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We noticed as we read these wonderful stories, sent to us by the readers of *Air & Space,* that they are filled with longing. As you read them, you’ll notice these common themes: “All too soon, the flight was over” and “All good things must end, and so did our flight” and “I’ll always remember...” and “I’ll never forget.” There are certainly a few experiences included that the writers wish had not happened, but the majority of these stories recount happy times in the air. Reading them made us happy, and we hope you enjoy them as much as we did.

Happy reading. Happy flying.

—The editors
Happy Birthday
MARK EVANOFF, KALISPELL, MT

In 1981, on the occasion of my 25th birthday, I flew an early design hang glider off the 3,200-foot cliff in Yosemite known as Glacier Point. Several days before the flight, I brought along my future wife to inspect the launch site, effectively a granite slab plunging toward the valley below. We looked at each other, and our expressions echoed our mutual conclusion...I was about to die! Typically my flights were initiated from gentle hillsides and sloping terrain, not a precipice of such consequence.

The Yosemite morning air was still as I gingerly carried my aluminum and fabric glider across the granite escarpment. As per site protocol, the launch manager confirmed my harness attachments and sized up my mental resolve. The assembled bystanders grew solemn. When I exclaimed “Well thrillseekers...let's do this!” a few laughs and nervous chuckles could be heard. As counterintuitive as it was, I ran head first downhill to ensure a successful take off in the thin 7,200-foot-elevation air.

The earth fell away yielding the awesome sights of Yosemite Valley. From a vantage that relatively few have enjoyed, I circled over the Ahwahnee Hotel, and hooted at rock climbers on El Capitan suspended in their hammocks. After remaining aloft for shorter than I’d hoped, I landed in an idyllic meadow to the warmest of welcomes. With a glass of champagne in hand (you're only 25 once!) I pondered how life could possibly get any better than this.

Fast Movers
DEAN BRAYTON, GOLD CANYON, AZ

From July 1968 until October 1969, I was a Staff Sergeant and Non-Commissioned Officer In Charge of Officer Records, 343rd Combat Support Squadron in Duluth, Minnesota. Each time a new pilot was assigned to the 87th FIS, they were required to visit my office for a records review. After the review, I always respectfully asked if they ever needed someone for the back seat of one of their jets to please call me!

One day the call came: a backseat ride in a T-33 that Captain Larry Livingston was flying into Canada and back. We became a target, picked up by NORAD and the SAGE computer network facility at Duluth, and chased down by two F-106 Delta Darts.

When we first saw the F-106s they were dots in the distance, and with a blink of the eyes, one flew over the T-33 and one flew under. One flew just off our wing for a long time before leaving us. And after we made a sharp, banked U turn over Lake Superior, we were back on the ground.

I continued to ask for a ride in the F-106B, but transferred to a Special Assignment Program in London, England before it happened.

The T-33 ride was a thrill I remember vividly 50 years later.
GARY L. PEPPERS, CAPE CORAL, FL

I sold my Jaguar roadster to buy my first airplane, an AA-1 American Yankee, when I went to work flying helicopters offshore in 1976 out of Lafayette, Louisiana. Best trade I ever made. The Yankee is a two place, side-by-side speedster with a sliding canopy that’s much faster than the Cessnas and Pipers I trained in. I found it in an ad in Trade-a-Plane—a 1969 model located in Poteau, Oklahoma, fresh out of the paint shop, for $5,995. Its 108-hp Lycoming engine gives it a cruise speed of 130 mph, and a reputation as being a “hot” ride, unforgiving of pilots who didn’t respect its quirky character, especially on landing. So I asked Wayne, the agent selling it, to go up with me for a familiarization flight before I took it home to Louisiana. He readily agreed, climbed into the right seat and handed me the checklist as I slid into the left. I felt relieved to have an experienced instructor aboard.

We took off and did some stalls and falls, steep turns, slow flight, then came back to the airport for three landing cycles. I thought I did okay because Wayne never said a word.

After the final landing, we taxied back to the ramp and shut down. When I asked Wayne if he would sign off the checkout in my logbook, he said, “Oh, I’m not an instructor. I’m not even a pilot. I just paint the things.” So I learned to fly the Yankee that afternoon on my way home to Lafayette.

I flew that Yankee all over the South and successfully employed it to take young ladies for a dinner date to the Holiday Inn in Jennings, which had its own grass airstrip and aircraft parking ramp, in addition to a first-class restaurant. One day an old girlfriend working in Effingham, Illinois called from out of the blue. The Yankee made my weekly pilgrimages from Louisiana to Illinois quick and affordable. We were married six months later in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

We took off for our honeymoon in the Yankee, which my siblings had discovered parked at the airport and decorated in suitably colorful and ribald art. Fortunately, it was dark when we landed at Hot Springs. But when I called the tower for takeoff clearance on a bright morning five days later, the controller announced, “Honeymoon Special, cleared for takeoff.”
After You
PETE PLANTE, HEATH, OH

On June 29, 1970, I was a student pilot with a total of 12 hours around Whiteman Airpark in Pacoima, California long before it became a controlled airport.

My certified flight instructor Dan Brennan had drilled in my head in the past: If necessary, don’t argue. Avoid!

On this day, Dan said, “You are ready, you are on your own, do me proud!”

I taxied on to runway 12 and made a happy takeoff, went around the patch... until I was on a short final, full flaps, and looked up to see another aircraft taxing straight at me! At that, I remember those words out of my instructor’s mouth:

Don’t argue. Avoid!

Full power, took off, one notch of flaps, banked right over San Fernando Road, and went around again, landed, parked the C-150, and noticed my instructor had the guy that was taxing the other aircraft by the shirt collar!

Hold Your Hercules
JOHN ZITNICK, COUPEVILLE, WA

In 1971, I was an Air Force sergeant stationed at March Air Force Base in Riverside, California. I had always had an interest in airplanes and flying. I joined the base flying club to get my pilot’s license. I had a few hours and had made my solo flight. On this particular day, I was out doing a short cross-country in a Cessna 150. I returned to the base and was put in a holding pattern over the base golf course. At that time March was the home of the 22nd Bomb wing, which meant we had a wing of B-52s and KC-135s. We also would routinely get other aircraft doing touch-and-go landings. The pattern that day was rather busy. I had seen two F-102s and a KC-135 in the pattern. On about my fifth orbit of the golf course, I got a call from March tower, “We have a C-130 five miles out. Can you get your aircraft on the ground now?” Of course I replied “yes” and proceeded on a short downwind to land as soon as possible. As soon as I was on the ground the tower called again, telling me to take the next turnoff. I was about 50 yards off the runway when I heard the C-130 come barreling down the runway behind me.
A Fortunately Brief Nap
RONALD DEADY, POST FALLS, ID

A typical sortie out of U-Tapao Air Base, Thailand, 15 July 1969. I lead a three-ship formation of B-52s. Mission: Bomb North Vietnam. All is very normal, takeoff, join-up, and start our climb to 37,000 feet. Climb checklist complete at about 8,000 feet, then a strange voice starts saying, “Lead, where you goin’?” I’m aware that I was waking up, the aircraft is in a 50-degree left turn, and the nose is at 40-degrees down. We’re about 3,000 feet above tall mountains.

