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Missed Approaches American Style

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There are two important differences that Canadian pilots should understand about missed approach procedures when flying in the United States. The first is that ATC can and will issue alternate missed approach instructions (like “Runway heading to 3000”), and it is both safe and legal to fly them. The second is that when not under terminal radar control, generally speaking ATC is expecting pilots to fly the published missed approach procedure all the way to the missed approach termination point. But, as usual, it’s not quite that simple.

Alternate Missed Approach Instructions At airports served by a terminal approach control facility, ATC will issue alternate missed approach instructions to aircraft in the event of a missed approach or when conducting multiple practice approaches--typically a heading and altitude to fly. Unlike in Canada, these instructions do ensure obstacle clearance—the same exact obstacle clearance as the published missed approach procedure.

You say you’re the kind of person who needs proof? Here’s chapter and verse from the Airman’s Information Manual (AIM) found at www1.faa.gov/aim, for your quotation pleasure:

“5-4-19a. When a landing cannot be accomplished, advise ATC and, upon reaching the missed approach point defined on the approach procedure chart, the pilot must comply with the missed approach instruction for the procedure being used or with the alternate missed approach procedure specified by ATC.”

“5-4-19d. At locations where ATC radar service is provided, the pilot should conform to radar vectors when provided by ATC in lieu of the published missed approach procedure.”

“5-5-5a6. Pilot responsibilities: If making a missed approach from a radar approach, [the pilot] executes the missed approach procedure previously given or climbs to the altitude and flies the heading specified by the controller.”

Multiple Practice Approaches If you are conducting multiple practice approaches, recognize that ATC’s verbal missed approach instructions supersede the published missed approach instructions. Therefore, even if you fail to break out on an approach, you should still fly the alternate missed approach instructions ATC gave you. Once issued, verbal missed approach instructions remain the same until changed and ATC will not reissue them for every approach.

Touch and Go Landings – When conducting touch and go landings from an approach, apply departure rules to your verbal instructions. Delay all turns until at a minimum of 400’ and past the departure end of the runway if visible. If the departure end is not visible, climb on runway heading until 400’ AAE before beginning your turn.

Full Stop Landings However, the alternate missed approach instructions do not apply to full stops. If you have declared your intention to full stop and subsequently don’t break out on that approach, follow the published missed approach instructions. If you have any doubts about breaking out on the approach, it’s a good idea to precoordinate with ATC so there is no confusion about what you will do in the event of an actual missed approach.

Missed Approach Termination At airports not serviced by terminal ATC, the Yanks are not as accommodating about further clearance after the missed approach. Paragraph 963 of the GPH 204 is very explicit about what you can do in Canada if ATC has issued further clearance, such as clearance to another destination, a holding fix or an initial approach fix. In Canada, you may terminate the missed approach routing to comply with further clearance issued by ATC provided that the aircraft is at an appropriate minimum IFR altitude.

There is no provision for this in the American AIM. Therefore, it is expected that aircraft will fly the entire published missed approach procedure all the way to the missed approach termination point—typically the VOR or NDB.

But going all the way to the missed approach termination point can be quite inconvenient sometimes. Fortunately, despite what you read in the newspapers, many Americans are actually reasonable, intelligent people, air traffic controllers included. For instance, if the published missed approach takes you outbound on a westerly track followed by a 180 back to the VOR, and your next en route course is out the same general direction (west), air traffic control anticipates that you might not want to go all the way back to the VOR before continuing outbound. Most controllers in this situation (not all) will protect both options so they are covered (and you are safe) no matter what you do. However, if they have conflicting traffic, you should expect them to be very specific with their missed approach instructions, particularly if they don’t want you to go back to the VOR. The key is to coordinate what you want to do as early as possible.

Recognize that in the States, ATC won’t issue your en route clearance until after the approach when you contact them on your overshoot. The sooner you contact ATC on your overshoot, the sooner you’ll get your en route clearance and avoid having to spin back to the VOR. Be careful about how you phrase your en route clearance request. If you request “direct XYZ, flight planned route” does that mean direct XYZ from your present position or from the missed approach termination point? If you want present position direct, then say that, and ATC will know exactly what you want to do.

Still have questions? Contact Lt Col Al Laursen at the ICP Flight at AVN 257-6279 or Laursen.AP@forces.gc.ca.