Brilliant at the Basics

Mark Jones Jr.

In 1958, Vince Lombardi took over as coach of the famous Green Bay Packers American football team. At that point, the team had an abysmal record and had not won any titles for over a decade. When he took charge of the team, the new coach held a press briefing. A group of reporters wanted to know what he was going to change and asked about his strategic guidance and transformation initiatives. Lombardi said this: "I am not going to change anything. We will use the same players, the same plays and the same training system. But we will concentrate on becoming brilliant at the basics."

Something about that story resonates. What he said seems to be true. His results, the championships he earned, and the way he reinforced the importance of the basics in preparation for those victories, strengthen our belief. Whether or not he said those words or actually had that press conference, we may never know, but the legend persists.

He was not the first nor the last to say something like this, and many people have repeated similar phrases that capture the essence of the principle. This too bolsters the claim, but how do we conduct our own verification and put it into practice? Is there a way to prove it? And if there is, shouldn't we have an idea about what we mean when we say "the basics", or its synonym, "the fundamentals"? Finally, and most importantly, how do we apply it to Flight Test Safety?

The Perfect Play

Most of us are connected to sports in some way, whether that is through our own experience, a passion for watching the game, or a love for a child who plays the game. So when you read the words in that heading, "The Perfect Play," you probably pictured or remembered something specific. I remember watching a basketball game, and I saw one of my daughter's teammates fight for a defensive rebound and turn towards the sidelines where she instantly noticed a teammate sprinting down the court. She delivered the ball with a perfect pass, which turned effortlessly into a dribble past the first defender while the player scanned even farther down the court. She drove towards the top of the key and finally saw a third teammate cutting straight towards the hoop. One bounce pass later—just out of the defender's reach—you could hear the crowd suck in a gasp as a young girl grabbed the ball, leapt from one leg towards the backboard, and sailed over another defender, gently lifting the ball towards the goal. Donk—the ball hit the backboard—swish—through the net. A perfect layup, and our half of the gym erupted into a deafening roar.

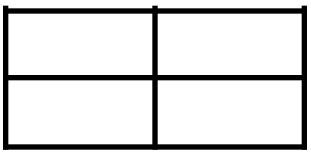
It was the perfect play, and we all knew it. Watching it was wonderful and elicited something that felt like pure joy, a joy that also reflected on the faces and in the gestures of the players. I don't remember every play, but I do remember talking about that play on the way home. I also remember how it felt to see the smile on my daughter's face as she felt the bliss that comes from being brilliant at the basics.

What are the Fundamentals?

In the setting of high school sports, we've heard parents and coaches say it countless times, "Focus on the fundamentals," but what are the fundamentals? It's probably easy to start a list: shooting, dribbling, rebounding… Would you be able to list them all? If we go back to the story of the perfect play, what do we observe when we examine it more closely? Several new things probably come to mind, like passing and stealing, but even as the list continues to grow, the ideas swirling in my head grow even faster. There are many things that we might call fundamentals, but are all of them the basics? And if the list is too long, is it even possible to be brilliant at all these things? Perhaps there is some way to organize the way we think about this.

I'll offer two "shapes" as a proposal for how to organize thoughts on the topic.

