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AVIATORS CLUB

The Hangar Conversation



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SEE AND AVOID IS NOT ENOUGH

Issue 1 October 2026

Because flying is **serious fun**.

The
Hangar Conversation

Published by the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA)

Issue 1 — October 2026

Editorial / Safety Promotion Team

Contributors

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THE HANGAR CONVERSATION

TAKING SAFETY PERSONALLY

Safety in general aviation is often discussed through regulations, procedures, accident reports and lessons learned. All of these matter. But safety is also something much more personal.

It is present in the decisions we make before a flight, in the doubts we sometimes choose to listen to—or ignore—and in the honest conversations we have afterwards. It is found in the small moments: deciding to take a little more fuel, going around when an approach does not feel right, or admitting that we were tired, distracted or simply not at our best.

That is why The Hangar Conversation is here.

This magazine is not intended to tell pilots how to fly, nor to add another layer of heavy guidance to an already complicated aviation environment. Instead, we want to talk openly about the situations we as general aviation pilots actually face: changing weather, limited experience, pressure to complete a flight, fading skills, unexpected distractions and the many small decisions that shape the outcome of a flight.

We want to keep things practical, relevant and to the point. We want to look beyond rules and procedures and explore what really happens in the cockpit—and sometimes inside our own heads.

Safety communication should not feel like a lecture. Most of us do not need another finger pointed at us. We need ideas we can recognise, experiences we can relate to and questions that make us stop and think for a moment.

And this should be a real conversation.

For me, taking safety seriously also means taking it personally. Safety is not something that belongs only to authorities, organisations or experts. It belongs to all of us. It grows through experience, reflection and the willingness to speak honestly with one another.

So consider this first issue an invitation: take a seat, join the conversation and help us, as a community, make general aviation safer—one flight and one honest discussion at a time.

Wendell Lynch
EASA Safety Promotion Officer

THE RISKS WE DO NOT ALWAYS SEE

Fatigue, pressure and communication in General Aviation



Many GA risks do not announce themselves loudly. They often look like normal life: ordinary fatigue, subtle pressure or different expectations about the flight ahead.

Most of us in General Aviation recognise the obvious safety topics.

The unstable approach.

The airspace infringement.

The runway excursion.

The loss of control.

The hard landing.

The near miss.

These are important. We need to talk about them, investigate them, and learn from them.

But as pilots and instructors, we also know that those final visible moments are rarely where the story begins. Very often, it starts earlier. Sometimes much earlier.

It starts when we arrive at the airfield already a little tired.

When the weather is finally good after weeks of poor flying conditions.

When the aircraft is booked by someone else after us or passengers are excited and we do not want to disappoint them.

It starts when we quietly feel: "I really want this flight to happen today."

None of this is dramatic. None of this automatically means the flight is going to be unsafe.

But these are the kinds of conditions that shape how we perform that day, on that flight.

SAFETY IS ALSO WHAT NORMALLY GOES RIGHT

Traditionally, aviation safety has often focused on what went wrong. That is necessary. We need accident reports,



occurrence reporting, investigations and lessons learned.

But there is another useful question:

Why do things normally go right?

Most of the time, flying does go right. Not because every condition is perfect, but because people make good decisions—often small ones—all the time.

A pilot pauses and decides not to fly.

An instructor stops an exercise early.

A student says they are overloaded.

A club pilot decides not to continue into worsening weather.

Someone asks ATC for clarification before uncertainty becomes a problem.

Someone makes a go-around instead of forcing the landing.

These are not failures. These are examples of safety being created in real time.

This way of thinking is often called Safety-II. It does not replace the traditional safety view. We still need to learn from things that go wrong. But it adds something important: it also looks at everyday flying and asks how pilots, instructors and organisations like flying clubs keep things safe before there is an incident.

For GA, that is particularly relevant because many of our safety margins are managed locally, personally and practically—in the cockpit, at the club, during the briefing, and sometimes in the decision not to fly.

FATIGUE IS NOT ONLY AN AIRLINE PROBLEM

When we hear the word fatigue, we may think of jet lag, airline rosters, night flights and flight time limitations.

