

PostFlight: An Old Pilot's Logbook

Companion Guide



—An old pilot—

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his companion guide has been prepared for you to use as a companion to the book. In this guide I summarize each chapter of *PostFlight*, including the lessons that end each one. I compiled the guide for a couple of reasons: First, to add value to you as you make your way through *PostFlight*, a way to thank you for taking time with my book. Second, as a kind of worksheet, a step-by-step checklist you can use to mark your progress into the cockpit. In aviation you'll become very familiar with checklists, so this may be your first one. Use it as a shortcut, or whichever way it helps you.

I've based this guide on the lessons at the end of each chapter of *PostFlight: An Old Pilot's Logbook*. Some of them may seem a bit simplistic, and possibly juvenile. I present this info not knowing your level of experience, or the way you choose to enter aviation. If the particular text or lesson doesn't apply to you, move along to the next part. I hope you find the guide useful overall.

Pass the guide along to friends and family, especially if you know of someone else who wants to fly. As I wrote several times in *PostFlight*, if someone

wants to fly, barring an unforeseen difficulty they *can* fly. I believe everyone should try it.

The ‘checklists’ will be simple bulleted lists at the end of each segment. Use them or not, your choice. They can be a place for you to write down your steady progress, a place to tick off the boxes, or just simple diary type entries for you. As I wrote in *PostFlight*, I wish I had a record of my own path to the cockpit, and a documentation of my time over fifty years and 12,500 flight hours. I didn’t track that time, all those flights, and I regret it now. So I offer the opportunity to you. Write something every time you fly, and someday you’ll be glad you did.

I hope you enjoy reading *PostFlight*, and that my book helps in your pursuit of an aviation goal, whether that’s simply to fly for your own pleasure, or a long-term career in aviation. I flew for fifty years, and I’d do it all again in half a heartbeat. It was a wonderful way to live and work, and despite the speed bumps and disappointments along the way, I can’t imagine another life.

In each section, I’ll write about the various career opportunities available in either fixed-wing or rotary-wing flight. If you plan to fly an air medical helicopter for example, I’ll detail some important considerations for you. I flew a helicopter at a hospital for 20 years, and those were wonderful assignments, so I’ll detail that. I know a lot about certain other jobs as well, such as corporate, ENG, and tour flying, so I’ll scribble some tips about those. What I know about the airlines I’ve learned from several pilots in that sector, and their advice has been priceless, so I’ll share that with you as well.

A last item, and I’ll get to the guide. One thing flying showed me, beyond the mechanical part, the takeoffs and landings, moving the controls etc. was that aviation is a unique business. It offers you a chance to give back to people in a way no other business does. When we fly for a living, we take people into a

place we're not supposed to be able to go, to deliver them where they want and need to be safely and efficiently. Because of that, there is no place more filled with displays of emotion than an airport. People boarding planes, people departing from planes, telling friends and loved ones goodbye, and greeting them with hellos. Airports are emotional venues with the tears and laughter, the frowns and smiles, even a few desperate voices now and then. Those scenes elicit the very best, and sometimes the worst in humanity.

It's interesting, and fun, and heartbreaking, and exhilarating to watch those displays of human spirit in an airport, or on a helipad. You've been there, of course. To know you've helped make peoples' departures and arrivals happen safely and well is the definition of a good life. In regard to that, I include a section on ways to optimize your career, to recognize the gift you've been given, and the responsibility that gift places with you. If you're like me, you welcome it, and will know how to appreciate it.

Enjoy *PostFlight*, this companion guide, and the checklist. Here's to your amazing takeoffs, and great landings.

PostFlight: An Old Pilot's Logbook Companion Guide: Part 1

In Chapter 1, My Dream of Flight, I wrote that if you get the chance to fly, no matter what that chance is, you should *'jump on it like a duck on a June bug.'* What I was getting at is this: There will be opportunities to fly, and they'll arrive from a direction you never guessed. It may be an uncle, or an

aunt, or a grandparent that was or is an aviator who knows someone, who knows someone else, etc. In my case, my uncle spent his career working for an aerospace company, North American Aviation, and he took me to several airshows and aviation-related activities when I was young. So here are a few places you might visit, or hang around to get a feel for aviation, and to increase your opportunities to learn what it's like to fly.

- ❖ The local airport. If there's a fixed base operator (FBO) at your home airport, drop in and introduce yourself. Ask if you can work there, or make yourself useful to them in any way. Ask aircraft owners and operators if they need help with anything. Wash the aircraft, pick up FOD from the ramp. Check with the maintenance staff if they could use your help. Become a presence at the airport. Soon you'll be asked about your future plans, and if you'd like to go flying. Many pilots started out at small airports, learning aviation from the ground up.
- ❖ Airshows are a great way to learn about aviation, and pilots. Don't be shy. Introduce yourself to the performing pilots, ask about their path to the sky, get their advice. Recently, I read a LinkedIn post from the first woman to fly for the Thunderbirds, the Air Force precision flying team. She said she'd once signed an autograph for a young fan after an airshow demonstration, and the young fan is now an Air Force jet pilot. Aviation is a collaborative career. Put yourself out there.
- ❖ Check into the military's aviation programs. As I wrote, the Army is always seeking new pilots, and the training is the best there is, for helicopters and even fixed-wing. You'll have to make a time commitment to the service, but it will be time well-spent, and well-compensated. The military is the only flight school that pays you!
- ❖ Start taking notes, keep a diary, write down everything you learn and check it out for accuracy etc. You'll be glad you did this later on. I wrote in PostFlight that one of my biggest regrets is that I didn't keep a diary of some kind in Vietnam when I flew there during the war. One

reason I encourage you to do this is that you can write about your experience, and there are outlets such as magazines, and periodicals that will be eager to pay you for your submissions. Plus, much later, after you've retired as I have, you can write your memoirs with amazing accuracy.

- ❖ Last, stay fit and healthy. If you want to fly, it will be important to avoid some of the activities that may harm your health, such as smoking, alcohol & drug abuse, and other harmful things. If your dream is an aviation career, you'll be taking a rigorous flight physical every year, or maybe more often, and you must pass that test or be grounded. The act of flying demands that you look ahead, and that starts before you enter the cockpit.

