

An example of the sort of overblown language that led to the development of the bush pilot myth. This editorial ran after the death of Ben Eielson in 1929; similar exaggerated pieces ran all over the country.

-*Lincoln Star*, Lincoln NE, March 27, 1930.

It was an errand of mercy, a flying trip to the relief of the ice-bound trading ship, Nanuk, which finally cost Eielson his life.

Something of the spirit of the Norsemen, who for hundreds of years have been noted for their hardiness, their courage, and their inveterate love of adventure and exploration, flowed in the veins of Carl Ben Eielson. He had to his credit an achievement of trail blazing in the silent North which would have satisfied the ordinary man. But his restless soul pushed on. Others who had been with him returned to the haunts of civilization, partook of its comforts and conveniences, but he remained in the land which had captured his imagination and interest. Through the long winters and the short summers he soared through the skies, over wastes which had never been charted by man. He knew the north as probably no other man has known it.

Let's talk about Focus, Distraction & "Compartmenting"

By Harry Kieling, Chairman

It is that time of year when we all have a lot going on. Friends and family visiting, fishing and camping, summer projects, and, of course, our jobs. When we throw in flying on top of all that, it takes on a whole new dimension, a dimension that can end up in an aircraft accident if we don't exercise what I call "compartmenting".

Simply stated, we need to mentally create separate compartments in our brain. When we get ready to fly we need to throw that switch where we tune out all of the distractors listed above. During preflight and when we are in the air we need to concentrate solely on the airplane and the mission. We need to leave ourselves plenty of time get a proper weather briefing and exercise thorough flight planning.

It is tempting on these warm summer afternoons to just rush out after work and jump into the airplane and fly — we might not even take the time to change clothes. But what we need to do is shift gears and focus on flying. We need to leave behind work or

family worries or anything else that doesn't pertain to flying that aircraft. We need to compartmentalize.

When you climb into the aircraft, flying safely is all that you should be thinking about. This was one of the reasons for the sterile cockpit rule. In that case when you are close to the ground and flying in a busy airspace environment your thoughts and cockpit discussion should only be about flying and not the date you had the night before or the King Salmon you caught last week. The same concept applies here.

Compartmentalize. When you are flying, concentrate on flying. If you do you are much more likely have a good safe flight with incident. And if the day has just been too busy, if you find that you can't separate from everything else that is going on in your life, then don't fly at all. There will always be another day.

Fly Safe!

Harry

The bush pilot myth is killing Alaskan pilots

by Colleen Mondor

We need to talk about the bush pilot myth.

As John Mahany writes elsewhere in this issue, “Contrary to what many may think, and what television and the media want us to believe, bush flying actually requires a higher degree of ability and more precise flying, not cowboy-like, reckless flying.” A key point there is “what television and the media want us to believe”. This should remind pilots that the bush pilot myth was never about reality and always —*from the very beginning*— about media spin. There’s a reason why I put that snapshot from a newspaper on the front page of the newsletter this month; I wanted everyone to see that exaggerated lies about Alaska aviation & pilots have been spread since the earliest days of flying in the Last Frontier.

If the bush pilot myth was just a way to sell t-shirts and baseball caps and get folks even more excited about taking a flight seeing tour, than that would be one thing. The problem is that the myth has so permeated the Alaskan aviation environment that it has given birth to something else: “bush syndrome”. This is the “go big or go home” attitude far too many pilots here, both Part 135 and general aviation, succumb to. Bush syndrome is the attitude that persuades a pilot to overload and improperly load their aircraft, it convinces them to fly VFR into IMC situations and makes them susceptible to dangerous pressures from employers, bosses and passengers. As the NTSB succinctly stated in a 1980 special study on Alaska, bush pilot syndrome ranged “from a pilot’s casual acceptance of the unique hazards of flying in Alaska” to a willingness to accept risk in completing a flight. The study suggested that changes to aviation infrastructure would eliminate the problem but clearly, that has not happened.

