

The Britannia incident by Ted Tierney

As everyone knows, the wintry weather conditions in Canada are more than matched in various parts of the world. But as far as modern airports are concerned most Canadian airports go through their yearly aberrations, sometimes experiencing fairly dangerous taxiway surface conditions.

This, in turn, means that airline personnel there are well grounded in methods aimed at lessening unforeseen accidents though accidents will occur. So, with hindsight, a wonderful thing befell one unfortunate Canadian Pacific Airlines pilot wherever his normal domicile.

Now I am not in possession of all the facts but as this was a ground related incident it may have been the case that this pilot was alone in the cockpit with the aircraft parked with the intent of carrying out a power related check on the engines. During such stationary ground based power checks the continual vibrations sometimes convey the illusion that the airplane is actually rolling on the move. A dangerous illusion at times. So as the engine run up continued with the pilot's alertness subdivided between reading gauges plus observance all around the following events took their course.

Unknowns to him, with brakes applied or not, the aircraft began to slide forward at an ever-increasing speed directly and squarely towards a substantial hangar building with its main doors closed.

On looking up the pilot saw the hangar doors "coming straight for him" but too late to avoid a collision owing to the slippery ice all around. He wisely applied reverse thrust but to no avail. The collision, although partway diminished the impact, KO 'd the pilot temporarily.

This resulted in the airplane beginning an acceleration backwards with no one controlling the throttles or the steering. Well you know what happens when you wheel a bike backwards with your hands off the handlebars; the front wheel turns away from straight. So you can imagine the havoc that occurred as this plane ran backwards skidding here and there on impact with various aircraft parked nearby until the pilot recovered or the aircraft got lodged.

Myself, I knew nothing of this until arriving for my shift the next day. And what a sight! Admittedly only a few airplanes and helicopters nearby with damaged wingtips and rotors was one thing; but with all these guys trigged out with eggs and bacon everywhere assessing the damage was a bit out of the ordinary. Then as I strolled around to the front of the Britannia saw how remarkably flat and smooth the nose cone appeared; .as if a shear cut slice of solid metal.

However, it was a lesson to us all involved as we were with engine power checks on stationary aircraft for previously our big dread was taxiing large aircraft on ice with a following wind or while turning past a hangar at close quarters in windy circumstance.

When towing aircraft to a parking position we always knew to spatter sand on the areas intended for the tires before rolling into the required position. This was old hat long before that incident.

Regards Ted Tierney.