A Federal Express pilot David G. Sanders, 49, is helped from an ambulance at a Memphis, Tenn., hospital.

Remembering Hijacked Flight 705 That Flew Upside Down

Marion McCool October 22, 2015

A FedEx cargo plane first officer flew his DC-10 upside down while the pilot was fighting a flight engineer who was trying to hijack the plane and kill everyone on board.

(Newswire.net -- October 22, 2015) --April seventh was a beautiful day for a cargo flight back in 1994, or at least Captain David Sanders would have thought so as he was making his way to the airport. He and two other crew members were scheduled to fly from Memphis, TN to San Jose, CA and back the same day - a routine flight for an ex-navy pilot with over 20 years of FedEx service.

Other two crew members were a 39-year old Flight Engineer Andy Petersen, and First Officer James Tucker. Both men had been flying for FedEx for years, and they had no reason to doubt they would ever reach San Jose, let alone think this would be the last time they would ever fly again.

"The bond of pilots... what you do together in the airplane, and outside of the airplane – I miss that... I miss it very much," Sanders said in a 2005 interview with the Discovery Channel Canada, as he recalled the struggle for survival that nearly killed the three men.

Originally, a 42 year-old Flight Engineer Auburn Calloway was scheduled to be on a Flight 705. But one day prior to the flight, him and his crew exceeded their maximum airtime and were grounded the following day. But that wasn't going to stop Calloway from being on that flight – the company allows their flight crews to hitch a ride on a cargo planes free of charge. So Calloway got up early, and was the first one to board the plane, guitar case in hand, long before the crew showed up.

The next person to arrive was Petersen. He introduced himself to Calloway, who informed him he was going to be riding with them. Once Petersen proceeded to prep the cockpit for the flight, an interesting thing caught his attention—a circuit breaker that powers the Cockpit Voice Recorder was off. Petersen placed it back in the on position, and then stepped away for a minute. Once he was back, he noticed the breaker was once again in the off position.

"I re-set, it and decided that I would see if it would stay in," said Petersen. "If it popped back out, I would call maintenance because that is a no-go item".

In case of an accident, no record would be made of anything said in the cockpit without a Cockpit Voice Recorder. So the rules stipulate that the recorder must be operational, or the flight has to be canceled until the problem can be resolved.

Grounding or delaying a FedEx flight is not cheap. If the plane has to be delayed too much, the cargo has to be taken off the plane and loaded onto another aircraft. Also, as the crew was going to be pushing a minimum 10-hour round trip, significant delays would likely mean they would have to overnight at San Jose. So Petersen reset the breaker once again, and started keeping an eye on it.

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The next to arrive were the captain, accompanied by a 42-year-old First Officer James Tucker, an ex-navy flight combat instructor with 10 years of experience with FedEx alone. Soon, the fuselage doors were locked, the crew completed their pre-flight checks, and the plane was cleared for takeoff.
As the aircraft climbed through 19,000 ft, Calloway, who was riding the jump seat in the galley, reached inside his guitar case, pulled out a large hammer and headed for the cockpit.

In the pre-9/11 days it was unusual for company employees to have their luggage screened at the security checkpoints. So when Calloway set out for the airport that morning, he knew there was little chance he would be discovered until it was too late. And now he was standing in the doorway of the cockpit, gripping a hammer in one hand, readying himself to bludgeon the crew.

The first few swings landed on Peterson's head, as he was closest to the door. Peterson left out a low whimper and slouched in his seat. As Tucker turned around to see the source of the commotion, he too got hit to the left side of his head with a blow that instantly incapacitated him before he could react. Calloway then turned to the captain.

Amazingly, although badly injured, Peterson and Tucker were still alive. And while Calloway wrestled with the captain, the two men were starting to regain focus. But a still buckled-in captain was in no position to defend himself from an attacker swinging from behind, and received a devastating blow to his head that nearly knocked him unconscious.

Realizing all three members of the crew were still alive, Calloway stepped out of the cockpit and retrieved a SCUBA speargun from his guitar case. Two of the three men got out of their seats, but Calloway returned, pointed the speargun at them, and ordered them to sit back down or he would kill them, he said. Little did they know that's exactly what he was planning to do anyway.

Although suffering from tunnel vision and experiencing loud ringing in his ears, Petersen, who was standing beside his station to the right of the door, suddenly lunged forward and grabbed the spear with all his might. At the same time Tucker, still seated, got an idea that ultimately saved all their lives – he pulled hard on the steering column, putting the airplane into a steep climb. Petersen and Calloway, still struggling for the speargun, lost balance and were thrown back and out of the cockpit along with Captain Sanders.

The two men in the back continued to struggle with the attacker, but Petersen's skull was fractured, his temporal artery severed, and he was losing a lot of blood. Sanders was in a better shape than Petersen, but Calloway was uninjured, and was starting to win the battle.

Tucker, still in the cockpit and in command of the aircraft, is an ex-navy flight combat instructor. He knew it was time to push the DC-10 to the limit, so he started a series of aerobatic manoeuvres to keep the attacker from gaining balance and winning the battle. One moment the DC-10 was on its side, the next - just shy of being upside down. Calloway freed himself just long enough to reach for his hammer and hit the captain in the head again as Tucker placed the airplane in a dive.