With decades of improvements to everything from weather reporting to nav aids, bush syndrome is still a big part of why too many Alaskan pilots continue to crash and people continue to die from accidents that are remarkably similar to those that occurred in the Golden Age of flight. To give you an idea of how long this has been going on, consider that Ben

Eielson and Earl Borland died flying in adverse weather conditions in 1929. Change out the aircraft, add some technology and there are still far too many similarities between that crash and thousands of others in the years since. As Jean Potter later wrote in *The Flying North*, Eielson did not want to depart Teller that day; the weather was terrible. But fellow pilot Frank Dorbandt goaded him into taking off. Hours later, Dorbandt and mechanic Bud Bassett returned, unable to get through because of dense fog; Eielson and Borland were never seen alive again.

In 1929 no one dared suggest that Ben Eielson could have been at fault or, even worse, had taken off in bad weather due to pressure from a fellow pilot. Today, just as he was at the time he disappeared, Eielson is heralded as dying “while rescuing passengers and cargo” according to UAF, “while on a rescue mission to save crew and cargo” according to the museum in his hometown or, at the Alaska Air Museum, “while attempting a rescue in Siberia for the cargo ship “Nanuk”.” The truth is that his company had just signed a \$50,000 contract to transport furs from the icebound ship to Nome where they could be shipped to New York City. The Company needed that money and Eielson was running the company; he probably would have gone even if Frank Dorbandt had not pressed him.

(It’s worth noting that while the ten week search for the missing men was underway, pilots for Alaska Airways continued to fly the contract and transport the furs. The *Nanuk* returned to Alaska, after breakup, in the summer of 1930. No one was ever in peril and in fact, the search crews used the ship as a base of operations.)

First and foremost, myths are about stories not tedious details like business contracts. Historically, Alaskans have embraced myths with ease, from the wealth-drenched dreams of the gold miners to a stubborn professed insistence on self-sufficiency that defies all semblance of truth.

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But even the recent surge in Alaskan fantasy fueled by reality television and ill-conceived proclamations of seeing Russia from our houses, (and dating back to *Into the Wild*), can barely compare to the strength and endurance of the bush pilot myth. While all of America saluted aviation heroes of the twenties and thirties, no one expects to suffer today like Charles Lindbergh did when crossing the Atlantic or rely on light towers for night flights like the early air mail pilots. Those exploits reside firmly in museum exhibits. And yet, in Alaska flying VFR into IMC in an IFR-equipped aircraft with an IFR pilot to an IFR airport is just something that happens in the Bush. While accident investigators exhibit palpable frustration after such crashes and many pilots utter a few curses amongst themselves, stopping this behavior is seemingly impossible.

The early bush pilots have always been characterized as larger than life. Bundled in furs that were never warm enough, they flew repeatedly into the cold and the snow and the fog and rain. The equipment was faulty, the maps nonexistent and every flight seemingly carried an incalculable significance, if not the weight of life and death itself. Joe Crosson was even called “The Mercy Pilot”, for saving so many lives, a sobriquet he tried unsuccessfully for years to discard. (Meanwhile Harold Gillam relished the nickname “He thrill ‘em, spill ‘em, but no kill ‘em Gillam.”) (FYI Crosson died of a heart attack while seated at a desk, Gillam flew into a mountain killing

himself and one of his passengers while seriously injuring four others.)

But now it is 2017 and Alaskan pilots are still crashing the same way they did in the 1920s and every decade that followed. Increased weather reporting hasn’t stopped it, GPS hasn’t stopped it, moving map technology hasn’t stopped it. Pilots can weigh their loads in the bush as accurately as in town and that hasn’t stopped it. Largely removing the post office from the equation after the passage of the Rural Service Improvement Act hasn’t stopped it. Increased competition, decreased competition, Part 91, Part 135, scheduled service, charter service, single-engine, twin, turbine, you name the category, you name the situation, you point to any location in the state and you will find that accidents continue to occur there in almost the same way that they did for Eielson and Gillam and Crosson and Russ Merrill and Noel Wien and Ralph Wien and Sig Wien and Chris Christensen and Bob Ellis and Bob Reeve and Jack Jefford and Cliff Hudson and Don Sheldon and on and on and on.

We are well into the twenty-first century and the bush pilot myth is still killing Alaskan pilots. I think it’s time that we talked about it.

*Colleen Mondor is the author of *The Map of My Dead Pilots: The Dangerous Game of Flying in Alaska* and the editor of the AAFS newsletter.*

Annual Fall Safety Seminar

Saturday, November 18, 2017

Registration will start at 8 a.m. for this all-day event

Details to follow on location, lunch options and the seminar schedule.

