



Open up and become a better pilot

IN DECEMBER I ATTENDED THE ANNUAL ICAS (International Council of Air Show) convention in Las Vegas. This is where the vast majority of the air show performers from across the United States, Canada, and a few other countries gather to showcase themselves and their acts to prospective air show committees for the upcoming 2013 air show season. This is also a time for pilots to attend numerous seminars.

Our opening guest speaker was four-time Super Bowl champion and football hall of fame player Rocky Bleier. For those not old enough to remember or know his name, he played for the Pittsburgh Steelers in the 1970s. His message to the attendees was simple and to the point: keep focused and never give up. His story touches on the serious war injuries he sustained in Vietnam that threatened his career and how he overcame them through hard work, determination, and the support of his teammates. Rocky was not afraid to ask for help. You too may not realize it, but you have many resources out there that can help you become the best pilot you can be, and all you have to do is ask. Don't hesitate to ask your flying mentors for help. Ask me for parachute help, but ask someone, if you need help. One of the best quotes I heard at the convention was words to live by: "Safety is a byproduct of professionalism." What a powerful statement. Be professional and ask for help.

Several seminars addressed issues of safety and encouraged input and suggestions, from those listening, on how to make flying better and safer. There was also a closed-door session and discussion amongst the pilots about the previous year's incidents and accidents. These meetings are a gathering of minds and are all about sharing ideas and trying to make flying as safe as it can be. Not just for air show pilots, but for all pilots. Particularly those of you who fly in unusual attitudes.

Here's what I'm asking of you. Don't shut your mind off to new ideas and suggestions. Why am I bringing this up? After all I just pack parachutes; what does that have to do with your flying? You need to know your aircraft intimately. You need to know your ability, and you need to *know when to say no*, like my last column talked about. You need to do what's necessary to prevent an accident. I'm not

just talking about you. If you observe unsafe practices of others, you need to speak up. Bailing out of your aircraft is your final attempt at survival. You need to try to prevent backing yourself into a corner where you're running out of time and altitude because you didn't know when to say no.

The theme of all the seminars was of course safety-related. They had many things in common. One challenged you to make "disciplined decisions." One talked about *complacency* and not practicing your routine and emergency procedures over and over until they become second nature and you could do them in your sleep. Another discussed *poor planning and briefings*, in other words preparation. Re-

member, good flights don't just happen. Every flight deserves good planning, a preflight briefing, and a debriefing. *Distractions* that take you and your mind away from your upcoming flight were discussed. You

need about an hour to prepare your mind for the task at hand. *You also need to have a plan to abort your routine* before it goes horribly wrong and you cannot bail out. Remember, you can abort a maneuver and fix what is wrong and do it better the next time. Just make sure you leave enough room for a next time.

Remaining disciplined and focused is critical when flying, especially when you're flying in close proximity to the ground. I don't want anyone to think that all they have to do is bail out to fix a problem. I believe most problems associated with flight can be fixed with careful planning before the wheels ever leave the ground.

One issue that was a factor in several accidents was DA (density altitude). You need to understand this very clearly. Running out of altitude leaves no room for bailing out. The DA in your early morning flight may not require you to increase your entry altitude at all. But, don't assume that your afternoon flight will be the same. It's now 20 degrees warmer. You need to do the simple math and adjust your routine accordingly for DA before you take off. Every flight is different. When flying at your home field you should practice at a DA as close to where you will be flying your next contest or air show. This may require you to practice hundreds or even thousands of feet above the normal altitude you practice at. It's critical you understand that your turn rate and turn radius will change dramatically at a high DA.

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Practice aborting your routine at various times, during your routine. You can always re-enter later, but you need to be around later to do so. Just like your flying routine, my bailout seminars have a similar message: practice, practice, and more practice until your routine becomes second nature. Don't back yourself into a corner where escape is impossible. *Your flying should not be done on a wing and a prayer.* Leave that for the movies.

Recently one of my customers sent me an e-mail regarding bailing out. I had seen it before, but it's worth sharing with you. If you run out of options and have to bail out, you already know it's a bad day. When you're falling and you pull your rip cord you shouldn't have to wonder about the fact you had your parachute packed by the lowest bidder. Choose your parachute rigger wisely.

As the weather starts to turn warmer and the snow is almost gone, now may be the time to return your parachute to the manufacturer for a comprehensive check and to make sure it's being serviced properly and all upgrades (if any) have been accomplished. It also allows the manufacturer to check the workmanship of your local parachute rigger.

Have a safe flying season, and please do not hesitate to e-mail (allen@silverparachutes.com) or call me with your questions. I always enjoy hearing from you. Remember, I'm available to give safety seminars at your next meeting or contest and would like to meet you in person.

May you always have blue skies.

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