

# Thomas P. Turner's Mastery of Flight®

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## FLYING LESSONS for June 4, 2026

FLYING LESSONS uses recent mishap reports to consider what *might* have contributed to accidents, so you can make better decisions if you face similar circumstances. In most cases design characteristics of a specific airplane have little direct bearing on the possible causes of aircraft accidents—but knowing how your airplane's systems respond can make the difference in your success as the scenario unfolds. So apply these FLYING LESSONS to the specific airplane you fly. Verify all technical information before applying it to your aircraft or operation, with manufacturers' data and recommendations taking precedence. **You are pilot in command and are ultimately responsible for the decisions you make.**

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### *This week's LESSONS*

**Three years ago** one edition of Mastery of Flight® derived LESSONS from preliminary accounts of a Beech King Air 200 crash that received a substantial amount of press at the time. As a curiosity, let's look back at those LESSONS, then fast forward to the [NTSB's final report](#) to see how our LESSONS held up...and if there's more to learn.

**Here's what** was reported in the days following the crash, and the LESSONS I took from it:

**A Beechcraft 200 Super King Air**...sustained substantial damage when it impacted heavily wooded terrain in Elk Grove Village, Illinois. The sole pilot onboard received minor injuries.

**The pilot departed** Chicago-O'Hare International Airport (KORD), Illinois, at 16:43 local time, on a flight to Waterloo, Iowa. **Less than 50 minutes into the flight**, before reaching Waterloo Airport (ALO/KALO), Iowa, **the pilot encountered an unexpected situation** and was **cleared to return to his departure point** of Chicago-O'Hare.

**On approach** to runway 9L, he **initiated a go around** procedure then a turn to the left for a second circuit to land. While descending on final, he lost control of the airplane due to an **apparent fuel starvation event** (all engines powerless) then crashed into a wooded area located in Elk Grove Village, less than 4 miles northwest of O'Hare Airport at 18:41 local time.

**ATC recordings** do not indicate why the pilot chose to return to his departure point instead of continuing to Waterloo, or diverting somewhere close by or along the route back toward Chicago. The also do not reveal **why** the King Air pilot performed a go-around off O'Hare after his first approach, but the pilot says the **tower "told me to go around"** for some reason. On the go the pilot reported **"minimum fuel."** Later when asked the flight conditions he repeated **"minimum fuel"** in his response.

**A just-the-facts** visual presentation of flight track combined with ATC audio is chilling. Sequenced for a second landing attempt, controllers warn the pilot he is turning inside traffic he was directed to follow. The pilot then radios **"we have a big-time problem, we're out of fuel,"** and then **"both engines quit"** and **"we don't have any fuel."** The pilot radios his decision to land on a road and controllers advise the location of a highway two miles away. Still a pro but with obvious grief in his voice, the controller reports **"radar contact lost"** and the big turboprop went down—but the pilot, alone in the aircraft, suffered only minor injuries.

**The pilot told us** what happened. Quite fortunately for him, his family and friends, he not only survived but did so with minor injuries. So if there are LESSONS for the rest of us from *why* he turned around 50 minutes downrange, *why* he chose to return to O'Hare instead of diverting

somewhere closer, *why* O'Hare Tower instructed him to go around, and *how* he let his fuel state get to where it was, **we may learn them from the NTSB investigation** and/or other interviews or statements the pilot may make.

**Going from example to generalities** and then to specifics for dealing with those generalities is somewhat circuitous, but it's the *FLYING LESSONS* way. What are three general *LESSONS* suggested by **what we know** happened in this case, and what ***might* happen** in similar situations?

## 1. Diversions

**Long ago**, when I was a simulator instructor, one of my scenarios began with a roughly one-hour flight in instrument conditions. About halfway along the trip, I presented a **system anomaly** requiring the pilot to detect and respond to a problem. In single-engine airplanes this was an alternator failure, in an era in which backup generators in that type of airplane powered only a limited (and poorly selected) fixed set of airplane equipment and was basically a battery extender to get the airplane on the ground as soon as possible. In twins I gave a low oil pressure/high oil temperature condition on one engine that called for a precautionary engine shutdown and single-engine flight.