Unbeknownst to Tucker, the first blow had fractured his skull and embedded pieces of it into his brain. As the airplane dove, he started to lose feeling and motor control over the right side of his body. Within seconds he found himself flying the aircraft with one hand, with cockpit alarms blaring, and Earth rapidly approaching.

At 430 Mph, the aircraft reached its maximum safe speed. At 500, the windspeed indicator pegged at the top of the scale. At 530, the airflow was disrupted over the elevators, and the airplane became unresponsive as it could no longer be pulled out of the dive. Tucker glanced to his side and realized the throttle was still full on, left in that position since the airplane took off.

With the only hand that was still functioning, he let go of the steering column, and pulled the throttle back. It didn't slow the plane much, the gravity was still doing its job. But the wind resistance did slow the plane just enough for him to regain the control. With elevators and wings shuddering from excessive speed, and barely able to hang on, he slowly pulled the plane out of the dive.

In the meantime the struggle in the galley continued. Calloway managed to grab the hammer one more time and strike the captain yet again. With his Flight Engineer bleeding out from his severed artery, and with repeated blows to his head, Sanders gathered the last ounce of his strength, pulled the hammer from Calloway's hand and struck him until the attacker stopped moving.

It looked like the crew finally won the battle. Disoriented Tucker called the Memphis Centre and requested directions back to the airport and an ambulance to be waiting. He also informed them the airplane was a subject of attempted
hijacking, and asked for a SWAT team to storm the plane upon landing. And once the autopilot gyroscope was stable enough for autopilot to take over, semi-paralyzed Tucker went back to the galley to help Peterson and Sanders. And while Calloway started to wake up, Stunned captain returned to the cockpit to fly the plane back to Memphis. But it wasn't meant to be.

Tucker gripped the speargun he picked up on his way to the galley, and kept it pointed at Calloway. But the paralysis made his grip slip, and Calloway took that opportunity to attack again. The only thing the two seriously injured men could do was throw all their weight onto their attacker to try to kip him pinned down. But Calloway was slipping, and Peterson was in no shape to put up a fight.

Hearing the struggle in the back, captain was forced to turn the autopilot on, and climb out of his seat to help subdue Calloway once again. And while he was making his way, Tucker picked up a hammer and hit Calloway again.

By the time captain was back in his seat, the airplane was coming in too steep and too fast. Still loaded with fuel, and too heavy to slow down in time, he didn't want to chance Calloway waking up again. Instead he switched his approach in the last second and, with warning alarms blaring, executed a hair-raising approach to an alternative runway that had more room.

It turned out that was the right thing to do - Calloway started to struggle for a hammer for the third time, while the airplane was less than 300 ft off the ground. Flaps fully extended and with landing gear down, Captain Sanders hit the runway hard and rolled to a stop with less than 900 ft of the runway left in front of him. By the time the medics got onto the plane, Petersen and Tucker were in critical condition, and in need of urgent medical assistance.

Later investigation revealed Calloway's motive for attack. He had a promising career ahead of him, and was looking forward to putting his kids through the university. But his marriage ended four years earlier, and his career as an airman stalled. And the day after the attack, he was also about to lose his job in a hearing, having been caught forging flight documents.

So he came up with a plan. He would disconnect the cockpit flight recorder and bludgeon the crew to their deaths using weapons that wouldn't stand out in the wreckage. Then he would crash the plane. Indeed, a speargun in the wreckage would probably have been seen as part of crew's luggage, and the hammer would likely be dismissed as a tool left behind by maintenance.

Any injuries found on the bodies would have been consistent with the crash, and the investigation would eventually wind down, attributing the deaths to the crash. Calloway's children would have received his life insurance, as well as any damages awarded by the company, ensuring they could afford to go to university.

The original plan involved his own crew - as a Flight Engineer, he would have been alone with two people in the aircraft, not three, and one of the crew members would have been female. As a martial arts expert, he'd have little trouble overpowering that crew, and there wouldn't have been anyone present to reset the Cockpit Voice Recorder breaker. He would also have had a tactical advantage since the Flight Engineer's station is located directly behind the other two crew members. It would have been a perfect crime.

But once his crew was bumped, he figured he could still pull it off, and he almost did. Even with a discovery of a disabled fuse, he could simply continue to fly after killing the crew, and allow the Cockpit Voice Recorder to loop over the oldest recorded data - which, in 1994, was a standard 30 minutes. He would then fly the airplane into the ground, taking his own life.

Calloway got life in prison without the possibility of parole, and is currently serving two life sentences in a California penitentiary. The Airline Pilots Association awarded the Flight 705 crew with a gold medal for heroism, the highest recognition a civilian aviator can receive. But even though all three men eventually recovered from their injuries, none of them were able to get recertified as medically fit for commercial flight.

"The only way for me to be able to fly, without someone with me, is to be off the medication. And at this point, it's been ascertained that I will never be able to do that," said James Tucker in 2005. He is the only one of the three men that eventually returned to recreational flight.

As of today, the DC-10 involved in the incident is still in service.
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