

No one sets out to do stupid things or make foolish decisions. However, when we do, it's most likely because we allowed ourselves to fly into a sequence of circumstances that got us to the point of no return. Because my actions violated several FAA rules, I will remain anonymous. However, I implore every member not to make my mistake, even though I was lucky enough to live through mine.

The phenomenon of "get-there-itis" is real, and 99.9% of pilots will succumb to it at some point in their flying career. Anyone who says they haven't either are lying or are only fair-weather flyers and hardly fly, to begin with. I was no exception. I set out on a summer afternoon to meet my family in Connecticut for a July 4th BBQ. Because I had to work the next day, I choose to fly since it would take less travel time, and I could stay a bit later than if I had driven (plus, does anyone *really* need a reason to fly?)

The weather was VFR at my origin and destination; however, there were some clouds along my route that were hanging out around 3000 MSL. I would cut through the NYC corridor (a must if you've never flown around NYC) and head east after the Tappan Zee bridge. I planned my flight using Foreflight, and even submitted a VFR flight plan but never called for a briefing. Instead, I did a self-briefing using Foreflight and aviationweather.gov website.

Fast forward to the good part: Take off, climb, and the initial cruise was unremarkable. I was cleared through the Class B airspace through the NY corridor at 2000' MSL. Clouds were supposed to be 3000'MSL, right? Wrong! Instead, they dropped to about 2100'MSL and falling. I was in the corridor, so I couldn't do a 180, and I wasn't instrument-rated so that I couldn't ask for a pop-up clearance. So what should I do? I kept flying and started to use Foreflight's Synthetic Vision feature to help guide me during the areas where I was in white conditions while scud running (I know, I know – I can see your face already).

From my briefing, I knew that clouds were supposed to clear up after the Tappan Zee to 5000'MSL, so if I could just make it past the bridge, I'd be home free and in VFR. However, as a dumb private pilot who hadn't learned about IRF weather yet, I didn't understand that the air is colder in the valleys, like the Hudson Valley than up on the hills. Combined with the moisture from the river, it may form fog patches.

So there I was, flying at 2000'MSL heading east, breaking in and out of clouds with them descending on me and the ground climbing up to me. Flying at about 800AGL, seeing the depiction on Foreflight's Synthetic Vision of the towers I was passing, I decided to climb to 2500MSL. And just as I had made that decision, the clouds opened up, and I could see the ground and my path to Danbury.

The rest of the flight was as usual and I landed without issue. However, I was beside myself the rest of the day, and even til today, that I allowed myself to get into that position. I knew better, but the "get-there-itis" got the better of me, and I permitted hubris to let me believe that I had everything under control and that I could fly through this "temporary patch of clouds."

So what's the moral of the story? Don't ever VFR fly into clouds. Period.

The author has since received his instrument rating and has never flown into IMC condition under VFR rules again.