Hanging up one's wings

Phil Stade, Cu Nim Safety Officer

Each of us hopes that we will be able to fly safely until our last day of life. The evidence, however, indicates that most of us will have to make what today may seem like a difficult choice: is now the time to hang up the wings? I've asked three octogenarian pilots living in Alberta, George Dunbar, Walter Mueller, and Hugh McColeman, for their take on this subject. Their opinions were not only sought because of their age but because of the love of soaring they have demonstrated over many years. Each of them has reached a different stage in the decision to fly or not to fly: one chose to step out of active flying last year, one is expecting to quit soaring in the next year or so, and one is looking forward to more seasons of great flying.

> Is it time to hang up your wings? As we begin a new season of flying, I encourage you to take the advice of these pilots.

Count your "Y-did-I's" – George Dunbar

MY FIRST CONTACT WITH GLIDING was with the gliding club at McGill University about 1940. I remember doing bungee launches from some of the lower levels of the ski hills at St. Saveur in the Laurentians. My total time there was approximately ten seconds! After McGill, I was still interested, and started the Gull Gliding Club in Dartmouth, NS. We built a Slingsby Cadet, which was flown for some months, until I was moved to Sarnia. There I flew with SOSA, then moved to Calgary in 1964, where I flew at Cu Nim until last year.

We are sometimes surprised to see reports of skaters or other athletes announcing their retirement at ages of 35, 25 — or even younger. In business, the "standard" retirement age is usually 65. In our sport we are more fortunate and many of us can continue our activity some years beyond even this latter figure. However, we all grow older — after all, we do want to avoid the alternative! How long can we or should we continue to fly? Those unfortunate to have a physical impairment should generally discuss their condition with their doctors. How



about the rest of us?

I suggest we count our Y-did-I's.

What are these? Well, they are situations where we say, "Why did I" How many times have *you* gone out to the kitchen for something then had to ask, "Why did I come out here?" when you got there. A more serious example might be starting your takeoff roll and finding the canopy not secured, or the spoilers not closed ... "Why did I miss that in my checklist?"

Memory fades with age. Have you ever met a friend whom you last

saw three days ago, but now can't remember his last name? This is certainly embarrassing, but less critical than giving a position report of, "I am over ... ???" two miles from your home field.

People differ. I won't offer a suggestion for a maximum number of YDI's for you. But I do say that we all, young or old, should give thought to these changes that may be affecting our gliding.

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Hugh McColeman has been soaring since 1968 but his love of aircraft dates back to 1919 when he saw a WW1 biplane fly over his parent's farm.

Hanging it up – Hugh McColeman

In 1949 I had a commercial flight in a DC3. In Montreal, we made occasional motor trips to Ottawa and enroute we passed by the Montreal Soaring Council airfield at Hawkesbury. We always paused for a while to watch with interest those beautiful sailplanes in action. On an October afternoon in 1968 I finally ventured through the gate and had my introductory flight in the big Schweizer 2-32. I promptly joined the club and started training in 2-22's. After nearly ten happy years in the club and 38 good years with the Aluminum Company of Canada (now Alcan), I retired in 1978 and my wife and I moved to Edmonton where our two daughters were then living. I promptly joined the Edmonton Soaring Club and have been an active member there for nearly 25 years.

Now 89 years young, with almost 35 years of nearly continuous glider flying, I realize that I cannot go on forever and must plan for the inevitable termination of flying. I now have an annual medical which I have passed with a Category 3 rating. The decision to continue flying therefore remains within my own control. I know that my physical strength and mobility have decreased markedly over time and I must rely on the good will of other members to rig and move my glider. This has not been a seri-



ous problem. What I consider to be a more important concern is the subtle silent deterioration of the mental process. It can be similar to the hypoxia that follows oxygen deprivation. It happens without your realization or appreciation.

So at what point does it become so serious that, in spite of your keen desire to con-

tinue, you must act responsibly and fold up your wings?

It becomes important to watch the simple things even more carefully: the walk around, ballast requirements, the altimeter setting, the gear position — the list goes on. If you note that you are missing more of these than you used to it is surely sending a message you must respect. In addition to the usual spring checkflights, take some extra dual flights with instructors whom you trust to give you an honest evaluation.

Never let matters slide to the point that your long time friends are forced to tell you that you must cease flying. These comments apply to pilots of any age. They may meet all the official criteria but must still make a personal evaluation of their flying capabilities.