There is a checklist item called “pressurization switch ON!” [After] take-off at 2 a.m., tired, I fail to monitor the copilot’s actions—which is my fault. Luckily, I wake up after having no sensations of hypoxia, and we all live the rest of our lives.

We rejoined [formation], regained altitude, and jumped back in front of the cell and went on to drop our bombs. Unlike other kinds of events in life, it was paramount that I write it up and discuss it with others—the credo of pilots. You make sure that others don’t ever make the same mistake. Yeah, it’s embarrassing, but you do everything you can do to try to be professional so no crew ever ends up in a smoking hole in Cambodia.

Ode to a DC-6
TOM SALES, SOMERSET, NJ

In late June, 1966, I boarded a United Airlines flight from Newark, New Jersey, on an evening flight to visit my brother in Greensboro, North Carolina. The aircraft was a Douglas DC-6B. Its four massive Pratt & Whitney engines made an amazing racket as it taxied up to the gate. In those days, you walked out onto the tarmac and up a flight of portable stairs to board the airplane, which also gave you an impressive, close up view of its mighty engines and propellers.

Now, a DC-6B could hold over 60 passengers, but on the night that I flew there were just four of us: myself, two businessmen, and a soldier on leave. Yet, there were two stewardesses, who told us we were free to sit anywhere we chose! Imagine that!

The interior of the plane reminded me of a bus, as much as anything else, given its seat layout and capacity, but with more comfortable seats.

We took off just after sunset and I, having chosen a seat behind the right wing, had an excellent view of a second sunset, as we ascended to something below 20,000 feet, for the short hop south to Greensboro. For the first 30 minutes I was glued to the window, watching cities gradually light up beneath me, and cars with their headlight beams shining onto the road in front of them. There is a definite charm to viewing the world from propeller-plane heights! I was entranced by the sight.

It was the most pleasant flight I’ve ever taken, on an aircraft that was a relic even when I boarded it! Plus, I had the plane almost all to myself! I cannot imagine such a thing happening today, or ever again. Mostly, I feel privileged to have flown on a Douglas DC-6B at all!
To Phoenix with Pleasure
DICK LUDDERS, HENNIKER, NH

As airport consultants, my friend Steve and I were in San Francisco for a series of meetings when Steve, a certified flight instructor with lots of time logged in biplane taildraggers, got a call from a friend back in our home state of New Hampshire who was buying an N3N, the Navy’s primary trainer during World War II. The airplane was in the Bay area and could Steve fly it to Phoenix where a second pilot would ferry it to New Hampshire? It took us about 10 seconds to check our schedules and say “YES!” to such a once-in-a-lifetime flying adventure.

With Steve flying in the aft cockpit and me navigating with a paper sectional chart in the front, with no radio, and only an hour’s worth of fuel range with reserves, we headed south from the Bay area to get to where the mountains were low enough for us to turn east for Phoenix. What an experience! Hopping from airport to airport, usually only 1,500 feet above the ground, unconnected to any others, we experienced two days of pure flight!

False Alarm in a B-25
WILLIAM VIETINGHOFF, THOUSAND OAKS, CA

In 1947, after completing the Navy Electronics School training in Washington, D. C., I used the opportunity afforded servicemen to hitch rides on military aircraft. I wanted to visit my parents in Arizona.

At the nearest air base, I signed the manifest indicating I wanted a ride heading southwest. An hour passed. Then an airman called my name and told me an airplane was heading in that general direction. I took the offer, praying that there would be another flight at that destination that would get me close to Tucson. The airman handed me a parachute.

The aircraft on the runway was a B-25 Mitchell bomber. Two soldiers and I climbed aboard and were seated in a small compartment behind the cockpit. The pilot lifted a flat plate on the deck. He said, “If we have to ditch, raise this, and jump here.” That was somewhat unsettling. He pointed to a telephone on the fuselage. He said, “If I have a problem, I’ll ring that phone.”

We took off. About 45 minutes later, the telephone rang. My heart almost jumped out of my chest. The other soldier yelled above the deafening engine noise. I began looking for the strap arrangement on my parachute.

“What was that about?” the other soldier shouted, “The pilot said not to smoke. He’s going to transfer fuel.”

**Help for Puerto Rico**

JOEL LUDWIGSON, INVER GROVE HEIGHTS, MINNESOTA

In October 2017, I was flying a Falcon 10 for a part 135 company. We were in Fort Lauderdale, and we had airline tickets home for the next day. We had been gone for 10 days and were very much looking forward to the trip home and sleeping in our own beds.

I was watching television late, when the phone rang. The captain told me that we had an early morning trip and to meet in the lobby at 3:00 a.m. Just three weeks earlier Hurricane Maria had devastated Puerto Rico. The trip was to bring a plane load of “stuff” down to Puerto Rico and pick up a family of five and fly them to Orlando where the daughter could receive some medical attention that wasn’t available in Puerto Rico that soon after the hurricane. We arrived at the airport and loaded everything we could fit into the airplane—canned goods, medical supplies, diapers, paper towels. You name it, they needed it.

The trip down was uneventful. We watched the beautiful sunrise from FL 360 over the Caribbean Sea. When we landed, we were met by two people who were very happy for the supplies we brought with us. The airport was a mess. They had cleaned up everything they could, including removing destroyed hangars where there was just the slab left.

We loaded our passengers into the airplane, including a stroller seat-belted into the remaining seat and delivered them to Orlando. We then rebooked our flight and flew home for a long needed rest from being on the road for 11 days. But it felt great to have made even a small contribution to Puerto Rico’s recovery.

**Tanker, Take Your Time**

HARRY B. PITTMAN, COLLIERVILLE, TN

I was the aircraft commander on a KC-135Q tanker aircraft and was qualified for refueling the SR-71, the Mach 3+ reconnaissance aircraft. The SR-71 was the fastest aircraft in the U.S. Air Force. We were scheduled to offload about 70,000 pounds of fuel on an air-refueling track and the refueling normally took about 18 minutes. The KC-135Q and SR-71 mated at 320 knots (indicated air speed) and as the fuel was off-loaded, we would let the tanker accelerate to a speed of 355 knots. At that point, the SR-71 was near to the “backside of the power curve.” Under normal conditions, the SR-71 would be “blown off” the end of the boom (or pressure disconnected) at the end of the air refueling with full tanks. This time, the SR-71 was not as close to full tank as he should have been, so he asked us to slow down so he would reach the end of the tracks with full tanks.

That was the first and only time I was asked to slow down for the fastest USAF aircraft!
AIR & SPACE  We All Fly Reader’s Stories

Catalina to Palmyra
RODGER EWY, BOULDER, CO

When I was doing scientific photography with the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) in Boulder, I had the opportunity during the International Geophysical Year (1957) to go to the Pacific Ocean atoll of Palmyra, 1,000 miles south of Hawaii.

Our IGY task was to make surface and aerial panoramas and even early all-Earth satellite images of the atmosphere centered on this equatorial location.

My transportation out of Oahu to the unoccupied Palmyra had been arranged with a pilot, his wife, and his airplane, a venerable Catalina PBY flying boat!

