

# Charlie Three's Big Adventure

My name is Charlie 3. I am a Horizon Hobby airplane made mostly from foam. The people who invented me decided to call me a "Timber." I'm pretty basic and lots of people have learned to fly me. I have enjoyed many hours of flying especially by those who treat me well.

Several weeks ago I got lost. My owner, Bill, forgot that I have a mind of my own as I was trying my darnedest to just fly on my own. Well, I decided to leave the confines of our flying area in Maricopa and head northeast to see what was "over there." Boy, was that a mistake!

How the heck was I supposed to know that Daddy Bill couldn't bring me back if he lost sight of me? And besides, I thought that since my SAFE mode was on, that everything would be okey donkey! That my Dad could just bring me home with the flick of a button. Boy, was I wrong!

The next thing I know, I'm headed for Eloy....Oh no! Now I know that my battery was still pretty full and I was flyin' pretty straight and level and it sure was nice not having to fly in circles like over at the field and turn left every time Dad took me off and then brought me back in for those bounced landings where I'd almost toss my lunch each and every time, don't ya know! Yeah, this was great! Out here, on my own, flyin' straight and level with little to no wind and gettin' a birds eye view of all that pretty desert down below! Man, I don't ever want to go back, I'm just gonna keep flyin' on forever....

Uh oh, what's that I hear? Why is my motor starting to sound like it's losing power; it doesn't sound as loud as it did just a minute ago. Why is that nice desert down there getting ever so closer I'm wondering...uh oh. Daaaaaddy, Daaaaddy, help! I think I'm in real trouble now. But I can't be THAT far from home, I mean Dad has still

got to see me, right? Uh oh....  
Meanwhile back at the field....

“Denny, here, take my radio. Charlie 3 has gone off in that direction! Can you see where Charlie 3 went?” Bill asks as he hands his radio to The Denny in hopes that he can somehow see the faint pinpoint of an airplane as it recedes in the distance.

“Hell Bill, I don't see it but maybe I'll get lucky and it'll turn around,” as The Denny pulls hard on the sticks of Bill's Spektrum transmitter.

Alas, Charlie 3 has slipped from their grasp and is headed only God knows where!

“Quick,” Bill shouts. “Let's organize a search party and go after Charlie 3, now!” But not knowing exactly where to head, the last few members of the club still present, just shake their heads and decide it's time to pack it in for the day. Bill's heart is almost broken as he's lost one of his most favorite airplanes....Charlie 3. Not knowing what to do right then, Bill too heads home to decide what his course of action should be to either commence a search for his beloved Charlie 3, or let it go hoping that Charlie 3 has flown on to bigger and brighter blue skies over the I-10 freeway.

With heavy heart, Charlie's Dad Bill, waits several days before putting into effect his plan to scour the central Arizona desert using his friend Tony's multi-rotored drone. Waiting for just the right day which just happens to fall on a Saturday, Bill hooks up with Tony at the field and comes to find that The Denny and Kim are already there with plans to fly.

But wait! Aren't four pairs of eyes better than two? Bill agrees, and so off the foursome go down a dusty and pot-holed dirt road, heading in a north, northeasterly direction just this side of the huge Native American reservation where they decided to begin the search for the lost Timber named Charlie 3, using Tony's multi-rotor drone.

Near the end of the dirt road, they set up a makeshift area for the drone to take off from and settle down in their folding chairs while Tony brings the drone up-to-speed. And off it goes....

“Hey Kim,” Tony says. Are your eyes pretty good? I can't really see the ground too well in this screen of mine and it's real-time signal is good, but my eyeballs just aren't up to seeing close up.

“Sure,” Kim says. “Give me the transmitter and I'll see what I can see but we gotta get this thing higher up for a wider field of view.”

So Kim climbs the drone another 60 to 70 feet while moving the stick forward, slowly, to advance the drone covering the desert in a northeasterly direction.

In about 10 seconds Kim hollers, “THERE IT IS! Holy shit! It's Bill's Timber! Tony, we gotta get this drone down lower for a positive ID. I'm gonna lower it now!”

