

# Clearance Confusion

*Never acknowledge a clearance until you've reviewed it and are sure it makes sense.*

By Harry Kraemer

I HAD JUST COMPLETED A series of NDB approaches with my student at York, PA (17 nm south of Harrisburg, PA and 45 nm northwest of Baltimore, MD). We were in a Piper Cherokee (N96M) south of York and returning to our home field in the Baltimore area when an interesting exchange took place with Harrisburg Approach. See if you can figure out what happened.

APP: "Cherokee Nine-Six-Foxtrot, turn right heading 290, join Victor 12 west of Harrisburg, resume your own navigation."

N96M: "Ah, Nine-Six-Mike, say again please."

APP: "Nine-Six-Mike, turn right heading 290, join Victor 12 west of Harrisburg, resume your own navigation."

At this point, two aircraft transmitted at the same time and were unreadable except for: "...290 on the heading, Nine-Six-Foxtrot."

N96M: "290 on the heading, join Victor 12 west of Harrisburg."

APP: "Nine-Six-Foxtrot, that's correct."

N96F: "Harrisburg, Nine-Six-Foxtrot."

APP: "Nine-Six-Foxtrot, Harrisburg go ahead."

N96F: "Was that last transmission for us, 290 on the heading?"

APP: "Somebody read it all back."

N96F: "Nine-Six-Foxtrot."

APP: "Nine-Six-Foxtrot, one of you did get it, is that correct?"

N96F: "I'm going on over to Victor 12 now, Nine-Six-Foxtrot."

APP: "Roger, heading 290, join Victor 12, resume your own navigation."

N96F: "Thank you, Nine-Six-Foxtrot."

APP: "Nine-Six-Mike, contact Baltimore Approach 133.0."

My student read back someone else's clearance and the controller failed to pick up on it, which created even more confusion. Fortunately, the other Cherokee on the frequency (N96F) got it right and the situation quickly resolved itself.

In the high workload that followed the missed approach, and while getting organized to return home, the student immediately jumped at the controller's instructions without pausing to write down the clearance to determine if it made sense. Besides, we already had a clearance to return to Baltimore, so this "new" clearance was totally off-the-wall. A quick check of the en route chart would have revealed we weren't even close to Victor 12.

ance comes along you can ask yourself, "Can I get there from here?"

## Call-Sign Confusion

This incident is an example of the potential hazards of having aircraft with similar call-signs on the same frequency. AIM Section 4-2-4 recommends using the full call-sign when this occurs to avoid confusion. My student and I, as well as the controller, were all guilty of not following this practice.

If you're ever confused or in doubt about a clearance, don't read it back and provide an opportunity for more confusion. Instead, respond to the controller with, "Verify clearance for N1234X." Always use your full call-sign.

## Does It Make Sense?

Good positional awareness in this situation is important so if a new clear-

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