We lifted off from Oahu and cruised south on a lovely day. I had a great view out of the familiar gun “blisters” on the sides of the PBY hull.

Hours later, somewhat beyond our estimated time of arrival, I went forward to the cockpit. The pilot said he wasn’t getting as strong a radio signal as he would like—it turns out he was island-finding solely by means of his radio reception! Palmyra is one of the Line Islands, one of the longest island chains in the world. We were criss-crossing the chain of islands, only gradually homing in on Palmyra Atoll!

We finally found it and came down on Palmyra’s World War II runway, happy to make landfall before the night fell! This was my only flying boat flight, ever.

White Rocket
DAVID R. HAULMAN, RIDGELAND, MS

Advanced pilot training in the U.S. Air Force (in the 70s) required proficiency in the supersonic T-38, which once held the world’s time-to-climb record (30,000 ft/min), had a roll rate of two revolutions (720 degrees) per second, and was flown by both the Thunderbirds and the NASA astronauts.

On my third solo flight in the “White Rocket,” I flew to a remote block of assigned airspace farthest from the base to practice aileron rolls, barrel rolls, chandelles, loops, Immelmann turns, split-Ss, cloverleafs, and Cuban 8s. We had to demonstrate proficiency in each. What an absolute thrill! To me, there’s nothing quite as exciting as solo aerobatics in a supersonic aircraft!

I felt a pang of apprehension when I tried, unsuccessfully, to contact Air Traffic Control for my return—complete radio failure. Procedures were to signal the appropriate IFF code and navigate back to Craig Air Force Base primarily using my eyeballs. Finding my way home, and squeezing into the pattern among lots of other jets—many occupied by young solo students like myself—wasn’t easy, but soon I was rocking my wings on final, prior to an uneventful landing. I felt proud.

I had performed exactly as I was trained. Instead of praise, I got what amounted to an interrogation. So much for the hero. Four months later, I earned my silver wings.
Clouds Above and Below

ANGELO MANTAS, SKOKIE, IL

It was a beautiful Florida spring day, mid 70s, blue skies with nice popcorn cumulus everywhere. A Dragonfly ultralight pulled me and my hang glider up to around 2,000 feet. Releasing from tow, I found some light, but steady thermal lift. I easily climbed up to 4,000 feet or so in the mellow air. Cruising around the area, the thermals were closely spaced, so I found myself staying up without much work at all.

Since the flying was effortless, it was easy to look around and do some sightseeing. And what a sight! Florida is flat, but besides the farms, orchards, swamps, and forests, there are lakes and ponds. Lots of them, scattered all over. On this particular day, there was no wind at all. The water, which would usually have some ripples or chop to it, was perfectly smooth, which turned the ponds and lakes into giant mirrors. All of the clouds were perfectly reflected in them. Instead of water, it looked like another sky you could view through these holes in the ground.

After enjoying this for a couple hours, I decided to land. I thought I would just forget about finding thermals, and boat around, digging the view while descending. Maybe fifteen minutes later, I didn’t feel any lower, so I checked my altimeter. I had gained 300 feet! I was going up without even trying! Eventually I started coming down. On approach, the wind was light, but I had a perfect, no-step landing. A great day.

Huey Jump

DAVID R SAUNDERS, KODIAK, AK

Helicopters don’t float like balloons. Not unusual to see one or two fall free from a stick of jumpers; the slipstream from a C-130 or -141 tear more than your lid off. But not so with choppers. “Goin’ Hollywood,” we’d call it. Six of us—sans gear—chuted-up and seated in the open doors of the Huey, boots on the skids. Panoramic ascent to 1,000 feet, a rap on the helmet from the jumpmaster, push-off with your hands, launch with your legs, and a pleasant plummet through tranquil skies. And no dodging steel hailstones.
Gooney Bird Attack
GLENN ICKLER, HOPEDALE, MD

On May 21, 1959, I was the combat information center officer of a 22-man Navy Airborne Early Warning flight crew. We flew an oblong track from Midway Island to the Aleutians and back—15 hours—as part of a radar barrier to detect long-range bombers.

Midway was the home of thousands of Laysan albatrosses, Canada-goose-size fowl known as Gooney birds because of their comical actions on the ground. Their actions above ground were not so comical. They’d soar near the end of the take-off runway, and striking one could cause substantial damage to a wing or an engine.

Our aircraft, the WV-2, was a Lockheed Constellation, which had three vertical stabilizers. The military added a tall height-finder radar on top and a circular search radar below.

On take-off, we heard a loud bang from atop the cabin. The navigator looked through his periscope amid ship and saw feathers on the upper radome.

The chief technician stood on the back of a seat, opened the overhead hatch and stuck his head and shoulders into the upper radome, checking for interior damage. He reported that there were Gooney bird feathers and bones inside it and came down. Seconds after he fastened the hatch, the airplane shuddered and we heard another bang.

The navigator again looked through his periscope. He reported that the radome was gone, and so was the middle vertical stabilizer. The chief technician’s face turned white and he had to sit down as we turned around and headed back to Midway.

Spin Doctor
EUGENE C. "GENE" McCall Jr., GREENVILLE, SC

My father was a flight engineer on a four-engine seaplane that flew critical cargo throughout the Pacific in World War II. He returned home to take over the dairy farm from his father. He arose early and worked late to milk cows twice a day; I had to help some weekdays and every weekend.

My father encouraged me to study hard, learn to fly, and not become a dairy farmer. My first instructor was the fixed base operator at the grass-strip airport in Bennettsville, South Carolina. He’d instructed French pilots in World War II.

Mr. Boone’s introduction to flying was a weed-out experience rather than a pleasant first flight. I was sixteen when we took off in his Cessna 150 and began gaining altitude.

He pushed in full power and pulled back on the yoke until it seemed we were pointing straight up. Then, we snapped over and were headed downward and spinning. I was wide-eyed as he talked me through recovery. We leveled out, and he discussed what causes spins. He applied power and we headed up again to near-vertical. The first spin was a shock, but I was pretty terrified this time, knowing what was coming. The plane stalled, he kicked the rudder, and we were headed straight down again in a spin. He had me follow him on the controls and we recovered smoothly.

We both smiled as we continued straight and level; I’d apparently passed my first test. He said we’d do it again next flight. It was an awe-inspiring and indelible first lesson.
In 1967 another Marine sergeant, Harvey, and I were assigned as couriers for a load of Avionics Maintenance vans being transferred from Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point to Chu Lai Republic of Vietnam. An Air Force C-133—known as “the crate a C-130 comes in”—was flown down from Dover Air Force Base. Took most of the day to load all the gear, but finally in the afternoon we were ready to go. The C-133 had a small crew rest cabin behind the cockpit. We took our seats along with an Air Force colonel who was flying as an observer.

After taxiing out, we start down the runway but something did not seem right. Sergeant Harvey looks out the window and then at the colonel and then out the window again and then looks at the colonel and says, “Sir, what are we trying to do?” The Colonel looks at him with a look of amazement and says, “We are taking off.” Sergeant Harvey looks out the window again, looks back at the Colonel and says with a deadpan monotone, “Not going to make it.” Just about then we hear from the cockpit, “Abort, abort!” and all hell breaks loose. Loud bangs and smoke fill the cabin. We finally come to a halt and before I even got my seat belt undone, three of the crew had passed me. We got outside and smoke is billowing out from the main landing gear. At that point, I remember I had signed for several million dollars’ worth of avionics equipment, and it was about to go up in flames.

