



# Haste Makes Waste

by: Bill Rhodes, Ph.D.

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## Preamble:

This is the first in a series of articles based on findings from the Airmanship Education Research Initiative (AERI), sponsored by Avemco Insurance Company.

Although aircraft, electronics, and internet-based education have made great strides over recent years, there has been little improvement in the losses GA suffers. While this relative lack of improvement may seem surprising at first, it makes sense when we remember that most losses are the result of pilot error. We can improve our equipment and systems all we want, but if we fail to improve as pilots, the loss statistics are likely to remain grim.

The roots of pilot error have never been fully understood. The AERI research, however, is making progress, and while there remains much work to be done, it is appropriate to offer some preliminary findings in the interest of improving aviation safety.

The AERI research is led by Dr. Bill Rhodes of Aerworthy Consulting, LLC. Feel free to contact him at brhodes@aerworthy.com

## “Haste Makes Waste,” or “Being in a hurry around airplanes is often a bad idea.”

It seems so obvious that it's barely worth mentioning, and yet we see losses, sometimes fatal losses, that could most likely have been avoided had caring about safety superseded caring about a deadline.

### Don't take my word for it; check these brief synopses from NTSB fatal-accident summaries:

After landing the pilot called FSS at 11:32 CST & required weather info to his next destination. The specialist advised that his weather computer was out of service & suggested the pilot contact another facility or call back in about 20 min. The pilot indicated he was in a hurry & ended the conversation. No record was found of any other weather briefing. The aircraft departed at 1155 CST. While cruising at 8000', the pilot asked the center controller about weather along his route. The controller advised his radar displayed an area of light showers ahead & cleared the pilot to deviate around the weather. Approximately 5 min later, radar & radio contact were lost & the aircraft crashed. An exam revealed one wing had separated in flight from overload failure. The wing was found approximately 1 mi from the main wreckage. No pre-accident part failure or malfunction was found. A weather study showed the aircraft crashed in an area of frontal activity where thunderstorms were building. Lcl personnel reported heavy rain, lightning & ground visibility of 1/8 mi. Convective sigmet 26c (issued at 1055) warned of imbedded thunderstorms in the area with tops above 45,000'.

### And from another report:

The pilot & passengers were on a flight from TX to AR. An en-route stop was made at approximately 1900 to refuel. The owner of the airport stated that the plane arrived in a fairly heavy rainstorm. At that time, a winter type cold

front was moving east thru Texas, Oklahoma & Arkansas. Numerous thunderstorms & heavy rainstorms were present & a tornado watch was in effect from 2130 to 0100 for eastern Oklahoma and west Arkansas. The airport owner suggested waiting over night & offered accommodations, but said the pilot & passengers were in a hurry. Reportedly, rain was falling quite heavily when they went to the aircraft. They waited until the storm subsided then takeoff; however, their planned route would have taken them thru the same storm. At approximately 2010 a witness near the crash site heard variations in engine power. He went outside & observed the plane approximately 10 to 15 sec before it went out of sight then heard an explosion & saw a fireball when the plane hit a mountain side at night. No pre-impact engine failure was found.

### Similarly:

The pilot departed on a special VFR clearance after being advised numerous times that VFR flight was not recommended. Shortly after takeoff (8 minutes) the aircraft dove out of the clouds and crashed near the airport. The pilot was not instrument rated. Prior to taking off, the pilot had indicated that he was in a hurry to get to anchorage to participate in a gun show.

While we will never know the full story behind these accidents, it seems clear that haste played an important role. (I found these on the NTSB's website by using the keyword "hurry").

Getting to a destination on time comes with a sense of satisfaction. But if the urgency to be in the air overrides what good airmanship requires, the outcome can be tragic. Injuries or fatalities will distress our families, friends, and business associates far more than tardiness or a polite

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notification that plans have changed. Commercial operators delay or cancel flights when good judgment dictates they do so. Our safety record in GA would undoubtedly improve if more of us were willing to do the same or divert to alternate airports when continuing on presents hazards.

Though still in its early stage, AERI, research relies in part on recreating mishaps in sophisticated simulators. Our scenarios are based upon actual accidents. While our sample size thus far is small, when we set pilots up using the same circumstances found in the accident reports, we find that a number of pilots seem to end up making the same mistakes. However, a fair share of pilots successfully complete the scenarios to fly another day with relatively little stress. Those who manage the problems successfully typically do so in an efficient and methodical “first-things-first” fashion. Often, they choose to terminate the scenario short of the planned destination, despite being encouraged to “press-on.” Those who complete the session unsuccessfully often try to do many things in a rush, as though everything were of equal importance. Many let concern for getting to their destination override concern for safety, and so they fail at both.

While there are times that speed is important (in-flight fire, for example), most activities around airplanes are best conducted methodically. Effectiveness is not the same as speed. And this is true well before we get near airplanes. Rushed preflight planning or inspections are obviously risky. But being in a hurry, for example, to complete training, to buy an airplane, to repair an airplane, or to get to a destination can also invite regrets later.

Flying and owning an airplane is extraordinarily fulfilling, but it demands time, devotion, and properly-focused attention. That’s part of what makes it so fulfilling. We’re GA enthusiasts because we enjoy it; there’s little reason to hurry through training or to rush the process of getting to know our aircraft. Doing so can create gaps in our knowledge or skills that may develop into in-flight emergencies. On the other hand, taking the time to engage our passion for aviation in thoughtful and deliberate ways is both fulfilling and contributes to loss-prevention. As we used to say in the military, “If you want it bad, you’ll probably get it bad.”

This article is based in part on NTSB reports and internal research at Avemco® under AERI. Accident synopses were developed from actual National Transportation Safety Board reports, with minor changes in specific locations and for ease of reading. No reflection is made upon any person, living or dead.

My thanks to Katy Allen for her review of this article.

Bill Rhodes is the lead investigator for the Airmanship Education Research Initiative (AERI), of which Avemco is the charter sponsor. His ongoing participation with this program is bringing a rigorous academic approach to the understanding and prevention of accident-causing behavior in pilots. A retired military officer, Bill is also the author of *An Introduction to Military Ethics: A Reference Handbook* and a former professor at the U.S. Air Force Academy.