

That Was Stupid

By Tom Johnson

When something happened to someone in our community, I bet you have said that at one time or another. A sailplane has crashed. You may have known the pilot or pilots. You hear snippets of the details of the accident. You ask yourself how they could have done something so stupid.

The answer is simple.

It is the same reason a professional baseball player swings at a pitch that lands two feet in front of home plate?

They were anticipating one pitch and got one that looked like what they wanted and committed to swinging before they knew what had happened. The pitch count or situation forced them into having few options.

The same thing happens to us. We can get into situations where our experience and training is not adequate for the situation at hand. We run out of options that we are familiar with, and now have to wing it. Now you have to make decisions based upon your best guess of what is going to happen. If you guess correctly, you get to keep going on. If you do not guess correctly, a broken glider or something worse could result.

The question is then how you build that level of experience without putting yourself or your equipment in peril.

I think the answer lies in simulation, chair flying and preparation, hangar flying, and proactive CFIG involvement.

Simulation is great if you have access to a device. Condor is a great way to get started. Have your club CFIG put you in situations and see how you handle them. Make sure the CFIG can critique your performance and discuss what options were available to you at various points along the way. Start with single abnormalities or situations and build up to complex scenarios.

Chair flying is a good way to simulate if you do not have a device. Find a quiet spot and fly the flight in your mind. Envision what you would do at various points in the flight. Be specific about what you expect to see. Then start going through the details asking yourself what you would do if you did not see what you expected. Engage your

local CFGI to help. As an aside, I recently had a senior citizen student who used this method diligently. The progress he made once he started doing this was nothing short of remarkable.

If chair flying seems to cerebral for you, engage your fellow pilots and hangar fly with them. Have them relate stories of their exploits and perils. Think what you would have done in those situations. Ask your CFGI to help and even critique what they could have or should have done differently. Be the sponge that soaks it all up.

Finally you can go straight to your club CFGI. Talk about areas where you feel weak. Even after 40 years of sailplane flying, there are areas where I know my skills could improve.

Be systematic in your approach. Break the flight down into the various segments. Take-off roll, low-altitude tow, release, thermalling, pattern entry and landing. Place yourself in each situation as best as you can. "What if this happens" each segment as much as you can.

You will find that your ability to cope with various situations will be much better. The reason is simple. You have been there before. You experience rolodex flips through and finds the right situation, and now you have a way out.

I can tell this works from experience. I "flew" many an instrument approach during my Navy training that involved a Dixie cup on the floor, a plastic compass card and pointer in one hand, and the approach plate in the other.

It really works. Give it a try

So go flying whenever you can wherever you can. Stuck in traffic, go flying. Stuck in the monthly accounting meeting, go flying. Instead of the crossword or phone game, go flying. You will find your actual flights will go much better and be more enjoyable because you will find yourself far ahead of the airplane.