Luckily the crash crew got there very quickly and saved the plane and the gear. But the bird was not going anywhere soon. So a crew came out to unload, and Sergeant Harvey and I went to the NCO club to celebrate one more night in the states and our good luck to have survived the day. As a footnote, another C-133 was flown down the next day and off we went. It was supposed to take four days to get to Chu Lai. It ended up taking 11 days and a grand tour of a lot of Pacific Air Force bases. When we landed at Chu Lai, the Air Force crew never even shut down the engines, just lowered the rear ramp and shoved everything out—took all day to load and 20 minutes to unload.
My Most Memorable Flight on the Boeing 727

MICHAEL TARSA, LOUISVILLE, KY

Asking me to recall my most memorable flight in a Boeing 727 is like asking Hemingway which one of his novels was the best. Each lived in its own time and space and held a special meaning incomparable to the others.

My first flight in the 727 was a gift. Back in the 1960s, Midway airport was a ghost town. When the jet age dawned, those 707s and DC-8s couldn’t operate on runways designed for DC-3s, so the big airlines all moved out to O’Hare. However, American was short of space at its growing O’Hare hub and used Midway to park some of its new 727s on the weekends. Some bright boys in asset utilization decided that those idle aircraft could make a few bucks doing sightseeing tours. For about $35.00 they would take you on a 20-minute “intro flight.” It took off from Midway, headed east and up along the Lake Michigan shoreline, around O’Hare, and back to Midway. My dad decided that I would like to have that experience.

I will never, ever forget that day. I was 13 years old, and it was the first time I had ever been in an airplane. When we lifted off the runway, I felt that exciting sensation of upward acceleration and freedom that I still relish to this day every time I ease back the control column on takeoff. Once in the air, I stood up and looked out the small porthole window in the aft entry door. I saw the houses and lake shore below and I was struck with the realization that there was nothing holding us up except air! I knew in that moment that whatever was going on was something that I loved, and I wanted to be able to do it on my own someday.

I was born in Elizabeth and from our house in Hillside. On that first leg, along with all the other things that thrilled me, I can remember so clearly what happened as we approached Illinois from the east. Looking out from about 26,000 feet, I saw the lights of the Chicago skyline straight ahead. I recalled my first ride in the 727 out of Midway with my dad. Just then, a brilliant shooting star passed from north to south across the horizon just above the city lights. Okay, it was a coincidence, but that was one flight I’ll post in the memorable column.

On November 21, 2003, I returned from Cologne, Germany, via Reykjavik, Iceland and Bangor, Maine. We were ferrying an aircraft back from the European routes to use here in the United States over our busy holiday season. It was my first time flying over Europe in the 727. I landed in Iceland, and my first officer flew the leg to Bangor while I did all the oceanic navigation work and position reports. It is always eerie out there alone, hundreds of miles from land, above the clouds, with no one on the radio for long periods.

I flew the final leg from Bangor to Louisville. Passing north of Manhattan, at 39,000 feet, I looked down and saw Tarrytown where I met my wife, Marla. I looked south and could pick out Newark, the airport, and saw where my first home still stands in Hillside. Soon we were over Allentown, Pennsylvania, and I looked north and saw the Mahoning valley where Marla was born and grew up.

The sky was still cloudless when we arrived into the Louisville area, and there off the right side of my aircraft, as we were being vectored to runway 17L, I could see our neighborhood clearly, knowing that Marla and Amanda were down there, at home, after school, on an unusually warm and bright November day. We banked left, lined up on the runway, and I landed my 727 for the last time in my life.

Thanks, Dad.
Aardvark Adventures

JOE BEJSOVEC, NAMPA, ID

The F-111 Terrain Following Radar (TFR) could be flown at 200, 300, 500, 700, and 1,000 feet. To activate the TFR, all the pilot had to do was hit a toggle switch and down we’d go from any altitude to the selected altitude. One day in south England, we hit a tanker just before landing. Sometimes scheduling lacked sense. It was twilight and the skies (surprise) were clear. After taking on a thousand pounds, which we were going to have to dump before landing, we pulled up abeam the tanker and Wally said, “You want to see something cool?” We turned on the dump valve and lit the afterburners. A 200-foot flame lit up the sky and all the telephone exchanges in south England. As may be expected, we got briefed when we returned to Heyford.

The Weapon Systems Officer (WSO), me, did the job of four BUFF crewmembers: simulated copilot (SCP), electronic countermeasures, navigator, and bombardier. As SCP, I managed the fuel, set the radios, talked to the command post on one to tell them where we were. In circling formation, left wing, focusing on lead’s left wing light, and in the soup while waiting for crossing from Italy into France, I noticed Wally’s eyes bouncing around like a broken slot machine. When I asked him what’s going on, he said he had a bad case of vertigo, so I started reading the attitude indicator to him, and he calmed down, and we stayed in formation.

On the bombing range I dropped a practice bomb from the right seat. At 500 feet, 480 knots I could pickle a retarded bomb off as soon as the target passed the nose. No HUD on the right side. Then applying full throttle and bending the stick back could score the hit upside down, before rolling out of the Immelmann for downwind and another attack. A roll in the Aardvark was almost a nonevent. It was immediate, smooth, with no wallowing around the forehead, and a thing of beauty.

One day making a finger-tip, three approach to Upper Heyford, I was looking out as usual, when I spotted a glider at co-altitude, right in front of us, and called out on the radio, “Bogie at 12!” Two went over and one went under. Didn’t hear anything about a glider crash. Shortly afterward I was made an instructor.

The main job of the IWSO was to fly with pilots newly separated from their instructor pilots. The most memorable flight I had was with a student. We did a pitch-dark-night, low-level in Scotland. The head wind over the flat was 50 knots without turbulence, but when we got to the mountains, the burbling wind created severe turbulence knocking the plane off the TFR and thrusting it into the ground. “UP, UP!” I yelled. With the stick aft and the throttles in full military, the kid replied, “What the F**k do you think I’m doing?” Reading the radar altimeter passing through 300 feet, I said it wasn’t enough, and he finally plugged in the afterburners, arresting the violent descent and climbing out. We put it on autopilot at 15,000 and let it go round in a couple circles until we recovered our senses, glad to have survived the wild ride.
Private Warzone
FRANCIS HSU, ROCKVILLE, MD

Flying into a warzone for the first time is flying into the unknown. I was drafted into U.S. Army in 1968. In early 1969, about a year after the Tet offensive, they sent me to South Vietnam. The Vietnam War was in its fifth year. It was night, and I was one of the planeload of soldiers in a chartered DC-8 circling Tan Son Nhut airport northeast of Saigon, waiting to land. The scare: As we were flying above complete cloud cover, everywhere flashes were bursting in the clouds, I was apprehensive. After landing, as I walked off the airplane, the airport was quiet. Those flashes in the clouds, what I thought was an ongoing battle or firefight were only lightning flashes. But how is a fresh recruit that never flew into a warzone to know that?