As the drone descends over what Kim believes is the lost Charlie 3, the drone's liquid crystal screen starts going off-line. Tony says that it's gonna take a few seconds for the telemetry to reboot and to be patient.

The screen clears as predicted and there's what looks like the perfect outline of a small airplane....the lost Charlie 3! The Denny takes a quick peek and sees it too. But the screen only blinks clear for an instant and Kim tells the guys that it's for sure, Bill's plane. Now what to do?

Quickly, and with experienced hands, Tony reaches over and hits the button that locks the Lat/Long coordinates into the LED screen on the left. At least now, the search party has a general idea of where the plane is relative to their position. But, the drone's battery is signaling only a few moments of power left as Tony reaches for the switch that

will automatically bring his multi-rotor back to where it took off from. Fortunately Tony has with him another full battery to fly the drone from an area closer to where they think Charlie went down.

So off the foursome go, Bill and Kim in Bill's car and Tony and The Denny in his truck, heading west to get to the main drag, highway 347, that leads out-of-town with the plan to turn onto Casa Blanca Road. Then head east on Casa Blanca Road to where the Lat/Long coordinates puts the foursome in the area where the missing plane can be reached on foot.

Disregarding the climbing temperature of the Sonoran Desert that early on this July morning, the guys turn off onto a dirt road and head due west until the dirt road ends along a water-filled concrete ditch that local farmers are using to irrigate their cotton. From there, Tony and Kim to decide to hike the couple miles on foot in the sweltering morning heat focusing on one thing and only one thing.... to bring the beloved and lonely plane back to Daddy Bill.

“Tony,” Kim yells. “You see anything? Man-oh-man, it's gotta be 110 by now.”

Tony, far ahead and with his cell phone in hand heading to the coordinates, yells back that he's still not exactly at the right spot.

Tony finally gives up, turns around, and heads back to rendezvous with Kim and says, “Stay here, I'm gonna head back to the truck and fly the drone. When I see Charlie, I'll hover over it. Then you'll be able to go where it's at and pick it up.”

A few minutes later, which seemed like hours in the morning blast furnace, the drone whizzes past Kim, overhead, heading west until it's out of sight. Kim gets on his cell phone and tells Tony to bring it back because it's too far to walk and besides Tony relays that they still don't see the plane when the drone arrives at the preset coordinates.

The four decide that with Tony's batteries depleted, the rescue will just have to be put off until the next day. Tony, ever the optimist, decides later that day to again try to find the downed airplane and searches from a westerly direction, on foot, almost until dark.

Sunday morning, after church, the guys get together for one last all-out effort to find the spot Charlie 3 has holed up in the past couple weeks. (With its battery completely and utterly depleted, Charlie 3 can't even think for itself anymore. Let alone signal the rescue party with a tail or wing wag. And the brutal Arizona sun is taking a toll on poor Charlie. It wasn't bad enough that the tires came off in the mostly level impact on landing or that the ailerons were pointing askew. Nope, the heat had robbed the plane of its vibrant personality. It lay there, in the desert, totally without emotion, for all intents and purposes, a broken foamie).

“Hey Bill,” Tony says. “Let's try to get to Charlie from our side of the reservation heading easterly on foot to the coordinates in my cell phone.”

“Sounds good to me,” Bill responds. And off they go.

Arriving at the Lat/Long coordinates, Tony tells Bill that he's going to put a battery in the drone and fly around the area to try and spot Charlie 3 from the air. Bill agrees and as Tony readies his multi-copter, Bill decides to take a quick look-see in the area himself on foot.

And guess what? Not 15 feet from where Bill starts his search, there laying on the desert ground, looking no worse for wear, is Charlie 3!!! Oh, happy days, happy days!!!

Bill hesitates, but only for a moment. A silent prayer going out to the airplane gods that watch over these little ones. And with tears welling up, Bill walks over to where Charlie is splayed. He also yells for Tony to come, but to please not touch Charlie until they are sure of its condition. Tony runs to where Bill is as Bill pulls out his cell phone to

take a picture of Charlie, Tony standing next to this lost soul, before gently picking the plane up and carrying it back to Tony's truck.

And that is when Bill hears, barely audible, a whisper-like voice come from Charlie. "Dad, I land better by myself."