Missionary Flights International
by Lyle Reffey

Last November, the MSI Safety Audit Team of Lyle and Becky Reffey, Joe and Barbara Fowler, and Robert King headed to Florida for an MSI audit of Missionary Flights International (MFI). Of course, it felt good to enjoy some warm weather as well as having some great fellowship with the MFI team.

MFI has completed its Hospitality Center. The Hospitality Center provides a wonderful place for teams or families to stay as they are volunteering at MFI or transitioning to or from their ministries in the Caribbean. The team thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to stay in two of the houses—as well as to swim in the pool.

MFI’s ministry begins at its home base in Fort Pierce and extends throughout countries in the Caribbean. MFI operates a fleet of airplanes, consisting of two turbine powered DC-3s and a Cessna 310. Good progress is being made on the refurbishment of a third DC-3.

Some of the MSI team rode along on a flight that transported a number of missionaries and a large amount of cargo and mail to one of those ministries. And God continues to send individuals and families to join teams that make such flights possible as well as safe for all concerned.

There were many opportunities for the team to have conversations with MFI team members and audit their operations. From the start of the audit to the end, it was great to see all the improvements and changes that had been made to further enhance the safety of the program.

Everyone on the MSI team was blessed by the opportunity to come alongside MFI to assist them as they stand in the gap for the many missionaries, organizations and churches in the Caribbean.
Is that the best you can do?

by Tony Kern

These words still bite when I hear them, reminding me of my father’s apparent disapproval of something I did as a child that did not live up to his expectations. It always hurt, especially so when I had tried very hard at something. Looking back over the decades, I now realize that he was going to ask the same question no matter how well I performed a task. More importantly, I now understand why he asked it. It was seldom about the quality of the work, but rather the quality of the boy he was working with. My father wanted me to know that there are differences in workmanship that are wholly under our control, but only if we seek it. And so, the question was asked—and in my mind is still asked five decades later—about nearly every task I attempt; Is that the best you can do?

Getting better is something of a lost art these days. As an historian, I can trace the demise of “betterment” to the fall of the Trade Guilds with their career-spanning quests for new and better craftsmanship. The journey from Apprentice to Master Craftsman had multiple gates of performance (novice, journeyman, craftsman) and provided the title and honor of Master Craftsman only to those who contributed something new to the tradecraft to share with others. When the federal regulator came on board, they established minimum standards for worker safety and consumer protection and poof, just like that, a thousand years of routine betterment was replaced with “meeting standards.” Since that day, it has all become about credentials and standards, and the quest for seeking and finding the best in us has quietly ceased to be a driving force in most of our lives. But it need not be so.

I’d like you to think of your performance differently for a few days. Pick a routine task, any task, and try to recall the one time in the past when you did it the best. If you are like most of us, you won’t be able to, because we don’t think about doing it better, we simply think about getting it done. This is a critical realization. If we can’t (or won’t) think about what our best looks like, we are little more than production line workers who are marking time on menial tasks. This is not in keeping with the demands of a high-risk endeavor, nor for that matter, our eternal one (see Phil. 3:14).

If you are even a little bit intrigued with this means of thinking about how much you know about everything, you don’t know something, find it and learn it. Stay curious.

- If you can’t measure your “true best,” practice precision and picture perfection until you can begin to differentiate levels of performance that exceed the standards set by others.

If you try these few small steps, you will quickly see that the quality of the work is just the means to establish and grow the quality of the worker.

As always, I am fighting for feedback to improve the quality of my work, so please feel free to let me know your thoughts on this!

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Dr. Tony Kern is a Founding Partner and the CEO of Convergent Performance, LLC, a veteran-owned small business located in Colorado Springs, dedicated to reducing human error and improving performance in high-risk environments. Tony is one of the world’s leading authorities on human performance in time constrained, error intolerant environments and has lectured on the subject around the globe for over three decades.

Dr. Kern is the author of nine books on human performance. In the past decade, he has broadened his approach beyond aviation. In his latest “Empowered Accountability” series, he creates a 21st century guide to extreme professionalism for individuals and organizations “while remaining true to themselves and growing where they are, with the resources at hand.” His expert opinion has been sought for interviews by several news networks.

Despite his numerous advanced degrees, Tony does not consider himself an academic. He has deep operational roots in the U.S. Air Force as a Command Pilot and Flight Examiner in the B-1B bomber, as well as diverse senior staff and leadership experience; including service as the Chairman of the U.S. Air Force Human Factors Steering Group and Director and Professor of Military History at the USAF Academy. Upon retirement from the Air Force in 2000, Dr. Kern served as the National Aviation Director for the U.S. Forest Service, where he directed the largest non-military government aviation program in the world in support of federal wildland fire suppression.