Fifty years ago, communications and media were still so primitive by today’s standards that an individual’s private experience remained isolated. Today with the Internet and smartphones, any private experience can be broadcast worldwide in seconds. To think of things as distant and as unknown as ‘warzone’ seems so quaint today.

Hindenburg Spotting
BOB LAGASSE, BRISTOL, CT

My grandparents had a cottage in Old Saybrook, Connecticut. The town is located on Long Island Sound, and during the summer of 1936, we looked up to see a huge object in the sky. It was so low that we could see people waving from open windows. It was the Zeppelin, Hindenburg. We waved back at them. Even after all these years, it was a sight that is still clear in my mind. Its massive size, the drone of its engines was impressive and to be able to greet the occupants with waves made us a part of the event.

We didn’t know at that point in time that the swastika painted on its tail was going to become an emblem of terror. We didn’t see the airship again during the summer of 1937, as it crashed and burned in May of that year in Lakehurst, New Jersey.
I was stationed in Japan as a gunner on a B-29 bomber crew assigned to fly long-range night missions over North Korea. We would fly at night in a bomber stream, because the B-29 was no match for the MiGs in the daylight.

On the night of July 30, 1952, we were on a mission to bomb a factory for the Oriental Light Metals Company not far from the Yalu River along the Chinese border. After our briefing, we took off at 1820 hours with 4,500 gallons of gas, 40 500-pound bombs, and ammo canisters full of 50-caliber ammunition. We were at 70 tons, 10 tons over the maximum payload.

We departed over the Sea of Japan towards North Korea. The target was heavily defended with radar-controlled flak guns and searchlights. As we neared the target, we could see the large Chinese airbase lit up across the river, and the MiGs were taking off. We were not allowed to cross over into China. Their flak guns were very accurate and could still operate even in cloudy conditions. They quickly knew our altitude, heading, and airspeed. If their searchlight locked-on to our bomber, our electronic countermeasures (ECM) operator could jam the signal, and their light would swing away. If the flak was close, the ECM operator could jam it, but with so many signals, he couldn’t jam them all.

At “bombs away,” we put 38 bombs through the roof of the factory, but two were still hung up in the rear bomb bay. Two flash-bombs went out last above the target to provide enough light to acquire photos. Photos taken from the two planes ahead of us showed light damage. However, after our bombardment, 90 percent of the building had been destroyed. Our plane was hit with flak just after our strike.

When we were back over the ocean, we dropped to 8,000 feet to depressurize. I went into the open rear bomb bay and released the two bombs. Following our mission, our crew was nominated for the Distinguished Flying Cross for accuracy with a determination to strike a target with heavy opposition.
It was the last day of 1991 and I had stopped by Steve Wolf’s hangar at the Creswell (Oregon) airport to see the Gee Bee project as it neared completion. The airport was socked in with dense fog. I had been stopping by the hangar on a fairly regular basis to watch the construction of the Gee Bee. I had also been bugging Steve to take me flying in Samson (the original), his showplane. When I asked if we might get a chance to fly Samson now that the Gee Bee project was nearing completion, he said his wife was insisting that he put the new tires on Samson before he flew it again. I offered to do it for him. I knew Steve was itching to do some flying.

So while Steve worked with the crew on the Gee Bee, I went over to the hangar where Samson was parked, got the wheels off, struggled to break the old tires off the split magnesium wheels, got the new tires on and got the wheels back on Samson. Suddenly we had sunshine in the hangar, as the fog was clearing right around the airport.

I was back watching the work on the Gee Bee when I felt a tug on my sleeve and Steve saying softly, “Come on, let’s go flying.” We rolled Samson out, did the preflight, and got the engine started. Steve strapped me into the front seat and handed me a headset so we could talk to each other. We chatted while we waited for the oil temp to come up in that big 450-horsepower radial engine swinging its 10-foot diameter prop. I was in the middle of asking him if he could turn the plane upside down in the pattern, when he keyed the mike on Unicom, announcing that we were taxiing onto the active runway. With a roar, we turned onto the runway as Steve eased the throttle open. It seemed like we rolled 60 feet or so and we were airborne! (Later when I asked, Steve said it was more like 120 feet.) We cleared the far end of the runway at 1,000 feet!

The fog had cleared for several miles in all directions so we had plenty of room to fly. I asked Steve again if he could turn the plane upside down in the pattern. When he asked if I was serious, I told him to go for it. So, we got out of the airspace directly over the airport and we flew! We did point rolls, snap rolls, barrel rolls, inside and outside loops, hammerheads and tail slides. Steve would check in with me after each maneuver to see how I was doing. I was having a blast! Finally he pulls the plane into the vertical and tells me the plane makes a pretty good helicopter. “Watch the climb indicator,” he says, as he starts pulling the throttle back. Climb indicator hits zero. He still has control. That 10-foot prop is washing the inboard ends of the ailerons and the entire tail. We dance, doing slow spins, rocking and bobbing while looking straight up at the blue sky. My inner ear starts to complain, and I finally tell Steve I’ve had enough. We both laugh, and he gently drops the plane into level flight again. I want some stick time, but we are running out of daylight.

Steve’s parents were there to greet us when we arrive back at the hangar. When Steve’s father sees me get out of the plane he exclaims, “You let him do all that with you in the plane?” Yeah, I said, with a huge grin on my face.
The first time I ever saw the Grand Canyon was in 1969, on a trip to Nellis Air Force Base on my first cross-country flight to Las Vegas, Nevada. I was a young fighter pilot in the U. S. Air Force, assigned to duty as an aircraft commander in the F-4 Phantom II at Holloman AFB, near Alamogordo, New Mexico.

We departed Holloman AFB, on the edge of the White Sands National Monument in southern New Mexico. It was a four-ship flight of Phantoms from the 49th Tactical Fighter Wing. We drilled up to Denver for an overnight and a fuel stop, courtesy of the Colorado Air National Guard at Buckley Field.

Out of Buckley the next morning, our four screaming Phantoms are west-bound across the divide, sweeping by Durango and Farmington. Shiprock broaches the distant horizon, and we run a ninety-beam, visual intercept on the mast. Thundering across its bow, I look to the left at eye-level with the top of the sail, and gaze in wonder at this mysterious rock formation standing tall out of New Mexico’s northwestern desert.

Our four fighters, in arrowhead formation, skim the desert floor for another hundred miles or so until the sandy brown horizon turns to a brilliant blue in the waters behind Glen Canyon Dam.

From this point on, until we pop up over Sunrise Mountain to land at Nellis, we’ll be navigating not with sophisticated avionics black boxes but with the downstream flow of the mighty Colorado River. We are going to fly the Grand Canyon from Lake Powell to Boulder Dam. We will not fly over the Canyon; we will fly in it.

Leader bends the flight southwestward around a cone-shaped island, a reasonable sight-seeing pace.

He porpoises his machine, which is our signal to fall back in extended trail formation. There can’t be many things much more fun than rat-racing down the Grand Canyon, chasing each other’s tailpipes like a bunch of playful puppies.