Shape 1

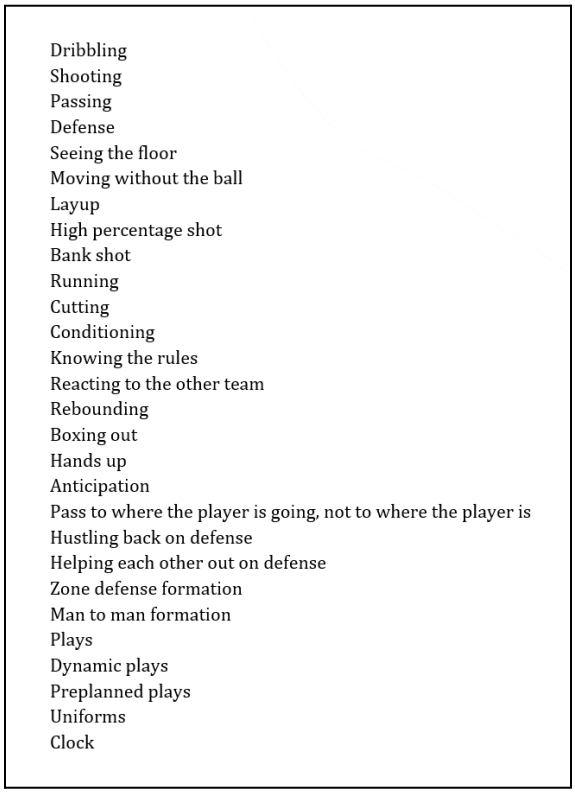


Shape 2

Shape 1

Consider the 3x1 rectangle on the left. Take some time to stop what you are doing to answer the original question: What are the fundamentals? Find a piece of paper and pen or open a notes application on your phone. Look at the clock and give yourself three minutes to write down some of the fundamentals. When you are done, turn to the next page to see the list I made when I did this exercise.

I followed my own instructions, but I used a word document to type some notes. Here are my results.


Dribbling
Shooting
Passing
Defense
Seeing the floor
Moving without the ball
Layup
High percentage shot
Bank shot
Running
Cutting
Conditioning
Knowing the rules
Reacting to the other team
Rebounding
Boxing out
Hands up
Anticipation
Pass to where the player is going, not to where the player is
Hustling back on defense
Helping each other out on defense
Zone defense formation
Man to man formation
Plays
Dynamic plays
Preplanned plays
Uniforms
Clock

I forgot "drills and practice". I probably should have included those. Forgetting reinforces the idea that being overwhelmed happens, and a more organized way to think may help us make methodical observations. I've done a similar exercise before with various groups, in meetings and classroom settings alike, and the results are usually similar. After doing the exercise I ask the group to organize the list, putting fundamentals they have identified in groups. One way to group the fundamentals appears in the table below.

Head	**Heart**	**Hands**
Seeing the floor Knowing the rules Knowing the plays Anticipation	Hustle Excitement Humble	Dribbling Shooting Boxing out Hands up

In the first column, I have placed those fundamentals that deal with the head, how we think and what we know. Qualities like the excitement of the team appear in the second column, because those things happen in the heart, the word that describes what we believe and how we feel. The final column are the physical behaviors and skills that we normally think of when talking about the fundamentals, because we do those with our hands and the rest of the body. These explanations of what we mean by "head", etc., have been added to the table below.

Head	**Heart**	**Hands**
Seeing the floor Knowing the rules Knowing the plays Anticipation	Hustle Excitement Humble	Dribbling Shooting Boxing out Hands up
What I know How I think	What I believe How I feel	What skill I can accomplish How well I execute the skill

I noticed that as I filled out the table, I added things that were not in my original list, like "knowing the rules" and "excitement." I also observed that some of the fundamentals probably didn't fit perfectly in a particular group. "Hands up" is a good example of this phenomenon. A player must know (head) the defensive posture is the triple threat stance with hands up, but in the fourth quarter, getting into the triple threat stance with tired arms in the up position is a choice made in the heart, an act of will. Or one could suggest that the physical conditioning of the team determines whether the player has "hands up," and conditioning is a fundamental in the third group, the one labeled "hands" and described by physical skills.

The list of fundamentals was overwhelming, but organizing our thoughts in this way seemed to help. It also had some limitations. I think we can agree that the fundamentals fall into the three categories of head, heart, and hands, but talking about them in this way doesn't seem to get everything in the picture. Is there a different way to think about the fundamentals?

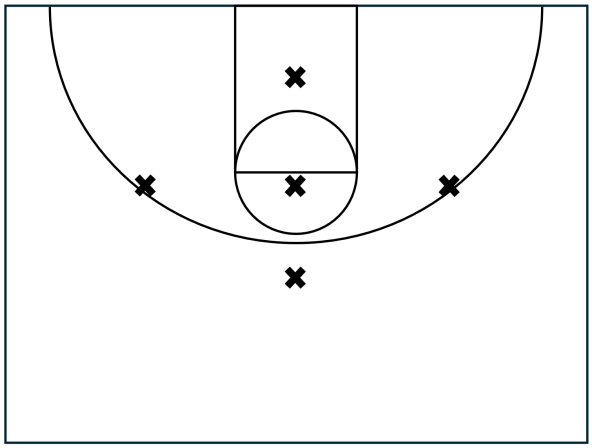
Shape 1 - Revisited

There is a second organizational construct to consider in the table below.

