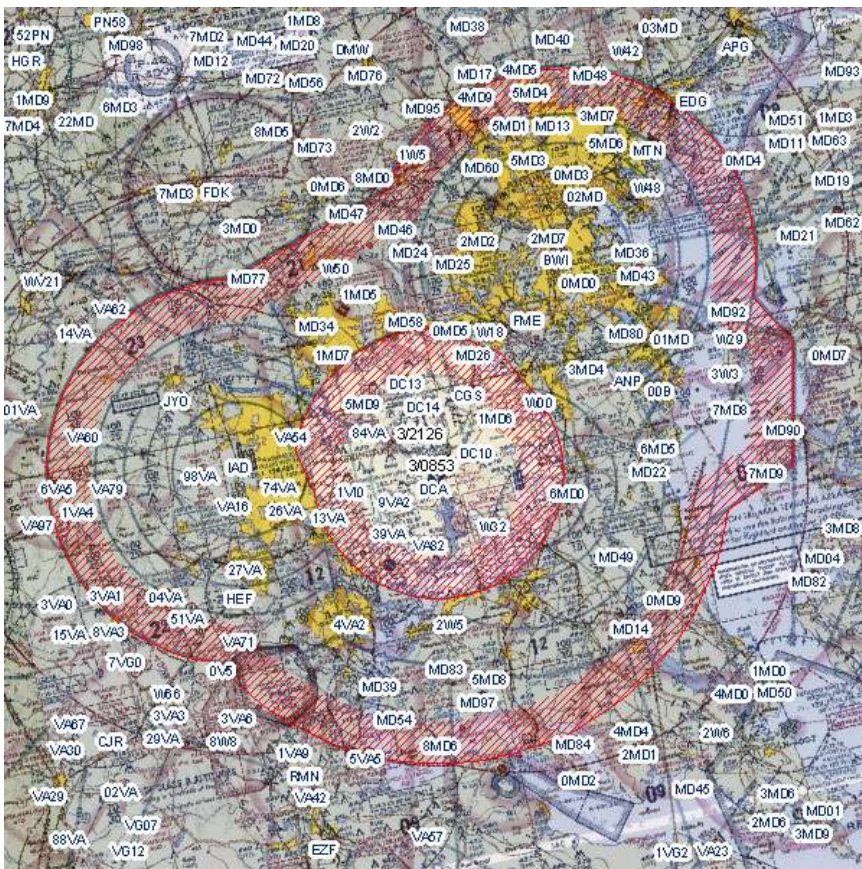


Flying in the Washington DC Area ADIZ

by Mark Smith

On September 11, 2001, a group of fanatics took over four large jet airliners. Two were intentionally flown into the World Trade Center towers in New York City, bringing down both, killing thousands of men, women, and children in the process. Another was flown into the pentagon causing major damage and killing others. The last one crashed into the Pennsylvanian terrain after a brief struggle with passengers and crew.

This story is not about these flights, at least not directly. The details of that day described above are mentioned to drive home the seriousness of our national response. Our government has taken many measures which it believes will result in, among other things, a safer environment for passengers and crew in the skies and for objects and people on the ground.



Many pilots across the United States have seen some changes to procedures and, to be sure, these procedures will likely change over time. One of the procedures instituted was the creation of the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in places within our national boundaries and Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFR's) over key areas. One of those areas is over Washington, DC.¹

The Washington, DC area includes four large airports (class-B), including Washington Dulles International Airport ([KIAD](#)), Reagan National Airport ([KDCA](#)), Baltimore-Washington International Airport ([KBWI](#)), and Andrews Air Force Base ([KADW](#)).

Andrews is an active AFB and is usually off limit for civilians. National is currently covered by a long standing TFR disallowing non-scheduled traffic into it (3/0853).²

Three GA airports are within this TFR and have been severely hamstrung by the restrictions. FBO's have been forced to close down and other local businesses suffered greatly. These are the so called DC3, College Park [KCGS](#) (the longest continually operating airport in the world, home of the Wright brothers military showcase airport), Potomac Airfield ([KVXK](#)), and Washington Executive Hyde ([W32](#)).

