

5-6-2. Intercept Procedures

a. General.

1. In conjunction with the FAA, Air Defense Sectors monitor air traffic and could order an intercept in the interest of national security or defense. Intercepts during peacetime operations are vastly different from those conducted under increased states of readiness. The interceptors may be fighters or rotary wing aircraft. The reasons for aircraft intercept include, but are not limited to:

- (a) Identify an aircraft;
- (b) Track an aircraft;
- (c) Inspect an aircraft;
- (d) Divert an aircraft;
- (e) Establish communications with an aircraft.

2. When specific information is required (i.e., markings, serial numbers, etc.) the interceptor pilot(s) will respond only if, in their judgment, the request can be conducted in a safe manner. Intercept procedures are described in some detail in the paragraphs below. In all situations, the interceptor pilot will consider safety of flight for all concerned throughout the intercept procedure. The interceptor pilot(s) will use caution to avoid startling the intercepted crew or passengers and understand that maneuvers considered normal for interceptor aircraft may be considered hazardous to other aircraft.

3. All aircraft operating in US national airspace are highly encouraged to maintain a listening watch on VHF/UHF guard frequencies (121.5 or 243.0 MHz). If subjected to a military intercept, it is incumbent on civilian aviators to understand their responsibilities and to comply with ICAO standard signals relayed from the intercepting aircraft. Specifically, aviators are expected to contact air traffic control without delay (if able) on the local operating frequency or on VHF/UHF guard. Noncompliance may result in the use of force.

b. Fighter intercept phases (See FIG 5-6-1).

1. Approach Phase.

As standard procedure, intercepted aircraft are approached from behind. Typically, interceptor aircraft will be employed in pairs, however, it is not uncommon for a single aircraft to perform the intercept operation. Safe separation between interceptors and intercepted aircraft is the responsibility of the intercepting aircraft and will be maintained at all times.

2. Identification Phase.

Interceptor aircraft will initiate a controlled closure toward the aircraft of interest, holding at a distance no closer than deemed necessary to establish positive identification and to gather the necessary information. The interceptor may also fly past the intercepted aircraft while gathering data at a distance considered safe based on aircraft performance characteristics.

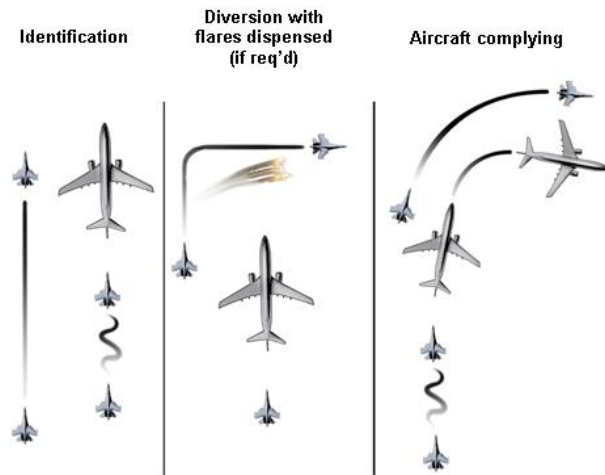
3. Post Intercept Phase.

An interceptor may attempt to establish communications via standard ICAO signals. In time-critical situations where the interceptor is seeking an immediate response from the intercepted aircraft or if the intercepted aircraft remains non-compliant to instruction, the interceptor pilot may initiate a divert maneuver. In this maneuver, the interceptor flies across the intercepted aircraft's flight path (minimum 500 feet separation and commencing from slightly below the

intercepted aircraft altitude) in the general direction the intercepted aircraft is expected to turn. The interceptor will rock its wings (daytime) or flash external lights/select afterburners (night) while crossing the intercepted aircraft's flight path. The interceptor will roll out in the direction the intercepted aircraft is expected to turn before returning to verify the aircraft of interest is complying. The intercepted aircraft is expected to execute an immediate turn to the direction of the intercepting aircraft. If the aircraft of interest does not comply, the interceptor may conduct a second climbing turn across the intercepted aircraft's flight path (minimum 500 feet separation and commencing from slightly below the intercepted aircraft altitude) while expending flares as a warning signal to the intercepted aircraft to comply immediately and to turn in the direction indicated and to leave the area. The interceptor is responsible to maintain safe separation during these and all intercept maneuvers. Flight safety is paramount.

