

# Problem of America's Overcrowded Airways Studied by Ike's Assistant

**By Joseph L. Myler**  
**United Press Columnist**  
 Washington — U.S. airways are the world's safest—and they are so crowded that every day hundreds of Americans brush close to death in aerial "near-misses."

Sometimes death makes a direct hit. In the past five years there have been more than 65 collisions between civil aircraft with heavy loss of life. The nation's skyways are chronically overloaded, and the jam is steadily getting worse.

Why? Can anything be done about it? What?

Retired Maj. Gen. Edward P. Curtis, President Eisenhower's special assistant on aviation planning, has given the United Press some answers to these and other questions.

The country finds itself with an obsolete air traffic control system, now 21 years old, because "We grossly underestimated the volume of the aviation industry in all its aspects."

The air traffic control problem is complicated and tough. "But we have got to solve it somehow," Curtis said.

Curtis is 59. He was a fighter pilot in World War I. In World War II he was chief of staff of the Strategic Air Force in Europe. He is an old friend of Dwight D. Eisenhower. He was vice president of Eastman Kodak Co. when the President summoned him to his present post last February.

**Plan Will Take Time**  
 It will take prodigies of effort to make the skies over America safe for a mushrooming aviation industry now rushing into the age of jet transportation. The chunky, blue-eyed veteran of aerial combat seems to have no doubt these prodigies will materialize.

"But," he said, running a tanned hand over his close-cropped gray hair, "it will not be cheap and it will take time."

Time? Only the other week, on June 30, two crowded airliners going the same direction at 21,000 feet collided—or so the experts believe—over the Grand Canyon in Arizona. The resulting crash killed 128 persons in history's worst commercial aviation disaster.

It would be hard to imagine a less congested region of air space than that over the Grand Canyon. If two aircraft could collide there, how much more dangerous must be the air approaches to the nation's great airports?

Actually, the Grand Canyon tragedy was a freak. As one expert observer put it, "a hundred things had to go wrong for those planes to hit, whereas on the approaches to any big airport on any day a hundred things have to go right to prevent a collision."

The Grand Canyon crashes served, however, to point up the fact that the air is no longer empty but instead is packed with potentialities of disaster. It has been reported that there are an average of four near-collisions a day between civilian aircraft. In some instances airliners have roared within 100 feet of each other. Over New York a while back two mammoth DC7s were said actually to have touched in the air.

**Automatic System Needed**  
 As Curtis sees it, you can't scrap the present air traffic control system overnight and set up a brand new one in its place, however desirable that might be.

Many experts believe that ultimately the country must have a largely automatic system in which all planes, civilian and military, will be constantly under surveillance of control officials on the ground.

The military is working on a \$3,000,000,000 electronic system (SAGE) for keeping track of all airplanes in the sky. It is a defense system, but many authorities believe something like it will have to be used for both civil and military control, particularly after 1959 when high-speed commercial jets enter the air space between 24,000 and 40,000 feet, now reserved exclusively for military use.

But Curtis points out that SAGE is not an automatic system. It does not do everything a machine could do. It is a "man-in-the-loop" system, and the ultimate responsibility will be taken by the man in the cockpit.

The CAA has a long way to go before it can be considered a "complete" system for all aircraft in all times and places, Curtis believes, at least until 1960.

Meanwhile, something must be done about the present situation which is growing steadily more hazardous. Curtis believes the first thing to do is to get the CAA's so-called "five-year plan" to give ground controllers radar eyes.

**CAA Project Speeded**  
 This will cost \$246,000,000 and, he CAA says, will "blanket the country" with radar. But for years in view of the hazard is a long time. Commerce Secretary Sinclair Weeks says the program may be telescoped into three years.

President Eisenhower on July 17 asked Congress for an additional \$63,943,000 to speed up the CAA project. Congress already had appropriated \$40,800,000 for the fiscal year which started July 1.

But nevertheless it is a fact, according to Curtis, that the process described in the statement of the nation's long-range requirements for aviation facilities does not exist.

Still, however, it is known that the nation's air traffic control system is not only out of date but also is not doing its job. It is not doing its job, Curtis said, because it is not doing its job.

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Equipment plus an extended testing program.

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SIX—MEDFORD (OREGON) MAIL TRIBUNE

Tuesday, July 24, 1956

## 18 Fishermen Safe In Fog at Reedsport

Reedsport, Ore. — U.S. Eighteen Oregon residents reached safety here yesterday after being unaccounted for on fishing boats out of Salmon Harbor for more than a day when fog blanketed the Pacific Ocean port Sunday night.

Patrols kept a constant watch on the beaches through Sunday night and three coast guard boats patrolled the coast yesterday morning to keep small craft in until the missing boats had been located.

The "Pacific Queen" brought in three of the missing boats yesterday morning and a short time later the other three were sighted by coast guardsmen from Florence.

Aboard the six fishing boats were 17 men and a woman. They had come to the port from Portland, Hillsboro, Eugene, Springfield, Cottage Grove and Glide.

Not so, according to Curtis. He said "No practical anti-collision devices have been developed so far."

There is no doubt that the skyways are in a mess, Curtis, who can look as deadpan as the next, gave no sign that he thought any individual or agency is to blame.

He did tell Congress, however, that he is making a study to determine in what respects existing agencies have succeeded or failed. And he promised to come up with recommendations for a new agency to put things right.

Hard as it is to see, the present air traffic control system is not only out of date but also is not doing its job. It is not doing its job, Curtis said, because it is not doing its job.

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