In spite of the above comments I find that I have great empathy with the ancient Alberta farmer who was being interviewed by a bright young TV reporter. When asked, "Have you lived here all your life", he paused briefly, then with a twinkle in his rheumy old eyes he replied, "Not yet".

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Walter Mueller started flying primary gliders when he was about 16 years old. His instructing career started shortly thereafter in the Luftwaffe and today is CFI of the Grande Prairie club, so in many ways he's seen it all.

When is it time to quit flying? - Walter Mueller

With more and more pilots reaching an age where contemporaries are happy playing shuffle board, whist and floor-curling, the question, "When is it time to quit flying", is becoming acute. Since I am an octogenarian myself and still happily flying (when the weather is good and I can get a tow), my own musings on the subject are probably skewed in favour of prolonging the unavoidable decision time. However, in order that the paper this is written on is not wasted, I shall try to be as objective as possible. What, then, should be the criteria to terminate one's flying career? Here's my opinion.

Mental Fitness

On top of the list is Enthusiasm. If that is missing, go no further, just quit and go bowling. My reasoning for this is, if a pilot is enthusiastic about flying, he or she will gladly continue to do all the things that are necessary to be safe. If on the other hand one is only lukewarm about it, then some vital points may be overlooked and the results are often an insurance claim or worse. Remember: examining your mental alertness if you are still an active pilot requires strength of character.

Physical Fitness The Class 4 medical self-declaration was a step in the right direction, but like most "bargains," there is often a catch somewhere. You must be honest with the declaration and not omit something or stretch the truth. Remember: it is for your own safety and not to please Transport Canada. The Class 3 Medical is valid for five years for the glider pilot's licence. This is okay for younger pilots, but in later years a more frequent examination would be appropriate. We can compare this with the annual inspection of our aircraft. I like to know something is wrong while it can still be fixed.

Flying Skill An aging pilot should never get the idea that he knows it all; when one has reached the point where one can not learn anything any more, that is definitely the point to pull the release and call it quits. Having problems staying behind the towplane, poor circuit planning, and misjudging landings are sure signs that the flying skills need upgrading. My recommendation is that the annual checkflight be done with the CFI and if the pilot does not fly often enough, another checkflight later in the season should be done. On these checkflights, special attention should be given to coordination, quick reactions, and judgment.

Currency

"Practice makes perfect", is nowhere more applicable than in piloting an aircraft. With our long winter layoff it is imperative that one gets his spring checkflight as soon as possible and after that fly often to stay in practice. This is, of course, applicable to any pilot, but more so to the senior.



One should also be receptive to constructive criticism and be open minded to suggestions from one's peers.

When is it time to quit flying ? Here are the guidelines that I have set for myself — it's when:

- I have lost my enthusiasm,
- I don't feel sure of myself anymore,
- I don't feel comfortable in the cockpit any more,
- · The doctor tells me to quit, based on physical facts,
- My checkflight instructor tells me to quit, based on deteriorating flying skills,
- And last, but not least, when I have enough common sense simply to know that the time has come to quit flying and go fishing.

In the meantime however, I hope to have many more enjoyable hours in my "rocking chair with wings", the cockpit of my Open Cirrus.

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safety & training

Incident report Spoilers on downwind check

Ian Oldaker, chairman, Flight Training & Safety committee, and **Dr. Mark Voisey**, FRCP(C).

This incident occurred on an instructors' course late in 2002. It is being shared as widely as possible because several interesting teaching points arise.

We were very busy preparing for a demonstration of how to plan the circuit, having been busy with not much height at release doing a previous exercise. We were approaching the airfield (ahead of entering the downwind leg), the height was decreasing and there was a certain urgency to the situation. We started the downwind at which point the instructor trainee, 2iC, said we had to do the SWAFTS check. This was started (and then interrupted by the PiC instructor, questioning the timing of the checks, and consuming important time in a critical phase of the flight (also see note 1 below).

Because of this, the checklist was rushed (which was the topic of PiC's comments), and at the "spoilers" item, the flap handle slowly came back as 2iC said "spoilers". The following comments were then exchanged as best PiC can recall:

"You sure the spoilers are open?"

"Yes, they are open."

"I can't see them, will you confirm they are open."

At this point the flap handle moved further back! We could then hear the change in airflow noise. 2iC was still sure they were open. Then:

"Are they open?"

"— Oops!"

The handle moved forward to close the flaps, and the spoilers were selected (note 2).

