

Richard P. Pedersen

Valley View, TX

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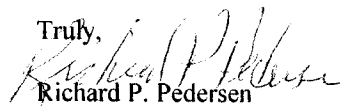
Ms. Deb Cottier  
206 Norfolk Avenue  
P.O. Box 819  
Norfolk, NE 68702

Dear Ms. Cottier:

Here is a short story about the Blizzard of "49", from a book I am writing so our children and Grand children Will have an idea of our life during the depression, and how their Grandparents got started. There also is a copy of a picture from the book "Blizzard" by Roy W. Alleman. The caption under the picture should read Superintendent H.K. Douthit getting supplies for the UNSA Curtis dormitory. I am the pilot the A/C number was N89121.

Would you ask the Amundson's if they had any relatives at the UNSA at Curtis in the "40's".

Truly,



Richard P. Pedersen

## Blizzard

The snow snakes slither down the road.  
And the mercury drops from out the glass.  
While the wind a murdering gale she blowed.  
The snow would drift and close the pass.  
And the cold would chill you to your gizzard.  
“Hell”, man this is a BLIZZARD!

When the fall of 1949 was approaching I was lucky enough to get a contract to teach at District 10 in Frontier County, a one room country school on the Curtis airport. It would be hard work because I would have 37 students in all grades but the sixth. Still I was in luck for now it would be easy for me to build flying time.

I had been at the house in town for three days, the snow was so heavy and with winds over thirty miles per hour, you could not see past the windowpane. On the fourth day the wind dropped, to a gentle breeze, and the sun came out. Like every one else I headed out to see what the roads were like. There were none just drifts of snow; the cut banks on the road to our place, and to the school I was teaching were drifted full. All thirty to forty feet, also the passes that the railroad came through were full, and the one east of town had a train stuck in it under thirty feet of snow. Any way we started out east to try and get the folks off the train. We worked with a bulldozer and a road grader and by two that afternoon reached the train. There were not many on the train, but they were sure glad to see us. By that time the wind had picked up again and the road back to town was drifted closed again, it was dark by the time we reached Curtis. Though there were not many on the train, the Curtis Hotel could not accommodate all of them so we put some up in homes of town's people. By morning the roads were drifted closed again, so it was the same thing all over again bulldoze the road open to get out of town. This time I took some food and water with me, with the thought of staying at my schoolhouse to start school early the next day. Just a dream, the wind came up during the night and all the roads were drifted closed by morning. I was able to get Bud Nelson, (president of the school board) on the telephone and we agreed that we would postpone school till the

weather was more settled. With nothing better to do I decided to see if I could dig out my airplane and go see how the cattle had fared on the east place, where we were wintering them. At that time there were no hangers on the Curtis airport, only one small building which had a forty foot piece of pipe with a wind sock attached to it. And I had tied the Cessna 140 down on the south side of that building. As snow will some times do it had drifted around the building and left a clear spot for about seventy or eighty feet.

Luck was with me for when I inspected the plane there was no snow accumulation in the fuselage area so that was one job I didn't have to spend time on. Well I took a scoop and started digging a path back to where the ground was clear, and it looked as if I could get to the runway. After a couple hours and perhaps thirty feet of scooping my lazy side took over and I decided to put the plane up and see if I could get a bulldozer to come dig it out the next day. So I pushed the Cessna back as far as I could, got in and started the engine, and sat there while she warmed up. Then I figured I would taxi backup and tie her down. I started the power up she wouldn't move so I increased the power more wiggled the controls and popped the flaps and fire walled the throttle. Cessna, NC89121 started to move, at about the same time a big gust of wind caught her.

I felt the plane get light and pulled back on the controls and we were airborne, I lifted the left wing to miss the wind sock and we were out of there. There was just time to make it to North Platte before dark. I spent that night in a hotel in North Platte, and then early next day flew back to Curtis by way of our farm. It looked as if the cows had fared better than I would have expected, so back to the airport to get a look at it in the daylight. The runways had multiple drifts on them so I landed on a field just across the road to the south, and walked to town. On the way into town I had been thinking of some means that I could use to feed our cattle. The thought came to me that at the very least I could drop cotton seed cake to them from the plane. So when I got home I told Dad of my plan which was to get some small paper sacks put about two to three pounds of cake in each one and drop them on some clean area near the cows. By mid afternoon I was back in the air and off to bomb our cows. It worked well the sacks would hit the ground and brake open, leaving a small pile of cake, it didn't take those old cows long to figure out where the food was coming from after three or four days they were as tuned in to the sound of the airplane engine as to the horn of a pickup. That feeding worked so well that when I was able to get a 170 from Clinch's we took the door off and dropped bails of hay from it. That was how we feed the cattle for the next thirty days.

