

Orville and Wilbur Wright. Charles Lindbergh. William Boeing. Amelia Earhart. Chuck Yeager. You know these people's names - they were all aviation pioneers. Their dedication and sacrifices led to the airplanes and airports we rely on today. But there's a name missing from most lists of famous aviators that really belongs alongside the Wrights and the Boeings: US Army Lieutenant Tom Selfridge.

Lt. Selfridge graduated in 1903 from West Point, a classmate of Douglas MacArthur, and was commissioned to serve in the field artillery. You probably recognize 1903 as the year of the Wright brothers successful flight in Kitty Hawk. The Army was very interested in the military possibilities of manned flight, and in 1907 the Aeronautical Division of the Army Signal Corps was begun at Fort Myer, VA. Lt. Selfridge was assigned to this new division and quickly became a leading pilot. He even designed his own plane, the "Red Wing," which was built by Alexander Graham Bell.

On Sept. 17, 1908, Orville Wright visited Fort Myer to demonstrate the new Wright Flyer to the Army. Lt. Selfridge was invited to accompany Wright on the flight. At a height of 150 feet, the Flyer's right propeller broke, causing the plane to nose dive and crash. Wright was severely injured and was hospitalized for seven weeks, but survived. Selfridge fractured his skull and died. Lt. Thomas Selfridge thus became the first person to lose his life in an airplane accident.

Selfridge was well on his way to becoming our nation's foremost military pilot and might very well have made his way onto a list of aviation pioneers through some spectacular achievement. Instead, he is remembered for dying - the first person to die in an airplane. It's certainly not the way Lt. Tom Selfridge planned to be remembered.

But something good came from his death. Selfridge hadn't been wearing any head protection when he died. From that point forward, all military pilots were required to wear protective headgear, and countless injuries have been averted and lives have been saved through the years because of that safety requirement.

Our God works that way in our lives. Even though we have experiences we'd rather not have, pains that we'd rather not suffer, failures and losses we'd much rather avoid, God does something wonderful with all these negatives. He turns them into positives. That's what he means when he teaches us through his apostle Paul, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28a).

Sometimes God gives us the grace to see the good that he's bringing through something bad. Sometimes he doesn't. But we can always trust him to do what's best for us, because he has proven himself worthy of our trust. And if God is promising good for us in every bad situation, we can bank on that promise.

That helps us see the bad things in our life differently. These aren't just random accidents and happenings; they are part of our loving God's plan for our lives. May the Holy Spirit strengthen your faith today to see that something that looks bad for you right now is actually just another way for your living and loving Savior to bless you.

Prayer: Dear Savior Jesus, sometimes I am overwhelmed by everything that I have to do and everything that I have to endure. But then I see what you did for me - taking my sins to the cross and paying for every one of them. If you loved me enough to do that, then I know that you love me enough to stand with me and strengthen me when I need your help. Lead me to put my full trust in you. Take away my stress and worries. Point me forward to the heavenly inheritance that is mine through your sacrifice. In your name I pray, Amen.

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