



STEVE KROG

COMMENTARY / THE CLASSIC INSTRUCTOR

Incidents

They can happen anywhere, anytime

BY STEVE KROG

AS PILOTS WE HAVE all been exposed to a line of thought that states: Situations that may become incidents or real emergencies are usually the result of a series of small things that when combined create a serious situation. Many safety articles have been written about such situations, and you may have read about some of these incidents. Recently, we experienced a couple of these situations here at the Hartford, Wisconsin, airport (HXF).

Our airport is a relatively small, nontowered facility with a 3,400-foot hard-surface runway, 09/27, and a 2,200-foot turf runway, 18/36. Approximately 120 powered aircraft are based on the field, along with a number of gliders and ultralights. Weekends find the place quite busy if the weather and wind are favorable. It is not uncommon to have two to four aircraft in the pattern at any given time during the day, often more on summer weekends.

ANALYZING A SITUATION THAT COULD HAVE PROVEN DISASTROUS

It was a beautiful fall Saturday morning, cloudless blue sky with the outside temperature in the 60-degree Fahrenheit range. A light southeast breeze was blowing favoring either turf Runway 18 or hard-surface Runway 09.

At about 9 a.m. a Cub renter taxied away from the ramp headed toward Runway 18. While the renter was doing his pretakeoff checklist, the mounted handheld radio apparently slipped in the mounting bracket, creating a hot mic situation. A hot mic blocks all other radio transmissions. Initially unaware of the stuck mic, the Cub pilot performed two takeoffs and landings and then began taxiing back to the hangar to report the issue with the radio.

! SMALL PROBLEM NO. 1 STUCK MIC

During the time the hot mic was interfering with all radio transmissions, three aircraft approached Hartford at approximately the same time, all intending to land. The first aircraft entered the left-hand traffic pattern to land on 18 while the second approaching aircraft followed in a distant trail position. The third aircraft, neither seeing nor hearing either of the other two airplanes, decided to make a straight-in approach, landing on Runway 09. At this point the hot mic was still activated, preventing any of the pilots from being heard as they announced their landing intentions.

! SMALL PROBLEM NO. 2 THREE APPROACHING AIRCRAFT

The first approaching aircraft made an uneventful and safe landing, immediately taxiing to the ramp where I was standing, and reported a hot mic problem. Meanwhile, the second approaching aircraft destined for Runway 18 turned onto final but then opted to make a go-around and use the hard-surface runway. His wife, who was with him, has a bad back and did not want to land on a “bumpy” turf runway. Aircraft number three, unable to see or hear the other two aircraft, continued the straight-in approach to Runway 09.



**! SMALL PROBLEM NO. 3
AIRCRAFT CHANGING RUNWAYS**

Aircraft number two then turned left after initiating the go-around, entering an abbreviated, tight low-altitude downwind leg for Runway 27, trying to expedite the landing. Unable to hear any radio transmissions, pilot number two was not able to hear pilot number three announcing the straight-in approach and landing on 09.

**! SMALL PROBLEM NO. 4
AIRCRAFT USING OPPOSING RUNWAYS**

Aircraft number three continued with the straight-in approach and was approximately one-quarter mile from the runway and unaware of and unable to see aircraft number two. Just as pilot number three crossed the threshold and was about to touch down, he spotted aircraft number two on a short final approach on Runway 27. Aircraft number two had not yet seen aircraft number three.

**! SMALL PROBLEM NO. 5
AIRCRAFT NOW NOSE TO NOSE**

The pilot of aircraft number three fixated on airplane number two and prepared to execute a go-around. Power was added. A second or two later, pilot number two saw landing aircraft number three and decided to make an immediate go-around as well. Full power was added.

**! SMALL PROBLEM NO. 6
INATTENTIVENESS**

Both pilots decided to execute go-arounds, and aircraft number three added power lifting off. But aircraft number two, after adding power, turned left rather than right as the FARs require, turning directly into the path of departing number three aircraft! Number three saw what number two was doing and made a steep, hard turn to the left to avoid number two.

