



"Two Heads Are Better Than One"

By: Maj. William "Bill" Trussell, CFI, IA, MEI

There are many examples of the old saying that "two heads are better than one" being true. In aviation, look at the airlines, where a two-person flight crew and a dispatcher overseeing the operation is largely the norm. Business aircraft operations are similar to the airlines, they also use a two-person crew. The FAA gets in the game a bit by allowing student solo operations only under the supervision of a qualified flight instructor. In CAP, we have the flight release officer, and their role is being a second resource in the Risk Management process for flight operations. In our non-flight operations, we are connected to a mentor in CAP to assist us in on-boarding into new roles or advancing in specialty track training. In each of these cases, the role of being a mentor or "wingman" is essential to the safe and efficient operation of the organization.

One opportunity to act as a Wingman is to offer yourself as a resource to evaluate weather conditions for operations, both flight and ground. There are many flight instructors that offer their students the opportunity to call them, after their student/teacher relationship is concluded, to ask for a second opinion on weather conditions for a particular flight or to validate a decision. The instructor often has a lot more experience in evaluating local weather conditions and forecasts for the area of operations, even extending to other geographic areas they are familiar with. Weather conditions often vary in different parts of the country, including severity, speed, and extent one can expect in the near and long terms. Being able to consult with someone who could evaluate the weather information available, and the accuracy of what is being provided against the forecast trends and typical weather patterns can be invaluable to a pilot who may be uncertain when presented with too much information. Instructors should consider offering their students the opportunity to call them for a "two head" check on weather conditions.

Two great examples of how the wingman can play a critical role for both pilots and non-pilots.

The first example is a pilot facing the need to fly to an initial destination to ferry another plane for maintenance. The weather for the first of two legs is acceptable for a VFR flight. The pilot in this scenario is not instrument current, much less proficient. Complicating this flight is airspace restrictions, requiring a decision on a northerly route to the initial destination or one going on a southerly path. Planning for the second leg of the flight is more of a concern as mountainous terrain and a weather system playing off the terrain is creating possible lower clouds and visibilities for the later flight. Unsure of what to expect, the pilot called his instructor for a second opinion. After reviewing the information available together, they agreed to change the pilot's plan. The suggestion was to fly the southerly route to get a better understanding of the weather conditions for the second leg as the route would provide a good opportunity for local observations to be made against the forecast. The timing of the flight was also discussed, as "the earlier, the better" was a concern. The flight went well, and the pilot debriefed the conditions encountered with his instructor, with both agreeing that changing the route was the best decision.

A recent CAP ground activity is another good example of how a wingman can assist across more operations than just flying. In this scenario a ground training meeting was planned with personnel needing to travel across a wide range of distances and routes. The forecast indicated winter weather conditions across a swath of the region, including the destination. These conditions were predicted to get worse as the day progressed. The activity director contacted the safety officer for the activity to discuss the

conditions and the decision-making process. They decided the conditions created an unnecessary risk for the training activity, a risk that was easily mitigated by changing the format of the meeting to a virtual one. The safety officer noted to the activity commander that the process and the information used was similar to a go/no go decision for flight activities. Store that one away for next time!

We are fortunate to have a wide range of experienced members in CAP that can serve as a wingman to others. It takes time to develop trust in these resources. These members also volunteer their expertise at no cost to the recipient. There is no better scenario for those who could use a second opinion, or those who can receive the satisfaction of having helped someone else.

Maj. Bill Trussell, CFI, IA, MEI
Squadron Commander, DE-019
FAA Safety Team Representative
Assistant Stan/ Eval Officer, DE Wing
CAP Instructor Pilot, Check Pilot