Independent	Interdependent	Environmental
Dribbling	Passing	Boundaries of the basketball court
Shooting	Anticipation	Rules of the game
Hands up	Moving without the ball	Referees
Hustle	Seeing the court	Fans, sound, and energy
Conditioning	Defense	Scoreboard
Knowing the rules	Pass to where the player is going	Time clock
	Boxing out	

Independent fundamentals, the first column, are the things I can do, know, and believe. They are the fundamentals that I must master, but basketball is a team sport. Thus we should consider a second category that captures the interdependent characteristics of the sport and its fundamentals. Finally, the third column lists basics that are environmental or external.

As I look back over both tables, it still feels like something is missing, though the word "defense" might capture the essence in a broad sense. When one team runs back down the court and sets up on defense, they establish a formation. For example, one common defensive formation is the one-three-one zone defense, pictured below. Each member of the team has an assigned position together with assigned roles. The role includes competing priorities like guarding the offensive player nearby and assisting other players when needed. It requires skill and time sensitive decision making to know which is the more important task in the middle of the game. What a player does may change depending on environmental conditions. For example, if a defensive player already has four fouls (one less than the maximum allowed by the rules), he may choose not to back up a teammate who got beat, for fear of causing another foul. The skill of the opponent may factor into the decision as well. Finally, the time remaining and current score are both important factors to consider too. These observations—my stream of consciousness on the notion of "defense"—leads me to this conclusion. The basics are important, but *integrating* the basics together is also one of the basics.

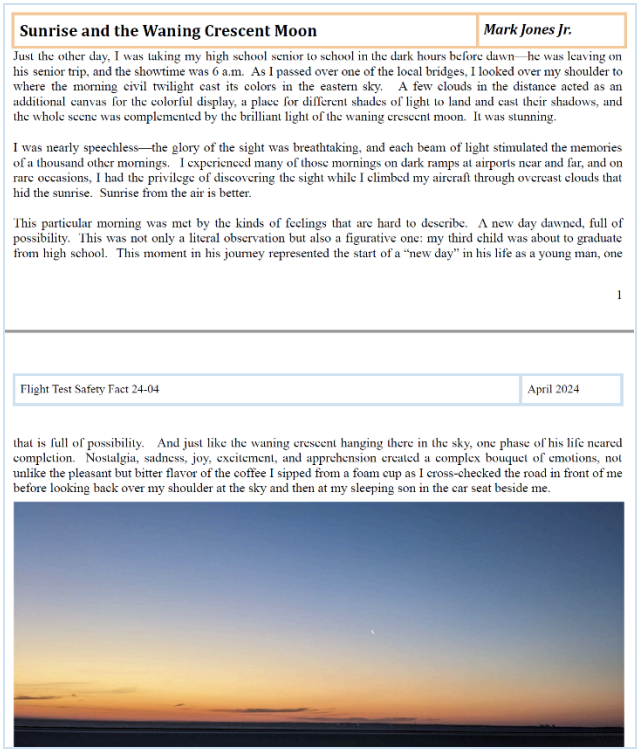


The situation is certainly complex, but it should not distract us from seeing the fluid way a team responds to its individual members and its function as a whole. This is what we mean by *formation integrity*. Most will observe that formation integrity is a significant

factor and give it its rightful place in the list of fundamentals. And most will likely agree that a good team can overcome a poor one. There is one phrase which may capture the essence of this principle: "I must be in the right place and do the right thing." When every member of the team is giving their full effort to accomplish this, it is a beautiful thing, and occasionally, the perfect play results.

Shape 2

The 2x2 matrix labeled shape 2 first appeared in the April 2024 issue of the FTSF (24-04). The article "Sunrise and the Waning Crescent Moon" introduced the ideas of "skills and scenarios" as the row labels and "expected and unexpected" as the column labels. In that sense it was an organizational construct for talking about "skills" which clearly brings us back to the "basics." For a more detailed introduction to Shape 2, please find the article attached to this newsletter at the end, or find it on the Flight Test Safety Committee News webpage.



