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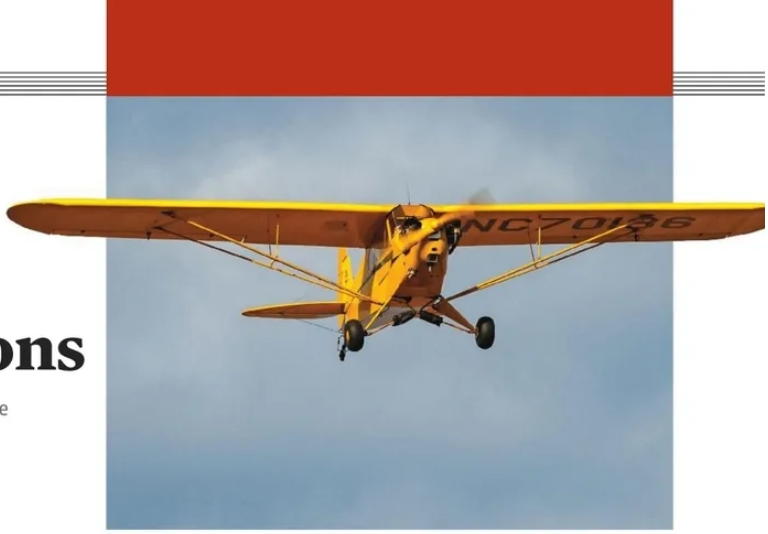

Incursions and Deviations

On the ground, in the air, they're everywhere

BY STEVE KROG

AN ACQUAINTANCE FROM HARTFORD stopped at the hangar recently. Perplexed with blood pressure rising, he confided that while heading back to Hartford Municipal Airport (HXF) from central Illinois, he observed an airplane several miles to the left off his wing flying at approximately the same altitude.

It appeared to be on a potential collision course. Seeing that it was a modern production aircraft most likely equipped with a full glass panel including ADS-B, he closely observed it to see what, if any, action the pilot might take to prevent a potential collision.

Seconds ticked by while he kept eyeing the approaching aircraft. It didn't appear the pilot was aware of my friend's airplane even though it had ADS-B Out. When it seemed the airplane was about to overtake my friend, he took evasive action to establish safe separation.

While doing so, he was able to catch a glimpse of the cockpit occupants. Neither of them looked up, and it appeared they were completely oblivious of my friend and his airplane.

Several days later, I had the opportunity to meet with our FAA safety inspector and asked if he was experiencing situations such as this. He rolled his eyes and said the FAA was getting reports of this nature, including numerous ones of incursions both on the ground and in and around the airspace.

In Wisconsin alone, we had two or three reported incursions last fiscal year to date. This year for the same period, we've had more than 50 reported incursions requiring investigation.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

Some of the reported incidents include runway incursions, landing on the wrong runway, taking off on the wrong runway, landing at the wrong airport, and flying through Class C and D airspace without talking to anyone. Each of these situations could lead to a serious outcome.

The bottom-line cause for all these incursions is the all-inclusive "pilot error" excuse. But upon further investigation, there is more to each situation.

One pilot even admitted he had no sectional or airport charts in the airplane, nor did he have a GPS. His flight was from one nontowered airport to another. Deciding he didn't need charts, he departed for his destination. But directly along his route of flight was a busy Class C airport. Oblivious to his surroundings, he continued through the airspace at 1,500 feet AGL and never bothered using the handheld radio.

The tower operators attempted to contact him but to no avail. Low enough and slow enough, the tower folks were able to easily read his N-number. While all of this was happening, several commercial flights had to be held on the ground, and another was required to hold until this individual was well clear of the Class C airspace. Sadly, this story repeats itself with some frequency.

Another Class C incursion incident was shared with me a while back. An individual who owned a Cessna 150 and kept it on a private airstrip decided to do some practice takeoffs and landings on a nearby hard surface airport.

Thinking the tower didn't open until 0700, he proceeded to do about 10 takeoffs and landings before stopping for breakfast. When a couple of people from the FAA met him at his airplane, he couldn't imagine what they wanted. He was reminded that the tower opened at 0600, and he had been tying up Class C airspace for nearly an hour. Never once did he bother to turn on his radio nor glance at the tower.

Pleading ignorance didn't help this individual. In fact, it caused one of the FAA inspectors to carefully look over the airplane. Before the inspection was completed, several discrepancies had been noted, grounding the aircraft on the spot.

