

2011 Convention Welcome and Opening Remarks, Jonathan Sisk

Last year, I spoke to you on the theme of Freedom & Flight... about how blessed we are as pilots to routinely experience what most people will never know... the ultimate expression of freedom and individual liberty... to escape the bonds of earth in our own aircraft and travel at will, several miles above the surface at hundreds of miles per hour. I challenged all of us to recommit ourselves to the highest standards of education, training, judgment and airmanship, to protect our heritage of flight from any who would restrict or diminish it.

Today, I would like to focus our attention on another underpinning of our enjoyment and use of general aviation, and that is safety. It is the theme for our convention, the focus of what we do, and I would like for you to consider this convention our Safety Summit.

We have almost unrestricted use of our aircraft not because the public understands, approves of, and appreciates what we do. Quite the opposite: for the most part, the public is uninformed and doesn't care too much about general aviation. We operate with relative ease in the national airspace system because accidents are sufficiently infrequent that the public does not consider us a threat or nuisance, and therefore, there is little political will to further restrict our privileges of flight. Most of that comes from regulators.

But when accidents do happen, their rarity makes it news, often in a big way, and with coverage out of proportion to the same loss of life from other modes of transportation. But closer to home, when we lose one of our own, it is a dramatic blow to our flying community.

Over the years, I have watched the reaction from our members when a PA46 aircraft goes down and lives are lost, often our own members along with family members or business associates. The scenario is always the same. We look for answers, to make sense of the loss, to better understand the sequence of events, and I think many times to rationalize our own doubts and vulnerability to a similar event. The chatter often centers around how someone who has flown a PA46 for years, trained within our community, attended our academic programs, read our magazine, gone to our safety events... how could they fall victim to this situation? Of course, we benefit from the perspective of objectivity in studying the situation after the fact... you know, 20/20 hindsight.

Looking back, you will remember that it was safety of flight concerns that gave birth to this organization. In the early 90s when the Malibu was being restored to full flight status, the recommendations of the NTSB included changes to enhance PA46 pilot training.

Well, here we are 2 decades later and we still have concerns. At the Spring meeting of our Board of Directors, our Safety Committee was tasked with examining the accident record of the PA46 for the past decade to look for evidence whether the programs and safety initiatives of the association are working to reduce accidents. Or, put another way, do we, as a group, enjoy a

safety benefit or advantage because of our membership and involvement in MMOPA? Does participation in our Foundation's regional ground and flight training events make us safer?

Manny Casiano, our Safety Committee chair will be presenting the details of this investigation and what we have learned at tomorrow's Safety Review. Manny's presentations are always thoroughly documented and enlightening. You don't want to miss it.

As an association, we must periodically take a hard look at what we are doing and ask difficult questions: Does this activity advance the goals we have set? Is it a good use of the association's resources? Can we change something to make it more effective?

One of the challenges any organization faces is simple inertia... continuing in the same direction, doing the same things, the opposite of change. And in a volunteer-based association comprised of successful people, our most precious resource is time. We are all very busy. For that reason, it's not hard to understand the tendency to keep doing what has been done... to run on autopilot, if you will.

But I am reminded of a relevant quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) was a German Lutheran pastor, theologian and martyr. During the war he became a part of the Nazi resistance movement. A double agent of the Abwehr, he was arrested in April 1943 and hung in April 1945, just days before the war's end. He said:

“If you board the wrong train, it is no use running along the corridor in the other direction.”

MMOPA's examination of our safety initiatives is to make sure we are headed in the right direction, and on the right train.

As we spend the next 3 days immersed in a first-rate academic program, I would propose that we frame all this in what I will call the MMOPA Safety Ethic – a body of right principals or values that pervade our culture, define our attitudes, governs our decision making, and inform our actions... The MMOPA Safety Ethic.

The vast majority of accidents continue to be linked to pilot error of one sort or another, so improving safety begins up here. We train the intellect to transform the will... the idea that “you become what you put into your mind.” The MMOPA Safety Ethic is a contagious idea that values, respects, encourages, and holds us accountable for, excellence in the three areas that determine the safe operation of our aircraft:

Knowledge Skill & Judgment

I hope you enjoy this year's convention – the learning, the camaraderie, the relaxation, and this beautiful setting.