



ORM Corner is a bi-monthly department.

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It was late afternoon at a high-elevation Air Force base in the Midwest. We were running a little behind schedule with a plane full of VIPs. The red carpet was out, and the band was playing. We were doing our best to make up the time lost on the front end of the mission. Our speed was restricted to 200 KIAS below 5,000 feet AGL and 7 DME from the airfield. We were also getting the dreaded “slam dunk” descent from ATC. At least we had a choice of runways.

We could land with a crosswind that was at the 21-knot limit, get off at the mid-field taxiway, and park on time. Or, we could land into the wind on the perpendicular runway and taxi two miles back to Base Ops, which would make us late. We took the first option.

I had relatively low time in the C-20, and this was my first line mission. I was out of my comfort zone. On base, I fought hard to descend and slow down. I considered all the ORM stuff that had been pounded into my head for the last year, then I called for full flaps and pressed on. With power at idle and in the landing configuration, I tried to bleed off some of the excess airspeed. I crossed the numbers 20 knots fast, and with a huge ground rush from the higher-than-normal true airspeed (because of the high elevation), I floated down the runway.

As we touched down and the spoilers deployed, the aircraft swerved to the left, weathervaning in the wind. The C-20 is a challenging aircraft in a crosswind and requires a lot of rudder and nosewheel steering to maintain centerline on the rollout. The combination of

higher-than-normal landing speed, high crosswind, and my inexperience in this aircraft put me on a 40-foot drift left of centerline. Curiously, this also happened to be the time when my career flashed before my eyes as I looked at the weeds on the left side of the runway. I considered I would at least blow the nose tires, and it would be a messy ordeal.

My C-20 hung in here, though, and I even managed to get it back to a respectable position on the runway. Having aged about 10 years, I managed to pull into the spot on time. A bonus!

Besides shaky knees and more gray hair, what did I get from this little adventure? The little voice that whispered, “ORM,” was telling me I was violating my comfort zone. I should have listened. We should have gone to the other runway. I could have traded altitude to get back on a normal glide slope, gotten my speed under control, and had the winds down the runway. But, instead, I opted for saving 10 minutes of taxiing. 🛩️

Lt. Freytes flies with VR-1.

The Slam Dunk

by Lt. Bert Freytes