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In a victory without loss, there is no winner. In a loss without retrospection there is no resolution. The loser is he who does not learn from his past at every opportunity^[1].

Combat is about competition. It is about getting cuts and beating an opponent in a head-to-head battle of wits and agility. It is about bringing home the loot; this much is obvious. However, combat is about much more than all this, at least for those who choose to take on this sport as a long-term hobby or endeavor.

No, I am not about to offer a public school self-esteem class inspired feel-good lecture on the importance of feeling good about oneself regardless of one's performance. It is true that, when you have flown your hardest, laid it all on the table and left nothing behind, you should feel a sense of pride in what you have done and achieve some level of satisfaction from it regardless of the outcome. However, this is not what I have in mind.

What I do have in mind is the view that, when taken as a long-term pursuit, combat is a mountainous journey toward an unreachable summit. On any given day, we as combat pilots compete with the goal of winning. This is something that is spelled out for us in the rules and that we are taught from day one. But what are our goals for the long-term? Is combat simply a day-by-day activity with no overreaching correlations or consequences? Is every day truly a "new day" as we might often tell ourselves? These are the questions that I hope to address this month.

If "winning" truly is the one thing that we strive to do each time we enter circle, then one might consider his/her long-term goal simply to be to develop the ability to win consistently and often. Ideally one would strive for the ability to win every time, but of course this is not possible. However, one can always look for ways to improve and to achieve greater and greater consistency.

Is each day really a brand new day? Does our result from last weekend have any influence on what will happen today? If we focus on the short-term and never look beyond it to see the bigger picture, then the unfortunate answers to these questions will be yes and no, respectively. These answers are unfortunate because on the mountainous journey of a combat career, one would always like to be ascending towards the summit rather than meandering aimlessly through the foothills. If, on the other hand, we take away some lesson from each flight that we make, then we will in fact start from a higher point every new day.

The point is that, at minimum, you are given a clean slate each time you enter a contest; it is up to you to give yourself something even greater. Everyone has days when things go wrong, when matches are lost, when the day is cut far short of expectation. Such days are inevitably filled with disappointment. More importantly, such days are also filled with opportunities. There is a reason behind everything that goes wrong. Though there may not be an obvious way to prevent such things from happening, with proper retrospection one may come up with ways to try to avoid such mishaps in the future.

But what of the "good" days, when things seem to click, when the streamers fall your way and you end up with a nice fat bag of loot? Is this the time to finally relax, to pat yourself on the back, and to bask in the glow of your personal awesomeness? Certainly it is a time for rejoicing, but if that is all that comes of it then you are doing yourself a disservice. Next week, when everyone else has come back even hungrier and a little bit higher on the mountain, you will be sitting at the same place you were 7 days earlier. Now it is a new day, but you have cheated yourself by not reaping *all* of the available rewards of the last contest.

Even in the smoothest win, there are always flaws. By developing the ability to critique your own flying in win as in loss, you will begin to make use of the vast array of data available to help improve your flying abilities and consistency of winning in the future. Without it, you may continue your path up the mountain, but I guaranty it will be a bit rockier and most likely quite a bit less direct.

[1] Yes, that was a bit over the top...