



STEVE KROG

COMMENTARY / THE CLASSIC INSTRUCTOR



Was I Wrong?

Straight-in approaches

BY STEVE KROG

ARE STRAIGHT-IN APPROACHES GOOD OR BAD? This sometimes becomes a hot topic when a pilot has experienced the situation. A lot of articles have been written and lip service shared about the straight-in approach, but little has come of it. Earlier today a student of mine had to deal with a straight-in situation. Here's how I dealt with it.

A Cub Air student pilot was practicing takeoffs and landings on Runway 09 this morning. All was going well when he encountered a situation that flustered him. He came to me wanting to know if he had done something wrong.

He was in the pattern along with another student-flown aircraft, and each had completed about six takeoffs and landings. While on downwind and about to turn onto the base leg, he heard a radio announcement that aircraft N1234 was on a straight-in for Runway

09 and was 8 miles out. Not knowing what type and speed N1234 was, the student had no idea how fast said aircraft was approaching the airport.

Before initiating the turn to base, the student searched the horizon attempting to spot the aircraft but couldn't make visual contact. His thought process was, "I'm turning base about to turn final and doing a touch-and-go." He proceeded with his approach, touched down, and then lifted off. While climbing out the straight-in pilot began to chastise the student, claiming right-of-way.

"Was I wrong?" he asked.

The second student in the pattern joined in the conversation, commenting he heard the radio transmission, saw the first Cub turn base and final, but decided to extend the downwind leg as he still hadn't made visual contact with the straight-in aircraft. He

commented that without being able to see the straight-in aircraft, he was uncomfortable turning to the base leg.

WHO WAS RIGHT?

I asked each of the student pilots if they were using the radio, and both replied positively. They were calling out their positions on crosswind, downwind, base, and final.

This led to a teaching moment. I suggested each student pilot research this situation. One student was to look at Advisory Circular 90-66C, *Non-Towered Airport Flight Operations*. The other was to look at Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR) 91.113, 91.126, and 91.127. Both were asked to present their findings the next day.

According to paragraph 9.11.4.2 of Advisory Circular 90-66C, to avoid the risk of midair collision, inbound pilots should communicate with the pilots already in the traffic pattern and advise those pilots of their intentions. With the other aircraft already in the traffic pattern, safety may be best served by breaking off the straight-in approach and entering the airport's downwind leg so as not to disturb the current flow of landing traffic.

Paragraph 8.2.1 of AC 90-66C clearly states that the FAA does not regulate traffic pattern entry, only traffic pattern flow. When entering the traffic pattern at an airport without an operating control

tower, inbound pilots are **expected to observe** other aircraft already in the pattern and to conform to the traffic pattern in use.

Paragraph 9.11.3 adds that pilots conducting instrument approaches in VMC should be particularly alert for other aircraft in the pattern to avoid interrupting the flow of traffic and should bear in mind **they do not have priority** over other VFR traffic.

FAR 91.113 states when weather conditions permit – regardless of whether an operation is conducted under instrument flight rules or visual flight rules – vigilance shall be maintained by each person operating an aircraft so as to see and avoid other aircraft.

COMMON SENSE

Often when flying the traffic pattern with students, we'll encounter other aircraft performing a straight-in or nonstandard entry to the traffic pattern. At first, the student is a bit confused, but then will

Always assume the other pilot doesn't see you – or doesn't care about observing proper, safe, and courteous traffic pattern entry.





STEVE KROG

COMMENTARY / THE CLASSIC INSTRUCTOR



ask who has the right-of-way. Yes, you may be right, but if you continue with the pattern we're flying, we may be dead as well. Always assume the other pilot doesn't see you — or doesn't care about observing proper, safe, and courteous traffic pattern entry.

When I'm flying or with a student, I almost always yield to the aircraft on straight-in. Why? If I can't make visual contact with the airplane, I have no idea exactly of their position. I've sometimes asked for type/model of aircraft to get an idea of their approach speed and then decide. However, most straight-in pilots only state make and N-number of their aircraft. If the model aircraft is known, experienced pilots will have a better idea of its approach speed than a student pilot. However, inexperienced or student pilots still may not have an idea of what the straight-in aircraft is and what the approximate approach speeds might be.

