

Section 5. Surveillance Systems

4-5-1. Radar

a. Capabilities

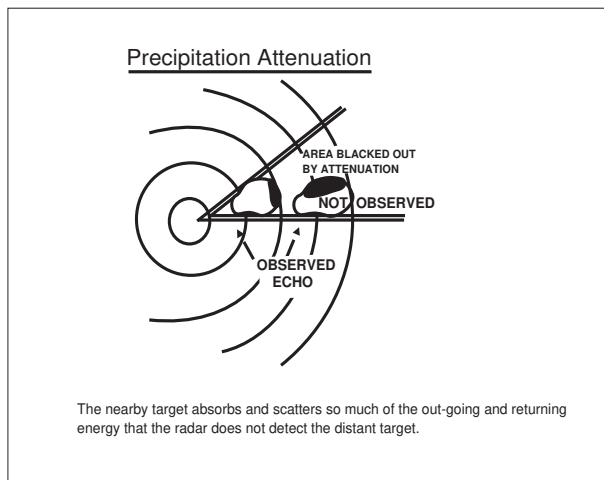
1. Radar is a method whereby radio waves are transmitted into the air and are then received when they have been reflected by an object in the path of the beam. Range is determined by measuring the time it takes (at the speed of light) for the radio wave to go out to the object and then return to the receiving antenna. The direction of a detected object from a radar site is determined by the position of the rotating antenna when the reflected portion of the radio wave is received.

2. More reliable maintenance and improved equipment have reduced radar system failures to a negligible factor. Most facilities actually have some components duplicated, one operating and another which immediately takes over when a malfunction occurs to the primary component.

b. Limitations

1. It is very important for the aviation community to recognize the fact that there are limitations to radar service and that ATC controllers may not always be able to issue traffic advisories concerning aircraft which are not under ATC control and cannot be seen on radar. (See FIG 4-5-1.)

FIG 4-5-1
Limitations to Radar Service



(a) The characteristics of radio waves are such that they normally travel in a continuous straight line unless they are:

(1) “Bent” by abnormal atmospheric phenomena such as temperature inversions;

(2) Reflected or attenuated by dense objects such as heavy clouds, precipitation, ground obstacles, mountains, etc.; or

(3) Screened by high terrain features.

(b) The bending of radar pulses, often called anomalous propagation or ducting, may cause many extraneous blips to appear on the radar operator’s display if the beam has been bent toward the ground or may decrease the detection range if the wave is bent upward. It is difficult to solve the effects of anomalous propagation, but using beacon radar and electronically eliminating stationary and slow moving targets by a method called moving target indicator (MTI) usually negate the problem.

(c) Radar energy that strikes dense objects will be reflected and displayed on the operator’s scope thereby blocking out aircraft at the same range and greatly weakening or completely eliminating the display of targets at a greater range. Again, radar beacon and MTI are very effectively used to combat ground clutter and weather phenomena, and a method of circularly polarizing the radar beam will eliminate some weather returns. A negative characteristic of MTI is that an aircraft flying a speed that coincides with the canceling signal of the MTI (tangential or “blind” speed) may not be displayed to the radar controller.

(d) Relatively low altitude aircraft will not be seen if they are screened by mountains or are below the radar beam due to earth curvature. The historical solution to screening has been the installation of strategically placed multiple radars, which has been done in some areas, but ADS-B now provides ATC surveillance in some areas with challenging terrain where multiple radar installations would be impractical.

(e) There are several other factors which affect radar control. The amount of reflective surface of an aircraft will determine the size of the radar return. Therefore, a small light airplane or a sleek jet