

Working Title: Terminal Flight - A Work in process

Written by Mike

Saturday, 08 January 2011 10:14 -

Here is an excerpt from a new work. Comments are welcome.

Delta Flight 1283 from Atlanta to Chicago

Friday, November 26 - 3:42 p.m. Central Standard Time

27,000 feet above Tennessee

Passengers sat in the crowded Airbus A319 like cattle. All but a hand full of the 124 seats were occupied by passengers making the short return flight from Atlanta to Chicago during the holiday rush. The flight crew all wore the same haggard expression of the season, a vain attempt to please the unruly masses.

Rough weather didn't help matters. Although the A319 was making a valiant effort to climb through the gray sky, rain lashed against the windows. Twin engines at full power provided a comforting sound behind the steady roar of a hundred conversations.

So far, the flight was textbook. The flight crew made their last call to Atlanta departure control

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and set the autopilot. But still, Captain Stark kept a close eye on his instruments, lest a stray bolt of lightning ruin his plans for a later turkey dinner with his family.

As the passengers and crew settled into their routines, things took on their normal course, all be it a bumpy one. Turbulence would delay the drink cart at least until they reached 32,000 feet, and by then there would only be a short hop until touchdown at Midway Airport.

Captain Stark spoke into the microphone. "Atlanta, this is Delta 1283 heavy, passing flight level 30. Request clearance to flight level 35 to get over this storm, over."

Not even static in his high priced earphone responded to his call.

Captain Stark repeated his call. Still no response. "Rick, check your radios."

"Atlanta Control, Delta 1283 heavy, do you copy, over?"

"Not even static, Captain."

Captain stark turned to his engineer. "Don, try the text channel."

The Engineer typed on his console. "Nothing. I'm going to run a systems check."

"All right. Rick, pull out the emergency checklist. I'm setting the transponder to 7600. Maybe they can hear us, but we defiantly aren't receiving."

Captain Stark spun the controls on the radar transponder to set 7600, the setting to show Air

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Traffic Control that they had a radios-out emergency. They could fly all the way to Chiago without radios, but couldn't communicate with ground control to set up for a landing.

"Captain, something's wrong here. Diagnostics say everything checks out, but I still can't get through to ATC."

Captain Stark breath caught in his chest as his eyes fell on the familiar dials and readouts of his cockpit. All his training told him to believe his instruments, but they should have cleared the storm by now. The Autopilot controls said they were on a steady climb to 35,000 feet, but he didn't believe it for a second. "I'm going to manual control."

With a single click of the joystick controller, he released the autopilot and took control of the plane. And with that single click, his world began to come apart.

"We just lost the engines," Rick said.

No crap, thought Captain Stark. "Hit the starters on one and two."

"No response," Don said.

"Rick, set the transponder to the emergency number and don't let go."

The first officer reached across the console, flipped the transponder one digit over, and hit the Indent button, to send out a signal that the plane was in distress. Unfortunately, he switched the digit in the wrong direction, setting the transponder to 7700 instead of 7500. 7700 signified a hijacking.

"Oh Crap, switched it the wrong way."

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“Right now, I don’t care. Drop the flaps; we need lift. Start looking for somewhere to land.”

All power to in the plane went out in an instant.

Rick looked up from the controls. His face went white. They were no more than a few thousand feet from the ground. “No response from the flaps. Jesus, we’re already too low.”

The instrument panel was dead. The controls were unresponsive. The engineer flicked switches by flashlight, trying to revive the dead plane, but nothing he touched seemed to have any response.

As quickly as the plane had begun its nosedive, the bird resorted itself. Power came back on, the engines spooled to full speed, and Captain Stark let out the breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. In his ear, he heard, “Delta 1283, pull up! Pull Up!”

Captain Stark didn’t bother to respond to the message. He pulled the stick hard and shoved the throttles full forward. He guessed they were less than a hundred feet from the ground when the power came back on, and his instruments now confirmed that guess. For a moment, his heart pounded in his chest, shock of fear and joy flowing through his body. In that moment of clarity brought on by adrenaline coursing through his veins, he saw the high-tension wires crossing his path and felt the rain on his face for the second it took the wire to slice through the forward windows and remove his head.