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## Into the Blue: A Career in Aviation

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Into the Blue: A Career in Aviation

by Natalie Hustead

(English 1102)

There are moments in everyone's lives that define them, that help them choose a path in their life and change who they are and what they want forever. For me, the first time I took the controls of a single engine airplane forever changed who I would become. I was riding along with my mother above Cook Inlet in Alaska and she let me fly. It wasn't for very long and all I really did was keep the small aircraft on track, but something clicked in me and I knew what I wanted to do with my life.

It takes a lot of work to become an airline pilot, even more so to become a chief pilot. But flying is in my blood and it is the only thing I want to do. Fred Peters, a friend of the family decided to become a pilot, and later a chief pilot, for much of the same reason: "I decided on Aviation at a very early age. My father was a [sic] airline pilot and also flew general aviation aircraft. I had fun with him and was really interested in Aviation."

Aviation takes a long time and a lot of hard work. Simply to acquire a private pilot's license, one of the most basic of Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) licenses, takes forty hours of flight time plus additional classroom instruction for each class. The hourly requirement jumps to 250 hours to become a commercial pilot. To fly professionally, a pilot also needs an instrument rating, to be able to fly without looking at the natural horizon, and a multiengine rating, to be able to fly and aircraft with more than one engine (FAA.gov). Additional hours of flight time are required for ratings such as these. It is a long and expensive road to the sky. One of the fastest and perhaps the best choice for would-be pilots is in a branch of the military. Although, I must note, that the military is not an option for everyone. The civilian route does take a long time, though.

To get a private pilot's license, a person has to be at least seventeen years old. He or she also has to be in good physical health and have a FAA third-class medical certificate. Forty hours of flight time has to be logged, twenty of which with a certified flight instructor and at least ten hours solo. The twenty hours with an instructor include three hours of cross country flight, three hours of instrument flight training, three hours at night including ten take offs and landings and three hours in an airplane within sixty days of taking the final FAA private pilot flight exam. Any would-be pilot also has to pass the FAA private pilot airmen knowledge written exam (FAA.gov).

It takes considerably more work to become a commercial pilot. The minimum requirements up the age from seventeen to eighteen and the pilot must have at 250 flight hours logged (Forsyth). To receive a multiengine rating requires one hundred hours in a powered aircraft, fifty of which in an airplane, as opposed to a flight simulator. Another one hundred hours of pilot in command flying, half of which in an airplane in cross country flight. A required ten hours on instrument with five hours in a multiengine aircraft. Pilots in training have to fly ten hours in an aircraft with retractable landing gears, flaps and controllable pitch propellers or is turbine powered. Two hours must be spent in a cross country flight no less than one hundred nautical miles from origin in daytime visual flight rules (VFR or non-instrument) and two hours at night under the same conditions. Ten hours must be spent as pilot in command in a multiengine aircraft with an authorized instructor performing a flight of no less than three hundred nautical miles from origin and five hours VFR at night with ten take offs and landings, each landing must involve a flight in the traffic pattern, at airports with an operating control tower (Forsyth).

All major airlines require an air transport pilot's license. To obtain that, pilots must be at least twenty three years old and have 1,500 hours of flight time. He or she also has to have a restricted radio telephone operator's permit from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for communication with air traffic controllers (Forsyth).

Once someone has become a professional pilot, the pay is not worth the effort at first. The salary ranges from less than \$26,000 a year when a pilot first starts out. Pilots also have a lot of responsibility if they are regional captains because the care of the aircraft could also be up to them. Once someone become captain of a major airline, however, he or she works no more than 100 hours in a month and can earn upwards of \$145,000 a year (Ferguson's Careers in Focus 166.). That is not a bad salary considering a college degree is not a mandatory requirement, though it is encouraged.

