OVER THE BACK FENCE

By Jack Fichter

How many could land a plane without a pilot?

I like old stuff — houses from the late 1700s through the 1800s, cars from 1930 to 1970 and music from the 1950s to the end of the 1980s.

Classic television shows are my favorites. I remarked to my better half that the current writers strike has no effect on my television viewing habits unless the writers travel back in time to 1965.

I've renewed my obsession with steam locomotives, and it will get worse this fall when the Woodstown Central begins running a steam train just an hour away from here. I watch a live web camera from the Strasburg Railroad on my smart TV every midday to see the steam train come and go.

I've flown on very old airplanes for news stories, one of which was a B-17 that later crashed, killing seven.

I flew in a 1928 Ford Trimotor purchased by a farmer who started a barnstorming tour across America in the 1980s. My flight had one pilot and no co-pilot. I didn't really think much about a crash until we got up in the air and I thought, "If this guy dies, could I land this plane?"

In March, the Washington Post published a story on the age-old question of whether an inexperienced person could land a plane safely in an emergency.

In a survey, 30 percent of respondents said they could land a jet. The Washington Post placed four civilians in a flight simulator of an Airbus 320 at the University of North Dakota. Of the four, two would have crashed the plane. One person, who had past flying experience, was able to land the jet in the simulator and a travel writer who spent two days in the simulator prior to the test was able to land the plane with a lot of direction from a pilot.

The television show "Mythbusters" featured four participants in a Cessna 172 simulator. Three crashed the plane despite explicit instructions, but one made a safe landing. So when flying, always have three others with you and one of them will be able to land a plane.

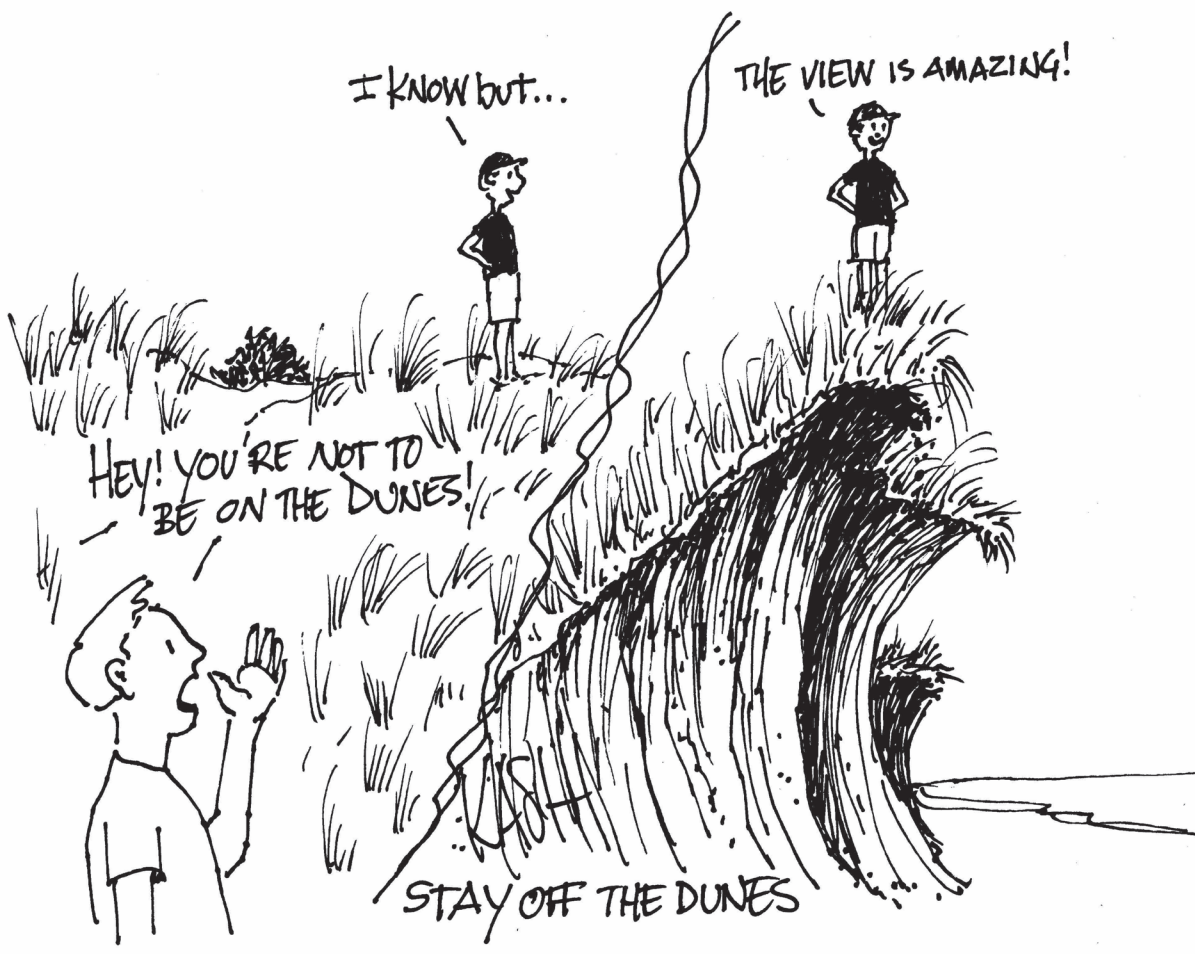
Patrick Smith, an airline pilot flying Boeing 767 aircraft and the author of the popular book and blog "Ask the Pilot," told CNN that a person with no flying experience taking over the controls of a commercial passenger plane at altitude would have no chance of a successful outcome.