The lesson for you is that, as I said in the book, there are no straight lines into an aviation career. This can be good or bad news. Good because there are as many paths to the cockpit as there are aviators, it seems. Bad, because your path may cause a lot of disruption and hardship, for you and your family. But don't give up. Gaining those certificates and ticket punches is worth all the hard work.

Lessons Chapter 1 PostFlight: An Old Pilot's Logbook

- **Timing is everything. take opportunities to fly when and where you find them.**
- **Never doubt your own ability.**
- **Find a tough instructor.**
- **Show up ready to commit aviation.**

—Timing is everything.—Take opportunities to fly when and where you find them. There are no straight lines into the cockpit.

Whichever path you decide to follow will be the right one for you. Don't be afraid to ask a ton of questions, and do a lot of research, especially when choosing a school. If you have an opportunity to fly, don't hesitate to take it. Every aircraft you fly will teach you something new.

—Never doubt your own ability. Perhaps the biggest obstacle you may face is your own lack of confidence. As I write in the book, flying isn't that hard, and there are a lot of marginal pilots making a living at it. Most pilots are excellent, and their ability will show. But you'll meet a few that barely make the grade. The message is, with the right attitude, a fair amount of physical & mental ability, and a healthy dose of common sense, you can fly.

—Find a tough instructor. I advise this because the reality of danger is there, and especially in the early part of your career, your learning curve will be steep. An easy, laid-back instructor may let you slide by, and that will not serve you well in the long run.

—Show up ready to commit to aviation. If you don't feel up to a lesson any particular day, skip it and try again. Especially as costly as flying lessons are, you'll want to optimize every takeoff, and every landing. Don't sell yourself short, get every ounce of training you can.

Checklist/Notes

Random thoughts on your progress thus far, and going forward.

1—Why did you decide on the aircraft/category you wish to fly? What long-term assignment would you like to have? Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?



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PostFlight: An Old Pilot's Logbook Companion Guide:

Part 2

Flight Training

As Chapter 2, Student Pilot, states, your training will be *'hard, exhausting, discouraging—and triumphant!* In that chapter of *PostFlight*, I wrote about the difficulty I had with my first instructor, learning to fly in the gawdawful Texas summer heat, and the very steep learning curve I had to scale to become an army pilot. What I failed to address were the feelings I experienced after I soloed the first time, in June 1969. I'll try to describe those feelings, but it won't be easy.

It's true what I wrote that in this hyper-protective world, where parents and teachers and clergy and various supervisors guard us against anything that may harm us, the act of taking an aircraft into the sky all by yourself is almost a radical action. So when I soloed on that Friday afternoon, after a tough, hot, exhausting week of lessons with my instructor, it did seem like I was welcoming the feeling of open rebellion.

I felt like I was escaping the iron grip of supervision, the chains of control that had held me back for a long time. Part of that feeling was what today people may call imposter syndrome, the haunting sense that I really didn't belong in that cockpit, that I'd never master the cascade of skills necessary to be a pilot.

What I felt mostly, though, was pure adrenaline-fueled, gut-churning joy and exhilaration that I'd accomplished the simple goal of flying the helicopter by myself. I'd gone from zero flight hours in any kind of aircraft a month earlier, to becoming a qualified pilot, with a grand total of 11 hours logged! I was as raw and inexperienced as I could be, and I likely would have been a danger to myself if some emergency had cropped up. But I was a pilot nonetheless.

I felt like I'd passed into a different realm, a new and elite kind of club that allowed only certain highly-qualified individuals to enter. This feeling was elevated by the simple fact that I was among the first in my flight school class to solo. My instructor, Wayne Alexander, was assigned three students, myself and two colleagues. I was the first of the three to solo, and the other two guys didn't go solo until much later.

That told me something else. It told me that the self doubt and anxiety I'd had about my personal skill was unfounded, even counterproductive. So if you sense that you lack the skills and/or the aptitude to fly, that feeling could very well be 'imposter syndrome' hard at work holding you back. Especially for the young women reading this, I can't transmit this message forcefully enough. You CAN fly. It's entirely possible for you to become a fine pilot. The one person that will prevent you from attaining that goal stares at you each morning from the mirror. Here's the takeaway from Chapter 2 Student Pilot:

- ❖ Flight training will be hard. There's no easy way to the cockpit. But there's no better place to be once you get there. Here's something else I didn't include in the book, the physical endeavor involved in

controlling an aircraft. Your instructor will likely mention the most common problem student pilots have, and that is overcontrol. This is especially true in helicopters, because they are inherently unstable.

- ❖ This may sound a bit woo-woo and strange, but you'll see the value in it. If you've ever watched professionals in any segment of society, either pro golfers, or ballplayers, or people in any sport at the top of their game, they always envision their next move. Business people, sales people, even the lowest strata of employment, those who thrive in it, and are very successful in it imagine what their product, or service will look like, or should. In other words, those who make a name for themselves, regardless of their position or occupation, have become very good at putting themselves in a position of success well before they step into that position. When I was in flight school I was advised to do this. My instructor told me to sit each night in the dormitory in a hard chair, take a broom handle, (true story), and imagine each maneuver as it should be flown. I'm not going to claim, especially fifty years later, that this scenario accelerated my training. But I can say that of his three students, I was the first one to solo. So it's worth a try. Envision every maneuver, every emergency, every instrument approach you may encounter and fly it before you enter the cockpit. It cannot hurt, and it likely will help.
- ❖ I wrote about this in *PostFlight*, but it's worth mentioning again. Once you get into school, fly as often as you can. Everyone learns in a different fashion, but one thing all of us share is the fact that repetition helps our retention. The other benefit of frequent flying is that your training time will be shorter, of course, and if your intention is to fly for the airlines, for example, you'll want to be in a position to accept a training slot with them if it's offered.
- ❖ Here's a difficult but important discussion about the flying life: It's volatile, and uncertain. Aviation has as many ups and downs as the aircraft involved in it. This will affect your training as well, hopefully

not in a damaging way, but schools do go out of business. So do your homework before choosing a school, and ask people who know what each school's financial condition might be.