PATTERN ADJUSTMENT FOR THE SITUATION

One method I personally use, and also teach to students, is the "pancake breakfast approach." For example, when in the traffic pattern and following another aircraft flying a wider or longer downwind leg, I throttle back on downwind and fly in a modified slow flight configuration. This prevents having to fly an extended downwind leg, keeping the pattern tighter.

How many times have you flown to a pancake breakfast and you are fifth or sixth in the pattern? The first aircraft flies a slightly longer than normal downwind leg, causing the next aircraft to extend even farther. By the time it's your turn to enter the base leg, the pattern has been extended 10 miles beyond the destination runway.

About this time, a new no-radio arrival enters the pattern and not seeing the aircraft on a 10-mile final, turns base and final on a 3/4-mile final at 55 mph. By the time the no-radio aircraft reaches the threshold, the Bonanza on the 10-mile final is now too close to comfortably and safely continue.

Staying alert and watching for traffic when flying to an event is of utmost importance. Because pilots of all walks of life and all levels of experience like to attend these events, you can expect most anything

to happen in the traffic pattern. Patience, alertness, and courtesy for your fellow pilots are vital to make sure everyone gets on the ground and back into the air safely.

When dealing with an aircraft on a straight-in, I preach the "pancake breakfast approach" as well. Most likely the straight-in aircraft is bigger and faster than what we may be flying, so let's just throttle back to a modified slow-flight configuration, execute proper spacing, and then we can still be friends after landing.



Most pilots employing a straight-in approach are courteous and diligent about calling out distances from the runway. If made aware of numerous other aircraft in the pattern, they remain alert and will try hard to safely mix in with the other traffic. Yes, sometimes this might mean a go-around, but the established pattern traffic will often adjust to make room for the straight-in aircraft.

According to FAR 91.113(g) aircraft, while on final approach to land or while landing, have the right-of-way over other aircraft in flight or operating on the surface, except they shall not take advantage of this rule to force an aircraft that has already landed off the runway surface.

When two or more aircraft are approaching an airport for the purpose of landing, the aircraft at the lower altitude has the right-of-way, but it shall not take advantage of the rule to cut in front of another that is on final approach to land or to overtake that aircraft.

When questioning charter and corporate pilots about the straight-in approach, most will say this is quite normal for their type of operation. Having been a charter pilot in a former life, I understand where they are coming from. However, this should not give the charter/corporate aircraft carte blanche in airport arrivals.

Let's go back to the student's question of "Was I Wrong?" It is a bit of a gray area. A 10-mile final versus a 1/2-mile final can be argued. However, common sense and judgment must be used when making decisions while in flight. It is better to give way and remain alive to fly another day than it is to believe you are right and end your life with the decision you made.

It is the responsibility of **all** pilots to operate their aircraft safely. Assume that responsibility for yourself and remain alert and watch for other pilots. In this day and age, many of them are playing with their fancy panel toys and not looking out the window for other aircraft. *EAA*

It is better to give way and remain alive to fly another day than it is to believe you are right and end your life with the decision you made.

Steve Krog, EAA 173799, has been flying for more than five decades and giving tailwheel instruction for nearly as long. In 2006 he launched Cub Air Flight, a flight training school using tailwheel aircraft for all primary training.

STOL CH 750 Super Duty **Zenith CH 750 Cruiser** **Zenith STOL CH 701** **Zenith CH 650**

Build It. Fly It! With Zenith Aircraft Company
Building your own Zenith kit airplane is easier, quicker and more affordable than ever!
Factory Workshops | Quick Build Kits | Easy to build. Fun to fly! www.zenithair.com

ZENITH AIRCRAFT CO.
Build It. FLY IT!
Since 1992

1
Number One
Light Sport Aircraft Brand

Made and Supported
in the USA

Zenith Aircraft is the Number One Light Sport Aircraft brand in the U.S. based on actual FAA registration numbers Zenith Aircraft Company, 1881 Airport Rd., Mexico, Missouri 65265 573-581-9000