While the renter was doing his pretakeoff checklist, the mounted handheld radio apparently slipped in the mounting bracket, creating a hot mic situation. A hot mic blocks all other radio transmissions.

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! SMALL PROBLEM NO. 7
INCORRECT ACTIONS

While all of this was taking place, the Cub had returned to the runway after the radio bracket was readjusted and then continued his Saturday pleasure flight, unaware of all the confusion.

The end result was that no harm came to any pilot, passengers, or airplanes. But it could have ended quite differently. If you had been the pilot in any of the airplanes, what would you have done? It is easy to criticize while sitting on the ground and discussing the situation, but what would you truly have done in the heat of the moment?

As a flight instructor, had I been flying aircraft number two, at the request of my passenger, I would have executed a go-around and continued straight ahead for at least 500 feet and then performed a 45-degree right turn and climbed to pattern altitude. At this point I could execute a 180-degree teardrop right turn and establish myself at pattern altitude on a left downwind leg for Runway 27.

If the surface wind had been any stronger, I would have crossed over the airport at midpoint after performing the right teardrop turn at pattern altitude and joined the downwind leg at the midpoint for Runway 09.

Had I been flying aircraft number three, attempting a long straight-in approach for Runway 09 and encountering the stuck mic issue, I would never have continued the straight-in approach.



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Rather, I would have climbed back to pattern altitude while on final, side-stepped to the right so that I could look over the entire airport, and then turned crosswind and downwind, setting up for a landing on 09. A stuck mic creates confusion, frustration, and a potential compromise of safety. Under the circumstances, all the pilots should have been on alert for traffic, both in the air and on the ground.

The most serious infraction committed in this situation was pilot number two turning left rather than right after initiating a go-around. From day one in our primary flight training, we are taught to turn or move right when encountering oncoming traffic. Thankfully, there was nothing that came from this confusion other than some shattered nerves.

Just three days ago, another situation developed that could have ended in disaster. A Cub pilot was practicing takeoffs and landings on turf Runway 36. While this was happening, a transient aircraft called in stating he was executing a 12-mile straight-in approach for landing on Runway 09. The Cub continued working in the pattern, and the approaching aircraft continued inbound for 09.

The Cub was now on short final and about to touch down on 36 while the other aircraft was about one-quarter mile from the approach end of 09. The pilot of the transient aircraft could see the Cub but continued with his approach. The Cub landed, rolled out for a few seconds, and then powered up for another takeoff. Rather than give way to the Cub, the other aircraft continued with the landing on Runway 09 and touched down, rapidly approaching the runway intersection.

The pilot landing on Runway 09 had been observing the Cub landing on 36, but the Cub pilot had not seen the aircraft approaching on the 12-mile final until it was on the runway. Both pilots took evasive action. The Runway 09 aircraft pilot applied brakes, and the Cub lifted off flying over the top of the other aircraft.

In this situation, the aircraft approaching Runway 09 on a long straight-in approach was in error for not giving way to the Cub on short final. Remember, FAR 91.113 states that an aircraft on final approach for landing has the right of way over other aircraft.

All over the country there are general aviation airports without control towers. At many of these airports, there are airplanes flying that are not equipped with radios, legally so. Consequently, it is especially important for a pilot operating to or from said airport to be extremely vigilant in looking for traffic and practicing the safe rules and regulations. As a suggestion, one might want to dust off the FAR/AIM book and read section 4-1-9 in the AIM. It covers operations at airports without control towers.

Be careful, fly safely, and always assume the other pilot does not see you when encountering potential harmful situations. It's better to practice safety and perform a go-around than it is to be right and have a broken airplane to fix! *EAA*

Steve Krog, EAA 173799, has been flying for more than four decades and giving tail-wheel instruction for nearly as long. In 2006 he launched Cub Air Flight, a flight training school using tailwheel aircraft for all primary training.


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