



You & Your Passengers

Dale DeRemer

Dale DeRemer is Professor Emeritus, Uni North Dakota - Aviation, he has taught aviation at University level for the past 20 years and has 20,000+ hour ATP and CFI.

Dale is known as the father of the SEAWINGS national FAA safety program for seaplane pilots and he has authored many articles and books on aviation, particularly seaplane safety. He was 1998 SPA Seaplane Pilot of the Year

There is the story about the famous educator of physicians who made each prospective medical doctor check into the hospital for a complete physical so the medical student could endure all the indignities that are put upon the patient, drafty open-backed gown and all. No doubt this was done so the young doctor would gain an appreciation for the feelings of future patients.

And so it was for me as a seaplane pilot one day when I was offered a ride in a Caravan on floats. To make my lesson complete, fate dealt me a pilot who knew nothing about briefing passengers. The entire instruction consisted of "get in." I selected the seat in the second row directly behind the pilot.

I found my seat belt. Fortunately, I knew what to do with it. Then I looked around for the location of the personal flotation devices but didn't see them. I knew where the door was that I came in through but had no idea how to open it. It looked very strong - like I might never be able to get it open. I felt closed in. Trapped. Two other invited SPA field directors were sitting to my right. They were looking around like they weren't too sure they liked their situation, like they were expecting a little attention be given them, at least a basic safety briefing.

The company pilot's pre-departure briefing consisted of a slight turn of the head in our direction and the words "everybody ready?" as he advanced the power levers.

Now we were really feeling uneasy! The rest of the tale is a long, horror story. We never got off the water that trip but the pilot sure did scare three seasoned seaplane pilots. We couldn't get out of that airplane fast enough, back at the beach.

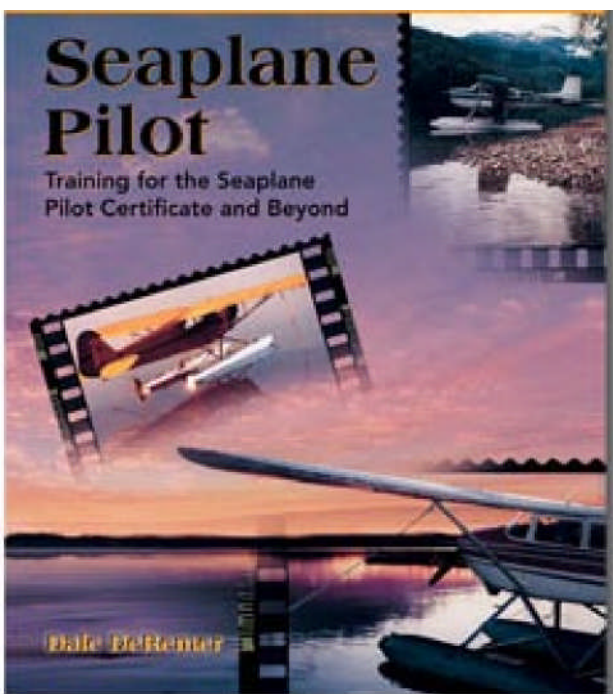
After that experience, we headed directly for the bar and didn't go near the water again that day. During the 15 minutes in that airplane, I had experienced apprehension, uncertainty, and discomfort that I was in that situation and finally, anger that I had been treated the way I was. In addition, I had been exposed to what I perceived as a dangerous environment.

That 15 minutes changed the way I treat passengers and students in a seaplane. Now, they get the most complete briefing I can give them. I involve them in the flight so they will feel they are a part of the crew. Passengers are told just what to expect next, very much like a CRM (crew resource management) crew briefing before each manoeuvre.

Preflight passenger safety briefing

So, it is up to us as pilots to include a good safety briefing. We should, because we know:

- ▶ 50%-60% of seaplane accidents happen during takeoff
- ▶ 67% of passenger fatalities in a recent Canadian study were caused by drowning without other incapacitation
- ▶ The floatplane's ultimate stability is achieved after upset
- ▶ In order to take advantage of the good news (that upset floatplanes will usually float forever), those inside must know how to get out and what to do after egress.
- ▶ That one accident where passengers inside are found without a mark on them, sitting in their seats with seatbelts fastened, but drowned, is one accident too many. (Unfortunately, there have been a few of these).
- ▶ If we have an accident on the water, some



passengers drown but one survives to testify that we didn't give a proper passenger briefing, probably condemnation in the courtroom will be our reward.

