



Rako Studios » Media » Politics » Disaster

## Disaster

**The Kursk, the Kennedy crash, the Ostankino tower are all disasters.  
So is the course of American politics.**



The Russian submarine Kursk sank in 2000. The same year later Russia suffered a fire in the Ostankino Tower.

The elevator cables melted through and the elevator fell 1000 feet, killing several fireman and the elevator operator. This got me thinking about socialism, as well as the death of John Kennedy Jr.

You really have to hand it to Russia. What other country has such a fabulous gift for tragedy? It's easy to see why Tolstoy and Doestoyevski came from there, not to mention Ayn Rand. The submarine story had me pretty engrossed but now they top even that with this burning tower gig. What a flair for drama those commies have. One has to think of the decrepit conditions in Atlas Shrugged when one reads about Russia falling apart at the seams. Ayn must be smiling in heaven.

## 1. Disaster

1. Were they screaming?
2. The Kennedy airplane crash
3. The Alaska Airlines crash
4. The Kursk
5. The Ostankino Tower
6. Conclusion

Both Russian tragedies had that great component of un-muffled terror right at the end. The sub guys had 2 minutes and 15 seconds and the people in the elevator had whatever time it takes to free-fall a thousand feet.

The fact that after they splatted on the ground floor the counterweights and cable came down on top of them makes this event even more entertaining. The news that the cable burned means only one thing: The elevators in the tallest building in Russia are operated by rope. It's Victor Hugo meets the Road Runner. I see why newspapers follow the creed: "If it bleeds it leads."

### **Were they screaming?**

I get curious about this stuff because I have started to ask myself that defining question: "Were they screaming when they went?" After all, that is the basis of the entire genre of B-grade horror flicks.

I was in Las Vegas a few years ago and went on a ride called "The Big Shot". It's situated a thousand feet in the air on the top of a very tall skyscraper. The ride, if you can call it that, consisted of spire that shot you up at several G's another 300 or so feet. Then you went into free fall as you came down. Right before you hit, the thing slows your decent and gently returns you to the starting position.

Now, the several G take off really didn't bother me at all. But that free fall decent up a thousand feet in the air with nothing to look at as a reference, well that had a more telling effect. I screamed like a teenage schoolgirl. So did everybody else.

The silly little merry-go-round ride at the top of the building was broken that day (very comforting) so my sweetheart and I wangled another launch on the Big Shot. I screamed like a schoolgirl again despite my firm resolve not to do so. So screaming as you go is something of an emotional beacon for me.

I know cool reason and rationality might be dispensed with no matter how earnest the intent is to keep it, even when you know what's coming and the harmless eventual outcome. It is a decidedly non-Objectivist kind of experience which is probably why I liked it so much.

### **The Kennedy airplane crash**

The first time I asked myself "Were they screaming?" was after the Kennedy airplane crash. I made a few phone calls to my aeronautically inclined engineering buddies and asked their opinion.

One buddy pointed out that in a light fog you can just fly the damn thing into the ocean as smooth as silk. The propwash swirling around the cockpit can be very disorienting and if you don't trust the instruments you can fly it right into the water. My other buddy had a little more info about the crash and postulated that Jonnny-boy got caught in a "Death Spiral". I liked the sound of that so I asked him to elaborate.

He said that it's easy to lose your sense of level in those conditions and if you don't look at or trust the artificial horizon the plane begins a slight bank. Physics being what it is, this causes the plane to lose altitude since the wings are at an angle and shedding a little lift. The concerned but clueless pilot sees the altimeter falling and does the natural thing and pulls up on the stick.

This just makes the bank tighter and the plane continues to turn tighter and continues to lose more altitude. So the victim just pulls back on the stick harder and the plane tightens its spiral even more. Nobody bothers to look at the artificial horizon gauge which is falling out of its gimbals by now or they would know to use the ailerons to level the damn plane out.

The airplane starts really losing altitude (this is that tense "I'm confused -- nothing makes sense" stage). The hapless aeronaut pulls back even harder on the stick. Then the plane goes into a stall-spin.

I can guarantee you the gals and Johnny K were screaming their asses off when they hit the water. It's kind of comforting in a way. I mean there is no arrogance like political arrogance and it's so satisfying to see reality get the upper hand. The privileged elite screaming their asses off right before their misuse of a brilliantly engineered million-dollar piece of machinery snuffs out their lives. How sweet.

