

# What's a Bug Smasher Doing in My MOA?



By LtCol. Ed Linch, USAF

*[Editor's note: The author is an Air Force pilot and a private pilot. This article shares his views as the latter.]*

**A**s a general-aviation pilot, I fly through MOAs (military-operating areas). When I use my GPS moving-map display, I can fly along the border of a restricted area. My Mode C sometimes doesn't work, and I tend to turn off my radio for most of the flight. I rarely call ATC because I hate being vectored—too inconvenient. I've even flown from Oshkosh, Wis., to West Palm, Fla., without talking to a soul. I fly direct to save time and gas, and yes, I'm 100-percent legal.

You might think I am a cowboy aviator, but you are wrong; I maintain my aircraft well within federal aviation regulations (FARs), using airmanship skills developed and honed as a USAF F-16 fighter pilot. Because of my experience, I'm more likely to go above and beyond what a typical general-aviation pilot would do to look for you and stay out of your way.

Are you looking for me as we share the skies? I know a lot about you because I'm also a military aviator, but do you know much about me as the civilian aviator in a light aircraft? I fly an experimental aircraft with a 23-foot wingspan at 150 knots. Sometimes, I fly in formation with several aircraft—from finger tip to 6,000 to 9,000 feet line abreast, with an altitude split, or I'm a single-ship doing aerobatics. I hope you're looking for me and not just depending on your radar to find me and my friends. I'm usually flying between 3,000 and 10,000 feet. I would expect other light singles to be around these same altitudes, following roads, at speeds between 100 and 250 knots. For light twins, expect alti-

tudes in the midteens. I also would plan on civilians not observing the existence of your MOA (I have had them blast right through the middle of my military "4 v X" engagements). You may never see them because you are focused on air-to-air tactics, not doing a visual search for a "bug smasher."

Regardless of your situational awareness (SA) and ability to find me, I'm looking for you. When available, I use flight-following with ATC. I fly below your air-to-air floor, and I check SeeAndAvoid.org for any information about your airspace. If the FAA has a VHF-common safety frequency for your MOA, I monitor it to make sure I get out of your way. But, not all civilian aviators



Photo by LtCol. Ned Linch, USAF, Modified.



are looking for you. Many civilian pilots are not aware of MOAs or military-airspace information for a variety of reasons: lack of training, lack of available information, attitudes toward military airspace, or ineffective MACA (midair-collision avoidance) programs at your base.

How effective is your MACA program? I've flown throughout the United States as a light aircraft (experimental) pilot, as well as an airline pilot, and have yet to see any MACA information displayed that warns me about your local flying area. Just because you have a MACA program and a pamphlet doesn't necessarily mean the average civilian pilot has your information. Near-misses, midair collisions, and TCAS (traffic-alert-collision-avoidance system) alerts continue to be part of the safety database. I believe many mishaps and incidents could have been prevented with a more effective and robust MACA program.

#### **Recommendations to improve your MACA program:**

- Use sectional charts for your MACA products. I recommend using a sectional chart for any phases of flight where you'll be flying below 18,000 feet.
- Put up a poster showing the local military airspace and aircraft information. A well-displayed poster would remind all aviators what is happening in the local area.
- Have a local MACA website.
- Report all close encounters using WESS and hazreps.

I know what it's like to be on both ends of a close encounter. I've seen a lot of near-misses with other air-

## See and Avoid Program

The SeeAndAvoid.org mission is to eliminate midair collisions and reduce close calls. The exchange of information between the military safety community and civilian pilots will help us all share the sky.

The SeeAndAvoid.org was developed by the Air National Guard for the Department of Defense. This website:

- Allows links to all existing military MACA programs in a single website.
- Targets two groups:
  1. General aviation pilots by encouraging them to use seeandavoid.org as part of their flight planning.
  2. Military safety officers, with the opportunity to create a web-based MACA educational and public-outreach program.

**The SeeAndAvoid.org; website contains information to avoid midair collisions.**



craft, and in most cases, everyone was legal. Be vigilant as you share the skies with everyone; your best friend could be the guy in the other aircraft. 

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