I have discovered that there is an even better reason to give a thorough briefing: it seems that whenever I "level" with a passenger regarding those "tough-to-talk-about" safety issues, the passenger (now trained from my briefing) willingly accepts responsibility for their own egress from the cabin and mentally becomes a part of the trained crew. They seem eager to learn more and to take on more responsibility (so I give them more to occupy their thoughts - see below). After the flight, they will often say, "that was fun, I learned so much."

Passenger involvement

It is not difficult to get passengers involved during the flight in many different ways. If we are in an amphibian, the preflight briefing includes how to visually inspect to see that the wheels are up for water landing. After the passenger practices wheel up inspection on their side of the aircraft the first time, they are usually way ahead of me, doing their inspection before I ask for it.

All passengers, including youngsters, are good at spotting other aircraft and pointing them out to me during flight. I involve them in some CRM, asking them to point to the other aircraft but not use pointing to point out anything but other aircraft. Passengers enjoy practicing the "sterile cockpit rule," too. I have heard passengers say "sterile cockpit" to another passenger who is talking about trivia during final approach. It is amazing how passengers enjoy becoming responsible members of the crew rather than just "geese" (old airline term for the bodies in the back that are just along for the ride).

The preflight seaplane briefing

Can the passenger hear about all the "bad news" scenarios and still want to go flying with you? My experience indicates the answer is "Yes!" if the passenger is involved as a crewmember with responsibilities and is properly briefed. The passenger needs to know everything necessary to be able to get out of an inverted airplane, even with an incapacitated pilot. The passenger needs to hear that the pilot cares. If it is apparent that the person responsible for the flight cares and if the passenger is made to feel a part of the crew (with responsibilities) most of the fear is dispelled that is caused by learning about what might possibly happen.

A good briefing should be one that is specially developed by the pilot for the situation. It will be successful at improving safety and building passenger confidence. It needs to get the passenger involved. A well-done briefing will return a big helping of good feeling to the pilot, and that's reason enough to do a complete passenger briefing every time!

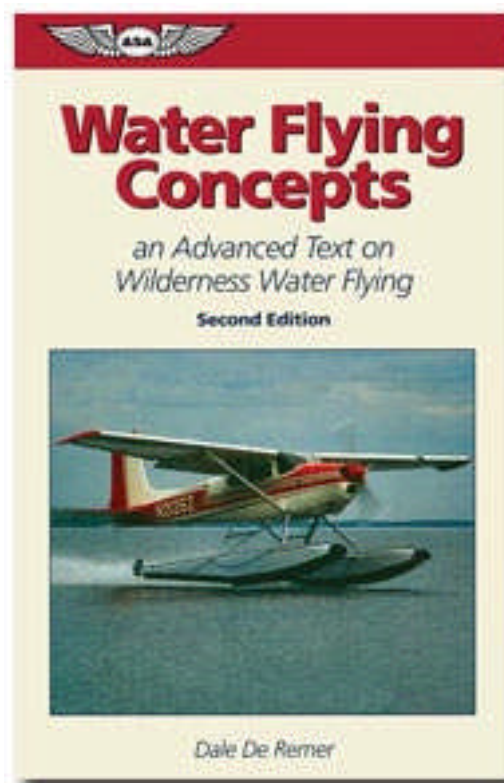
Flying friendly with passengers also means shallow banks, pre-briefing any unusual manoeuvre (getting close to obstacles, short lake takeoffs, sudden manoeuvres, etc.), selecting flight times that minimize turbulence, keeping the flight short, continuously checking on passenger comfort and state-of-mind. In short, letting the passenger know you care and making the passenger feel special is an important form of "fly friendly" as well as a strong safety statement.

Developing the passenger briefing

Every responsible pilot develops his or her own passenger briefing checklist, to be sure that all topics are covered. The passenger briefing must be crafted so that it fits the aircraft used, the environmental conditions and the pilot's own style.

To help you develop or improve your own personal passenger briefing, I'd like to suggest a resource. The most comprehensive pilot's passenger briefing and discussion I have ever seen can be viewed at <http://www.secureav.com/seaplane-briefing.doc>. It is a fine resource to use as a guide when developing or improving your own passenger briefing. It was developed by a team of highly experienced seaplane pilots and improved by review and critique of many other seaplane pilots. I recommend it highly. And while you are on line and at that site, you might want to take a look at the Seaplane Pilots Model Code of Conduct. It is another tool you can use to improve your professionalism as a seaplane pilot.

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Water Flying Concepts is one of Dale's very popular books on Sea Plane flying.