

Column: Condor Corner
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Title: KidVenture 2013 & My Condor Story
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2013-CA – Candidate for a glider category add-on rating

Introduction

In this issue of Condor Corner, I will be reporting on EAA Airventure / Kidventure 2013 with a comparison to Kidventure 2012. I am also inaugurating an addendum to Condor Corner called “My Condor Story”.

EAA AirVenture

The Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) annual convention (a.k.a. Oshkosh, a.k.a. AirVenture) is one of the world’s largest aviation events. Roughly 500,000 aviation enthusiasts from around the U.S. and the world attended AirVenture 2013.

Let’s Talk Soaring

The SSA sponsored an impressive display on the EAA main grounds this year with the theme “Let’s Talk Soaring”. It featured a large tent with a lounge area, information table, membership signup, SSA merchandise, and an LS-4 on display outside. The lounge hosted a large flat-panel monitor capable of showing short (2-4 minute) visual demonstrations of soaring-related concepts including a takeoff and aerotow, a gliding traffic pattern and landing, intercepting and climbing in a thermal, flight on a ridge, and a winch launch. These demonstration video clips were specially developed for “Let’s Talk Soaring” using Condor.

KidVenture 2013

KidVenture is a special venue at Oshkosh where kids of all ages (typically five to fifteen) can experience a wide variety of aviation-related activities and learning experiences. 2013 marks the 4th consecutive year SSA volunteers have helped staff KidVenture. After staffing one of KidVenture’s core modules (Aircraft Design) in 2010, we secured our own **Soaring Flight** booth comprising large, colorful wall and floor graphics, an information table, a small seating/waiting area, and three Condor simulation stations (one of which incorporates an attention-getting 6-foot projection screen); all tucked into 225 square feet (15x15) of Kidventure’s main hangar.



**KidVenture – Soaring Flight 2013
Future CFIG Spencer Anderson at the keyboard**

Statistics

Here is the Executive Summary of Kidventure 2013, with comparisons to 2012.

- 1) Activity at the 2013 Soaring Flight booth was up 21% over 2012. We ran just short of 500 kids through the venue this year. In 2012, we never had more than 70 kids in one day. This year, we had more than 80 kids on 4 of the 7 days, with over 100 kids on Friday.

For the week, that is an average of one kid, flying our standard 10-15 minute simulation, every 5.75 minutes, for 6.5 hours a day, for 7 straight days. On Friday, the average was one kid every 4 minutes.

- 2) Geographic representation was more widespread this year. We had kids from 43 of the 50 states compared to 37 states in 2012. Foreign country representation was about the same: 5 foreign countries including 3 Canadian provinces this year compared to 6 foreign countries and 3 provinces in 2012.
- 3) Average age for boys dropped from 10.8 (2012) to 10.0 this year. Average age for girls was up slightly from 9.8 (2012) to 10.0 this year.
- 4) Percentage of boys to girls was almost exactly the same as last year:
2012 - 84% boys, 16% girls;

2013 - 83% boys, 17% girls

- 5) Adult (over age 20) participation was down from 8 adults in 2012 to 2 this year, probably because we only let adults fly the simulations when there are no kids waiting, and that didn't happen much this year.
- 6) I didn't keep good records of daily staffing levels for the booth either year, but my sense is we were understaffed this year compared to last. A lot of the time there were only two of us on duty. The day with 100 kids was such a day. I almost didn't survive that day. I suspect having two SSA venues (KidVenture and the new "Let's Talk Soaring") may have stretched our available volunteer pool a little too thin. With the volume of kids we are getting, a steady staffing level of four is the minimum to keep the three simulation stations staffed, manage the queue, allow for lunch and bio breaks, etc.

KidVenture 2013 Soaring Flight was once again a huge hit with our 500 future glider pilots and I would like to thank the following folks for their help in staffing the venue:

Pat Osbakken, Terry Kramer, Spencer Anderson, Juergen Otte, Richard & Preston Hadden, Lee Murray, Kaylin and Bob Hart, Gene Franklin

My Condor Story

Inauguration

Frank and I have been writing the Condor Corner article since April of 2010. While I can't imagine ever completely running out of something to say or report on this topic, I am finding it a bit of a struggle these days to fill an entire article. I guess I could just start over. If most of your memories are like mine, this will all seem new to you again.