MSI is especially grateful for Dr. Kern’s willingness to advance the cause of mission aviation safety through participation in MSI seminars. We welcome his contributions to Safety Net.
The Trouble With Hope
by Steve Quigg and Steve Zaboji*

Dates. They’re just random numbers on a page. Just random numbers, that is, until a certain combination comes together which evokes a mental (and sometimes visceral) response. For Americans, 12/07/1941 (Pearl Harbor attack) is such an example. 09/11/2001 is another. But unless you were a part of the tragedy, 03/01/2003 is probably just another insignificant date on your calendar.

The weather was terrible in the mid-Atlantic area that weekend with late winter weather, low clouds, and icing ensnaring a number of pilots, resulting in life-altering events. One of those flights was a TBM 700 turboprop approaching the Leesburg, VA airport with 3 souls on board. The flight had every asset needed to complete its mission successfully. Yet in spite of a world-class turboprop aircraft equipped with state-of-the-art avionics for guidance and situational awareness, a pilot with a Ph.D., and a highly qualified flight instructor in the right seat, they lost it all. They lost the airplane, the pilot’s life, the co-pilot’s life, the passenger’s life, and the well being and stability of close and extended families. Even before the NTSB investigation began, the aviation community broke out once again in that old accident spiritual: “Why, Lord, why oh why oh why?*

On the Loudoun County Reader’s Forum the next day, one of the first postings read:*

*I Love You Dad (03/02/03 at 8:24 p.m.)

“This tragedy that has just occurred with my dad will never be explained. All I can keep thinking is why did it have to happen? There are so many emotions that I feel right now...denial, hurt, and frustration, to name a few. I had the best dad in the world, and something out of my control took him away from me. I feel like I am left with nothing. He was the one I looked up to, he inspired me, he gave me advice...he is half of who I am. It goes to show that you don’t know what you’ve got until it’s gone! I love you dad!!!”*

The author was teenager Emily Byrd. Her dad, an attorney, was the passenger in the back seat of that TBM 700. Her message tears at your heart, all the more so because her tragic loss was completely, totally avoidable. Her cry of “why?” needs an answer loud enough that others will hear, heed, and prevent another “pilot error tragedy” like hers.*

While Emily’s dad died in an American registered aircraft with an American trained pilot approaching an American airport, the harsh reality is that there are plenty of “Emilys” in this world whose dads were missionary pilots who died on the slopes of the Eastern Congo mountains, or off the north Australian coastline, or in the thick Bolivian jungle. Being a missionary pilot who is bringing help and hope in the back of an airplane doesn’t exempt him/her from the laws of physics or the weakness of human frailty.

*No room for hope*

Much of the inspiration and content for this article comes from a piece in the AOPA Pilot magazine written by Steve Zaboji. He lived not far from Leesburg and knew of the aircraft and pilot. This accident tore him up with the senselessness of it all. So he took it upon himself to look closely at the Leesburg accident and others of a similar nature to find out why such capable crews and aircraft came to such tragic ends. His conclusion about the root cause? Not pilot error in the classic sense, not mechanical issues, not weather. No, his conclusion was that the single most significant contributor to aviation accidents is, Hope. Really, Hope?!? One of the Big Three in 1 Corinthians 13?

When I started reading his article, I thought, “Where are you going with this, Zaboji?” By the time I finished it, I was a puddle on the floor. Somehow, without having ever met me, Steve was writing exactly about me! Hope—how else do you explain the young private pilot who flew for hours over unfamiliar territory on a dark night and landed at a strange airport with 2 gallons of gas left in the tank? Or the missionary pilot who landed on an unlit bush airstrip after sunset because he wanted to get back home after delivering a patient to the hospital? Or the mechanic who replaced an exhaust stud with an automotive bolt because the right part wasn’t in stock and “besides, the engine was just 50 hours away from overhaul”? If it wasn’t Hope at work that somehow things would turn out alright in the face of reason to the contrary, will someone please tell me what it was?

The saddest thing in the world is that I’m not alone. As Elbert Hubbard expressed it, “Every man is
Hope in Aviation Safety

a dang fool for at least five minutes every day; wisdom consists in not exceeding the limit.” According to the Air Safety Foundation, nearly three airplanes a week crash in this country due to fuel mismanagement. Pilot error? Maybe. A pilot defaulting to HOPE? More likely. You know where pilots almost always run out of gas? In sight of the destination runway, after passing a dozen potential fuel stops along the way. “Wow, this is going to be close. Wait, I know, I'll just switch to my virtual fuel tank of HOPE, and we might just make it.” By the grace of God, they sometimes do.

