



Offbeat Oregon History: No. 472

By Finn JD John
For The Sentinel

At around 11 a.m. on the morning of Saturday, March 26, 1955, Florence Hollister was reclining on a comfortable window seat on a Boeing 377 Stratocruiser as the stewardess busily prepared a sumptuous lunch.

The airplane was a big one by 1955 standards, a double-decker with four big radial engines, capable of handling more than 80 passengers. Today, though, this one was comfortably empty; only 23 people were on board, including the crew of 8. Most of those other passengers were tourists looking forward to a week or two vacationing in Hawaii.

Not Mrs. Hollister, though. She and her husband, Claude, both former Portlanders who'd moved away during the World War, were actually on their way to Jakarta, where Claude had taken a job as aviation adviser to the Indonesian government.

She gazed out the window, letting her eyes rest on the wing of the plane as the endless blue Pacific Ocean reeled away beneath it, 10,000 feet below. They'd left Portland International Airport about an hour before; they were now roughly 35 miles off the Oregon Coast,

over international waters.

And then the inboard engine, just a few feet away from her, disappeared in a great red ball of fire, as if it had been hit with an artillery shell.

Up in the cockpit, things had suddenly gotten very lively. Captain Herman S. Joslyn had noticed a ferocious vibration a few seconds before. Thinking it a cowl flap that had torn loose from the engine nacelle, Joslyn turned off the autopilot. And that's when it happened. Joslyn didn't see the fireball, but he definitely felt the shuddering impact as the number-three engine suddenly ripped itself out of the wing and hurtled down into the sea below.

Joslyn struggled with the elevator controls. They seemed locked. The plane, trimmed for four engines and now running on three, settled into a spiral dive. Joslyn stood with feet braced against the firewall, pulling up on the yoke. Nothing happened. He called to co-pilot Angus Hendrick to help. Slowly the controls started to respond — the nose came up, and the airspeed dropped. But now suddenly the plane was on the verge of a stall-and-spin.

Somehow Joslyn and Hendrick managed to get the nose back down in time to prevent

that. But by then, less than 1,000 feet lay between them and a watery grave. Joslyn shouted for power, and engineer M.F. Kerwick pushed the throttles forward. They did not respond. He tried them one at a time. Nothing. They were still stubbornly making the same amount of power they'd been generating when the number-three engine tore free. And that just wasn't enough power to keep the plane in the air.

Joslyn shouted a warning to prepare for a ditching, and feathered the controls as best he could with Hendrick's muscular help. Then the 70-ton airplane touched the water's surface, skipped, and slammed to a stop. Trays and knives from the galley, suitcases, books and papers, and seats torn loose from their bolts — many of them with passengers still strapped into them — hurtled forward to crash into the front of the plane.

The crew hastily collected the life rafts — which had flown forward with the other stuff and demolished a row of seats (empty ones, luckily) near the front of the plane. These they pitched out the main door, on the left-hand side of the plane. The passengers, unbuckling themselves from the wreckage, made their way as best they could to the

doors and hatches, jumped into the sea, and swam for the life rafts.

Meanwhile co-pilot Hendrick, who had helped Joslyn tame that death spiral after the engine blew, and engineer Kerwick, who'd struggled with the throttles, had clambered out the emergency exit over the right side of the plane. After jumping into the drink, they'd found themselves faced with an impossible task: swim around the sinking airplane to reach the life rafts on the other side, which the light surface wind was blowing away faster than they could swim.

They wouldn't make it, and the survivors in the life raft had to listen to their dwindling cries as the wind carried them away.

A young banker from Auburn, David Darrow, also was unable to reach the life rafts, and an 80-year-old passenger named John Peterson died in his wife's arms after being pulled aboard one of the life rafts.

"I didn't know it was John," Mrs. Peterson told Associated Press reporter Elmer Vogel. "I just noticed that someone had been dragged in all covered with oil. I lifted his head up and laid it in my lap so it wouldn't lie in the water on the bottom of the life raft. He opened his eyes

and smiled weakly, then said, 'Oh, is that you, Emma?' Then he didn't say any more."

More would doubtless have followed, but luckily a Navy ship was 18 miles away when the plane went down, and less than two hours later help was on the scene. Most of the survivors were badly chilled, but only one — a young Seattle woman named Patricia Lacey, whose leg was broken in the crash — suffered a serious injury (other than death, of course). She was rescued by purser Natalie Parker, who swam around the airplane to retrieve her as she lay unconscious in the water, and dragged her around the airplane in time to catch the last raft as the wind blew it past the broken-off tail section.