I am, however, becoming increasingly aware of the growing number of Condor success stories out there, and thinking some of you successes might like the opportunity to tell your stories.

With this issue of Soaring, I would like to inaugurate "My Condor Story", an opportunity for those of us interested in simulation-based flight training and proficiency to learn from each other.

In each of my future articles, I hope to feature at least one Condor success story. Contributors may remain anonymous or share the article's by-line. Contact me at the email address listed at the bottom of this article if you would like to share "Your Condor Story".

Introduction

2013-CA is one of my current distance education students. We have been meeting regularly, over the phone, since May of this year; usually weekly, but occasionally 2-3 times a week. While sharing the same sense of humor, 2013-CA and I still manage to get

a lot of serious glider flight training done. Our longest session was 5 hours. Time flies (no pun intended) when your having fun.

My Condor Story by 2013-CA

Once the flying bug gets in you, it just never seems to quit buzzing! It may lay dormant for a while, but sooner or later it makes its way back.

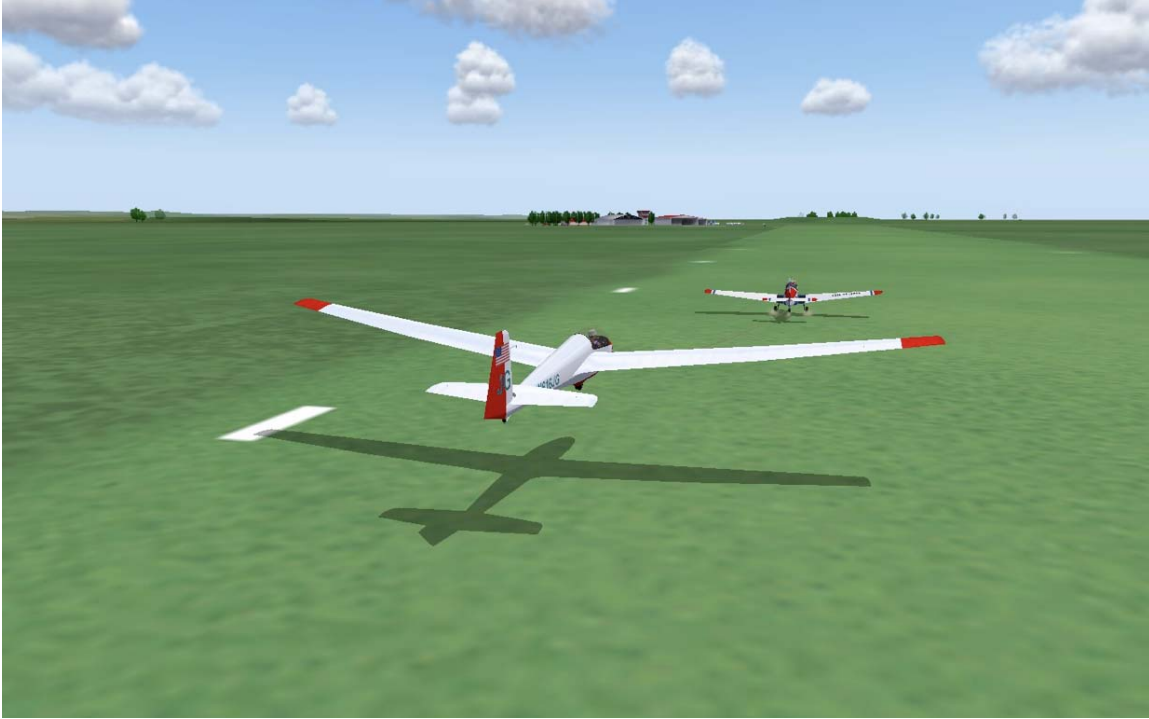
Some of my best memories in life are of getting my private and commercial certificates and an instrument rating and buzzing around the country in my straight-tail Bonanza. I dabbled in aerobatics in a 2-place Pitts, and had a blast on a sky diving team, but I dropped all those activities many years ago as too expensive, too time consuming, or downright scary. More recently, however, having more free time, I increasingly found myself looking up at that pretty blue sky. The flying bug started buzzing again!

