



Photo by ANTHONY S. CASPER

Steve Griggs, a junior civil engineering major from Spring, sits atop a pole for MDA donations. The ATO fraternity and several local businesses are sponsoring the event. ATO plans to have someone pole sitting from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. until Friday afternoon.

FAA questions landing options of Nelson's plane

Associated Press

EULESS — Rick Nelson's plane was only about 10 miles from a private airstrip when it reported trouble before crashing, but the condition of that field was unknown and wasn't offered as a landing option, a Federal Aviation Administration official said Tuesday.

James Howden, manager of the Air Route Control Center in Fort Worth, said there was a ranch airstrip in undetermined condition about 10 miles closer than the two nearest airports, which were about 20 miles away.

He made that statement after a news conference Tuesday where the question of landing options arose. FAA officials released the tape of the conversation between the control tower and Nelson's DC-3 which caught fire and crashed on New Year's Eve in northeast Texas.

Nelson, 45, his 27-year-old fiancée, four band members and a sound man died in the crash. The pilot and co-pilot survived.

Howden said he didn't know if air traffic controllers considered the ranch airstrip located about 10 miles from Nelson's plane or if they had too little time to spot it on a map.

The unedited tape recorded the voice of either the pilot or the co-pilot requesting help.

The recording indicates that the first sign of trouble aboard Nelson's plane is a statement from a crew member at 5:08 p.m. (CST): "I think I'd like to turn around, uh, head for Texarkana here. I've got a little problem."

The Fort Worth traffic control center tells the pilot Texarkana is the closest airport.

The pilot responds, "Uh, Fort Worth, just any field will do. We've got a problem here."

The control center then informs the pilot that Red River County Airport is 19 miles away and the Mount Pleasant airport is 22 miles away.

At that point, the pilot said, "We've got uh... smoke in the cockpit."

An American Eagle airliner in the area then joins in the conversation.

"Says he can't make it. Have you got anything closer at all, even shorter?"

Then the last response from the DC-3 cockpit is heard at 5:11 p.m.: "(Unintelligible) smoke in the cockpit, have smoke in the cockpit."

From an unknown source, but most likely from the cockpit, comes the comment, "—on oxygen."

The American Eagle offers to help:

"Hey, Center, can uh, (we) be of any assistance. We'll pull up on his wing and lead him someplace if we have to."

The center informs American Eagle it must make a 180-degree turn and head back to Texarkana.

"Find whatever it takes," the Eagle pilot responds.

Then, the tower says, "... I don't believe you're gonna, uh, be able to catch him in time. I show his Mode C now 600 feet so that would put him just a couple hundred feet above ground level."

At almost 5:13 p.m., the airliner responds, "We want to follow him anyway if we can help him out."

And 28 seconds later, a helicopter pilot radios, "Uh, we have the aircraft in sight looks like he's gone down. Uh, you need to call Texarkana for the Air Life helicopter."

At 5:19 p.m., the medical helicopter contacts the control tower.

American Eagle followed with a relay message from the helicopter, "He says it's totally engulfed in flames."

Continental flying high in '85 profits

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Continental, estimating it will post a record \$62.2 million profit for 1985, filed an amended plan in federal bankruptcy court Tuesday to repay almost \$900 million in debts.

The filing, which amends the airline's original reorganization plan submitted Sept. 5, includes provisions to pay \$17.5 million in severance pay to former striking pilots, Continental said.

The amended plan also allows for \$14.2 million in reorganization expenses, the carrier said.

Although the reorganization plan included estimates of Continental's 1985 income, the Houston-based airline has not yet released its year-end earnings report.

The \$62.2 million projected profit — which would be the highest in the carrier's 51-year history — includes the severance pay and reorganization costs, according to a statement from Continental.

"The strong 1985 results were aided by major strikes against two of Continental's largest competitors and by generally strong industry conditions," the Continental statement said.

Employee strikes were waged last year against Pan American World Airways and United Airlines.

Continental filed for reorganization of its debts under Chapter 11 of the federal bankruptcy code on Sept. 24, 1983. At the time, Continental slashed salaries by as much as 50 percent and trimmed its workforce by two-thirds.

The carrier posted a \$57.1 million loss in the fourth quarter of 1983, but has since emerged as a profitable, low-cost airline. Continental reported a \$41.3 million profit for the third quarter of 1985, its largest quarterly profit ever.

Three unions struck against the carrier at the height of its financial problems.

The Air Line Pilots Association last November became the last union to end its strike against the carrier. The Union of Flight Attendants and International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers ended their walkouts last April.

A Texas original First black Ph.D. had an unlikely beginning

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Ray Floyd Wilson's early education was nothing to brag about.

As the son of a struggling black farm family in Giddings, Wilson attended a one-room country school where as many as 90 youngsters vied for attention from one teacher.

It was an unlikely beginning for the student who was to become the first black Texan to break the state's higher education color barrier by

"I started school on a wing and a prayer. It could have gone either way."

— Ray Floyd Wilson, Texas Southern University's chemistry department head

earning a doctoral degree from the University of Texas.

Wilson, 59, now chairman of Texas Southern University's chemistry department, graduated with honors from the UT chemistry doctoral program in 1953 — three years before all-white Texas colleges began admitting blacks as undergraduates.

But Wilson said he never meant to be a pioneer. He just loved chemistry and wanted to keep learning.

Wilson was one of four black graduate-level students admitted to UT in the wake of a 1950 U.S. Supreme Court decision that said the

university must enroll blacks who would otherwise be denied graduate admission.

Under the ruling, UT became the first all-white institution of higher education in the South required by law to admit blacks to graduate programs.

There were no law or medical schools and few other advanced programs open to blacks. As a result, UT was sued in 1946 by Herman Marion Sweatt, a black Houston man who wanted to attend law school.

Sweatt was admitted to UT's law school in the fall of 1950 and Wilson followed close on Sweatt's heels by enrolling in January 1951.

Meanwhile, Wilson had completed a stint in the Navy and had earned a degree from Huston-Tillotson College in Austin. He was completing his master's degree in chemistry at TSU when he heard of the opportunity to enroll in the UT chemistry program.

By that time, Wilson, Sweatt and two other black men were enrolled in graduate and doctoral programs at UT, but Wilson was the only one to win a doctoral degree. The next wave of black graduate students at UT would not come until the late 1950s.

"I started school on a wing and a prayer," said Wilson of enrolling at a nearly all-white institution. "It could have gone either way."

Wilson's parents could not provide financial support, but a sympathetic banker in Giddings arranged to lend him \$200.

But his financial plight improved in the fall of 1951. UT chemistry professors arranged for him to get a research fellowship in lieu of a teaching assistantship because they were scared of student reaction to a black instructor. But he said he encountered few instances of being treated differently than whites.

"The degree of prejudice in Texas is on a different scale than that of the Deep South," says Wilson. If there was any prejudice, it was prejudice in my favor."

After graduation, Wilson headed to Houston to start a teaching position at TSU. He is in his 35th year as a chemistry professor and is chairman of the department.

A few months ago, Wilson won a \$134,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Energy for a 3-year study on removing toxic materials from wastewater. He and several

"The degree of prejudice in Texas is on a different scale than that of the Deep South."

—Ray Floyd Wilson

other TSU faculty members are researching conversion of coal into other energy components.

Despite his experiences at UT, Wilson has elected to work with a predominantly black school. He said he believes it is important to work with low-income students and give them the same chance to succeed that he was lucky enough to get.

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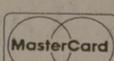
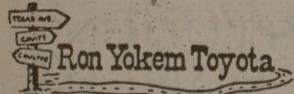
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