



Beware - The Ides of March
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March 15th is generally known as the Ides of March. In 44 BC Julius Caesar died on that day. On his way to the Theatre of Pompey Caesar passed the seer and joked, "The Ides of March are come", implying that the prophecy of his death had not been fulfilled, to which the seer replied "Aye, Caesar; but not gone." (ibid: wikipedia.org)

By the time you read this it will be mid-March and I will probably be just finishing my first contest of the season and looking forward to another summer of soaring. Being from the Midwest, and not doing much sailplane flying during the Winter months, and before I embark on yet another season of soaring adventures I try and look back on the past years accidents and what I might learn from those accidents.

As I was looking through the NTSB reports of glider accidents in 2018 I was struck by the number and kind of fatal accidents the soaring community endured. In total we had seven fatal accidents, with eleven total fatalities, four of which were passengers. Two of the accidents were commercial rides. One pilot was described as "highly experienced" by her peers, the glider was found in pieces. Another experienced pilot was seen flying "amongst the clouds" by an observer and ended up hitting a mountain top. One accident was an in-flight breakup after numerous observers said the wings were "bent up in the shape of a U" and the glider broke apart. Another accident was described by an observer as a low altitude spin while attempting to thermal. Another was a PT3 followed by a low altitude spin. Yet another glider apparently suffered from an in-flight separation of a wing. In the other fatal accident the wreckage was found about ½ mile from the airport at the end of the day after the pilot failed to return.

Next month the SSF will be publish the 2018 Annual Soaring Safety Report with the summary printed in this column space.

As I read through these accident reports, I find that I could have been one of those pilots. I have similar experience and certificates. I fly or have flown similar gliders. I have enjoyed giving rides to numerous passengers. I have flown over similar terrain and in similar flight conditions.

These pilots and passengers were our friends. I'm sure that many of you that are reading this article personally knew and were profoundly saddened by their deaths. I have known the pilots involved in some of the fatal accidents that have occurred in past years. Several of those accidents have caused me to reflect on the way that I fly sailplanes and question if I too take unnecessary risks.

So the question I ask is, "Why do these accidents continue to happen?" Is there a way to train pilots to make better judgments and decisions? Is there a better way to train pilots to assess risk and mitigate those risks that are killing our peers and friends? I don't know for sure, but I think there is.

For those of us who are currently certificated pilots, recurrent training could be the key to our successful future. The FAA wings program is an excellent way to get such recurrent training on an ongoing basis and it also satisfies the requirements for a flight review. This form of recurrent training consists of 3 modules of ground training that can be accomplished in many ways (usually each take about an hour to complete) and 3 modules of flight training (each is centered around an area of operation from the PTS consistent with the level of pilot certificate you hold (either private or commercial for a glider pilot). The airlines, corporations and military all employ this kind of training and have successfully lowered their





accident rate significantly. This type of recurrent training is more comprehensive than that of your typical flight review and it is meant to be conducted continually each year instead of once each 2 years.

One such area of continuing education would be that of how to evaluate one's own medical condition, and determine your fitness to act as PIC.

In these NTSB reports an item that is missing is some of the background of the pilot including their age and possible medical condition. It is usual to not disclose this information in the case of fatal accidents.

As our soaring pilot population ages, I am one of those being in my middle 60's, I wonder if we give due consideration to this aspect of our flying. In the soaring community, since we are not required to maintain an FAA medical certificate, glider pilots have the responsibility to maintain their own medical health per FAR 61.53 (b) which states, in part, "a person shall not act as PIC while that person knows or has reason to know of any medical condition that would make that person unable to operate the aircraft in a safe manner."

Sometimes we use the acronym I'MSAFE to help analyze our medical condition. Illness, Medication, Stress, Alcohol, Fatigue, and Eating (hydration).

I'm sure that most of us have flown when we have had some degree of illness, it's a judgment call. I'm sure many of us are on some kind of prescribed medication and have taken OTC medication to relieve our symptoms of illness. Something I discovered a few years ago was the FAA's recommendation to not fly for a period of 5 times the dosage time after taking medications that could cause drowsiness (i.e. if the medication says it's good for 6 hours then you should wait 30 hours after taking the last dose before flying). We all live stressful lives. Some of us drink alcohol; in fact I remember being handed a beer as I climbed out of the glider to celebrate a successful flight. Many of us suffer from fatigue, either chronic or acute, which can affect our judgment and decision making skills. Last on the list is nourishment and hydration. I think hydration is a major consideration when flying long flights because without some kind of system to relieve our bladders we will drink less water and become more dehydrated as we fly.

I know that at several contests that I flew in last year, a few pilots decided not to fly the entire contest for various physical ailments including illness, medications, fatigue and stress.

I'm not saying that the pilot medical condition was the cause for any of the fatal accidents in 2018. I don't know. However, what I am saying is that the soaring pilot population as a whole is an aging population and that everyone has a responsibility for watching out for each other. Please watch out for your fellow pilots and ask for them to watch out for you as well.

Try to fly everyday as if it's March 15th. We all start the day with optimism. Do not let your guard down each day that you fly. The goal is to use your best piloting skills, decision making skills and risk management skills to arrive back on the ground safely at the end of the day.

