

# The Manager's Approach



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Columbia & Pine Mountain Lake Airports

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## *AWOS Repair*

The AWOS at Columbia Airport was taken off line for 2 weeks this October for the repair of the computer motherboard. We lost all manual control of the system and thought it was the man-machine interface, but it appears that the problem was in the motherboard. Not having a spare in stock, we had to remove the board and send it off to be repaired. By the time you receive this Bulletin the AWOS should be back up and running.

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## *Air Attack Air Museum*

I have been working with Dan Ward, Battalion Chief for the CDF Air Attack Base at Columbia Airport, to try and obtain a surplus S2A air tanker for display at Columbia Airport. Columbia Airport has been an air attack base since the 1950s and the S2A tankers were first based here in the 1972. These aircraft have served Tuolumne County well, protecting life and property from the destruction caused by wildfires. Many people feel putting a S2A on static display would provide a fitting monument to the men and women that have worked in this dangerous profession.

With an eye on the future, there has been discussion and agreement that we should not stop with just the S2A. To the best of my knowledge, there are no aircraft museums that are specifically dedicated to collecting and displaying fire fighting aircraft. It is felt that if we can get one aircraft, we can get two. And, if we can get two, we can get four, and so forth. The Columbia Air Attack Base has been the home of the TMB, PBY, F7F, O2, Huey helicopter and several other

aircraft. So, you can see the possibilities of a museum.

The idea of establishing a museum was discussed with the FAA and they are fully in favor of it. Their only concern is that it be outside the building restriction line for both runways. My feeling is that the ideal location would be in the triangle of ground behind the windsock, between the two runways and adjacent to the campground.

Well, dreams of an aircraft museum are fine but it is hard work and support that will make it a reality. So far the Board of Supervisors has sent a letter of interest in obtaining a S2A to CDF's Chief of Aviation. Additionally, the Air Attack Base firefighters have asked their union to voice their support for the S2A acquisition. What is still needed is for our local pilot's organizations and individuals to write letters to their State representatives urging them to support Columbia Airports desire to obtain a surplus S2A. Ask your representative to express their support to:

Mr. Mike Padilla, Chief of Aviation  
Calif. Dept. of Forestry & Fire Protection  
5500 Price Avenue  
McClellan, CA 95652-2421

Political support for this is most important, but individual support also is needed. If you want to write a personal letter to Mike Padilla, please feel free to do so. Time is of the essence here because there are only a limited number of these aircraft being surplus this year.

If you would like additional information regarding our plan to create an Air Attack Aircraft museum or our request for a surplus S2A, please come by my office or give me a call. I love to talk about such possibilities.

## *Parts Solvent Disposal*

Once again we have received two buckets of used parts cleaning solvent at our used oil hut at Columbia Airport. One bucket was extremely full resulting in a minor spill when the bucket was opened for inspection.

I want to emphasize that we cannot mix parts cleaning solvent with the used oil. Mixing the two contaminates the whole tank which then needs to be hauled off as hazardous waste. The Airports budget is pretty thin to begin with and having to pay several thousands of dollars to dispose of 8 gallons of solvent is something I want to avoid. Please, don't use our airport as a waste dump for your parts solvent.

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## *Stupid Pilot Tricks*

It is interesting that whenever someone performs a stupid stunt around an airport, the pilot's heads come out of the hangars and watch in bewilderment. Airport people can usually sense that something odd is happening because our ears are "tuned" to normal airplane sounds. When something different is heard we just have to go outside and look.

Well my ears detected a small helicopter traveling at a high rate of speed low across the airport. Normally helicopters approach the airport slowly as they transition from cruise to hover flight, an entirely different sound. This guy was really hauling butt!

When I got outside my office I noticed 2 other pilots that had also just stuck their heads out to see what was going on. There was a helicopter (not locally based) just completing a high speed pass down Runway 11 and then pulling up into a chandelle to bleed off speed, and finally setting quickly, but with great skill, on the helipad. A perfect display of hotdog helicoptering!

Sounds fun, but very stupid. First, Runway 11 is not recommended for take-offs or landings because you cannot see aircraft departing on 17 which is the commonly used runway. Second, we sometimes have; aircraft flying that either do not have a radio,

pilots that don't use their radio, improperly tuned their radios, or radios with the volume turned down. The helicopter pilot had no way of knowing that he would not have a potential conflict with an aircraft departing 17. Also, flying at high speeds and then focusing on the timing of his pull-up, the pilot could not have been properly looking for conflicting traffic.

Not more than a week later two homebuilt aircraft announced their intention to make a formation departure on 11. They had camped out in the campground over night and 11 was the most convenient runway for departure. Columbia UNICOM told the pilots that departures on Runway 11 were not recommended because of the potential conflict with departing traffic on 17. The pilots chose to ignore the UNICOM broadcast and proceeded to execute their take-off. Do you think the guy in the number 2 position was looking out for traffic? If his eyes were anywhere but glued solidly to his lead, he should have his brain examined. If his lead made an abrupt maneuver to avoid conflicting traffic, would number 2 have been able to react quick enough to avoid being left as a sitting duck in the flight path of an approaching aircraft?

Columbia Airport discourages landings and especially departures from Runway 11 for good reason; it is blind to Runway 17. Please, if you want to use the grass use Runway 29.

*Stupid Pilot Tricks is a monthly article that attempts to raise awareness of safety and courtesy issues around our airports.*

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*The Manager's Approach* is a monthly publication from the Tuolumne County Airports Director for the purpose of keeping our community informed of local aviation and airport issues. You can contact me at:

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