
Attn Fellow Pilots,
NO PART 91 FLIGHT OPERATIONS ARE PERMITTED WITHIN A 25 NAUTICAL MILE RADIUS OF THE WASHINGTON/DCA/VOR/DME.
PART 135 OPERATIONS ONLY ARE PERMITTED AT GAI

ADJUSTING to a CHANGING WORLD

AOPA continues remembering, rebuilding, and restoring

BY JULIE SUMMERS WALKER

Like every other American and world citizen, you know exactly where you were and what you were doing on the morning of September 11, 2001. For the staff of AOPA, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 changed forever the way we conduct the business of protecting, preserving, and promoting general aviation.

Sleeping city

Yes, it was a crystal blue-sky morning outside of the nation's capital, where farmland meets concrete highway, which travels all of the way to the steps of the White House; where cows graze serenely next to the 1940s airport serving the commuter bedroom community of Frederick, Maryland. There was squabbling over a tower for the growing community. The two main arteries in and out of the burgeoning city—Interstate 270 and 70—still were not connected except by side roads. The world's largest general aviation organization was virtually unknown in its community.

Staff of the association come from all over the nation—and world. Yet many on staff are also local to the area. Some have aircraft housed in the hangars at Frederick Municipal Airport (FDK); most have either taken a first flight in a general aviation aircraft or come to the association with certificates in hand. And all of us recognize that the value of general aviation to the United States is reflected in their job security.

We felt fairly secure that September morning. In the Publications Division we were coffee klatching in our hallway but were brought up short by the news on our conference room television. We watched mesmerized and in tears as the events

ILLUSTRATION BY PETER HORVATH

in New York City and the nearby Pentagon unfolded. And then, at 9:40 a.m. on this incredibly beautiful day, the FAA air traffic control systems command center ordered all aircraft in the nation to land. And the skies went silent.

The horror and the tragedy of the loss of life, the fear and uncertainty of a nation besieged by terrorists, and the overwhelming desire to find and be near loved ones affected all of us. But as the first line of defense for our freedom to fly, we also had work to do and a nation with freedoms to defend.

Crisis control

AOPA's website was launched in 1995; *AOPA ePilot* was two years old. Although we effectively communicated to our members via our magazine, newsletters, and other traditional methods, 9/11 tested and strengthened our electronic communications. Within minutes of the attacks, aopa.org carried up-to-the-minute information on the status of GA—there were more than 1 million hits in the first week after the attacks. The website was the primary news source for pilots and the national media as well. *ePilot* issued nine special bulletins in the first few days after the attacks and then became our members' source for alerts, changes to air space, and temporary flight restrictions. AOPA's Pilot Information Center answered questions from some 1,600 members a day in the first week, nearly four times the usual call volume.

One of our boardrooms was set up much like a "war room" where staff met to plan, discuss, and execute our day-to-day strategies to get GA flying again.

AOPA also provided general aviation's side of the story to media outlets ranging from small newspapers to major television networks. We pointed reporters to GA business owners torn between patriotism and bankruptcy.

GA grounded

AOPA efforts to restore general aviation flying started just hours after the attacks. Two days after the FAA grounding, limited airline service was restored, and soon after that, the Bush administration announced that the "U.S. aviation system has been restored." But general aviation was still grounded and, in horror, we realized GA was taking the brunt of the fear the attacks had engendered. Were small airplanes now the terror of the skies?

Melissa Bailey Rudinger, AOPA senior vice president of government affairs,

Post 9/11 airspace/operating restrictions

By the AOPA Government Affairs division

General aviation access was restored slowly and incrementally over an extended period of time. Full (pre-9/11) restoration of general aviation access to the National Airspace System (NAS) never occurred. The following is a high-level review of the major airspace restrictions and operating limitations that AOPA was fighting against in the months following the attacks.

September 11, 2001: At 9:40 a.m. the FAA grounds all IFR and VFR air traffic. Only military aircraft and Air Force One are allowed to fly. All airborne traffic is instructed to land.

September 14, 2001: General aviation IFR operations may resume with some restrictions, including 25-nautical-mile no-fly zones around Washington, D.C., and New York. VFR operations are still prohibited. No international operations permitted (to/from the United States).

September 18, 2001: Agricultural aviation and aerial photo operations are permitted. VFR and international operations are still prohibited.

