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Notre Dame, Indiana

University of Notre Dame

Office of the President

March 30, 1959

Lieutenant General Ilwood Quesada
Federal Aviation Agency
Washington, D. C.

Dear General Quesada:

As one of the paying customers who has traveled some five hundred thousand miles in commercial aircraft, I am more than somewhat interested in the recent discussions regarding the age and ability qualifications that the FAA may place on commercial airline pilots. My own personal interest, which may be somewhat related to my hope for survival, leads me to suggest that this is not a matter to be decided as most union matters are, since in the balance rests a life and death proposition, not simply a matter of comfort or pleasant working conditions. I realize that it would be difficult to state that an arbitrary age like 60 would be the cut off age for working commercial airline pilots, but it still seems to me that with the advances that have been made in electronic flight simulators, it should be possible to detect that pilots over the age of 50, to take an arbitrary break-off point, find it much more difficult to accustom themselves to the split-second reactions that are required in modern jet aircraft. As a matter of fact, I would be surprised if many of these past-fifty pilots would not prove themselves in the simulator quite capable of crashing a considerable number of aircraft.

I am fully conscious that one letter like this does not have any great effect in federal policy, but I would hope at least that it may assist you in coming to the conclusion that standards must be adjusted to the technology of our day, and that standards relating to the age of commercial aircraft pilots are badly needed in this day considering the tremendous technological advances that have been made in modern commercial aircraft. For whatever it has been worth, I do appreciate your having given me this brief hearing by means of this letter.

With all best wishes for the successful performance of your very difficult job, I am,

Cordially yours,

s/ T. M. Hesburgh, C.S. C.

(Rev.) Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.
President

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April 17, 1959

Mr. [Name] [Address] [City]

I am sorry to hear that I have covered on your letter on this topic in Dear Reverend [Name] [Address] [City] [State] [Zip]

Thank you very much for your letter of March 30, 1959. The complex problem of pilot aging is naturally of great concern to this Agency. It is not a large one numerically, but most of the airman who are involved could be senior airline captains so it is of considerable importance to know whether any or all of them are unsafe in performing such duties and should not be allowed to continue. In seeking to answer this question it should be noted that aging, per se, is not the problem, but rather the frequency of conditions likely to be associated with sudden incapacity or impairment of function or judgment. In other words, it is physiological not chronological age we are really concerned with. There is wide variation in the physiological age of individuals of a given chronological age. Furthermore, in any one individual there may be wide variation in the physiological age of different organs, tissues or systems. All these variations depend on differences in hereditary constitution together with the accidents of daily living and other environmental factors.

In the present state of the science and art of medicine the physiological age of all the component parts of a particular human body cannot be determined precisely, but only to a rough approximation. Research in this area is needed, which should follow two main lines. The first is development of new and more sensitive tests, instruments and techniques for measuring deterioration of functional capacity of various components of the body. The other is evaluation in terms of its effect on safety in flight, of whatever deterioration can be measured. The use of electronic flight simulators in the manner you suggest would contribute greatly to both these lines of investigation, and I will make every effort to institute and support such a program.

Although there exists at present no sound scientific evidence that airline piloting, or any other aeronautical activity, becomes critically unsafe at any given age, nevertheless it can be said that such activities do undoubtedly become less safe with increasing age beyond some ill defined point. Therefore I feel that until more evidence is available we have a moral responsibility in the interest of public safety to prohibit individuals over 60 years of age from undertaking the responsibility of commanding transport aircraft. Such action, if taken, will undoubtedly arouse a great deal of controversy, in which case your support and encouragement would be of inestimable value.

AGING

April 10, 1959

Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.

Acting Chief Air Surgeon

I earnestly hope that I may count on your backing on this topic in the future. In fact I should like to go further and request permission to call upon you for active assistance if necessary to help resolve this problem.

For the present I should appreciate it if you would consider confidential the information that we are contemplating issuance of regulations concerning an upper limit on the age of pilots permitted to command transport aircraft. Premature revelation might make it much more difficult to accomplish.

Once again, thank you for your letter. I find it difficult to express how much your interest and encouragement help when difficult decisions must be made.

Sincerely yours,

W-1, Mr. MacKenzie

E. B. QUISADA
Administrator

Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.
President, University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana

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cc: W-1, Mr. MacKenzie, W-265(2), W-268
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