

Towline Times

Tampa Bay Soaring Society Newsletter

March 2007

Safety Review Leads to Procedure Changes

by Jim Watts

At the invitation of the club's board of directors, the club recently underwent a site survey conducted by Burt Compton, an officer with the Soaring Safety Foundation, and a long established flight instructor. Burt met with the club's board, flight and ground instructors, and other interested members on February 18th.

As an introduction to his efforts on our behalf, Burt explained his role with the Soaring Safety foundation as it relates to the concept of a "site survey". This is basically an audit of a club or commercial operator's functions regarding the operation of a soaring site. There are about 150 such sites in the United States, and Burt has visited about 30 to offer his expertise in an effort to improve the safety record of glider flying. And there is certainly room for improvement. As was noted at the recent FAA-sponsored safety seminar at Lakeland Regional airport, an average of five deaths each year occur nationwide due to glider accidents. These losses include both glider pilots and tow pilots.

During the course of the day, discussions were held with Burt on several topics. Some related to operation of the tow plane itself, and the chief tow pilot and the board agreed some mechanical and procedural revisions to the Pawnee's operation will be forthcoming.

The bulk of time with Burt, however, was spent in discussions of ground operations, flight instruction, and the all-important "last minute of the flight", i.e., the pattern and landing. Burt was given details on our safety record over the last decade – which sadly is less than ideal. I will not go into the details of this history, but it was thought by Burt that another claim for a hull loss might result in non-renewal of our insurance policy.

Burt was given a walk-through of our operations and procedures, and a list I have been compiling of errors and failings on all our part over the past few months. Let me detail for you some of the items I witnessed:

- 1.) A pilot attempted to take off in the Lark with full flaps (flaps at neutral are specified.)
- 2.) A pilot was strapped into a just-assembled glider by its owner, and the elevator was not hooked up.
- 3.) An instructor gave the thumbs-up to the wing-runner, and the spoilers were plainly 'out'.
- 4.) Numerous instances of walk-aways from the gliders with the canopy left open.
- 5.) A club member hops into a golf cart, floors the pedal, unaware the cart was hooked to a glider with several people standing near the leading edge. Injuries were avoided only because the rope broke at the last second.
- 6.) Spoilers popped open on tow, and the tow pilot later confessed he didn't know the 'fan the rudder' signal.

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After all these discussions, and an emergency board meeting, it was decided that the club badly needs to take our game to the next level concerning safety. In addition to an appointed safety officer, a safety committee is established consisting of the officer, the chief tow pilot and all club instructors, and assigned daily tow pilot. Any of these people have the authority to suspend any flight or ground operation until appropriate remedial action can be taken. Such action might be as simple as taking someone aside, or into the office, and in a gentlemanly fashion, having a little discussion of the perceived failing, and an assessment of the member's response. This is not meant to embarrass or chastise anyone. Nor will we permit fellow club members to behave in such a manner. We are not trying to take people to the woodshed, but trying to avoid this casual attitude of walking a tightrope without a safety net. Starting immediately, the safety committee will be your secondary safety net – you will still be your first.

You may fairly ask what standards you are being held to. For my part, if you are seen to violate the Federal Aviation Regulations, the policies of the city airport, or commit an error that would subject you to a 'bust' if this were a check ride with an examiner, you can expect to be spoken to. If you feel you have a personality conflict with a member of the safety committee, you may ask any other committee member to step in and handle the situation. All these committee members have been chosen because of their experience and qualifications. Our flight instructors, ground instructors, and tow pilots have all undergone more rigorous training and evaluation than the average glider pilot in the United States, and none of us are unwilling to share this knowledge and experience – in fact it's available to help us all.

To these ends, several new policies are being placed into effect:

- 1.) A positive control check for all gliders, regardless of ownership or assembly status, is mandatory before the glider's first flight of the day.
- 2.) The ground crewmember with the rope shall ask the pilots if the spoilers are closed and locked before hooking the glider up.
- 3.) No visitors or newcomers are permitted beyond the hold-short line. They are never to be 'drafted' into launching a glider. If club members are not available, the launch is not to take place.
- 4.) No negative comments will be made to a pilot who lands long. The board feels these sarcastic comments are placing negative peer pressure on beginner pilots to approach low over the trees and hit the numbers.
- 5.) While in the traffic pattern for landing, the radio calls should not identify the glider by its make or model. Simply announce yourself with the words 'glider' and N-number. This is being asked to avoid confusion among the airplane pilots who don't know what a Grob or Blanik is, but who can at least identify a glider by sight.