**For more information, contact the AASF at
(907) 243-7237 or aasfonline@gmail.com**

Are the rules really different for bush flying?

by John Mahany

Must Alaskan pilots be bolder and braver? This is an old myth that has been perpetuated for nearly a hundred years, but a recipe for disaster among aviators. Has bolder and braver somehow become confused with the fact that because Alaska can be a demanding environment to fly in, one has to be bolder and braver to fly there? Not so. Yet some foolishly still believe this.

Contrary to what many may think, and what television and the media want us to believe, bush flying actually requires a higher degree of ability and more precise flying, not cowboy-like, reckless flying. It takes knowledge and skill to safely fly into remote bush airstrips, with shorter, unimproved runways and limited nav aids. And that is in good weather; we all know how much worse it is when conditions are marginal.

Think back to what it was like before GPS and moving maps. I remember those days well from having done it many times when I flew in the Bush for a small part 135 Alaskan operator 20+ years ago. Airspeed control, along with proper glide path and descent rate were mandatory. (Think 'stabilized approach'.) Sometimes it was a tight, descending turn to final at the airstrip when landing to the west, as I recall in Nanwalek, on Kachemak Bay, southeast of Homer). A straight-in approach would not work there when landing to the west, with the surrounding terrain.

Consider also this quote from the website www.oldboldpilots.com "Don't be a show-off. Never be too proud to turn back. There are old pilots and bold pilots but no old, bold pilots". – E. Hamilton Lee, 1949.

"Bravery" among pilots is really foolish, unless you are in combat or a war zone and being shot at, which we are not. This is where the Aeronautical Decision Making (ADM) process (IMSAFE) unfortunately takes a backseat to a pilot's ego and emotion, and 'get-there-itis' wrongly influences the decision-making process. Rational thinking goes out the window. A pilot must have the skills to be able to fly the airplane competently, and, equally important, must have *the good judgment* to know when it's ok to fly. Yet, more importantly, when is it better to stay on the ground, and not fly?

Remember the definition of a superior pilot? One who uses his superior *judgment* to avoid a situation that might require the use of his or her superior skills! Flying in the 49th state DOES present its challenges, to be sure, but every pilot has their limits and every airplane has its limits. No one is immune to the laws of physics! Unfortunately, some pilots forget that, or get blinded by the bush pilot myth and foolishly think that it does not apply to them.

Some pilots who fly in the Alaskan bush need a reality check to separate fact from fiction. The bush flying myths that have persisted over the years belong in books, not in the sky.

Fly safely!

John

John Mahany is an ATP/CE-500, MCFI, in southern California. He has experience with airline and charter flying, and spent 4 ½ years flying in Alaska. He flies a CE 180 for fun.

NTSB Investigative Hearing scheduled in Anchorage for 2016 Togiak crash

WASHINGTON (July 18, 2017) — The NTSB has scheduled an investigative hearing for Aug. 17, 2017, in Anchorage, Alaska, as part of the agency’s ongoing investigation of the Oct. 2, 2016, crash of flight 3153 near Togiak, Alaska.

The NTSB conducts investigative hearings as part of a major transportation accident investigation to gather sworn testimony from subpoenaed witnesses on issues identified by the NTSB during the investigation and to allow the public to observe the investigation’s progress. An investigative hearing differs from a board meeting in that no analysis is conducted or discussed at the investigative hearing – it is for fact finding only. Like a board meeting, an investigative hearing is open to the public.

This is the first investigative hearing held in Alaska since the Exxon Valdez accident. This is also the first investigative hearing held outside of Washington in nearly 20 years.

Flight 3153 was a scheduled commuter flight operated by Hageland Aviation Services, Inc., dba Ravn Connect, under the provisions of Title 14, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 135. The turbine-powered Cessna 208 B departed Quinhagak, Alaska, at 11:33 a.m., Oct. 2, 2016, destined for Togiak. The airplane, carrying two pilots and one passenger, impacted steep mountainous, rocky terrain at about 11:54 a.m., approximately 12 miles northwest of Togiak. There were no survivors.

“The NTSB is conducting this investigative hearing in Alaska because the majority of witnesses we want to hear from are in Alaska,” said board member Earl F. Weener. “We also believe that holding the hearing in Alaska will help increase awareness within the Alaskan aviation community of the issues surrounding controlled flight into terrain accidents and flight into instrument meteorological conditions.

