

## **The Foggles and Hoods of Life**

by Richard A. Hansen, M.D., AME

It was a beautiful day for flying, with clean clear air, blue sky and sunshine, VFR weather that makes our snow-covered mountains stand out in bold relief against the Cascade foothills. Exhilarated with such a view, this reverie was abruptly terminated as my instructor handed me the hood, with a terse instruction, "I'll watch for traffic now; you'll be flying by the instruments." For the next hour, it was the attitude indicator and the cockpit panel that had my attention. And, in learning to fly by the numbers, with strict attention to each instrument's message, I also learned some lessons of life, which hopefully will help my fellow aviators, as it has already in my business and home.

First, when you can't see where you're going, nor look back to where you've been, it is vital to trust implicitly in your instruments. As all pilots are aware, there is one instrument to tell you how fast you're going, another to indicate whether you're going up or down, or turning sideways. There is another to indicate which way you're heading, one to coordinate your turns, and still another to measure the rate of descent or climb. Those are the basic ones, with still other gauges to measure engine power, temperatures, pressures, etc.

The reason to trust these measurements is obvious, but it is much easier said than done. Additionally, the pilot hears instructions from the right seat, whether an instructor or copilot, and various air traffic controllers in the nearby tower. Why do we need all these people, and the information from the gyros and dials and numbers in the cockpit to tell us what to do? Can't we just trust our impressions, and fly "by the seat of our pants?" As I was mulling this over, with just a seed of independence (or possibly rebellion) stirring in my mind, the instructor spoke again. "Put your head down, close your eyes, and fly the airplane." After about fifteen seconds, which seemed like minutes, he said, "now open your eyes, and check the instruments." I had entered a gradual descending turn, and quickly corrected my attitude, both kinds.

Now I could see why you must trust implicitly in the instruments, not personal impressions. That is true about other things, like spending money, preserving a marriage, or succeeding in business. But, this is mostly about flying; so on to the next lesson.

My instructor had noticed that I was staring at one instrument. "Don't fixate," he said firmly. "Scan the instrument panel." And he showed me how to do it systematically. That made sense, for each dial gave important data, which taken as a whole, could help one fly through obscure clouds when necessary, or even track the ILS approach to a nearby airport when the weather turned sour. What a life saver such knowledge would be! I wanted to learn everything possible about instrument flying.

Then we made some appropriate radio calls, and headed for KEUG, on an instrument approach which would guide us precisely on the path and glide slope to a touchdown. It was exciting when we broke through the cloud layer at 1,200 feet. For there just ahead was the brightly lit runway, approach lights flashing, including the "rabbit." It proved that the ILS does work, when a pilot keeps the needles centered for a precision approach, even when all is murky outside.

There are three warnings which came from this experience, thoughts which can also help when life's danger signals are going off, and health or happiness is in jeopardy on the high seas

of life or the winds of strife. First, is the lesson that we should not try to fly by feelings alone. There are absolutes in life – principles involving honesty, decency, morality, truthfulness, etc. – which can guide one’s decisions when appetite, desire, and our “seat-of-the-pants” feelings are not safe indicators of what should be done next.

Second, I learned that if a pilot flies into a cloud, a cautious U-turn may be the quick path to safety. Whether it is a mid-life crisis, a temptation to dishonesty in business, or the risk of an affair that could ruin a happy marriage, the pilot with his head in the clouds should immediately begin a 180-degree turn. Then, a rapid return to stable circumstances, before impending disaster sabotages life dreams or financial success which might have been just around the corner.

Finally, we pilots must always resist the macho spirit, the braggadocio that wells up to attest, “It just can’t happen to me! No way!” Remember, fellow aviators, no one is immune to accident, momentary poor judgment, or a fatal outcome. Every day, there are plane crashes, funerals, bankruptcies, divorces, and suicides, most of them affecting people that at one time had excellent reputations, fine folk who may have turned little errors into big ones, by not heeding the instruments or listening to friends or following that inner voice which spoke softly, “Go back!” “Turn around!” or just plain “No!”

That is what I learned in the cockpit the other day. It is already helping with my life and my profession. Remember these rules. Your life could be saved as well.

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*[Doctor Hansen, author of the popular book on home health care, **Get Well At Home**, currently serves as medical director of the **Emerald Valley Wellness Clinic**, and its **Live-for-Health Seminars** in Creswell, Oregon. Pilots who for health reason are having trouble passing their medical should contact us. For further information or inquiries, contact: [clinic1@emeraldwellness.com](mailto:clinic1@emeraldwellness.com)]*