That Johnny boy and the missus were still of childbearing age makes it all the sweeter since the gene pool is improved twice, once by their absence and once by the prevention of any more Kennedy political Stepford Children being brought into the world.

## **The Alaska Airlines crash**

Next was the Alaska Airlines crash off the Pacific coast. My friend Fred worked for Boeing many years ago. They had just fitted a prototype plane with leading edge flaps. Fowler flaps, I believe they're called.

Flying the plane was Tex Johnson, the famous test pilot that once did a barrel roll with the only 707 in existence. He would have been fired except for the fact that the Saudi sheik in the grandstand turned to the Boeing executive next to him and said "I'll take 30 of them" the moment Tex was done with the maneuver.

So anyway, Fred is flying in the back and Tex is jetting around Seattle and then the right side leading edge flap breaks off. I will take Fred's word for it that a jet having one wing with a 12 inch gash in the leading edge flies very very scary. He heard Tex radio the Boeing president and heard the Boeing president say Tex should "put it in the Sound" if there was any danger to civilians and ground personnel in landing it. That's Puget Sound.

Well, Tex kept playing around with power and pitch and all them funny little levers in the cockpit until he could kind of feel he had some small thread of control of the beast. He finally did manage to land the thing A-OK.

The interesting thing was Fred telling me how much worse it is being a passenger in that situation. See, if you're flying the thing you can only think of pulling the levers and talking on the radio and all this other stuff so you're pretty busy not to mention that you're in control of the whole mess.

As a passenger you have all time in the world to ponder that one thought: "I am about to die."

Now I've never asked Fred if he was screaming but I doubt it because he's a pretty serious guy.

During WWII his Uncle and Aunt used to hide Jews in their house across the street from SS headquarters in Amsterdam. When a US bomber pilot intentionally crashed his plane into the Headquarters, Fred's relatives used the confusion to sneak a few more Jews into the attic.

So Fred doesn't strike me as the screaming kind. As to the passengers on that Alaska Airline jet though, well, the black boxes show the plane went inverted before it hit the drink so I think it's a pretty safe bet everybody was screaming on impact. There is more of a tragic air to these screams as the passengers surely were not at fault and did not deserve their circumstances. I'd like to think they all be OK now if Alaska didn't stop using that Mobil grease on the jackscrew but that's only because I really liked those pro-capitalism Mobil Oil ads 15 years ago.

### **The Kursk**

Then came the Kursk. The first explosion and the 2 minutes and 15 seconds sure could create that same sense of "Something's going terribly wrong here." Still, I have to believe the submariners training and the sense of indestructibility shared by all adventurous young men would have superseded the instinct to scream.

I see a lot of shouting and confusion and desperate measures to get the thing slowed down and pitched upward but no hysterics. Not by submariners. They have a certain dignity. When that boat slammed into the seabed and the 4 or 5 torpedoes went off the end was instant and final. No, there was no screaming on the Kursk

### **The Ostankino Tower**

But what about the radio tower? The elevator plunged a thousand feet. They were enclosed so they didn't get that scary out-in-space feeling I had on the Big Shot. They were professional firefighters. What about the elevator operator? Would she have lost it?

Don't assume that women scream first. Studies show it's us control freak men that really lose it and go hysterical in crisis situations. It may be that the child-rearing function requires women to keep cool so they can save the offspring. Who knows?



I have to believe the people in the elevator were screaming. I mean, it was a 1000 feet for Christ's sake. That's a lot of time to consider "the thought". Screaming seems like a good option. I'm sure the screams stopped the instant the elevator hit the ground. The crushing thud of the counterweights a few seconds later only served as grim punctuation to the event. The Atlas Shrugged imagery of some poor hapless animals being destroyed by forces beyond their comprehension make these screams pathetic and haunting.

## **Conclusion**

Ideas do indeed have consequences and the idea that nobody owns anything is playing out before our eyes in Mother Russia.

When I see George Bush and Al Gore tripping over each other to give even more entitlements to the old and the young and everybody in between I think maybe we all should be screaming too. They are about to deliver us to a system that produced the sinking Kursk and the burning radio tower. Most of America will be screaming like the poor clueless passengers in the Alaska Airline jet. Our privileged leaders will be screaming like the arrogant Kennedys in the private plane. But the result will be the same--the death of the finest country in history.

Weep for the dead. Weep for the future.