

# Droning On and On

By Reg P. Wydeven

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This Christmas was the Year of the Drone for my son. He used his birthday money to buy a mini drone on Black Friday. He got a drone from one set of grandparents that does tricks and is marketed as “virtually indestructible” (we’ll see). His other set of grandparents got him a drone that has a camera. It’s like living at O’Hare airport.

My son is actually becoming a pretty good pilot. He can take off and get the drones close to the ceiling without touching it. He can also land them almost wherever you tell him to. I, on the other hand, am not so skilled. I crash the drones into the ceiling and then cause them to come hurtling back to earth. Thank goodness for indestructibility.

Well, I’m not alone in my lack of skills. Barry Billcliff isn’t the greatest pilot either.

On August 8, Billcliff got married. To capture the memories of the happiest day of his life, Billcliff brought his drone to the reception at Searles Castle in Windham, New Hampshire. While attempting to get some photos of guests out on the dance floor, he allegedly crashed the drone into the heads of Kneena Ellis, of Seabrook, and Kelly Eaton, of Peabody, Massachusetts.

As a result, Ellis and Eaton sued Billcliff. Their suit alleges that the collision with the drone caused them both to suffer concussions and permanent physical and emotional injuries. Billcliff admitted to the Boston Herald that he is the owner of the drone, but he denies that he was operating it during the crash. Scott Robb II, vice president of Searles Castle, claims he never gave Billcliff permission to fly the drone in his establishment.

The suit is just the latest of many involving drones. In addition to increased FAA regulations, civil lawsuits between individuals, like Ellis and Eaton’s against Billcliff, have been on the rise.

Many cases involve people blasting drones out of the sky with shotguns. The most famous involves William Merideth, who dubs himself the “Drone Slayer.” When a drone was hovering over his Kentucky property, allegedly filming his daughter sunbathing, Merideth grabbed his gun and took down the drone.

Merideth was initially charged with felony wanton endangerment and criminal mischief. However, the charges were later dismissed when a judge ruled that he was within his rights to shoot down the drone, which was ruled to be trespassing and harassing.

But that wasn’t the end. David Boggs, the owner of the drone, has asked a federal court for a declaratory judgment that shooting down drones is illegal and also for damages for the loss of his \$1,800 drone. Boggs, a roofer who claims he was using the drone to examine Merideth’s neighbor’s roof, produced a flight plan that shows his drone never flew under 200 feet. Therefore, he argues, the drone was not trespassing nor invading anyone’s privacy.

Much of the nation is following this case closely, for the outcome will decide what gets more protection: a hobbyist’s right to fly his drone or a person’s right to privacy.

I cut our lawn in my Speedo, and we don’t seem to have any trouble with drones.

Have a blessed and happy 2017.

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