

# Don't Worry About That C-5 in Front—They Must Be Circling To Land

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It was a normal preflight, just like the many others we'd done during our detachment to a foreign airfield. The planeside brief was complete, and we were copying down the ATIS information. Information "Alpha" was current, reporting the winds 140-to-160 degrees, 5-to-10 knots and runway 28 left active. Before taxiing, we contacted Metro to update the weather forecast; we were going to take off at maximum recommended gross weight (135K). Metro reported the winds 140 degrees at 10 knots. I was the pilot at the controls. We started the engines and got taxi clearance for runway 28 left, the duty runway. However, because of the unfavorable winds and our weight, we asked for departure on runway 10 right. Subsequently, our requested taxi clearance was granted for runway 10 right.

As we taxied, we completed all our takeoff preparations, and the crew was ready to go. We approached the hold-short, contacted tower on VHF No. 1, and requested our IFR release.

Tower said, "Line up and wait, runway ten right." Having the luxury of an extra VHF radio in our aircraft, we had already been monitoring the approach-departure frequency on VHF No. 2. As a result, we were aware of a C-5 on approach to runway 28 left, between 1 and 7 nm away.

After getting our lineup instructions, we saw the C-5 on approach approximately 12 nm to the reciprocal runway, 28 left. Awaiting takeoff clearance, we assumed that the C-5 was going to circle to land on runway 10 right, based on the current winds and the fact that tower had cleared us to lineup. After a short delay on the runway, tower cleared us for takeoff.

We reviewed our takeoff performance numbers and then began our near-fatal takeoff roll, ignoring the hard-to-miss C-5 in front of us.

At approximately 90 knots with 5,500 feet of runway remaining, I watched the C-5, then 3 to 4 miles in front of us, continue its descent for landing. Realizing the imminent danger, I initiated an abort. Concurrently, the tower told us to "Abort takeoff." Also, the approach-departure controller directed the C-5, now on short final, to "execute missed approach."

We taxied clear of the runway, composed ourselves, and taxied back to the approach end of runway 10 right for an uneventful takeoff. Meanwhile, the C-5 circled south of the field and executed a visual approach to runway 28 left.

After this unnerving incident, we conducted an in-depth investigation to understand this incident. The approach-departure controller had cleared the C-5 to land on runway 28 left without authorization from the tower, while they simultaneously granted the tower permission to release us for takeoff from runway 10 right. In doing so, the approach-departure controller didn't recognize the imminent conflict between the opposing C-5 and us. Ultimately, the foreign ATC review board found the approach-departure controller at fault and suspended him indefinitely.

Armed with this information, I felt like justice had been served. The controller was responsible for placing us in a near-fatal position. However, once I thought about it, I felt silly. How could I have ever dreamt of taking the runway and starting takeoff roll without clarifying with the tower that the C-5, a hard aircraft to miss, was in fact going to circle to land. This entire incident could have been avoided if I, or another flight station crew member, had insisted on clarifying the C-5's intentions. It would have only taken a second to query the tower controller before ever taking the runway. It was a tough, embarrassing lesson for everyone, especially me. 