**Restrictions and Regulations: How 9/11 Impacted DC General Aviation**

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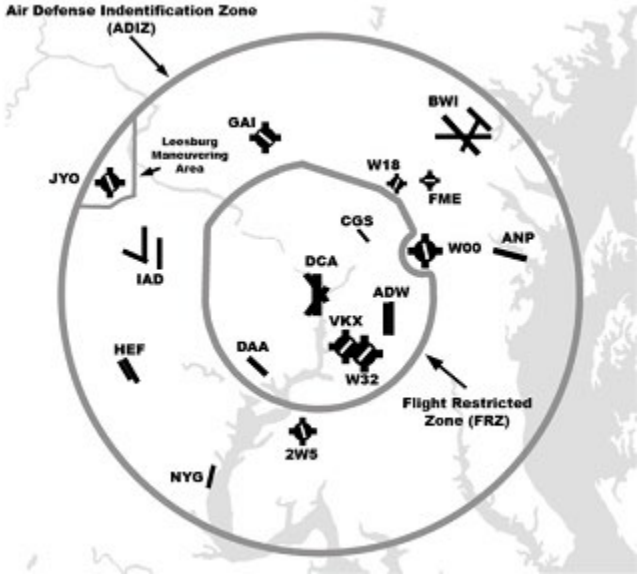
On September 11, 2001, Flight 11, crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center at 8:46 am, and 17 minutes later at 9:03 am, Flight 175, crashed into the South Tower, changing the United States forever. Immediately after the attacks, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) quickly rushed to ground all planes in the US airspace, and by 9:45 am, the FAA shut down the national airspace. The federal government worked to strengthen national security, realizing possible security threats in aviation. As a result, American aviation changed forever. Airports and commercial flights began to reopen two days later on September 13, but with stricter security policies and checks. However, general aviation (GA) operations took longer to resume, especially those around DC. The closure of GA airports negatively impacted the industry, and GA airports around DC are still affected by it today, two decades after the attacks.

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) defines general aviation as "all civilian flying except for scheduled passenger airline service." General aviation accounts for more than 65 percent of flights in the US and more than 90 percent of registered aircraft.[1] Three out of four takeoffs and landings in the US are from GA aircraft.[2] General aviation encompasses a wide range of aircraft, including small single-engine airplanes, large cargo jets, helicopters, gliders, and powered parachutes. Civil aviation activities include crop dusters, Medevac aircraft, police aviation, firefighting aircraft, sailplanes, air carters, and more.




ADIZ and FRZ Photo: Federal Aviation Administration

On September 14, the federal government established a 25 nautical miles radius no-fly zone, known as the Flight Restricted Zone (FRZ), around DC.[3] In December 2001, the government reduced the FRZ to a 15 nautical miles radius. But the newly established no-fly zone negatively impacted and restricted GA airports and operations near DC. Before 9/11, GA aircraft were

permitted to fly in DC and operate out of and into Reagan National Airport.[4] When GA operations began to resume across the country, GA airports within the FRZ were not allowed to continue operations and were forced to remain grounded.

The three airports, College Park Airport in College Park, Potomac Airfield in Fort Washington, and Washington Executive/Hyde Field in Clinton, within the FRZ are referred to as the Maryland 3. When the FRZ was 25 nautical miles, it affected three other airports: Suburban Airport between Anne Arundel and Prince George's County, Freeway Airport in Bowie, and Maryland Airport in Indian Head.[5] But after the government reduced the FRZ, those airports were allowed to reopen, but the Maryland 3 were not.

The closest airport to DC is College Park Airport, which is around 15 miles from DC. As the world's oldest continuous operating airport, it had "survived world wars, depressions, tornadoes, and floods," but was unable to "operate because of a perception."[6] Known as the "Field of Firsts," the airport was established in 1909 when Wilbur Wright taught two Army officers of the Aeronautical Division, U.S. Signal Corps how to fly the first military airplane. Second Lt. Humphreys made the first solo flight of a military officer at the airfield. It was also the site of the first military aviation school. Another historic moment was that the first United States Postal Service airmail flight that used civilian aircraft and pilots took off at College Park Airport on August 12, 1918.[7]

From September 14, 2001, to February 14, 2002, the Maryland 3 watched as the FAA began to loosen restrictions or implement new regulations on GA activities, but the airports were not permitted to resume operations. On September 14, all GA Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) operations were allowed to continue, but with new security regulations, and on October 21, the FAA allowed limited Visual Flight Rules (VFR) operations. The FAA permitted most flight training operations on September 22, 2001; but with stricter measures on student background checks. On November 8, the US began to slowly open international flights. The FAA issued multiple Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs) over sports events, nuclear power plants, and national landmarks.[8]


