

F2D News - January 2007

Mark Rudner
rudner@mit.edu

Happy New Year everybody! The winter in much of the east coast has been very mild so far this year. I've been away in sunny Southern California for the past few weeks, but I hope some of you have taken advantage of these additional flying opportunities.

In recent months I have received a slow and steady stream of emails from people who have seen the website and are thinking about starting to fly combat or returning to it after a break of anywhere from a few to tens of years. It's really great to receive these messages, so keep 'em coming and I'll do whatever I can to help out. Probably the most important thing I can do is to help set you up with current active combat fliers in your area, but I will also try to answer any questions you may have about equipment, training, etc.

This month I'll discuss a bit about training to fly combat again after a break of a few years. This is a pretty common scenario, and actually most of the ideas can be applied equally well by new fliers or even steady fliers looking to kick their flying up a notch or two.

When approached by a someone who is ready to get back into combat after a long lay-off, the conversation often starts something like this: "Mark - My name is xxxxx yyyy. I used to fly combat zz years ago, and want to try getting back into it. What's the best way for me to get back to the level I was at zz years ago?"

This is a very natural question to ask, and quite a reasonable goal for one to set for himself. However, this is really a time of rebirth – a new beginning – and as such it is a great opportunity to push oneself to even greater heights. Flying control line is like riding a bike; the basic mechanics will return with relative ease, especially if you have done some sport flying in the interim period. During the layoff, any old bad habits will have weakened their hold on your flying, and any possible misconceptions about flying style/strategy have probably become foggy at best. Now is the time to lay out a regimented training routine for yourself that will build up proper technique and the skills you want while pushing aside any bad habits that you don't.

I think that this notion is nothing new to most of you. Simply by the fact that many people ask me if "just getting back in the circle and smashing up some models" is really the best way of getting back up to speed, it seems clear that everyone knows there must be another, possibly better way. The idea may not be clearly formulated, however, or you may be unsure how to execute such a plan.

If you just get back in the circle and smash up some models, you will get back in the swing of things and regain your old level after some time. However, it will be a somewhat costly/painful process, and may bring up old or new bad habits that will be even harder to break in the aftermath. Below I'll outline my suggestions for a more efficient and powerful method of getting (re)started in combat.

The first step toward getting back to combat is to get your timing back and to get the feel of the combat model (how it pulls, how it turns, etc) back into your fingertips. You're going to accomplish this by taking a lot of solo flights with your top of the line combat models (you do have some fresh equipment, right?). It's all about timing and feel, so flying garbage will train you to fly garbage. If your goal is to fly good combat with good models, you'll need to train your arm to fly good models.

When you fly by yourself, don't just fly around. Make every maneuver have a purpose. Make sure you're just as comfortable doing gigantic wide loops or figure eights as you are doing small ones. Practice doing your maneuvers low to the ground. Fly "eyes-off" for segments of your flights. Be sure you can fly inverted, eyes on or off. You should also practice "clean pull-outs," i.e. maneuvers that end up with you flying either perfectly flat right side up or inverted.

One last thing is to practice flying through stationary or moving objects in the sky. For example, if a jet or bird is flying over, focus on it with your eyes and fly your model right through it (focusing always on the jet or bird). If nothing is flying over, you can pick a particular point on a tree, or a flag in the distance. The point is just to train yourself to focus on a target and make the model fly to it.

You can burn through a gallon or two of gas doing this kind of stuff, getting yourself really in tune with your models. It's important to be focused on your goals and what you're learning while you test fly, otherwise you'll just be flying around. Any stick time helps, but it won't set you up for where you want to be when you start flying matches if you aren't exercising the right parts of your brain while you test fly.

Once you're ready to start chasing streamers, you have another choice to make. You can find a partner and let loose, or you can formulate some exercises to do with your partner. There are merits to each method, but whichever you choose the most important thing is to always know what it is you're trying to learn with each match and to stay focused on that. You may spend some matches working on your following skills, others concentrating more on defending. Above all else, however, the most important thing to work on is to *always* keep your eye on your opponent's model.

No matter if you're flying offense or defense, fast or slow, if you can get yourself to where you're looking at your opponent's model 85-90% of the time, you'll be golden. That's what all that solo flying was about, and that's what will get you into the driver's seat. Nobody ever hit a baseball by staring at his bat.

While this isn't a comprehensive training guide, I think it lays out a solid template for you, the returning or new flier, to get up and running. Tailor it to your own needs/skills/desires, and go from there. If you try any of these things, write back to me some time and let me know how it works for you. Any feedback I get on this will help me refine my advice for future like-minded re-treads.

Happy Flying!