

General Aviation Security

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Flight Safety Edition

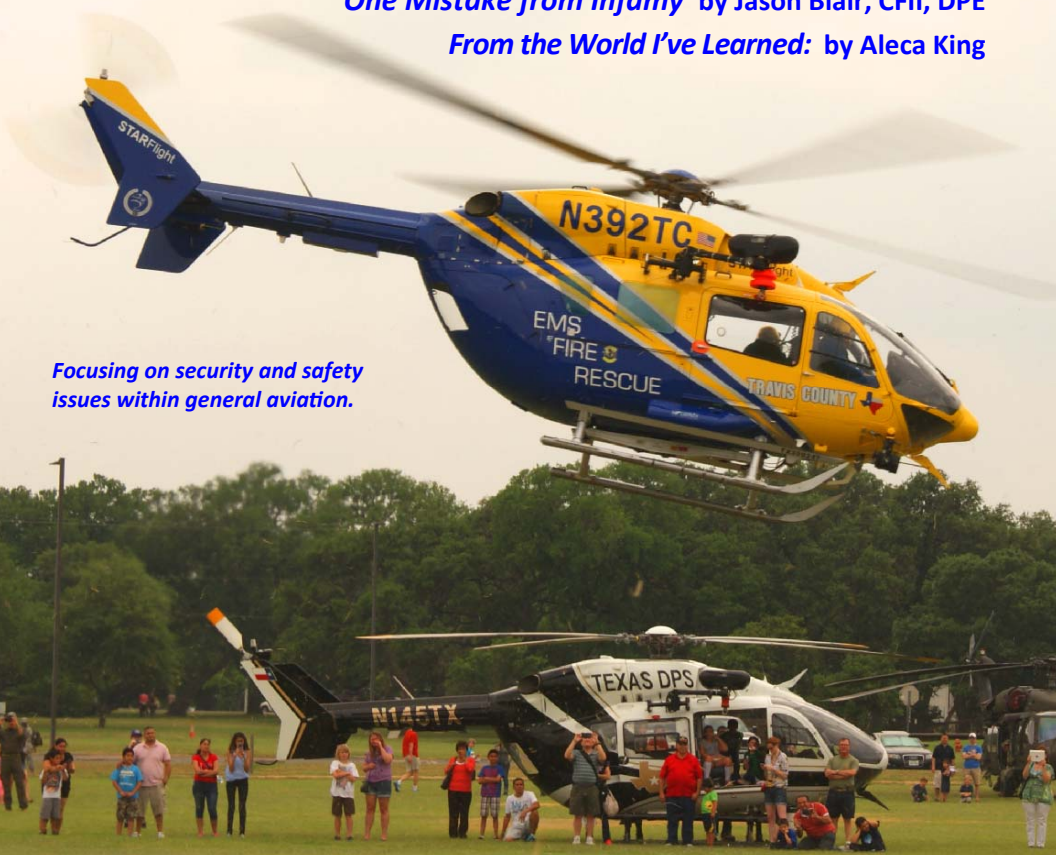
Helicopter Air Show Safety

Elements of Risk by Joe Corrao, J.D., M.A.

One Mistake from Infamy by Jason Blair, CFII, DPE

From the World I've Learned: by Aleca King

*Focusing on security and safety
issues within general aviation.*



One Mistake from Infamy

By Jason Blair, CFII, DPE



Vehicle ends up in pond. Everyone gets out safely. Can you imagine this making national news if it were a car? Even a bus? Probably not. But if it happens with a jet, it will be major news. Don't believe me? Check out NBC's recent story ([click here](#)). This pilot made one mistake.

Every day we fly we are one mistake from national news. Safety in our profession is not something that is optional, neither is security. We aren't even allowed one mistake. It is likely that our name will be national news, and our career may be in jeopardy.

