

# Training Corner

## A CFI's NIGHTMARE

*A special article in a series of articles by Bill Ortmyer; CFI, CFII, MEI*

In my last article I discussed an Instructional Task Listing From The Ground Up. It represents one effective method of teaching flight control coordination and gyroplane aerodynamics. It steps you through several stages or levels of skill. It is necessary to master each stage before progressing to the next. Why? Just because you can take-off, fly around the patch, and land does not make you a gyroplane pilot. It makes you an intermediate student ready to go on to advanced training. Don't quit your training early! If you do, you might become a CFI's nightmare.

I want to do a special article at this time to tell all of you of this CFI's nightmare. The news we dread the most is to hear of the fatal crash of one of our former students. Recently I received the most dreaded of all calls.

Most of us who instruct in gyroplanes do so because of the desire of sharing one of our loves and passions with others that also have a similar interest. Gyroplanes are not easy to learn to fly. Once you get the hang of it, it's a piece of cake. However, it takes some time and patience to learn the machine and its limitations. A student learns over a period of time mastering each stage of flying before progressing to more advanced stages. The instructor's pre-nightmare is when we get a student that leaves our supervision with insufficient training, has a machine, and will probably go home and try to fly it, before he is ready.

I was deeply saddened to hear of the fatal crash of a young man to whom I had given some instruction. He came for one weekend this last February and took some dual instruc-

tion. He was a low time fixed wing pilot with some aerobatics experience.

Bud O'Neal, president of the Sunstate Rotor Club, called to inform me of the crash. He knew that I had given Jim some instruction. Bud was agonizing over what he or the club could do to prevent such needless accidents. I was told that the crash was pilot error due to a power push-over which unloaded the rotors so severely that the blades reversed-coned far enough as to strike the gyroplane's tail at the top of an abrupt pull-up. This is a maneuver that is far outside the normal operating limitations and spells certain disaster.

Jim had taken 6.6 hours of dual with me, went home and began flying. He had accumulated about 30 hours of flying before his fatal accident. Clearly he did not fully under-

stand his machine or else thought he was good enough to get away with the maneuvers he was flying. There is a way to do what he was doing and keep the blades positively loaded. Jim was not good enough in knowledge and skill for the type of flying he was doing, and it cost him his life.

A while back I watched a cable channel series on why airliners crash. Accidents were grouped into three categories: mechanical, weather, and pilot error. The interesting discovery of pilot-error-accidents centered mostly on the personality of the senior pilot-in-command. The investigators discovered that the senior pilot, in many instances, had a dominance and arrogance in his personality that prevailed in the cockpit against the better judgement of the other flight-crew members [thank goodness for cockpit voice recorders].

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As a result of this personality trait, many airlines now employ what is called cockpit resource management. [CRM]. It consists of personality profiling and arriving at a cockpit team that can work harmoniously together. It is significantly reducing the cockpit antagonism and tension that can arise when the captain is "the boss who knows it all and will not accept recommendations."

I have had a number of students come through my training school who I would characterize as very competent, talented, assertive, and accomplished successes in most things they have done in life. They are the type of people who are always in control and usually tell instead of ask. From many years of gyroplane training and knowing what dangers are unforeseen, this type of guy worries me the most. The nature of a gyro is that by the time you see what mistake you've made, it might be too late to recover from it!

Don't misunderstand what I'm saying here. Gyroplanes are safe and stable if operated within their flight limitations. But, unlike a Cessna that can recover from virtually any mistake given enough altitude, rotorcraft cannot! If you unload a rotorcraft's blades, this includes helicopters, you can't always make a recovery. You need to know what NOT to do before it happens to you.

This is part of the extended training that goes with flying gyros. When you can do take-off and landings it makes you an intermediate student that is ready for instruction toward the next stage of training. Don't be your own flight instructor.

Don't venture into the unknown thinking you can get the feel as you go.

From what I can ascertain, Jim got ahead of himself. He became lost in the fantastic thrill of flying that only a gyro can provide. He enthusiastically pressed on leaving caution behind. Part of the tragedy is that many around him were providing warnings, but the words of caution fell on deaf ears. He pressed on and ended up flying outside of his operating limitations falling to his death.

As Bud O'Neal and I talked, we expressed our mutual grief. What could we, or should we, have done differently so as to be able to prevent these types of accidents? Bud says that he preaches training, training, and more training. He says some members get tired of hearing him preach. Bud, and others like him, has been flying safely for many years. These guys know what they are talking about. Listen to the voices of experience.

Making others aware of what can and does happen is one thing we agreed should be done. Bud gave me permission to use his name and his club's name, and further encouraged me to write this article in hopes that others may learn from one club member's error in judgement.

When you lose a club member, it becomes everyone's nightmare. It is also every one's responsibility to keep watch for the person

who thinks he can fly anything. You all have seen this attitude or personality. According to the National Transportation Safety Board [NTSB] they are the ones most susceptible to becoming pilot error statistics.

In conclusion, the reality of human nature is that we will never be able to prevent pilot error accidents. Some personalities are simply far more prone to them than others. We can, however, all work together to reduce them. The signs are there. Watch for them and take group action if necessary. Watch out for and take care of each other.

Continue to enjoy the incredible world of flying in a way that can only be experienced in a gyroplane. Always fly with caution and common sense.

Read my next paragraph twice...it ends all of my training articles.

**CAUTION:** Be patient and master each stage of flying before venturing on. The longer you are in aviation the more you find out you are never as good as you think you are.

In my next article, #12, I'll continue with the practical test standards.

Remember, "the air, even more so than the sea, is most unforgiving for the slightest mistake." Get qualified flight instruction before getting into a gyro. Skillful pilots make it look easy, but it is not quick and easy to learn.

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