Sunrise and the Waning Crescent Moon — *Mark Jones Jr.*

Just the other day, I was taking my high school senior to school in the dark hours before dawn—he was leaving on his senior trip, and the showtime was 6 a.m. As I passed over one of the local bridges, I looked over my shoulder to where the morning civil twilight cast its colors in the eastern sky. A few clouds in the distance acted as an additional canvas for the colorful display, a place for different shades of light to land and cast their shadows, and the whole scene was complemented by the brilliant light of the waning crescent moon. It was stunning.

I was nearly speechless—the glory of the sight was breathtaking, and each beam of light stimulated the memories of a thousand other mornings. I experienced many of those mornings on dark ramps at airports near and far, and on rare occasions, I had the privilege of discovering the sight while I climbed my aircraft through overcast clouds that hid the sunrise. Sunrise from the air is better.

This particular morning was met by the kinds of feelings that are hard to describe. A new day dawned, full of possibility. This was not only a literal observation but also a figurative one: my third child was about to graduate from high school. This moment in his journey represented the start of a "new day" in his life as a young man, one

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that is full of possibility. And just like the waning crescent hanging there in the sky, one phase of his life neared completion. Nostalgia, sadness, joy, excitement, and apprehension created a complex bouquet of emotions, not unlike the pleasant but bitter flavor of the coffee I sipped from a foam cup as I cross-checked the road in front of me before looking back over my shoulder at the sky and then at my sleeping son in the car seat beside me.

What do you think?

That's an incomplete introduction to the topic, but it's supposed to be incomplete, because: 1) we want your input, and 2) the 2025 Flight Test Safety Workshop theme is "Brilliant at the Basics." What better way to stimulate thought and discussion at the Workshop then to prime the pump with the thoughts above and…

There's one more thing you can do: Here is a two question survey to share your thoughts about "the fundamentals of Flight Test Safety."

We hope you get a chance to answer BEFORE the workshop begins. As you meet people at the Workshop, ask them what they put for their survey answers (or share the link with them). In the next edition of the FTSF, we will share some of the results.

Follow up: Letter to the Editor – CANMAN Responds to Mike Rabens

Jeff Canclini

Thank you for another excellent newsletter with many ideas to ponder (and hopefully retain). Mike Raben's suggestion to employ a dedicated non-advocate to vet proposed solutions was excellent. But I wonder, why stop at one? Years ago, I had the good fortune to engage in an enlightening conversation with a gentleman during a flight to Washington, DC. He had recently been interviewed by CBS 60 Minutes for an article exploring how he had successfully started hundreds of companies even during economic downturns. He told me one of his keys to success was adopting the methodology outlined in the book "Six Thinking Hats" by Edward de Bono, who has been long recognized as an authority on conceptual thinking and the teaching of thinking as a skill.

In the book de Bono argues, "The main difficulty of thinking is confusion. We try to do too much at once. Emotions, information, logic, hope, and creativity all crowd in on us. It is like juggling with too many balls." The solution? De Bono unscrambles the thinking process with his "six thinking hats." One of those hats is a "black hat" synonymous with the "devil's advocate" hat. The gentlemen told me that in all his meetings and discussions, every attendee had to come prepared to participate wearing each of the six hats for a period of time. In his experience, this produced great benefits for effective and efficient collaboration. So, could a test team not adopt a similar practice to leverage the concept of a non-advocate?

Regards,
Jeff

president@sfte.org

New Member Highlight

John Rudzis is one of the new members of the Flight Test Safety Committee. Read his bio below.

Contact Flight Test Safety Committee

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Susan Bennett, FTSC Administrator susan@setp.org
Society of Flight Test Engineers edir@sfte.org
Society of Experimental Test Pilots setp@setp.org
AIAA Flight Test Group derek.spear@gmail.com

Contact *Flight Test Safety Fact*
Mark Jones Jr, Editor mark@flighttestfact.com

Mr. Rudzis is a distinguished aviator with a career spanning operational flying and flight testing in military and commercial aviation.