It may seem unfair that pilots are held to a different standard than those who control other modes of transportation, but I know more than one person in my life has told me that life isn't fair. It is a part of our profession, and it is something we need to think about every time we fly. Safety and security in aviation is a mindset. This mindset isn't an option.

“Every day we are one mistake from national news.”

In this recent case I suspect the pilot did the right thing even. It seems that he found himself high on the approach after executing a 360-degree turn to make spacing from another aircraft in the

pattern. Being high, he got fast on the approach. Being fast made him long on the touchdown. With not enough runway remaining to land and stay on the runway, he ran off the end. This was probably a safer decision than if he had tried to do a last-minute go around. Running off the end of the runway going slowly instead of going faster and not getting enough speed to execute the climb out would have been much more dangerous. But that story is unlikely to get out in the news.

Airplane accidents, crashes, or even just pilot mistake makes great news fodder. Think back to the [Southwest pilots](#) or the [Atlas pilots](#) who landed at the wrong airports. Can you imagine there being national news coverage of a bus driver that went to the wrong address when picking up passengers? I doubt I would tune in to watch that.

It's great media to show pilots' mistakes. Reporters will always take advantage of a pilot's mistake, whether it is a big airliner that lands at the wrong airport or just a local airport that has a GA single-engine aircraft that runs off the runway into the ditch. And if you think you can cover it up, well, don't. Cell phone cameras and video are everywhere. Someone will share it with the media or just on their own social media sites.

Many people in the general public still think flying is scary, dangerous, or risky. The media will always play this up when anything goes wrong, which means any mistakes pilots make are going to be highlighted and exploited. There is no doubt that any tragic loss becomes major news fodder for multiple news cycles...or in the case of Malaysia

MH370 even months of coverage. This kind of coverage heightens public fear of aviation and increases our need to focus on safety in everything we do.

Yup, it sucks. But that's life.

Safety and security are part of the underlying mission for every flight we make. There can be no exceptions; there can be no forgiveness; there can be no slips. As individuals we can't compromise. If we see even a minor problem with our aircraft, it is incumbent upon us not to dispatch that aircraft. A friend of mine always said, "I don't ever start flights with an aircraft that is already broken." That seems like a good thing, but we let little things go every day in aviation. Things we don't "think" will cause a problem. But little things can trigger bigger problems. Remember the Swissair Flight 111 flight that was a total loss caused by what seems to have been simply faulty wiring in the television systems? I'm not saying anyone missed this in the preflight or anything, but one simple thing like faulty wiring caused a catastrophe. How many times has a general aviation pilot found that the landing light in the cowl of their aircraft has been spliced over and over and taped together with electrical tape? Do you think there is any chance that this could cause a short, a fire, and a major problem?

Safety in aviation is a mindset of no allowances for exceptions. I know one individual who works in another transportation industry whose company doesn't even allow them to walk and text on their phone in the corporate offices. While this may seem overzealous about safety, it builds a mindset that keeps every individual thinking about safety at all times.

And this goes beyond personal safety considerations. We have to work to stop others from making exceptions in safety, also. When any one of us sacrifices safety and makes a mistake that makes national news, it affects the entire industry.

Every day we fly we are one mistake from infamy. Which means every day we fly we are saddled with a responsibility to perform to the absolute best of our abilities... always. And if you have any doubt that your flying abilities won't be up to the challenge on any given day, it is up to you to make sure you don't fly.

When pilots make mistakes it is going to get noticed. Any mistakes. So we have to do everything we can to not make them. But wait, there's a side effect. Not only will not making mistakes avoid negative press for our community, but it will also make us safer.

It may feel unfair sometimes that we are held to a higher standard than some other communities, but it's a part of our industry. The actions of every pilot on every flight affect the view of the general public on our entire community. It's a big responsibility on our shoulders, but I think we are up to the challenge.



Paul Fiala taxis by in *Woodstock*, his brightly painted Great Lakes biplane.

Photo: Dave Hook



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