



BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT I THOUGHT YOU SAID

Editorial, by Gene Hammond

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When SAILPLANE SAFETY received the following recently, a small light began to glow in the deep recesses of cognition.

"One reason the military services have trouble coordinating joint operations is that they don't speak the same language. For example: If you tell navy personnel to 'secure a building', they will turn off the lights and lock the doors. The army will occupy the building so that no one can enter. The marines will assault the building, capture it, and defend it with suppressive fire and close combat. The air force on the other hand will take out a three-year lease with an option to purchase."

We have all been subjected to the banal arguments in SOARING magazine from time to time regarding which came first - the stall or the spin, or even more insipid, the know-it-all that blasts everyone who has an opinion contrary to his on how to fly and teach flying of gliders.

Someone once said, "There's more than one way to skin a cat." While that may appear to have little to do with flying gliders, it does demonstrate that perhaps, just perhaps, there might be more than one way to successfully teach others to fly, and better yet, to fly successfully through a better understanding of the whys and hows, rather than the very narrow focus one person may present.

The most outstanding instructors (and pilots) I've seen recognize this and speak freely about searching out 'a better way' to do things. They feel no constraints of rote learning and single-minded approaches, but let their inquisitive powers search endlessly for the better way.

A recent poll appeared in FLYING magazine which noted that 77% of the pilots polled flew because of the challenge and excitement of the task. Why the other 23% flew varied from 'My dad wants me to' to 'I can meet chicks (or guys)'. It is imperative for soaring pilots and instructors to recognize that by confining one to operating in a strict manner where there are no options eliminates the challenge and sooner or later the excitement of flying sailplanes.

That same poll disclosed that 71% of those polled thought they were 'above average' as pilots. Even worse, 96% of the ATPs knew they were above average. To

be really scientific about this, it would take years of tracking to prove or disprove either of those figures; but when one looks at the reasons for accidents as defined by the NTSB, 'pilot error' is far and away the leading cause. Not mechanical problems with the equipment, not weather, but pilot error.

Of course, occasionally the pilot errs because of some outside factors, such as weather, a tow rope break, etc., but the lack of judgment and poor decisions made by the pilot population would tend to discredit such a large percentage of pilots as being 'above average'. The NTSB has stated that as many as 80% of the accidents are directly related to poor judgment or bad decisions - and those numbers are only for the accidents that did happen!

The reduction of that huge percentage is up to you! Regardless of how frequently 'keep your airspeed up' is parroted, there are already six glider accidents attributable to stalls and spins in 1994! That is a whopping 23%! Were the three pilots who died in those accidents (and maybe all five of those killed so far in 1994) below average pilots? I doubt it.

If the soaring community is to reduce the number of accidents and truly have 71% of the pilots 'above average', everyone must stand ready to help.

Instructors must be honest with their students and with themselves. They must be as current, as competent, as lacking in complacency, as they expect their students to be. They must exude confidence ... that quiet confidence ... gained only through continuous efforts to improve, both as a pilot and as an instructor (and even as a person, if I may be so bold).

All pilots must constantly take an introspective look behind their own facade, and work to expand their knowledge, skill, and experience through reading about flying and practicing flying.

As far as I know, there is no one who flies sail planes because someone is holding a gun to their head (sorry,O.J.). This is perhaps the most challenging and enjoyable sport around, so let's enjoy it while we can, being sure to recognize what limits we have to place on ourselves each day, considering physical, mental, and environmental conditions. Then, and only then, can we expect to see a permanent reduction in accidents and deaths.