Well, that was a little over 50 years ago and aircraft flight rules in the Grand Canyon area have become more restrictive over the years, even for military operations. If you tried it today, the military authorities would rip those cherished wings off your chest.

I was very lucky to have been a fighter pilot 50 years ago. That navigation proficiency flight was one of the highlights of my career. Any other visit I ever paid to the Grand Canyon since that day has been damned ho-hum.
Memories of a B-17
BOB BAIR, CHARLOTTE, NC

The year was 2006. The B-17 Liberty Bell was coming to Concord Airport just north of Charlotte. I had a friend working in media that had a chance to take a ride. Knowing I was an avid World War II aircraft fan—having built and read about seemingly every model since I was in seventh grade—I was able to come along as a sound recorder. Along with us came Jack Roush of racing and flying fame. With just a few people on board we got to move around and sit at each station while checking the great views of our city and the race tracks in Concord. My favorite view was from the bombardier seat at the nose. As an extra treat, they pulled the top back at the radio room and let us fly convertible style!

Jack was then given permission to take the controls and made a couple of laps. Finally after landing, we met up for a few more pictures and obtained one other precious memento besides our memories. We used the air sick bags that were handed to us before the flight to get an autograph from Jack Roush. The best flight ever! Thanks Wilson!

I shed a few tears when I saw Liberty Bell was damaged beyond repair.

Transatlantic Mooney
VAREL FREEMAN, OCALA, FL

In 1974, I was just finishing seven years of intense work at a university. Bachelors and two graduate degrees in hand, I would soon be off to work. Time for one last adventure before “adulting.”

A friend wanted to sell his Mooney in Europe, and asked me to ferry it from the United States. What a challenge to plan and execute safely and successfully. Remember the last century—before satellite phones and GPS?

I followed the transatlantic ferry route used in World War II—Goose Bay to Narsarsuaq Greenland (Bluie West One back in the War), over the ice cap to Iceland, and down through Scotland.

It was dead reckoning and a feeble automatic direction finer (ADF) that got me to the icy fjords of western Greenland—what beauty—and what relief to find a runway at the end of the fjord before the next glacier. Massive mountains and ice across Greenland provided a monochromatic trip punctuated by radio chats with airmen stationed at the various early warning radar sites I overflew.

My bride joined me for the last part of the trip as we explored Scotland and France by air. She had a special 25th birthday treat overflying Mont St. Michel followed by a fabulous dinner in a little restaurant we found by accident.

Remember the Mel Books line, “It’s good to be king? It’s better to be a pilot and fly.”
Temptation in a Boxcar  
OWEN D. WRIGHT, PLEASANT GROVE, UT

I was a young Civil Air Patrol cadet gathered at the Salt Lake Air Guard base with cadets from around Utah excited about our coming two weeks of summer camp on an Air Force base. Before us was a flight of beautiful C-119 twin-tail Flying Boxcars. We were fitted with parachutes and given a briefing on how to use these new toys should the need arise, then we were loaded in the cargo bay with strict instructions on how to behave in flight.

Our Boxcars had their clamshell rear doors removed and just a safety net across the back. After takeoff we were allowed a couple at a time to unstrap and move to the back for a fantastic view. There I was, with a parachute on my back looking down on the buoyant waters of the Great Salt Lake. What a temptation to step over the net and float down to that water where I couldn’t sink. Then the thought came that the lake is shallow, and with my luck I would land in seven feet of water and drown with my boots stuck in the mud. Then I thought about how mad a lot of people would be, and I would miss out on the whole summer camp, so I returned to a seat near the back to enjoy the scenery of Northern Utah, Southern Idaho.

We soon arrived at Mountain Home Air Force Base with it’s Strategic Air Command B-47 Stratojet Bombers for our fun two weeks as junior airmen.

Stoppin’ Robin  
MALCOLM A SOARE, FORT PECK, MT

N7145. I will never forget that N number. It belongs to a 1928 Curtiss Robin. I was a 19-year-old pilot, living in Glendive, Montana, when my Dad purchased the Robin in Peru, Indiana in October 1963. It was a flyable aircraft, and he had had one when he was younger and had to sell it during World War II. We flew to Peru and my dad, who was an Airframe & Powerplant mechanic with an inspector authorization, licensed the Robin. My friend Skip and I hopped into the little high-wing airplane and began our interesting trip to Montana. We had to stop every two hours to replenish the oil supply, and the Continental radial leaked out of every seam. We had over four hours of fuel, but two of oil. We later discovered that a mud dauber had made a nest in the engine breather line, pressurizing the crankcase. It took us three days, 11 and a half hours of flying time, and numerous stops to get home. Every time we stopped, we drew a crowd around the aircraft. The last day, going towards home, we had a headwind so strong that the highway traffic was passing us. It was a fun trip for a young commercial pilot who continued on to have a great 50-year career in aviation. The sad part is my dad was killed in an airplane accident that winter, and never got to enjoy his purchase. The Robin was later sold to the Harrah’s collection in Reno, and now lives in a museum in Iowa.
A C-133A Cargomaster in its final approach to the Travis Air Expo, August 30, 2008, to be placed on static display. (USAF/KRISTEN ROHRER)

Moving Marines
KENNETH ABLETT, CHESAPEAKE, VA

In 1962 Air Force C-133 Globemaster aircraft were used to moved Marine units from Hawaii to Pleiku, Vietnam to combat heavy VietCong guerilla forces in the area. The aircraft was a high-wing prop jet with a 180-foot wingspan. As part of that mission our aircraft was on final to the 6,000 unimproved runway with Huey gunships on each wingtip to discourage ground fire. We planned an engine-running offload in order to get off the ground before Cong mortar fire could be brought to bear. As I came out of reverse, the number 4 engine quit, and no effort during the offload could get it restarted. Review of performance charts showed that, after offload, the gross weight made a three-engine takeoff feasible. Because of the mortar threat we were give a waiver to make that takeoff. It wasn’t standard and it wasn’t comfortable, but we were successfully about 100 feet over the departure end of the runway.

After climb checklists were complete, we unfeathered the number 4 prop and, with the slipstream force of air spinning the prop, achieved engine start. We changed our planned destination from Saigon and flew to Clark airbase in the Philippines. The engine quit again on landing but was easily repaired at that well-equipped base.

Thrilled Sick in an F-4
ROBERT C. MUELLER, HAMBURG, NY

In 1987, I was named noncommissioned officer of the quarter for the 107th FIG New York Air National Guard, Niagara Falls. One of the awards for this honor was a flight in the back seat of an F4 Phantom II. We took off, climbing straight up. Flew upside down over Lake Ontario, and did 6 G turns. We then flew about 1,500 feet over Niagara Falls, down the Niagara River, and cut inland over my regular place of employment, where the afterburners went on! Made an approach to Buffalo Airport, and back to Niagara Falls. Sick bags used twice! Would do it again in a heartbeat!
Flight to Nowhere
ESTA-ANN ELLIOTT SCHAPO, BETHESDA, MD

Usually when you board an airliner, you’re going somewhere. If you happened to be flying the Concorde, you were going somewhere fast. Unless you were on a flight that departed Atlantic City International Airport on October 20, 1995.

