

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR

AVOID MIDAIR COLLISIONS WITH CIVILIAN LIGHT

By Lt. Col. EDWARD H. LINCH III

Photo by JIM KOEPNIK



As a general aviation pilot, I fly through military operating areas! ... And since I use my global positioning system moving map display, I can fly right along the border of a restricted area. My Mode C altitude reading sometimes doesn't work, and I tend to turn my radio off for most of the flight. I rarely call air traffic control because I hate being vectored — too inconvenient. I've even flown from Oshkosh, Wis., to West Palm, Fla., without talking to a soul. I fly direct to save time and gas, and, yes, I'm 100 percent legal.

If you believe I'm a cowboy aviator, you're wrong. I fully fly and maintain my aircraft well within Federal Aviation Administration regulations, using airmanship skills developed and honed as an Air Force fighter pilot. Because of this, I'm more likely to go above and beyond what a typical general aviation pilot would do to stay out of your way.

Actually, the question should be directed at you, the military aviator: Are you looking for me as we share the skies safely?

I know a lot about you since I'm a military aviator, but do you know much about me? What do you know about the civilian aviator in a light aircraft?

I fly an experimental aircraft with a 23-foot wingspan at 150 knots. My aircraft is difficult to see both visually and on your radar. Sometimes I fly in formation with several aircraft — from fingertip to 6,000 to 9,000 feet line abreast with an altitude split. Or I could be flying single-ship doing aerobatics.

I hope you're visually looking for me and not just depending on your radar to find me and my friends. I'm usually flying between 3,000 and 10,000 feet as I cruise across the country. I would expect other light singles to be around the same altitudes, following roads and at speeds between 100 and 250 mph. For light twins, expect them

ME?

AIRCRAFT



Flying his experimental aircraft, Lt. Col. Edward Lynch III warns military pilots to watch out for civilian light aircraft like his "Van's RV-4," which has a top speed of 210 mph and is fully aerobatic. Such aircraft do fly in military operating areas. If the pilots aren't watching for each other, there is a high risk of a midair collision.

to be in the mid-teens. I also would plan on civilians not observing the existence of your military operating area (as I have had them blast right through the middle of my four-ship engagements in the past). You may never even see them since you are focused on air-to-air tactics versus visual search for a "bug smasher." (For more information, check out the above article titled "How to See and Avoid.")

Regardless of your ability to find me and your situational awareness, I'm looking for you! Among other things, I fly below your air-to-air floor, and check the outstanding flying safety Web site SEEandAVOID.org for any information regarding your airspace.

The Web site, started by the Air National Guard, promotes information exchange between civilian and military flying communities to reduce close calls and help eliminate midair collisions.

Nevertheless, not all civilian aviators are looking for you.

A high percentage of civilian pilots are not aware of military airspace information for a variety of reasons — lack of training, lack of information available, attitudes toward military airspace, ineffective midair collision avoidance programs at your base, and the list goes on.

I know what it's like to be on both ends of a close encounter. With experience in

fighters, experimental aircraft and airliners, I've seen a lot of near misses with other aircraft. In most cases, everyone was legal. The bottom line is you have to be vigilant as you share the skies safely with everyone. ... Your best friend could be the guy in the other aircraft.

Colonel Lynch is the chief of flight safety with 12th Air Force and Air Forces Southern at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz. He is a command pilot with more than 3,000 flying hours in the F-16 and F-111, including more than 150 combat hours. He also is a general aviation pilot. Mr. Koepnik is with the Experimental Aircraft Association, and the photograph is used with permission from the EAA.

HOW TO SEE AND AVOID

- 1.** Clear your flight path. If heads down, ensure your wingman is looking for threats (other traffic). Sounds like common sense, but it's easy to get a "helmet fire" and spend more time looking in the aircraft than out ... especially with all the new gadgets in modern cockpits. Below 10,000 feet and/or anywhere near an air traffic area, your cranium should be on a swivel — never focused inside the cockpit unless you have someone clearing for you.
- 2.** Use flight following when on a cross country or returning to base from the range or military operating area. But don't count on air traffic control to save you. You should be the one with the most situational awareness.
- 3.** Plan on civilians blasting through your operating area as a general rule of thumb, and have a plan for your knock-it-off.
- 4.** Don't intercept civilian aircraft unless specifically directed. I know it's tempting, but don't. Besides alarming the other pilot, you're most likely violating your own training rules.
- 5.** Speaking of training rules, Air Force Instruction 11-214 states to knock-it-off if "an un-briefed or unscheduled flight enters the working area and is detrimental to the safe conduct of the mission."
- 6.** Use sectional charts for your mission planning.
- 7.** Comply with the federal aviation regulations — speed and airspace restrictions. Don't go blasting through Class B airspace after cancelling instrumental flight rules as you enter a low-level route.
- 8.** Book your visual low-level route, and make your entry time.
- 9.** Keep your situational awareness high. Know where you are at all times. Six years ago a fighter pilot had a mid-air with a Cessna. Why? The fighter pilot had no situational awareness on where he was and blasted right through Class B and C airspace for two large airports.
- 10.** Report all close encounters via a Hazardous Air Traffic Report form. I'm positive there are many close encounters never reported. For our system to better accommodate civilian and military traffic, there needs to be data to substantiate the agenda to push for safety related issues.

— Lt. Col. Edward Lynch III