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Senator John McCain  
508 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.  
Suite: Russell 241  
Washington DC 20510-6125

Dear Senator John McCain,

I am a FAA air traffic controller at Houston Approach Control. I am also a pilot. I have (3) aviation safety issues in which your U.S. Senate Committees have oversight (naval aircraft safety, commercial aircraft safety and FAA ATC services). I will only address one issue in this letter in order to establish my credibility. However, all of these safety issues are intimately linked together.

**1. US NAVY & MARINE CORPS FIGHTER / ATTACK JET AIRCRAFT (F-18, F-14, EA-6, & AV-8) PILOTS ARE RISKING THEIR LIVES UNNECESSARILY. NONE OF THESE AIRCRAFT HAVE ILS RECEIVERS THAT WORK WITH LAND BASED INSTRUMENT LANDING SYSTEMS!**

In the last twenty-five years, US Naval Aviation has made great strides in the development of shipboard landing systems for the recovery of landing aircraft in instrument meteorological conditions (IMC). Newer model F-18s can auto-land on aircraft carriers using ship based ILS or with data-linked PAR. However, the naval aviators flying these aircraft into airports in IMC still have to rely on the same two instruments you used in the sixties in your A-4 (TACAN or NDB receiver). In other words, a minimally IFR equipped civilian Cessna 172 has better instrumentation for conducting IFR approaches into an airport than a \$40 million dollar Navy fighter.

In the past twenty-five years, I have personally conducted two "unpublished" radar surveillance (ASR) approaches (one F-14 at RND in 1975 & (3) F-18s at EFD in 1998) that allowed four Navy pilots to stay with their aircraft for successful landings. In both cases, the TACAN was out of service at the destination airport, the weather was low IFR, and the aircraft were in emergency fuel status. If I had not conducted these ASR approaches, which by the way many FAA ATC personnel think are illegal, the pilots would have had to eject.

On February 2, 1997, one of my co-workers conducted an "unpublished" emergency ASR approach with a US Marine Corps F-18 into IAH. The only difference in this emergency was the F-18 was unable to see the runway on a TACAN approach into EFD and upon making a missed approach declared emergency fuel. The weather at EFD was well within ILS minimums.

Had the above aircraft been equipped with an ILS, as do all the other military service aircraft, none of the emergency "unpublished" ASR approaches would have been required.

In March 1998, I was working a "Blue Angel" F-18 pilot and I told him about a recent emergency "unpublished" radar surveillance (ASR) approach that I conducted with (3) F-18s on February 4, 1998 into Ellington Field. This pilot stated that the "Blue Angel" F-18s were the only US Navy aircraft to have ILS instruments and that I should have let these aircraft crash. I said, "**Say again!**" The pilot stated that the only way to make the Navy equip these aircraft with ILS was for a couple of these thirty million dollar aircraft to crash. He went on to say that the use of US Naval Aviation power has changed over

the past ten years. Many naval fighter aircraft are now land based in Europe where there are very few airports with a TACAN. Consequently, frequently these fighters have to weather divert to airports without a TACAN facility or NDB. The only instrument approaches to these alternate airports are an ILS approach or VOR approach (of which the aircraft are not equipped). These pilots are unnecessarily risking their lives because the Navy will not purchase a \$12,000 ILS for these aircraft. I was very surprised to hear this despair from one of the "finest" of the US Navy.

A few weeks later, I telephoned a F-18E/F "Super Hornet" Navy test pilot at the Navy Advanced Weapons Laboratory. Amazingly, during our thirty minute conversation, this Lt. Commander informed me that the new \$40 million dollar fighter was also without a land based ILS. He stated that this was a Navy blunder. I asked why the inertial navigation system (INS) could not be used for IFR approaches. He informed me that this instrument (INS) loses a 1/2 mile of azimuth accuracy for each hour flown therefore can not be certified for instrument approaches. Based on this discussion it appears that Navy Headquarters has neither recognized this safety issue nor planned corrective action.

"Any organization with three or more people is a hopeless bureaucracy." – Tom Peters, the author of "In Search of Excellence".

Sincerely,

  
Clinton Matheny

(3) Attachments

To Be Continued At A Later Date

# F-14 EMERGENCY (NOVEMBER 1975)

On a Friday night in November 1975, I became aware that F-14s are TACAN equipped only. I was working a mid-shift getting OJT for my facility rating at San Antonio Approach Control. I had just transferred from DFW.

I received a radar handoff from Houston Center on an F-14 inbound to Randolph AFB (RND) for the Veterans Day Air Show. When the pilot checked in, I told the pilot to expect an ILS 14L approach to RND and issued the weather (200 overcast, visibility 1 mile with fog). The F-14 pilot told me that he was not ILS equipped and wanted a TACAN approach.

I informed the pilot that the TACAN had been out of service for two days. The pilot then requested a PAR. I told the pilot that RND GCA was closed after 10PM. The pilot then declared an emergency, advised me that he had less than 15 minutes of fuel (he was 15 miles northeast of RND), and they was going to eject. I told the pilot "NEGATIVE, expect a radar surveillance approach to Runway 14L at RND".

My OJT instructor informed me that I could not conduct an ASR approach to RND. Only RND GCA could conduct the approach. (I thought his attitude was unusual at the time.) I told my instructor to leave the room if he did not want see me to conduct this emergency approach. He left the radar room. I gave the F-14 an emergency "unpublished" ASR approach to RND. The pilot broke out of the overcast at 150 feet on a ½ mile final and landed. Published radar surveillance approach minimums are never lower than 400 feet. *This was an emergency!*

Thirty minutes later, the pilot telephoned and expressed his appreciation. He wanted my name and the facility address. I told the pilot not to write any letters because he would get in trouble for poor flight planning and my OJT instructor might get into trouble for letting me conduct this radar approach.

Twenty- three years later..