In GA, fatigue can mean flying after work, coming to the airfield after school, instructing several demanding flights in a row, or spending over an hour in traffic before even reaching the aircraft.

This will be familiar to many pilots. You are legal to fly. You are motivated. The weather is good. The aircraft is available. So, the flight feels possible – even though you may already feel somewhat tired.

But possible is not always the same as wise.

Fatigue rarely appears as one clear warning. More often, it shows up quietly.

The lookout becomes weaker.

Handling the radio feels slightly more demanding.

Small changes become irritating.

The scan becomes less disciplined.

A simple surprise demands more capacity than expected.

And GA flying is full of simple surprises: a runway change, unexpected traffic, stronger crosswind, turbulence, a nervous passenger, a bounced landing, or a go-around.

So maybe the better question before a flight is not only:

"Am I legal to fly?"

But also:

"Am I in the right condition to manage this flight well today?"

That second question is not always comfortable. But it invites honest self-reflection.

PRESSURE DOES NOT NEED TO BE COMMERCIAL

In GA, we sometimes think pressure belongs to commercial aviation. But it is real in GA as well. It just has a different shape.

We have all felt it: wanting to complete a navigation flight or perform well during a skill test; dealing with a tight aircraft booking when availability is limited; or trying to use a long-awaited weather break after weeks of poor forecasts. And sometimes pressure does not feel like pressure. It feels like enthusiasm. Commitment. Motivation. Or simply wanting to make the day work.

A healthy GA safety culture is not about blaming people for every mistake. It is about being curious.

The point is not to avoid pressure completely. We all experience it from time to time. Some pressure can even help us focus and perform. The real issue is recognising when pressure starts to reduce our margin rather than sharpen our performance.

COMMUNICATION STARTS BEFORE ENGINE START

When pilots talk about communication, we often think about radio calls.

In the familiar "Aviate – Navigate – Communicate" order, communication comes third.

And rightly so: when we need to control the aircraft, communication is not the first priority. But it is still one of the core flying skills we need to master.

Communicating clearly and making sure we understand one another can be a challenge, even beyond flying. As pilots, we therefore need to make an extra effort before the engine starts and the aircraft moves.

Is the plan for the flight really clear?

Did the student understand the purpose of the lesson?

Did the instructor explain when they would intervene?

Did the pilot brief the passenger properly?

Especially in training and club flying, a short and honest preflight briefing is one of the best safety tools we have.

It does not need to be complicated.

"What will we do if the crosswind is stronger than expected?"

"What is our personal go-around point?"

"What would make us stop the exercise?"

"What are we not going to do today?"

"What do I expect from you, and what can you expect from me?"

These questions help create a shared picture of the flight ahead. And a shared picture reduces surprise.

TALK ABOUT THE WEAK SIGNALS

A lot of safety learning sits in the things that almost happened, or could have happened, but did not. Often, these are the same small decisions described earlier: stopping, asking, clarifying or going around. The outcome was safe, but the experience may still have something to teach us.

These are not embarrassing stories. They are useful experiences to share.

But in GA, they often stay invisible. We may think the event was not serious enough to report. We may not want to look inexperienced. We may worry what others at the club will think. That is understandable. GA is a small community.

Still, if we only talk about accidents, we miss many opportunities to learn while the signals are still weak.

What made the decision difficult? What created the pressure? What was unclear? What helped resolve the situation? What can others learn from it?

That is where the real value often is.

This is also why the debrief matters. Not as a formal exercise, and not only after something has gone wrong, but as a short moment of honest reflection after a flight. What made today easy? What made it more difficult? Where did we adapt? Where did we use more capacity than expected? And what would we do slightly better next time?

In training, club flying and private flying, this is where weak signals can become visible: a small pressure, a misunderstanding, a moment of overload, a rushed decision, a good go-around or a timely cancellation. All of these can offer useful learning before there is ever an occurrence to report.