In the end, 19 of the original 23 passengers and crew made it home safe. Most of them were now faced with a decision: should they call off their vacations and go home, or get on another airplane?

For Gail Dillingham, 18, there wasn't much choice. She lived in Hawaii, and would have to get home somehow. During the hearing on April 20, a member of the crowd asked her how she planned to go.

"United Airlines," she quipped.

Several months later, the investigation concluded that propeller failure was to blame. The tip of one of the propeller blades had apparently started to tear — causing the vibration that Captain Joslyn mistook for a cowl flap — then ripped loose and flew off, at which point the engine ripped itself loose in a cloud of fuel mixture which was ignited by the engine exhausts. Luckily, the 220-knot slipstream blew the fire out like a candle flame; had all the gasoline that ended up floating on the sea after the ditching caught fire, many more would have died.

The engine, the report continued, had physically removed a link in the electrical circuit when it went, disabling all electrical power on the wings. This had apparently disabled the servo-motors on the elevator flaps, making the controls very difficult to move; and the constant-speed propeller hubs, making it impossible to change the power settings.

In the end, the lessons learned in the accident — especially the 14 recommendations that the heroic purser, Natalie Parker, offered at the preliminary hearing — ended up saving hundreds of lives in future ditchings over the years.

Dr. Fuhrman: Does diet impact seasonal allergies?

The best medicine for seasonal allergies may not be medicine. Instead, healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle go a long way in lessening symptoms. A study of 56 different countries found that populations with higher rates of tobacco use, trans fat intake and acetaminophen use had higher rates of allergies and asthma; however, populations with higher intake of plant-based foods had lower rates of allergies and asthma.

When you follow a high-nutrient diet, you are creating an environment in your body that promotes proper immune function and regulation of the inflammatory response, which may help to blunt allergy symptoms naturally.

The daily activities and quality of life of about 7.5 percent of adults and nine percent of children in the U.S. are impaired by the sneezing, coughing and red, itchy eyes that are symptomatic of allergies.

Pollens from grass, trees and weeds are the primary culprits; the immune system inappropriately recognizes these airborne substances as harmful

invaders and produces antibodies. Each time one comes into contact with the pollen, an immune attack ensues, leading to inflammation and cold-like symptoms.

Factors associated with increased risk of allergy development in children include a family history of allergies, exposure to cigarette smoke during early childhood, childhood acetaminophen use and the relatively low intake of omega-3 fatty acids in developed countries.

Unfortunately, allergic conditions are increasing, and there are several theories for why this is occurring. One theory is the hygiene hypothesis, the idea that having less exposure to pathogens and bacteria early in life increases our susceptibility to allergic conditions. According to this theory, early viral and bacterial exposure activates an immune response that aids the developing immune system, making later-life allergies less likely. Supporting this hypothesis, having pets, a greater number of siblings and a greater number of early viral infections are associated with decreased risk

of allergies.

The factors that affect development of allergies in children may also be relevant to allergy symptoms in adults. Higher intake of antioxidant nutrients, such as vitamin C and beta-carotene, is associated with reduced seasonal allergies in children. Similarly, high blood levels of carotenoids, including beta-carotene, are associated with a lower likelihood of seasonal allergies in adults.

Omega-3 fatty acids are one widely studied dietary factor associated with the development of allergies. Higher omega-3 intake (primarily ALA and EPA) and blood omega-3 levels have been associated with reduced risk of seasonal allergies in adults. Several studies have suggested that omega-3 supplementation during pregnancy likely reduces the risk of allergic conditions in the child. ALA is found in walnuts and flax, chia, and hemp seeds. The omega-3 fatty acids DHA and EPA are commonly found in fish, but due to mercury and pollutants commonly found in fish, an algae-derived omega-3 supplement is a cleaner option.

Adults deficient in Vitamin D are more likely to have allergies than those with sufficient vitamin D levels. Getting adequate vitamin D during pregnancy may be protective against the development of allergies in children. The safest way of getting adequate vitamin D is via supplementation with D3.

Currently, there has not been much data published on the effects of diet on symptoms of seasonal allergies. However, in my medical practice I have observed that the change to a high-nutrient diet is accompanied by a wide variety of benefits, including an improvement in allergy symptoms. I have seen many allergic patients slowly reduce the severity of their allergies, and over time many achieved complete relief from allergies. Adding certain supplemental phytochemicals, such as rosmarinic acid and luteolin from the Perilla frutescens seed, to a healthful diet may provide additional help for the nose and eye irritation characteristic of seasonal allergies.

I wish you an allergy-free season!

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