Pulling Rank On The Virtual Copilot

On June 5, 2008, as an Eclipse 500’s two-pilot crew approached the Chicago Midway International Airport, it encountered a 10-to-15-knot wind shear, developing a high sink rate the pilot flying (PF) arrested by applying power. The PF stated after touching down at about 83 knots and applying brakes, the airplane was rapidly accelerating through 100 knots and the engines were at maximum power. The crew alerting system (CAS) display indicated “L ENG CONTROL FAIL” and “R ENG CONTROL FAIL” as the airplane climbed out. The PF lowered the landing gear and brought the flaps from the landing to the takeoff position to remain below 200 knots; still it was necessary to maintain a shallow climb.

The crew declared an emergency and ATC cleared them to land on any runway. After referencing the handbook’s emergency procedures section, they elected to shut down the right engine. As they were maneuvering to land they got a stall warning and the PF noticed decaying airspeed. He also reported the left engine was at idle power and would not respond to throttle movements. The airplane landed and stopped on the runway, blowing both main landing gear tires. There were no injuries and no further damage. This incident prompted an emergency Airworthiness Directive (AD) calling for inspection of all Eclipse throttle controls, the particulars of which are outside this article’s scope.

It’s important to note, however, NTSB chairman Mark V. Rosenker’s comment in his “urgent” June 12 letter to the FAA recommending the emergency AD: “Had it not been for the resourcefulness of the pilots, the visual meteorological conditions that prevailed at the time, and the airplane’s proximity to the airport, the successful completion of this flight would have been unlikely.”