AOPA was having its annual convention and my husband, aviation journalist Jack Elliott, had been offered a complimentary Flight to Nowhere in the Concorde. He refused because he had already flown in the supersonic plane.

I told him that I wanted to go because I had never flown in the Concorde. He was able to secure the last seat and I was off to the airport by public bus. I got there in time to be the last to board the iconic jet.

The aisle was narrow with two luxurious seats on each side. The windows were small. I felt like I was in a very slim, sleek, fancy corporate plane.

It was noisy at takeoff, and zoom, at 250 mph we were off like a rocket going straight up. It sure did not feel like our Piper Arrow, which takes off at 65 mph.

We were headed for Bermuda as we could not break the sound barrier over land. There was a digital board informing us when Mach 2 (1,350 mph) was reached at 60,000 feet. Once over Bermuda we turned around and headed back to Atlantic City, but not before we could enjoy the most delicious hors’ d’oeuvres accompanied by a fine French champagne.

The friendly crew allowed us to have a peek into the cockpit and the passengers were given certificate commemorating an amazing, unexpected, exciting flight to nowhere.

Alone Over Russia
RICHARD BENNETT, CONROE, TX

I got my private pilot’s license when I was in high school. Several years later, after graduating from college I was hired to teach English in the Russian far east city of Magadan. Roma, one of my students there, was a pilot for the local (and now defunct) regional airline which flew Antonov An-26 turbo-props. Discovering my love of aviation, he offered me a ride on one of his shorter routes to Omsukchan. One day he told me to meet him at the employee gate and he would get me through. Handing me the flight engineer’s ID badge, he showed me the way to the cockpit and had me take the engineer’s seat. When crew asked who I was, he said, “American pilot friend.”

“Ooooh,” they would say, and nod.

We taxied out for our 250-mile flight and took off to the north northeast. As we climbed to our cruising altitude, I was moved to the co-pilot’s seat for a better view. Leveling off, Roma told me to take the yoke and he sat back to chat with a stewardess who popped into the cabin. A few minutes later, the co-pilot got up and left for the bathroom... then the navigator stepped out for a beer, and then Roma got up and left for something...and I was all alone in the cockpit. Me, a private pilot with 100 hours. I was in charge of a passenger plane with 23 passengers over far east Russia. The irony was not lost on me, and I scanned the skies carefully for traffic and didn’t touch ANYTHING.

A few minutes later, the crew trickled back into the cockpit. They had not worried I would do anything drastic, but I was sure such an occurrence could only happen in Russia. The rest of the trip was uneventful, and the crew were incredibly professional and precise in their flying....other than leaving me in control for five minutes, that is.
We All Fly Reader’s Stories

Two Heads Are Better
MIKE SAFIER, NEWBURY PARK, CA

It’s always good to have an old flight engineer on board.

Don and I have been flying together since 2008. He is 90 years old. We both have extensive flying experience. Don is an Airframe & Powerplant mechanic and a multi-engine rated pilot. He flew many years as a flight engineer for the Flying Tigers cargo line on the 747. I have an airline transport certificate, flew F-15s in the U.S. Air Force, and currently sit left seat on the Airbus for a major U.S. carrier.

Late one afternoon, we departed Oxnard for Santa Maria to take Don’s Turbo Arrow IV to get an estimate for an interior upgrade. I was pilot-in-command, and Don managed the systems.

Things started going wrong when we neared the half way point. First, the marker beacon started chirping, then the number two radio failed, then the transponder. Don lost his ability to communicate with me on his headset. The amp meter showed zero. We were on battery power, and it was failing fast. We agreed to turn back. We cycled the alternator switch, then the battery switch. We were able to get a small bit of battery power in order to tell the tower we were inbound with electrical failing. We asked that they be ready with the light signals. We discussed that the gear pump probably wouldn’t work either—it didn’t. Don reached down and emergency extended the gear. With barely any juice left, we saw three green lights before the battery failed.

As we approached Oxnard, we got the steady green from the tower and landed safely.

When things go wrong, you have your hands full. When there’s an old flight engineer on board, you’ll likely have a much better day!

Flight Over Disaster
BRUCE HAMILTON

On the morning of March 28, 1979, I was headed to Los Angeles International airport for a flight to Philadelphia. As a 12-year-old aviation enthusiast, I was thrilled to be making my first flight and on one of my favorite airplanes, the Lockheed L-1011. On the way to LAX, we heard the report of a minor accident at a nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania.

As we approached Philadelphia, I glanced out the window and noticed the four towers of a nuclear power plant slide by below, and I wondered if that was the location of this minor accident. Of course that night the facts would show that the accident was more serious and yes, it was Three Mile Island we had flown over.
Dad and I on the Dragon
ANN DICIANO, APTOS, CA

My father, Ken Barmore, and I were able to share a once-in-a-lifetime experience—a ride in the last flying B-24 Liberator in the world! My dad, a B-24 pilot in World War II, was shot down returning from Ploesti, Romania. He was captured and became a POW in Bucharest. He was never shy about telling us his stories and sharing his love of flying, B-24s in particular. In May 2002, we were passengers on The Dragon and his Tail through the Collings Foundation. We picked up the flight in San Luis Obispo, California and flew to Monterey. We had the run of the plane, except “Don’t step on the bomb bay doors!”

On the exhilarating take-off, we sat on the bench seat above the ball turret and could see the ground moving slowly past the small opening. The whole airplane was a cocoon of vibrating, roaring metal. When we could move around, my father made a beeline to the cockpit! He couldn’t stop smiling, and neither could I!

Daring to cross the bomb bay, toward the back of the plane, I was being very careful to stay on the catwalk. I was carrying my SLR camera and a video camera, and I couldn’t believe how narrow and limited the space for a body was. I could barely make out the remains of an S-shaped wake where we had landed. Nice ride!

Floatplane Slalom
STEPHEN COLES, ALLENSPARK, CO

My first flight was when I was 13—in the summer of 1958, when my parents, sister and I vacationed near Long Lake, New York. Already a big fan of all things aero, I really pestered my dad to let us take a floatplane sightseeing trip from the dock next to New York Highway 30. He relented, and Dad, Trish, and I took off, the pilot taxiing under the highway bridge as all flights do. Passing over our campsite at Lake Eaton State Park, I swore I could see Mom waving at us. Landings at Long Lake are into the southwest summer sun, which is complete with glare. We touched down, bounced once, settled in, then full throttle, a swerve to the left on one pontoon as we roared past a canoe with two very surprised paddlers visible out my window, just past my wingtip. As we pulled up to the dock to disembark, I scanned the water for the canoe. They were just fine and I could barely make out the remains of an S-shaped wake where we had landed. Nice ride!
Kicked Out of a Slick
JAMES REYNOLDS

In 1971, I was stationed at Phouc Vinh, Republic of Vietnam, which was about 90 kilometers north of Saigon. Phouc Vinh was the main base of the 1st of the Ninth Air Calvary. I was an avionics specialist, which meant I took care of the radios. When a helicopter comes out of maintenance, it must have a check ride which includes autorotation. One day a Slick (UH-1) came out of maintenance and since I was always up for a flight, I hopped on with the pilot and another enlisted. I was sitting on the right-side gunner’s seat with a bare gun mount. Now normally when it comes to the autorotation part of the flight, the pilot usually flattens the blades and varies the attitude of the chopper to keep the RPM at 6600 and then pulls out of the autorotation. For some reason this pilot decided to slam the collective down, which caused the rear of the Slick to kick to the left, which left me hanging onto the gun mount for dear life staring at the jungle several thousand feet below me.

