THE INS AND OUTS OF HAMILTON

Pilots flying in and out of Hamilton aerodrome need to know it's a busy piece of airspace, with a lot of training traffic. It's also a relatively small control zone which means things can happen pretty quickly.

Photo: istockphoto.com/andrew_t

Greg Hagarty, the CFI at Hamilton's flight training school L3Harris Airline Academy, says people need to appreciate the volume of traffic operating at and around Hamilton.

"In terms of movement numbers, it's second only to Auckland, which operates more hours of the day than us. The training areas around Hamilton are very busy."

That means pilots must be well prepared and study the arrival and departure procedures in *AIPNZ* Vol 4 thoroughly before flying to Hamilton.

"The arrival procedures require thorough study before coming in. Don't underestimate the procedures," Greg says.

He says the entry and exit points from the zone means traffic tends to concentrate at either Cambridge in the east or west around Temple View.

"They're nice, easy points to pinpoint your location as you're coming in and out of the zone and the arrival procedures reference these points. Arrival briefings should be completed in good time to allow pilots to concentrate on looking out and listening out. If you are not immediately given clearance into the zone, you may find yourself holding clear with a number of other aircraft."

Tim Bradding, the chief controller at Hamilton Tower says the other factor is that there's a lot of training aircraft.

"They're all working as hard as they can to do the right thing, but it is a training environment, so errors do get made. The aerodrome is busy and also prone to people doing the unexpected," Tim says.

That means they have very standardised procedures.

"The key thing for us as controllers is that people are well briefed on those procedures before they come to Hamilton.

"It's very likely that they will get those published procedures when they arrive rather than just plain language clearance."

Tim encourages any pilots who are uncertain about anything, to make a phone call to the tower.

"We would really recommend that they give us a call and have a chat about it."

He says they also encourage pilots to tell them if it's their first time flying into Hamilton when they first call up on the radio.

"So that we can be aware of that, and just give them a little bit more space and time to get themselves sorted."

Tim says if pilots have a good understanding before they come to Hamilton aerodrome, it will make their lives a lot easier in the busy airspace.

Peter Wilson, the CFI at Waikato Aviation, agrees.

He's been flying in and out of Hamilton for 15 years and says if you're a first-timer, you must read the arrival and departure procedures thoroughly before coming to Hamilton.

He says situational awareness, keeping a good lookout, and maintaining an active listening watch are all essential.

"Have an idea where traffic is in the area, because there are some quite high density points for arrival and departure and a lot of training traffic in the area."

Peter says people should also be aware of Te Kowhai aerodrome on the north-western side of Hamilton aerodrome.

"There's quite a few light sport aircraft that operate out of and around and south of Te Kowhai."

Radio traffic

Greg Hagarty says the radio traffic can be very busy.

"Remember to push the PTT (push to talk) before you start to talk and do not rush your radio call. Speak clearly and at the correct pace. Rushing your radio calls often leads to having to repeat the call or the readback. Clarify with ATC if you have any uncertainty about what to do; they are there to help you."

He says some arriving and departing traffic may be operating on the Tower frequency, while other traffic may be on the CFZ frequency.

"It's that juggling act departing the zone and calling clear on Tower frequency as you enter the CFZ, which is right up to the edge of the control zone. Our guidance has always been that when you're within close proximity of the control zone, you should be on the Tower frequency so that as you depart you have awareness of joining traffic and as you return to the aerodrome you have awareness of departing traffic. That does potentially put you out of comms with people on the CFZ frequency who may be transiting close to the CTR without talking to ATC. This is where two com boxes can be of benefit but it does require intelligent management. Regardless of anything else, do not let use of radio distract you from maintaining a good lookout."

Peter Wilson says you have to stay on top of the radio.

"Especially from your initial call prior to entry to the arrival reporting points at Mystery Creek or Rukuhia. »

» "Getting that call in, you have to be active on the radio. You also need to know where to hold if you can't get that radio call in.

"Keep an active listening watch and know the visual reporting points."

Tim from the Hamilton Tower says it's critical pilots are aware they'll have to change frequencies.

"The initial call will be made on 122.9 MHz and that's a controller who will give them their clearance into the airspace.

"Then prior to entering the airspace, they change to 126.8 MHz and that's the controller who's actually controlling all the traffic within the control zone.

"They must make that frequency change, otherwise they won't receive any instructions as to what's going on."

Tim says the RT in Hamilton is extremely busy with clearance limits in each part of the procedure.

"We need people to be very aware of what those clearance limits are, and not to break them if they can't get in on the RT."

He says there are specific procedures if you can't get in on the RT.

"And that's to hold at certain points. So the key message is – if you can't make a call, make sure you know what you should be doing next.

"We often have occurrences where people who can't get a call in on the RT will just continue on flying and join the circuit – these are often pilots who come from uncontrolled aerodromes."

Tim says another thing they see quite often is itinerant pilots joining into the downwind and then turning onto a very short base leg without making a radio call.

"That's a dangerous position to put yourself in because the circuit's so busy that we've got traffic on both sides of the circuit pattern. And if they make a turn into the base leg without having made a radio call and having received a sequence from us, chances are they'll be turning directly towards traffic coming on the opposite base leg."

He says in that situation a pilot should keep extending downwind until they can make a call to the Tower or the controller can call them and give them instructions.

AS IF YOU NEEDED IT, THERE'S ANOTHER REASON TO STAY OUT OF MILITARY AIRSPACE. DRONES.

The NZDF is increasingly concerned about near misses between its drones and manned aircraft.

General aviation aircraft shouldn't be in active military operating areas anyway. But sometimes they unwittingly or carelessly 'wander through the gate'. Now, aside from the risks posed by weapons firing, demolition exercises, and low-level aerobatic training, civil pilots also need to be aware of possible military drone activity.

The New Zealand Defence Force is increasingly testing and using drones – both commercial and military – and has more than 200 qualified drone operators.

"Drones are a proven lifesaving capability for NZDF," says Hayden Robinson, the army's experimentation manager.

"It's genuinely a game changer. Our personnel can conduct reconnaissance tasks and find adversaries without putting themselves in harm's way.

"Our work has also highlighted a range of additional tasks where UAS[1] can be valuable. They include security tasks at camps and bases, surveying, search and rescue, firefighting, and delivery of small logistic packages such as water or first aid kits."

Hayden says the NZDF has developed procedures for the safe and professional use of drones, with a certification process and many of its airworthiness rules and policies mirroring those of the CAA.

Squadron Leader Don Richardson from RNZAF Flight Safety says "All our UAS-trained personnel are taught the CAA rules, and also to be familiar with the idiosyncrasies of the Defence Force airworthiness system."

1 Drones are also referred to as remotely piloted aircraft systems, RPAS; unmanned aerial vehicles, UAVs; unmanned aerial systems, UAS; and UA, unmanned aircraft.