

I Become a Pilot

After I left teaching at Glassboro State College (now Rowan university) and began working at RCA Government Systems, I wanted to take up a new challenge. Since I had always wanted to learn how to fly an airplane, this seemed the right time to begin. I knew that my good friend and colleague Al Taylor was a flight instructor. So I approached him with my idea, and he agreed to take me as a student. So on August 14, 1982, I had my first lesson. Al instructed out of a small airport located at Cross Keys, New Jersey which is about 30 miles south of Philadelphia and a few miles from the college. The aircraft that I used were Cessnas, 152 and 150.

The requirements to obtain the private pilot license include instruction by a certified flight instructor, including specific flight experience such as cross country flights to other airports and knowledge of the flight regulations. My initial instruction included practice in takeoffs and landings, as well as various flight maneuvers such as turns, climbs and descents. My instruction progressed rapidly, and then one day, Al stepped out of the airplane and said "take it around by yourself". This is called your "first solo" flight, and it is very exciting. For the first time you are in the airplane alone. I did a takeoff, circling the airport and then landing. It was an exhilarating experience, and it happened routinely without any problems.

Next, after much preparation, I began to take cross-country flights with Al. One such flight was from Cross Keys, New Jersey to Reading, Pennsylvania. When Al considered me ready, I made that flight solo. It was exciting to be on my own between two airports. I now realized the utility of flying an airplane. It was no longer just having a good time, but rather doing something which could be extremely useful.

Next, Al gave me flight instruction for my first triple cross country flight. This was a flight from Cross Keys to Tangier Island, Virginia, then to Dulles International Airport and, finally back to Cross Keys. After flying this route with Al, I was ready to do it solo. So, on November 11, I departed Cross Keys Airport in a Cessna 152 aircraft, and landed 1.5 hours later at Tangier Island.

At each stop of a cross-country flight, the student is required to get his flight log signed, so I went into a store where several people were sitting. They spoke a very interesting dialect of English which I have since learned is a "Southern American English". After getting my logbook signed, I walked around a bit. There were no cars visible anywhere and the houses were very close together. Some residents had buried their relatives in their front yard with large tombstones visible. It was most interesting to see this, and I'll never forget it. Next, I took off for Dulles International. One and a half hours later I could see the runways 5 miles ahead. Approach control instructed me on the radio to fly straight in for landing. After a handoff to Dulles Tower, I touched down and Taxied into the ramp area where I was greeted by my aunts, Josephine and Faye, my cousin Albert, and his two daughters, Natalie and Karina. Josephine signed my logbook. I then visited for a few moments, departed Dulles and finally landed at Cross Keys Airport after a 1.5 hour flight.

Finally, on November 11, I completed my flight test and earned my private Pilot license. I had 56 flight hours with 20 solo, and was now able to take anyone up in any airplane that I was qualified to fly.

My first big use of my new license came when I went to Hawaii with my wife Joanne. I called



ahead and reserved an airplane. On March 12, 1983, I went to the place that rented airplanes at Honolulu International Airport (called a fixed base operator or "FBO"). An instructor had me check out in a Cessna 152. The next day, I rented a Cessna and flew from Honolulu International Airport to Kahalui Airport on the island of Maui. The flight took us over some open ocean where we saw whales swimming below. Needless to say, this was very exciting. Before returning, we rented a car and drove around Maui for some bird watching.

This memoir tells the story of how I began flying. Later, I went on to get a Commercial Pilot License in 1985, and Airline Transport Pilot License in 1991, a certified flight instructor certificate in 1985, an instrument rating in 1984 and a certified flight instructor instrument in 1991.

Several later memoirs feature interesting trips that I took in my Mooney aircraft which I purchased in 1992 after I joined IBM.