

Training – The Sun

There are many topics which can be of interest to student pilots and seasoned veterans alike. One topic which is seldom written about but which can have a significant impact on our flying is the light from the sun. Because of the orientation of our runway and entire flying field, we have some unique situations depending on the time of day as well as the season of the year, which can significantly impact our flying and even the safety of our pilots and others. In short, because our pilot stations face close to southeast, at times we can have the sun shining somewhat into our faces when we try to fly. If you are not prepared for that, it can cause a rude awakening when you suddenly realize that you have been *blinded* and *can't see your plane*. While this can be an issue for more experienced pilots, it is particularly difficult for students who are unsuspecting.

Your humble *Training Coordinator* can attest to this problem because back when I was starting my solo flight, right on takeoff the trainer climbed much steeper than I had planned and also veered a little to the right (must have been the plane's fault, not the pilot) and WHAM I looked right into the sun not three seconds after takeoff. I couldn't see! I panicked and cursed (a normal reaction for me) and figured that I would not only fail my solo, but would probably also lose my plane. Not what I was hoping for at all! So I tried to fly the next few seconds (it seemed like forever) by memory thinking of what the plane was probably doing. I can't claim skill, so it must have been luck that when I finally was able to see again, the plane was exactly where I expected it to be. I continued an otherwise fairly decent and successful solo flight. I don't think the training staff ever knew how out-of-control I was. But, that experience taught me to respect the sun. Now the sun is not always a problem, but at certain times of the day and certain times of the year, you have to be careful.

So what can we do to minimize the impact of the sun? Sunglasses can certainly be of benefit and for some of us (post cataract surgery) they are essential. We have talked before about the importance of vision, and since many of us wear glasses for vision correction, we have a dual problem. We need glasses for vision and glasses for the sun. There are a couple of ways to deal with this. The most technically correct solution is to get prescription sun glasses. There are some really nice ones advertised in various RC magazines. The trouble is they can get pretty expensive and might take money away from the main goal which is flying! A much cheaper solution is to get one of the various brands of over-your-glasses sun-glasses. I have some which are big enough to cover most prescription glasses but don't look too goofy, have a great reddish tint which actually helps the wearer see many shades of color we use on our planes, and they sell at the Wal-Mart stores for about \$20. They help a lot, but they are still not the total answer.

So what else can we do? Most of the more experienced pilots wear a hat. There are many different styles used, but the main feature is that they need to have a brim or "bill" which shields your eyes from the sun under most circumstances. A simple baseball cap helps a lot, but many of our pilots prefer to wear something with a brim all the way around like a straw hat or a "floppy" hat where you can actually pull one or both sides down to make a shield for sunlight

coming in from the side. You will be amazed how much more comfortable that can make you feel while flying. It still won't totally prevent the possibility of unexpectedly staring right at the sun, but generally provides more comfort.

There are two more considerations which can help you avoid the dreaded sun-in-your-eyes issue. First be mindful of the time of day and year as you plan the day and time of your next flying session. It is a bit of an individual preference thing, so I won't try to suggest when you should fly, but note that many of our pilots prefer flying later in the day as opposed to morning. The very best time for flying at our field in my opinion is late on a summer day when the sun actually gets pretty much behind us and puts beautiful coloration and depth on our planes.

My last suggestion is to consciously think about the location of the sun each time you start a flight. Plan to keep your flight path a ways from that location and thus you won't get near the danger zone. After a while this gets to be "second nature" and you won't really think you are doing it. It's kind of like talking while you are walking. You don't really think about what your feet are doing while you are concentrating on the content of your discussion.

A lot of us have developed a list of "things to take to the field" and three of the items on my list are "glasses", "sunglasses" and "hat". Several times I would have forgotten one or more of these items had I not checked the list.

Hopefully this discussion has been helpful, and.....

Until next time; remember to try something new each time you fly.

Steve Klute
Training Coordinator