College Park Aviation Poster
Photo: College Park Aviation Museum

While GA operations slowly resumed across the country, the Maryland 3 remained closed to all GA operations exempt for first responders' flights. During the six months of no activity, the airports were only allowed to open once in October to allow pilots to move their private planes out of the FRZ.[9] The closure negatively affected the airports economically. Businesses and pilots fled the airports, moving to places outside of the no-fly zone. The College Park Airport lost more than $15,000 a day "from fuel sales, housing fees, mechanical operations, and other services."[10] Attendance at the College Park Aviation Museum decreased by 80 percent and business at the 94th Aero Squadron Restaurant declined.[11] Many airport owners wondered when airports would be allowed to reopen and if they could last that long. The only other time private planes had been banned from taking off at College Park was during World War II when the airfield was only opened for military aircraft.[12] One of the few positive things about the six-month closure is that College Park Airport did not lose its record for the oldest continuously operating airport. Every day, a Prince George's County Police helicopter would touch down on the tarmac, maintaining the record.[13]

On February 14, 2002, the Maryland 3 airports partially reopened with several new tight federal restrictions; after being closed for six months.[14] However, the new security measures did not boost activity, rather it hindered it more. Lee Schiek, director of College Park Airport at the time, summed up the feeling of the new limitations. "Our friends from the Federal Aviation Administration and Transportation Safety Administration tell me the airport is open with certain restrictions. Our pilots say it is closed with certain exceptions."[15] Before 9/11, College Park Airport had more than 1,500 monthly takeoffs and landings.[16] Yet as a result of the new restrictions, airport activity declined by 92%.[17] Most pilots decided to leave College Park Airport, taking their operations outside of the no-fly zone. Of the 90 planes that operated out of College Park, only 22 planes remained. Fuel sales dropped by almost 90 percent.[18] The establishment of the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) on February 10, 2003, a 30 nautical mile radius around Baltimore-Washington International Airport, Washington Dulles International Airport, and Reagan National Airport, only added more restrictions to the airports.[19]

Before being able to fly within the zones, pilots need to gain permission to either take off or land at the Maryland 3. To gain clearance, pilots must travel to DC to get fingerprinted and watch a security tape, then go to Baltimore-Washington International Airport or Dulles International Airport for a background check.[20] After getting clearance to use the Maryland 3 airports, pilots need additional permission to fly within the FRZ and ADIZ. First, pilots need to file a flight plan with the Washington Air Route Traffic Control Center for each trip. While filing the flight plan, pilots must identify themselves by providing an assigned secret pilot identification code. Pilots flying IFR must obtain clearance from ATC. VFR pilots are required to maintain close two-way traffic with ATC throughout their flight. Pilots need permission to take off and also to enter into the ADIZ.[21]

These new restrictions lead to various issues. When federal officials created the ADIZ, they did not formulate a system to handle the new regulations.[22] As a result, air traffic controllers were unprepared for the new influx of traffic into their offices. They were understaffed, causing delays for pilots. It became frustrating for pilots to file flight plans, as they would often get busy signals

when trying to call an FAA flight service station.[23] Other times, their plans would get lost or expire quickly. Additionally, pilots needed to wait for air traffic control to grant them permission to take off or enter the ADIZ. Sometimes pilots were grounded for up to an hour, waiting for clearance to take off. It was even more dangerous for entering the zone. Air traffic control instructed pilots to wait and circle around the zone while they searched for the pilot's flight plans. Yet, this could lead to accidents. There was a case where a pilot ran out of fuel while waiting to enter the ADIZ, causing him to crash. Another had to abandon his plans of entering the zone as a storm was approaching quickly.[24] The increased amounts of requests overburdened air traffic controllers.

In 2005, federal officials reopened Reagan National Airport to GA operations on an extremely limited basis. Before 9/11, GA pilots were free to take off and land at the airport. But now, only 48 planes were allowed to use the airport daily. But pilots, crew, and passengers had to follow strict security procedures beforehand. Pilots had to apply to use the airport. If approved, pilots, crew, and passengers were subjected to screening by TSA. Additionally, all flights had to be equipped with armed security guards.[25] Twenty years later, GA pilots still need to follow the same rules and procedures to land at Reagan National.[26]

Today, pilots that want to fly in the ADIZ and FRZ or access the Maryland 3 airports must follow the same rules. They are required to file flight plans with the Washington Air Route Traffic Control Center's Flight Data Unit. When filing, they must identify themselves with their confidential pilot identification number or assigned waiver number. Additionally, pilots flying under VFR must complete special awareness training. While all of these restrictions are necessary for national security, they negatively impacted DC general aviation. Pilots had to surrender their personal freedom to fly anywhere in the name of national security. While some pilots left the area, others stayed and learned to fly under the regulations. But the damage had been done; GA operations had never been the same. General aviation around DC is a far cry from what general aviation used to be twenty years ago.

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