There have been 36 accidents involving controlled flight into terrain in Alaska between 2008-2016, resulting in the loss of 40 lives. We know aviation in Alaska is central to sustaining communities, economies and the enjoyment of the wilderness of our nation’s last frontier. The safety issues being addressed in this hearing will bolster the efforts already underway within the Alaskan aviation community.”

Among the safety issues to be discussed at the investigative hearing are: Operational control at Hageland Aviation, including its FAA oversight, organizational structure, policies and procedures, and training and guidance for operational control agents; Pilot training and guidance related to deteriorating weather conditions to mitigate controlled flight into terrain risk, including the incorporation of lessons learned from previous controlled flight into terrain accidents; and Safety management, training and oversight resources available to the Alaskan aviation community.

An NTSB review of accident data revealed Hageland Aviation Services aircraft were involved in six accidents since 2013. Four of those accidents involved controlled flight into terrain and one involved flight into instrument meteorological conditions. The NTSB issued two safety recommendations in 2014 asking the FAA to conduct audits of operators owned by the holding company HoTH, Inc., which included Hageland Aviation Services.

Hageland Aviation Services is a participant in the Medallion Foundation’s Shield Program. The Medallion Foundation, Inc., is a non-profit partnership between the FAA and industry, created in 2001 by the Alaska Air Carriers Association, with the goal of improving aviation safety in Alaska while reducing insurance rates for commercial air carriers.

The NTSB has issued 32 safety recommendations to Alaska general aviation operators and organizations in the past decade, of which, more than two-thirds were acted upon favorably.

The hearing is scheduled to begin at 8 a.m. (Alaska Daylight Time), Aug. 17, in the Mid-Deck Ballroom of the Captain Cook Hotel, 939 W. 5th Ave., Anchorage, Alaska.

The investigative hearing will be transmitted live via the NTSB’s website at <http://www.capitolconnection.net/capcon/ntsb/ntsb.htm>. A link for webcast will be available shortly before the start of the hearing. An archival video of the hearing will be available via the website for 30 days after the hearing.

AASF Scholarship Award Announcement

AASF is pleased to announced that Levi Michael was awarded the 2017 Tom Wardleigh Memorial Scholarship.

Levi is a lifelong Alaskan, born in Anchorage and raised on the Kenai Peninsula and is currently a student at UAF Community & Technical College. Some activities he enjoys are hunting, fishing, and flying. He intends to work in Alaska as an A & P mechanic when he completes the UAF certificate program.

Levi has worked diligently in his study to become a good mechanic and is thankful for all the support from the Alaskan aviation community.

Congratulations Levi!



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Avoiding a Midair Collision in Alaska – En Route Traffic Advisory Reminders

Although many pilots in Alaska may subscribe to the “Big Sky” theory of aircraft separation, fatal midair collisions have occurred in both congested, high-traffic areas and remote areas that may be far from high-traffic routes and runways. While Alaska does have vast amounts of airspace and terrain, pilots still need to communicate, listen, and maintain a visual scan in all areas where they fly.

Communicating on a Common Frequency

1. The first key to communicating is selection of the correct frequency. The acronym CTAF stands for Common Traffic Advisory Frequency. A CTAF is a frequency designated for the purpose of carrying out airport advisory practices while operating to or from an airport without an operating control tower. The CTAF may be a UNICOM, MULTICOM, Flight Service Station (FSS), or tower frequency and is identified in appropriate aeronautical publications. NOTE– FSS frequencies are available only in Alaska. (AIM 4-1-9.b.1.)

2. In Alaska, a CTAF may also be designated for the purpose of carrying out advisory practices while operating in designated areas with a high volume of Visual Flight Rules traffic. (AIM 4-1-9.b.2.)

3. The CTAF for a particular airport or area is contained in the Chart Supplement Alaska (the peach book), Alaska Terminal Publication, Chart Supplement U.S., Instrument Approach Procedure Charts, and Instrument Departure Procedure Charts. Also, the CTAF can be obtained by contacting any FSS. Use of the appropriate CTAF, combined with a visual alertness and application of the following recommended good operating practices, will enhance safety of flight into and out of all uncontrolled airports. (AIM 4-1-9.b.3.)

