# 6 - AIRMANSHIP & THREAT MANAGEMENT

Airmanship includes good lookout and considerate behaviour in the air, as well as being ahead of events rather than dangling behind them like someone struggling with an out of control lawnmower. It also involves such apparently futile activities as looking both ways before crossing a one-way street, and not plunging boldly into areas where our ignorance seriously outweighs our competence.

Good airmanship is not simply about how we protect ourselves, but how we avoid putting other people at risk. For example, when thermalling with other gliders we should do so in such a way that not only are we are visible to them, but they don't have to keep manoeuvring to get out of our way. If pilots constantly leave thermals when you arrive, it may not be because they don't want to be out-climbed. Airmanship is good manners and caution, not aggressive behaviour towards other users of the air, either through 'stock car' styles of flying or bad-mouthing them over the radio.

As a subject, airmanship is difficult to teach. We all agree on good lookout and some of the other major components of good airmanship, but the rest often consists of 'opinions' about the best way to do this, that or the other, and some aspects of airmanship are extremely subtle. Teaching it is further complicated by the fact that the trainee's attitude and relationship to the world in general is a highly significant factor, for good or ill. When good airmanship is being exercised it goes unnoticed because nothing very dramatic happens. Good airmanship is usually most obvious when it's not there!

It is most important that the trainee understands that good airmanship is not something you turn on every now and then during a flight. Airmanship begins before you leave your home for the airfield.

### Physical and psychological condition

## I'M SAFE

### ILLNESS

You don't need to have a raging fever to be ill and unsafe. If you had a fever you wouldn't go to the airfield at all, you'd stay in bed. Not feeling 100%, though less dramatic, probably wouldn't stop you although it could be just as dangerous to your safety. Even a mild headache can mean that you won't concentrate fully on what you should be concentrating on, namely the flying. Have you a blocked nose or ears? Apart from the obvious distractions of such miseries, flying at any altitude with these conditions can damage your inner ear and lead to various other infections.

### MEDICATION

Some drugs can cause drowsiness, blurred vision, nausea, and produce various allergic reactions. Why are you taking the drugs in the first place, and are you safe to fly if you are?

### STRESS

Non-professional pilots often use flying as a way of winding down from the grind of work. Gliding can be a therapeutic pastime, but be very sure that when you climb into the aircraft you really have forgotten all your troubles, otherwise you are quite likely to find yourself playing host to a few more.

Anything which prevents you from concentrating on the flying puts you at risk. People are, on the whole, very bad at recognising their own lack of awareness, though they'll notice that of others readily enough. Pre-occupation with something other than the task in hand will make you more concerned with what's filling your head, than with anything that might be trying to come in from outside. Emotional stress of the 'slightly more than I'd actually wanted or felt I could enjoy' variety can make you vulnerable to potentially dangerous mistakes. If the marriage is crumbling, your partner is ill, or the girlfriend/boyfriend is about to/has dumped you, or you've bought a new house and had a row with the neighbour(s), then take care! If you know that your attention is, or is likely to be less than 100%, don't pretend it's anything else. Either make suitably broad allowances, or don't fly at all, which is probably the safest if not the most attractive option.

### ALCOHOL

The un-coordinating effects of alcohol are indisputable, unless of course, you happen to be drunk and argumentative with it. The RAF's old 'eight hours from bottle to throttle' rule referred to a very modest amount of drink. In reality, any residual alcohol in the system will have an adverse effect which may not be very apparent to anyone, least of all you. In any event, the military - who can't afford to lose pilots or aeroplanes - now demand that 'no alcohol be consumed 10 hours before flying duties, including not more than 5 units in the previous 24 hours'. Being drunk is one thing, but the resultant hangover can be far worse for your flying competence than any illness.

### FATIGUE

Did you have a good night's sleep? Have you already done lots of launches today? While tiredness is something with which you may be familiar and can allow for, boredom and even long spells of hard concentration are also forms of fatigue whose capacity to undermine your intelligence shouldn't be underestimated.

### FAMILIARITY

Are you in current practice? When did you last practise stalling or spinning, or have a launch failure? Not that you should give yourself a real failure just for practice, but when was the last time you really thought about what you would do if you had a genuine launch failure? When was the last time someone else looked at your flying? Are you totally familiar with the aircraft you are about to fly? Have you read the Flight Manual recently/at all? When did you last fly the aircraft? When did you last fly at the site? Is the weather as expected? Have you flown in these conditions before?

If you are doubtful about your currency with any of the above then have a check ride or read the glider's manual. In addition to your own health, what about the 'health' of the aircraft you are about to fly? Who DI'd it? Were they as thorough as you would be? Would it be a good idea to do a quick walk-round before you get into the cockpit, just to be sure, especially if this is the very first flight of the day? Have you done positive checks on the control connections?

### EATING

If you go for several days without proper meals your blood sugar level falls and can cause lack of concentration. In extreme cases you can become unconsciousness. A touch of food poisoning, however mild, won't do you any favours either. The

 

first question asked by accident investigators after at least one gliding fatality was, *What had the pilot had to eat?* and *Where was it prepared?* Inadequate fluid intake can also have potentially serious effects. Dehydration can rapidly incapacitate if not actually kill you. In one incident a glider pilot became ill in the air, landed safely, and was found unconscious in the cockpit.

## Pre-flight

- have you checked your weight recently?
- is any ballast properly secured?
- is any packing going to give on the initial part of the launch?
- are all loose articles stowed correctly?
- is the weather suitable for the forthcoming flight? If it's hot and blue, don't forget to wear a sun hat and to roll down your sleeves. This helps to prevent dehydration, sunstroke, and being lightly crisped
- are you prepared for emergencies such as cable breaks?
- what is the purpose of the flight? Whilst it is unnecessary and sometimes counter-productive to be forever striving mightily, meandering aimlessly about after the launch doesn't improve your flying skills, or increase your chances of a long life. Stay awake and alert by having something to aim for; preferably not another glider.

## PRE-FLIGHT BRIEFING

There is no Airmanship Pre-flight Briefing as such. The subject is broad, has blurred edges, and tends to be learnt by osmosis. A club with a poor 'atmosphere' and a lackadaisical attitude to safety, for example, can create pilots whose airmanship will be as bad as if they had been deliberately taught and lectured on how to make it that way. As an instructor, and whether you want it or not, you are often the example by which such matters as Airmanship and its usefulness are judged. If you have any degree of derring-do this can sometimes be intensely frustrating, but there is no refuge whatsoever in that hypocritical old adage, *Don't do as I do, do as I say*. When your trainees are solo, and probably when you aren't there, they will be apt to do exactly what you did, whatever it was you said, and with a lesser degree of competence. If you are a fan of low turns and 'Look at me' styles of flying, blaming your trainee when he tries the same thing and cartwheels into the clubhouse, does somehow seem to miss the point.

What needs putting over in every way possible, short of actually spreading yourself across the airfield, is that really good pilots are thoughtful and look after the interests of other pilots - which includes helping them to stay alive. Whether X can do a 300kt beat-up with the merest splinter of daylight under the fuselage or not has no significance, except perhaps to X. Leave X's problems to X. Safe doesn't mean dull.

As well as the emphasis on airmanship and safety throughout the training, you should also (as part of your own good airmanship) discuss the whys and wherefores of any decisions you are making, jointly or singly. Gradually introduce the trainees to more responsibility for the safe conduct of their flights. In that way they'll learn to be safe, considerate and thoughtful pilots, and you'll be able to save your voice and nerves. Oh yes, and enjoy their flying.

**If you cannot honestly say *I'm safe*, then don't fly.**

 