Lessons Chapter 2 PostFlight: An Old Pilot's Logbook

- Becoming a pilot is worth it, but only if you believe it is.
- To solo in this hyper-protective world is almost too rewarding.
- A life in aviation isn't easy, predictable, romantic, or enriching, at least in terms of dollars, but you'll never regret it.
- Precision is the mark of an aviator. Strive for it.
- Remember, you're always a student.

—Becoming a pilot is worth it.

Your intuition is correct, flying is a great life. There are careers that seem to suit people, and some that clearly do not. I could have imagined myself as a hard-charging insurance salesman, or a famous standup comic, or a plumber, I suppose. Those are dignified, worthwhile roles, but they're not me. I knew from an early age that I wanted to fly. Actually I didn't *want* to fly; I *needed* to fly. Who knows why we choose our roles? Maybe they choose us. In any case, aviation is one of those life careers that either fits or it doesn't.

—To solo is too rewarding.

You've heard people talk about 'helicopter parenting.' You read the warning labels on everything from corn flakes to shower curtains. For many reasons, we live in an overprotective, tediously observant world where it's difficult to injure ourselves. I'm convinced that this social overcaution is what produced TV shows such as *Too Hot to Handle*, and *Survivor*. We rebel against too much oversight, it's just human nature. Going up solo in an aircraft is the balm for that. It puts our lives in our hands, and is a very satisfying feeling.

—An aviation life isn't easy.

You'll have disappointments, speed bumps, failures, and furloughs along the way. That's the bad news, even if it's true. The good news is that unlike many careers, aviation is highly cyclical. You'll be down at times, but you'll inevitably be back up again, often sooner than you think.

—Precision must be your goal.

No matter what the job, or the aircraft, or the weather, or the clearance, or the makeup of your crew, strive for perfection every flight. There may be no such thing as a perfect flight, but when you come close to it, when you kiss the pavement, and taxi in, and arrive at the gate or the helipad on the exact split-second time the schedule says, there's no better feeling.

—You're always a student.

Every flight, every takeoff, every landing, every activity is different, so you'll learn something new every day. After flying for fifty years I was still waking up to new things, new understandings, new equipment, new regulations, and new approaches to safety and flying well.

Checklist/Notes

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PostFlight: An Old Pilot's Logbook Companion Guide:

Part 3

Where to Start

Depending on which category of aircraft you want to fly, you'll choose a flight school accordingly. If your plan is to fly fixed-wing, and to work for the airlines, that will narrow down your choice of schools and/or training scenarios. I don't endorse or cite any particular school. It all depends on your budget, your timeframe, and your personal preferences.

I flew helicopters for many years. The jobs I was assigned took me all over the world. Some of them demanded that I live in remote, inaccessible places, far from home and family. A few of them turned out to be more dangerous than I anticipated, and I quit. If by chance your plan is to fly a medical helicopter, I have a vast store of knowledge about that. I flew air medical for 20 years, the best years of my aviation career. But it's all personal choice, and what works for you.

Why discuss this before the subject of flight training? Because what will serve you best in aviation is what old pilots like myself talk about, that is, staying five minutes ahead of the aircraft at all times. That anticipation is necessary for your career as well. As odd as it may sound, you'll be better off if you don't commit too hard or too early to any one aircraft, company, or posting. There will be changes, and flexibility is certainly a useful skill in the flying business. That applies to your choice of schools as well.

In the book, I encourage you to acquire a medical clearance first, before anything else. Without the medical, you cannot progress in aviation, and even in flight training you'll need proof of medical ability. When I was in boot camp in the army, a fellow was there with me who'd enlisted on the promise of getting into helicopter flight school. During basic training he went to the dispensary to take his flight physical, and failed. He was color blind, and never knew it. That, of course, derailed his plan to fly. He was still obligated to stay in the army, but flight school was no longer an option for him.

So find the local FAA approved flight surgeon, get your medical clearance—I recommend a class 1, so called first class medical—and only then proceed with your training plan.

In the book, I wrote that you fly an aircraft with your head, not your hands and feet. This is somewhat disingenuous; of course you fly with your hands and feet, but after you've put up a substantial number of flight hours, you won't even think about moving the controls anymore. You'll just make the aircraft go where you want it to, without a conscious thought.

This presents an opportunity for you as a rookie pilot. One of the clearest indications of a pilot's proficiency level is in the way she or he moves the controls. This sounds simplistic, but you'll understand it later on. The thing is, regardless of which category, fixed-wing or rotary-wing aircraft, control movements needed are typically quite small, even impossible to observe in many cases.

So especially in today's fly-by-wire aircraft, with basically computerized flight control systems, there's even less reason to move things except to make a flight regime change, and then the manipulation of the controls ought to be minimal. My instructor in flight school, Wayne Alexander, used to tell me to stop 'wiping out the cockpit.' It was nervous energy on my part, and you may have that, too. Just be aware of it.

In a helicopter, for example, it's easy to discern a rookie pilot's low level of experience when they constantly shift the cyclic around, stirring it like they're making bread dough, mindlessly manipulating the stick. This random movement makes the rotor system less efficient, spilling a portion of the lift being generated. So in axiomatic fashion, the smoother you are on the controls, the less power is required to fly.

As you gain experience in the air, try to avoid moving the controls unless you have to. This sounds like strange advice: Of course you have to move the controls, but do so in minimal fashion, and you'll get better results. Plus, a knowledgeable observer will assess your skill level accordingly.

In the book, I mention a few options for gaining flight time. Here are those options, and a few more:

- ❖ A flying club. Especially if the club has a CFI or CFII, you can join and work on your licensure there. Dues at flying clubs are typically minimal—years ago I paid \$100.00 to join one, giving me access to a small fleet of Cessnas—and they tend not to be terribly busy, so you can get the aircraft when you like. Of course you'll need at least a private certificate for this, but again, with a CFI available, you could gain that as well.
- ❖ Purchasing an aircraft is an option, albeit a rather expensive one, and filled with what ifs. What if the aircraft needs work, or what if it's been in an accident, or its engine is close to an overhaul, or the airframe needs major work? Clearly, any aircraft purchase must be done with a lot of research, and with the expertise of a qualified, certificated mechanic who knows the airframe and powerplant inside out. A purchase can be enhanced by forming a club of your own, with proper guidance, and a minimum number of members you trust. That could spread the cost of operation around, making it feasible for everyone.
- ❖ Also, as I write in the book, FBOs that do charter work may be able to include you in whatever flying activity they have. This might not add valid hours to your logbook if you're not qualified to fly the aircraft, but all experience is valuable.

