

The Gray Hair Department

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One of the major problems in the reduction of sailplane accidents is the need for much firmer flying discipline until the pilot has obtained enough experience to be able to impose adequate discipline on himself.

The above paraphrase is from *Sailplane and Gliding*, the British Gliding Association publication, which contained an article earlier this year on the causes and prevention of accidents. The opinions in the article, prompted by questions from Ann Welch, were expressed by a number of Club Instructors throughout England who are exposed, in general, to many more take-offs and landings per flight hour than are instructors in this country. Comparative statistics show that the British fly about one half the number of sailplanes we do for a total of approximately the same number of hours but in doing so, make roughly four times the number of take-offs and landings we do. It is a well known fact that the take-off and landing phases of flight are responsible for the highest percentage of accidents. This is where judgment and experience are a prime necessity.

So—let us see what they have to say. Following are extractions from the Instructors' comments.

Allan Pratt, C. F. I., Newcastle Gliding Club, writes: "It is generally accepted that the majority of accidents occur to overconfident pilots whose judgment is not backed by experience. Until a pilot has proved his airmanship by consistently good flying in all conditions, he must discuss his flight plan with the duty instructor prior to take-off. As the duty instructor is generally in the air, this briefing is often missed unless the off-duty instructors take an active part in assisting where necessary.

"Briefing should always be aimed at improving ability and judgement rather than just detailing the circuit procedure to be used.

"All accidents are caused by a combination of circumstances. If the pilot can recognize the beginning of a chain of events and take the necessary action, an accident is replaced

by an incident or avoided altogether. Some causes of accidents are:

"(1) While the pilot is unaware that anything is wrong, the preliminaries to an accident are usually all too obvious to ground observers. One can only assume that this is because the pilot has an inflexible attitude towards his flying. The concentration upon what lies ahead must dull the senses to what is actually happening. The answer to this can be a repetitive check on position, airspeed and sink throughout the approach.

"(2) Pilots returning to base after a high thermal flight fail to judge their approach correctly and turn on finals too high. This becomes dangerous if the pilot takes unplanned action such as 'S' turns. Pilots should rejoin the airfield at winch launching height and do a planned circuit.

"(3) When a tricky situation arises due to pilot error, too many pilots have the 'spot land at all costs' complex. In many cases an accident could be avoided by landing out of the field or below the ridge."

W. B. Reekie, C.F.I., Norfolk and Norwich Gliding Club, writes: "The problem is mainly one of overconfidence, as the immediate post-solo pilot still has a healthy fear and respect of his aircraft, whereas the pilot of, say, 5-20 hours gliding experience, or 25-200 hours powered experience, is able to relax more in the air as regards the actual handling of the aircraft, but because he has not developed at this stage the instinctive reactions of the old hand, he may find himself in difficulties because of this relaxation.

"The more experienced a pilot is, the more I find he is willing to accept a briefing from another experienced pilot, although in this case it is obviously an exchange of ideas, rather than an instructor-to-pupil briefing. Now, if this is so, how much more should a pupil benefit from a briefing for literally each and every flight. There should be a purpose for each flight, and the instructor should discuss this and explain any problems involved in achieving it.

"For example, even the most ob-

vious things, such as being warned of being drifted too far downwind of the airfield when local-soaring, and of approaching with a sufficiently high airspeed in conditions of strong winds, should be mentioned. Most people will not resent this, even if it is repetition, and even those who do will probably remember the instructions in the air.

"I believe that an instructor who authorizes a flight should and must give full briefing instructions, which after all need only take about three minutes. Other factors in achieving safety are, of course, giving frequent dual checks, but this is easier said than done. But in the case of pilots who are not in current flying practice, it should be essential."

George Collins, C.F.I., Cornish Gliding Club, writes: "All the problems referred to, in my opinion, stem from a lack of discipline, not in the sense of making more rules, but in the sense of inculcating to all pilots the need for self discipline."

Roy Hubble, C.F.I., Kent Gliding Club, writes: "When a pilot goes solo, the leash of course is 'loosened' but should never be 'severed.' The supervisory control is more important than ever, and a rigid flying training programme, with suitably timed two-seater checks, should be adhered to, at least until the pilot is qualified to go cross country.

"Most of the following are good old 'evergreens,' but is there any harm in mentioning them again?

"(1) Low and slow turns on the approach (getting back to the launch point at all costs).

"(2) Insufficient pre-flight briefing and post flight criticism.

"(3) Too few two-seater checks after having gone solo.

"(4) Insufficient knowledge of turbulence, curl-over and wind gradient.

"(5) Too early advancement to high-performance machines.

"(6) Wrong correction applied to check drift as aircraft touches down.

"(7) Overconfidence.

"(8) General lack of flying discipline.

"(9) Heads in the 'office.'

"(10) Impossibility of simulating some of the flying characteristics of medium and high-performance sailplanes in the two-seater.

"To help in this business of a post-solo training programme, I have instituted a system whereby every pilot has a Flying Progress Book."