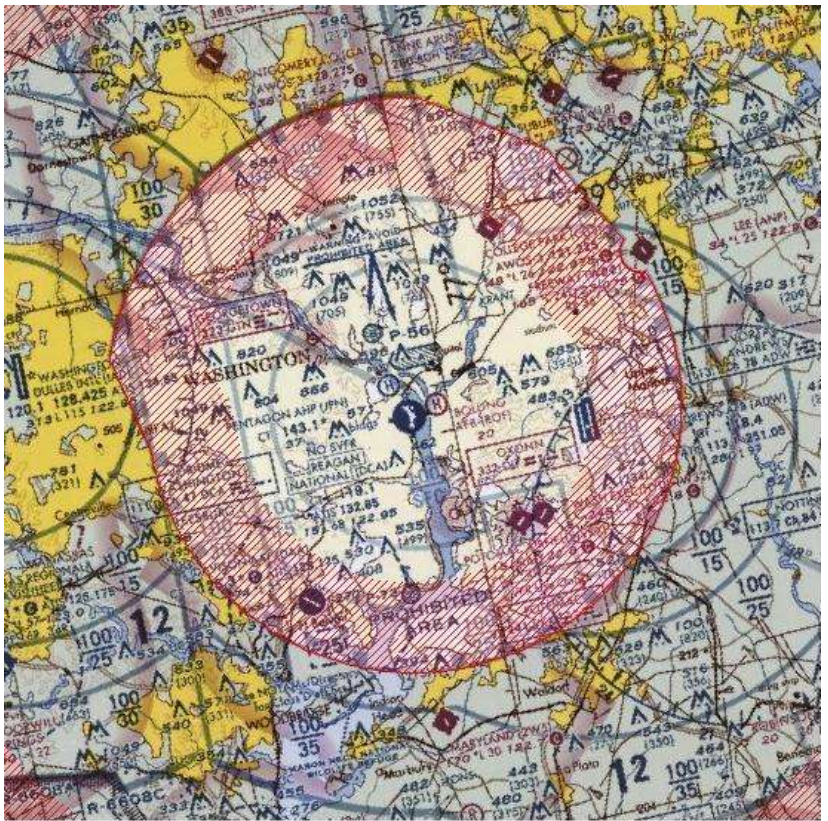
¹The FAA graphics depicting this can be found at: http://tfr.faa.gov/tfr/jsp/save_pages/detail_3_2126.html

²The FAA graphic depicting this can be found at: http://tfr.faa.gov/tfr/jsp/save_pages/detail_3_0853.html

That leaves several airports that are within the ADIZ umbrella, but are outside of the TFR. These GA airports include Leesburg, VA ([KJYO](#)), Gaithersburg, MD ([KGAI](#)), and Manassas, VA ([KHEF](#)). Flying in and out of these airports are the topic of this story. There are some very specific rules when flying in or out of them. Break any of them, and you may find yourself on the wrong side of a gunship very quickly.

In fact, write-up's of pilots happen here very frequently. The weekend of April 17, 2004, saw 17 unauthorized incursions into the ADIZ and nearby prohibited airspaces. It is a region of fast moving rules some of which don't make much sense so it's important to get a thorough briefing when entering or leaving the area.

With regards to making sense: when the ADIZ was first instituted, it was mandated that a pilot always be in communication with ATC while in the air. To a non-pilot, that sounded practical, but in practice, it's makes non-towered airport much more dangerous as no one would have been able to make positional calls on CTAF. Thankfully, [AOPA](#) has been working tirelessly in trying to force sense into the rules.



