

AIR BEAT

The Official Journal of the Airborne Law Enforcement Association

March/April 2011

A front-facing view of a twin-engine turboprop aircraft, likely a Beechcraft King Air, with its two propellers crossed in an 'X' shape. The aircraft is parked on a tarmac with a clear blue sky and distant hills in the background.

**Fixed-Wing Aircraft In
Public Safety Aviation:
WE HAVE APPS FOR THAT!**

**ALEA AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS
DETAILS INSIDE**



VIEWING VIOLATIONS:

FIXED-WING FLEET PROVIDES TRAFFIC SAFETY PLATFORM

By Trooper Pilot Justin Cromer, Ohio State Highway Patrol Aviation Section



Is there any better platform for traffic enforcement than a fixed-wing aircraft? The pilots from the Ohio State Highway Patrol Aviation Section would say no. Perhaps they are biased, but consider the following.

BENEFITS OF THE FIXED-WING PLATFORM

One of the most difficult tasks in traffic enforcement is being able to position yourself in the right spot at the right time in order to view a violation. Fixed-wing aircraft have a bird's eye view of violations. The focus in traffic enforcement is to stop the reckless and aggressive driver. This is the

driver who has little or no regard for the safety of others while traveling on the roadways.

The dilemma when trying to view these violations on the ground is that the vast majority of drivers change their driving behaviors when they see a cruiser, whose mission it is to help them change those behaviors (usually by means of a citation). Most people don't notice aircraft flying above them, and it is therefore easier to view their unadulterated driving habits from an airborne platform.

The target audience is not the driver who momentarily speeds up to get out of the way of a tailgater. The target is the tailgater trying to push the car ahead out of the way. When a ground officer is

working traffic enforcement alone, he or she may question whether the first vehicle that slowed when the cruiser came into sight caused the tailgating vehicle's violation. The pilot in the aircraft has no question. He has been witnessing the violation (and perhaps others) for an extended period and knows who the aggressive driver is. In fact, nearly all traffic violations are easier to witness from an elevated platform, as opposed to working on the ground. Following too closely, unsafe lane changes, passing on the berm and aggressive speed are just a few of these violations. The ability to view these traffic violations over a longer period of time and distance, as opposed to a line of sight distance with laser or radar, is perhaps the greatest advantage of the airborne platform.

BATTLING THE BUDGET

Especially in these days of struggling economies, one might initially see reducing aviation assets as a good way to reduce budget constraints. There is no question that aviation-related operating costs are high. The Ohio State Highway Patrol Aviation Section's daily fleet of fixed-wing aircraft averages around 5,000 flight hours per year. This equates to a big number on the operating budget; however, the return on investment in this same category is off the charts. In an economy where police operations are continually required to do more with less, the fixed-wing fleet stands out as one of those items the Ohio State Highway Patrol cannot do without. Aviation sections are a force multiplier for Ohio law enforcement. When working traffic enforcement with the airplane, ground units are able to accomplish three to four times as much as compared to working on their own. Couple that with the fact that one pilot sometimes works with as many as six to eight ground units at a time, and you can begin to see that the force multiplication effect of an aircraft is an invaluable resource.

Nearly all of the airborne traffic enforcement details of the Ohio State Highway Patrol involve multiple ground officers working with a single aircraft. Backup officers are always close by, and the pilot can easily monitor all officers. The typical response of an aggressive driver as they approach an area where multiple cruisers have vehicles stopped is to slow and blend in with the flow of traf-



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fic. They typically do not realize their driving habits have been monitored by the pilot in the airspace zone perhaps miles back. The suspect is much more likely to stop if he or she doesn't think the officer has witnessed the violation.

The number of pursuits mitigated or avoided all together as a result of aerial support will never be fully discovered. And when a pursuit does occur, is there any better tool available than an “eye in the sky” to advise and direct officers of a suspect's every move?

On a recent motorcycle pursuit in Cincinnati, the advantage of having a fixed-wing aircraft on scene was realized. Once it was clear the suspect was not going to stop, ground units backed away from the suspect and

followed the directions of the pilot as he continued to update them on the suspect's position.

