

Harrison Ford, Death Wishes and Dangerous Planes

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Harrison Ford

When I got the call, I was happily sipping a cup of tea and working on emails, so many emails. I picked up my Galaxy phone and looked quickly at the caller ID, but I didn't recognize the number. I could tell it was from a New York City area code, which meant it was either a call about a TV appearance or a PR agency inviting me to an event of some kind who knows where.

"Robert Goyer," I answered.

It was TV. The voice on the end of the line was that of Bob, a producer from CNN I got to know over the phone last year when I was asked to appear to speculate on the mystery of the missing (missing still) Malaysia 777 Flight 370.

What was happening now, I wondered. With clearly no time for pleasantries, Bob came right out and asked me the question he wanted to ask: He'd heard I was close friends with Harrison Ford. Could I appear on the show to comment on the Harrison Ford crash, like right now?

Immediately I felt faint. I tried to interrupt Bob, who was busy in the way only a 24-hour news cycle producer can be scheduling guests to discuss late breaking news, but it took me a few tries to address the only detail I cared about.

"Bob, stop and listen," I said. "Is he OK?"

He was banged up, Bob said, but it looked as though he'd be fine. Whew.

I made clear to Bob that Harrison and I were friendly acquaintances and not besties, which was good enough for him, and he transferred me. I was on the air.

One of the first questions Erin Burnett asked me was what kind of pilot Harrison Ford was. He is, I emphasized, the kind of pilot that a lot of us pilots wish we could be.

Every time I have the privilege to weigh in on a breaking story, especially when it involves personally flown airplanes, I know what my job is: to educate the folks presenting the news and those watching it on how our little segment of aviation works, because what they don't know is only the most important stuff there is to know.

For example, another producer from another network I talked with shortly thereafter asked if Harrison Ford had a death wish, what with him flying a dangerous antique airplane like he was.

Far from it, I said. What he was doing was what a guy does when he's cruising along a lonely two-lane highway on a gorgeous old-school Harley: living life and taking it all in, the sights, sounds, wind in his hair.

Death wish?

More like a life wish, if you ask me.