How is it that a missionary pilot colleague, a man with great faith and wonderful success in ministry, could stuff an airplane full of people and baggage, look at the trees at the end of the runway and say, “You know what, I don't think we're going to be able to get over them.” And then take off anyway? Did he go to the performance charts in the airplane flight manual which said, “It won't make it” and then turn to another section in the manual listed HOPE and find that the performance figures for the virtual turbocharger were better? “Aha! I think this takeoff will be okay after all.” The takeoff was defaulted to HOPE and away they went, until the next stop was in the trees at the end of the runway. By the grace of God, they all survived.

So tell me, what is the difference between Faith and Hope? I would contend that the difference between the two is the trustworthiness of the person/place/thing you are counting upon to deliver the goods. Or as the author of the book of Hebrews writes, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for.” For example, which would you rather have—a ticket for the million dollar lottery, or the promise of a $1,000 check from your favorite rich uncle? A 5 year warranty from a fly by night outfit, or the assurance from a reputable shop that they'll stand by their work?

The value of a guarantee should be judged by the integrity of the person or company issuing it, not on the terms of the contract itself. A flight relying on Hope for a safe outcome is headed for the accident files, but a flight conducted by Faith in good planning, verified performance figures, and conservative decision making will almost always turn out right.

The flight

It is sometimes said that our strength can be our weakness, and conversely, our weakness can be our strength. In the case of the TBM 700 pilots, their strength was an aircraft equipped to handle IFR with tremendous technological assistance. But perhaps the false comfort of the high-tech features and a possible lack of technical proficiency detracted from the serious nature of their intended approach. Being wealthy enough to buy a sophisticated aircraft is a strength few enjoy; yet that strength can turn into a weakness when the aircraft can oufly its pilot. It's then that the crew is flying at the mercy of a fatally flawed guidance system called HOPE.*

As the TBM flight was moving along routinely toward Leesburg, the pilot certainly learned of the weather at Leesburg and understood that it was down to raw minimums if not actually below. While it was perfectly legal to shoot the approach under the reported weather conditions, radar tracks confirmed that the approach was unstable, and I suspect that they were operating more under the guidance of HOPE than placing their faith in the truths of airspeed, altitude, attitude. A simple and minimally inconvenient alternative would have been Dulles International Airport, a mere 10 miles, or 3 minutes of flying time away. That would have cost an extra 20 minutes and $30 for a cab ride home in exchange for a 2 mile long runway, world-class lighting, a precision approach, and live controllers to guide them all the way to the parking ramp.*

You have a choice to make about what you're going to do with Hope. It's far better to make the decision now rather than when you're in the midst of a pressure situation. It's one of the lessons I tried to teach my daughters when they were teenagers—know your response before you get into a situation where peer pressure will tempt you to do something you shouldn't. So, what's it going to be? Fly by faith in the quality training you receive, in the performance figures in the flight manual, and according to your organization's Standard Operating Procedures? Or just wing it and hope everything turns out alright? As for me, I've decided it's time to kick Hope out of the cockpit.

*This article adapted by Steve Quigg from an article by Steven B. Zaboji that appeared in the AOPA Pilot magazine, February 2008, Volume 51 / Number 2. Paragraphs followed by (*) are from the AOPA article. All other paragraphs are by Steve Quigg.
On October 17, Lyle and Becky Reffey and Terry Brabon headed to Bolivar, MO for Service Oriented Aviation Readiness (S.O.A.R.’s) third safety audit. We expected to soar smoothly into town, but with COVID challenges things didn’t go as expected. Flights were affected and no rental car was available. After about an hour of discussions and negotiations, a bright red 4x4 pickup truck was found for the team to use.

The next morning everyone was a bit surprised to find a bright red pickup truck in the parking lot. But, after we all shared our stories and met everyone, we soared smoothly into the audit. Everyone was very friendly and hospitable, and the audit team was very well taken care of. We talked with everyone on the staff, all the missionary candidates, and even a few members of the Board of Directors.

Everyone at S.O.A.R. had been working diligently the past three years to improve the facilities and make the program even safer. It was very obvious that things had been reorganized and improved throughout the maintenance hangar. It was especially meaningful to observe the maintenance instructor taking time to talk with the candidates and show them the proper procedures to use when conducting maintenance. Later, one of the more experienced candidates was seen working with a new candidate to help them learn one of the maintenance procedures.

Effort had also been made to try to help the flight program soar even better. God has provided eight conventional and tricycle gear aircraft to use. These range from a Cessna 172 to a Cessna 206 to a Helio Courier. There is a need for additional flight instructors and further development of the flight training curriculum. But God has called another family to join the S.O.A.R. team to share the load and eventually help in this area.