Developed and edited by
EASA Safety Promotion



Good judgement often starts before take-off

BEFORE THE NEXT FLIGHT

A one-minute personal safety pause

1. How am I really doing today?
- Am I rushed, distracted or tired?
- Is anything bothering me mentally?
- Am I fully ready for this flight?
- If not, what do I need to change?

2. What is putting pressure on this flight?
- Time pressure
- Passenger expectations
- Weather closing in
- Wanting to “just get there”

3. Do we share the same picture?
- What is the plan?
- What are the main threats today?
- What is our no-go or turn-back point?
- Have we really talked it through?

TAKEAWAY

A short, honest pause before the flight can prevent a long chain of poor decisions later.

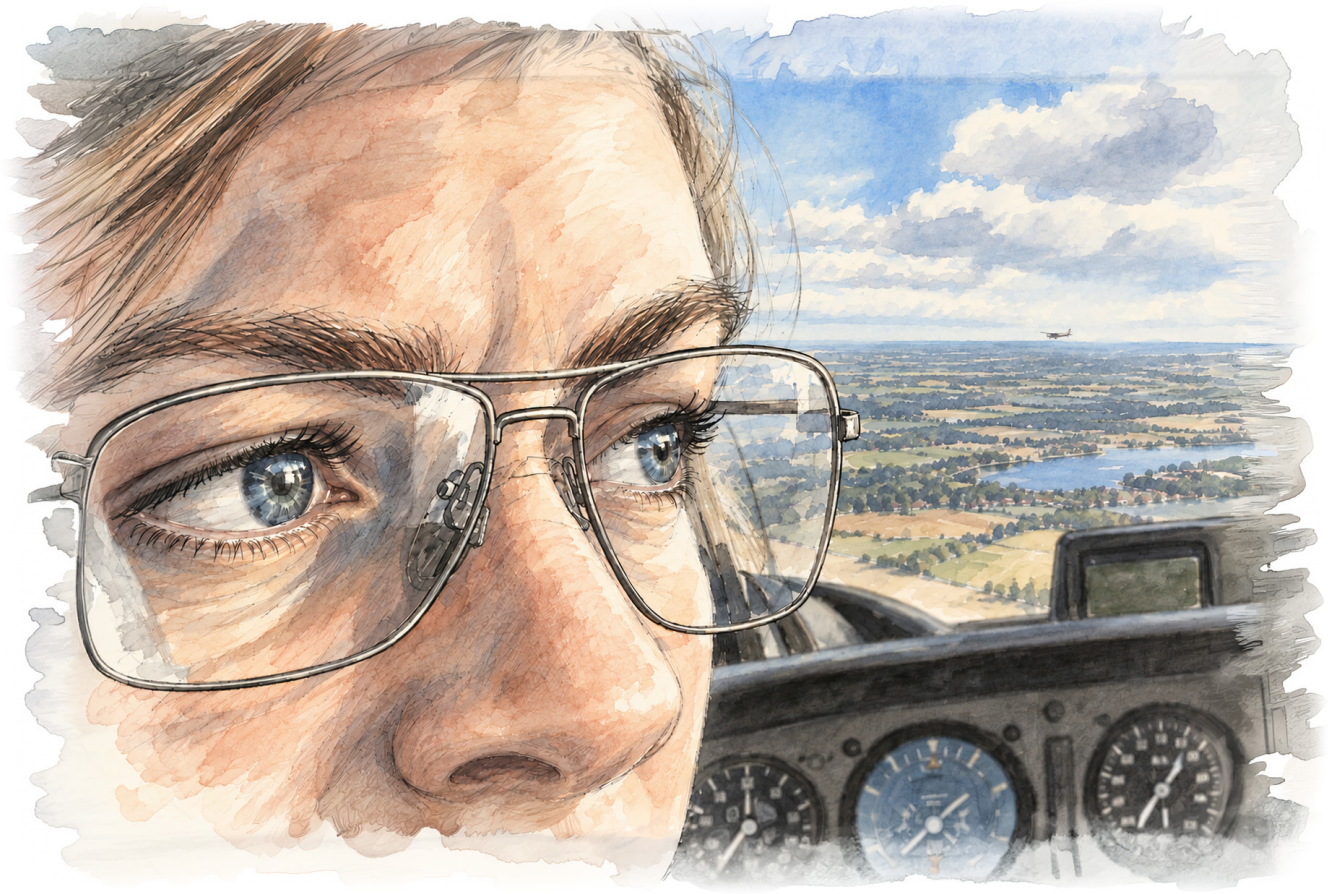
BRIEFING CARD



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SEE AND AVOID IS NOT ENOUGH

Why collision avoidance starts before we spot the other aircraft



Earlier this year, many of us saw a video showing a light aircraft and paraglider collision. It was a hard reminder, not because we know all the facts, but because it showed how quickly a traffic conflict can become real. A normal flying day, good visibility, beautiful scenery — and then suddenly, almost without warning, the safety margin was gone.

The point here is not to judge the pilots involved. The point is to recognise something most pilots already know, even if we do not always like to admit it:

Seeing other traffic in time can be very difficult.

We often say “see and avoid” as if it is one simple action. Look outside, see the traffic, avoid it.

But in real flying, it is not that simple. Spotting another aircraft or airspace user can be difficult even after ATC or flight information has given us a general direction and distance. We may still need time to make visual contact.

Sometimes because the other aircraft is small or hidden by a wing, a canopy frame, a windscreen pillar or the nose attitude.

Sometimes because the background makes the target almost disappear, and the sun, haze, scratches or dirt on the windscreen make detection worse.

Sometimes because we are caught up with radio calls, navigation plotting, passenger care, joining traffic, or completing a checklist item.

And sometimes the aircraft on the collision course is the one that appears not to move, which makes it the hardest to spot.

