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By: BY Mike Echo Mike, Michael E. Marotta. (c) Copyright 2001
E-mail Address: mercury@well.com

Darker Shade of Blue: the Rogue Pilot by Lt. Col. Tony Kern, Ph. D., (McGraw-Hill, 1999) examines the fundamental failure of otherwise good pilots to maintain discipline. Too many aviators who have "good hands" for flying have bad attitudes toward authority, risk, the immutable facts of aeronautics, and ultimately their own limitations. This lack of discipline kills. It kills pilots -- and it costs the lives of crews, passengers, and people on the ground. Despite the uncompromising tone of Kern's book, the understated truth is that rogue culture pervades all of aviation.

Kern teaches history at the U.S. Air Force Academy. He earned his doctorate in flight education systems. *Darker Shade of Blue* is a set of case studies in the wakes of accidents that took lives. Kern examines military flyers and civilians, individuals and organizations. In every case, he shows that the rogue pilot often has demonstrated superior flying ability, has moved up the ladder of success, and often has been rewarded by the organization for undisciplined flying.

Years before Bob Hammond crashed his B-52, he had been praised for low passes at airshows for the brass. He also had been condemned by crews who would not fly with him. The Air Force swept their complaints under the rug. Valery Chkalov (1906-1938) was called "Russia's Lindbergh" for the advances he forced in the early days of Soviet aviation. His status can be measured by the fact that Joseph Stalin was one of his pallbearers. Kern allows that in the barnstorming era, rogue pilots had their place. Now that aviation is mature and complex, there is no room for those attitudes, says Kern.

The introduction to *Darker Shade of Blue* comes from "Skip, a recovered rogue." Skip admits that he fit Kern's description with his "perceived need to expand our personal envelopes by chasing fictitious characters like Top Gun's Maverick." Skip confesses that he "found the disciplined approach to flying difficult, if not impossible... When I fly for the company or for Uncle Sam, I play it pretty much by the book, but when I am out in my private aircraft, I often cut loose." Reading the manuscript to *Darker Shade of Blue*, the light went on for "Skip." Before I read this book, I figured that piloting a plane is what flying is all about. We do not thrill to the paperwork of flight planning. There is no fun -- and no hangar talk glory -- in staying on the ground when the winds are high or the clouds are low or a front is moving in. I believe that many aviators are too often motivated by the chance to impress themselves and their friends. Since reading *Darker Shade of Blue*, I have learned to

accept flight planning as part of the flying process. I do not relish it, but I know that I should, and someday soon I will.

Kern says that in the military especially but also in commercial there is the wrongful belief that achieving the Mission is more important than safety. As a result, Secretary of Transportation Ron Brown and 30 other people died on a mountain near Dubrovnik, Croatia. The fault did not lie solely with the crew. They were part of a rogue organization, a flight wing that lived with "a willingness to accept less than full regulatory compliance... These guys just wanted to get the job done and the regulations were starting to get in the way." Among those regulations were rules about flight training, rest, and carrying the correct charts and plates. According to Kern, ValueJet was another rogue organization that placed its Mission above the lives of its crews and passengers.

Kern says that he met resistance when he first discussed the theme of his book. Many of his peers and superiors scoffed at the notion that rogue behavior is widespread and pervasive. In the book, Kern makes a passing remark about how we all enjoy the opportunity to brag about close calls. He does not follow that lead. When I read that, I thought of the aviation magazine columns "I Learned About Flying From That" and "Never Again." Failing to heed the weather advisories -- or failing to consider what it means when they do not agree -- or failing to verify this or that item not on the checklist in the preflight. Whatever the initial blunder, we envy and thereby reward pilots who fly outside the envelope and get away with it. And we seek to outdo them. We can brag about it. We cannot brag about consistently flying six take offs and full stop landings within the narrowest limits of deviation in altitude and airspeed.

The way I see it, if you grease six landings and rush in to tell everyone about it, you are a braggart, indeed. But, if you get caught in a rainstorm and land not half bad in the wind and the water, you have earned your bragging rights. The proper response should be "Did you not check the weather before you took off?... Did you have to land here?... Why were you short on fuel?..." Pointing to nominal externals such as "unexpected weather" rationalizes rogue behavior. Rationalize is a pun for "rational lies." You knew the difference, but you want us to help you pretend that you did not. And we will because we want the same opportunity. Kern sweeps his light on these facts, but does not closely examine them from the viewpoint of general aviation.

For the general aviation pilot, flying must be all about personal minimums and striving for personal maximums. Kern takes a few pages from Tom Peters and Edwards Deming when he calls for an innate and consistent culture of constant improvement, of raising the standards for quality and excellence, meeting those standards and then defining higher levels of success. For Kern, the key word is "consistency." To be an excellent pilot, he says, you must thoroughly understand your aircraft, your team, your environment, (physical, regulatory, and organizational), your risks, and yourself. You cannot slack off in any one area -- and you cannot concentrate on any one item until you are equally and consistently proficient in all of them.