**I did this** almost directly over a small, rural airport with no Unicom (only Multicom) service and (at the time) an NDB as its only approach guidance. Weather there was near minimums, and it was not much better at the departure airport half an hour behind and the destination half an hour ahead. In four years of presenting this scenario I found **almost every pilot** either, in order of likelihood (1) **pressed on** toward the original destination; (2) **turned around** to the point of departure; or (3) tried to **slam-dunk** into the airport 7000 feet directly under the nose while dealing with the emergency.

**Almost no one** asked ATC for the weather at airports off the route (this was before Garmin seemingly invented the magenta line). If they asked, however, they'd learn a 12,000-foot runway at a tower-controlled airport less than 70 miles off their wing had marginal VFR conditions and airport rescuers just in case.

**The LESSON:** Faced with an anomaly or an emergency, **evaluate your options**. Ask ATC questions if you need information; controllers are happy to help. **Land as soon as practical** to sort things out. Conditions *might* be right for "practical" to mean return home, or press on, or dive to the closest airport. But **make the decision based on the facts**, not what seems will be most convenient *after* you get on the ground.

## 2. Fuel state

**We've devoted** many past *LESSONS* to fuel planning and inflight monitoring. This week we'll focus on when that planning didn't work. As a result of the landmark **Avianca Flight 52** fuel exhaustion crash emphasis has turned to using precise language to describe specific levels of fuel-state urgency. In 2012 ICAO established internationally recognized terms for critical fuel states, specifically:

**Minimum fuel.** Using this terminology tells controllers the "aircraft's fuel supply has reached a state where, upon reaching the destination, it can accept little or no delay. **This is not an emergency situation** but merely indicates an emergency situation is possible should any undue delay occur."

**ICAO continues:** "Declare MINIMUM FUEL when committed to land at a specific aerodrome and any change in the existing clearance may result in a **landing with less than planned final reserve fuel.**"

**Mayday fuel.** Formerly "low fuel emergency," the more direct call **Mayday, Mayday, Mayday Fuel** makes it clear that "the calculated fuel on landing at the nearest suitable

aerodrome, where a safe landing can be made, will be less than the planned final reserve fuel” remaining on board. In other words, **the airplane will run out of gas.**

**This call is an emergency declaration**, and “not only opens all options for pilots (e.g. available closed runways, military fields, etc.) but it also allows ATC added flexibility in handling an aeroplane.”

**If you had been** flying that King Air, when might it have been appropriate to tell controllers you were at minimum fuel? At the beginning of the go-around, knowing the airplane was scant minutes from fuel exhaustion, would you have told controllers (repeatedly) you were at **minimum fuel** and accepted normal sequencing for the second approach? Or should you declare **Mayday fuel** and have everyone vectored out of your way for an immediate landing at O’Hare, nearby Chicago Executive, or some other immediate-vicinity airport?

### 3. Surviving the impact

**When all else fails**, survival depends on the pilot maintaining control of the aircraft as long as possible, and a certain amount of luck that this control takes the aircraft to a surface conducive to maintaining that control, decelerating smoothly and keeping at least the fuel tanks and aircraft cabin intact to resist fire and protect those aboard. I emphasize **WUSS**: touching down **wings level, under control at the slowest safe speed.**

**Although in the example** that prompts this discussion fuel tank integrity may be moot. Despite what happened up to the point the King Air ran out of fuel, you’ve got to give him credit for bringing the big turbine twin down and flying it “as far into the crash as possible” to save himself and, had anyone else been aboard, given his passengers the best possible chance at survival.

**Evidence strongly suggests** that shoulder harnesses, installed **and used**, are essential to surviving almost all off-airport landings.

**I truly wish** that the **good decisions**, the expertly planned and executed flights, were as well documented as accidents so we could learn from positive examples. Unfortunately crashes are what get reported. Sadly, there’s never a shortage of events from which to draw new **LESSONS** and repeat the old. Let’s take as many positives as we can.

See: <https://thomaspturner.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/2023.0908-B200-IL.pdf>

**Now let’s see** if anything changed, if any new details were uncovered by the NTSB’s investigation, and if other **LESSONS** are suggested by the [final report](#), which states:

**The pilot reported** that he had completed a charter flight and departed to pick up new passengers at an airport about 200 nautical miles away. While on approach to the destination airport, the previous passengers notified the pilot that they were ready to be picked up, so the pilot did not land and turned the airplane back toward the departure airport. The pilot climbed to 10,000 ft and noticed the airplane’s fuel burn was high, so he climbed to 16,000 ft.

