

The Final Approach of Flight 232

Jeff Barker

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

SYNOPSIS

A radio voice representing Minneapolis Center Control announces an emergency and hands off the flight to Sioux City Approach Control. Within moments, the United pilot and the Sioux City controller are working together to coax the crippled aircraft into the airport. The pilot focuses on his instrument panel and the controller focuses on her radar screen as they link hands across the miles to save as many lives as they can in a matter of a few minutes.

As it turns out, the plane's hydraulic lines have all been severed. It can only be controlled by using differential power on the plane's two wing engines. As the plane spirals down in right hand turns, the controller attempts to calculate a path to the airport. Suddenly the pilot announces a left hand turn toward the airport. Things are looking good until the controller realizes that the plane is on a potential collision course with the city. They make a dangerous attempt to get the plane on a better course. When this fails, and time is running out, the pilot heads straight for the runway. The controller rejoices to see the plane come into view, only to discover moments later that the plane is headed for a closed runway that is filled with emergency vehicles. A last second scramble clears the runway in time only to see the plane lose control and burst into flames. After the crash, we learn that the pilot actually survived. His story, along with the controller's, is an image of the beauty of disciplined human cooperation in the face of gravest danger.

The world of the play consists of a single chair to repre-

sent the control tower, a single chair to represent the cockpit, and a projected map showing the airplane's position throughout the play. Projections at the beginning also summarize details of the crash: date, location, number of casualties, and number of survivors. This perspective draws the audience into the urgency of the events of the play and sharply focuses attention on the human relationships.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: the air traffic controller assigned to bring airplanes to within five miles of the airport. In this case however, because of the emergency, the controller brings the plane all the way in. The controller works hard to remain calm professional so as not to upset the pilot in any way. Ultimately, since the pilot can hear her but not see her, her body tells a slightly different story than her voice. She is casually dressed but is not sloppy. This character may be played by either a female or a male.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: This character, on the other hand, should be played by a male actor because of all the references to him as "sir." He is in his forties or fifties. There is no attempt to costume him in a literal United Airline uniform. He wears a blue long-sleeved shirt and a dark tie.

SCENE

The control tower and the cockpit of the airplane, simultaneously.

TIME

July 19, 1989.

* * *

SETTING

There are two 4-foot by 8-foot platforms on the stage. They are parallel to each other and perpendicular to the audience. They are about six feet apart from one another. On each platform is a single, modern chair with arms. The chairs face straight toward the audience. A projection screen hangs behind the actors.

PROJECTIONS

Throughout the play, we see an aviation map which shows the entire flight path of the airplane from just shortly before the initial engine failure until the plane arrives at Sioux City. A tiny white airplane travels the flight path by cross fading of slides throughout the dialogue. In this way, the audience is able where the plane is at each point of the dialogue. These flight path positions are noted within the body of the play according to the numbers which correspond to the map at the back of the script (*see page 73*). Other projections used in the play are titles and video footage of the crash. These are described within in the body of the play.

AT RISE

The play begins in darkness. Music is heard--a high, slightly ringing sound, somewhat melancholy. The actors take their places. United 232 Heavy is seated stage right and Sioux City Approach Control is standing above the chair stage left. The first image of the flight path map fades in. The plane is at radar position thirteen (R13). As the music continues, the plane moves to R20, then R28. As the plane moves to R36, the high melody is accompanied by a solid low tone. This low tone accompanies each of the following titles and the plane continues to move along the flight path as indicated.

Transcript of Communications Between

(R41)

Sioux Gateway Airport Approach Control

(R46)

and United Airlines Flight 232

(R51)

Immediately Prior to Crash Landing on Runway 22

(R55)

Casualties: 11

(R59)

Survivors: 185

(R62)

July 19, 1989, 4:00 p.m.

(R67)

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: *(On tape.)* Sioux City. Got an emergency for you.

(R71)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: All right.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: Uhhh, I got a United aircraft coming in. Lost number two engine, having a hard time controlling the aircraft right now. He's out of twenty nine thousand right now and descending to Sioux City right now. He's . . . east of your VOR, but he wants the equipment standing by right now.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: All right. Is he the two seven six one code?

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: I believe so. Standby here.

(R78)

He's forty miles east, forty four miles east right now, zero nine one radial. The two seven six one code.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Uhh, radar contact.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: He's descending out of twenty nine right now.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: All right. KB.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: PJ.

