

# That Guy Is Going

# to Land!



By LCdr. Paul V. Neuzil

Last October, the operations and maintenance officer told me to take a crew to Greenville, S.C. We were to pick up the squadron's newest AIP aircraft. It was being modified at the Lockheed facility at the Donaldson Center.

As any good pilots would do, we began our research into the type of airfield and local area where we would operate. Being the senior pilot and having experience flying out of this area, I took the lead in briefing and preparing the crew. We looked up the airport information, approaches to the Donaldson Center and the surrounding airfields. We'd be landing at an uncontrolled civilian facility. This meant we would operate jointly with civilian aircraft under rules we were not used to but certainly trained to follow.

After arriving at the field, we consulted with

Lockheed-operations personnel concerning the local area and airfield-flight rules. We also talked with the airport-facility manager and the local FBOs on the type of traffic we likely would encounter. From my experience as a training-command-instructor pilot, I knew our crew was thoroughly prepared, and they had completed a solid operational-risk-management brief. We were ready to operate out of this airfield.

After the inspections and ground turns were completed, we went on a functional-check flight. It went without a hitch, and all the aircraft systems were working.

We headed back to the Donaldson Center, and I was confident the most difficult part of our flight was complete. What could go wrong? I even put the third pilot in the left seat, and I was the copilot in the right. This meant I would talk to the controllers and other aircraft on arrival at Greenville. We received radar vectors to final for the ILS and were approximately 20 miles from the field.



Photo by Matthew J. Thomas  
Modified

I had one radio tuned to approach and simultaneously was monitoring the unicom frequency. I heard two civilian aircraft in the local pattern. I briefed the flight crew about the traffic and asked them to keep an eye out. I also knew I had another civilian aircraft behind me on approach.

We were cleared for the approach and were told to contact the unicom frequency. Since we had clear weather with unlimited visibility, I canceled my IFR clearance and closed out my flight plan while on approach at 10 miles. I had a visual on the two aircraft in the pattern and wanted to tell them my intentions. At 10 miles, I made my first unicom call. I coordinated our landing with both aircraft. At five miles and on short final, I made the required radio calls and was rogered by the other two aircraft.

The landing went smoothly, except we landed a little long, which meant we would have to roll to the end and taxi back 4,000 feet on the runway to our turn off. Again, I coordinated this with the two aircraft in the pattern, and they flew an

extended downwind, allowing me to turn around and taxi back. I also received a call from the civilian Learjet behind me on approach that he was 10 miles out and had me in sight.

We turned around and proceeded back to our turnoff. I had the pilot expedite his taxi back on the runway to help with the traffic in the pattern. When we were 2,000 feet down the runway, I noticed an aircraft on left base. It made a turn to final for landing on the same runway on which we were back-taxiing. I felt that sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, as I realized he was going to land. I made a quick (OK, frantic) call on the unicom frequency to alert the pilot that I still was on the runway. There was no reply, and the aircraft continued for the runway. While I looked for an out, I told the pilot to turn left onto an old taxiway that was just big enough for a Cessna but an extremely tight fit for a P-3. Upon turnoff, I told the flight engineer to secure our outboard engines to prevent damage. Meanwhile, the Cessna landed and turned off at the taxiway that we should have used. We continued to taxi, turned around at the local FBO, and once again unsuccessfully tried to communicate with the aircraft. We then taxied to the Lockheed facility without further incidents.

Operations at uncontrolled airfields always should raise the hair on the back of your neck. You can do everything by the book and still have an incident. You never know what that other person will do, so plan for the best, but be prepared for the worst. In this case, we had a civilian pilot who did not talk on the radio and landed with another aircraft on the runway. This is yet another reason we need to keep our heads on the swivel and heed the see-and-avoid doctrine. 

LCdr. Neuzil flies with VP-47.

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