“Why not try soaring?” I thought. It appeared to be a vastly simpler means of flying compared to powered flight, much less complicated mechanically, quieter, easier, and not as mentally taxing. Right?

With the renowned Sierra mountain range fairly close by, why not check it out? Seeing amazing photos of Gordon Boettger at 25,000 feet over snow-capped Mount Whitney, I thought “Yeah! I want to do THAT!”

Snooping through past issues of Soaring Magazine, I got more and more excited! The perfect entry point into real life gliding seemed to be this Condor simulation program I was hearing so many good things about. Paul Remde at Cumulus Soaring, Inc. set me up with the full Condor package and suggested I contact Scott Manley. As one of the gurus of Condor, I imagined “Mr. Manley” as having a long waiting list of wannabe glider pilots, being pricey, unavailable, or incompatible with my learning style. A single phone conversation with Scott dispelled all my concerns. He agreed to take me on as a student and I decided to jump right in. We were off into the simulated clouds!

Scott had suggested I not experiment with flying Condor on my own, but of course being the highly experienced pilot I am, I ignored his advice and decided to get a little taste anyway. How hard could it be to do a few simple aerotow takeoffs and landings? Fifteen destroyed gliders later, and every simulated tow pilot loathing my face on the ramp, I actually got a glider into the air on tow; for about 3 seconds! ‘More carnage. Hmm.. this was not as easy as I imagined. ‘Must be something seriously wrong with this software.



Visual demonstration of a properly executed takeoff and initial aerotow

Flash forward to my first lesson with Scott on takeoffs and initial aerotow. We started with a clear, concise explanation of the whys and hows of the upcoming task. That was reinforced with a video demonstration (Condor Replay) of a properly executed takeoff and initial tow. Then it was my turn to attempt the task in Condor Free Flight, followed by a full debriefing of my performance, again using Condor's Replay feature. This instructor-based method resulted in a greater and more immediate level of success than my self-taught method had, and with near zero frustration.

With my newfound competence in Condor, and not being one to give up easily on my prowess as a pilot, I decided to once again jump ahead in the curriculum; with the same undesirable results I might add. So I jettisoned my "already know it all" attitude, quit jumping ahead in the program, and did vastly better. Clearly, if one is serious about learning to soar logically, safely, and comprehensively, having a pilot mentor/CFI vastly improves your Condor experience, makes you a much better real life pilot, lets you have more fun while learning, allows you to learn more quickly, and above all else, makes you a much safer pilot.

So the lessons flew by week by week, Scott making it all quite logical, sequential and fun. In my book, any instruction is much better with a sense of humor and Scott has loads of it! I was always excited for my next lesson. Scott's program was highly flexible and he custom-fit each lesson to my pace and area of interest. Many lessons seemed to fly by. Others we expanded on and perhaps detoured off of a bit. 'All great stuff.

While I was having a ton of fun in Condor and learning a lot in the process, I had the sense I had barely scratched the surface of what soaring had to offer. I actually thought