Lessons Chapter 3

- Ask questions, veteran pilots are always happy to help.
- Make sure you're medically qualified to fly.
- Flying isn't difficult, but it demands precision.

—Ask questions.

As an old veteran pilot I can count on the fingers of one hand how many times a rookie asked me for advice or counsel. This is the way the world works, I suppose. Looking back, I never asked an old guy either. So I encourage you to start a new tradition. Next time you see a grey-haired old aviator, ask him about his or her career, and the choices made, and the best and worst part, and whatever other flight-related questions you can muster. Here's one thing I'll put in writing: That old pilot will smile like they haven't in years. The only challenge you'll have at that point is shutting them off.

—Make sure to get your medical.

I belabor this point, but it really is the first step you must take if you want to fly. I won't put too much emphasis on this, because I'm quite certain today's flight training schools are legitimate and above suspicion. But if you pay upfront for a block of flight hours and flunk your medical, it may be tough to get any money back. I recommend getting a first class medical as well, since they're more stringent, and having that class of medical in your pocket qualifies you to fly in any environment or training scenario. If you're hired by the airlines, under FAR Part 121 you'll be able to fly only with a successful first class medical.

—Precision is mandatory.

Aside from the obvious fact that aviation can be deadly, something we ignore at our peril, there are numerous reasons to be devoted to precision in your cockpit. If you're flying a crewed aircraft it's especially important. No one wants to fly with a sloppy, careless crewmember. I've written about how small, almost intimate the flying business can be. But despite the hundreds and thousands of people involved in it, word gets around about deficient members, pilots, mechanics, line people and staff. But pilots who fly carelessly and imprecisely quickly gain a bad reputation. Try to do every maneuver and procedure as well as you can, and always accept criticism as a way to improve, and you'll do fine.

Checklist/Notes

1—Write a few notes on your instructor's comments. What do they say about your technique? Your grasp of the basics, and your interaction of the material into the real life cockpit situation?

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General Notes

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PostFlight: An Old Pilot's Logbook Companion Guide:

Part 4

Fixed-Wing?

Most people dream of flying airplanes. Those of us who spent a career in rotary-wing aircraft arrived at that through the military, mostly, or from some other quirk along the way. During 50 years in aviation I met exactly two helicopter pilots who'd acquired their flying skills in non-military, commercial operations. Both of those pilots learned to fly helicopters by getting sufficient instruction to start spraying crops. Indeed, ag flying is a gateway for a lot of commercial helicopter flying, and there are several opportunities for this, if you're so inclined.

But flying airplanes is the standard pathway into the sky, and that career does offer advantages. It all depends on what you want. As I wrote in *PostFlight*, a few advantages of flying fixed-wing are the perks involved, eventually, and the assorted other benefits. Fixed-wing folks tend to hang around airports, and they tend not to work in the bush all that much.

I'll itemize some of the advantages and disadvantages of flying an airplane for a living. The list is not definitive, and of course we should never preclude the possibility of flying both categories. But here's what this old pilot saw during my career.

- ❖ For starters, it seems to me that the competition is much stronger for a fixed-wing cockpit than for a helicopter's, even though there are, aircraft for aircraft, more seats in the airplane side of the business, since most helicopter jobs are single-pilot.
- ❖ That said, there are simply more positions for airplane pilots, and likely more turnover in those slots, though that may or may not be true.
- ❖ The work itself is more sanitized and cleaner overall in airplanes. In a fixed-wing machine you're always going to land on a hard surface, with at least a candy machine and a rental car close by, and likely more.
- ❖ The career ladder in fixed-wing can be much higher and more lucrative than in helicopters where

Lessons:

—Fly solo? Or as a crew?

It depends on what you want. I wanted more autonomy, and less oversight of my day to day flying activity. I wanted to fly single-pilot, not because I was concerned about supervision, or didn't care to have the scrutiny, that wasn't it. I just enjoyed the latitude being the sole pilot provided. And I enjoyed the responsibility it demanded to take whatever posting I was given, and to do the job no matter what.

—Fixed-wing offers:

Fixed-wing can offer more travel opportunities, more time in your logbook, better accommodations, and (eventually) better pay. I'd not suggest that there's less volatility, and fewer chances for a layoff in helicopters, but in the fifty years I flew I didn't experience one furlough. That may have been because of the postings I had, at the hospital for example. But during the time I flew helicopters commercially I had no interruptions in my employment. Does that mean my compensation was actually more, since there were no breaks or furloughs? I'm not sure. But from hearing airline and charter fixed-wing pilots discuss layoffs, I get the impression those disruptions go with the territory.

—Flying wet Vs dry cargo

Many fixed-wing pilots, in the passenger airline or the charter sector may not say it aloud, but a lot of them prefer flying cargo instead of passengers. It's not that you won't fly cargo in a helicopter, that's always an option. But flying people is the norm, and that's always a challenge.

Checklist/Notes

1—Write a few notes on your instructor's comments. What do they say about your technique? Your grasp of the basics, and your interaction of the material into the real life cockpit situation?

2—Write something about your progress in the cockpit. What are you satisfied with? What comes easily? Not so much?

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PostFlight: An Old Pilot's Logbook Companion Guide:

Part 5

Rotary-Wing

I flew helicopters for a living, so I'm a bit partial to them. I'll list a few of the advantages and disadvantages I ran into in my time as a rotary-wing pilot, and you can decide if it appeals to you. As I said in the previous section, there are few paths into a helicopter cockpit outside of the military, specifically the army. It is possible to learn to fly rotary-wing on your own, but the flight hours are considerably more costly for helicopters, and it's somewhat more difficult to find a school that offers them. Here's the overview nonetheless.

