

# INSTRUCTOR'S WING

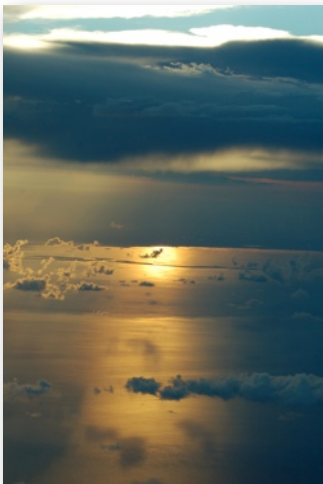


## HAVING A PLAN C

*It was a dark and stormy night. I have always wanted to start an article like that. Actually at Miami International it was a beautiful summer evening. We would not experience "dark and stormy" for a few more hours.*

Paul, my captain for this trip and I were enjoying a highlight of flying out of Miami International, Cuban coffee, as we reviewed the flight plan and weather for our trip to Medellín Colombia.

The weather in Colombia was reported good and forecasted to stay that way. Our alternate of Panama City, Panama was also forecasting good weather for our arrival time into Medellín.



A little over an hour later we were climbing southbound. The sun was starting to set, leaving a golden hue to the waters surrounding the Florida Keys.

As we proceeded southbound some unforecasted evening thunderstorms started to "pop up" on our route. We deviated as necessary, and started preparing for our arrival into Medellín.

We pulled up current weather, reviewed the arrival procedures, terrain and



### Welcome

*This months feature article is on having a secondary back up plan.*

*Pilots pride themselves on having a back up "game plan" including alternate airports, if weather fouls their plans. Are you prepared if your back up plan is longer usable?*

*Safe Flying*

*Ruben Alconero*

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minimum en route altitudes. We also thoroughly briefed the ILS approach and missed approach procedures. Paul and I had flown into Medellín the week prior, however we reviewed all information as if it were our first time. It is important to stay vigilant and on guard to "routine". Routine can breed complacency which can have disastrous results.

More unforecasted thunderstorms appeared and we soon found ourselves off the arrival procedure and intercepting a radial inbound to the VOR. Turbulence in the area had forced us down to a lower altitude, burning more fuel.

Approach control finally cleared us for the "full" ILS approach leaving us with responsibility of flying a procedure turn to realign us inbound to the runway.

We slowed down early and configured the jet for landing.

At 1000 AGL from the runway a blinding flash of white light illuminated the cockpit. As our eyes readjusted to the night sky the runway lightning had vanished.

Paul frantically called the tower, however the radio simply crackled with static.

With no runway lights and no tower communication, I

pushed the throttles forward and commanded a go-around. "Flaps 15, positive rate gear up, set missed approach altitude." Paul and I ran through the litany of items required to be completed for a "go-around" as the Boeing climbed into the dark and stormy night.

Thunderstorms were now in all four quadrants of the airport, other aircraft were holding as approach control had also been lost in the lightning strike.

The other pilots were speaking in Spanish as Paul quickly thumbed through low enroute charts to find another frequency. I was flying and monitoring the weather radar.

As I glanced at our fuel it became evident that we had burned too much fuel deviating around weather on our flight down here.

"Panama isn't an option Paul, maybe Bogota?" Paul had finally found a sector frequency for Bogota and after a few more minutes of rapid fire Spanish a female voice called us back. "Go ahead American 998."

Paul requested a routing to Bogota, and we were soon on our way. Our ACARS(Aircraft Communications Addressing and Reporting System) was now inoperative, leaving us unable to view current weather or send a

message to dispatch. The passengers were informed, and not skipping a beat we were soon reviewing the arrival and approaches available at Bogota.

While Paul was reviewing some of the information out loud, I pointed to more convective activity blocking our route to the airport. We also heard Bogota issue holding instructions to a Continental flight ahead of us.

Bogota sits at an altitude of 8,361 feet, 39 feet shy of our maximum take-off and landing altitude. The performance at this altitude in the event we went "missed approach" and had an engine failure was going to be poor with our heavy weight and the airport's high altitude.

We were now in a situation where fuel was becoming a serious concern.

Paul had requested weather for Cali Colombia when he heard other aircraft go into holding at Bogota. The weather was better and the airport elevation around 3100 feet.

