



VIRGINIA FLIGHT SCHOOL SAFETY ARTICLES – NO 04/06/07

AIRMANSHIP

INTRODUCTION

Not even the most experienced pilot can accurately judge the potential outcomes of all the variables that are faced in even the apparently most straightforward of flights. Any flight is a complex interaction of pilot, machine, air traffic, weather, planning and effective risk management. A system of rules, regulation, SOP's, etc is therefore put in place to assist the pilot in providing him/her with an acceptable level of protection – reduce the risk factor to an acceptable and manageable level. It is however, all too often that this system providing inherent protection is blatantly flouted with resultant dire consequence. One only has to look at the accident record for general aviation in South Africa during the preceding twelve months – it is abysmal.

The very essence of safe flight and hedging against mishaps is the pilot's approach to and manner of execution of every aspect of a flight. This intangible is what is known as "*Airmanship*". It is a state of mind characterized by inherent responsibility, exceptional discipline, good judgment and wise decision making.

The two key elements in good airmanship are attitude and discipline. Skill and knowledge enable a good approach to flying through the application of a high level of discipline.

ATTITUDE

Attitude is simply defined as a person's response to any given situation or stimulus. It is a healthy respect for flying, the desire for safe self improvement and a high level of self discipline. It is recognizing own limitations and operating within those limitations. It is recognizing equipment limitations and operating within those limitations. It is equipping yourself with all possible knowledge about the flying you are doing and applying that knowledge in a highly discipline fashion.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline can be defined as personal willpower to conduct all flights within recognized limits for a safe outcome. Good airmanship and therefore safe flight cannot co-exist with poor discipline – it is simply an accident in preparation. It is inconceivable, yet very real, that so many pilot's prepare to have an accident through lack of adherence to even the most basic of procedures. Once again our very poor safety record in general aviation in South Africa bears testimony to this.

SKILL

In flying, skills are divided into two main categories :

- Physical flying skills; and
- Thinking skills.

Thinking skills are at least, if not more, important than physical flying skills. In flying, thinking can be said to be mental process of information processing to arrive at a suitable decision for a safe outcome. In the simplest of flights elements such as :

- Time pressures
- High workloads
- Prompt decision making; and
- High levels of situational awareness

have to be effectively processed to arrive at a safe outcome. Knowledge is the foundation of the thinking process during flight. Simply put, a thought process involves the recognition of a stimulus from one of the five human senses, sight being the main one in flying, and the comparison of that stimulus to a mental reference framework (knowledge) to arrive at a correct decision for a course of action that will result in a safe outcome. So we need knowledge to effect a good decision that will result in a safe outcome.

KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is considered to be the range of subject information readily available for recall when required, in a person's mind. More importantly is a very clear understanding of this subject information and how to apply it as the demand arises when flying.

Good airmanship therefore requires detailed information (knowledge) and the application thereof when required about :

- Man
- Machine
- Mission; and
- Medium.

COMPETENCY

Competency is that quality of being capable, and most importantly, willing to perform a task well and to operate an aircraft safely in all foreseeable situations. The combination of attitude, good discipline, skills and knowledge will result in a high level of pilot competency. Tony Hayes, CFI, Brisbane Valley Leisure Aviation Centre sums airmanship up most ably :

“It is why we fly and how we go about flying. It is not just about staying alive or not bending the aircraft. It is about leaving the airfield with a deep sense of inner satisfaction knowing that you have performed safely and to the best of your ability”.

FLY SAFELY THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF GOOD AIRMANSHIP!