On one of the flights from Curtis to North Platte, I was about thirty miles north- west of the Curtis airport over a large area of canyons, when I happened to see a distress signal at a farmhouse in the bottom of one of those canyons. By the time I circled back several people were out waving blankets. So once again I let stupidity take over and decided that I could land close to the house with no problem. The blanket wavers told me that the grandfather had, had a stroke and needed to be in the hospital. Also that the army was supposed to pick him up with a helicopter the day before, but because of the high winds were still on the ground in North Platte waiting for better weather. After looking things over I realized that now I had a problem there was not enough clear room for take off. While they were getting Mr. Madsen ready to brave the cold, his three sons and I worked with scoops to get a longer runway. After about an hour and a half it looked like we were ready to try a takeoff. It took several minutes to convince his wife that she could not go along. Then when we got the old man to the airplane I ask him if he liked to fly, his reply was, "I have never been in a plane till now". Then he reassured me that he was not the least bit afraid because he had figured he was going to die anyway, and at 86 he was ready to go, (now that was a comforting thought). We got the old man in the plane and I held the brakes while applying full throttle, as soon as the power was up I released the brakes when we got a show of air speed. I dropped one notch of flaps, breathed a little prayer and applied light backpressure. She came off and I rolled in a little right aileron to lift the wing over the barn and we were off to North Platte. By calling ahead I was able to have an ambulance waiting when we got to LBF. Mr. Madsen had made the trip in good shape (several weeks later I received a nice note from his family telling me how much he liked his first airplane ride). Right after I helped get Matsen in the ambulance, Pat Clinch told me that the army colonel that had brought the helicopters down from Denver would like to see me. So I went to the office to talk to him. His first words were, "what the hell do you think you were doing, we came down here to make that rescue and you cut us out. Now all we have is a long trip and no publicity at all". Well I had been running twenty-hour days so my reply was not too polite. "Sir I'm sorry you won't get the publicity you were after, but if that's what you wanted to talk to me about, go to hell". I went and swapped the 140 for a 170 so I could feed hay the next day and headed back to Curtis, I called dad on the radio so he could drive out and pick me up at the airport.

When I arrived it was well after dark but Dad had parked his car at the end of the runway with his headlights into the wind and I would land over the top of the car. Unless you have tried a landing like that you can't know how big the shadow of that car is. Over the next two months we used this procedure many times. The next several weeks were filled with many hours in the air. On odd days I would go to Holdrege and pick up the mail, on even days out to Sterling Colorado. Then it would be off to North Platte to bring back food- stuffs for the high school or parts for some ones vehicle. On weekends I could fly some of the high school kids to their homes in the sand hills. It was one of these trips that my guardian angel had his hands full once more. The day was some- what ominous with an overcast at about fifteen hundred feet and some lower scud. One of the boys from north of Mullen father was sick and he needed to get home to help out, so we took off and headed for his ranch. It was about a two and a half- hour flight, navigating was no problem as he knew all the roads and that plus Hi-lines were what we used to navigate by. I dropped Ted off at his place and started home. Shortly after I crossed the Platte River the overcast started to get lower. The further south I went the lower it dropped till I was down to about one hundred feet, now this is January and the outside air temperature is about 10 degrees, then I flew into a light misty condition and started to ice up. Boy does that stuff build fast. Even as I push the power up the plane is slowly losing altitude and now I must open the side window to try to see where I am. By now I just hope to find a field to put her down in, just then I catch a glimpse of the Gorley house and know that the airport is less than a half mile in front of me, if I can just clear the fence. Whew! Just by inches we made it to the runway with full power on the touched down. There must have been two to three inches of ice all over the plane.

Several days after the experience with icing, it was to be but one of the experiences I would have with icing while flying. Dad asked me to pick up some warrants and writs for him at the county court house in Stockville. Because there was a new cover of snow on I thought I would get Doug McMillan to go with me and we could swing by the east place to see if there was any sign of coyote or deer to hunt. We seen several coyotes running in the draws and they did not act shy of the plane so we decided the next day to see if we could shoot some out of the plane. Then we went on to get Dad's papers. When we got to Stockville and looked for a place to land the only thing we could find

was a wheat field south and east of the court house, it didn't look to good so I thought we could land on Hi-way 18. Now in those days all the main roads were graveled, which was no big deal as we landed on them all the time. First I flew east along the road to see if there were any drifts left which could trip us up, then turned back to land to the west with the plan to just taxi up main street to the court house. Well I must have been totaly mesmerized by the snow because I failed to see the cable stretched across the road as a brace between two REA polls. Whump! Suddenly we stopped and bounced up we had hit the cable with the bottom of the tires and went over it. If we had been six inches lower we would have been in one hell of a wreck. We did land and picked up Dad's papers, then took off north right up main-street. A few days later Dad said, "Did you hear that some one hit a REA poll down at Stockville so hard that the shock broke ten polls on to the north". I never said a word. One other thing that hangs in my memory was a trip to Alliance, when a small return oil line froze and burst, I had to stop at five ranches to get oil so the engine would not seize. That sure made a long day. On the up side I got to fly 300 hours in about ninety days. Then there was the call from McCook to come pick up the new vet who had moved in when Doc. Bared died. When I got to McCook the new horse doctor had been fortifying his self against the cold to the point he could hardly walk. Dumb me instead of telling him to find a bed and sober up I put him in the plane and started back to Curtis. On the take off roll we hit some slush with the prop and it made one hell of a noise, which startled the drunken passenger. Doc. Sat up grabbed the yoke and stomped on the right rudder. We ground looped, lucky me the only damage was a bent prop and a little mud in the air scoop. I cleaned the air scoop did a run-up and when I detected no vibration flew back to Curtis. Once again the mechanic at North Platte chewed me out. Yes, the man up stairs surely had his hands full looking after us fools.