

Point A to Point B Arrival

By Jim Sweeney

The first two installments of From Point A to Point B were published in the October and January issues of UltraFlight Magazine. They covered the Preparation/Departure and Enroute phases of the cross country flight. This month we discuss the Arrival phase.

Of the three phases of cross country flying, the arrival at your destination can be the most stressful. Anticipating your plans after arrival, fatigue from hours of flying, operating into what may be an unfamiliar airport and air space, aircraft traffic at and in the vicinity of the airport, the need to share your attention even more between cockpit tasks and scanning for traffic, distractions from anxious passages, radio traffic and flying the aircraft all contribute to a very busy pilot. Yet as busy as you may be, you must be in control of the arrival process to complete the trip safely.

The arrival phase begins after the last checkpoint and at least 10 miles before the destination airport. It consists of reviewing airport data and procedures, frequencies, weather, wind direction & velocity and aircraft pre-landing checklists. The arrival phase ends when the aircraft is secured and the post flight checklist is completed.

Arrival Aids

As busy as the arrival may get, there are a number of memory aids, checklists and helpful publications to assist in the process. On a rainy afternoon, take a minute to review operations at non-towered airports and/or towered airports. You can find material at:

Operating at Non-towered Airports

- AOPA Air Safety Foundation
www.aopa.org/asf/publications/sa08.pdf

Operating at Towered Airports

- AOPA Air Safety Foundation
www.aopa.org/asf/publications/sa07.pdf

Sectional Chart

Review the airspace from your last checkpoint to the destination airport and the surrounding area. Are there any altitude restrictions or communication requirements? If so, make note of them for quick reference.

A knee pad comes in handy for noting key frequencies, transponder codes, and specific instructions that may be issued by ATC at towered airports. The more unfamiliar you are with the airport and/or air space, the handier the knee pad becomes.

Note CTAF & AWOS frequencies. It may be necessary to contact approach control if landing at Class C and Class D airports or airports within their airspace.

Note major landmarks on the route to the airport and near it. These will help you identify the specific location of the airport quicker as you approach it.

Note the runway orientation and traffic pattern direction. Plan your close in approach with this information in mind.

Airport/Facility Directory

Review the airport information, airport diagram and other data not found on the sectional chart. Airport orientation is best practiced before you arrive at the airport. As you are reviewing the airport diagram, orient it in the direction you are approaching from. This will place the ground landmarks on the proper side of the runway as you approach the airport.

Landing Checklist

While you are still miles from the airport and have a minute, run through the landing checklist. In this process, you are reviewing what you are going to do when you perform the checklist in its proper sequence.

Collision Avoidance

Having reviewed the key data and where it is located for quick reference, the arrival process begins. While reviewing all this data, you must still FLY THE AIRCRAFT and SEE AND AVOID other aircraft. Dividing your time between tasks is a skill and should be practiced continuously. Do not become so distracted or fixated on one item that you forget the other two tasks. By the same token, do the "paperwork" well before you get close to the airport. Don't be looking for frequencies when you should be looking for traffic.

Collision Avoidance

- AOPA Air Safety Foundation
www.aopa.org/asf/publications/sa15.pdf

AWOS, ASOS, ATIS

Tune & listen on the AWOS frequency for wind direction & velocity, visibility, cloud height, temperature/dew point and altimeter setting.

With the wind direction and velocity, you can plan the best runway for the existing conditions. Make sure you have at least minimum VFR conditions with the reported visibility and cloud heights. Set the altimeter to the current altimeter setting. Warm temperatures will affect aircraft performance. A close temperature/dew point spread may indicate visible moisture. If any of these measurements does not meet VFR minimums or your personal limitations, change your destination and go to your alternate.

AWOS, ASOS, ATIS

- Airman's Information Manual (AIM):
4-3-26. Operations at Uncontrolled Airports With Automated Surface Observing System (ASOS)/Automated Weather Observing System (AWOS)
- Airman's Information Manual (AIM):
7-1-12. Weather Observing Programs
- Airman's Information Manual (AIM):
4-1-13. Automatic Terminal Information Service (ATIS)

CTAF, Approach Control

Tune and listen to the CTAF or approach control frequency. Listen is the key word. By listening early, you can get a feel for the flow of traffic, the amount of traffic, the type of traffic, active runway and the workload of the pilots & controllers. The traffic around the airport could range from ultralights to the C5 that was on final behind me. The more information you have, the better you can plan your own actions.

As you approach an airport without an operating control tower, use the CTAF frequency for traffic advisories. The CTAF frequency is on the sectional chart and in the Airport/Facility Directory.

If your destination airport is within Class C air space, contact approach control 20 nautical miles out. The frequency is on the Sectional Chart and in the Airport/Facility Directory

For airports within Class D air space, contact approach control more than 10 nautical miles out or the tower if less than 10 nautical miles out.

In all Class D and Class C airspace, communications must be established before entering the airspace.

In all cases collision avoidance is the responsibility of the Pilot in Command. Keep your head on a swivel AND remember to Fly the Aircraft.