Not anyone can become a pilot, either. It takes a certain type of person to be able to handle the stress and rigors of the job. Pilots need to be proficient in mathematics and physics in case of emergency, also just to have a good idea of how and why the plane is flying; English and geography are also important ("Pilot"). Since most of a pilot's work is done in a cockpit or on a flight deck, he or she needs to be able to work well with others in confined spaces for long periods of time. Good leadership and management skills are a must. The sooner a would-be pilot starts training and preparing to be a pilot, the easier it will be. Some high schools and many colleges have aviation clubs, teams or other organizations. It is a good idea to get involved in these as soon as possible. I have been considering transferring to Southern Illinois University because the Flying Salukis, the school's competitive flight team, has an excellent reputation.

One of the largest problems facing the airline industry is the after-effects of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. Fred Peters was in the prime of his career when "9-11 changed everything. The security has gotten tighter and, although we do not profile in this country, as a pilot you are looked at quite a bit closer than the average passenger." There were 70,000 layoffs between the United States and Europe in the week following the attacks (Taylor 18). I know from personal experience the effects of what happened. My mother, who had been in training all of 2001 and had a job lined up lost it before she even started due to the breakdown of the industry. Several major airlines have yet to recover fully and two companies still remain bankrupt (Taylor 18). It is because of this volatility of passenger lines that I decided on a career flying cargo. People can choose not to fly, or to drive wherever they are going for the most part. But international corporations still need their million-dollar contracts and packages the next morning. It gave me confidence to know that Fred Peters made the same decision I did based on the exact same reason: "I guess the worst part of the job has been the uncertainty on where the industry is going. I flew passengers and corporate executives for several companies and, when the economy took a turn for the worse, layoffs occurred [sic] which disrupted lives. I made a decision to fly freight as the economy always needed the movement of freight."

The airline industry is struggling right now. Not only to keep the airplanes full of passengers but also to keep the flight deck occupied. Many of the baby boomers who have military flight training are nearing the FAA mandated retiring age of 60. By the end of 2007, the age is supposed to be moved up to 65 to keep pilots flying the country's planes. That does not help, however, the pilots who have already turned or are going to turn 60 before the end of 2007. The airline industry will be in dire straits if more people do not become professional pilots. This is good news for those of us who are just getting into the profession.

Time in aircraft is expensive. It is not so much the cost of the aircraft itself; it is more the cost to insure it. Therefore, logging 250 would be a burden on the average person's wallet. It is because of the extraordinary cost of renting a plane that joining a branch of the military is an excellent choice for those who wish to fly. The military would pay for someone to learn how to fly, and the hours would build quickly because that person would be flying nearly every day and when looking for employment as a civilian, also the experience would provide a major career boost ("Aviation FAQ").

One problem with joining the military at this point is that there is a risk of going overseas to Iraq. Even the military reserves are being called in. Also, if someone has poor vision that is not correctable to 20/20 or has had Lasik surgery or anything along those lines, then that person is disqualified from the Air Force flight program ("Disqualifications"). If a person can not fly in the Air Force, then it would not help to join. If a person's financial situation is restricting his or her path to becoming a pilot and he or she has good vision, the military may just be the path for that person.

When I interviewed Fred Peters, it was through e-mail. When he responded to my questions, he was in Taipei, Taiwan, on a lay-over. I was surprised and pleased at the same time to realize that he was, at one point, exactly where I wanted to be. Peters was Chief Pilot for a time, which gives you a position of authority over the other pilots. A person can only become chief pilot after becoming captain. Obtaining rank of captain can take a long time depending on how long a pilot stays with an airline. Seniority is everything, according to Peters, and it determines the quality of life. Depending on the airline, once you become captain it can take anywhere from five to ten years to become eligible for chief pilot position.

There are a lot of obstacles to overcome for those of us who want to become pilots. It takes a lot of time, hard work and dedication to pass all of the exams, receive all of the certifications and log all of the required hours. But it is my feeling that if you love your job, you never work a day in your life. Peters puts it this way: "It is important to have a passion for flying in order to be successful. There is an old saying in the aviation world - hours of boredom with moments of terror." I love to fly and I can not wait to introduce myself as Captain.

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