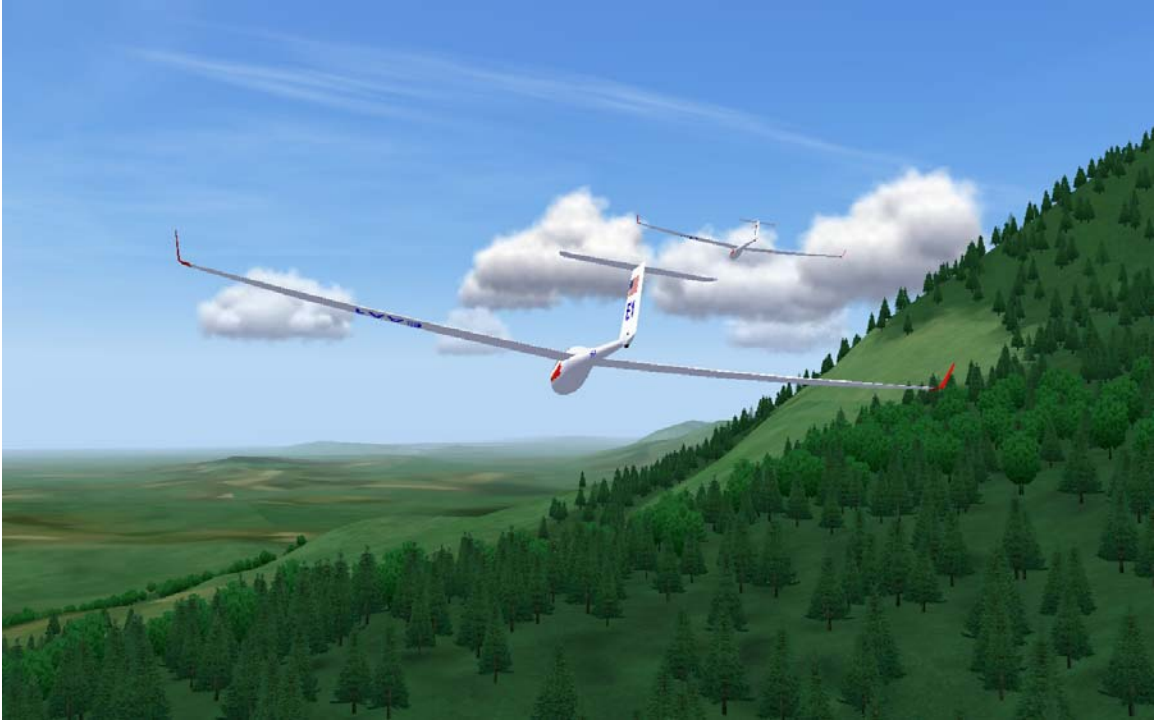
about just enjoying Condor and not bothering to jump into real life gliding. I then came to my senses. I wanted to be like Gordo, Bruno, and Sebastian.

After covering approximately 75% of Scott's lesson syllabus, I felt I was ready to at least start into real-life lessons. I contacted 4 different glider operations in my area, booked an instructor at a place with an ASK-21, and was raring to go. I was feeling pretty confident from my Condor sessions and figured I would ace my first lesson; impressing my instructor and myself! Ah, the delusion of grandeur! A few surprises shook me out of my fantasy.

Take off and tow were much louder than I imagined and the turbulence, even on what I was told was a "moderate" day in the Sierra, immediately (and literally) shook me out of my cocky confidence. In addition to now being humbled, after 40 minutes in rough air, I wasn't feeling very well either. The rough conditions notwithstanding, I did pretty well on tow as well as with my steep turns. My instructor thought I handled things very well for a rookie. Instructors never lie do they?

I wanted to try a few different glider operations and instructors before pulling the trigger on real life training, so I booked flights at a second operation for the next day. Their philosophy on safety, an accelerated learning pace, and cross-country orientation sounded right up my alley. After a nice initial chat, we walked into the hangar to take a look at their ASK-21. When they mentioned their policy of "oxygen and parachutes on every flight", I knew I had found my spot! And a beautiful spot it was!

My second flight in a real glider was also quite bumpy on tow, but I was able to follow the tug well and the air calmed down shortly after we released onto a big, active ridge. "Jump right in" was this operation's MO, and I was all over it, having flown ridge simulations in Condor. We worked our way into some booming thermals and up we went; 12,000 feet MSL in no time. Impressive. My instructor pointed out that, from this altitude, we could actually see Mt. Everest in the distance, and wisely kept asking how I was doing. The thermal and ridge experiences were too good, so I lied and said "I'm feeling great". 'Big mistake. I went well past my limit and the descent to the pattern and landing was mostly a blur.



Follow the Leader – Learning to Fly on a Ridge in Condor

So how does all this relate to Condor?

I had plenty of stick time in my Pitts and over a thousand hours in my Bonanza, but this glider flying was an entirely new universe of being in the air; much more demanding than I anticipated.