A former career Marine Aviator and Delta Air Lines Captain, Mr. Rudzis' credentials include designation as a Naval Aviator, operational deployments with the U.S. Marine Corps, flying CH-53 heavy lift helicopters, a fixed wing flight instructor with the Naval Air Training Command, and graduation from the prestigious U.S. Naval Test Pilot School (USNTPS) with Class 91 in 1987. Mr. Rudzis' flight test experience includes serving as a military test pilot on all models of H-53 helicopters, a USNTPS flight test instructor, and the Government Flight Test Director (GFTD) on the MV-22B Osprey Integrated Test Team (ITT) during the Engineering and Manufacturing Development (EMD) flight test phases of the V-22 Development Program. Upon retiring from active military service in 2000, he joined Delta Air Lines, Inc., flying domestic and international routes until 2021, in Boeing, McDonnell Douglas, and Airbus airplanes. During 2006 to 2007, he also served as a Senior Flight Test Pilot for Bell Helicopter Textron Inc., flying developmental test flights for the VH-71 Presidential Helicopter ITT at Patuxent River, Maryland. Between 2000 and 2024, he was also employed by ARINC Engineering Services, Inc. and Coherent Technical Services, Inc.,providing engineering support for various aviation systems development programs for the Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR).

Mr. Rudzis has over 12,000 flight hours logged across more than 25 different type, model, and series of aircraft, encompassing helicopters, tiltrotors, and fixed-wing airplanes, Mr. Rudzis holds an FAA Airline Transport Pilot rating for multi engine fixed wing airplanes, commercial ratings for rotorcraft and fixed wing airplanes, and type ratings in B-737, B-757, B-767, DC-9 and BD-500 airplanes.

In addition to his extensive aviation career, Mr. Rudzis is an accomplished academic and aviation consultant. He holds a B.S. in Ocean Engineering from the U.S. Naval Academy, an M.S. in Aviation Systems from the University of Tennessee Space Institute, and M.B.A. from Johns Hopkins University. Mr. Rudzis presented a paper to the Society during the Annual SETP Symposium in September 2000, titled "Unique Tiltrotor Handling Characteristics Encountered during MV22 Sea Trials Tests". He has been a proud member of the Society of Experimental Test Pilots (SETP) since 1989.

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Connect with us by joining the LinkedIn Group: "Flight Test Safety Committee."

In April's podcast, Turbo kicks off a new mini-series: Check out "Talking with Trigger and Turbo" about prepping not for first flight, but for first flights...plural.

We talk a lot about preparing for the first flight of a new aircraft but what about preparing for the first flights for an organization? This month I talked with retired US Navy Capt Mike "Trigger" Saunders about preparing for initial flight operations of the F-35 at Eglin AFB.

Chia Chat

Folks, I hope you all enjoyed reading this month's newsletter. What a great introduction to the tutorial "Brilliance in the Basics" that will occur at the Flight Test Safety Workshop in just a couple of weeks. I am really looking forward to hearing what our team has put together to remind seasoned professionals of the basics and ensure new teams understand what those basics are. I am sure it will

create some great discussion not only with the Panel but also during the networking opportunities on breaks and mealtimes. Please make sure you take the survey (Here is the link again!), so you can be an active participant at the FTSW. You will learn and remember so much more going in prepared, and your flight test organizations will be grateful for what you are able to bring home. We also have a great line up of papers and I am especially thankful for all those that submitted papers for this year's Workshop. We had 19 papers submitted which is absolutely fantastic, and I wish we could hear them all. To try and squeeze in as many as possible, we even added a Lunch and Learn presentation. That is going to be a great but busy day! Sadly, I know everyone will not be able to attend the Workshop but remember we will be posting the videos to the FTSC's website after the event, and that is a great way to catch up on what was discussed from home. And don't forget about our European FTSW in Trieste in November. A call for papers is out and hotel registration is available. Please consider submitting. The workshop is only as good as the presentations.

In addition to the Flight Test Safety Fact, I enjoyed Turbo's conversation with Trigger in our latest Podcast, "On Condition." Management of Change is a critical step in any organization's growth and just as relevant to a test organization as it was to the training Wing at Eglin AFB that is discussed as the F-35 program was stood up. I hope you can extract lessons learned and best practices they utilized and apply it to your flight test organization. As Heraclitus said, the only constant in life is change, and we need to ensure we are doing our best to mitigate the risks associated with it.

