

WHEN YOU NEED A POP-UP

Most of the time we file full-route flight plans and get our clearances on the ground; sometimes it just doesn't work out that way.

by Harry Kraemer

En route on a beautiful winter day, you check the ATIS at your destination and are surprised to find that it's IFR. During your preflight weather briefing the TAFs called for CAVU, so you decided to go VFR, but a winter inversion has trapped a thousand feet of cloud between you and your destination airport.

You decide to call ATC and ask for an IFR clearance to get in. What you are asking for is called a pop-up clearance, and controllers refer to you as a pop-up aircraft.

The Pop-Up Request

When asking ATC for an IFR clearance in a situation like this, and after you have established proper radio contact and given your position, your conversation should go something like this: "Kansas City Approach, November One Two Three Four would like an IFR clearance into KMCI, we are IFR-rated and -equipped."

Approach will have to look at the flow of traffic, and most of the time they'll find a slot for you, issue a clearance and you are on your way.

You may find yourself needing an IFR clearance for a short time to climb or descend through a cloud layer, to land at an airport that is IFR, to exit an area that is IFR or if you find yourself approaching IFR conditions that were

The closer you get to East Coast terminal areas, the less likely it is that your pop-up request will be approved.

not forecast.

You either can file a full IFR flight plan with Flight Service to get into the system or you can contact ATC and ask for an IFR clearance to accomplish the climb, descent or approach.

Workload Permitting

Controllers may not be able to issue a pop-up clearance immediately, due to workload or the lack of radar coverage, and in that case they will ask you to call up Flight Service and file. If you are facing an immediate need for an IFR, advise ATC that you are in deteriorating weather conditions and cannot maintain VFR.

ATC may be too busy or unable to issue a pop-up clearance, period. In this case, you will have to stay VFR and land or air file a full IFR with Flight Service.

If you manage to get a pop-up, you are responsible for terrain and obstacle

clearance until reaching the minimum instrument altitude or the minimum en route altitude. The controller will ask if you are able to provide your own terrain and obstruction clearance up to the MIA or MEA.

Often the weather may be good VFR at your departure airport and en route but IFR at your destination. To file IFR would add a considerable amount of time to the flight. The delays can be due to traffic congestion or IFR departure routing, or you may experience delays obtaining the IFR clearance itself.

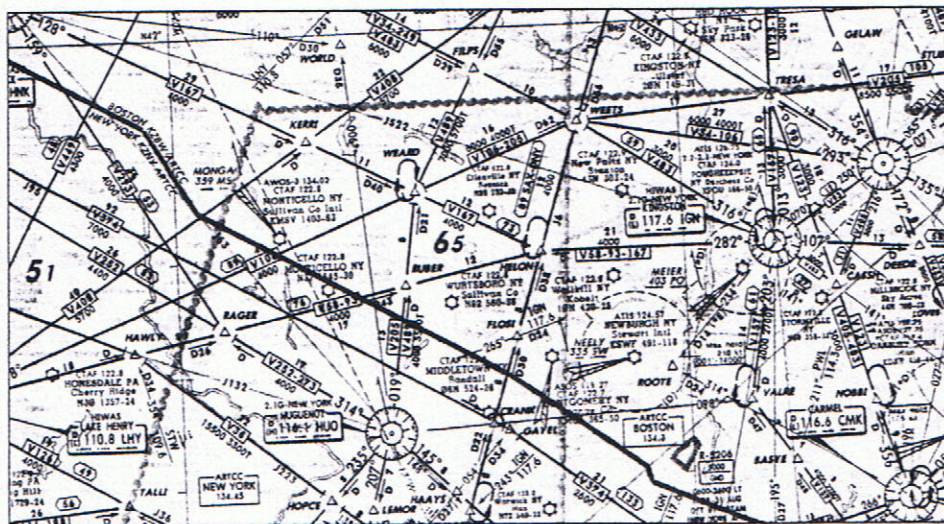
Just remember that if you decide to go VFR and get a pop-up clearance closer to your destination, ATC can turn down your request and you'll be back at square one, so plan for such delays and carry enough fuel. If your request for a pop-up clearance is denied, you need enough fuel to get to an airport in VFR conditions or perhaps enough gas to return to your departure airport.

Remember that when you get an IFR clearance, your fuel requirements go from plus 30 minutes (day VFR) to plus 45 minutes.

Congested Airspace

Another reason pilots ask for pop-ups may be to obtain a clearance through congested and highly controlled airspace.

(continued on page 5)



When You Need a Pop-Up

(continued from page 3)

The Washington Tri-Area Terminal Area (Class B airspace) has three different airports that make up this large Class B area. To go through VFR would require obtaining a clearance from several different controllers, and you may not get a handoff to the next controller when you are VFR.

The alternate to getting Class B clearance would be to navigate under or around the Class B airspace. Navigating around or under Class B airspace can be very demanding on the pilot, depending on equipment and weather conditions.

LORAN or GPS (with a moving map) will make navigation around or under Class B airspace easier, but an alternate scheme is to ask for an IFR clearance to your destination. Give ATC plenty of time to work you into the system and be prepared to have your request turned down.

Not a Planning Substitute

A pop-up-clearance, when used correctly and at the right time, can be a very efficient tool in the IFR environment. There can be delays in obtaining such a clearance, however, and ATC can turn down your request. Plan your fuel requirements for such delays.

The pop-up is not a substitute for preflight planning. There are enough

surprises in the ATC system without having pilots motoring around until they hit an IMC wall and then come crying for a clearance.

If you flight plan carefully and believe that there is a chance that your destination will not make VFR minimums at your ETA, file a VFR/IFR. If you know that you'll have to climb through 15 minutes of IMC to get to VFR conditions, file an IFR/VFR flight plan or file an IFR and cancel when you're in the clear.

Pop-ups are just that — quick access to the system to solve problems.

Harry Kraemer is a 6,000-hour corporate pilot and CFII living in the Washington, D.C. area.