

Will There Be Pilots to Fly Our Jumpplanes Tomorrow?

Report Of The Jumppilots And Operators Committee

The airlift at Canadian drop zones are the most stringently regulated in the world.

I say without hesitation, “we are over regulated!” We are designated by Transport Canada as 702 commercial air work. To operate our jumpplanes we must qualify for an Air Operating Certificate and maintain our flight activities and aircraft support according to approved manuals for operations and maintenance. We must have an approved dispatch procedure and a certified maintenance program. Accordingly, we must use Approved Maintenance Organizations (AMO) and employ commercial licensed pilots (CPL) supervised by a qualified chief pilot.

Now this specter of over regulation is coming to haunt us. Canadian drop zones are exposed to the effects of the world wide explosion of air travel, probably a result of the millions of Chinese and Indian tourists. Airplane manufacturers such as Boeing and Airbus simply cannot make airplanes fast enough. They have backlogs of airplane orders for years. And there is a corresponding world wide need for commercial license pilots to fly these airplanes. Hence, a shortage of pilots has developed over the past five years. This shortage is particularly severe in Canada as our country enjoys good relations around the world and Canadian pilots are wanted.

Over the next five years, thousands of new commercial pilots will be needed; over the next decade ten of thousands of commercial license pilots must be trained. And as expected, all commercial license pilots are jumping at this opportunity. But there is a serious log jam. Flying schools cannot produce enough new pilots because their flight instructors are also joining the rush to the airlines. Despite Labour Canada funding there is a severe shortage of flight instructors.

So who is going to fly our airplanes tomorrow?

Signs of the lack of commercial licensed pilots (CPL) are everywhere:

- Jazz and Porter and other airlines have programs in which they pluck aviation college students as soon as they graduate. The copilot at the controls of the jet that you boarded to come to Edmonton may have only a few hundred hours.
- Small commercial carriers such as North Star, Harbour Air, Wasaya Air and Thunder Air, etc. are all faced with a shortage of pilots, as their staff move up to the airlines after a few months.
- The lack of jump pilots is now being felt in a serious manner. Skydive Toronto trains about 10 junior Cessna 182 jumppilots every Spring. Even five years ago, the graduates of this ParaPilot Course could be counted on to stay for two to three years and then move up to flying Caravans. Now, they move on after a season or less. In 2019, STI jumppilot graduates went to fly at 6 drop zones across Canada.

- One Canadian drop zone cannot maintain its AOC for want of a pilot to stay around to qualify as chief pilot.
- Another veteran DZ Operator is closing its doors as he feels the limited returns do not justify the hassle of getting pilots.

It is clear that there may be no one to fly our jumpplanes tomorrow!

Yet in many/most other countries of the world, drop zones are untouched by the present shortage of commercial license pilots:

- In Britain the jump pilot requirements are a private license, 250 hours and an endorsement from the BPA (British Parachute Association). Such are the requirements in Europe, New Zealand, Australia and in France.
- These are not marginal skydiving countries. New Zealand and Australia are hot beds of tandem skydiving. For their size, their dropzones do more tandems than any other country. As we speak, private license pilots (PPL) are flying turbine jumpplanes in Australia.
- And France considers itself the leading nation in competitive skydiving. It consistently wins the most medals at the Mondial. In 2003, at the Mondial held at Gap Tallard Drop Zone, both private, commercial and military pilots flew the ten Porter jumpplanes. I was there.

And Canadian Drop Zones operated their airlift in a similar fashion with an exemption from Transport Canada, using private licensed pilots flying private registered airplanes until 1997.

How did Canadian drop zones get into this situation of requiring commercial license pilots?

The story is a sad one. In the early 1990s an Alberta drop zone operated by Jim Mercier had a string of student fatalities. A CSPA faction was in deadly opposition against him and against his rival association called CAPS. This faction thought that the solution was to have Transport Canada oversight and invited Transport Canada involvement. Transport Canada did the only thing that they knew how; they removed the exemption from holding a commercial air certificate and required all Canadian Drop Zones, both clubs and centres, to apply for and hold an Air Operating Certificate. This required the use of commercial registered jumpplanes and commercial license pilots.

Now we are suffering from the world wide shortage of commercial license pilots. Indeed the chickens have come home to roost! Imagine if you will your jumpplane on the ground because there is no one to fly it!

The Solution Please?

The action is to make application to Transport Canada for the use of private license pilots (PPL) as in France, Britain and Australian and most nations of the world. And here are some Canadian private license jumppilots (PPL) of long standing:

- David Williamson, of Atlantic School of Skydiving, Jumppilot as per CARS 722.76.
- Joe Chow, of Skydive Toronto, a PPL jumppilot of 2000 hours since 1983 as allowed by CARS 722.76.
- Vic Borghese, lifelong operator of Borghese Sport Parachuting Centre with 4500 hours flying all types of Cessna's and Twin Beech.
- Bert St Louis and Susie Brunet who operated the largest Quebec drop zone at St Antoine de Richelieu for many years flying Cessna 185, 182 and Twin Beech. Retired.

Some may think that private license pilots (PPL) are inferior to commercial licensed pilots (CPL). Often the opposite is true. The long staying PPL jumppilot may become a better jumppilot for these reasons:

- Commercial pilot training involves topics such as point to point horizontal navigation, radio navigation, air space classification, diversions and additional skills and information that are largely irrelevant to jump flying.
- The private license pilot (PPL) is a different breed of pilot. His/her mindset is different. Unlike the CPL who is building up hours to move on, the PPL will stay for years or even a lifetime to develop into a superb jump pilot.
- The CPL has no time to develop. The airlines are calling and so he/she moves on.

The Jumppilot and Operators Committee was voted in at an AGM to do a fact finding mission at no cost to CSPA. In December it submitted its finding to the CSPA Board of Directors. Now the time has come for action to resolve the lack of commercial license jumppilots for Canadian Drop Zones. In fact, to make that shortage irrelevant to the piloting of our jump planes.

I ask you, the affiliated group member of CSPA, to support the motion at this years AGM for the "CSPA to apply its administrative and financial resources to submit application(s) to Transport Canada for the use of private license jumppilots (PPL) for the Canadian skydive community."

Report Submitted By

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Note: This committee is seeking more participant members. Interested parties please contact Joe Chow 705 331-6509.