended centerline of the grass runway and carefully lift it back onto dry land without further damaging the aircraft. I overheard a call from the crowd "You caught a big one!" followed by a few well-deserved groans from the others. Thanks

for that. The aircraft had relatively minor damage. A tweaked right wing and of course being waterlogged. But overall, not too bad. Hats off to airport employee Robert Rice, NRPD, NRFD, and St. Croix County Sheriff's Department for their absolutely exceptional work. Many, many thanks for your efforts. Five out of five stars.

As Nancy and I drove back to her house, we did a lot of soul-searching. It was a perfect morning to go flying. So easy to do when your hangar is in your backyard! She left at sunup (0530), buzzed over to Red Wing for a landing and then

to Menomonie for the same. Back to New Richmond to get gas. Nothing wrong with landing on the grass runway as its next to the gas pumps. But something was off. A little fast, a little high perhaps and a longer than normal flare. Wet grass... braking might have been marginal if any. Off the end into the water. Suddenly a beautiful morning becomes a survival situation. No one knew she was going flying that morning. No one saw the accident at 0700 in the quiet of the rural airport in western Wisconsin. The lake is probably 10 feet lower than the end of the runway and not visible from the hangars. The water at the shoreline is not all that deep. The airplane was inverted floating for a time but sinking as it filled with water. How did she get out?

Let Nancy tell her story....

Dawn, Thursday, July 17, the weather was cool and clear, I departed on a local flight with a planned fuel stop at KRNH. The weather was ideal. As I approached KRNH I entered a left base for 22. I have landed here dozens of times. On final I was a little high and slipped to correct. As I was setting up to flare I realized I did not have enough runway left to land. With my speed close to stall, I knew I could not stop in time. I have never tried to abort a landing so late and did not feel confident that a botched go around might make the situation worse. I chose the lake.

I mostly remember the whole sequence of events except for two; how I righted myself after unbuckling my harness and how I exited Athena.

I cleared some trees and brush before landing in the lake. When the wheels entered the water Athena flipped on her back. One second I'm seeing sky and lake, and the next water. I remember seeing water squirting into the cockpit from every crack. The instrument panel displays were still lit. I remember thinking I could die here. I reached down to unlatch the canopy and tried to push the canopy open and but could not open it. Then I unbuckled my 4-point harness and the next thing I remember was being right side up, my feet resting on the canopy and my head above the water with Athena above me. I knew the canopy wouldn't open until the water pressure equalized on both sides. Athena sank a few more inches and I felt my feet push the canopy open.

The next thing I remember is being outside Athena holding on to the wing. Athena knocked over a couple of small trees and I was able to put my feet on one tree under the water and grab hold of another tree with my hands. I made my way a couple dozen feet to the shore. The shoreline was dense with tall brush and small trees, and it took several minutes to thread my way to reach the grass at the end of the runway. To the best of my knowledge no one witnessed my accident. The time was 0702.



I lost everything except for my thoroughly drenched clothes; glasses, iPhone, hearing aids, belt bag, flight bag. I walked about 600 feet to the nearest hangar, which was occupied. I announced my predicament and requested they call 911 and the airport manager. Folks got me a chair, and I sat down. They asked if I was hurt or needed anything. After a few minutes police, paramedics, and emergency responders arrived. I answered their questions and the paramedics were satisfied I did not need medical care.

An NRPD officer suggested I go to the station since there was no reason for me to stay at the airport. The

station would be a convenient place for someone to pick me up. I did not know anyone's number, but the officer was finally able to reach Doug, who arrived about 45 minutes later. At that time the police reported that Athena had been pulled from the lake and that I could go to the airport to retrieve any personal items. The responders found my belt bag containing my wallet and I found my iPhone, glasses, and flight bag on the passenger side floorboard. The iPhone still worked after being submerged for three hours.

The recovery team towed Athena to Pete Salisbury's hangar. Pete reached out to let me know I could store Athena in his hangar and not to worry about leaving her there. Doug drove me home. I was home before noon. Doug and Pete supported my most pressing needs that morning.



The next day I connected with the FAA and NTSB via email. Each agency provided me with a list of records they wanted and forms to fill out. I also called my insurance company to file a claim. Over the weekend a friend drove me to KRNH where I retrieved some additional items: headsets, seat cushions, and other artifacts the responders had collected. I took detailed pictures of Athena's damage. The canopy was smashed. The rightwing tip crumpled inward. The wing leading

edges were dinged. The cowling and gear leg fairings were cracked. The propeller had dings and the engine would not turn over.