That last point is worth remembering. If traffic is moving clearly across the windscreen, we may notice it more easily. But if it remains in the same position and only becomes larger, that may be the aircraft we most need to see — and also the one that is easiest to miss until very late.

A GOOD VFR DAY IS NOT AUTOMATICALLY A LOW-RISK DAY

Many mid-air collision risks exist on the days when flying feels easiest.

Good visibility.

Daylight.

Pleasant weather.

Those days, however, are exactly the days that draw out many other pilots and aviation enthusiasts who had the same idea. That can lead to busy airfields, gliders and powered aircraft sharing the same airspace, and more aircraft joining or leaving the circuit and gathering towards popular destinations, visual reporting points (VRPs) or scenic areas.

That is all familiar to GA flying.

In summer especially, the sky is shared by many different users: powered aircraft, microlights, gliders, sailplanes, paragliders, hang gliders, balloons, helicopters, parachuting activity, drones, you name it. Some are talking on the radio. Some are not. Some are electronically visible. Some are not. Some are exactly where we expect them. Others are not.

So "good weather" should not make us relax our traffic picture. It should actually do quite the opposite. Making traffic part of our threat and error management before the flight is a good habit to develop.

LOOKING OUTSIDE IS ESSENTIAL — BUT IT HAS LIMITS

Of course we must look outside. That remains one of the most important things we do as pilots. That applies to VFR pilots and IFR-rated pilots alike.

But we should also be honest about the limitations of the human eye and the cockpit environment.

We have to deal with the limits of our eyes. Our sharpest vision is only in a relatively small part of what we see. Peripheral vision is useful for movement, but it is not good at detecting small, distant aircraft. Our eyes also need time to focus properly. When we stare into empty sky, our focus can drift. When our head or eyes move too quickly, we may scan across traffic without really seeing it.

Then there is the aircraft itself. High-wing, low-wing, canopy, windscreen posts, glareshield, scratches, reflections, dirt, sun visors, instrument panel, tablets, phones — all of these can hide or distract from traffic.

And workload matters. When we are busy, our attention narrows. We may look outside, but not really search and actively see. We may hear a radio call, but not build the mental picture of where that traffic might be two minutes from now. We may glance at our traffic display, but not connect it to what is outside the window.

