

Keys to Successful Civil Air Patrol Flight Operations for the Leader and Aircrew

**William J. Moran Jr., Col (ret) USAF
Colonel, Civil Air Patrol**

After 43 years of air operations - as an aircrew member and as a flying squadron commander in the United States Air Force (USAF) and Civil Air Patrol (CAP), I've had ample opportunity to develop insight into how successful flying organizations function, how it leads its members and conducts its operations. The keys to success are continuous learning, open and transparent communications and assignments, effective aircrew operations, respected aviation leaders, and responsible aircrew members.

First, continuous learning is essential for everyone. Improvements in technology resulting in upgrades to avionics (e.g. WAAS, ADS-B), changing route and approach structure (RNP), and various other flight related operations require study. Reading the latest AIM and receiving flying magazines is one way to keep abreast of the many changes. Periodically reading the applicable Pilot Operating Handbook helps refresh your familiarity with the airframe especially if you fly several models.

And as we grow older, we must acknowledge our diminishing physical and mental abilities and proficiency. Our can-do attitude must be tempered with a realization of our personal limitations when considering risk and minimizing it. Personal minimums usually increase, as we get older. A pilot who fails to study and stay abreast of fast moving operations not only puts himself/herself at risk, but also his/her passengers and those on the ground.

CAP pilots come from a vast spectrum of flying backgrounds and experience - from the 100-hour general aviation (GA) pilot to the 25,000-hour retired airline pilot. The GA pilot's knowledge of professional pilot and aircraft commander conduct is nascent, while the mature pilot may have forgotten some of the attributes of being a professional. To help develop their knowledge and keep seasoned pilots sharp, New Hampshire CAP offers several paths to continuous learning.

We strongly encouraged aircrew members attend monthly meetings, where the annual training syllabus is reviewed. What better way to encourage proper flight operations than group influence?

For the local unit, this meeting has been held at my house for the past 16 years. It is informal and relaxed so every one feels he/she can be free to discuss the syllabus material topics and flight operations, as well as review flight procedures, aircraft systems and emergency procedures.

Additionally, New Hampshire CAP has purchased Pilot Reliability Certificate CAP e-learning Module 101, by Convergent Performance LLC, for all its aircrews. The two and a half hour course has two parts: Airmanship and Professionalism. Both aspects of aviation must form our foundation if CAP is to remain a valuable organization to our country. New Hampshire CAP is also in discussion with PilotWorkshops.com LLC to provide our pilots with an array of informative and current aviation e-learning courses.

CAP's role is no longer primarily search and rescue. We don't just operate at night chasing false emergency locator transmitters - we are an integral part of the Total Force performing more and varied missions directly for the Air Force (Green Flag, MQ-9 Escort, etc.), National Disaster Response (aerial damage assessments) and varied patrols (fire, ice e,tc.). All our operations require us to step up our professionalism.

We must know how to conduct and present ourselves to our customers, as their confidence in us is strengthened by our performance, timeliness, and personal appearance, which includes how we wear the CAP or USAF-style uniform. We must not be an embarrassment to our parent organization, the USAF.

Second, open and transparent communications and assignments are an absolute must for successful flight operations and the growth of CAP aviation. Back-pocket secret telephone lists must be rooted out of every squadron, group, and wing. Fairness is an important leadership quality; without it the trust needed to keep an organization strong will never develop (or if trust exists, the organization will crumble).

Every flight operation funded by the Air Force, other federal agency or state agency must be available to the entire qualified pilot/aircrew list. We expect some members will have more sorties than others; however, leaders must be active participants, and be aware of the reports that can help ensure assignments are equally distributed

Each flying unit should have at least two certified flight instructors (CFI) so pilots don't have to travel hours to get flight instruction. There are many CFIs hungry for flight hours as they climb towards the 1,500-hour requirement for commercial flight operations. If you have unit or wing funds, encourage their membership by paying for their checkout.

Third, I spent many years in Strategic Air Command; it was the finest, most disciplined force in the world. We were a crew force, not individual pilots or navigators. The command-flying magazine was titled "Combat Crew." We were only effective if we functioned as a smoothly operating crew.

CAP operations require a crew force, and our web site and publications should reflect this. Both pilot flying and pilot non-flying procedures should be developed and trained. Non-pilot procedures for the right seat should also be developed and trained. Mission observer proficiency flights should also be instituted. Even a non-pilot mission observer can contribute to the safety of flight. For example, a well briefed approach and the importance of such immediate and critical data points such as the initial missed approach heading and altitude is for everybody's well being.

Crew coordination is imperative today. For instance, aerial photography has added significantly to our mission repertoire. In order to meet a customer's request, it is crucial that the pilot and photographer be on same page. Even on cadet orientation flights, I have the cadet in the right seat read the checklist. You can only imagine the additional thrill this adds to the cadet's experience.

Fourth, every aviation unit must have a respected aviation leader...the operations officer. This leader is respected for his/her daily demonstration of by-the-book aviation experiences based on a thorough understanding of CAP regulations and procedures.

He/she must also be a servant leader, involved with all members and interests. This leader must make sure unit aircrews are improving their knowledge, and skills and that they are striving for proficiency - not just qualification. An operations officer must be the example new members should want to emulate.

The wing's Director of Operations and squadron operations officers must also be impartial and fair. Because of our voluntary status, availability often decides who flies. The leader must monitor everyone to ensure a suitable - but maybe not equal - distribution of flight hours. Decision-making must be for the benefit of the entire unit not just a few.

Finally, aircrew members must take responsibility for themselves. Because we do not have a dedicated scheduling section, each aircrew member must be familiar with the reports available that identify upcoming requirements so he/she remains current and qualified. Each member is responsible for fully knowing and understanding all rules, regulations and procedures. And because we fly under the banners of various organizations, exemptions, and insurance coverage, it behooves each member to be aware of and understand the intricacies of our full complement of mission types.

CAP has been a great experience for me. Watching cadets mature with previous unknown confidence, both on the ground and in the air, has more than fulfilled my desire for a great retirement after a 26 great years in the Air Force. I am proud to be a part of CAP and its many successful operations in the past decade. However, it cannot rest on its laurels. CAP must seek to continually improve its aircrew force to better meet the increasing mission sets.

The keys above are tested and proven winners and will ensure the Civil Air Patrol is a successful flying organization that functions effectively, leads its people toward positive growth and outcomes, and conducts its operations in a way that ensures it continues to be a valuable asset for America.

Bill Moran is a retired USAF Colonel and former New Hampshire Wing Commander. During his USAF career, he was an aircraft commander in the T-37, B-52G, F/FB-111 and B-1A/B. He has also been a PC-12 fractional

Captain. In addition, he holds three B-1B Time-To-Climb aviation world records. Presently, he is a NH Wing Finance Officer, flight instructor and check pilot. Write to Bill at moranw23@gmail.com