(R81)

(Pause.) Did you say you say you had a radar on United Airlines Two Thirty Two?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Affirmative radar.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: He's having a hard time controlling the plane right now and trying to slow down and get stea-steady on a heading right now. As soon as I get comfortable, I'll ship him over to you and he'll be your control.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: All right.

(R85)

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: You talkin' to five six one now?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Yes, we are.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: Okay, north of the VOR I got a guy at fourteen. A Hartley goin' to Sioux Falls. I'll keep him.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: All right.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: And you got fifteen thousand and below as far as we are concerned now also.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Good'enuff. KB.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: PJ.

(R89)

(Sioux City Approach Control sits. Lights up on the actors as soon as both are seated. A low level engine sound begins. This sound continues until the crash, slightly increasing in volume during the last few minutes prior to the crash. Sioux City Approach Control spends most of her time looking straight ahead at her radar screen. United 232 Heavy looks at his instrument panels which are slightly down, both straight ahead and to the right. He also looks out his windshield straight ahead. His hands rest easily on the inside of

his knees and do not suggest any attempt to mime the controls of the plane. His upper torso, however, responds as if his hands were pulling on the yoke.)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Sioux City approach, United Airlines Two Thirty Two Heavy with you out of twenty six. Heading right now is two nine oh, and we've got about a five hundred foot rate of descent.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Airlines Two Thirty Two Heavy, Sioux City Approach. Sioux City weather VFR. Wind three five zero at one one. *(She looks directly above her radar screen for the altimeter number.)* Altimeter three zero zero. Fly heading . . . two five five'll be vectors for a visual approach to runway three one.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, so you know. We have almost no control ability. Very little elevator and almost no aileron. We are controlling the turns by power. I don't think we can turn right, but I think we can only make left turns.

(R93)

We are starting a little bit of a left turn. I mean we can only turn right, but we can't turn left.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Understand, sir, you can only make right turns?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: That's affirmative.

(Sioux City Approach Control sits up straighter, looks at the imaginary controller on her left and then back at the radar screen.)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. Your current . . . uh, your present tracks put you about eight miles north of the airport, sir, and the only way we can get you around to three one is a slight left turn with with differential power or if you can, like, jockey it over.

(R97)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, we're in a right turn right now. That's about the only way we can go. We'll be able to make very slight

left turns on final but right now just going to make right turns to whatever heading you want.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. Ah, right turn heading two five five.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Two five five.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Thirty six, Sioux City. *(Pause.)* Thirty six, Sioux City. *(Return to calm as she speaks to United 232.)* United Two Thirty Two Heavy. When you roll out on the right turn, stop your heading on about a two four zero heading.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: *(On tape.)* Thirty six line.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: *(Return to terseness.)* Yeah, that United, he can only make right turns. I'll have to jockey him back around to the right into your airspace, too.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: Okay. You've got him for anything you need.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: All right. KB.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: 'kay.

(R104)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: *(She looks over her shoulder as some one asks her to find out how many people are on the plane. She glances back to the radar screen and then speaks.)* United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Fly heading two four zero and say your souls on board.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Say again?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Souls on board, United Two Thirty Two Heavy.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We're getting that right now. *(He glances over his right shoulder at the navigator.)*

(R110)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Can you continue your heading two four zero?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: I don't know. We'll try for it.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Say souls on board and fuel remaining.

(R114)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: (*Looks at fuel gages.*) We have thirty seven six fuel. (*Glances back at navigator.*) And we are counting the souls.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger.

(R118)

(*United 232 Heavy looks to his right at his engine gages. He looks pointedly at the co-pilot. He looks back at the gages.*)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Sioux City, United Two Thirty Two.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy, Sioux City.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We have *no . . .* hydraulic fluid. Which means we have no elevator control--almost none--and very little aileron control. I have serious doubts about making the airport.

(R122)

Have you got some place . . . near here . . . that we might be able to ditch? Unless we get control of this airplane, we're going to put it down wherever it happens to be.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. Ah, standby one. (*Pause.*)

(R125)

United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Can you hold that present heading, sir?

(Pause.)

(R127)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: 'z'e airport now for Two Thirt Two as we're turning around in circles?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Say again.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: *(With a bare hint of humor or chagrin.)* Where is the airport for us now as we come spinning down here?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Sioux City airport is about twelve o'clock and three six miles.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay. We are trying to go straight.