I do have some unfortunate news to report. Some folks have already noticed, but the Flight Test Safety Database is currently shutdown with no specific timeline to return it to service. There are unfortunately several significant cybersecurity violations that need to be corrected before the database can be re-enabled and the level of effort to fix it on the old software is not worth it at this time. We are actively working on some short- and long-term solutions to this problem. I will provide more information on these solutions as they become available.

Hope to see most of you in Greensboro in a few weeks. Fly Safe, and don't accept any unnecessary risk!

Stuart "Chia" Rogerson

Flight Test *Safety* Fact

Published for the Flight Test Safety Committee

BONUS Issue - the preWORKSHOP Edition of the FTSF

Flight Test Safety Workshop Highlights - check out these particular events, presentations, and challenge for the attendees
Sunrise and the Waning Crescent Moon - a nostalgic look at the kinds of skills we need to navigate the future of flight test
March Madness RECAP - a short report on how the Tournament went in our office and which rotorcraft was crowned king
The *Last* Turbo Talk - reflections from the outgoing Chairman of the Flight Test Safety Committee in his last ever column

Flight Test Safety Workshop Highlights

This is the 2024 FTSW *Preview* edition of the Flight Test Safety Fact.

Tuesday, 30 April - 0815 Welcome until 1600L

Two tutorial topics of note: First Flight Anomalies of First Article Aircraft by Roy Martin (Northrop Grumman), and Accident Investigation Board Results From MQ-9 Fatality Mishap, Reynaldo Enriquez (Air Force Test Center)

Wednesday, 1 May - 0815 until 1620L

Featuring many technical talks and turnover of the Flight Test Safety Committee Chairman position

Thursday, 2 May - 0815 until 1200L

Announcement of the Dave Houle Award for Best Flight Test Safety Workshop Presentation (Sponsored by Bombardier); technical tour in the afternoon

Challenge to Attendees (thanks Chia for the exhortation):

1. First, how will you actively capture lessons learned and bring them back to your home organization as you listen to the presentations and the tutorial?
2. Second, and I think, just as important: How will you actively contribute to the FTSW either through questions or coffee break discussions so that everyone leaves better prepared for the "unexpected."

In both cases, I deliberately used "actively". I want to challenge our attendees to be active participants at the workshop, not just passive observers.

Sunrise and the Waning Crescent Moon

Mark Jones Jr.

Just the other day, I was taking my high school senior to school in the dark hours before dawn—he was leaving on his senior trip, and the showtime was 6 a.m. As I passed over one of the local bridges, I looked over my shoulder to where the morning civil twilight cast its colors in the eastern sky. A few clouds in the distance acted as an additional canvas for the colorful display, a place for different shades of light to land and cast their shadows, and the whole scene was complemented by the brilliant light of the waning crescent moon. It was stunning.

