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HOW ABOUT A SYSTEM ?

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The attached article concerns a problem area about which I feel compelled to write. I feel that a new approach is necessary to simplify the existing manuals, regulations, and directives concerning aircraft operation to a more palatable and workable source of information.

The problem is not a new one but solutions of the past have been left behind under the heels of growth. I feel that now is the time to attack the problem again to up-date the solution.

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The young captain stood nervously at loose attention in front of the squadron commander. The commander glanced up at the captain then looked at the daily flying schedule lying on his desk and pointed an accusing finger at an ugly red splotch underlining a takeoff time.

"You were late!"

"Sir?"

"Late . . . late you were twenty minutes late for takeoff."

"Yes sir, I know," the captain managed to mumble.

"Did you have some problem with the airplane?"

"No sir."

"Were you held up by ATC?"

"No sir."

"You started engines on time; taxied on time; completed your engine run on time . . . that's it! Some problem with the run-up?"

"No sir, the airplane checked out just fine."

"Well then, what the hell was it?" said the commander now beginning to turn slightly crimson in the vicinity of the face.

"Safety, sir," said the captain confidently.

"Safety, huh?"

"That's right sir, safety."

"Would you care to explain?" the commander intoned in a barely audible whisper.

The captain inhaled deeply, "Well sir, this was the first time I had flown with this crew so when we reached the crew briefing item on the checklist, I thought that I'd better brief . . . in the interest of safety, of course . . . all of the Air Force manuals including major air command supplements, numbered air force supplements, base supplements, and wing supplements pertaining to aircraft operations."

"Do you mean to say you quoted them verbatim?"

"No sir, just the publication number, date, and title."

"Well certainly that didn't take twenty minutes."

"No sir."

"You mean there's more," said the commander open mouthed.

"Oh, yes sir," said the captain beaming, "then I briefed all of the Air Force regulations as supplemented down the line that have anything to do with flying an airplane."

"Is that all?"

"No, sir."

"Somehow I didn't think it would be; continue."

"O.K. sir, then I briefed all of the numbered Air Force manuals and regulations as supplemented, the base regulations as supplemented by the wing and the wing regulations as supplemented by the squadron, then I briefed the applicable tech orders"

"STOP!"

". . . . the operations directives" . . .

"STOP!"

". . . . the stan/eval directives" . . .

"Dammit, I said stop," the commander shouted as he began to hover about two feet above his desk.

"That's no excuse . . . that's ridiculous and son," said the commander finally cooling down to a more paternal posture.

"Yes sir?" questioned the captain in beaten bewilderment.

"Son, it wasn't very smart to do all that."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Not smart, boy, poor judgment . . . and besides . . ." the commander paused to set the stage for the full impact of his next statement. "It's against squadron regulations."

This scene is of course a fabrication and a satirical approach to a basic, unsolved problem which has its roots imbedded deeply in human actions and ultimately . . . safety.

The preponderance of manuals, regulations, and directives that a crewmember is responsible for in the operation of an aircraft has reached the extreme. The decision making process that confronts pilots numerous times during the conduct of a mission is clouded by uncertainty. This uncertainty springs from the feeling of the pilot that somewhere, in some obscure regulation, lies a baited trap, a paragraph or sentence wrought from experience and inserted to cover the situation being confronted. Perhaps the pilot may have accidentally stumbled across it at one time or another. Nevertheless, the nagging feeling of uncertainty is there and it affects, sometimes detrimentally, the logic sequence in decision making.

Over-supervision? Possibly, but a more accurate description would be complexity. We live in a complex environment, operate complex machinery, and produce complex directives to achieve our goals. We aren't going to change our environment or make our aircraft less complex but we can do something to simplify our directives.

What should be our goal in simplification? A single source document written from the pilot's point of view combining all of the wheat and none of the chaff contained in all Air Force manuals, regulations, etc., that have anything to do with aircraft operation

Can we achieve this goal? Probably not, but we can go a long way toward achieving it if we confront the task and leap into the fray. We can reduce the tons of verbiage to salient facts and put it all in a fewer number of baskets.

There is an approach that is current vogue within the Air Force and can help us in the clean-up task. It is known as the "systems approach" and has been used successfully in many areas within the Air Force. The "systems approach" is a planning and program design technique that addresses the component functions of a process in an interrelated manner. The process is looked upon as an entity having an input and an output. (TIG Brief, 11 Dec 70.)

The task is incredibly monumental, but not impossible. Within the "systems approach" philosophy lies the seeds of accomplishment. So, how about it? How about a system? →