

Mike Goulian Aviation Pro Tip of the Month - Defensive Flying by CFII John Drennan

Imagine this - You're flying into an uncontrolled field that's notorious for having unpredictable traffic. With heavy flight training and parachute operation, airplanes often choose to fly patterns to different runways at the same time.

While you and three other aircraft are in the pattern for runway 14, a fast-moving twin calls a two mile straight in for the crossing runway 07. As you turn final, you hear, "Cirrus on final, the Twin will land 07 and hold short of runway 14." While a myriad of thoughts on what could happen go through your head- "What if we both have to go around?" "What if he doesn't land and hold short in time?", you continue your approach, land, and taxi off safely without any hiccups.

How do you feel about putting the safety of your flight in another pilot's hands? Do you have an alternate plan ready for unforeseen circumstances that may/may not be in your control?

DEFENSIVE FLYING

Defensive flying is being prepared for another pilot to do something unexpected, such as a runway incursion, not following right-of-way rules, taxiing onto the runway for takeoff while you are on short final, failing to comply with Land and Hold Short instructions, anticipating the possibility of encountering another aircraft when crossing a VOR, among other possibilities. Defensive flying could also mean giving way to another aircraft even if you have the right of way.

A perfect example of this is the most recent midair collision in California. A brief explanation of this incident is a fast-flying multi engine Cessna 310 overtook a slower single engine Cessna 152. While there are many other factors that led to this collision, situational awareness may have been a big one. A prime example of this is that shortly after the faster 310 called "Three Mile Final," the slower 152 called their base turn. It is unknown why the 152 decided to turn base inside the 310. However, had the pilot waited to turn behind the 310, both planes would have been in a position with safer options should a conflict arise.

Defensive flying also means being prepared to deal with unexpected situations not involving other aircraft. One that comes to mind for anyone who has been in that situation is dealing with an engine failure in any phase of flight. A thorough takeoff briefing is one such tool that can alleviate further stress and confusion. We set a plan of action in place, so we know exactly how to get ourselves out of a potentially hazardous situation. Included in our takeoff brief is a selection of altitudes and what they allow us to do. Under 600' AGL we land forward. This sets in motion that upon engine failure, your way out is to get the airplane on the ground. Then 600'AGL to 2000'AGL your way out is pulling CAPS immediately and worrying about everything else post deployment. Finally above 2000'AGL troubleshoot your problem first and then pull CAPS if needed. Reading that little paragraph prior to departure subconsciously sets in motion your plan to **Fly Defensively**.

Flying Defensively is a topic that is not talked about much directly in aviation. However, it plays a vital role in the Aeronautical Decision-Making process. Developing the habit of defensive flying will add to your sense of confidence and make you a safer pilot.