13-01-262: Airport Facility Directory (AFD) Depiction of Traffic Pattern Altitudes

Current Guidance:

4–3–3 Traffic Patterns

a. At most airports and military air bases, traffic pattern altitudes for propeller-driven aircraft generally extend from 600 feet to as high as 1,500 feet above the ground. Also, traffic pattern altitudes for military turbojet aircraft sometimes extend up to 2,500 feet above the ground. Therefore, pilots of en route aircraft should be constantly on the alert for other aircraft in traffic patterns and avoid these areas whenever possible. Traffic pattern altitudes should be maintained unless otherwise required by the applicable distance from cloud criteria (14 CFR Section 91.155). (See Figure 4-3-2 and Figure 4-3-3.) Unless otherwise indicated, all turns in the traffic pattern should be made to the left. On Sectional Aeronautical and VFR Terminal Area Charts, right traffic patterns are indicated at public-use and joint-use airports by the abbreviation “RP” (for Right Pattern), followed by the appropriate runway number(s), at the bottom of the airport data block.

AC 90-96A paragraph 8c:

It is recommended that airplanes observe a lOOO-foot above ground level (AGL) traffic pattern altitude. Large and turbine-powered airplanes should enter the traffic pattern at an altitude of 1,500 feet AGL or 500 feet above the established pattern altitude. A pilot may vary the size of the traffic pattern depending on the aircraft's performance characteristics

Recommendation:

4–3–3 Traffic Patterns

a. ~~At most airports and military air bases, traffic pattern altitudes for propeller-driven aircraft generally extend from 600 feet to as high as 1,500 feet above the ground. Also, traffic pattern altitudes for military turbojet aircraft sometimes extend up to 2,500 feet above the ground.~~ **Unless a specific traffic pattern altitude is published in the Chart Supplement entry for the airport, it is recommended that propeller-driven aircraft enter the traffic pattern at 1,000 feet above ground level (AGL), and that large and turbine-powered airplanes enter the traffic pattern at an altitude of not less than 1,500 feet AGL or 500 feet above the established pattern altitude. A helicopter operating in the traffic pattern may .fly a pattern similar to the airplane pattern at a lower altitude (500 AGL) and closer to the airport. This pattern may be on .the opposite side of the runway with turns in - - the opposite direction if local policy permits.** A pilot may vary the size of the traffic pattern depending on the aircraft's performance characteristics. ~~Therefore,~~ Pilots of en route aircraft should be constantly on the alert for other aircraft in traffic patterns and avoid these areas whenever possible. Traffic pattern altitudes should be maintained unless otherwise required by the applicable distance from cloud criteria (14 CFR Section 91.155). (See Figure 4-3-2 and Figure 4-3-3.) Unless otherwise indicated, all turns in the traffic pattern should be made to the left. On Sectional Aeronautical and VFR Terminal Area Charts, right traffic patterns are indicated at public-use and joint-use airports by the abbreviation "RP" (for Right Pattern), followed by the appropriate runway number(s), at the bottom of the airport data block.

Recommendation:

Amend Figure 4-3-2 and 4-3-2 to illustrate straight-in option described in AC 90-66A

Include Note:

NOTE –
The FAA encourages pilots to use the standard traffic pattern. However, for those pilots who choose to execute a straight-in approach, maneuvering for and execution of the approach should be completed so as not to disrupt the flow of arriving and departing traffic. Therefore, pilots operating in the traffic pattern should be alert at all times to aircraft executing straight-in approaches.
REFERENCE – AC 90-66 RECOMMENDED 'STANDARD TRAFFIC PATTERNS AND PRACTICES FOR AERONAUTICAL OPERATIONS AT AIRPORTS WITHOUT OPERATING CONTROL TOWERS

Recommendation

Examples

Key to traffic pattern operations

1. Enter pattern in level flight, abeam the midpoint of the runway, at pattern altitude. ~~(1,000' AGL is recommended pattern altitude unless established otherwise…)~~

2. Maintain pattern altitude until abeam approach end of the landing runway on downwind leg.

3. Complete turn to final at least 1/4 mile from the runway.

4. Continue straight ahead until beyond departure end of runway.

5. If remaining in the traffic pattern, commence turn to crosswind leg beyond the departure end of the runway within 300 feet of pattern altitude.

6. If departing the traffic pattern, continue straight out, or exit with a 45 degree turn (to the left when in a left-hand traffic pattern; to the right when in a right-hand traffic pattern) beyond the departure end of the runway, after reaching pattern altitude.

Examples

Key to traffic pattern operations

1. Enter pattern in level flight, abeam the midpoint of the runway, at pattern altitude. ~~(1,000' AGL is recommended pattern altitude unless established otherwise…)~~

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6. If departing the traffic pattern, continue straight out, or exit with a 45 degree turn (to the left when in a left-hand traffic pattern; to the right when in a right-hand traffic pattern) beyond the departure end of the runway, after reaching pattern altitude.