

## Who Is Watching Out for You?

Donald W. Mitchell

Most youngsters are taught not to go hiking or swimming alone. With a buddy along, either one can intervene to avoid harm or to get help if the other one encounters danger. Such a presence can make all the difference when a leg is unexpectedly broken where there is no cell phone reception or a cramp occurs where the water is deep.

Of course, nothing usually goes wrong, but it's better to be safe than sorry. I'm sure you agree.

Based on such experiences, we learn to feel comfortable in situations where highly trained people are there to help us. Otherwise, would anyone submit to surgery, except in a life-threatening emergency? Yet, we often don't personally know enough to be sure that the choice of person to look out for us is a wise one.

Realizing that, many fields have put in place rules, processes, training, inspections, and tests to determine objectively that safety is being adequately maintained. Surgeons, for instance, go through many years of rigorous education, training, and supervision before they are allowed to operate on their own. That approach sounds right to me.

Yet after awhile the surgeon is assumed to be competent, even if skills, attitude, and effectiveness have declined. As a result, your experiences with surgeons can vary quite a bit, even in the same hospital.

Wouldn't it be better if someone was watching out for all aspects of safety, especially before any problems arose? Sure it would.

Let's consider aviation. An airplane can have as many critical parts as a dozen automobiles combined. Unlike an automobile, it has to stay in the air to perform properly, so the tolerance for certain mistakes and problems is slight. Even the hint of a design flaw can ground hundreds of aircraft until further examinations and study can determine what needs to be done. I'm sure you are glad that such precautions are observed.

A plane is only going to fly as well as it is maintained. Mechanics need to take the right actions on the ground so that problems don't occur in the air.

If that's not enough, a pilot can still make a bonehead mistake that causes harm. Instruments and copilots are there to help avoid fatal moves. Thank goodness for that.

Occasionally, something does go wrong with a flight . . . and there will be an investigation to determine the causes and to recommend what needs to be done to avoid similar accidents.

If you imagine that all this care is a good idea when it comes to commercial aviation, imagine how much more critical it is for combat aircraft that have to operate under much more difficult and dangerous conditions.

Consider combat helicopters as an example. Without proper maintenance, a helicopter can literally shake itself apart. When a helicopter comes under fire from the air or ground, it often doesn't have the speed or maneuverability to get away quickly. Helicopters also can operate in places where there's no good place to land. The pilots had better be on their toes.

At other times, a helicopter may be essential to saving someone's life, by either pulling a downed pilot from freezing or shark-infested waters or rushing an injured person to a trauma center.

Chances are that you'll never meet most of the people who are watching out for you. What draws them to such roles? What do they do? As a partial substitute for closing that information gap, let me introduce you to someone who has devoted his life to watching out for others, Jeff Roy.

As the youngest child in his family, he was used to having his parents and older sisters watching out for him. Upon graduation from high school, he decided to defer starting his college studies, and instead entered the U.S. Army to learn aircraft maintenance. Intrigued by flight, he also qualified while in the Army as a helicopter pilot and to fly fixed-wing aircraft. After ten years of active duty, he continued in the Army Reserves for another 21 years, eventually retiring as a colonel.

During his army service, Colonel Roy's perspective on aviation was further broadened by becoming a safety officer, serving on accident investigations, and sitting on several accident investigation boards. In addition, he also worked as a transportation officer, a standardization pilot, and an instrument examiner.

Liking the assignments, he took a civilian job in Army Aviation after his active duty ended. After seven years in that role, he began a new career with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), working in various management and executive roles over 22 years.

After retiring from the FAA, Colonel Roy established a new consultancy with Aviation Safety Consultants of Colorado where he has a busy practice in helping flight operations to improve their safety practices and in serving as an expert witness.

While looking out for aviation safety, he also took courses to improve his knowledge. During active duty, he earned the equivalent of a college associate's degree. While working for the Army in a civilian role, he earned a bachelor's degree in business management from Southern New Hampshire University. At that point, his desire to learn just kept expanding. He earned a master's degree in public administration from the University of Oklahoma, and a master's in aeronautical science from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Still thirsting for more knowledge, he completed the coursework for a Ph.D. at the University of Missouri--Kansas City, and later graduated with a Ph.D. from Rushmore University where he serves as an associate professor. While earning the degrees, he also attended the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and the Armed Forces War College.

Dr. Roy also knows the terrors and pain of war, having served two tours of duty in Vietnam where he was wounded and awarded a Purple Heart. Since then, Dr. Roy has been active in the National Military Order of the Purple Heart and is a former national commander of this highly esteemed organization. His faithfulness to his fellow veterans shows his desire to keep an eye out for others, as exemplified by eloquent testimony before the U.S. Congress about several important measures that veterans need.

As a scholar, Dr. Roy has also contributed to the subject of privatizing government activities as one tool, among many, to make change required for

rapid improvements more effective through his 2003 book, *An Approach to Privatization in the 21st Century*, which is based on his doctoral dissertation.

As a professor, Dr. Roy brings the same watchful, caring attitude to his students. At a time when many students feel lost in large, factory-like universities where no one seems to know their names, Dr. Roy works one-on-one online with his students to help them gain useful knowledge and to apply it in their aviation careers.

When asked why he chose to take on this teaching role, he responded that “I wanted to pass on to others what I learned in life, and I hope to give others some of the opportunities I have been blessed with.”

Having heard that answer, I asked a follow-up question, “What advice do you have for prospective students?” Professor Roy replied, “Work hard, for the rewards of that labor are ahead of you.” That advice could also serve as an accurate description of the caring career that Professor Roy has followed in watching out for others who have often benefited from his keen, caring eye for safety and effectiveness.

As you can see from this example, watching out for others can be a great way to live. How can you contribute?

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