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# Final Approach

An Air Bear White Paper

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## **The Final Approach**

It's Saturday night and I'm preparing for another routine swing shift patrol flight. But tonight is anything from routine. The last hour has been spent cleaning out my locker, and only a single hanger remains from the flight suit I just pulled on. My mind is retracing the last three decades. Thousands of incidents, 11,000 plus hours in the air, everything I've seen and accomplished in this fantastic career is embodied in this next patrol flight. For tonight my friends is what we all work for and hope to see, and that's the final and last shift of a long career.

My TFO tonight is Kevin. He does the schedule and it was planned my last shift would be with him. Kevin and I were in the CHP academy together, and have been a crew for a really, really long time. Yes, we are the old guys in the squad and proud of it. I had told Kevin a month before that I wanted to go out fighting, working a normal shift on a Friday or Saturday night. I wanted to film the entire shift, from take off to the final landing, and use it for the fixed wing classes I teach for ALEA. We would be loitering over a populated region, assisting a dozen police agencies in Placer, Yolo, and Sacramento counties in Northern California. The MX-15 camera system attached to our airplane was our eye in the sky, and we would make that an unblinking eye for the next three hours on patrol. We would scan all frequencies, type in the address of every critical call, and slave the geo-pointing camera system onto crime scenes. Using a powerful spotter lens, we would be looking at the crime scene within seconds, pointing the nose toward the call and trading altitude for airspeed to expedite our response.

Our mission for tonight is to provide clear and concise real time information to our ground units. Get on scene as fast as possible, find the bad guy, and give the good guys information so they have the advantage. This is our critical core task, and if we do this well, bad guys go to jail. It's really that simple. My unit flew a single special equipped airplane over 1800 hours this year, performed thousands of IR searches, located and directed responding units directly to fleeing felons, and 600 bad guys went to jail. The use of fixed wing patrol has dramatically changed with the advancements in camera technology. I witnessed and have been a part of this transformation and can say without any reservation that the most actively flown and successful police aircraft in the USA, is actually the ISR airplane I piloted on this last and final flight.



## **RULES FOR SUCCESSFUL AIR SUPPORT**

**Rule 1:** This is the same rule for any business model. We must always be exploring the “next best way” to improving service, and once we find it we must commence the search for the “next best way”. Continuous improvement has to be a part of the way we provide pro-active air support. The issue I have seen with many agencies is being stuck in a “Status Quo” cycle; “we have always operated this way using helicopters “. The ‘Status Quo’ answer is just no longer acceptable when we consider the Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) equipment availed to law enforcement. Embrace change and technology that’s availed, and make a bona fide effort to continually improve how you serve and protect from above.

**Rule 2:** Units that fly the greatest number of hours statistically have better results. The window of opportunity to be in position over a crime scene, pursuit, or tactical event is only open for a few minutes. When I consult with airborne law enforcement units, I ask them to study the results of the next 100 air support calls they respond to. Ground based response in our line of work is statistically ineffective. Only 1 in ten ground response calls will result in the aircrew playing a role in locating and directing ground support to a successful arrest. Focus on timely, clear and concise information, as this is what our ground support can make use of. Swat and air support are the firemen within law enforcement, meaning that they respond from the station/ airport.

Only airborne response is effective, allowing us to be in that window of opportunity. See first, position the aircraft, bring the crime information into the cockpit, and send out solid tactical information to responding units. When you focus on this core task of providing responsive airborne support, then you can start the search for the “Next Best Way”.

**Rule 3:** Personnel running complex systems should be highly capable. Our tactical flight officers (TFO’s) need to be sharp and receive extensive and focused training to be effective. It’s the TFO who brings the “crime into the cockpit”. Recruit the best troops; invest as much time and money in specialized training for the TFO’s as you would to get a pilot certified to fly the aircraft. Make sure you have a fully functional ready to work ISR aircraft from day one, and a fully trained crew.



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## **Conclusion**

In my 3 decades of experience, these three simple rules will transform any airborne law enforcement program. I fully understand many agencies have faced draconian budget cuts over the years, and that piece of budgetary slice of pie keeps getting thinner. Air units manage budgets by reducing flight time, which ultimately results in a ground response in lieu of air support. The secret to successful air support is to make use of the latest technology and tactics to improve your support while operating in the most cost effective manner possible.

If you are willing to explore a different and more cost effective way of providing information from above, than I'd like to show you the video of my final patrol flight. Let's discuss how to cost effectively field the most effective airborne solution in support of your ground units. You most likely will agree that outfitting the most advanced military grade ISR technology onto an easy to maintain and low cost platform is truly the "next best way" of pro-active police air support.

*John*

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