This is why collision avoidance should not depend on one barrier alone. It is a stack of small layers. Active lookout is just one of many.

Planning for where traffic is likely to be is another.

Radio discipline and active listening help us build the mental picture.

Electronic conspicuity can add another layer.

Flying predictably helps others build their picture of us.

Together, these barriers contribute to good airmanship and risk management.

The stronger our stack, the better our chance of detecting the possible conflict before it might be too late.



INSTRUCTOR CORNER

THEY COPY WHAT WE DO

As instructors, we sometimes teach lookout as a verbal item: "keep a good lookout", "clear the area", "look before turning".

But students learn much more from what we actually do in the aircraft.

If we are often head-down, they learn that head-down time is normal.

If we accept vague position reports, they learn that vague is good enough.

If we rush lookout before manoeuvres, they learn that lookout is a formality.

If we use the traffic display without looking outside to confirm, they learn to trust the screen more than the sky.

So maybe the instructor habit is to make our thinking visible.

"Before this turn, let's clear left and right."

"We are approaching the VRP, so eyes outside now."

"I heard traffic joining downwind. Where do we expect them?"

"Let's not reprogramme the tablet here. First, fly and look."

"We cannot see the reported traffic, so let's treat it as a factor."

That is not extra theory. That is practical instruction.

A good lookout is not only something students should do for the skill test. It is a habit we help them build from the first lessons onwards. And like many habits in flying, it starts with what they see us doing.

FROM "SEE AND AVOID" TO "SEARCH AND DETECT"

Maybe the phrase "see and avoid" is too passive.

It can sound as if traffic will simply appear in front of us and we will naturally see it. But good lookout is more active than that. It is not just looking. It is searching. Searching for conflict and confirming there is none.

Before entering a busy area, we can ask:

Where is traffic most likely to be?

Which runway is active?

Where are the joining points?

Are there glider sites, parachute zones or popular scenic routes nearby?

Which altitude bands are likely to be busy?

Which traffic might not be on the frequency?

That mental preparation matters. It tells the mind and the eyes where to search.

It also tells us when to reduce cockpit workload. If we are approaching a VRP, circuit, glider area, airspace boundary or known traffic hotspot, that is not the moment to have our head down fiddling with the tablet or reading a paper checklist. It is not the moment to reprogramme the route, search for a frequency, or have a long passenger conversation.

We need to arrive there already prepared.

