

**I Knew That Was Coming** (published in AircraftOwner.com January 2012)

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Over the years, I have read more than my share of accident reports and articles about accidents. You have read them as well.

We read that “everything was going fine until the engine quit due to fuel exhaustion”. Or “everything was going fine until the plane hit the side of the mountain”. Or that it was “a normal landing until the cross-wind proved to be too much for the pilot to handle”. And generally, the article goes on to point out that the pilot had all of the data available to avoid the accident. He should have known that the fuel was low, that he was close to the mountain, or that the cross winds were excessive. And while I agree that that is probably a correct conclusion, the fact is that the pilot truly thought that there was no need for concern up until the moment of disaster.

But there is another class of accidents that should have been totally eliminated years ago. We add as a factor in these reports the words, “get-home-it is” or words similar. These are accidents where the pilot said, at least to himself, “I’m not comfortable with this, but I think I can probably do it.”

These are situations where the pilot thinks, “Well, the fuel level is a bit low but I just don’t have time to stop. I think I can make it.” Or, “Yeah, I can’t see the top of the mountains now, but I think it will be okay if I

follow the highway through the pass. I bet the weather will be better on the other side. Or this one. “If I take the runway that is aligned with the wind I will have to taxi farther. Besides, I have a perfect downwind entry for this runway. So, I will just go ahead and land downwind.” And there is another statement that I sometimes hear around the airport on Saturday mornings. “Well, I wouldn’t fly that airplane with my family on board, but I think that it will be okay if it’s just me.”

I see a couple of thought processes going on here. One is that we have a plan set in stone, and regardless of the changing situation, we need to follow that plan. But another thought process is that for some reason, some pilots think that the laws of physics are somehow set aside for them if they are by themselves. There is a thought that there were rules to follow, but they only counted if someone else was watching.

Another facet of this mind set is that we don’t think that others are involved in our decision-making if they are not actually in the airplane with us. But actually, all of our day-to-day decisions affect those we care about. A statement from a widow that I recently came across: “Why did he take off in that weather? Couldn’t he think that we would have been just as happy to have him home tomorrow instead?”

Over my 30+ years of flying, I have more than once looked at continuing on to my destination with deteriorating weather ahead, or with fuel tank needles moving to the left. And as soon as I get that, "This is not comfortable" feeling, I look for that alternate I gave myself. The first time that decided to land twenty miles short of my destination and top off the tanks, I felt a little foolish since I had more gas than I imagined. But, I realized that the piece of mind I gained when I left that fuel stop was worth the thirty minutes I spent. And no one cared are about. Because you are.

that I arrived at my destination thirty minutes later than expected.

So, put these two ideas into your "best practices" First, if a situation gives you the "something's wrong here" feeling, then something is wrong. Now is the time to act, while there are still some good options.

Second, everything you do affects those who care about you, whether they are with you or not. So whether you are solo, or every seat is filled, fly as if you are responsible for those you c

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