(R129)

We're not having much luck. *(Pause.)*

(R132)

Sioux City, United Two Thirty Two. Could you give us, please, your, ah, ILS frequency, the heading, and the length of the runway.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Affirmative. The localizer frequency is one zero nine point three, and you're currently about thirty five miles to the northeast. It'll take about two . . . two . . . two three five, two four zero heading to join it.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We'll see if we can come up with that. *(He turns to listen to the navigator. He glances to the co-pilot.)*

(R135)

Two Thirty Two, we're going to try and put it in at Sioux City.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Understand you're going to try to make it into Sioux City. *(She glances over her left shoulder to hear a comment behind her.)* There is no airports out that way that can accommodate you, sir.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay. We'll head for Sioux City.

(R142)

We got a little bit of control back now. How long is your runway?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. The airport, uh, the runway is nine thousand feet long and hundred fifty foot wide.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay. Thank you.

(He looks at the co-pilot. She looks to her left at her area supervisor. They all have realized that a plane without hydraulics will not be able to stop on that length runway.)

(R145)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: And United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Did you get the souls on board count?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Standby. Tell you right now, we don't even have time to let go and call the gal.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Two hundred ninety two souls on board United Two Thirty.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two, say agi-say again.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Ah, two hundred ninety two.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger, thank you.

(R151)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Two Thirty Two, we are just going to have to keep turning right. Not much we can do about left. We're going to have to come back around to the heading.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two. Roger. Need

you on about a two three five heading, sir, if you can manage that and hold that.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We'll see what happens.

(R156)

(Pause.) Where is Sioux City from my present position, United Two Thirty Two?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two. It's about two twenty on the heading and thirty seven miles.

(R161)

United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Do you think you'll be able to hold about a two forty heading?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We'll try and turn to it right now.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger. (Pause.) When you get turned to that two forty heading, sir, the airport will be about, oh, twelve o'clock and thirty eight miles.

(R165)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay. We're trying to control it just by power alone now. We have no hydraulics at all so we're doing our best here.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger. Ah, we have notified the equipment out in that area, too, sir. The equipment's here on the airport standing by and they're sending some out to that area.

(R168)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay. You got one twelve five for the localizer and what's the heading?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Localizer is one zero nine point three, one oh nine point three is the localizer for one three. And two forty on the heading.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay. One oh nine three. And two forty.

(R174)

UNITED TWO THIRTY TWO, ah, we're going to have to continue one more right turn. We've got the elevators pretty much under control within three or four hundred feet but we still can't do much with the steering.

SIOUX CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. Understand you do have the elevators possible under control. Will you be able to hold the altitude?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Negative. We don't have it. We are better. That's all.

SIOUX CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Using maximum deflections on the controls both directions trying to control it.

SIOUX CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger.

(R178)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: How far is the field now, please?

SIOUX CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. You're currently, ah, thirty three miles northeast.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Thank you.

SIOUX CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. There are a couple of really small airports out in the vicinity you're in. Ah, Storm Lake is, ah, four thousand two hundred feet by seventy five. That's about fifteen miles east of your position.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Thirty Two. Roger. We're still going down. Trying to control it as we get down a little lower here. Ah, we'll pick it out.

(R182)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. There is a small airport at twelve o'clock and, ah, seven miles. The runway is four thousand feet long there. *(Pause.)*

(R188)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, United Two Thirty Two. We're starting a left turn.

(Both characters have a sense of elation.)

(R193)

UNITED 232 HEAVY (continued): Since, ah, we have no hydraulics, braking is gonna really be a problem. Ah, we suggest the equipment be towards the far end of the runway.

(R198)

And I think under the circumstances, regardless of the condition of the airplane, when we stop we're going to evacuate. So you might notify the, ah, ground crew equipment that we're going to do that.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Ah, wilco, sir, and if you can continue that left turn to about a two twenty heading, sir, that will take you right to the airport.

(R203)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Two twenty now. *(Beat.)* Your ceiling right now.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Ah, the ceiling is four thousand broken, and, ah, the visibility is one five underneath it.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: The airport elevation.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Ah, one thousand ninety eight. Ten ninety eight.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Thank you.