Recommended Communication Procedures

- Pilot Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge FAA-H-8083-25
Chapter 12, Figure 21-1, Page 12-2

http://www.faa.gov/library/manuals/aviation/pilot_handbook/media/faa-h-8083-25-3of4.pdf

Traffic Advisories

- FAA Advisory Circular AC 90-42F
Traffic Advisory Practices at Airports without Operating Control Towers
www.airweb.faa.gov/Regulatory_and_Guidance_Library/rgAdvisoryCircular.nsf/0/C54E50252A7FA56D862569D8007804BA?OpenDocument&Highlight=90-42f

Sterile Cockpit

As you approach the traffic pattern, things will get very busy both inside and outside of the aircraft. Distractions unnecessarily increase the pilot's workload. To minimize distractions inside the cockpit, secure loose items, turn off the entertainment system, fold & store all unnecessary charts and other reference material. Key frequencies and important notes should be on your kneepad. Minimize passenger conversations. Details of the plans after landing can be discussed after landing.

Sterile Cockpit

- AOPA online
www.aopa.org/asf/asfarticles/sp0006.html

Traffic Pattern

At a non-towered airport, the standard traffic pattern (turns to the left) is in operation. A nonstandard traffic pattern can be identified on the sectional chart or in the Airport/Facility Directory. The traffic pattern altitude can only be found in the Airport/facility Directory. Other pilots expect that you will fly the traffic pattern properly.

AT Class C and Class D airports, you will be directed where to enter the traffic pattern. The traffic pattern altitude can be found in the Airport/Facility Directory. You should repeat back to the controller all instructions, hold short and clearances and the associated runway numbers. This is conformation that you heard what he said.

If radio communication is lost while operating in Class C or Class D airspace, the control tower may elect to issue control instructions via light signals. A high intensity light will be seen in the tower cab. The steady or flashing, red, green or white light will indicate the clearance. The colors have different meanings for aircraft on the ground and aircraft in the air. Take a minute before your flight and review the light gun signals.

As you approach the traffic pattern and/or while on downwind, perform the landing checklist. Depending on your aircraft, this could be very short or multiple items on the check list.

The short version is GUMPS

- Gas – proper tank
- Undercarriage – Wheels down, 3 green lights
- Mixture – Rich or proper setting
- Prop – Flat pitch
- Switches – Electric fuel pump and other switches set properly

The longer version is the checklist from the Pilot Operators Handbook (POH) or the checklist you create for your specific aircraft.

Whichever one you choose, use it!

In all cases collision avoidance is the responsibility of the Pilot in Command. Keep your head on a swivel AND remember to Fly the Aircraft.

Traffic Patterns

- FAA Advisory Circular 90-66A
RECOMMENDED STANDARD TRAFFIC PATTERNS AND PRACTICES
FOR AERONAUTICAL OPERATIONS AT AIRPORTS WITHOUT
OPERATING CONTROL TOWERS
[http://rgl.faa.gov/Regulatory_and_Guidance_Library/rgAdvisoryCircular.nsf/0/74c9017c9457e4ab862569d800780551/\\$FILE/AC90-66A.pdf](http://rgl.faa.gov/Regulatory_and_Guidance_Library/rgAdvisoryCircular.nsf/0/74c9017c9457e4ab862569d800780551/$FILE/AC90-66A.pdf)

Light Gun Signals

- Pilot Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge FAA-H-8083-25
Chapter 12, Page 12-11
www.faa.gov/library/manuals/aviation/pilot_handbook/media/faq-h-8083-25-3of4.pdf

Taxiing

You are not done flying until the aircraft is parked. Advise on CTAF when you have cleared the runway. Keep your taxiing speed slow and the aircraft under control. Maintain situational awareness as you taxi to the ramp or hangar/tie down area. Do not let thoughts of your off airport plans get in the way of completing the flight.

At a tower controller airport, the tower will give specific instruction on exiting the runway and how to proceed to the ramp area. If you can not exit the runway as instructed by the tower, advise them and they will issue an alternative exit instruction. No need to wear out the brakes.

Do not switch to the ground control frequency until advised to do so. If you are not familiar with the airport and need directions to the ramp area, FBO or parking,

etc., ask for PROGRESSIVE taxi instructions. Do not guess or go exploring. Ask and they will help.

Read back all “Hold Short” instructions.

Airport Markings and Signage

Ground incursions are a major focus of the FAA due to an increase of ground incidents and accidents. The largest number of fatalities in a single aircraft accident occurred when two 747's collided on the ground.

Airport markings on taxiways and runways are an attempt to prevent ground incursions. Take a minute and review the meaning of each. They are applicable to all airports, but larger airports have more of them. As a absolute minimum, recognize and understand the “Hold Short Line”.

Airport Marking and Signs

- Pilot's Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge FAA-H-8083-25
Chapter 12, Page 12-3
www.faa.gov/library/manuals/aviation/pilot_handbook/media/faq-h-8083-25-3of4.pdf

Post Flight

Secure the aircraft on the ramp or in the hangar. Use wheel chocks and tie the aircraft down if parked outside. Make sure all switches are OFF before leaving the aircraft. Note TACH time or Hobbs time for the logbook. Most pilots like to fuel the aircraft on arrival so that it is ready to go for the next flight. Full fuel tanks also prevent moisture from condensing in metal tanks.

Close your flight plan!

Point A to Point B

As I write this installment of Point A to Point B, I am half way through a cross country flight between Yakima, WA and Morristown, NJ. The flying has been great and the scenery breathtaking. This is a beautiful country.

Note

The Pilot's Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge is a very good reference for all types of flying including cross country flying. If you have not looked at it recently, the publication can be found at your local pilot shop or on line.

- Pilot's Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge FAA-H-8083-25
http://www.faa.gov/library/manuals/aviation/pilot_handbook/