We immediately requested vectors to Cali. Continental followed us as Bogota weather continued to deteriorate.

Paul and I were now reviewing Cali's arrival and approach procedures. We also agreed if anything else occurred we would declare an emergency

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and continue inbound to Cali, we simply no longer had the fuel for any other surprises.

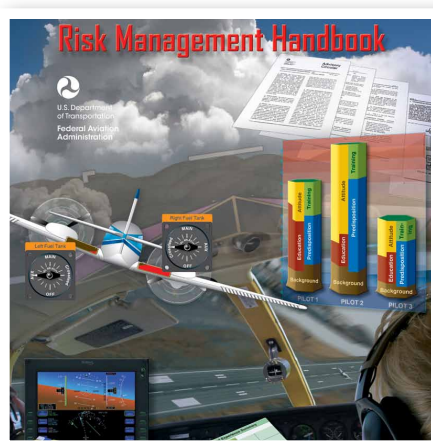
As I pushed the button on the flight computer to activate the arrival ATC had just issued us, both flight management computers blanked out. Our route and certain information disappeared from Multi Function Display. This couldn't be happening.

Paul immediately declared an emergency and requested radar vectors to the ILS approach.

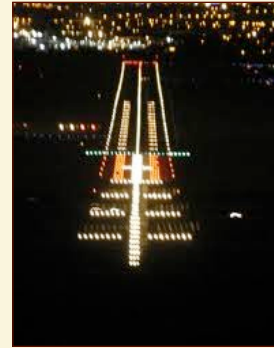
A few minutes later our tires kissed terra firma. As we taxied to the gate I could feel the adrenaline start to fade, I was exhausted and mentally spent. I could tell from Paul's face he was equally "done". As we pulled into the gate and ran the parking checklist all Paul could finish with was "that should count for our recurrent training ride this year".

The passengers were bussed onto Medellín and we went to a nearby hotel. I have never slept so well in my life.

When you fly do you consider your options if your Plan B falls apart? I wrote about the "go, no go" decision a few months back, keep in mind the



<http://www.faa.gov/library/manuals/aviation/media/FAA->



**FAROS**

*Final Approach Runway Occupancy Signal is a system that provides pilots on final approach to landing a warning that their runway of intended landing is occupied. FAROS uses the PAPI (Precision Approach Path Indicator) lights to give pilots a warning through the flashing of these lights that the runway is not safe for landing. FAROS is now being tested in DFW. For more information check out the link below.*

[http://www.faa.gov/about/office\\_org/headquarters\\_offices/ato/service\\_units/operations/td/projects/FAROS/how\\_it\\_works/media/050402-FAROS-FAQs.pdf](http://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/ato/service_units/operations/td/projects/FAROS/how_it_works/media/050402-FAROS-FAQs.pdf)

"go, no go" decision applies through your "entire" flight. Continually evaluate your flight as it progresses, the ability to fly to your airport of intended landing may not be an option as unforeseen events can arise.

No matter how many hours or ratings you have, always learn from your experiences or other peoples' experiences. After my flight into Medellín I now keep a "radio log" of all frequencies used on a specific flight. I also pull up weather and distances for airports not provided in our flight plan. This gives me a "bigger" picture of the flight and provides resources I may need in a pinch.

Consider having a "Plan C" on longer cross country flights, and remember when you least expect it "Murphy" may be riding onboard your airplane.

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## Ask the Instructor

How do large airports dispose of all that snow that accumulates?

Meet the snow melters. Snow melters are essentially 40 degree Fahrenheit whirlpools, heated by natural gas." In-ground units are capable of melting up to 120 tons of snow per hour. One portable unit will melt 60 tons of snow per hour. The melters have eliminated the time-consuming task of hauling snow down to ground level through height-restricted areas, or off airport property.

Portable units start at \$250,000.



### Ask the Instructor-

Do you have a question you would like answered in the next issue?

Please contact:

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### Next Issue: Different Airports

*After almost a year flying out of Miami International Airport, I am now based at NY's JFK airport.*

*Different airports have unique operating procedures, and as an airline base usually offers a variety of different flying. New airports offer new challenges in weather, terrain, and operating procedures. The layovers can also bring fresh adventures in using spare time. Till next month.....*

*Tailwinds and Blue Skies*