September 19, 2001: Limited VFR operations permitted. VFR is now permitted for U.S.-registered aircraft outside of enhanced Class B (ECB) airspace. ECB is defined as the airspace within the lateral limits of Class B airspace; Class B airspace overlies 30 major metropolitan areas in the United States. VFR flight training operations are still prohibited, as are banner-towing operations. In addition, a number of temporary flight restrictions (TFRs) remain in effect, including 25-nautical-mile no-fly zones over Washington, D.C., and New York. International operations still prohibited.

September 20, 2001: "Sporting event" TFR issued, prohibiting flight below 3,000 feet agl within a three-nautical-mile radius of "any major professional, collegiate, or high school sporting event or any other major open air assembly of people." The first indication that the FAA has again ceded control of the airspace is summed up in a statement from the FAA Air Traffic Division that "National Security Council insisted on this restriction."

September 22, 2001: Most flight training operations permitted. Some good news, the FAA approves resumption of most flight training activities—VFR flight training in non-turbojet aircraft and gliders weighing less than 12,500 pounds outside of ECB. Within ECB—with the exception of Boston, Washington, D.C., and New York—VFR flight training in single and multiengine piston powered aircraft under 6,000 pounds is permitted. International operations still prohibited.

October 21, 2001: FAA permits VFR operations in 27 of 30 ECB locations, subject to transponder requirement. Boston, Washington, D.C., and New York still restricted. International operations still prohibited.

October 30, 2001: At the insistence of NSC, the FAA issues a notam banning all general aviation operations within a 10-nautical-mile radius of 86 nuclear power plants and sites throughout the country. The notam effectively closes almost 100 public-use airports. There is much confusion created by the "nuclear" notam. Because the NRC database used to develop the notam contained errors, several nuclear facilities were excluded and some had incorrect location information. Compounding the problem, NRC would not release precise latitude/longitude data and pilots could not accurately plot the prohibited airspace.

November 6, 2001: The nuclear TFR expires and operations resume at 100 airports closed by the restrictions. There is a threat of it being reinstated, but it is not.

November 8, 2001: International operations still prohibited, but the FAA announces a waiver to allow Bahamas operations. U.S., Canadian, and Bahamian registered aircraft may now operate to/from Bahamas VFR. Operations to/from Canada and Mexico are also permitted.

November 26, 2001: The FAA issues a "blanket" waiver to allow VFR operations at four New York area airports. VFR with some restrictions is now allowed at Republic, Morristown, Caldwell, and Lincoln Park.

November 29, 2001: The FAA issues a "blanket" waiver allowing VFR flights to/from Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, and British Virgin Islands. This waiver is valid for all U.S., Bermuda, Cayman Island, British Virgin Islands, Canadian, Mexican, and Bahamian registered aircraft.

November 29, 2001: The FAA issues a "blanket" waiver restoring VFR flight privileges at Beverly, Hansom, and Norwood airports near Boston.

December 19, 2001: The FAA finally eliminates ECB nationwide, freeing airspace at 30 metropolitan areas nationwide. The FAA also reduced the size of the TFRs in Washington, D.C., and New York and added a very small TFR in Boston. AOPA declares this "the most significant step forward since initial resumption of limited VFR operations." A short list of tasks remains to restore full access to the NAS. Three Washington, D.C., area airports are still trapped under TFR and weight and class limitations on flight instruction aircraft remain. The FAA still limits flight instruction to single and multiengine, non-turbine aircraft weighing 12,500 pounds or less. And most international IFR and VFR operations are still prohibited.

February 14, 2002: The FAA issues a Special Federal Aviation Regulation that partially reopens the "D.C. Three" airports (College Park, Potomac Airfield, and Washington Executive Hyde Field). Only based aircraft may operate and pilots must complete security background checks and comply with special air traffic procedures. The FAA states that after a "procedural" evaluation period, transient operations will be considered. To date, that has not happened.

June 25, 2002: The FAA issues a series of security TFRs over national landmarks including the Statue of Liberty, Mt. Rushmore, and the Gateway Arch. Most remain in effect through July 4, 2002.

September 27, 2002: The FAA revises the "sporting event" TFR governing flight restrictions near large open-air events. The new notam is much easier to interpret and limits the restriction to Major League Baseball, NFL, NCAA Division 1A stadiums, and major speedways seating more than 30,000 people.

December 24, 2002: The FAA establishes three TFRs during the New Year holiday. TFRs are over Pasadena, California, midtown Manhattan, and the Statue of Liberty.

February 10, 2003: The FAA establishes a large flight restricted area called Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) around Washington, D.C. The ADIZ covers an approximately 30-nautical-mile radius of airspace around D.C. and requires that all aircraft operate on a flight plan, squawk a discrete transponder code, and establish two-way communication with air traffic control. There is also a no-fly zone established in the airspace within a 15-nautical-mile radius of D.C. (On December 16, 2008, the FAA issued a final rule to change the ADIZ to a Special Flight Rules Area.)