My July adventure was only just beginning. Five days after my accident I had total hip replacement surgery. Surgery went well and now I am ambulatory challenged to stumping around with a walker. Over the week I collected pilot and airplane logbook information as requested by FAA, NTSB, and insurance. I estimate I spent about 20 hours preparing the information. On the following Monday I had all my documentation ready, and after double checking for accuracy, sent the documentation via email to the FAA, NTSB, and insurance. The FAA and NTSB acknowledged receipt. My insurance claim is pending.





This more or less brings me to my current status. First on my to do list when I am medically able to fly is to satisfy the FAA request to complete some additional training to address the root cause of the incident, namely landings (including soft field landings) and low altitude go arounds. I can do this with an instructor of my choice in an airplane that reflects my future flying endeavors.

At this time my future plans, beyond getting back into the cockpit, are unknown.

I have been building an RV9 for the past three years that is mostly paid for and probably a year away from completion.

I would like to return to flying much sooner, either renting or buying a plane. I do not know yet how my options will be shaped by insurance.

In 20-20 hindsight the time to initiate a go around was when I was over the numbers, on speed, and flaring to land, not at incipient touchdown at the departure end. I've flown Athena for 24 years and accumulated 1420 hours. I was still learning and refining my technique. On this landing I was high and fast. I lost situational awareness as I was attempting to slow sufficiently to land. Airlines practice stabilized approaches that require specific metrics to be met to decide whether to continue landing or go around. On a longer runway bleeding off speed before touchdown is not the serious situation as it is on a 2000-foot runway with a lake at the end.

I am grateful to be here to tell my story by the grace of God. I want to thank Doug and Pete, and all who have reached out to support me. Beyond lessons learned, I feel blessed to be a member of the MN RV Wing.

Epilogue...

Nancy is recovering from both her recent medical procedures and also the trauma of the accident. She looks forward to getting back to flying in a rental or perhaps a replacement RV. She continues work on her RV-9 which is coming together well. As pilots we are all too aware that any flight can go sideways in a heartbeat. We mitigate the risk by any number of ways: training, recency of experience, good maintenance, wise aeronautical decision making, etc. etc. But no one is immune from the consequences when the “holes in the Swiss cheese” line up resulting in an accident.

But then again, miracles do happen....

“Can you hand me the 96 15/16
wrench from my toolbox...”



Twin Cities RV Builder's Fall fly-in and Picnic Saturday, September 13 – 12 noon

Sky Harbor Air Park (1MN8)

**N44 31.7, W093 19.5, FGT (115.7) 218 degree radial, 9.0 nm, CTAF: 122.9
4255 Chester Ct, Webster, MN 55088**

We are back to Sky Harbor!!!! It has been 7 years since we have gathered at the airpark and we are so grateful that the folks at Sky Harbor are welcoming us back. The first fly-in/drive-in picnic was way back in June of 1990 and we had 50 folks attend. Just a couple years later a dozen RV-4s and RV-6s gathered at Jerry VanGrunsven's home.

Yep, for over **30 years** we have gathered at Sky Harbor to indulge in great food and enjoy an afternoon of great RV talk and great RV friends. The plan is the same. Our guests are Ron and Mary Ovans and the residents of Sky Harbor. Bring your family and friends plus chips or dessert to share. The grill will be cranking out brats and hot dogs courtesy of SteinAir and all the other necessities will be provided.



Fly-ins welcome of course!! Unicom on 122.9 and ***please, please, please fly SAFE!!!!*** Look for the friendly parking crew.

More details on the website at www.mnwing.org

Flying Directions: 1MN8 is a 2700 foot turf runway 30-12. Field elevation is 1100 feet. Left hand pattern. Parking will be along the parallel taxiway on the south side of runway by the Ovans' home on the northwest corner of the airpark.

Driving directions from Minneapolis (due to road closure and staying on paved roads): going south on I35 to the Elko/New Market (exit 76) and go east on CTY RD 2 (Deuce Rd.) Turn right (south) at Pillsbury Ave. Turn right (west) on 280th (CTY RD 86). Go west on 280th/86 six miles to Fairbanks (CTY RD 3). Turn south. Follow CTY RD 3 around to the east through Webster and turn right (south) on Canby. Go south and turn right on 45th and it turns into Chester Ct. The Ovans home is at the end of the cul-de-sac (4255 Chester Ct.) Congratulations!! You made it! Lost? call Doug at 651-398-1184.



≠

