



Centre for Aviation Psychology ✈️

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WHY AVIATION PSYCHOLOGY: THE ROLE OF THE MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST

SRVSOP ICAO REGIONAL SEMINAR ON MENTAL HEALTH

7 JUNE 2021



Our Involvement

- EASA - European Aviation Safety Authority
- ICAO - International Civil Aviation Authority
- EAAP - European Association for Aviation Psychology
- AsMA - Aerospace Medical Association
- UK CAA - Civil Aviation Authority
- EPPSI - European Pilot Peer Support Initiative
- RAF - Royal Air Force
- AAIB - Air Accident Investigation Branch
- BPS - British Psychological Society

What will we *briefly* cover?

- Pandemic and well-being
- Psychologists in civil aviation
- Pilot mental health
- Crew licensing and mental health requirements
- What psychological issues affect pilots
- Mental health assessments

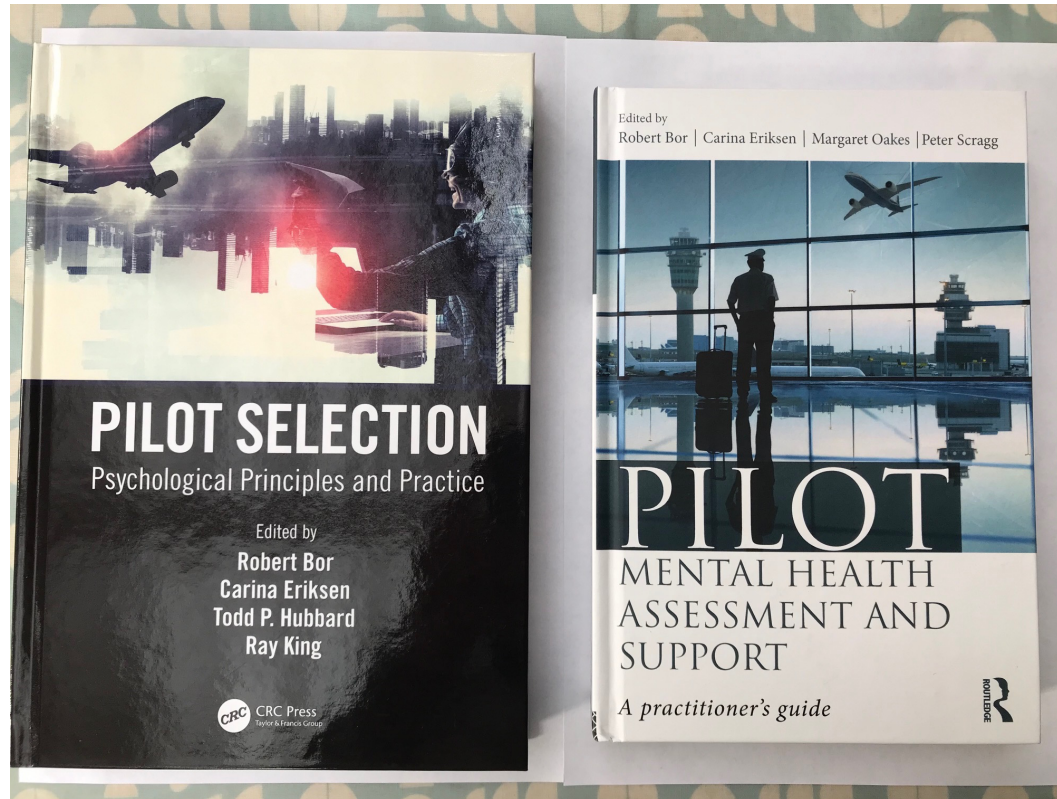


Pandemic and pilot well-being

Covid-19 has had significant effects
on pilot/aviation well-being

- Job (in)security
- Financial concerns
- Skills fade
- Enforced grounding alone
- Changes in sleep and personal relationships –alone or pressure on loved ones
- Physical ill health (covid and fears)
- Different (informal) support patterns
- Quarantine and isolation
- ?Leave aviation

Some recent books



THE
MEDICAL AND SURGICAL
ASPECTS OF AVIATION

BY

H. GRAEME ANDERSON, M.B., CH.B., F.R.C.S.

SURGEON-LIEUTENANT, ROYAL NAVY; SURGEON, ROYAL AIR FORCE
CENTRAL HOSPITAL; SENIOR ASSISTANT SURGEON, ST. MARK'S HOSPITAL;
SENIOR ASSISTANT SURGEON, BELGRAVE HOSPITAL

WITH CHAPTERS ON

APPLIED PHYSIOLOGY OF AVIATION

BY

MARTIN FLACK, M.A., M.B.