February 26, 2003: The FAA issues a notam warning pilots to not "loiter or circle" in the vicinity of nuclear power plants. TSA threatens to interrogate pilots who fly in a suspicious manner and to place the pilot's name in an incident database.

March 18, 2003: The FAA imposes ADIZ flight restriction in New York City. A 30-nautical-mile radius ADIZ is in effect with requirement for pilots to operate on a flight plan, with a discrete transponder code, and in two-way communication with air traffic control. The FAA also issues TFRs over Disney theme parks in Florida and California.

April 17, 2003: The FAA publishes the cancellation notam rescinding the New York City ADIZ and the downtown Chicago TFR following a statement from the TSA of reduced threat levels.

was then AOPA vice president of air traffic services. Shortly after the attacks, AOPA stationed her at FAA headquarters in Washington, D.C., where an air traffic situation room was established. She was there for six weeks—the only non-government representative—and worked with the FAA and Department of Defense to get GA flying again. She also helped resolve the hundreds of operational complaints that poured in each week and helped stranded aircraft across the nation.

"Please, please, please contact me if members receive conflicting information from FSS or ATC," Rudinger emailed staff at AOPA from the situation room. "The communication on these and other procedures is broken! That is one of the reasons I am here, to relay accurate information and attempt to fix the communications problems. Relying on FSS and ATC will result in chaos and inaccurate or even dangerous information dissemination."

In the weeks following the attacks, forces in the government were working hard to ground GA permanently or severely restrict our freedom to fly. By late September the situation was dire. There was a looming threat of permanent prohibited airspace over every major metropolitan area, professional sports stadium, nuclear power plant, military installation, oil refinery, and reservoir. A notam was being crafted, and the government was poised to send a registered letter to every pilot in the United States notifying pilots of the proposed restrictions and their implementation.

"Fortunately, AOPA's hard work was reaping rewards and the government eventually abandoned plans for such drastic actions," said Rudinger. "While we continue to this day in our fight against unnecessary security rules, we have come a very long way since those dark days of 2001."

Hardest hit

Flight school operators and FBO owners at first found the shutdown of air traffic and airports "understandable" and "a small price to pay." But as others returned to work and regained a sense of normalcy, many small aviation businesses found it impossible to do so. The ban on VFR flights left flight schools unable to conduct most daily flights in the week following the attacks. Restrictions to Part 91 IFR flights hampered instrument training,

while private and commercial training came to a standstill.

For cash-strapped flight schools, closure of more than a week meant the end. Often working on thin margins, small staffs, and limited resources—and now facing a crippled economy, uncertainty, restrictions, and the unfortunate fact that the terrorists had trained in U.S. flight schools—many schools found it nearly impossible to recover.

"While the impact to all Americans can't be overstated, the flight training industry in this country was hit particularly hard after 9/11. And unfortunately it has yet to fully bounce back," said *Flight Training* Deputy Editor Ian J. Twombly. "Sure, schools were allowed to start flying soon after the attacks, but the damage was done. Many flight schools operate on razor-thin margins and the combination of the down time and the confusion that immediately followed the approval to begin flying again meant that many schools simply didn't make it past the initial event. Since then, the flight training industry has been dealt blow after blow: We trained the terrorists; people were in a general malaise and not interested in avocational activities; the economy tanked; and restrictions followed restrictions. The U.S. student pilot population is still down by tens of thousands from pre-9/11 levels, and there's doubt whether it will ever come back."

AOPA is currently hard at work on our largest initiative to date—the AOPA Flight Training Student Retention Initiative. This is a long-term, industry-wide effort dedicated to increasing the percentage of students who earn a pilot certificate. Facilitating a positive flight training experience will help student pilots achieve their goals while growing the pilot population and strengthening general aviation. The association is creating resources designed to help student pilots, instructors, and flight schools get the most out of the flight training experience (www.aopa.org/ftinitiative).

General aviation is an economic engine that pumps $150 billion into the U.S. economy each year and creates 1.2 million jobs.

Contributing to the rebuild

Because we are pilots representing pilots, general aviation and its restoration became our focus after the terrorist attacks. But we are also members of the free world and recognize that keeping our country safe is everyone's responsibility.