In both examples, the pilots demonstrated poor or no preflight planning. Had the first pilot bothered to look at a chart, he would have seen that his route of flight took him directly through Class C

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airspace. The price paid for this mistake, I'm sure, was far more costly than the time it would have taken to glance at a chart. The second pilot needed to take a one-minute look at the FAA's *Chart Supplement* to confirm the tower opening time. His mistake was considerably more costly than losing a minute's time.

Runway incursions are happening nearly every day, especially in this age of electronics and the tools available to every pilot. Every towered airport requires a read-back before you begin to taxi. A simple airport diagram, either printed or on your iPad, would prevent many of these incursions.

However, many of the pilots experiencing an incursion read back the taxi instructions without thinking about what they are saying, and then begin taxiing and not complying with the instructions. Perhaps it's a guy thing. Many guys never bother with an instruction manual for anything so why bother listening to instructions from ground control?

My wife and I were once on a flight out of JFK Airport in New York. It was in the evening, and we were on a 747. Just as the pilot began to rotate, the nose came down hard on the runway, the engines were in full reverse mode, and the brakes were applied. We came to a stop, but not before overhead luggage bins had sprung open and luggage was flying everywhere.

We began a slow taxi back to the gate. While doing so we saw what caused the aborted takeoff. Another

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aircraft had taxied partway onto the runway we were using and would have taken most of our left wing off had the captain not quickly reacted to a serious runway incursion.

Runway layouts can be confusing, especially at airports where the runway ends meet. You may have been cleared to Runway 27, but being in a hurry to get going, you lined up on Runway 24. The airspace you were about to enter was cleared for Runway 27. Now the controller is upset because the airspace off Runway 24 was not clear of other airborne traffic. Not only that, but 24 is considerably shorter than 27. Whose fault would it have been had you mistakenly used 24 and parked your airplane in the trees on the departure end?

Similarly, landing on the wrong runway can cause serious problems. A situation occurred a while back where a Bonanza had been cleared to line up and wait for an aircraft landing on another runway. While positioning the aircraft, the pilot happened to look up and saw the landing gear of another aircraft landing on the wrong runway. It cleared his airplane by feet and touched down shortly beyond his runway position. Later, the landing pilot commented he was confused about the runway and never saw the airplane holding on the runway.

Both incidents can be attributed to poor or no situational awareness and also to never looking outside and scanning the immediate area.

How can one possibly land at the wrong airport? It seems impossible, yet it happens. When it does, especially when it happens commercially, it becomes headline news. Years ago, I had the opportunity to do some charter flying. One of my frequent destinations was Rapid City, South Dakota.

If you are familiar with the area, there is a large U.S. Air Force base about 20 miles away. Both airports had similar runway layouts. My first flight there was an eye-opener and a lesson well learned. This was before GPS units existed, so I was tracking inbound on the VOR.

When I thought I had the airport in sight, I called approach control and advised them of my intentions of landing at Rapid City Regional Airport and stated I had the runway in sight. A minute or two later the controller came on the radio and said, "N4094W, I believe you have the wrong airport in sight. Look over your nose about 15 more miles and you'll see us."

I broke off my approach while trying to stay out of the Air Force base traffic area. Once on the ground, I called the tower to thank them for preventing me from making a big mistake. The controller was quite nice about it and said it happens almost daily, so they always keep a close eye on traffic approaching from the east and southeast.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

The answer is quite simple; use your head and the many tools available to you:

1. Most of us flying general aviation pleasure flights have radios in our airplanes, either handheld or panel mounted. Don't be afraid to communicate.

2. Today we all have iPads loaded with several different flight planning applications. Some are free, while some require an annual subscription. If you have an iPad, use it every time you leave your home airport traffic area. Just because you have an iPad with GPS capabilities doesn't mean you should never bother with a paper map, or at least some sort of backup for navigation should your iPad fail.

3. Most every electronic flight application contains detailed information about the airport you are intending to fly to. Take several minutes and study that information. It may prevent you from creating a potentially serious problem at your destination.

4. Probably more important, though, is getting your head out of the cockpit and making visual scans. All the new fad electronics designed for improving safety have caused many pilots to fully depend on them and never look out the window. When doing this, situational awareness goes out the window.

Join me and all the other GA pleasure pilots and use your head and your eyeballs. Let's help make it safe for everyone to enjoy. Keep flying safely. EAA

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