

SHANWICK SHANWICK CONTROL  
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So today was not about Air Law, and from my perspective at 33,000 feet headed east at 660 mph, I hope air law stays the hell away from me tonight. In back I have 232 humans going to Gatwick, airport, London England to do whatever people do in London.

I know one thing. They want to arrive there alive, and they don't want to meet a single aviation lawyer. I am on my third cup of black coffee and am preparing to make a transfer from Shanwick radio, of the North Atlantic Track control, to a local controller of a regular European Radar traffic.

For the last four hours, we have been crossing the winter North Atlantic, where the only suitable airports to divert to were hours away, with cold names like Keflavik Iceland, Gander Newfoundland and Shannon Ireland. On our planned track the Equal Time point between Gander and Shannon was greater than two hours to either destination. In the High and Mighty they called this the point of no return.

The flight time from Atlanta to Gatwick is scheduled for 8 hours 32 minutes and our evening departure will bring us to England in mid morning, counting the 6 hour time change. In back the people are sleeping. Up front we are awake, tired and bored. The first and business passengers are comfortable and tourists are cramped for room.

*"Delta one niner, you are cleared to contact British control on VHF frequency one two six decimal point two when over Bluefin intersection. Shanwick control out"*

*"Good night Shanwick"*

*"Morning sir"*

*"whatever"*

I switch the radio frequency and note the guidance system shows a distance of fifty nautical miles to Blue Fin intersection. At this range I should start receiving the Omni navigational radio from Shannon. This radio will tell me the distance and bearing to Shannon Ireland. After 4 hours at sea, the approach of land is welcome. As soon as I receive the signal it will be incumbent on me to conduct a "feet dry" navigational accuracy check. During the four hours at sea we have been relying on three separate inertial navigation sets working in concert with one another to estimate our exact position. These same systems are so accurate in military usage they guide our intercontinental missiles. The airline versions are less accurate and they may drift as much as a mile an hour. Thus after several hours you may be slightly off course. When you come ashore you double check your position with the ground navigation station to verify that the drift was indeed minimal.

Today's European track will take me over " Lands End, Dover and on to London.

A secret knock on the cockpit door and a handset chime tells me that a flight attendant is asking to enter the cockpit.

*"Hi, It's just me with some hot towels, and I'm taking orders. We got the good Florida , real juice, Croissants and Bagels left over. Also we have some of the fresh fruit leftover...no breakfasts"*

I say, *" Tell you what, just a juice and a plain Bagel, nothing else"*

The engineer takes two fruit trays and the co pilot sticks with coffee regular.

We got about an hour and when we're starting down I'll do the seat belt. That will be time for your initial briefing, and ten minutes out we'll double ding you.... Also the descent should be smooth, but you never know since we are the leader of the pack this morning. I haven't heard one other aircraft in front of us. We are going to be almost 45 minutes under schedule... so you might remind the passengers that the people who were to meet them might not be at the airport yet."

After she leaves, I say to the co pilot.. *"Lot of good getting to the hotel early will do. They won't have our rooms ready yet anyway"*

*" yeah last time we sat in the lobby sipping hot chocolate for 40 minutes... The Brits do it their way "*

*" Still the Metropole, at Brighton is a great hotel "*

Then the engineer says *" Captain, I got a small problem here, low pressure light in fuel boost pump number 3 tank and the circuit breaker popped..... I'll get the book out, but I know it says that I can try one reset on the circuit breaker... You want me to reset it ? "*

Speaking like a Captain, and remembering the K.I. Sawyer B-52 accident, I say *" Hell no don't reset it...The son of a bitch popped for a reason...and none of the reasons are good. Just leave it out and write it up in the maintenance log book."*

I think to myself ...that's why they pay Captains the big bucks.

Even as we start down the sun starts up to herald another dawn, which makes me another day older and hopefully a little wiser.

*" God ... I have seen too many sunrises in this job. "*

*" Yeah the all nighters sure do screw up the body clock, probably shortens your life span too"*

*" So what the last years suck anyway "*

*“O.K. lets get serious. The weather here is good, two thousand overcast, ten miles, light snow shower, visibility 5 miles, temperature - 2 Celsius. Let's see that's about 28 degrees. They are using runway 28 right I.L.S. Wind is two six zero at Ten knots runway braking is reported good.”*

You tune and identify the radios, I'll brief the approach plate. Even though it's good weather let's set up for the real I.L.S. Normal Callouts....Since the weather is O.K. I'll probably hand fly it. Sam give me height of wheels above the runway, and do it loud so an old man can hear. (after all I was 55 and had flown noisy 727 for 17 years)

Something comes together when a group of practiced professionals go to work. In this cockpit, we have 70 combined years of flying experience 35 with the Captain, 20 with the co pilot, and 15 with the engineer.

The landing weight of this particular flight will be almost 400,000 lbs or 190 tons of metal touching down at 300 fts per second. That is both a lot of momentum and one hell of a lot of Kinetic energy, and I realize that if I screw it up, it is this Kinetic energy that makes big airplanes into small pieces. I am determined to reduce this transaction to routine proportions. To keep the take offs and landings to a one to one ratio and in particular to live to enjoy retirement.

In back the passengers take for granted what civilian American aeronautical engineering and American training has constructed. Magnificent, reliable machinery, flown by competent, professional humans striving to provide reliability. comfort and safety.

As we pull to the gate at Gatwick, the passengers disembark, and we head to our hotel bus. Now it is our time to ride. After another hour I put my head down on the pillow at the Metropole Brighton Beach Hotel, and before last nights sleep catches up with me this mid morning I consider the over three hundred aircraft accidents I have evaluated, investigated or litigated.

I know one thing for sure.. I am very thankful that I have had the opportunity to have been a pilot.. and I know one other thing about life... There are about a thousand ways to die and being bored to death would be the worst... Right now I am too tired to be bored. Let's see next month I think I'll bid the Hawaii trip.

And, Justice Scalia, you were wrong and you still are wrong, moreover you are short - fat -bald -ugly and your mother dresses you funny. And Louis Powell, in my opinion, you were just senile.

*“Goodnight ... and dear Lord thank you.”*