"A non-pilot wouldn't have the slightest idea how to even work the communications radios, let alone fly and land the jet," he said.

If the average person must make an emergency landing, it looks like the fat lady will sing, it's curtains and everyone will be knocking on heaven's door.

Getting back to my Ford Trimotor flight, could I have landed the plane if the pilot were incapacitated? I would have tried and since we were flying over Tampa Bay, I probably would have tried a Captain Sully landing into the water. I would have made the announcement that I didn't know how to fly but I did stay at a Holiday Inn Express last night.

Looking back now I realize there was another pilot on board the Ford Trimotor, a radio station owner who owned a Beechcraft.



YOUR VIEWS

Stop signs a poor, hasty choice on Elmira St.

To the Editor:

I am writing about the recent addition of three stop signs on Elmira Street for the specific purpose of controlling speed.

It is my understanding, and according to the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, speed control is not the purpose of a stop sign. A stop sign is used to regulate traffic through an intersection.

The corner of Venice and Elmira is not a busy intersection and the stop sign on the street of lesser volume was sufficient in regulating the traffic flow.

With respect to speeders on Elmira — yes, there are many. However, I believe there may be other ways to enforce speed control.

Observing the traffic flow after the installation of the three stop signs, most cars slow down and roll through them and then resume their speed. Many of the drivers are angry because they have to stop, and they actually accelerate faster as they zoom down Elmira. One motorist was so angry that he looked at me and started cursing, as if I had installed the signs. The stop signs are not regulating speed.

According to guidelines from the MUTCD developed by the United States Federal Highway Administration, stop signs are not to be used for speed control and not to be installed unless justified by a traffic engineering study.

These signs were installed to regulate speed not in compliance with MUTCD and a traffic study was not conducted, additionally not in compliance with MUTCD.

They are not solving the problem of speeders on Elmira Street and other methods would be much more suitable in doing so.

Eloise Boccella
Cape May

OTHER SIDE

Booming victory at Red Bank heard all the way in Cape May

By MARK ALLEN

It was perhaps the loudest explosion ever, up until that point, in the Western Hemisphere.

The explosion was so loud that it could be heard, or rather felt, some 70 air miles away on the southern tip of the Cape May peninsula. Watermen working creeks and wetlands in what would someday be transformed into Cape May Harbor heard what sounded like rolling thunder from a far-off storm, but there wasn't a cloud in the sky.

Communication was surprisingly efficient in the colonies in 1777. Less than a week later, word arrived of a horrific battle off the shores of Gloucester County at a place called Red Bank. It was reported that during the battle, the fledgling Continental Navy had engaged a British flotilla and managed to set fire and destroy its flagship, the third-rate ship-of-the-line HMS Augusta.

If true, it was big news as the Augusta was a full-size British ship-of-the-line carrying 64 heavy cannon. Compared to the diminutive American galleys, it was a Goliath. Reported to be the largest British man-of-war then in America, HMS Augusta had supposedly caught fire and exploded with a deafening roar, the roar that had been heard and felt on what would someday be known as the Other Side of Cape May.

Colonists everywhere were hungry for details about the battle, none more so than those at the very southern tip of the Jersey peninsula. After all, the initial warning of the British fleet's arrival and approach had originated with rebel spies manning watchtowers overlooking the mouth of Delaware Bay. After the British victories at Brandywine and Germantown, the redcoats had invested themselves in the capital city of Philadelphia and settled in for the long winter to come.

But there was a problem. Although the British fleet had made it all the way up the Delaware River to very doorstep of Philadelphia, they had been unable to break through the final barrier and resupply the army. Worse, since Washington's ragtag army occupied the high ground north and west of the city, resupply could not be easily gleaned from the surrounding countryside.