Why did this occur? First, the heavier workload plus the need to talk aloud as the circuit was to be demonstrated set up the pilot to make this error of choice of handle. Second, he did not catch the error because of two possible factors:

1. 2iC did not confirm by looking that he had hold of the correct handle; see note 3.

2. 2iC was not used to habitually checking the spoilers open. Hence when he was asked to confirm them open, he did so by checking the wing, did not see the spoilers so he moved the handle further back in an attempt to open the spoilers so that they would be visible — then the "Oops". The visual check lead to the relatively rapid diagnosis of the problem (total time less than about 15 seconds). Would this have happened if he had been flying alone? Probably not, for example,

if the other person in the airplane was an intro, ie. no authority-deferential factor would have been operative. See also note 3.

Three teaching points come from this:

1. We should teach that the pre-landing SWAFTS check is to be completed *before* entering the downwind leg. This reduces the high workload that occurs at the end of every flight. We need to space out what we have to do, and not cram it all into a short time. By completing the checks before the downwind leg, we have more time to plan a good circuit. Think of the student trying to sort out when to enter the circuit, especially when there is a higher than usual wind and an unfamiliar runway is being used, as was the case here.

2. The correct handle should always be confirmed visually (we should teach this) when the hand is placed on it; in the case of the L-13 Blaniks, this is a problem and a different shape or feel of the handle does not always work, especially when thick gloves are in use (yes, we were flying in very cold weather). Having said this, we should also continue to teach pilots to look at the spoilers, again to confirm that they are indeed holding the correct handle.

3. The opening of spoilers affects the trim of the glider, and the open brakes can often be heard, and these effects are clues that can be used by pilots. We should train ourselves and our student pilots to hear our flying environment as well as to see and feel it. These are a more subtle form of feedback but are valid if we sensitize pilots. For example, the airbrakes sure make a very noticeable noise when they inadvertently open on takeoff! We can use all our senses to keep us out of trouble. An attitude of unfocussed, freely-rambling attention is desirable and useful in many circumstances, and has saved all our bacon at various times. It comes under the heading of "there's something not right here".

Note 1

The trainee was placed in a deferential loyalty position — follow the PiC (which he was not) task of flying the aircraft, or deferring to the instructor and engaging in dialogue and answering the instructor's questions. In this situation many people will defer to the person of authority rather than to the task demands. Instructors must be aware of interruptions like this, possibly adversely affecting the outcome of the immediate task.

Note 2

2iC in his own words: I looked out at the wing hoping to see the spoilers, but could not see

them. Since they were only slightly open I tried to open them further to see if that would make them more visible - it then became clear that at half-extension or so (of the handle), they were not extending. My next impression was that either the rod had broken or that they were somehow glued/ stuck shut, but the resistance on the handle didn't feel right. The instructor had directed me to visually attend to seeing the spoilers. Upon checking the handle, I then realized that I had my hand on the flaps, and immediately realized that in my checklist (SWAFTS) I had pulled on the flap lever (which I, as usual, intended to extend in any case) but because I was rushed and under pressure and overfocussed, I announced as "spoilers". I immediately retracted the flaps and extended the spoilers, and made an acceptable (flapless) landing.

Note 3

There is another factor that sometimes occurs but was not operative in this case; however, it is mentioned for completeness: when a pilot expects a result from an action, he or she can believe the correct response has occurred — the pilot looks at the spoilers and sees them open, because he or she expects to see them open. This is known as *expectation* — the old "green lights" syndrome — a pilot expects to see the green lights after selecting undercarriage down, so sees green even though the lights were red.

There's lots more to say — design ergonomics, standardization of gliders, cockpit workload considerations, checklists, instructor deference in students, teaching points/styles, and so forth. These are subjects for another time perhaps!

7 types of lookout

There are seven (7!) basic types of lookout, and scanning technique is the basis for performing all of them. They are when a pilot is:

- about to change direction to make a turn,
- as above but at the same time climbing to slow into a thermal,
- · climbing in a thermal,
- about to leave a thermal,
- in the circuit,
- flying straight and level, and
- about to perform a height-loss exercise.

Though looking in the direction of the intended turn is a no-brainer, looking to the opposite side is not so obvious. However, another glider or possibly a faster-moving powered aircraft may be approaching from that side, and as the glider is rolled into the turn, the high wing may obscure this approaching aircraft. Hence take a good look to the other side as well.

Midair collisions have occurred when climbing into thermals, so looking directly above