"The single most important security enhancement that grew from the aftereffects of 9/11 is AOPA's Airport Watch program," said Rudinger. Congress established the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) after the 9/11 attacks. The TSA partnered with AOPA in 2006 and 2007 to promote AOPA's nationwide aviation watch system that was first created in March 2003, which is supported by a centralized toll-free hotline. "Not only does Airport Watch demonstrate that the GA community is serious about protecting itself from those who would do harm, it provides a great tool for educating security agencies and government officials on the value of partnering with GA to protect and preserve the industry," said Rudinger.

Airport Watch (www.aopa.org/airportwatch) uses more than 600,000 pilots as the eyes and ears for reporting suspicious activity at airports across the country. It received federal funding beginning in 2006. AOPA designed a course with guidelines to help pilots help enhance GA security (flash.aopa.org/asf/gasecurity).

An image problem

The restrictions and unfounded fears surrounding general aviation after the attacks pointed out that GA had an image problem. Testifying before the House of Representatives two weeks after the attacks, then-AOPA President Phil Boyer said to other GA representatives at the witness table, "Shame on us. Perhaps if we had been more vocal about the value of this important segment of aviation, we wouldn't be here now, arguing the case for fewer airspace restrictions."

General aviation is an economic engine that pumps $150 billion into the U.S. economy each year and creates 1.2 million jobs. But at a time when GA should have been part of the solution, we were considered part of the problem. From that realization was born the GA Restoration Fund and its accompanying

GA security initiatives since 9/11

Many, many security initiatives and changes have been created and put into place since the terrorist attacks. These are several that impact everyone in general aviation:

Recurrent Security Awareness Training—Requires flight instructors to undergo annual recurrent security awareness (September 2004).

Flight Training Security—Non-U.S. citizens must undergo fingerprint background check and be approved by the TSA (September 2004).

Pilot Identification—FAA mandates that pilots in command must have in their possession a government-issued photographic ID along with their pilot certificate (October 2002). Department of Transportation issues new difficult-to-counterfeit plastic pilot certificates replacing paper ones (July 2003). FAA develops rule and process for "picture ID" pilot certificate (January 2005). All pilots must have obtained a plastic certificate by March 31, 2010.

AOPA's Airport Watch—Based on neighborhood watch program calling for pilots to "Lock Up and Look Out" (February 2002).

GA Secure Hotline—AOPA's Airport Watch is supported by a toll-free national government hotline (1-866-GA-SECURE) to report suspicious activity (November 2002).

Twelve-Five Standard Security Program (TFSSP)—Aircraft more than 12,500 pounds follow prescribed security measures, including criminal background checks on their flight crews and vetting of passengers (February 2002).

TSA-Proposed Large Aircraft Security Program (LASP)—TSA extends security requirements to all aircraft owners and operators using aircraft that weigh more than 12,500 pounds (October 2008). Currently under review; expected to be published in the Federal Register for public comment December 2011.

Aircraft Registry—All aircraft owners are required to register their aircraft every three years (October 2010).

message that "GA Serves America." The ongoing effort reaches out to the American public and government officials and launched a public education program on the value of GA. High-profile actors such as Harrison Ford and Morgan Freeman are featured spokespersons. *AOPA Pilot* has run a continuing series of articles on these pages highlighting the myriad businesses—from wineries to welders, police and fire and rescue, and disaster relief aid such as during the Gulf oil spill and the hurricane in Haiti—that depend on GA to thrive.

The formation of the GA caucuses in the House and Senate—128 representatives and 33 senators are members—ensures that GA's concerns are considered and valued by the people who run the government.

Never the same

Frederick, site of AOPA headquarters, lies 15 miles southeast of the presidential retreat at Camp David in Thurmont, Maryland. For months after the attacks, and each time the president visited the camp, F-16 fighters patrolled the skies. We lay awake listening to the unfamiliar drone, missed it when it went away, and now react with concern when we hear it infrequently now. Two uninformed pilots wandered into the restricted airspace at Washington, D.C., and were grounded and arrested at Frederick Municipal Airport. The historic airports around the D.C. area, the "D.C. Three"—College Park, Potomac Airfield, and Washington Executive Hyde Field—were shut down until February 14, 2002, and still have restrictions placed upon them.

As this story goes to press, the control tower at FDK is set to open this month, interstates 270 and 70 have been connected, and AOPA—through its national efforts in the media and its embrace of the local community it inhabits—is known as the world's largest aviation organization not only to its members, but to the world. We protected the rights of GA pilots after the most unimaginable events of this century; we're preserving GA by undertaking the largest initiative we've ever tackled—the AOPA Flight Training Student Retention Initiative; and we're promoting the joy of flying general aviation. We are prepared to embrace this new world—but we will never forget. AOPA

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