

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FLIGHTDECK

- LIFE LESSONS LEARNED THROUGH AVIATION -

by Jerry Tobias

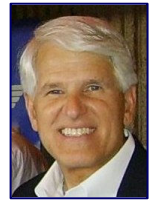
"I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw."

Proverbs 24:32



INFLIGHT REFUELING

...THE IMPORTANCE OF FOCUS AND TRUST



One of the most interesting and - at times - challenging flight maneuvers I have experienced is inflight refueling. Unique to military aviation, the ability to receive additional fuel from an airborne tanker is significant, because it enables mission capabilities that would not otherwise be possible.

The inflight refueling procedure begins with a rendezvous between the tanker and "receiver" aircraft. After completing the rendezvous, the receiver pilot must first stabilize the aircraft in what is known as the "pre-contact" position. This position varies, but is usually around 20 feet below and 50 feet behind the tanker. When stabilized, the receiver is then cleared to the "contact" position, which is just a few feet below and behind the tanker.

The actual connection is completed by either the extension of a refueling boom from the tanker to the receiver's receptacle (as shown in the photo on page one), or by a receiver probe and tanker drogue ("basket") arrangement. In either case, once connected, the transfer of fuel from the tanker to the receiver aircraft can begin.

I sometimes had to take on fuel during difficult conditions, and learned - first hand - that two of the things critical to the success of inflight refueling are **focus** and **trust**.

The receiver airplane is always "hand-flown" (the autopilot is off) while behind the tanker. As a receiver pilot, therefore, you must diligently *focus* on the tanker in order to keep your airplane in the proper position to maintain the connection and complete the refueling.

You must also *trust* the tanker crew for such things as severe weather avoidance, conflicting traffic avoidance, airspeed control, altitude control, heading control, general navigation, communication, etc. Why? First, these things are the tanker crew's responsibility during refueling. Also, though, if - as a receiver pilot - you give more than very brief, intermittent attention to these matters, the distraction and diversion of your focus would probably make staying in position behind the tanker impossible.

So, during inflight refueling, you quickly learn that you **must focus** on the tanker, and **must trust** the tanker crew to lead you safely along the refueling track. I have discovered that these two requirements are also crucial parts of life.

Our world is clouded by uncertainty and blanketed by turmoil and fear. The old song lyrics that reminded us that "the things that you can count on grow fewer every day" are truer now than ever. Getting through these times, therefore, really does require focus and trust.

Our **focus** determines our perspectives, which - in turn - govern our responses to all that we encounter each. And, whom and how much we **trust** determines whether we live with *peace*...or live with hearts full of *fear*.

I think of fear as **F-E-A-R**: "*Forgetting Everything Already Received*." In spite of all that is happening, has not every heartbeat, every breath that we've taken and every day that we've lived been a gift from God? Has He not provided the strength, talents, gifts and abilities that have enabled us to earn income to buy food and to pay the mortgage?

When we forget that, though, our focus tends to be on all of the uncertainties that surround us now and that we see ahead. The resulting perspective causes us to view our concerns as bigger than or beyond God. However, **NOTHING** is bigger than God. **NOTHING** is beyond His knowledge, His understanding or His reach. Why, then, should we surrender to a wrong belief that says, "God can't or God might not?"

Faith is just the opposite of fear. I define faith as **F-A-I-T-H**: "*Facing Anything, I Trust Him.*" No matter what *has* happened, what *is* happening, or what *might* happen, *I can trust God*, and trust that He is well aware of and well able to lead me over, around or even *through* anything. He has *never* forsaken me. He has *always* sustained me through every bit of physical, emotional or circumstantial adversity. I **can** trust Him to continue to do so!

Yes, focus and trust are important during inflight refueling. Both, however, are immeasurably more important in life.

I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. Psalm 26:1b

In God I trust; I will not be afraid. Psalm 56:4

I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings. Psalm 57:1b [like a receiver behind a tanker]

My eyes are fixed on you, O sovereign Lord. Psalm 141:8

THE BOTTOM LINE? I have relationship with God because of my response to the gift of His Son. Because of this, and because of His unfailing love and never-ending faithfulness, I can **focus** on and **trust** Him to lead, guide, protect, strengthen, sustain and care for me every minute of my life and every mile of my journey.

Whom, then, shall I fear? Of what shall I be afraid?

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