

## ILLEGAL OPERATIONS AT SMALL AIRPORTS ARE USUALLY KEPT SECRET

Most pilots have observed illegal operations happening at small airports and fly-ins they visit. Usually these are those non-commercial pilots flying passengers and charging them, at times using non-legal reasoning such as “sharing expenses” and misinterpreting the FARs, [FAR 61.113\(a\)](#) in particular (see the [opinion](#) from the Reigel Law Firm). At other times they observe those pilots non-rated for an aircraft, which may not even be registered and legal, flying them around those small airports which are rarely visited by the FAA. Usually the illegal pilots keep their operations private, and don't advertise them, but not John Walsh near Key Largo, Florida.

Authorities allege that John Walsh, 46, has been using an unregistered LSA-type aircraft and falsified pilot certificate to fly customers near Key Largo, Florida. Walsh was charged November 19th with felony operation of the aircraft — an M-Squared Breeze II that would otherwise be an LSA or experimental category aircraft, fitted with pontoons — in a careless and reckless manner and possession of an unregistered aircraft. Authorities say Walsh was in possession of a fake pilot's license and used Facebook to [advertise for customers](#). They say he was not in possession of a pilot certificate of any kind and an FAA safety inspector reportedly shot video of Walsh flying the unregistered seaplane, exiting the aircraft with a passenger, and soliciting others.



Walsh was released from custody after posting a \$10,000 bond. His aircraft has been confiscated, a Monroe County Sheriff's Office spokesperson told WPTV news. The sheriff's director of aviation, Brooks Bateman, told NaplesNews.com that Walsh “didn't have any pilot certification at all.” He added that the aircraft Walsh flew was “falling apart due to saltwater exposure.” Walsh was allegedly filmed soliciting rides for \$20 per passenger in the two-seat open-cockpit aircraft.

Federal Aviation Administration spokeswoman Kathleen Bergen said the agency was working with the sheriff's office on the investigation. According to arrest warrants, an FAA safety inspector on vacation in the Keys used his cellphone to record Walsh flying about 25 feet over boaters and landing near a group of boats. The inspector also observed Walsh exiting the plane with a passenger and then soliciting other customers, according to the documents. Walsh kept the aircraft in the water in Key Largo, not at an airport, Bateman said.

(Information adapted from [AVwebFLASH](#) 11/25/13, [CBS Miami](#) 11/20/13, [WPTV](#), [NaplesNews.com](#) 11/20/13, and the FAA)

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## YOUNG PILOT “WANNABES” MIGHT WANT YOUR PLANE

In 2010 the nineteen year old so-called “[barefoot bandit](#)” was sentenced to prison for flying around the country, and the Bahamas, and crashing there in a stolen plane. Often young people will hang around an airport and express interest in what pilots, aircraft builders, and airplanes are doing. We figure that these young “airport bums” are excited about the possibility of becoming a pilot. Sometimes pilots will take these youngsters under their wings and show them different aspects of their airplanes, and even take them up for a flight. But aircraft owners and pilots should possibly be wary of who is watching what they do since young pilot “wannabes” sometimes are not all they might pretend to be – clean-cut, hard-working, innocent, and trustworthy. These older youngsters may notice that hangars are left unlocked or with unsecured locks, planes are unkeyed, keys kept in the plane or in an obvious place in the hangar, the small airport has open gates or no gates and/or fences. Also the advancement of flight simulator software is such that computer savvy young people can gain a lot of information about flying aircraft in the privacy of their homes.



In a November, 2013, case, Geoffrey Biteman, a self-taught pilot at age 18, made his final landing on an unlit North Dakota state highway after dark, parking the Cessna 150 everyone had assumed was his at the farm where he was late for work picking beets. Over the course of many flights between April and October, Biteman occasionally raised suspicions (he was seen at least once landing nosewheel-first), but talked his way out of trouble until a phone call from a North Dakota farmer closed the net. The two-seat Cessna that Biteman made his own actually belongs to two brothers: U.S. Air Force Maj. Joshua Rasmussen, who is deployed in Afghanistan, and U.S. Army Maj. Adam Rasmussen, according to the [Grand Forks Herald](#).