Recommended Traffic Advisory Practices

1. Pilots of inbound traffic should monitor and communicate as appropriate on the designated CTAF from 10 miles to landing. Pilots of departing aircraft should monitor/communicate on the appropriate frequency from start-up, during taxi, and until 10 miles

from the airport unless regulations or local procedures require otherwise. (AIM 4-1-9.c.1.)

2. Pilots of aircraft conducting other than arriving or departing operations at altitudes normally used by arriving and departing aircraft should monitor/communicate on the appropriate frequency while within 10 miles of the airport unless required to do otherwise by the regulations or local procedures. Such operations include parachute jumping/dropping, en route, practicing maneuvers, etc. (AIM 4-1-9.c.2.)

3. In Alaska, pilots of aircraft conducting other than arriving or departing operations in designated CTAF areas should monitor/communicate on the appropriate frequency while within the designated area, unless required to do otherwise by regulations or local procedures. Such operations include parachute jumping/dropping, en route, practicing maneuvers, etc. (AIM 4-1-9.c.3.)

Helpful Tips

- Pilots are encouraged to use Air Traffic Control (ATC) flight following and FSS airport advisory services when available. They can help advise of traffic that may pose a potential conflict.
- When not in contact with ATC, pilots should use CTAFs to make position reports and while operating at airports within these areas.
- Always ensure you have the correct CTAF entered and selected on your radio.
- If you are ever unsure if you need to make a CTAF transmission, remember, “When in doubt, call yourself out” on the radio.
- Use CTAFs strictly for communicating your position, monitoring the position of other traffic, and communicating and monitoring potential and actual safety hazards in the area (some examples are deteriorating weather conditions, wildlife located on the airstrip, etc.). Utilizing CTAF for personal discussion (such as sports game results, favorite fishing spots, etc.) can hinder others who need

- to communicate and monitor to safely get to their destination. Air-to-air communications should be conducted on 122.75.
- While there are many remote flying areas in the state, CTAF transmissions and subsequent monitoring are smart operating practices to enhance the safety of everyone. Treat remote flying areas with the same situation awareness that you would as if you were flying in a congested traffic area. Listen for other aircraft on the radio and keep up your scan for traffic.
- Compensate for blind spots in your aircraft due to aircraft design and flight attitude. Move your head or maneuver the aircraft to maintain a clear view of the area around your aircraft.
- Ensure that the radios in your aircraft work correctly and are tested on a regular basis. If a problem with a radio is suspected or discovered, be sure to have the radio repaired/replaced as to not hinder radio transmission and receive capabilities.
- Ensure any publications that are used are current, especially if they have CTAFs listed. Current publications can be accessed and downloaded for free from the Federal Aviation Administration's Digital Products website: https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/flight_info/aeronav/digital_products/
- If flying in an applicable area, be sure to have a current CTAF area map. These maps can be found in the Alaska Chart Supplement. Maps of the Matanuska Susitna, Cook Inlet and Denali Area CTAFs can also be downloaded for free at the FAA Alaskan Region Flight Standards hyperlink: https://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/avs/offices/afs/divisions/alaskan_region/flyalaska/ctaf/
- Be aware of reporting points, practice areas, arrival/departure routings or traffic funnels where pilots can expect a large volume of traffic. Be especially vigilant in these areas.
- Pilots should consider the assistance of other crewmembers or passengers to help in looking for hazards and notifying the pilot immediately when they are concerned.
- Consider equipping with Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast Out and In technology, a traffic advisory system or a traffic alert and collision avoidance system. These technologies can provide assistance in displaying nearby traffic that pilots may not see.

Additional Resources

A variety of midair avoidance techniques and resources are listed below in the two National Transportation Safety Board Safety Alert hyperlinks:

http://www.nts.gov/safety/safety-alerts/Documents/SA_045.pdf

http://www.nts.gov/safety/safety-alerts/Documents/SA_058.pdf

The Federal Aviation Administration has some guidance documents that address pilots' roles in prevention of midair collisions:

https://www.faa.gov/documentLibrary/media/Advisory_Circular/AC_90-48D.pdf

https://www.faasafety.gov/gslac/alc/libview_normal.aspx?id=6851

For more information on radio communications, en route operations, and preventing midair collisions see the Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM): https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/media/aim.pdf