A small note should be inserted here to say that the steps that are being laid out below are for flying VFR into the region. If you are flying IFR into the region, the steps are far easier. In fact, the only thing you **MUST** do is to never, ever fly with a squawk code of 1200. To do so, even for a few moments will invite a mandatory write-up with stiff penalties.

Besides any other normal steps you take before flying, it is imperative that you get notams as close to departure as is practical. For those of us based at Leesburg, it is quite convenient as the [Leesburg FSS](#) for the region is located on the field and is quite happy to take walk-in customers. If you're in the air for any length of time while traveling towards the DC area, you should make time to check notams with FSS along your route of flight.

The next step is to file an ADIZ flight plan. This flight plan is an odd one. It is not like anything you've ever filed before. Because of this, you should file it with [Leesburg FSS](#) if practical. Other FSS regions can file it, but don't be sure it'll be done correctly. FSS's that are geographically near have a better chance of doing it correctly ([Altoona FSS](#) comes to mind), but the further away you're coming from, the less likely they're going to get it right.

For one thing, the VFR flight plan, must be put into the system with the IFR box checked. To distinguish this from an actual IFR flight plan, it will have the descriptor ***ADIZ*** attached to it in the comment box. This is done so that the FSS computers will route the flight plan to ATC. If you recall, VFR flight plans are normally handled by FSS's, but they're not the entities which will be handling traffic in the air, so that's not possible in this case.

For another, an ADIZ flight plan is just that, a flight plan. You will never be given a *clearance* for the ADIZ. The requirements for flying in that airspace is having an ADIZ flight plan, a squawk code, and be in communication with ATC. A clearance would imply something that ATC has not granted to you. You are not cleared into any Class-B airspace, you are only permitted to navigate within the ADIZ.

Another oddity of the ADIZ flight plan is that you are not permitted to file it via electronic means. You must either walk in to the FSS and file in person, or you must file it via a telephone. Filing via DUATS or other electronic means is not permitted.

An ADIZ flight plan is NOT a VFR flight plan. If you have a VFR flight plan on file and it is activated, you will also require an ADIZ flight plan. That is you'll be needing two flight plans. If you're flying IFR that flight plan by itself will be sufficient. An IFR flight plan meets the requirement of having established communication and a squawk code whereas a VFR flight plan does not.

An ADIZ flight plan only covers the ADIZ area. For instance, if you're flying in from Lunken, OH ([KLUK](#)) to Leesburg, VA and you're using a VFR flight plan, you'll file a VFR plan from KLUK to KJYO, activate it in the normal way and cancel it in the normal way. In addition, you'll also need to file an ADIZ flight from the nearest entrance point to the ADIZ. In this case, perhaps Winchester, WV ([KOKV](#)) would do for this purpose. You will also file an ADIZ flight plan from KOKV to KJYO. The ADIZ flight plan will be activated by ATC while in the air. Do NOT penetrate the ADIZ airspace without first getting a squawk code. You will be visited by the secret service after landing and/or forced to land by a gunship. Stiff penalties will be applied.

An ADIZ flight plan does not need to be canceled. It is automatically canceled for you some time after you land. Keeping that in mind, if you land and you take off again some time later, you may be in violation and will be asked to land. If you plan on landing and taking off again such as you would be doing for flight training, it doesn't hurt to make specific mention of that in the comment box.

A word of warning about agencies involved in monitoring the area. ATC is using radar with a nine second sweep, but there are a number of other agencies in the area who are actively monitoring air traffic that have different types of equipment. They take their job very seriously and have a hot-line to ATC. If they find any rule broken, they'll call up ATC. If ATC doesn't have an answer, the pilot must be written up. It's always in your favor to let ATC know what you're up to. Even brushing up against the side of the airspace requires a mandatory write-up. It's recommended that you keep 5nm outside of the airspace you wish to avoid. Many violators had been navigating with GPS's and thought they were outside of the ADIZ. Surprisingly, you may be written up even if you are outside of the ADIZ. If their radar system says you are, even if you are not, it's an uphill battle to prove yourself.