**The pilot reported** that “everything was routine until about a 3-mile final” to the runway, when the controller asked the pilot to slow to a final approach speed. **An airplane was still on the runway, so the controller told the pilot to go around. The pilot told controllers twice that he had “minimum fuel” available.**

**The pilot continued** on a visual approach for the same runway when the right engine lost power followed by the left engine. He **feathered both propellers** and made a forced landing to a wooded area. The airplane sustained substantial damage to the fuselage, both wings, and the empennage. The pilot reported that there were no preimpact mechanical malfunctions or failures that would have precluded normal operation.

**The pilot later stated** that he was “trying to do too much with too little” fuel and the accident was a result of **poor fuel management**. Although the controller directed the pilot to go around, the pilot should have recognized the criticality of the minimum fuel situation and landed the airplane.

**Probable Cause and Findings:** The pilot’s improper fuel planning, that resulted in a total loss of engine power due to fuel exhaustion, and a subsequent forced landing. Also causal was the pilot’s decision to go around with minimum fuel.

**So the diversion** back to O’Hare was designed to pick up waiting passengers, not a spring-loaded “get back where I started from” response to some anomaly. The pilot twice reported “minimum fuel” but never raised his situation to the level of a declared emergency.

**Still, the major LESSONS** remain unchanged—there’s no real new data that overrides what we discussed almost immediately after this crash:

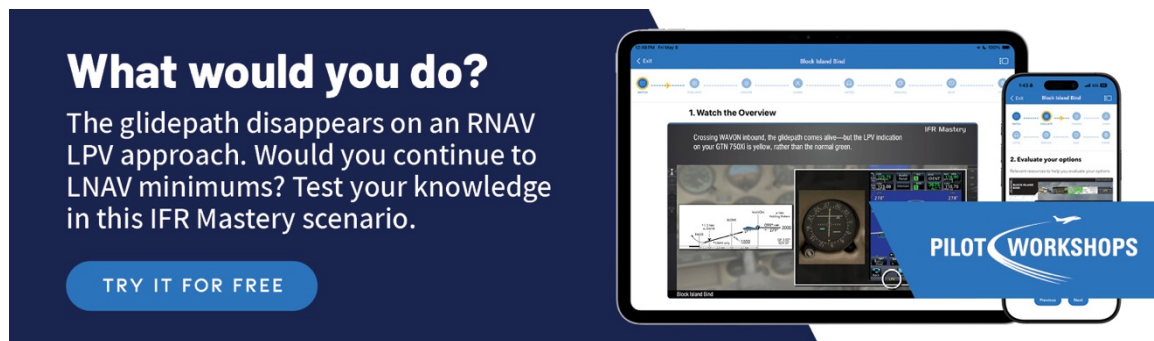
1. Evaluate your options
2. Make decisions based on facts
3. Tell controllers you are at “minimum fuel” as soon as you know that to be true. Follow up if controllers do not seem to respond to your call the way they should.
4. Transmit “Mayday, mayday, mayday” as soon as an emergency exists or is imminent.
5. Touch down wings level, under control at the slowest safe speed—as Bob Hoover put it, **fly as far into the crash as possible**.
6. Dress, buckle in and secure cabin baggage to maximize survival chances.

**FLYING LESSONS** does not pretend to solve the riddle of accident causation. Instead, we focus on things that **possibly** happened, and mitigations to those risks that **might** have occurred.

**In that regard** our **LESSONS** from the preliminary reports of this crash remain true to the actual sequence of events...but of course the **LESSONS** learned are always valid considerations when you’re trying to learn the most you can from accident reports.

**What’s this tell us?** Chances are something will be revealed by a full NTSB investigation that was unclear or missing entirely at the preliminary reporting stage. **That’s not terribly important**. When you read or hear an accident report, **there’s no down side** to envisioning scenarios that might have occurred, and thinking about what you could do to avoid similar circumstances, or **maximize chances of survival** for yourself, passengers and persons in the ground if you ever find yourself in similar circumstances...even if the official investigation later finds something else entirely happened in that particular case.

Questions? Comments? Supportable opinions? Let us know at [mastery.flight.training@cox.net](mailto:mastery.flight.training@cox.net).



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## Debrief

Readers write about recent **LESSONS**:

We’ll get back to the Debrief next week.

More to say? Let us learn from you, at [mastery.flight.training@cox.net](mailto:mastery.flight.training@cox.net).



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