FIG 5-6-1

Intercept Procedures



NOTE-

During Night/IMC, the intercept will be from below flight path.

c. Helicopter Intercept phases (See FIG 5-6-2)

1. Approach.

Aircraft intercepted by helicopter may be approached from any direction, although the helicopter should close for identification and signaling from behind. Generally, the helicopter will approach off the left side of the intercepted aircraft. Safe separation between the helicopter and the unidentified aircraft will be maintained at all times.

2. Identification.

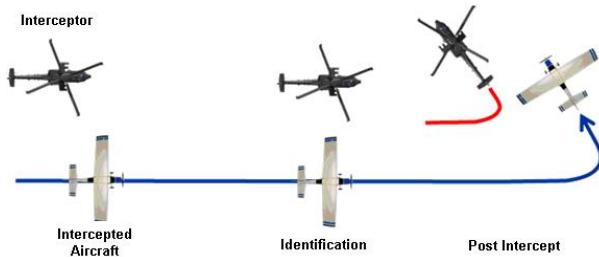
The helicopter will initiate a controlled closure toward the aircraft of interest, holding at a distance no closer than deemed necessary to establish positive identification and gather the necessary information. The intercepted pilot should expect the interceptor helicopter to take a position off his left wing slightly forward of abeam.

3. Post Intercept.

Visual signaling devices may be used in an attempt to communicate with the intercepted aircraft. Visual signaling devices may include, but are not limited to, LED scrolling signboards or blue

flashing lights. If compliance is not attained through the use of radios or signaling devices, standard ICAO intercept signals (Table 5-6-1) may be employed. In order to maintain safe aircraft separation, it is incumbent upon the pilot of the intercepted aircraft not to fall into a trail position (directly behind the helicopter) if instructed to follow the helicopter. This is because the helicopter pilot may lose visual contact with the intercepted aircraft.

FIG 5-6-2
Helicopter Intercept Procedures



NOTE-

Intercepted aircraft must not follow directly behind the helicopter thereby allowing the helicopter pilot to maintain visual contact with the intercepted aircraft and ensuring safe separation is maintained.

d. Summary of Intercepted Aircraft Actions.

An intercepted aircraft must, without delay:

1. Adhere to instructions relayed through the use of visual devices, visual signals, and radio communications from the intercepting aircraft.
2. Attempt to establish radio communications with the intercepting aircraft or with the appropriate air traffic control facility by making a general call on guard frequencies (121.5 or 243.0 MHz), giving the identity, position, and nature of the flight.
3. If transponder equipped, select Mode 3/A Code 7700 unless otherwise instructed by air traffic control.

NOTE-

If instruction received from any agency conflicts with that given by the intercepting aircraft through visual or radio communications, the intercepted aircraft must seek immediate clarification.

4. The crew of the intercepted aircraft must continue to comply with interceptor aircraft signals and instructions until positively released.

5-6-5. Visual Warning System (VWS)

The VWS signal consists of highly-focused red and green colored laser lights designed to illuminate in an alternating red and green signal pattern. These lasers may be directed at specific aircraft suspected of making unauthorized entry into the Washington, DC Special Flight Rules Area (DC SFRA) proceeding on a heading or flight path that may be interpreted as a threat or that operate contrary to the operating rules for the DC SFRA. The beam is neither hazardous to the eyes of pilots/aircrew or passengers, regardless of altitude or distance from the source nor will the beam affect aircraft systems.

- a. If you are communicating with ATC, and this signal is directed at your aircraft, you are required to contact ATC and advise that you are being illuminated by a visual warning system.
- b. If this signal is directed at you, and you are not communicating with ATC, you are advised to turn to the most direct heading away from the center of the DC SFRA as soon as possible. Immediately contact ATC on an appropriate frequency, VHF Guard 121.5 or UHF Guard 243.0, and provide your aircraft identification, position, and nature of the flight. Failure to follow these procedures may result in interception by military aircraft. Further noncompliance with interceptor aircraft or ATC may result in the use of force.
- c. Pilots planning to operate aircraft in or near the DC SFRA are to familiarize themselves with aircraft intercept procedures. This information applies to all aircraft operating within the DC SFRA including DOD, Law Enforcement, and aircraft engaged in aeromedical operations and does not change procedures established for reporting unauthorized laser illumination as published in FAA Advisory Circulars and Notices.

Reference – CFR 91.161

- d. More details including a video demonstration of the VWS are available from the following FAA web site: <http://www.faa.gov/VisualWarningSystem/VisualWarning.htm>.