"Continued VFR Into..."

Despite all the warnings here and elsewhere about scud running, admonitions to perform a 180-degree turn back to better weather and about just staying on the ground in the first place, pilots still find ways to ignore all that advice. Here are three examples of how well that's worked out in the past. Of course, your outcome will be different, right?

APRIL 10, 2003, OXFORD, ALA.

Aircraft: Cessna 180
Injuries: 2 Fatal.
At 1438, FSS advised the pilot that the lowest cloud conditions between Thomasville, Ga., and Gadsden, Ala., were 1200 feet, and that the observation was 23 minutes old. The current observation showed that the weather conditions were beginning to deteriorate and that the ceiling dropped 200 feet. On April 11, a hiker discovered the wreckage at approximately the 1800-foot level. Probable cause: "The pilot's continued VFR flight into IMC conditions and his failure to maintain obstacle clearance."

OCTOBER 7, 2005, TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES, N.M.

Aircraft: Piper PA-28-140
Injuries: 1 Fatal.
Recorded radar data captured a VFR target proceeding south from the airport until it turned to a southwest heading and initiated a climb to 7500 feet. Radar contact was lost at 1208. The nearest weather reporting station, located 34 n.m. east-northeast of the accident site and at an elevation of 4853 feet msl, reported a ceiling of 2500 feet agl (above ground level), or 7353 msl. The wreckage was found two days later at 8100 feet msl near the point where radar contact was lost. Probable cause: "[T]he pilot's attempt to fly VFR into instrument meteorological conditions, and his failure to maintain terrain clearance."

SEPTEMBER 19, 2009, LOWNDESVILLE, S.C.

Aircraft: Cessna 172
Injuries: 2 Fatal.
The non-instrument rated pilot was conducting a personal cross-country VFR flight and had not obtained a weather briefing. Two witnesses heard the airplane make several passes over their location. These witnesses also reported that there had been rain just prior to the accident, and the overcast cloud layer was approximately 100 to 200 feet above treetop level, or about 300 feet above ground level. Examination of the wreckage revealed no pre-impact mechanical malfunctions. Probable cause: "The pilot's inadequate preflight planning and improper decision to continue flight into deteriorating weather conditions, which resulted in spatial disorientation after entering instrument flight conditions."