Biteman allegedly first gained access to the aircraft by posing as a buyer and stating that he was both a pilot and aircraft mechanic. The seller allowed Biteman unsupervised access and gave permission for a flight, according to authorities. Then, they say, Biteman began to return for flights, regularly. At least one witness reported seeing Biteman flying the Cessna into and out of a nearby airport, frequently, throughout the summer.

The eighteen-year-old has been charged in Roseau, Minnesota, with theft of the 1971 Cessna 150 that he allegedly flew regularly without a pilot certificate, or the benefit of any prior lessons, and later used for unique night operations. "This kid was telling everybody that he's a pilot," Roseau Police Chief Ward Anderson said. "We even assumed, in the beginning, that he had a pilot's license. Who in their right mind would fly a plane without a pilot's license? You just don't hear of that kind of thing." The charges bring a potential sentence of 10 years in prison. In separate instances, the young man allegedly accessed the airport with friends and drove the airport's courtesy car, and accessed the incident aircraft. Later, he allegedly used the aircraft for commercial activities that included landing on an unlit road, at night, and loading the plane with sugar beets for transport, according to police. Biteman does have a prior criminal record, having pled guilty to stealing a horse trailer earlier in the summer.

The above mug shot, taken October 22nd by the county sheriff, captured Biteman with a vacant expression, tousled blond hair, a boyish face, and wispy fuzz on his chin. He will be sentenced January 6, following a routine pre-sentencing investigation likely to note the previous guilty plea for stealing the horse trailer that was noted by the Grand Forks Herald. Assistant County Attorney Michael Grover said the felony charge of motor vehicle theft and a misdemeanor charge for unauthorized use of an aircraft were all that could be proved. The teen pleaded guilty to state charges on November 25th that carry a negotiated penalty of 13 months in prison, suspended after 60 days, followed by another 60 days of home confinement with electronic monitoring, and five years of probation. He will be required to pay just over \$1,000 in fines, and make restitution for damages to the Cessna's owners—an amount that remains to be determined.

AOPA Manager of Aviation Security Tom Zecha said that while thankfully rare, the case highlights the potential cost of complacency for any owner who leaves an airplane unsecured. Door locks, throttle locks, propeller locks, and similar devices can deter or slow down, if not always prevent unauthorized use. Observant pilots and airport staff also have a role to play. "It can happen anywhere, unfortunately," Zecha said. "Complacency is a problem." See the AOPA [hints](#) for securing your aircraft.



So, lock your hangar, lock your plane, hide the key(s) very well, and [vet](#) youngsters that hang around the airport too often, especially around your portion of the airport facilities.

(Information adapted from [AVwebFLASH](#) 11/25/13, [AOPA ePilot](#) 11/29/13, [GrandForksHerald.com](#), 11/25/13 )



Sometimes you worry whether putting that extra bag on your old Cessna will make it overweight or push the CG too far forward or aft. Your problems are nothing like Santa's, according to some experts.

Assuming that each child gets nothing more than a medium-sized lego set (2 pounds), the sleigh is carrying 321,300 tons, not counting Santa, who is invariably described as overweight. We need 214,200 reindeer. This increases the payload - not even counting the weight of the sleigh - to 353,430 tons.

Santa's sleigh is moving at 650 miles per second, 3,000 times the speed of sound, so that he can make all his stops in time.

You have felt the force of a few Gs while flying. Santa's 353,000 tons traveling at 650 miles per second creates enormous air resistance and also Santa, with the 353,000 tons will be subjected to centrifugal forces - a 250-pound Santa (which seems ludicrously slim) would be pinned to the back of his sleigh by 4,315,015 pounds of force.

**And you thought you had problems with that measly bag on your Cessna!**

**Click the garland below to see the Expert's complete description of Santa's trip. Merry Christmas!**