(R208)

Ah, how far are we from the airport now, two thirty two?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Ah, thirty five miles, and if you continue that left turn about another, oh, fifteen or twenty degrees, it'll take you right to the runway.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We don't have the localizer or the glide slope, so. . . .

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Ah, yes sir. You're well too far north of it now.

(R211)

UNITED Two Thirty Two Heavy. Can you, ah, still make the, ah, slight right turns?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Yeah.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger, United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Fly heading two one five.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Two one five, okay. *(Beat.)* Right turn no problem. It's the left turn that's a problem.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Picked up the glide slope anyway.

(R216)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Negative, sir, you're well too far north.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We know. But it's just coming in though.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Your present heading is, ah, a little too close, sir. Can you make a shallow left turn about, oh, ten degrees or so?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We'll try that. *(Pause.)*

(R217)

Where's the airport for Two Thirty Two?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two. The airport is currently twelve o'clock and, ah, two one miles.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Twenty one miles at twelve o'clock.

(R219)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. You are going to have to widen out just slightly to your left side, ah, to make the turn to final and also to take you away from the city.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Whatever you do, keep us away from the city.

(R220)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Fly heading, ah, heading one eight zero. One eighty.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: I don't think we can do that, but we'll try.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: We need it over there as far as you can get us.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: You're currently, oh, one seven miles northeast of the airport. You're doin' good.

(R222)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: It has to be a right turn one eighty. We can't do anything about it.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. There's a tower, ah, five miles off your right side that's, ah. . . . Three thousand four hundred MSL is the height.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Thirty.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. How steep a right turn can you make, sir?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: About a thirty degree bank.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. Turn right heading one eight zero.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: One eighty.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Been advised there's a four lane highway up in that area, sir, if you can pick that up.

(R225)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, we'll see what we can do here. We've already put the gear down, and we're going to have to put it down on something solid if we can.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. If you can hold that altitude, sir, the right turn to one eighty, ah, would put you on about, oh, ten miles east of the airport.

(R225A)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: That's what we're trying to do. *(Pause.)* We've got about, ah, three or four minutes to go it looks like.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. Can you pick up a road or something up there?

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We're trying. It's still, ah, anywhere from two thousand feet up to fifteen hundred down now in waves.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Roger.

(R233)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: The airport?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. The airport is, oh, about eighteen miles southeast of your position, about two twenty on the heading, but we're going to need you southbound away from the city first if you can hold a one eighty heading.

(R238)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We're trying to get to it right now.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. I've been advised if you can pick up a road or anything where you can possible land it on that.

(R241)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, we're hundred and eighty degrees heading now. What do you want?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two. If you can hold the altitude, the one eighty heading will work fine for about seven miles.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, we're trying to turn back.

(R244)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Can you hold that heading, sir?

UNITED 2323 HEAVY: Yeah, we're on it now for a little while.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. That heading will put you, oh, ah, currently fifteen miles northeast of the airport. If you can hold that, it will put you on about three mile final.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, we're givin' it heck.

(R247)

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: *(She sees on the radar that he has*

just lost the heading and is going to come in over the city. She responds physically, perhaps shaking her as She says the next line.) United Two Thirty Two Heavy. The airport's currently twelve o'clock and one three miles.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay. We're looking for it. *(Beat.)*
(R252)

Okay, ah. . . . *(He turns to look over his shoulder at the navigator.)* The field elevation is what again?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Ah, one ten . . . thousand ninety eight, ah, eleven hundred feet, ah, one thousand one hundred.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Thank you. *(Pause.)* We're starting down a little bit now. We've got a little better control of the elevator.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Uni-United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. The airport is currently at your one o'clock position one zero miles. *(She hears the controller to her left say something and also glances to someone behind her.)* And, ah, United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Ah, if you cannot make the airport, sir, there is an interstate that runs, ah north to south to the east side of the airport. Ah, it's a four-lane interstate.