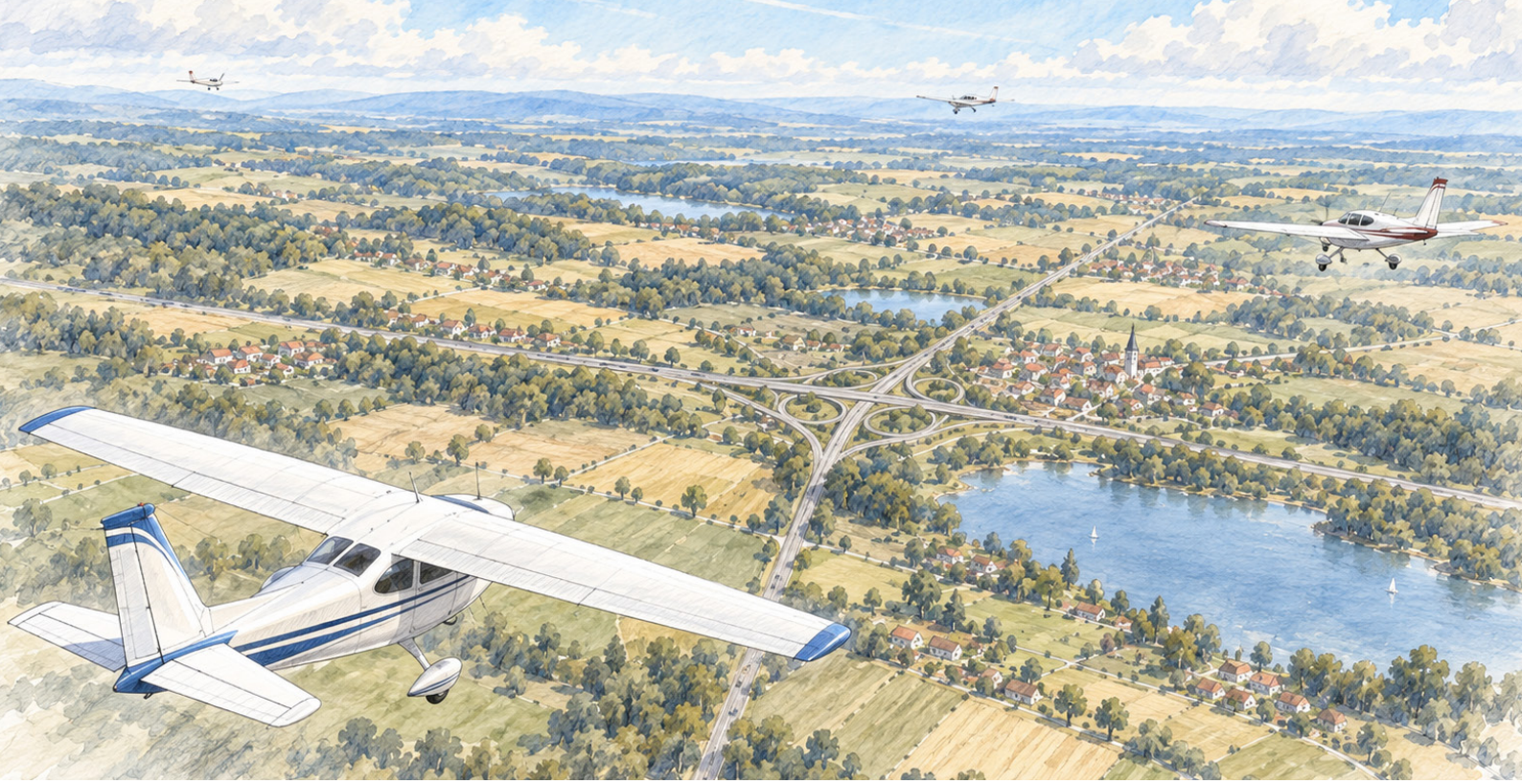
LISTEN, THEN LOOK IN THE RIGHT PLACE

Radio is not only for transmitting. It is also one of our best traffic-awareness tools.

A good position report from another aircraft is not just background radio. It is a clue. Where are they? What are they doing? Could they become a conflict in two or three minutes? That is the picture we need to build before we enter the hotspot.

And then we need to speak clearly ourselves as well. Short, accurate and timely position reports help others build their picture of us.

This is part of being seen.



BE SEEN — VISUALLY AND ELECTRONICALLY

We should make it as easy as possible for others to detect us.

Use the transponder where fitted. Use ALT mode. Use lights where appropriate. Even during daylight, it may be advisable to keep your landing light or taxi light on during the flight, depending on the aircraft and operation. Make clear radio calls. Fly predictably around aerodromes. Avoid cutting corners in the circuit. Do not assume others have seen you. And where available and appropriate, use electronic conspicuity.

Electronic conspicuity is not a magic shield. Not every aircraft, glider, paraglider or drone will appear on a traffic display. Not every system sees every other system. Not every alert is complete, timely or correct.

But used properly, it is a valuable extra layer. It can tell us where to look. It can help us detect traffic we might otherwise miss. It can make us more visible to others.

The trap is to move our eyes inside the cockpit and stay there, looking at the traffic display without making actual visual contact.

Technology should help us look outside better. It should not replace the lookout.

A SMALL HABIT BEFORE THE NEXT FLIGHT

Before your next flight, add one simple question to the briefing:

Where are we most likely to meet other traffic today?

Then make it specific.

Near the home airfield when joining the circuit?

At the VRP of a controlled airspace?

Near the IFR approach sector of major airports?

At a popular visual reference point?

Near a parachute drop zone?

In the vicinity of a navigation aid like a VOR?

If we know where traffic is likely to be, we can prepare before we get there.