With all this talk of gunships and being forced to land, it should also be noted that you must be aware of intercept procedures (you are reminded of this in a notam). If you're not up on this, pick up a FAR/AIM and read it. You're best bet (also by notam) is to always monitor 121.5 while in the ADIZ. A gunship will try to communicate to you on this frequency first (or so I have been told).

If you are taking off inside the ADIZ, you must have a squawk code activated before taking off. To get one, you can contact clearance delivery on the ground. Communications to get one is slightly different than getting an IFR clearance. A typical conversation for me while taking off from JYO is as follows (FRQ: 118.55):

Aircraft: Potomac Clearance, Comanche 8351P on the ground at Leesburg, requesting ADIZ activation.

ATC: November 8351P squawk 1234, frequency 126.1

Aircraft: Squawk 1234, frequency 126.1

ATC: readback correct

and the last statement may or may not be omitted. If it's a beautiful sunny weekend after a few rainy ones, it may take a while to get through the queue. This is not an IFR clearance so you will never receive a release time, a void time, or a clearance.

The only other thing the controller may ask of you is to tell him when you're done with the squawk code. If it's a really busy weekend, they may use up their allotment of squawk codes and would appreciate the explicit release of a code. This doesn't happen very frequently though and they will ask you to do so if they feel it is necessary. Don't offer your cancellation unless they ask for it because the airwaves and ATC work loads are already too high.

After this brief communication, set your squawk code, and get ready to switch frequencies. A frequent operation is to handle it exactly like you would handle a normal frequency switch. Personally, I setup the active frequency for my COM#1 with the CTAF at my Leesburg (122.975) and the stand-by for COM#1 with the ATC assigned frequency. Then take off normally. When you start to leave the pattern, contact ATC as a normal frequency change. For me, it looks something like this:

Aircraft: Leesburg traffic, Comanche 8351P, departing to the North

Then, I hit the frequency flip/flop button on my COM#1, wait to see if there's anyone else talking, then continue:

Aircraft: Potomac Departure, Comanche 8351P off Leesburg, 1400 feet

ATC: 8351P, Remain VFR

Aircraft: Wilco

In the Leesburg area, 1400 is about the highest you can go without penetrating the class-B airspace above me. At comanche speeds, you're out of the neighborhood quite quickly.

Upon leaving the airspace, your controller will most likely notify you:

ATC: N8351P, you are departing the ADIZ, squawk 1200, Frequency change approved

Aircraft: 1200

If the controller doesn't contact you, don't switch frequencies early and by all means do not switch to 1200. To do so, will invite a mandatory writeup with stiff fines. If you're unsure, wait; then when you're sure, wait another mile. You can't get written up for keeping a code for too long.

Flying into the ADIZ is, unfortunately, a harder prospect, but luckily, not much. The hard part is that you have to get the attention of a controller before entering the airspace and the controller must find your paper work. You should do this more than a few miles outside of the airspace.

Nevertheless, the basic problem is this: you are required to have an ADIZ flight plan on file. ATC will look for this flight plan. Unfortunately, since it's not entirely compatible with the way they have always done things, it may get delayed or mishandled by their computer system in one way or another. It's not atypical to be forced to orbit while they're looking for the proper paperwork. Be patient. They do not like being the cops in the sky any more than you like being delayed. The traffic in the area can be horrendous on a beautiful weekend and they're terribly overworked.

One particular issue to be aware of is that if you're arriving from the north, the ADIZ flight plan will be automatically transmitted to the New York Center computers and not to the Washington Center computers. The flight service specialist taking the ADIZ flight plan should enter a note that the flight plan must be transmitted to Washington Center. You can save some orbit time by gently reminding the agent of this.

