Jet Crashes Near Harrison, Arkansas, May 21, 1985

Floyd Sikes was a Naval Aviator, Corporate Pilot, Aviation Artist, a quiet, kind man and a good friend to all who knew him. He has been dead almost 25 years.

Floyd was killed in an airplane crash near Harrison Arkansas, May 21, 1985. According to the accident report, he was totally at fault.

He made several common errors, and his first officer made the same errors. It may have been that his First Officer was a very inexperienced, young aviator and was not in the situational awareness loop. I don't know because I don't remember this person, and I may have never met him. I'm sure that there are many who still miss his presence in their lives. It could have been that shared responsibility and good communication between the pilot and co-pilot was not practiced. We will never know.

Floyd was a young man with slight pre-mature gray in his hair. On days when we were both not flying, he would drop by my office. We would chat about his tour in the Navy and other aviation-related subjects. He was a talented artist, and he looked the part. He always dressed neatly, and often wore a tweed sport-coat with a cap to match. When I think of him——I think of a interesting and warm human being with a great personality. One who I would love to sit down with and have a great cup of coffee and just shoot the bull.

I don't know the owners of the airplane, but I earned my living flying a Private Jet at the time, and this is how I came to know Floyd. The system failed everyone, both the pilots and the owner of the aircraft. The desire to fly around in a jet aircraft and to spend as little money as possible in the process could have been a major contribution to this accident.

Because of the oil boom of these years there were a good many people especially in Oklahoma and Texas Oil country that suddenly had the available funds to own entry level Jet Aircraft.

The error made by the PIC (Pilot in Command), as the FAA likes to call the pilot, could have been because he was trying to fly single pilot in an aircraft that required two pilots especially during low ceilings and poor visibility approaches. There were two pilots, however could the second pilot do the job? The accident took place around 8:15 in the evening.

The mind-set for many aviators when flying in and around high terrain is sometimes a little anxious, tense and nerve-racking. Others seem so sure of themselves and their ability that they don't give it a second thought. Either mind-set has claimed the lives of many good men and women.

Speculation is all we have after the dust settles and the remains of the dead are removed from the scene of the accident.

What happened?

Floyd and co-pilot shot the loc approach once and missed because they saw the runway too late to make a successful landing.

I'm not sure about then but the present procedure for the missed approach is to make a slight left turn to the Harrison VOR (HRO) located about four miles to the northwest of the Boon County Airport and hold making right hand turns. The

procedure of entering the holding pattern required a tear drop entry which would keep them west of the 316 radial of HRO. After the missed approach, the radios must be re-tuned for the pilot in order for him to see the information given him from HRO. He changed from Harrison Loc I-HRO frequency of 111.7 to HRO frequency of 112.5. He must re-dial his course indicator to 136 degrees from the loc course indicator of 359 degrees. After making a turn or two in the holding pattern at an altitude of at least 3800 ft above sea level he would need to prepare to fly another loc approach. This would mean that all the radios must be retuned again. This step was probably over looked. ? ? ?

Normally he would fly from the Harrison VOR to the BAKKY LOM which is an intersection on the final approach and then fly outbound on the I-HRO 179 deg course for enough time for him to make another turn around and intercept I-HRO inbound course of 359 deg.

This ***could*** have been done making all the adjustments to the course indicator without changing the frequencies on the navigation radio from the HRO of 112.5 to the I-HRO frequency of 111.7.

Floyd may have assumed that he was looking at I-HRO information but was actually seeing HRO information. (Because for whatever reason, the frequency was never changed.) Although the information would be slightly different, and other misassumptions would have to be made, it is conceivable that Floyd was tracking the inbound course of the HRO VOR rather than the inbound course of the I-HRO. And, while making his decent flew his aircraft into terrain killing himself and his copilot. This is the most likely scenario of why this event turned out as it did.

The real reasons behind this tragic accident will never be known. And, there are many intelligent questions that remain forever unanswered.

One of the best questions would be what was the physical condition of the pilot? Was he tired? Sleepy? Anxious? Had he been mentored properly by someone about flying below terrain in hilly or mountainous country? Why didn't he double-check his radio frequencies? What was his co-pilot doing? Was the co-pilot sharp and on top to the approach procedures or was he more a 'tag-along' than a coach.

The first attempt was almost successful because they saw the runway lights, but too late to make a safe landing. They knew that the ceiling was right at minimums, and that they must be at minimums (1880' MSL) on the approach far enough away from the runway to make a visual landing.

They made contact with terrain (crashed) at 1840' MSL approximately about five or six miles from the Harrison VOR near the 179 degree radial. Long before contact with terrain, things were not right, and this fact should have been recognized by Floyd and his co-pilot. Something must have seemed strange to Floyd. Why didn't he miss the second approach and climb to a safe altitude and get re-organized? Maybe he was about to do just that. Maybe he didn't have enough fuel to try a third approach. We will never know.

But, I do know this——Floyd was a very nice man whom I liked very much. He was an artist who could make a painted airplane seem to be in flight. I know that many others feel the same way that I do, and he has been missed over the years.

When I consider this tragic accident, I know that but by the grace of Almighty God, I could have gone there more than several times in my career.

The advice I would pass on to young aviators is if you don't know for sure where you are going—don't go there. Remember air is plentiful, but the lower edge of it is very hard. And, don't allow yourselves to be backed into a corner because you don't have enough fuel. If you don't have a little extra fuel to cover a few human errors and mistakes don't ever get airborne.

And, don't forget to communicate with your crew. In my airline days, we had an annual class called Cockpit Resource Management, and in spite of all the aggravation of attending what was sometimes called a dumb class, I believe that this sort of education has saved many lives. And most of all, remember to communicate. Communications requires the ability to listen to the concerns of your crew. They may have very valid concerns.

~By Adverse Yaw