(R258)

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We're just passing it right now. We're going to try for the airport.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Roger. And advise when you get the airport in sight.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Have runway in sight. *(She scoots her chair back from her position at the radar desk. She stands looking out the control cab window in a downstage right direction. She is filled with joy and relief. He's made it!)*

(R258) *(Fades out on about an eight count.)*

UNITED 232 HEAVY (continued): We'll be with you very shortly. Thanks a lot for your help.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United Two Thirty Two Heavy. The wind is currently three six zero at one one. Three sixty at eleven. You're cleared to land on any runway.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: (*He laughs.*) You want to be particular and make it a runway, huh. (*She laughs.*) Say the wind one more time.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Ah, wind zero one zero at one one.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay, say it again one more time.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Ah, zero one zero one one. (*As she looks toward the radar control panel to double-check the numbers, she sees the emergency equipment lined up on Runway twenty two. She sees the plane descending fast. She needs to find out if he is planning to land on twenty-two.*) And, ah, there is a runway that's closed, sir, that could probably work, too . . . the south, ah, it runs northeast to southwest.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: We're pretty well lined up on this one or we think we will be.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: (*She waves frantically to someone over her left shoulder and on the other side of the cab. She is making sure that they are contacting someone to get the emergency equipment moved.*) United Two Thirty Two Heavy. Ah, roger, sir, that's, ah, closed runway. That will work, sir. We're getting the equipment off the runway, and they'll line up for that one.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: How long is it?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: (*Since it's a closed runway, she doesn't know! She turns upstage over her shoulder looking for someone to shout the answer. In three seconds that seem like a year, someone does. She looks back at the plane.*) Sixty six hundred feet. Six thousand six hundred and the equipment is coming off. (*She watches.*

She looks at the equipment that is driving away. She looks at the far end of the runway off to her left.) At the end of the runway, it's just a wide open field, so, sir, so the length won't be a problem.

UNITED 232 HEAVY: Okay.

(On the screen behind the actors, the video of the crash is seen. Just before the plane lands, we hear a ground proximity warning alarm. The alarm is accompanied by a computerized voice warning the pilot. The voice repeats, "Pull up, pull up" until the plane hits the runway. At the point of impact percussive music begins. The deep percussive sounds are accompanied by high pitched tones that grow in volume throughout the crash video. During the crash video, the actors move through a series of freezes that move their bodies to the positions they would realistic have at the end of the actual crash. United 232 Heavy slumps forward in his chair in a sequence of seven freezes. Sioux City Approach Control moves her gaze along runway Two Two moving from right to left in a series of seven freezes. Both characters change position at precisely the same instant and in time with the music. At the end of the video, the lights go out on United 232 Heavy. Sioux City Approach Control switches back into real time. She sobs and slumps into her chair. After a few moments, the lights fade on her. Titles come up on the screen.)

AT THE CRASH SITE

Ground Amulances: 35

Helicopters: 9

EMS Personnel: 150

Fire Departments: 31

Communities Providing Emergency Equipment: 40

(Cross fade to next screen.)

THE SURVIVORS OF FLIGHT 232
INCLUDED ALL FOUR MEMBERS
OF THE COCKPIT CREW

(Title fades out.)

(A slide of the radar map of United 232 Heavy's flight path fades in. A video title appears on top of the slide.)

TWO YEARS LATER . . .

(A slide cross fades in. This new slide has 232's flight path, but there is another flight path. This new one is straight and has a small white airplane again. The difference is that there is no radar recording ahead of the airplane. The slide cross fades to indicate even more of this new straight flight path. One more slide fades in to show more of this new flight path. We also notice that the latter part of the flight path is fading away, in the same way that the smoke stream from a jet fades. In the darkness, the actors have stood up and are now standing behind their chairs. We hear the same high bell tones that we heard at the beginning of the play.)

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: *(On tape.)* Sioux City, thirty six line.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Thirty six, Sioux City.

MINNEAPOLIS CENTER CONTROL: Yeah, I got a call comin' down for you outta thirty nine thousand. Standby.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Alright. KB.

(The slide cross fades as the plane moves closer to the edge of the screen.)

UNITED 1923 HEAVY: Sioux City Approach, United 1923 Heavy.

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: United 1923 Heavy, Sioux City. I think I'd recognize that voice anywhere. How are you, sir?

UNITED 1923 HEAVY: Sioux City. I'm VFR. This'll be my last pass over your control prior to my retirement. Any last instructions?

SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: No, your heading looks good. And hold that altitude, sir.

UNITED 1923 HEAVY: Roger. Wilco. United 1923 Heavy clear.