On the occasions that I was forced to orbit, I was able to convince them that I did in fact have an ADIZ flight plan on file. In this case, they gave me a squawk code thus allowing me in. If it turned out that I did not have a flight plan on file and someone checked (perhaps some of the 3-letter acronym agencies monitoring the airspace), I would be liable for stiff penalties.

A communication with ATC asking for ADIZ penetration might look something like the following. To determine the correct frequency, use the Washington Terminal Area Chart (TAC). I find that the frequency is often wrong, so make sure you call in with plenty of time to get the right frequency.

Aircraft: Potomac Approach, Comanche 8351P off of Winchester, requesting ADIZ activation
ATC: squawk 1234
Aircraft: 1234

Please note, as said earlier, there is no clearance to enter the ADIZ. Once you have your squawk code and have established communications, you should proceed to your destination. Again, unless you have explicitly been granted class-B airspace penetration, don't enter it. As always, if unsure, ask. Many controllers will remind you to stay clear of the class-B airspace as well.

As an interesting note, if you're coming from the northeast to an airport on the south side of the ADIZ, or if you're coming from the south and south east to an airport on the north, you may be asked to fly what was the VFR corridor between National (KDCA) and Dulles (KIAD). Okay, it's not a VFR corridor any more, nor can it be, but your route will take you within a few feet of the TFR. It is a good idea to stay alert during this transition. The controller will get written up for giving you directions which penetrate the TFR, but the pilot will also be held responsible. If in doubt, ask. If you're sure you're going to penetrate the TFR, give ATC enough notice to take corrective measures. This corridor can be busy with a parade of heavy's a few thousand feet over your head flying right hand patterns for 01R.

When approaching your airport destination, call up ATC and let them know you have it in sight. At that point, you will be directed to change your frequency to CTAF (or tower), but you will be reminded once again to not change your squawk code until on the ground. Once you have changed frequency, arrive normally. There is no need to cancel your ADIZ flight plan.

If the frequency is very congested, it is possible that the controller will merely state something like the following:

ATC: 8351P, understand that you have Leesburg in site, frequency change approved, keep your squawk code until on the ground

Aircraft: 51P

Obviously this is non-standard as the aircraft did not initiate the call with *Leesburg in site*, but it does get the job done. If you get close to your destination and would like to switch frequencies to start making position reports, do so by first asking.

Aircraft: Approach, 8351P is within 6 miles of Gaithersburg, but still don't have it in sight, would like to switch to CTAF

ATC: 8315P, frequency change approved, keep your squawk code until on the ground

The tendency is to want to continue to talk to ATC, but this is unsafe as ATC is not providing a separation service to other VFR traffic particularly near pattern altitudes.

When dealing with towered airports ([KHEF](#)) within the ADIZ, life is a little bit easier. You can get a squawk code on the ground without having to go through a ground outlet--just talk to clearance (in the case of Manassas that would be ground). All the normal rules still apply for a class-D airspace. When arriving, make sure you contact them before entering their airspace. Approach will make this easy by assigning their frequency to you. Again, you must not change your squawk code until after you have all wheels on the ground.

So, in a nutshell,

1. you must have an ADIZ flight plan on file from an entrance point to an exit point;
2. you must have an ATC assigned squawk code anytime you're in the air;
3. you must be in two-way communication except for maneuvering near untowered airports at which point you're supposed to be communicating on the CTAF for the airport;
4. getting the right frequency can be a difficult, do your homework before getting to the point of using certain frequencies
5. get all current notams

There are some new [AOPA](#) instigated procedures which are supposed to streamline this process. It involves using a standard squawk code for leaving the area, but I have not ever used it and will not comment any further on it.

Mark Smith is the owner of a PA24-250 which is based at Leesburg, VA ([KJYO](#)). He can be reached at mark@winksmith.com for further comment. Please note, that the methods and experiences described here for me as of the time of this writing. Conditions can change and do quite frequently, so nothing beats the efforts of a current CFI and up to date information.