Consequently, even though his victorious army was comfortably billeted in the rebellious nation's capital, Gen. Sir William Howe's British troops were beginning to starve. The problem was a pair of key colonial outposts located just south of Philadelphia. Fort Mifflin, situated in the middle of the Delaware River, and Fort Mercer on the New Jersey side had successfully staved off repeated British attempts to reopen the river, thus denying Howe's army much-needed provisions. And Christmas was

See **Other Side,** *Page A7*

WAVES FROM THE PAST

Cape May Harbor channel dredged in 1923

The Cape May Star and Wave, the nation's oldest weekly resort newspaper, has been published since 1854. Each week, we revisit stories from earlier editions. This week we turn the clock back 100 years to our March 24, 1923, edition when the government was taking action to remove "cork from bottleneck" between the stone jetties of Cape May Harbor:

In a communication from Washington last Friday, good news was contained for all interests about Cape May Harbor. For years, every possible effort has been made to have the government dredge between the stone jetties at the harbor entrance. (Now Cape May Harbor and Cape May Harbor Entrance and not "Cold Spring" as often given).

The communication was as follows: "Washington, D.C., March 18, 1932. Congressman Bacharach today was advised by the Chief of Engineers of the War Department that a survey of Cape May Inlet Channel shows a shoal at the entrance between the outer ends of the jetties with a least depth of 8.5 feet at mean low water.

There is, however, a channel way 200 feet wide with a minimum depth of 18 feet alongside this shoal and between the shoal and the west jetty. This survey also shows that a controlling depth of 15 feet exists in the remainder of the project channel extending to a point about opposite the inner end of the west jetty. Instructions are being issued for the preparation of specifications with a view to securing bids at the earliest practicable date for restoration of the entrance channel to full project dimensions of 25 feet in depth and 400 feet in width and for alternate bids for a depth of 20 feet, award to be dependent on the bids received."

While here recently government engineers frankly declared that it was expected that all other interested groups would make every effort to have the bars inside the harbor project dredged out. These include the fishing interests at Schellenger's Landing, both party and commercial, and at Two Mile Beach and Otten's Harbor, Wildwood, the Pennsylvania Railroad at Two Mile, the Reading at Cape May, the yachtsmen, the Delaware Bay and River Pilots' Association, Cape May City, and shipping companies. And most important, of course, the state through the Inland Waterways.

The channel swinging northward and eastward from the main entrance channel into Two Mile, and the channel passing Base Nine and on to Schellenger's Landing, are both shallowed up to form serious obstructions to navigation entering the harbor.

In view of the situation, which is the most promising in years, those who strongly advocate the improvements are making every effort to get together for the common good.

ANOTHER VIEW

Fireflies may be disappearing

By New Jersey Conservation Foundation

If ever there were creatures with the power to make a summer night magical, it would be fireflies — also known as lightning bugs.

Watching fireflies twinkling among the backdrop of wildflowers, shrubs and trees on a warm summer night is a mesmerizing and awe-inspiring experience. These bioluminescent beetles use a chemical reaction in their bodies to flash signals to the opposite sex that they're ready to mate. They are Mother Nature's own fireworks.

But if it seems to you that there aren't as many fireflies now as there were a couple of decades ago, you're not alone. All around the world, people are noticing fewer of these "jewels of the night."

"Anecdotal reports from around the globe describe fewer individuals being seen each year," according to the Xerces Society, a nonprofit working to conserve insect biodiversity.

However, there have not been many studies tracking firefly species, so there's little information about where the declines are occurring and how severe they are.

"It's hard to get great numbers because of the amount of sampling you'd need to do," said Dr. Jon Gelhaus, a Camden County resident and an entomologist at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University in Philadelphia. "There's concern by people who study fireflies that they're in decline — some species in some areas."

"I think there's some variation in years," he added. "We've had years (in New Jersey) when fireflies were incredible, and years when they were not."

The next few weeks will tell what kind of year 2023 will be in New Jersey, as most adult fireflies emerge from the ground in late June through July. The only goal of these emerging adults is to mate and lay eggs; they will not live to see another season.

Worldwide, there are an estimated 2,400-plus firefly species. New Jersey has about 21, including two that were recently described as new to science. Not all are nocturnal and not all are luminescent. Two of the most common in this state we're in are the eastern firefly, also known as the "big dipper" (Photinus pyralis), and the Pennsylvania firefly (Photuris pensylvanica).

Of the luminescent fireflies, said Gelhaus, each has its own distinctive pattern of flashes. Some have a greenish-yellow glow, while others have a more amber-yellow color. Some firefly species stay low to the ground, some prefer to fly high in the trees and others stay mid-canopy.

"It's pretty cool. They're not only flashing light, but doing it to find each other," Gelhaus said. "The males are flashing to females, and the females are answering."

He suggests that firefly watchers observe carefully to see how many different flash patterns, colors and flying levels they can identify.

A 2020 study in the journal Bioscience identified habitat loss/change, light pollution and

See **Another View,** *Page A10*

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