An awful lot was happening:

- maintaining aircraft control, maneuvering into a thermal core, keeping navigation and glide distance in the back of your mind
- keeping one eye on the yaw string, one eye on the ASI, one eye on the horizon, one eye on jet traffic descending into Reno, and one eye out for other gliders
- all the while trying to figure out how to keep the person in the back seat quiet

No doubt it would all become easier over time with good instruction and practice. In retrospect, however, I was pretty sure if I had jumped directly into real life glider flying, with no Condor experience, especially in these rough conditions, I might easily have been overwhelmed by the experience and decided this simply wasn't for me. Fortunately, Condor and Scott had given me the solid experience and knowledge base I needed to fight through the initial trauma, and provided me with a serious jumpstart on my training.

But here's the cool part. After my real life flight experience in the Sierra, I went back to Scott with my issues of turbulence and thermal upsets. We were able to dial up the thermal and mechanical turbulence in Condor to levels similar to those I had experienced in the Sierra. By flying in rough air conditions in Condor, I was able to increase my recognition and response times and be much more relaxed on my subsequent real life

training flights. My new instructors praised me and said I was well above average for a transition student. 'Huge kudos to them as fantastic instructors who live and breathe all forms of soaring, and the same to Condor and Scott for providing an invaluable experience base from which to launch my real life glider flight training.

Here is a list of reasons I'm glad I found, used, and continue to use Condor:

1. It dramatically eased my entry into real life glider flying.
2. It saved me a pile of money on instructor fees, aerotows, glider rental, and travel time and expenses.
3. It optimized my real life instruction, providing me the time I needed to adequately practice what I had learned between lessons and to deal with situations I will hopefully never experience in real life.

This is arguably the best part of Condor. How many takeoffs and landings does a real life student get; 30-40? I have easily experienced 10 times that number in Condor. How many low altitude premature tow terminations are typical; 2-3? I've done at least 50.

Imagine something extraordinary happening in real life; a rope break directly off the departure end of the runway, dive breaks failing full open, actually having to land-out, skidding the turn from base to final while trying to stretch a glide to the runway. We rarely, if ever, experience these situations in real life because they are too dangerous to incorporate into our training. We may talk about them, but when they jump up and bite us in real life, how do we respond? Freeze? Freak out? Yell "your stick" to the now absent flight instructor. The clock is ticking. Altitude is winding down.

By experiencing these situations in simulation (Condor), we at least have a chance should we find ourselves there in real life. We are much more likely to recognize the situation evolving because we have seen it before. We know how to react because we have repeatedly practiced a proper recovery. We truly feel we've been there and done that because mentally, visually, and procedurally WE HAVE.

Rope break? Nose down, turn into wind, configure, land." No drama. No big sweat. Done!

Squeaking in, stupid low, praying for no more sink? I've gone ahead and scared myself silly with the simulated results of this idiocy, then learned to recognize its onset and deal with it properly and safely before it becomes an emergency.

Inadvertent spiral dive after falling out of a thermal? Yawn. Grab a snack, adjust my sunglasses, dial in a touch of rudder and roll it on out. Recognize, respond, recover, and live to tell about it.

Reference: "Living through Fatal Mistakes" – Condor Corner - Frank Paynter

Yeah, I've drunk the Condor Kool-Aid. I highly recommend it. But I'm warning you, if you do, your family will wonder where you've gone for all those hours of every day. At worst, you'll have a ton of fun. At best, you'll be a more competent, confident and safe pilot. You can fly far, wide, and high at the best soaring sites on the planet. You'll keep your hand and head in the game in the off-season and be a much more heads up pilot. And it's immeasurably better with an experienced, enthusiastic CFIG and/or glider pilot mentor.

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Scott Manley owns, and occasionally actually flies, a DG-303. The back of his pilot's license reads: Commercial pilot: airplane single-engine land & sea; instrument airplane; glider. He lives in Madison, Wisconsin and flies as a commercial pilot and glider flight instructor for Sylvania Soaring Adventures in Beloit, Wisconsin.

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