Is There a Pattern Here?

Vigilance and adherence to published procedures are critical when operating in or near an airport traffic pattern. Whether the airport is towered or non-towered, certain fundamentals apply to all pattern operations. Clear, concise communications, see and avoid, and use of standardized arrival, approach, and departure procedures provide a pattern for efficiency and safety.

When I finally saw the traffic, it was close off my left wing, about 300 feet below me. I was told by Tower that I had flown through the final approach course, very close to landing traffic, and that I was to make a left 180-degree turn to enter final for Runway 6. An uneventful landing was accomplished.

After thinking about the incident, I realized what had happened. I have been to this airport many times, but almost always approaching from the northeast and usually landing on Runway 24. This time I approached from the southeast for a base entry to Runway 6. I was intent on looking for my traffic and mistook Runway 14/32 for Runway 6/24. I was looking at the wrong runway and looking for traffic in the wrong place. When I saw the traffic, I thought he was in the wrong place and I became confused, until the Tower told me about flying through the final approach course for Runway 6. I realize that orientation is a full time job, especially when flying in the pattern. When I didn’t see the traffic, I should have called the controller and asked for further directions.

Cutoff on Takeoff

As the pilot of a homebuilt aircraft reported to ASRS, use of the correct procedures for departing a non-towered airport can be “overshadowed” by a less conscientious arrival. Judging from a rather terse communication after landing, it appears that the Cessna may have had an attitude problem.

It was a busy, non-towered airport with several aircraft in the pattern and several waiting for takeoff on Runway 24…. After waiting for several aircraft in the pattern to land, a break occurred after a taildragger landed. I checked to see that no one was on base and announced that I was going into position and hold on Runway 24, until the taildragger cleared the runway. He took some time clearing and I then announced that I was rolling on [Runway] 24 with a westbound departure. As I was accelerating down the runway, a shadow appeared. I saw no traffic in the pattern, although my new Traffic Proximity Alert System (TPAS) warned me of an aircraft within two miles. The TPAS gives only range and not bearing, so I suspected the traffic might be heading to a nearby airport since no one was responding on CTAF. I turned final and made the radio call; still no response from other traffic. Now the TPAS began to display a rapidly decreasing range, down to 0.4 miles. Suspecting that I was descending onto another plane on final, I leveled off and went around, not climbing in case the traffic was above me. At midfield I heard a helicopter make a radio call on short final, then I saw him as I turned crosswind. He completed his touch and go, then flew another tight and very low pattern, completed another touch and go, then left the area…. I suspect that his radio was off until he saw me pass over him on final.

Traffic Alert

The Grumman AA5 pilot who submitted this report got a valuable assist from an onboard traffic warning system. As the reporter pointed out, traffic alerting systems do not replace the pilot’s responsibility to see and avoid traffic.

Four miles from the airport, the controller cancelled coverage with no comments about traffic…. I switched to the Common Traffic Advisory Frequency (CTAF) and called four miles out, then, since I was in position to directly enter left base for Runway 29, I did so and called my position. I saw no traffic in the pattern, although my new Traffic Proximity Alert System (TPAS) warned me of an aircraft within two miles. The TPAS gives only range and not bearing, so I suspected the traffic might be heading to a nearby airport since no one was responding on CTAF. I turned final and made the radio call; still no response from other traffic. Now the TPAS began to display a rapidly decreasing range, down to 0.4 miles. Suspecting that I was descending onto another plane on final, I leveled off and went around, not climbing in case the traffic was above me. At midfield I heard a helicopter make a radio call on short final, then I saw him as I turned crosswind. He completed his touch and go, then flew another tight and very low pattern, completed another touch and go, then left the area…. I suspect that his radio was off until he saw me pass over him on final.

...I failed to see and avoid traffic in the pattern (although it was difficult to see a small helicopter flying a nonstandard pattern). The helicopter pilot was not using his radio, apparently assuming he was the only one around. The major factor in avoiding a collision was the TPAS. It made me aware of traffic that I otherwise would not have seen. While it is relatively unsophisticated, giving only approximate range with no bearing and depends upon active transponders in the other aircraft, it has nevertheless proved its value to me. Still, it is not a substitute for “see and avoid.” I need to be more observant.

Old Habit — New Pattern

A Bonanza pilot related how an unfamiliar approach to a familiar field caused some confusion. Proper entry into the traffic pattern is crucial and should be based on situational awareness, not a habit pattern.

I was approaching the airport from the southeast. I contacted Tower and was told to call at three miles for a right base entry to Runway 6. At three miles southeast, I called and was told to watch for traffic on left base for Runway 6. I told Tower that the traffic was not in sight.
Flight instruction can be a demanding task, but the process should never demand so much of an instructor’s time and attention that safety is compromised. Several recent ASRS reports address some of the more common “unintended” lessons that result from flight training.

Two Pilots Too Busy Training

While an instructor and a student pilot in a twin-engine Cessna 182 RG learned a hard lesson about checklists and distractions, the instructor also shared a sound lesson about audible warnings.

From the student pilot’s report:

■ I interrupted the landing checklist to report mid-field, downwind. My instructor then pulled back the throttle and told me to set up for an emergency landing on the runway. I did not return to the checklist, but immediately began calculating distance to the runway and best airspeed.

In the next report, a student pilot and a flight instructor in a Cessna 182 RG learned a hard lesson about checklists and distractions. The instructor also shared a sound lesson about audible warnings.

From the flight instructor’s report:

I planned on simulating an engine failure after my student started the landing checklist at the point where he would have lowered the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear. My student made a position report, however, at mid-field, downwind where I had expected him to lower the landing gear.