Despite the fact that commercial helicopters have been around since 1947—thus the Bell model 47, world's first commercial helicopter—the machines are still seen as a bit exotic, and even rare. Thus, the flying careers in them are more limited than they might be in fixed-wing.

There are (literally) no scheduled helicopter services in existence, to my knowledge. The very few that have cropped up over the years have operated for a short time, and gone out of business due to high overhead and various other aviation-related woes. The closest helicopter operators come to scheduled operations is tour flying, and that, too, is a highly volatile and financially risky proposition.

So what kinds of careers are available for you with a commercial rotary-wing license? Here's a short and far from definitive list:

- ❖ —Hospital based, air medical helicopters. I flew air med for 20 years, and those were the best years of my career. The hours were long, the assignments strenuous, there was a lot of hospital politics, the flying was often very difficult, and I loved every day of it. If air medical helicopters are your goal, or air medical fixed-wing for that matter, there is ample opportunity for it. Here are some things to remember about it.
 - ◇ There's a tendency to blur lines between aviation and medicine, but you must avoid that.
 - ◇ The weather doesn't care that a child is dying 100 miles away. Go, No-Go decisions must be made based on safety, and nothing else.
 - ◇ Crew Resource Management is mandatory in the air med business.
 - ◇ The mantra 3 to go, 1 to say no means what it says. If one crew member doesn't feel safe, there is no launch.
 - ◇ Fatigue is a reality in air med. Take care of yourself, and rest when you can.

I will have much more about air medical aviation in a future book. The field is wide open, and it's finally becoming a safer, and more disciplined sector of aviation.

- ❖ —Offshore flying. In various parts of the world, such as in the Gulf of Mexico, the North Sea, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and other places where oil is extracted, helicopters are a vital link in the system to transport personnel and equipment. There are many operators around the world, and most of them are always looking for pilots.
- ❖ —Electronic News Gathering (ENG) flying. This is likely the best job for a rookie helicopter pilot in which to build hours. Many operators have contracts with various news organizations and outlets that use helicopters, some with scheduled flying. When I flew for Helicopters Incorporated in St. Louis one of my primary assignments as news and traffic in St. Louis, and as a relief pilot for several midwestern ENG contracts that Heli Inc. Had at that time. The work is steady, relatively easy, and can be repetitive, but the hours are good. There's seldom any night flying, for example, as it's difficult to impossible to do TV camera work after dark.
- ❖ —Corporate aviation of course has many helicopter jobs. Major corporate flight departments employ a helicopter to ferry C-suite individuals from place to place, and for various other tasks. As I wrote in PostFlight, corporate flying has its advantages. It tends to pay better

than other assignments for one thing, but it has drawbacks as well. One of those is that there tends to be a lot of down time. Another is that corporate jobs are somewhat less stable, especially in an economic downturn. It seems that the first items to go on the block during lean times are aircraft and pilots. The upside is that corporate flight departments generally use better equipment, it's very well maintained, and the bennies can be very good.

- ❖ —Miscellaneous helicopter assignments include fire-fighting gigs, TV and movie work, long-line and hoist operations, and several other jobs that only a helicopter can do. I found that persistence pays off. Even if your hours fall somewhat short of the requirement, if you keep checking in with an operator, and they get to know you, it's possible to be hired. It may take time, but keep trying.

Lessons

- **Single pilot or flying with company?** Commercial helicopter flying is almost always single-pilot. You may not like that idea; I preferred it.
- **Rookie jobs can be dirty, depressing, and dangerous.** Don't be surprised if your first helicopter job is miles and miles from civilization. Jobs in the bush can be fun, perilous, exhausting, fascinating, and very lucrative.
- **Corporate aviation is lucrative, clean, and often boring.** I flew for a corporation for two years before the company sold the aircraft out from under me. The pay was excellent, the benefits were outstanding, the helicopter was brand new with all the bells and whistles, I never worked a night or a weekend, never carried a pager. I hated it.
- **Imagine yourself in both cockpits.** As I wrote in the book, especially in a flight department, you'll likely be dual rated, or hired with the provision that you'll learn to fly both categories.

Checklist/Notes

1—Write a few notes on which category you'd like to fly, either fixed-wing or rotary-wing, and why that appeals to you. Is it the persona, the pay, the perks, or is it just what you always imagined?

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PostFlight: An Old Pilot's Logbook Companion Guide:

Part 6

Transition: Military to Commercial

If you're leaving the military, and intend to find a commercial flying job, the transition can be difficult. I described my own move from military flying to the commercial world in the book, and it was a rocky road at times. Everyone's experience will be different, but let me give you an overview of what I found, a few things that can help ease your passage.

I started flying helicopters in the US Army, then went to Vietnam for a year. After the war, I went looking for a paying seat, but there were so many Vietnam vet helicopter pilots at the time, that was 1971, and so few commercial jobs available, that it took me ten years to find one.

These days the ratio of pilots to jobs is much better, so your transition should be easier. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

- ❖ —The military competency written test for a commercial license is somewhat shorter and less involved than the standard FAA written test for a commercial, but not a lot easier. If you've flown in the national airspace system it shouldn't be difficult to pass. Your military instrument rating will transfer without difficulty.
- ❖ —Study up on airspace, emergency procedures, and FARs, such as Part 1, 61, 91, 121, and 135.

