

4. Interviews

We conducted interviews with the Japan Flying Association (JFA) and the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA-JAPAN), to which a number of pilots of private small aircraft and gliders belong as members, concerning their activities and challenges in preventing aircraft accidents involving private small aircraft and gliders.

(1) Japan Flying Association (JFA) (<http://ifa1953.org/>) (Only available in Japanese)

An interview with Mr. Hiroshi Okunuki, Director of the Japan Flying Association

○ Please explain the outline of the Japan Flying Association.

—The Association has engaged in activities with the aim of disseminating knowledge on aviation and promoting technological improvements, thereby contributing to the development of civil aviation and social welfare through the use of aircraft. We issue our association journals and hold lectures and training sessions.

○ In recent years, accidents involving private small aircraft owned and operated by individuals or groups of aircraft lovers are increasing. How does the JFA regard such situation?

—We consider that this is partly because the safety measures being taken by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism and the content of the accident investigation reports of the Japan Transport Safety Board are not fully disseminated to all the pilots.

One of the reasons is that many people obtain a license in foreign countries recently and have no sufficient “human network” in Japan for flying aircraft.

Japan has unique flying environments with many mountains and few flat plains. Information to secure safe flights in an environment with weather conditions peculiar to mountainous areas must be passed on from person to person.

However, those who obtained a license in foreign countries have no human network to provide them with such important information to fly safely in Japan. If necessary information is not sufficiently disseminated, we are concerned that similar accidents may occur repeatedly. We consider it a challenge how to prevent such situation.

○ What has the JFA been doing to disseminate information among pilots to secure safe flights in Japan?

—Five aviation-related groups including the JFA have established a system to accredit lecturers for Aviation Safety Seminars and have carried out educational activities concerning aviation safety. We think that we should further expand these activities. At the next seminar scheduled in this September, we will select some cases from the investigation reports of the Japan Transport Safety Board and have the participants consider how to react under the same situations. They will first form groups to discuss measures to be taken, then all discuss them together, and the results are to be shared among all participants.

We believe that our efforts to expand these activities and increase participants will facilitate the dissemination of the content of the accident investigation reports and the national government's safety measures, hopefully leading to a decrease of aircraft accidents.

During lectures, participants are made to think deeply about probable causes of past accidents, through which the knowledge is etched into their consciousness to help them understand how to avoid similar accidents.

Rather than having the participants simply read the investigation reports and think themselves about a statement of, for example, “The pilot encountered a downdraft and felt a descent,” have them answer questions, such as “If there is a downdraft, what should you do?” This will enable them to work out appropriate responses to unusual situations during flights. We consider it important to aim to decrease accidents in this manner.

○ What does the JFA consider recently, problematic about recent accidents involving private light aircraft?

— We are concerned about accidents upon taking-off or landing, accidents due to a stall, and the problem of the aging of pilots.

○ Are there any concerns about pilots' experience?

— We think that pilots with certain experience are more dangerous than those with less experience. What counts is the environment in which the person has accumulated experience.

If a pilot, who has encountered a dangerous situation in flight, recognizes it as danger, it would be all right, but some get the wrong idea that their skills have improved. The same experience has different meanings depending on whether the person was scolded or the person is proud of it. We are afraid that those who continue to take a chance of encountering danger and feel no fear will encounter a serious accident in the end.

○ What is important in efforts to decrease accidents involving private small aircraft and gliders?

— Considering people who are going to obtain a license from now on and fly aircraft in Japan, the fundamental principle is that education on the side of instructors is essential.

Instructors need to renew their awareness of the importance of instructing trainees from the entry level in a manner to enable them to work out procedures necessary for safe flights, not limited to teaching them flight skills.

It would be preferable if instructors who have thus been properly educated teach trainees and those trainees disseminate what they have learned to other pilots around them.

Additionally, it would be effective if there were a mechanism to surely disseminate information on accidents and matters to note to many people on such occasions as the Pilot Competency Assessment.

Outline of Pilot Competency Assessment

A person who has a skill certificate for piloting aircraft or supervising flight training is required to take and pass the Specified Flight Skills Examination from April 1, 2014.

- The following acts are prohibited unless the person has passed the examination conducted by a flight skills examiner accredited by the national government.
 - (i) Piloting an aircraft on board
 - (ii) Supervision of flight training of a person without a necessary pilot certificate
 - (iii) Supervision of flight training of a person who has not passed the Pilot Competency Assessment
 - (iv) Supervision of instrument flight training, etc. of a person without a necessary instrument flight certificate
- Flight skills examiners examine the following skills in the Pilot Competency Assessment.
 1. Basic flight skills for all piloting operations
 2. Flight skills in an abnormal situation or emergencies not required in an ordinary flight
 3. Knowledge necessary for flight including the latest knowledge
- This assessment is valid for two years.

