

# Mayday over the Mississippi

Q. What was the first clue that something was wrong?

A. The explosion. My number six cylinder blew.

When banker Mick Guttau's single-engine plane lost all RPMs at 23,000 feet in instrument flight conditions, he knew he had a problem. When the second explosion came, and a connecting rod punctured the Cessna Centurion's cowlings, he knew he had a big problem.

"It was like I'd taken a 50 caliber round," says the former Vietnam Cobra helicopter pilot.

Guttau, chairman & CEO of \$187.4 million-assets Treynor (Iowa) State Bank, was with his wife, Judy at the time. The couple frequently flies to meetings, and this trip called for a four-hour, 20 minute, route from Council Bluffs, Iowa, to Washington, D.C.

When the explosion came, about when they crossed the Mississippi, Guttau immediately set up for a glide

and radioed an emergency to Chicago Center controllers. He pulled his air-speed back to 85 knots to conserve momentum and gain distance. Airspace was cleared for him to attempt the closest runway, which was in Moline, Ill.

"I tell people that for 15 minutes, I owned Quad City International Airport," says Guttau.

The veteran pilot began working through his memorized emergency checklist and assessing his situation. He couldn't tell at that point what was going on under the cowlings, so he shut off the fuel to avoid a fire.

Cabin pressure remained adequate (pressurization had quit), but Guttau had to decide whether to "pop" the oxygen or not. "It's chemically generated," he explains, "and the process causes extremely high temperatures."

Then he thought, "I feel okay, Judy feels okay, everything's okay. But then I remembered that one of the symptoms of hypoxia [oxygen deprivation] is the feeling that everything's cool, euphoria," Guttau recalls. (In the end, he elected not to "pop.")

At one point, he says, "Judy put her hand on my arm, and said, 'I love you, Honey.' I didn't say a word, but I was thinking, 'You know, I love you too, but I'm a little busy right now!'"

He looked away from the instruments long enough to see tears in his wife's eyes. "Honey, don't cry, pray!" he said. And Judy answered, "I am!"

She'd flown thousands of hours with Mick, and knew all the risks. Guttau discussed options if the glide wouldn't take them to Moline—try for another



Years of safety courses came in handy when Mick Guttau made a "dead stick" landing to bring he and wife, Judy, down after losing power.

airport, a good road, or even a field, with the hope they wouldn't flip. He felt, at touchdown speed, even in a muddy field they'd stand a good chance of walking away.

Finally, the Centurion broke through the clouds at 7,000 feet and Guttau could see Moline, three miles off. The glide continued and he made a successful landing—with emergency vehicles waiting.

Said Judy: "Mick, that's the smoothest landing you've ever made."

He replied, "You know, ever since I bought this bigger plane, I've always had power management problems on landing. But now I've solved it. You just have to cut power at 23,000 feet." ■

*Thanks to banker/pilot Frank Breazeale for interviewing help. Flying enthusiasts: Read and see more at [www.ababj.com](http://www.ababj.com)*