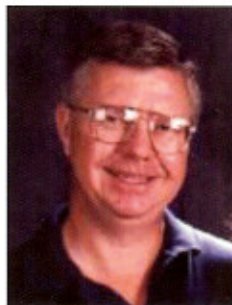


## Talk about **VALUE**



**C**heryl Popp at Blue Ash Airport, north of Cincinnati, is one of those “take the bull by the horns” kind of people. She saw a need for small airshows to have a place to discuss their particular challenges, so in her normal “get it done” style, she started an email-based discussion group which continues to grow in the absence of the old ICAS discussion boards.

Although this web-based group offers some very good advice and “best practice” benchmarks, the group recently got onto the subject of tight airport security and high concession prices at airshows in general. There was quite a lot of grouching about these subjects from the airshow fans, directed primarily at military base open houses.

I love the people that make up our industry’s loyal fan base, and I have written about their dedication, but a reality check is in order on these subjects.

Reality Check #1, Security: The world is a dangerous place. Our military is engaged in war in

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both Iraq and Afghanistan, plus other commitments in another 120+/- countries. It amazes me that any military base even has an open house in this environment. With the current and projected operations tempo straining both equipment and personnel, the cancellation of a base open house would be fully justified. The only reason a base moves forward with an open house is the dedication of our young men and women to show the America people their capabilities. They take on the additional work because of their justifiable pride in their mission and accomplishments.

The hassles a spectator must endure upon entering a base and clearing the security checks necessary for force protection pale in comparison to the daily hassles of these people in uniform. In the “sand box” our people face appalling working conditions and the continuous threat of injury or death. At home, our people routinely work 12 to 16 hours a day in support of the deployed troops and to make up for their absence.

To those airshow fans complaining about intrusive searches or the need to return something to the

car because it is not permitted on the flight line, how about a little empathy for that E-4 “volunteered” for security duty? Sure, it’s a long walk back to the parking lot, and it may even be hot, but not as hot, nor as long as that Airman First or PFC endured during deployment to the “sand box.”

To be very blunt, get over it! If you can’t stand the security procedures, gather your family, get back in your car and go home. And while driving home in a royal pout, think about your returning to a comfortable home while that Sergeant on the gate is thinking about the next deployment, away from his family, to a less than comfortable tent in some place we can’t pronounce.

Reality Check 2, Concession Prices: I’m not going to bust your chops on this one. Yes, the price of a hot dog at the open house is well above what you expect to pay at the 7-11. Why? Simple economics.

How much was the admission to the open house? How much did it cost to park? I believe the answer to both is zero.

How do you think the civilian flying and static displays are funded? Not with appropriated (government) funds, not with that zero admission and parking fee. The only source a military open house has to fund any civilian participation is through sponsorships and the concession sales profits. The large national concession companies pay large up front dollars to help bring in the civilian static displays and performers, then accept the risk of a rain-out or cancellation.

Back in the 1960s, a military open house consisted of a military static display, maybe a working dog or weapons demonstration, a few fly-bys of locally-based aircraft, and then the Blue Angels or Thunderbirds took to the sky. No historic aircraft on the ramp, no civilian aerobatics, no WWII aircraft beating up the pattern. If you were lucky, maybe an hour of total flying displays.

So when you bite into that hot dog and swill that soda, remember you are also funding the civilian portion of the show. Do the math. You will find it is a value in line with any other motor sports venue. In fact, considering what I pay for tickets and concessions at a professional sports or NASCAR event, it just well may be a better value.

If I have offended you with my bluntness, I will apologize in advance. My remarks are not intended to insult you personally. But do consider your complaints in the context of the big picture, and consider how they play against the realities of war. That’s the real reality check. 