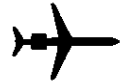


# Look Out!

by Jerry E. Tobias



One of the first differences I noticed between civilian and military flying when I began U. S. Air Force pilot training was the major emphasis placed on “see and avoid.” I was already familiar with the first training airplane (the Cessna T-41, which was similar to the 172 I’d flown in my college days - only with a Lycoming engine), but - admittedly - I was not at all accustomed to the constant clearing turns that were required when climbing to and descending from the practice areas. Those first T-41 check rides seemed to be more about how well we cleared than how well we flew the airplane. In hindsight, though, keeping our heads out of the cockpit was both good training and a very good idea, given the numbers of student pilots in the same approximate airspace at the same time.

Whether you fly military machines, air carrier or corporate jets, Bonanzas or J-3 Cubs, I would suggest that stopping to reconsider the importance of “see and avoid” is well worthwhile. Why? According to the AOPA’s aircraft accident database, there have been 82 midair collisions in the U. S. during the last ten years alone, more than half of which involved fatalities. That’s an average of about one midair every six weeks.

Why did that many pilots fly good airplanes into other good airplanes? Good question. The only common denominator is that - for whatever reason - the 164 (or more) pilots involved in those 82 collisions did not see and avoid. Of course, if you don’t *look*, you can neither see nor avoid.

Truth be told, many pilots have never formed (or, at least, do not practice) very good clearing or “looking” habits. Others relax their guard because of ATC and TCAS. Still others fly in areas where they assume that they are the only airplane within a couple hundred square miles or more. In any case, many pilots just don’t expect other airplanes to be much of a threat. That kind of thinking, though, needs to be changed.

Also contributing to the problem is new avionics technology that can “trap” a pilot’s attention inside the airplane. Take EFIS, Electronic Flight Instrument Systems, for example, which are now even offered on tail-draggers and available for homebuilts. Yes, the digital data, pictorial displays and situational awareness that EFIS systems provide are all amazing, but so is the power that these displays have to grip a pilot’s attention. The caution I would suggest within this context is that the acronym EFIS often also means “Eyes Focused InSide!”

The bottom line? Other airplanes *are* a real threat. Factors such as poor training, cockpit fixation, wrong assumptions and general complacency, however, negatively impact how effectively pilots see and avoid. As with most safety issues, being aware of the problem is the important first step. Taking that same awareness on every flight is what can help keep more pilots' names out of accident databases. And that is well worth doing. ■

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