

(Almost) Every Need I Learned

By Lt. Richard Klauer

As I sat in my tiny FFG stateroom, muddling through the final weeks of a counter-drug ops cruise, I realized there are axioms of aviation that, no matter what your experience level, will always hold true. I learned a few of these early in my career as a naval aviator, during primary flight training in the mighty T-34C Mentor. My on-wing, a Marine CH-46 driver, never failed to pass along the truisms of flying, often using colorful language to capture my attention. Here are the translations of his aviation adages and how I have managed to incorporate them into fleet flying.

“What are you doing up there?” My esteemed instructor had his own way of developing the finer points of CRM from the back seat. In multi-place aircraft, the copilot and crew are there to help you, just as you are there to help them.

“ Fly the aircraft.
Don't let the
aircraft fly you.”

“Have you even read your NATOPS?” Despite his criticism of my systems knowledge, I really did read my NATOPS. Now that your fleet aircraft NATOPS is about four times as thick as the T-34's, there is plenty of reading to be done.

“Underwater is not the time to inspect your SV-2.” Before you walk, make sure your HEED bottle has air and your PRC-90 and the rest of your gear works so you will be somewhat comfortable if you go for an unexpected swim.

“You're preflighting the wrong aircraft.” Yes, I did this once. Checking the tail number is just part of the attention to detail



Everything I Ever Wanted to Know Happened in Primary

demanding by every preflight, whether on the beach, at an airshow, or on the dark, cold, rain-slicked flight deck.

“Zip up your pockets.” After witnessing numerous near-FOD incidents, this is part of my personal preflight every time I get on or in the aircraft. Extra change rolling around in the engine compartment never did anyone any good.

“Are you going to put the gear down?” Checklists aren’t just a fact of life; they are the crux of safety in aviation. Rushing to meet the critical launch, becoming lax and not paying attention in the cockpit have caused more than just gear-up landings.

“Relax and take it one step at a time.” When the master caution light or fire light comes on, don’t rush to complete the

immediate-action items. Take time to determine the precise nature of the problem, then methodically configure the aircraft. When fighting emergencies, speed can kill.

“Knock, knock. That’s your ball trying to get back in.” Nowhere is solid instrument flying more important than when launching into the inky blackness at sea. A poor scan and lack of proficiency can allow vertigo to seize even the most savvy aviator.

“This hop will be over when we run out of gas.” Yes, it most certainly will. Ideally, that time also will coincide with a suitable runway or deck. Trying to stretch the legs of your aircraft can lead to disaster. Hawk your fuel, whether droning around your local NAS or venturing far from Mom on the big blue.

“It doesn’t look like it’s going to clear up. You’re canceled.” OK, sometimes bad weather has its benefits.

“Fly the aircraft. Don’t let the aircraft fly you.” The first commandment of the always-germane rule: aviate, navigate, communicate.

“Where are you going?” Navigate. This is the second most important thing you can do in the aircraft. If you don’t know where you are going, you won’t be able to get back.

“Think, key, speak.” Communicate. Tell your lead, wing or controller what you need and want. This will set you up for success. Keep in mind that comm brevity and radio discipline are essential elements of tactical flying. Just ask the air boss. 

Lt. Klauer is a former detachment maintenance officer in HSL-47. His on-wing’s whereabouts are unknown.

Have you heard any other “truisms of flying” in the training command, your first squadron, or later in your career? It may be serious or humorous. Send me an e-mail (jstewart@safetycenter.navy.mil) with the classic line and a short explanation, and I’ll print it in a future issue.—Ed.

Photograph by PH2 Darryl L. Wood