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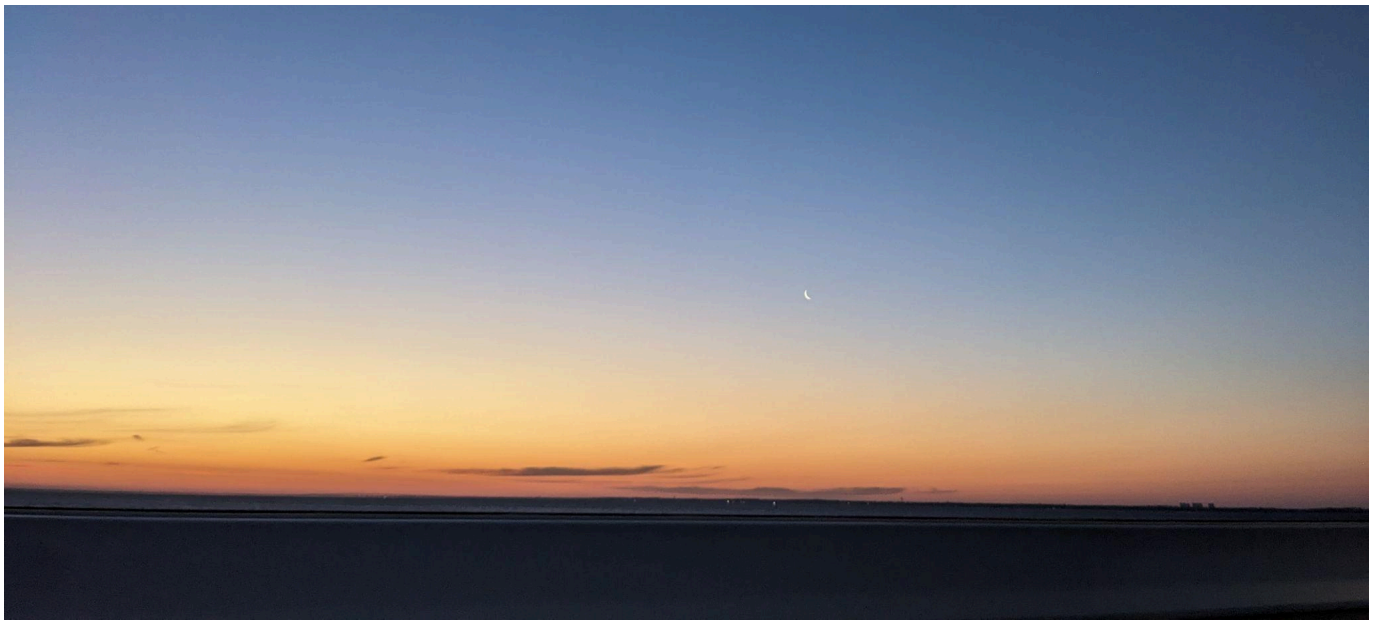
that is full of possibility. And just like the waning crescent hanging there in the sky, one phase of his life neared completion. Nostalgia, sadness, joy, excitement, and apprehension created a complex bouquet of emotions, not unlike the pleasant but bitter flavor of the coffee I sipped from a foam cup as I cross-checked the road in front of me before looking back over my shoulder at the sky and then at my sleeping son in the car seat beside me.



What is it about the end of one chapter and the dawn of another? The question hits closer to home as I near the end of my military career, one that probably took longer than average because of its composite nature, serving in the reserve component for part of the time and in the civil aerospace industry for part of the time. I still have many years of flying and flight test ahead of me, but for the first time in my flying career, I will be walking away from military flight test for good.

What must I accomplish in the few months I have left to bring closure or completion to that chapter? What must I do to prepare for the next chapter?

The question certainly applies to me personally, but it may also apply to Turbo, who we recognize in this edition as he arrives at the end of his tenure as our Chairman. It may also apply to the new test pilots and flight test engineers joining us as they graduate from test pilot schools or universities all over the world in this season.

As I survey the landscape of my experience, I am nearly speechless, the same way I felt while considering the sunrise and the nearly 135 degrees of sea and sky, bridge and land that made up the scene. In a photograph of the scene, there are more than 1000 by 1000 pixels of multiple colors, and that flood of more than one million pieces of information is overwhelming. I can focus on a few familiar landmarks that I believe will help narrow the scope of my answers to the questions. Thus, what follows is not an exhaustive discussion but a starting point. So first, we consider what lies before us in the day ahead, at least figuratively, as we ponder what the future holds?

One way that I organize my thoughts is to consider the kinds of scenarios we may encounter, as depicted in the table below.

	Routine	Unexpected
Scenarios		

There will be routine scenarios, the kinds of things we expect. Some of these things are linear extrapolations of what we encounter now, but there will also be unexpected scenarios, things we can't predict well. If you like bell curves, you can put the "routine" in the tall, fat part of the bell curve, and the unexpected occurs in the extremes of both tails. (I'll admit that this characterization is simple, but I think simple models are a defensible position that I won't defend here.)

I think we should have the kinds of skills needed to navigate each of these scenarios, which I depict by adding a row to the table below.

	Routine	Unexpected
Scenarios		
Skills		

This new row addresses skills in a similar way. Routine skills are the kind we have now, with perhaps, linear growth or extrapolation based on expected changes. "Unexpected" skills are something else.

A line of questioning follows naturally: How do we prepare for the things we can't perfectly predict? How do we develop skills we don't expect? I hope to come back to these questions after filling the table above with some concrete examples.

To illustrate these futures, consider the following. Remotely piloted aircraft (RPA) have been around for a long time, but we are just now seeing them propagate into routine operations. I refer to this kind of development as a linear extrapolation of what exists today. An MQ-9 Ground Control Station (GCS) looks like a cockpit, and it is controlled like a normal aircraft. It only required a few new "rules" to incorporate the aircraft into Class A airspace, adaptations of lost comm procedures for command and control datalinks.