See and avoid remains important. But by itself, it is not enough.

We need to actively search, listen out, build our mental picture, ensure that we can be seen, and use every available layer wisely.

That is how we create the extra few seconds that may make all the difference for a safe flight and arrival.

And then we can tie down the aircraft and enjoy the fact that we made a flight on a beautiful day and safely came back to share that with our loved ones.

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THEY KNEW IT WAS THERE — JUST NOT WHERE.

It was a good VFR afternoon at Schwäbisch Hall (EDTY). Visibility was more than 10 km, the wind was light from the northwest and the METAR reported CAVOK. Nothing in the weather suggested a particularly demanding arrival.

Earlier that afternoon, a Cirrus SR20 had departed Stuttgart for Schwäbisch Hall. The sole pilot onboard was flying VFR and wanted to practise an ILS approach to Runway 28 in preparation for an upcoming instrument-rating check.

The flight had already become longer and busier than planned. Other IFR traffic and landing gliders had delayed his approach several times. Eventually, the Cirrus joined a long final for Runway 28.

At about that same time, a D4 Fascination was returning from a cross-country flight from Regensburg. Its sole pilot joined the northern circuit for landing. Another aircraft, an HK36, was following behind.

There was quite a lot happening around the aerodrome, but this was not an unseen encounter between two aircraft appearing from nowhere.

Both pilots were on frequency.

Both knew there was other traffic.

Both received information about the other aircraft.

And both reported that they could not see it.

The problem however was not only that they could not see each other. They had also built different pictures of where the other aircraft was.

Seconds later, both aircraft collided on short final. Both pilots were fatally injured.

The BFU — the German Federal Bureau of Aircraft Accident Investigation — concluded that the pilots did not have an appropriate picture of the traffic situation and believed the conflicting aircraft to be somewhere else. Contributing factors included the mixed IFR, VFR and glider traffic, communication and landing-sequence information, workload during the Cirrus pilot's ILS approach, the D4 pilot's manoeuvring back towards final, and the absence of collision-warning equipment.

The lesson we can learn from this tragic accident is not simply: "look harder." That would be too simple.

Although lookout remains essential and technology can certainly help, collision avoidance also strongly depends on our listening, communication, workload management, predictable flying and constantly checking whether the traffic picture in our head still matches what is actually happening outside.

Where do I think the other aircraft is — and what if I am wrong?

Based on BFU Investigation Report BFU18-0398-3X, Schwäbisch Hall EDTY, Germany, 15 April 2018. The accompanying reconstruction illustration was created as a free editorial interpretation of the scenario described in the report. It is not reproduced from, nor adapted from, any BFU illustration or graphic and should not be read as an official BFU reconstruction. **Read the full report.**

Your turn!

This magazine is intended to start conversations—not finish them.

So, what should we talk about next?

Perhaps you have experienced something in the air that changed the way you fly. A decision you are glad you made. A mistake that taught you something. A close call, an unexpected lesson or simply a small piece of practical wisdom that could help another pilot.

We would like to hear your story.

You do not need to be a professional writer, and you do not need to write in English. Send it to us in your own words and in your own language—we can help shape and translate it for publication.

We are also looking for ideas for future topics, thoughtful reactions to articles in this edition, photographs showing the people, aircraft and everyday moments that make up general aviation, and contributors who would like to develop a longer feature with us.

This is a magazine for our community. Its future stories should not come only from us, but from its readers as well.

Your experience might be exactly what another pilot needs to hear.

Join the Conversation! Welcome :-)

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A note on how we make The Hangar Conversation

The Hangar Conversation is built around real aviation experiences, conversations, expertise and human editorial judgement.

Generative AI may be used as part of our editorial process — to explore AI-assisted illustrations, ideas, organise material, develop drafts and refine language. It does not replace the people, experiences and professional judgement at the heart of the magazine.

Editorial decisions, factual verification and final responsibility for what we publish remain human. Interviews and quotations are never invented, and aviation and safety information is reviewed before publication.

For us, AI is a tool in the production process — not the source of the conversation.

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