We were also encouraged how every missionary candidate has been launched debt free, and they have soared off to the mission field where God had called them. That is S.O.A.R.’s mission, and it is great to see how God is using the team there to accomplish that.

It was a great week in Bolivar, MO, and on Friday afternoon Terry, Becky, and Lyle climbed back in the big red pickup truck, soared down the highway, and then on to their homes.
MMS Audit
by Lyle Reffey

Missionary Maintenance Services (MMS) and MSI have worked together for many, many years and know each other well. But it was time for another safety audit this past February. The team of Stacey and Lyle Wyse, Paul Timblin, Lyle and Becky Reffey, and Greg Heller (l. to r. in picture) traveled from across the USA to meet in Coshocton, OH.

When they arrived, it was very cold and very icy—typical February weather in Ohio. However, there was a very warm welcome that included an invitation to a special Super Bowl party. Various MMS families hosted the team members and everyone quickly felt like part of the MMS team, even though we were there to conduct a safety audit.

MMS was busy refurbishing a number of different aircraft for missionary aviation organizations. Three engines were in the overhaul shop. Five apprentices were being mentored in preparation for overseas ministry. One of those families was finishing up and planning to head to Papua New Guinea later this year.

As the MSI team had conversations with the team members and observed the work that was being done, it was clear that MMS has a very positive and active safety culture. They care about each other, and each one considers it their responsibility to keep those around them and the entire program as safe as they possibly can. God blessed the week. It was a true privilege for each one on the MSI team to see and be a part of what God is doing at MMS as they prepare people and planes for worldwide missionary service.

It should be noted that each fall MMS also hosts an MSI Safety Seminar that primarily focuses on aviation maintenance topics. Everyone is invited to participate in these seminars in person or virtually to learn more about aviation safety.
The story of Cain and Abel recorded in Genesis 4 is a stark reminder of the effect that jealousy and disobedience can have on us. Probably the best known quote from that account is Cain’s reply to God’s question as to where Abel is: “I don’t know, am I my brother’s keeper?” Cain, of course was lying, as he knew perfectly well where Abel’s body lay, but his question still haunts many people today. In the account, God did not directly answer Cain’s question, but the implication is very clear—yes, we are our brother’s keeper!

We were not created to be solitary creatures, but social ones. Relationships are critically important and necessary for us, and part of those relationships are looking out for and caring for one another. We are supposed to “have each other’s back,” or alert each other when we see danger or a threat. This is especially true in aviation, where the complexity of the task can easily prevent us from being aware of threats and dangers. As humans, we make mistakes—and have a finite ability to absorb information. We need others to help us overcome this limitation.

This concept of looking out for each other applies not only to external threats, but also to internal threats. In our humanity, we often have a tendency to overestimate our abilities and be blind to our shortcomings. This trait is useful when we are trying to learn new things or setting out on an adventure, but it can also contribute to our undoing if we are alone. I often tell people that “accountability is a need, not a nice to have.” Unfortunately, holding someone accountable or pointing out shortcomings involves speaking words of truth that may not be received well, at least initially. Our desire to be liked and to not hurt someone can easily result in our silently watching them proceed in a direction that will ultimately hurt them or be disastrous for them.

This should not be! As our brother’s keeper, each of us needs to be ready to speak the truth in love, warning those when danger is seen, knowing that our words may sting a little at first, but are a true expression of our caring for them. Later, after the situation has resolved, they will thank you.

MSI has been a “brother’s keeper” for 39 years now. I can assure you that it is not easy to always be telling people where they can improve, or that what they are doing is headed toward disaster. We leave some safety audit briefings pretty beat up emotionally, after having to deliver a message that was not welcome. But we cling to the truth that they will come around, and thank us later, after the immediate sting fades away. We can do this because they know in their hearts that we care deeply about them, and want what is best for them. We are, after all, just “having their back”.

Let us all practice being our brother’s keepers and have each other’s back as we work to

Make Safety a Way of Life!

Jon Egeler
President/CEO

MSI Website Overhaul

If you haven’t logged on to our website, www.msisafety.org lately, you may not be aware that we have been busy completely re-doing our website. We hope that it communicates better and is easier to find what you are looking for.

For those of you who donate to MSI, we are using a new giving platform called SubSplash—so there will be some differences from the old GiveDirect. You still have the same features and functionality, but those who have set up automatic monthly contributions through GiveDirect need to change over to SubSplash, as our account with GiveDirect will be coming to an end.

If those who had access to the Members Only site no longer can log in, please register again, and we will get you access to it. There is a lot of good information in there that we have added.

Take a look, and let us know what you think about the new site!