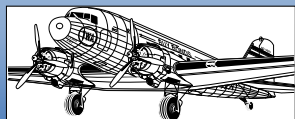


Ken Stoltzfus

Flying Higher



The Professional

No. 5 in a series

Daring to pursue the highest possible level in all of life

The DC-3 had rotated and was just into its climb with the gear coming up, when the left engine quit. The airspeed was "right on" and it was a "feather the engine, do it by the book and fly away" situation, even with 28 passengers on board. But it didn't.

The pilot had applied right rudder and picked up the left wing, but still the Douglas yawed to the left, over some trees beside the runway. More aileron, and the '3 started down. A passenger's video camera recorded the eerie sound of the belly scraping the treetops.

Immediately, the PIC made his call. Power was pulled on the right engine and they headed for a cornfield. The aircraft came to a stop on its belly with no passenger injuries, a mile from the start of the takeoff roll.



It is sometimes said that a professional pilot is one who thinks through potential crises before they happen. Then when they arise his response is premeditated instead of having to decide what to do in the heat of the moment.

Before the accident, this passenger-hopping operation was carefully thought out and was determined to be safe. The potential for an engine failure was considered. So what happened?

The investigation revealed that the rudder was not properly rigged. When the left engine quit there was not enough right rudder to keep the aircraft from yawing. When additional right aileron was applied it created an overwhelming amount of drag (okay, look at a DC-3 aileron and "go figure.")

That, combined with special gear doors that increased cruise speed but acted like barn doors in the retraction cycle, was simply too much drag. It wouldn't fly.

Now put yourself in the pilot's seat. You had determined that you were doing it by the book and that the airplane would fly if an engine quit. You have 28 admiring passengers aboard and hundreds are watching from the ground. A volunteer organization has invested heavily in the aircraft for missionary and relief work on another continent.

Try to feel the pressure and emotion of that moment. The instant denial - - the "This can't be happening." And then, "You gotta do this,

baby, you can't let me down!" *That* is where professionalism kicks in, as it did in this case. Many pilots would have tried to make it go and would have ended up in the trees and high-tension wires just beyond where the aircraft came to rest. But not this professional! He earned my highest respect.

Often when things get to us, it's the result of an emotional response to an undesirable situation. We don't think before we react.

We experience road rage, crush loved ones with harsh words and fall for cheap sex for the same reasons pilots make bad decisions in the cockpit. Too rarely do we premeditate how we will respond, or consider the consequences in this situation or that.

Several dynamics in the American mind are converging to lead to the increase in road rage. What *is* the smart response? And what if we decided now, to do the smart thing the next time some jerk cuts us off?

And how about the times we speak harshly when something doesn't go our way? Couldn't we avoid many hurtful words if we determined to be "quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to get angry," as the Bible says in James 1:19?

It is hard to make a good decision in the heat of the moment when cheap sex is "right there." But a premeditated response based on wedding vows, moral and/or spiritual values, or the reality of disease can empower one to respond in a way we won't regret.

When Jesus came into the world 2000 years ago, He experienced the same temptations we do. However, He always did the right thing. He never fell for the cheap stuff that deprives one of the best. How did He do it?

It's simple! (I didn't say "easy.") He determined in advance to be obedient to God the Father. His response to temptation was premeditated.

We practice single engine and emergency procedures over and over so we're ready when the challenge comes our way. It's a lot like the Bible says in Hebrews 5:14, "Solid food is for those who are mature, who have trained themselves to recognize the difference between right and wrong and then do what is right."

Being a safe pilot, and living well, follow those who contemplate the opportunities and challenges of flying and of life. They weigh the consequences of various courses of action and predetermine what is the right thing to do when the pressure is on. And then when a surprise pops up, they do it!

1999, rev. 7/10, Bible quotations from NLT



Ken Stoltzfus was born in 1940, the son of a crop duster. He has worked as a pilot, pastor, business man, missionary to Africa and writer.

A Commercial Pilot with S&MEL&S, DC-3, Glider and Instrument ratings; CFI with A-I-G ratings; Ground Instructor A&I; and A&P, Ken lives in northeast Ohio with Elaine, his wife of over 50 years. His hobbies are aviation photography and collecting aircraft photos, negatives and slides.

This is #5 in his "Flying Higher" series. ©2010, Ken Stoltzfus, www.John2031.com, P.O. Box 228, Kidron, OH 44636 USA