The suspect attempted to lure police cruisers to a location where he drove the motorcycle onto a pedestrian walkway that crossed over the interstate. With the shortest route to the other side of the pedestrian walkway being around 2.5 miles, the suspect would have plenty of time to elude police and get away. The pilot was able to direct units to where the suspect had parked the bike just blocks from the pedestrian walkway. Once in custody, the ground officers discovered the suspect had evaded police multiple times in the past using this same tactic. This is just one example of the hundreds of pur-



Trooper Pilot Scott Hartge on the job.

“AERIAL TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT IS THE ROUTINE ‘MEAT AND POTATOES’ OPERATION OF OHIO’S FIXED-WING FLEET.”

suits in Ohio that have ended with minimal exposure of the motoring public to high risk.

INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE UNIT

The Ohio State Highway Patrol’s Aviation Section consists of a section commander, safety and training officer, administrative officer, operations supervisor, secretary and 12 trooper/pilots. All of the pilots (who are also uniformed officers) and aircraft are based out of the Ohio State University Airport in Columbus, with the exception of two (soon to be three) remote pilots and planes.

On inclement weather days, the trooper/pilots deploy in their cruisers and join ground officers engaging in traffic enforcement, handling crash investiga-



tions and providing assistance to disabled motorists.

The Ohio Department of Transportation provides five aviation mechanics to maintain the fleet. Two AS350 American Eurocopters (equipped with FLIR systems) and a Cessna Grand Caravan C208B (equipped with an L3 Wescam surveillance system capable of downlinking) provide support for multiple agencies in addressing both law enforcement and disaster response needs. Two C-172s and eleven C-182s make up the daily fleet of aircraft that see about 88 percent of the total flight time for the section.

Aerial traffic enforcement is the routine “meat and potatoes” operation of Ohio’s fixed-wing fleet. The division has been conducting “airspeed” operations since 1959, so personnel know how effective it is. On average, Ohio State Highway Patrol Aviation Section pilots spend about 85 percent of their time working airspeed. This is advantageous because the pilots are then spread out geographically across the state to allow for a quicker response time to any specific area should something requiring aerial support occur.

In addition to aerial traffic enforcement, other missions that pilots engage in in-

clude criminal and missing persons searches, surveillance flights, photo flights, emergency or time sensitive transportation flights and marijuana eradication in the summer months.

RECENT SUCCESS

The proactive approach to traffic safety in Ohio means that each pilot (assigned to a specific district) goes out every day seeking to stop aggressive drivers on Ohio’s roadways. The unit does not stand by and respond to fatal crashes, it actively works to prevent them from happening in the first place. Some of the most dangerous areas to travel in Ohio are on sections of interstate that are difficult for ground officers to work on their own. Large volumes of traffic, concrete barriers on both sides of the highway and lack of good areas to initiate traffic stops are some of the reasons for this. When officers do initiate traffic stops in these congested areas, traffic quickly bottlenecks, presenting the opportunity for additional crashes. Many of these conditions are found in metropolitan areas. This is yet another area where fixed-wing aircraft shine.

In the summer of 2006, the Ohio State Highway Patrol’s Aviation Section, along with ground units from local patrol posts, began a joint operation with the Cincinnati Police Traffic Unit. Operation TRIAD (Targeting Reckless Intimidating and Aggressive Drivers) utilizes fixed-wing aircraft to engage in traffic enforcement in specific high-crash areas that are difficult for ground units to work. Since its inception, this program has proven to be effective, and plans are in place to continue and possibly expand it into the future.

“Overall, interstate highway fatalities within the City of Cincinnati have been reduced by 86 percent,” said Captain Dan Gerard of the Cincinnati Police Department’s (CPD) Special Operation Division. “Airspeed enforcement is now a core component of the CPD traffic safety plan that has seen great reductions in fatal, serious injury and total accidents citywide.”

The Ohio State Highway Patrol’s mission is to protect life and property, promote traffic safety and provide professional public safety services with respect, compassion and unbiased professionalism. Airborne traffic enforcement with fixed-wing aircraft is and will continue to be an integral part of that mission because it is one of the most effective tools for attaining that goal. 