See the website of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism for details.

(http://www.mlit.go.jp/koku/15_bf_000744.html) (Only available in Japanese)

An interview with personnel of AOPA-JAPAN

Mr. Tasuo Nomura, Safety Committee,
Mr. Masakatsu Aoki, Certified Safety Lecturer,
Mr. Hiroyuki Sakuma, Planning Committee,
Ms. Noriko Hatanaka, Secretary General

○ How does the AOPA-JAPAN regard recent accidents involving private small aircraft and gliders?

—Pilots who have caused accidents are relatively old, as the number of young people who enjoy small aircraft is decreasing in Japan.

There are not many airfields nowadays in Japan that private small aircraft can use and private pilots are decreasing due to such unfavorable environment. Young people are no longer interested in owning or leasing aircraft to enjoy piloting. At present, active private pilots are mostly those in their 50s or 60s with some time and money to spare who obtained a license in the past and are really fond of flying aircraft.

—Young pilots are generally eager to be employed by aircraft operating companies and there are only a few who enjoy piloting as a hobby. Aircraft operating companies are said to be short of pilots but only a limited number of pilots are actually employed.

—I obtained a license in a foreign country but have received training from my seniors as there are Japanese ways to fly aircraft in Japan. I am still learning from people around me to increase knowledge even after I came to be able to fly comfortably and I have adopted the rule of making prior confirmation about the weather and the features of the airport and aircraft when I fly to new places.

—We talk about our own experience of piloting private small aircraft at the Safety Seminars held by AOPA-JAPAN or on other occasions. How participants accept our talks is significant.

People who obtain a license in foreign countries have few people to ask for advice.

Those having aircraft in their 50s or 60s, who have high social status with limited people around them who give them advice, are apt to hesitate to ask questions and often lack knowledge.

In Japan, the high cost of flights makes it difficult for people in a private capacity to have sufficient flight experience.

I think if safety seminar participants have more experience before coming to listen to talks of the seniors, it would be more effective for ensuring their safe flights. Such talks may be more deeply rooted in those participants and may be recalled in emergencies.

—My impression is that there might be some cases where pilots who have caused accidents seemed to have no peer pilots. If they had had peers to have hangar talk with about air accidents or exchange opinions, they might not have encountered such accidents.

—Additionally, if new technologies and equipment effective for securing safety that are approved overseas are also approved in Japan earlier, this will facilitate accident prevention.

○ What do you think is important for piloting private small aircraft and what education should be provided?

—Aircraft operating companies have their pilots work in a team and have established their own maintenance systems, but private pilots need to do everything themselves. Therefore, we often tell veteran pilots to go back to the basics. If all pilots fly aircraft as if they were beginners, no accidents would occur.

However, accidents do occur actually. Therefore, we must provide education properly.

—During initial training, trainees learn how to pilot aircraft with non-retractable landing gear, and then they later have chances to experience handling landing gear. The operation of extending and retracting landing gear requires significant basic knowledge, but it is problematic that many trainees do not fully acquire such basic knowledge and actually pilot aircraft with retractable landing gear. They should keep in mind the necessity to receive sufficient education in advance.

Formerly there was no educational opportunity, but now we have the system of the Pilot Competency Assessment which may be an educational opportunity. Enhancing the content of the examination is a challenge for the future.

This system allows pilots to select an assessor, with the aim of encouraging them to select an excellent assessor with whom they can talk during the assessment, thereby facilitating accident prevention.

Aviation Safety Seminars

Aviation Safety Seminars are held by the Skill Maintenance Liaison Meeting jointly formed by the Japan Aircraft Pilot Association, AOPA-JAPAN, Japan Flying Association, Japan Soaring Association, and Helicopter Collective Japan for the purpose of having private pilots acquire knowledge about safety and raising their safety awareness.

At seminars, accredited skill instructors and people in the aviation industry have provided lectures on safety and skill maintenance under such themes as "Current Status of the VOICES," "Prevention of Veteran Pilots' Errors," "Hurry-up Syndromes," and "Methodologies for Maintaining Skills - Effectiveness of Accompanying Licensers on Board."



(Aviation Safety Seminars: photos provided by the Japan Flying Association)