- ❖ —Get familiar with the Airman's Information Manual, and any ops manuals for aircraft the company you're applying to flies.
- ❖ —Commercial operators use so-called operations specifications, referred to as op-specs, that define what they're authorized by the FAA to do. You'll have to know the company op-specs, and any restrictions an operator may have.
- ❖ —From personal experience, don't expect a lot of deference to your age, rank, or military accomplishments. Those attaboys and air medals you were awarded may look good on your uniform, but not especially on your résumé, and they won't enhance your chances to get hired, or supplement your paycheck. In other words, expect to start at the bottom of the heap, and work your way up just like you did before.
- ❖ —The hardest part, for me, was the seeming nonchalance in the commercial world concerning maintenance and regulations. I never flew for a company that broke the rules on purpose to get the job done, but there were times when aircraft took off with questionable systems, intermittent items, and things that flat didn't work. I learned pretty quickly that the dollar factor was a lot more important in commercial aviation than in the military.
- ❖ —Maintenance, likewise, is different. Not worse in the commercial world, just different. I never saw a mechanic pencil whip an inspection, but there were times when I questioned how things were accomplished, and how they were done so quickly. The bottom line is that once you accept the aircraft for flight, it's yours.
- ❖ —It's actually easier in the commercial world to decline a mission. In the military, taking a flight, and doing a mission is an expectation, regardless of aircraft condition, weather, time of day or night, pending danger, or even your personal, physical condition. In commercial aviation you can certainly decline a flight if you feel it's beyond your capabilities. It may cost you a job, or it may not, depending on your reasoning. You might refer to 'The Dayno response' in chapter 15 of *PostFlight*. It's a fun story, and the upshot from Capt. Stephen Walton is this: When you encounter a mission situation or aircraft condition you don't like, or that makes you uneasy, just say 'dayno way I'm flying that,' and walk away.
- ❖ In commercial aviation, things are less circumscribed, there are fewer hard and fast rules, and somewhat more latitude to get a job done when the dollar sign is driving the bus. Stay true to your own values, make your own decisions, and do what you have to do.

Checklist/Notes

1—Write a few notes on your personal expectations leaving the military for commercial flying.

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Part 7

Stretching the Rules

As I wrote in *PostFlight*, I'd never encourage anyone to break the rules, regardless of the situation. Aviation rules were written in blood, and moving beyond them better be for damn fine reason. The only thing I can think of is to save your passengers, aircraft and crew. Otherwise, know the rules and follow them. There's a crusty old aviation maxim that states there are no new ways to crash and hurt yourself. They've all been done before, and you won't live long enough to do them all over again, so don't try.

Here's a short, and far from definitive list of the rules that you could encounter every day you fly, some written, some not:

- ❖ —Know the rules! That's an unwritten rule, but maybe the best one. Get into the regs, know them like you know your name, and review them every chance you get.
- ❖ —One of the most important is FAR Part 91.3 the 'Pilot in command rule. It says just what it says. You're the PIC, and that comes with rights and responsibilities. Embrace that rule for what it is, but never abuse it.
- ❖ —Airspace rules may be next in line, because they apply to everyone, regardless of the aircraft flown, assignment, position in the system, or any other qualification. Think about this: If you're flying a 787, and a

Cessna 182 is in front of you waiting for takeoff clearance, the Cessna is observing the same rules you are.

- ❖ —Unwritten rules can be more important. For example, always walk around our aircraft. The number of loose caps, stray rags, FOD, unlatched cowls, missing parts, and attachments that shouldn't be attached is very high. That walkaround before entering the cockpit will save your butt, and yes, this is the voice of experience!
- ❖ —Another equally valid if unwritten rule is to play nice with other pilots, and the ATC folks. It was my experience that pilots in general are wonderful people striving to get along, while enjoying the sheer pleasure of transiting the sky. Be professional, of course, but don't be rigid. Everyone is flying their own aircraft.

Here's an elaboration on some of these things, and lessons:

Lessons

• **Stretch the rules only with a damn good reason.** The only reason to break rules is to save yourself and your passengers. Years ago a 737 crew departing Washington National Airport crashed shortly after takeoff on a bitter, snowy winter morning. The crash killed 74 people, including both pilots. It was later determined, in simulator reproductions of the crash sequence, that the aircraft could have been saved had the pilots overridden their own training and instincts. Instead of moving the throttles past the red line for power, they observed the limits, as they'd been taught. In other words, by following the rules, they crashed the aircraft. This is an extreme example, but relevant. If you're faced with the destruction of your aircraft, do whatever you need to do to save it and yourself. (See FAR 91.3 PIC).

- **Keep your head on a swivel, always.** Another unwritten rule, but a damn good one. Especially these days with the newer electronic installations, and the glass cockpits it's easy to stay inside the aircraft and monitor the flight as if you're the only aircraft in the sky. So now more than ever, stay outside. And keep your eyes moving all the time. This is particularly important in the vicinity of airports. Most midair collisions happen within 5 miles of a non-tower airport on a CAVU day.
- **Emergency? Slow down; it could save your life.** This unwritten rule seems counterintuitive. In any aircraft emergency it will feel like you must

act quickly, do something right away to clear up the mess. The truth is that there are likely more dead pilots and broken aircraft from acting too quickly than not fast enough. Taking a few seconds, or even longer to discern exactly what the problem is always makes for better decisions. In any emergency, your very first consideration is to fly the aircraft.

- **Always fly first. Remember: Aviate, Navigate, Communicate.** This applies in any emergency. You can be a pilot, or a passenger. You can't be both.
- A homely old aviation adage states that unprofessional pilots will be found in the wreckage with their hands gripping the mic. Fly it till it won't fly anymore

Checklist/Notes

1—Write a few notes on rules and regulations you feel are most important to the aircraft and assignment you anticipate having. Even though all the rules are important, there will be FARs that direct your activity, so it's good to know those best.

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General Notes

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Part 8

Situational Awareness

Older pilots like myself refer to this as air sense. It's that feeling you'll acquire when you have more experience that will tell you where you are, what position the aircraft is in, what other aircraft are around you, and even to some extent the disposition and mood of your crew. In Crew Resource Management, the opposite of situational awareness is called confusion. And it can be deadly in aviation.

The crash of NorthWest Airlines 6231 is the best example I can find of the lack of situational awareness. The accident happened in 1974 when a 737 took off from LaGuardia with only the crew aboard. With more than 50,000 hours of total flight time in the cockpit, the three pilots—there was a navigator at that time—mistook an increase in airspeed, and a tremendous vertical speed, when the pitot heat switch had been left off during the pretaxi checklist. With an iced up pitot-static system, the gauges read backward. The crew misread the increased airspeed and wild vertical speed. When they started getting the stick shaker, they thought it was mach buffet! The airplane was trying to tell them it was about to stall, but they convinced themselves they were going too fast!

Situational awareness is crucial, regardless of how much experience a pilot has. And clearly, there's no guarantee that high time pilots are automatically aware of their surroundings.