On the other hand, the jet and rocket engines ushered in a new understanding of aerodynamics and unexpected non-linearities resulting in years of quantum leaps in manufacturing, aircraft design, and other topics. It's safe to conjecture that hypersonic aircraft design will probably bring some kind of "unexpected" scenarios when we do the hard work of engineering something for routine operations in this regime. As far as I know, we haven't mastered the plasma field around the aircraft yet. We know a lot, but the biggest and brightest organizations still experience rapid unscheduled disassembly on their flight test programs, which is empirical evidence that supports my characterization, calling this "unexpected."

	Routine	Unexpected
Scenarios	Remotely Piloted Aircraft	Hypersonics
Skills		

This still leaves us wondering which skills are routine and which skills are unexpected and how to develop both sets. At least, I know it leaves me wondering, but what about you?

I believe that the investing in skills will prepare us to navigate uncertainty with skill, but the margin of this page is too small to contain the argument.

First, do you agree with the examples used to illustrate Routine and Unexpected? What other examples would you give?
Second, how would you populate the "skills" row? What is an example of a routine skill, and what is an example of an "unexpected" skill?

Finally, how does any of this relate to sunrise and graduating seniors and career changes?

I'll illustrate with a basketball game example before answering the last question. Just the other day, I was watching my youngest son play basketball. Things that I noticed him doing well included getting his hands up on defense, getting in position for rebounds, and cutting towards the basket to get open for a pass. These are all "fundamentals," skills taught to the young players before adding complicated scenarios. Ball handling and conditioning, as well as movement with and without the ball, and an understanding of the rules are all routine skills.

On the other hand, the first time he sees a new play with a double screen that gets the shooter open for an inbound pass—he might think it's unexpected, but each of his routine skills will help him execute the play. Furthermore, if something doesn't go as anticipated—which could include a teammate missing a cue or even an opponent behaving in an unexpected way—he can respond by executing routine skills. That example illustrates both routine and unexpected scenarios and also the idea of routine skills.

In the closing chapter of a high schooler's senior year, it's a great time for me to think about whether I have equipped my son with the skills he needs to enter the next chapter. It's also important for me to prepare him mentally for the unexpected things he will encounter and remind him that he has the skills to navigate the uncertainty with confidence. (I'm not sure I've successfully argued this point, but it is something I will return to in the next column.) I could apply the same advice to myself in the final months of my career as a military test pilot. Additionally, I need to make sure I continue to execute the fundamentals with diligent excellence as I near the end instead of getting distracted by the finish line.

You should too—you should consider how prepared you are and avoid both apathy and stagnation. You should take a look at your fundamentals, your skills. If they aren't getting sharper, they are getting duller. This train of thought is similar to what Turbo presented in his talk "Better Lucky than Good," which would be a good thing to watch again for another perspective on this topic.

In closing, I urge you to look at the two questions at the top of this page—one more time—especially in the context of the 2x2 table above, and think about your fundamental skills. Send us your thoughts. One of those fundamentals needs to be appreciating a beautiful sunrise on the walk across a dark flight line. Send us your photos too. And in the next column we will answer the burning question: What is an unexpected skill, and how do we get them?

RECAP: March Madness: The Greatest Airplane of All Time

Mark Jones Jr.

We made it happen in our office, a March Madness style bracket tournament that only looked at rotorcraft and VTOL aircraft. It all started one day when I asked a young Tech Sergeant (E-6) what he thought about a certain kind of rotorcraft. He didn't know what it was, so I asked him to do some homework. While he was learning about this particular rotorcraft (which I can't remember), I asked him to fill out a bracket that consisted of sixteen total rotorcraft, a fairly good sample that included old and new, military and civilian, domestic and foreign.

Then we spent a week voting on each "matchup." In the last round the MH-53 Pavelow, a USAF special operations helicopter, went head to head with the UH-1 Huey, a classic in the category. In the end the Huey pulled ahead and was declared the ultimate winner.

The event made two things happen. First, it gave some of us older aviators the chance to invest a little bit of knowledge about our heritage in a younger aviator. Second, it gave us some fun. What about you? Did you take