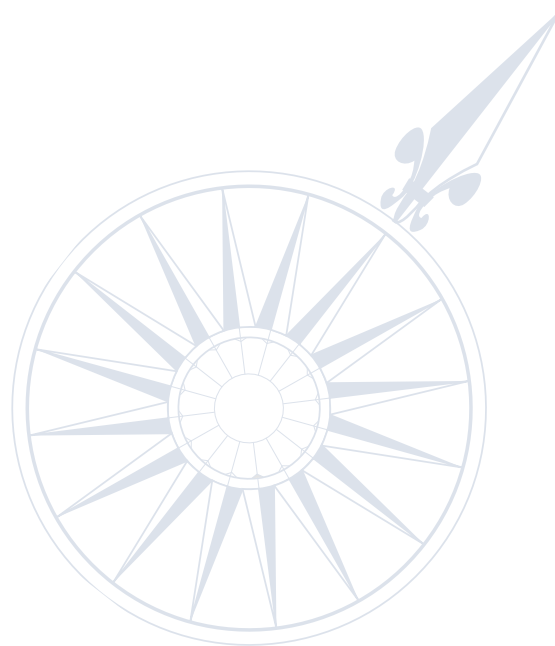


BY PAT ANDREWS

# It's Personal



Fifteen months ago, I retired after a safe and successful career in corporate aviation. Walked away from every landing, sometimes smiling with head held high, sometimes not so much. But aviation was largely good to me during 28-plus years of professional piloting and, ultimately, managing a good-sized flight department. Challenges presented themselves every day — weather, air traffic, equipment malfunctions, passenger issues and more — but the bottom line was a career free of Federal Aviation Administration violations, National Transportation Safety Board hearings, crumpled metal or tragic loss of life.

Most retired pilots have a similar story. Despite the rapid technical and environmental changes that have been characteristic of our industry over the last century, the vast majority of those who pursued aviation as a profession adapted well to those changes and look back with satisfaction on their safety records. Likewise, most aviation professionals who haven't reached retirement will get there with the same record.

You can chalk up aviation's great safety record to many things. Manufacturers build strong, reliable airplanes with redundant systems designed to give pilots lots of options to get from point A to B without incident. Training

historically has been widely available and widely utilized by most aviation professionals. And for the majority of aviation organizations, standard operating procedures are "the way we do things around here." But when it comes right down to it, one of the most important factors contributing to the safety of aviation is simply that it's personal.

Whether we build, fly, maintain or clear aircraft to take off and land, each of us starts with the knowledge that our success or failure to do so safely will have a lifelong effect on us as individuals. It's a powerful motivator, and one way we see that motivation play out is in the decisions of folks to get involved in safety initiatives, either within their own organizations or as part of broader industry endeavors.

Flight Safety Foundation's standing consultation bodies — International Advisory Committee, European Advisory Committee and Corporate Advisory Committee (CAC) — and working groups are good examples. Composed of volunteers, these groups engage in collaborative efforts to identify and counter safety threats. Problems such

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as wind shear, controlled flight into terrain (CFIT), approach and landing accidents, fatigue and many more have been the focus of the Foundation's volunteer efforts. Over the years, the groups' carefully crafted recommendations and products have benefited our entire industry. While these problems have not been solved entirely, significant advancements have been made, and wise guidance is now available for those who seek it.

Why do individual aviation professionals spend their time and efforts seeking ways to advance aviation safety? If asked, they might say they enjoy the time with colleagues away from the daily grind of their real jobs. Or they might say that they are interested in safety and want to make a contribution. But for each, there is usually also a personal side to the decision.

I was two years into my first aviation job flying light twin charter airplanes when I learned a hard and lasting lesson about the personal side of aviation safety. Turning on the news early one December morning, I was shocked to hear that a colleague's aircraft had impacted terrain on a go-around late the previous evening. Fog had closed our home airport, so he was shooting an approach to an alternate about 10 miles away. With conditions worsening, he descended below minimums. Too late, he began a missed approach, and the airplane caught the top of a ridge a couple of miles short of the runway. My colleague survived, but his passengers didn't. The destroyed airplane was one I had flown just the previous day. The spare key labeled with the tail number was still in my jacket pocket. I knew the passengers who had died, having flown them myself many times. It wasn't my accident, but it was personal and incredibly painful.

When the Foundation was seeking participants for its CFIT and approach and landing accident reduction (ALAR) projects, my hand went up, not for altruistic reasons, but to try to find out how these types of accidents happen and how they can be prevented. Since

that long-ago December morning, I had read numerous accounts of accidents resulting from CFIT or mismanaged approaches and landings. In many of the accidents, the pilots involved were professional, well trained and considered safe by those who knew them. I always wondered — could that have been me or someone I knew? Truth be told, the answer was sometimes yes, and at that point it became very important at a personal level to get to the bottom of what happened and why.

None of us will ever know for sure why we get to the end of our aviation careers without incident or accident. Good decision making, good equipment, good training and perhaps a little good fortune sprinkled in. But I have to believe that sitting around a table, earnestly seeking solutions to the threats in our business with like-minded colleagues, helped my cause. I never left a CAC meeting or an ALAR working group session without new insights and fresh resolve about how to be a little safer in my own work. My fellow volunteers were my teachers, every bit as much as my simulator and ground school instructors.

We on the CAC continue to teach each other. Our focus now is on threat and error management, corporate flight operational quality assurance and, most recently, next generation aviation professionals, assuring the personnel competencies and qualifications necessary to continue aviation's good safety record. Working groups are active in these areas, and we welcome ideas from any and all who recognize that they have a personal stake in the outcome. And we look forward to seeing continuing attendance growth at our annual Corporate Aviation Safety Seminar, where high quality presentations and lots of informal networking provide opportunities to advance aviation safety in our various organizations.

But let us never forget this: It all starts with a single individual who regards safety as a personal matter. If we all treat it that way, there will continue to be safe and satisfactory careers for those of us privileged to call ourselves aviation professionals. ➔

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