Here's a rundown of how this works in the real world, and how SA can help you:

- **Situational Awareness is a real thing. Trust it.** As a rookie pilot, you may be inclined to disregard your feelings of unease, or the sense that something's wrong with your aircraft or the situation. Pay attention to these feelings. What's the worst that can happen? Maybe you'll embarrass yourself? You might look silly, or unprofessional? We've all been there. There are no stupid questions in aviation. If your gut says something's wrong, something's wrong.
- **Aircraft don't magically fix themselves.** This is similar to the one above. The old aviation saying is that if something's bad on the ground, it will only get worse in the air. Aircraft do not magically fix themselves. If you sense a problem, listen to that sense, and figure out why you feel that way. Even if you have to land, don't ignore it.
- **You're not flying for pay; you're flying to build a legacy.** This may seem hard to live with at first with the debt you may have acquired learning to fly. But the debt will get paid off eventually. You have to be around to enjoy your career afterward, and that career will be better if you think about the legacy you want. Make a pledge to yourself to be the best, most professional pilot you can be. You'll be glad you did.
- **Risk can never be zero; but it can be minimized.** Situational awareness can get in the way of your actions as well. You don't want to be that pilot who refuses to go flying when the wind changes direction. Nobody needs that reputation. It's a fine line. Just remember that risk is always there, and how you minimize it and avoid it will define your career.

Checklist/Notes

1—Write down a few personal limits, some potential situations you anticipate that will cause you to say no. Even with little experience, we all have things that we know ahead of time we'll refuse to do.

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General Notes

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PostFlight: An Old Pilot's Logbook Companion Guide:

Part 9

Mechanics are your friends

The people who maintain your aircraft deserve a lot of respect. They work a lot of hours, for (often) less pay than pilots, longer hours, and often in less pleasant conditions. They have a license to protect like we do, so they should be considered a part of every aircrew.

It goes beyond that as well. In the CRM environment, your mechanic is absolutely part of the crew, so listen to them, and elicit their input on various issues. Aviation is a collaborative effort, so make sure you get the mechanic's opinion and expertise.

- **Mechanics are your friends. Treat them well.** As I wrote in PostFlight, be sensitive to the mechanic's schedule, and their availability. Especially if you're in a single mechanic environment, help them with the work, don't load them up with minor maintenance issues that can wait, especially if you have op specs for a minimum equipment list, and be careful how you write up glitches and equipment malfunctions.

- **The best way to treat a mechanic well is to treat the aircraft well.** Many mechanics consider the aircraft theirs, and they're gracious enough to allow

you to fly it, provided you take care of it. Don't beat the equipment up. Treat an aircraft well, stay within its parameters, and think of it as someone else's property—because it likely is anyway. Here's just one small example: Don't slam doors. Aircraft are fragile, and built to be very light and almost flimsy. Keep that in mind, and bring it back as you found it. Your mechanic will thank you.

- **Describing the glitch precisely helps a lot.** Write-ups for noises, and shimmies, and vibrations, and hiccups aren't helpful. Be very precise, explain what the issue is, when it started, any accompanying problems, and any other gauge or airframe issues that seem related.

- **Don't bring your mechanic in at 3 a.m. to fix an inop lightbulb.** Change it yourself, or wait till morning. Again, with an MEL this is a lot easier.

- **Help them with the work.** You'll learn a lot if you get your hands dirty with the mechanic. There's no better way to know and understand the airframe and engine than pitching in with an annual inspection, or any other time when the cowls are off. The bonus to this is that you learn about the maintenance records this way as well.

- **Take your mechanic flying.** They rarely ask, and few pilots offer, so especially if you have a glitch, or a system spits up, take them flying to see if you can duplicate the problem.

- **Don't boggle up the paperwork.** Here's the template I placed in the book:

1. When and where did you first notice the glitch?
2. Were there indications prior to failure?
3. Did it surge, or has it been intermittent?
4. If it's a cycling system, how often is it supposed to cycle?
5. For radios: range of transmission/reception before?
6. Did you notice unusual noises in the headset/helmet?
7. Did you feel any vibrations, looseness, or stiffness in controls?
8. Notice any smoke or fumes?
9. What did the generator/alternator do?
10. Leakage, lower/higher pressure, variations in other gauges?

- **Never blame a mechanic for your screwup.** You may be tempted once or twice to point at the mechanic and allege that something you've done to the aircraft, or damage you've found on landing rests with them. Don't ever do this. Never. In fact, it's a better policy to always assume the problem happened on your watch, until it proves otherwise.

- **Pay attention to pending inspections.** Don't overfly any time-limited maintenance item, or inspection. This is perhaps the best reason to keep your

mechanic happy. They have all the maintenance numbers in their heads for their aircraft, and they know when things are coming due.

- **The mechanic has a license to protect, too.** Your mechanic's A&P license is their career, just as yours is. Keep that in mind, that they're professionals, too, with a lot to lose if something goes wrong. This doesn't mean you can't hold their feet to the fire if they slack off, but don't

Checklist/Notes

1—Write a few notes on your experience with an A&P mechanic. Have you asked them about an issue? Have you talked shop with them? Have you asked them to explain systems and paperwork and records to you?

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PostFlight: An Old Pilot's Logbook Companion Guide:

Part 10

Take Care of Passengers

Depending on what kind of flying you do, you'll have to learn how to take care of other people. When I flew a helicopter at a hospital, I had two flight nurses behind me in the cabin, and for half the flight a patient aboard. None of those individuals had access to the controls, of course, so I was very cautious to keep one thing in mind: They were along for the ride.

Here's something that you'll encounter at some point in your flying career. If you're like me, you'll become uncomfortable riding in an aircraft. Why would a pilot be uncomfortable there? Because I had no access to the controls, and like my passengers, I was wholly dependent on the pilot's skill.

Put yourself in their position, and fly accordingly. This is yet another way to cement your legacy as a great pilot.

- **Listen to your passengers.** Be attentive to their needs, their fears, and their desire for an uneventful flight. Never assume the passengers enjoy maneuvers that may be outside the parameters, or beyond standard turn and bank. They may not say so, but chances are good they'll wish you wouldn't fly that way.
- Be the best pilot they've ever flown with. There's nothing wrong with this goal.