Editor's note: reporting the base and final pattern legs in a single radio transmission improves cockpit management by reducing the competition between hand-held radio and spoiler use in those critical moments prior to landing.

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The board of directors is also assuming a greater level of responsibility. Several new initiatives are planned. Better communication is will be undertaken with the airport manager and jump operators. Safety presentations will be planned for our monthly picnics. A formalized training syllabus will be agreed upon and followed to ease student workloads. Yearly check outs for all or most pilots may be implemented. Some of these items are still in the planning stages and will be rolled out as they are made ready.

For now, we are creating an enhanced pilot registry. This will be in a three ring binder and we are asking members to fill in the appropriate information. This will be in or near the line chief box. Please fill the form out as best as you are able, and keep in alpha order.

I am pleased to report that Burt Compton left the club feeling pretty good about our potential. He and the board feel we need to strive to create a 'culture of safety', rather than just getting by with the status quo. We are vastly fortunate at Tampa Bay Soaring. Where many glider clubs are located down a long dirt road that leads to a short grass strip, we have a city airport with huge open spaces. While many glider clubs have only one or two aircraft, we possess a large fleet. When many clubs shut for winter, we can fly year 'round. Let's establish these best practices and make these improvements – for the betterment of ourselves, our neighbors, and our opportunities.

Unofficial Minutes of the Emergency Board Meeting Sunday, February 18, 2007 *Submitted by Dennis Dix*

Pursuant to F.S. 617.0303, a meeting of the TBSS Board of Directors (BOD) was convened at approximately 1400 hrs EST to address urgent issues concerning the safety of club operations. The following rules of operation were unanimously enacted by the quorum of Board members present for immediate application:

1. In the interest of promoting a 'culture of safety', all active club members are extended the ability to intervene in any club operation, activity or procedure when there is a concern for safety.
2. The Flight Safety Officer presides over a Safety Committee comprised of the Safety officer, club flight instructors, the chief tow pilot, and the active tow pilot of the day. For safety purposes, any of the above listed individuals has the authority to temporarily suspend any club operation, activity or procedure. Any suspension is subject to the review of the Safety Committee for additional consideration.
3. As soon as practicable, a TOST tow hook is to be installed on club tow plane.

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The meeting concluded at approximately 1530 hrs EST.

Members present: Chip Chipman, President
Don Thomasson, Vice President
Bruce Patton, Treasurer
Dennis Dix, Secretary
Jim Watts, Flight Safety Officer

March Tow-Pilot & Line-Chief Schedules

by George McKenna & John Ellis

Day	Date	Tow-Pilot	Line-Chief
Sat.	3	Don Thomasson	Dick Guyer
Sun.	4	Dan Becker	Allan Broadribb
Wed.	7	Bill Brewis	
Sat.	10	Ralph Tarver	Jim Watts
Sun.	11	George McKenna	Mike Major
Wed.	14	George McKenna	
Sat.	17	George McKenna	Matthew Dion
Sun.	18	Bruce Patton	Marino Diaz
Wed.	21	Bill Brewis	
Sat.	24	Don Thomasson	Mark Nadeau
Sun.	25	Ralph Tarver	Dan Loveday
Wed.	28	Dan Becker	
Sat.	31	Buz Wilson	???

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Editor's Notes

by Dennis Dix

- **The TBSS March Cookout** will be on Saturday, March 17, Saint Patrick's Day. The chef *de jour* will be none other than our dear lad Bud O'Vacey. Rumor has it that Irish fare and green beer (the old bottles in the back of the fridge?) will abound. Anyone have a fiddle? Green or orange shirts may be worn, depending on your persuasion.
- **An ultralite hits a sailplane towline in flight** – this illustrates the need for getting your eyes off of the toys in the cockpit and for vigilant scanning outside of the canopy. After watching this video, consider the response of the sailplane pilot at the end of the tow rope.

<http://www.alexisparkinn.com/photogallery/Videos/2007-2-9-BallisticChuteDeployments.wmv>