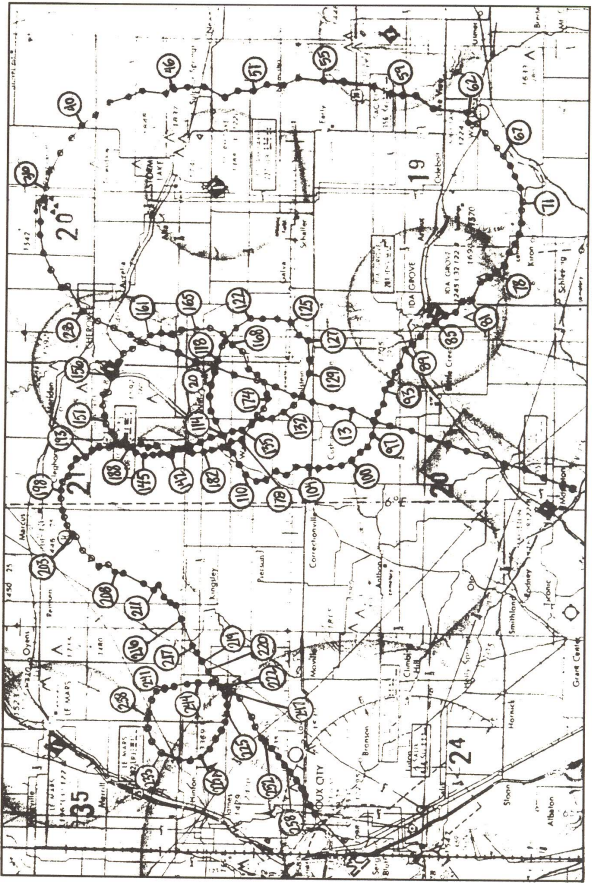
SIoux CITY APPROACH CONTROL: Sioux City. Clear.

(Slide cross fades to indicate that the plane has left the viewing area. Slide cross fades again to fade the trailing radar blips completely out. All that is left is the flight path of United 232. This final slide fades to black.)

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

This play tells its story through the use of historical phenomena surrounding the last half hour of the flight of United 232 on July 19, 1989: the radar record of the flight path, the transcript of radio transmissions, and the video footage of the crash. The final scene of the play is contrived on the basis of the recollection of Sioux City Controller, Mark Zielezinski.

The radio transmissions upon which the majority of the dialogue is based took place between several individuals in three locations. For the purpose of this play, the voices have been condensed to represent the three locations: Minneapolis Center Control, Sioux City Approach Control, and the cockpit of United Airlines Flight 232. Because of this condensing of characters, the actors are free to strive for occupational authenticity rather than impersonation of any particular historical individual. The character names chosen represent this emphasis.



GLOSSARY

Out of twenty nine: the airplane is currently flying at 29,000 feet above sea level and descending.

VOR: the VHF Omni-directional Radio sends a signal by which pilots navigate. Sioux City's VOR was shut down for service on July 19, 1989. But for this fact, much of the conversation contained in this play would not have taken place.

Equipment: emergency vehicles.

Two seven six one code: a number that shows up on the controller's radar screen, identifying a specific aircraft. On this particular date, 2761 was the radar number assigned to United 232.

KB: when controllers talk to one another, they use their initials to sign off.

Heavy: the category of large aircraft to which the DC10 belongs.

240 on the heading: planes are navigated according to degrees on the compass. 360 degrees points straight north. 180 degrees points straight south. Thus, 240 (or "two forty") is a south-westerly heading.

Runway three one: runways are also labeled according to compass headings, but the final zero is dropped. A plane landing on Sioux City's longest runway will be landing toward the northwest on runway three one (310 degrees). Planes landing on the opposite end of the same runway are landing on runway one three (or heading 130 degrees).

VFR: Visual Flight Rules, or good weather.

Altimeter: this number indicates the correct barometric pressure, which in turn affects the altitude gauge in the airplane.

Aileron: wings flaps which affect the airplane's turns.

Souls on board: passengers. On United 232, the captain gave a souls on board figure which did not include the four pilots in the cockpit.

ILS: the Instrument Landing System is a short range radio signal used to guide planes directly to a particular runway. Also referred to as a "localizer".

Glide slope: the correct angle of descent, which is also sent by radio from the runway to the aircraft.

Twelve o'clock: straight ahead of an airplane's present position.

Maximum deflections: pulling the controls as far as they will go.

Ceiling: the distance between the ground and the clouds.

Elevation: the distance above MSL (mean sea level).

Thirty degree bank: the maximum allowable turn for this type aircraft.