- **Pay attention to their physical needs.** They may need something from you that they don't know how to ask for. Ask them first.
- **Never dismiss their fears.** With a bit of experience, you'll be able to read body language, and hear anxiety in passengers' voices, and even questions they're unable to ask. Don't get so caught up in your flying that you forget those people are behind you. It's easier to do than you think.
- **For unreasonable requests.** From time to time people might ask you to do things that are borderline dangerous, or against regulations. Buzzing their house for example, is a temptation many pilots surrender to, and one that can bring the FAA to your door. If you get that request, cite safety as a reason to say no. It may cost you a friendship, but that's better than getting a violation.
- **Don't be a cowboy, it impresses no one.** I've mentioned this in other contexts, but it bears repeating. Modern aviation is too sophisticated, and too open to view—especially with gazillion smartphones—to think you can get away with impromptu aerobatics etc. Just fly the aircraft, enjoy the privilege, and forget all the cowboy stuff.

Checklist/Notes

1—Write a few notes on times you've flown passengers. How did they feel flying with you? Did you sense an added responsibility to them? And to yourself? Would you enjoy flying with you as a pilot?

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General Notes

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PostFlight: An Old Pilot's Logbook Companion Guide:

Part 11

Take care of yourself

It's awfully easy to launch into your flying day, take off, level off, clean up the cockpit, turn George on and let him take over while you do the crossword puzzle, or sip your Starbucks soy latte, while watching the clouds drift by outside your window. Aviation's a great way to live, ya know? Right?

It's too easy as well to land, taxi in, whip off the paperwork, then go to the lounge to grab a steak and a beer, and then put your feet up in the motel room with little or no regard for your physical condition.

If you plan to stay in the cockpit for a long time, you need to pay attention to your physical, emotional, and mental health. If that means heading to the gym instead of to the airport lounge, then that's what it means. We pilots are possibly more fragile than the aircraft we fly. Like them, we need scheduled maintenance, and attention to whatever glitches and system deficiencies that will crop up. Unlike an aircraft, pilots must pass a reasonably strict FAA physical every year, or more often, or we're grounded. This would suggest that paying attention to your physical well being should become of paramount importance to you.

It's not just the physical aspects, either. There are a number of career exposures you need to be aware of. Here's a short list.

- **You may have to be selfish.** I address this fully in the book. The short version is this: When you're asked by friends and family to take time away from an aviation matter that's critical to you, you must choose flying first. That sounds harsh, and it can cause bad feelings, but taking care of your career is taking care of you.
- **Don't be afraid to say no.** Keep your head up, and don't be afraid to turn down an assignment you're not comfortable with. There will always be other jobs, and other chances.
- **Don't be afraid to confront a cowboy pilot.** This may be a very difficult situation for you, especially as a rookie. But here's the deal. You'll be flying an aircraft they've been flying, and your career could be on the line, so find a way to confront them. Especially if the contract has one aircraft and several pilots, it's important that none of the others endangers you.
- If you can't stay single, look for another pilot. He/She will understand better than a non-flyer your need to dedicate your hours and days to flying.
- **Have another skill to fall back on.** This is taking care of you, too. Aviation is a volatile business. There are very few permanent, or steady positions, especially when you're new. Find something you can do—even as you fly—that can fill in during times you're off the schedule.
- **No smoking, and No drugs!**
- **Wear hearing protection.**
- **Get plenty of sleep and exercise.**
- **Pick up FOD.**

Checklist/Notes

1—Write up a workout schedule, and try to stick to it. Especially if you fly a scheduled service, make it part of your daily routine.

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General Notes

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PostFlight: An Old Pilot's Logbook Companion Guide:

Part 12

General advice & wisdom

To close this guide, I've listed a few final thoughts on things to remember as you pursue your career in the cockpit. While I was writing it, I was reminiscing about my own career, and all the stories and missions and people and situations I encountered, and it made me a bit sad. It ended much too quickly. I was only 56 years old, which may seem ancient to you, but you'll be there sooner than you imagine.

I'm putting on my old pilot hat, and closing out my logbook for the last time. The final entry to my actual logbook was written on December 5th 2005. I'd just landed after a tour flight around Kauai, a flight in which I'd experienced what is called 'near syncope.' In other words, I almost passed out in the cockpit. Since I was the only pilot aboard, that would have been a terrible event for me and my six passengers.

Fortunately, I stayed conscious, and landed uneventfully. But I knew that taking off again that day would be foolhardy, that until I understood what had happened to cause my near-syncopal episode, the risk was just too high.

That event happened 15 years ago as I write this. I miss flying. I miss the opportunities and the sheer pleasure it offered. Mostly, I miss doing something that I was very, very good at. I was at the top of my skill in the cockpit, and it

felt incredibly satisfying. When I lost that ability, the realization was very difficult to assimilate. I tell people that I never crashed until I quit flying, and that's true. Without the ability to fly, I was lost, miserable, and sad. I felt like I had little reason to go on, and my ability to enjoy life took a nosedive.

I tell you my sob story not to elicit your sympathy, that would be tacky and rude. I mention it only because I wish I had it to do over again, and to encourage you to enjoy every single day you fly. It will pass into your own history sooner than you want, and sooner than you think.

Here are a few last-minute words of advice.

- **Don't piss people off.** Aviation is a very small, almost intimate business. You'll meet people on the way up, and on the way down. Treat each other well, you'll be glad you did.
- **The FAA is not out to get you.** Treat the feds well also. They're just doing their jobs. If you get ramped—and you will—cooperate, smile, give them what they ask for, and be professional.
- **In aviation, knowledge = insurance.** Stock up on whatever aviation wisdom and skill you can. Make it a point to learn something new every time you fly.
- **Be a professional.** It may cost you, but professionalism is worth it.


Thank you for reading this guide. Thanks as well for reading PostFlight: An Old Pilot's Logbook. If you know someone else who will benefit from reading this, please pass it along, or refer them to my website for their own download.


www.byronedgington.com

I hope you have a long, prosperous, enjoyable, safe, and fulfilling career in the sky. I hope you have a career much like mine.

Notes

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