LIEUT.-COLONEL, R.A.F.; DIRECTOR OF MEDICAL RESEARCH TO THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

AND

THE AERO-NEUROSES OF WAR PILOTS

BY

OLIVER H. GOTCH, M.B., CH.B., M.R.C.P. (LONDON)

SURGEON-LIEUTENANT, ROYAL NAVY; PHYSICIAN, ROYAL AIR FORCE CENTRAL HOSPITAL

AND AN INTRODUCTION

BY

THE RIGHT HON. THE LORD WEIR OF EASTWOOD, P.C.

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE ROYAL AIR FORCE

LONDON

HENRY FROWDE
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

HODDER & STOUGHTON
WARWICK SQUARE, E.C.

1919



EASA Recommendations

- Pilots should have access to peer support networks
- AME's should receive enhanced training in mental health assessments
- Pilots should undergo a 'psychological assessment' at the start of line operations
- Random alcohol testing (after reporting for duty) will be mandatory, drugs testing will be discretionary

Different psychologists – in case you already feel confused!

- Clinical
- Neuropsychologists
- Counselling
- Health
- Human factors and flight safety
- Consultancy, research
- And finally, Aviation psychologists

Psychologists in (clinical) aviation

- Selections
- Assessments (clinical, neurocognitive, personality)
- Clinical services
- Critical incident support
- Training
- Peer support and mental well-being
- Human factors and flight safety training

Aviation Clinical Psychology

- select out those psychologically unfit to fly
- monitor the psychological health of trainees and employees
- assess and treat those with psychological problems
- determine how long a person is unfit to fly due to psychological causes
- provide psychological support
- prevent mental health problems, improve well-being

Well-being challenges in civil aviation

- Working away from family/home for considerable lengths of time
- Relationship disruption
- Long shifts/exhaustion/jet lag
- Transient workforce; different colleagues
- Perceived as a weakness to admit to problems
- Lack of exercise; gym attendance
- Limitations for regular healthy meals
- Physical health and sim checks

Job specific challenges

- **Promotions/ Career changes** (Command course, other aircraft types, taking on the role of training pilots etc)
- **Atypical experiences** (Accidents, faulty equipment, engine failure can cause fear/trauma)
- **Safety** (Personal/health safety in foreign countries, terror threats etc)
- **Cognitions challenges** (Workload, fatigue, sleep disruption, constant vigilance, hypoxia etc)



Current status of mental health in civil aviation

Loss (denial) of licence for
mental health reasons

- Psychosis
- Clinical depression
- Personality disorders
- Somatisation and anxiety
- Substance abuse or dependence
incompatible with flying
- Self destructive acts
- Attentional problems
- Neuro-degenerative conditions

Psychometric Assessments of Pilots: 3 Subgroups

- **Aptitude and ability** – used for selection (maximum performance measure)
- **Mental health** – contribute to an assessment of mental health, personality (typical performance measure)
- **Neurocognitive** – investigation of symptoms and deviation from the norm (pathology measure)

Psychological assessment of pilots

- Select-in methods: identifying individuals who have the psychological characteristics that predict excellent performance.
- Screen-out methods: identifying individuals who have disqualifying psychological problems/disorders.

Mental health screening contexts

- Point of Selection Testing
- Fitness-for-Duty or Return-to-Duty Testing
- Medical Certification or Re-Certification
- Monitoring of neurocognitive status (trauma, age, neuro changes, HIV, TIA etc)
- Evaluation of suitability of medications for use by pilots (and controllers)
- Annual medicals
- Command course

Objectives of the mental health assessment

- Identify and assess current or past mental health problems
- Highlight difficulties that arise when pilots go outside of aviation medicine for mental health treatment, especially where the AME is not involved
- Form and develop professional consultation and referral pathways to suitably qualified mental health specialists
- Improve the confidence of pilots that the majority of mental health conditions are transient, treatable and permit return to work

Assessment of mental health

1. Mental state
2. Corroborating personal and work history (CRM, line checks)
3. Psychological challenges
4. Lifestyle and health factors
5. Protective factors
6. Risk factors
7. Psychometric assessment (if indicated)

Mental Health and Wellbeing Support

- Start in flight schools
- Include resilience and stress coping in human factors training
- Change the culture that drives stigma
- Train psychiatrists, psychologists and AME's in pilot mental health
- Develop the skills of pilot managers to promote mental wellbeing
- Develop peer support programmes
- Provide support to pilots off work from mental health problems
- Ensure access to simulator practice to gain confidence

A photograph of an airplane wing against a sunset sky over a vast landscape. The wing is on the right side of the frame, and the sky is a mix of blue and orange. The ground below is a vast, flat landscape with a grid-like pattern, possibly a desert or a large field.

Thank you

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