

1958 Accident Summary

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With a new soaring season coming up and the activity increasing, it might be well to stop for a moment and take a look at last year's record of accidents. With no exception, accidents are the unsatisfactory solution to problems of flight that have faced pilots since the days of the Wright brothers. It might be appropriate to note here that an old saying is still very true; "Learn from the mistakes of others for you won't live long enough to make them all yourself."

There were 26 accidents last year of which we have a record, plus two more, the facts of which are unknown to the Safety Committee, and this is by no means a complete record. Each one of the accidents is a good lesson in the hard school of practical experience.

There were five accidents occurring in the take-off phase of flight. Four of the five stalled or stalled and spun in after releasing from winch or auto tow. Two of the four attempted to return to the starting point after releasing from tow at about 200 ft. One of the two stalled in and the other stalled and spun in. The remaining two stalled and spun in from about 400-500 ft. In both the latter cases there was an instructor on board with the student. In one, the student apparently panicked and the instructor was unable to get control of the ship. In the other case, the ship was apparently already at a minimum airspeed when the gust, in which release was made, suddenly died. The ship spun and the instructor was not able to effect recovery in the available altitude.

The fifth take-off accident occurred during single place training when the student, on low tow, bounced a little too hard, inadvertently jerked the stick back, and ended 30 feet in the air in a full stall with the tow rope broken.

There were three mid-air accidents. Two of the three were structural failures and have been previously reported. The third one took place when an experienced power pilot

turned into a ridge instead of away from it and the ship stalled 100 ft. above the ridge. Fortunately neither pilot was seriously hurt.

A total of ten approach to land accidents were recorded. This is 38% of the year's total. Eight of the ten pilots stalled on the base or final legs of the landing pattern. All these pilots were under 200 ft. at the time of the stall. The stalls in two of the eight cases resulted in spins. One fatality and two seriously injured pilots is the score here. Both ships were totally demolished. The remaining six of the eight stalled in with varying degrees of damage to both pilots and ships. The two who did not stall while landing missed the field entirely and hit trees, resulting in major wing damage.

Seven pilots hit objects after the wheel touched the ground. Four of these were on cross-country flights and landed in unsuitable terrain, but the other three hit airplanes, sailplanes or buildings within the limits of the field. A contributing factor may be considered to have been the congestion on the field at the time plus a determination to land right in the middle of it.

Then there was one case where a hard to inspect aileron linkage bolt, located in the fuselage, was missing entirely. The ship had just been brought out of storage and was being flown for the first time. The resulting "look, no ailerons" routine had an unhappy ending.

Let us summarize the major points of the above record and make up a list of "don'ts."

1. During take-off. Don't try to turn back if you have less than 500 ft. of altitude after release. It is not a money making proposition to attempt such maneuvers close to the ground. The danger here is that the flying speed under such conditions is usually at a minimum and it is very easy to stall — with no chance for recovery.

2. After release from winch or auto tow. Don't just sit there

with the stick back! Get the nose down and a safe flying speed will shortly follow. The nose should be down anyway to take the tension off the line just prior to release.

3. On the approach. Don't fly slowly in the pattern while approaching to land. F.A.F. Fly Approaches Faster! F.A.F. At least 25% above stalling speed. If it is turbulent, a speed 50% above the stall is only adequate, not excessive. There is no room to recover from a stall. Once you are down to pattern altitude, you should be committed to land anyway so there is no point in dawdling about. It can be, and is, dangerous.

4. On the approach. Don't get caught short or try another 360. It is far better to land long than to undershoot. Either way, suppose you do have to hit something. Isn't it better to hit an object while moving at 10 mph on the ground than to hit an object while still in the air at 50 mph?

5. Cross-Country Landings. Don't lose sight of the fact that there is always the chance of having to land. If you are low, pick your field while you still have some altitude and stick with it until you are sure of reaching the next one.

6. Airport Landings. Don't land in the congested part of the field. Land clear at the other end, if necessary, in order to stay away from other ships.

7. Thirteen of the 26 accidents were caused, in one situation or the other, by stalling. There should never be an inadvertent stall unless you are in conditions so unusual as to be a thousand to one chance. Various conditions call for various degrees of pilot skill but, in general, safety lies in speed. Speed means control. The lack of speed means the lack of control. And when you are close to the ground, it is no time to lose control. Speed makes sense when figgerin' dollars and cents.

It is hoped that 1959 will show a reduction in accidents. Safety is something that has to be actively pursued at all times. It doesn't just happen. The planning and work that goes into creating a safe operation is worth more, both from the short term point of view and the long haul, than any other phase of flying. A poor safety record does not encourage the growth of the sport or the enjoyment of it and, after all, these are the things we are all striving for.