Best Landing Ever
RAYMOND SIMONSEN, MAJOR, USMC (RET)

During the Vietnam conflict, if we Marine KC-130 pilots weren’t refueling fighters or helicopters or dropping million-candlepower flares so the grunts could spot the VC, we were hauling cargo and troops from one place to another. And whenever a pilot is ferrying passengers, one goal is to make all landings as smooth and squeaky as possible. It’s always nice to hear ‘attaboys from the departing guests!

One balmy afternoon in 1970, I was tasked to fly a load of passengers from Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, Okinawa to Danang, RVN. Weather forecast wasn’t bad and everything checked out well except that among my passengers was a gaggle of First Marine Air Wing pilots. Oh, please, let the landing be a good one!

Arrival in-country was as planned with light wind and rain and good visibility in the dark of night. No sweat. We descended slowly toward that long, wet runway and then—I kid you not—the landing was so smooth, I didn’t know when that big ole 130 actually touched down! We taxied to the ramp, shut the engines down, and amid the general pandemonium of debarkation there was not one ‘attaboy from any of those jet jockeys for the best KC-130 landing ever.
Gas Up the Bomber and Stay Awake

DAVID R VOLIN, SCOTTSVILLE, VA

In the late sixties, when the French were testing their atomic bombs in the South Pacific, the US would send a specially modified B-52 from a base in southern California to monitor the test. On one of these missions, the B-52 called in to say they did not have enough fuel to get back to the nearest landing site and requested emergency refueling. Apparently, a piece of flap had gotten stuck in the down position, and the pilots did not notice anything until their fuel began shrinking faster than it should have. As the closest KC-135 available on alert, we were scrambled, but noted that, for the temperature that afternoon (over 100 degrees) the aircraft was too heavy to take off safely. For normal takeoffs, we would taxi into position on the runway, run up the power, release the brakes, then hit the two switches (on the co-pilot’s side) to inject water into the combustion chambers and increase the thrust. This time we were still turning onto the runway when we slammed all four throttles forward and hit the switches simultaneously. I swear we pulled the left gear off the ground in the process, but straightened out and headed down the runway, watching our airspeed closely. We were fast running out of runway when we finally urged the beast off the ground. I remember looking out the side window and noting that I did not have to look down at much of an angle to see the stanchions on which the approach lights were installed. Pretty scary, but we got off.

We made it to the B-52, got him refueled so he could at least get to his base in southern California, and headed back to our base in Sacramento. Then we noticed that we were running out of fuel ourselves. There is no way to refuel a KC-135 in the air, but there were some techniques to reduce our consumption rate. Basically, this calls for flying at a higher altitude, where turbojet engines are more efficient. This is great for the airplane, but without pressure suits, we could not fly above 50,000 feet without danger of hypoxia, or lack of oxygen, even though we had our helmets and masks on and set at 100 percent oxygen. Pressure suits would have been required. We got to just short of 50,000 and stayed there until descending for the approach back at Mather. The tanks were almost dry when we got home. We had been scrambled at 2:00 a.m., and this flight stretched almost 16 hours. Both the pilot and myself had the navigator pour ice water down our backs to keep us alert.
Clean as a Whistle
TED WISE, NORTH PALM BEACH, FL

On a visit to my sister in Boulder, Colorado back in 2012, we were eating lunch on her patio when I happened to look up and notice a sailplane riding the updrafts along the face of the foothills. “Wow, I’d like to do that,” I said. An hour later we were at Boulder Municipal Airport. I filled out the waiver and handed them my AmEx card, and soon I was aloft in a Schweizer 2-32 sailplane being towed by a Piper Pawnee agplane. High above the Rockies, we unhooked from the tug and soon the pilot and myself were riding the waves, yanking and banking...and yanking and banking! Not long into the flight, I started to feel that bubble of nausea rising into my head, and as much as tried to hold it, I couldn’t. Recalling some good advice given to me years earlier by an aerobatic pilot about the subject of getting sick in someone else’s airplane, if you don’t have a bag to throw up in, pull out the neck of your shirt and throw up inside it. Meanwhile, back in the sailplane I had worn a tucked-in T-shirt and a flannel pullover shirt and proceeded to unload inside my wardrobe. The pilot heard me get sick and asked “Did you just throw up?” I answered, “Yes, but I contained it.” I didn’t think he believed me and he asked if I wanted to head back and I said “Yes, that might be a good idea.” The pilot had radioed the ground crew he was returning and I assumed they knew why. After we landed and coasted to the ramp, the ground crew were ready with paper towels and a spray cleaner. To their surprise—and to my vindication for the embarrassing incident—there was not one speck of my insides anywhere in the cockpit! I did grab some paper towels to clean up my stomach and shirt for the ride home, but that day I’ll never forget as one my most memorable flights!

Yikes! We’ve Gone to War
ROBBY GAINES, ARTESIA, NM

Do you remember the Clint Eastwood movie, “Heartbreak Ridge”? In the movie Clint Eastwood’s Marine unit goes on a practice invasion to prepare them for their invasion of Grenada.

A friend and I flew from Washington to Idaho to go backpacking. We landed in a remote airstrip in the Idaho mountains, put on hiking boots and backpacks then climbed the mountain. After four days of fun and not seeing a single person we walked down to our airplane, took off and flew home.

My home field was Vista Field, a small general aviation field in Kennewick. Because it is 10 miles from the commercial airport in Pasco it didn’t even have a manned radio. We just contacted Pasco for Kennewick traffic and airport advisories.

“Pasco approach, 714 Foxtrot Bravo, landing Kennewick, request airport advisory.”

“Roger 714 Foxtrot Bravo, contact Kennewick tower at 181.3.”

“What?” I thought, “Kennewick doesn’t even have a radio.”

“Pasco approach, contact Kennewick tower?”

“Roger 181.3”

“Kennewick approach, 714 Foxtrot Bravo, landing Kennewick, request airport advisory.”

“714 Foxtrot Bravo, Turn heading 360, Follow the C-130 on long final. You have two Cobra gunships escorting you in. Be advised land fast, you have two F-16s behind you.”

Looking to my right and left I saw two Bell helicopter Cobra gunships escorting us.

On the ground were lots of tanks and Humvees moving out.

Holy moly, we’ve gone to war!

No, it was the Marine dress rehearsal for the invasion of Grenada.
**We All Fly Reader’s Stories**

**It Was a Very Goodyear**
JERRY AMES, LAKE GENEVA, WI

During the 1970s, I was an independent Goodyear tire dealer in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. The Green Bay Packers would periodically play a home game at Milwaukee County Stadium. When this occurred one September, the Goodyear blimp was due to assist in televising the game.

A few weeks prior to this game, I was contacted by Goodyear and advised that my wife and I were invited to ride in the blimp the Friday before the game.

We arrived as requested at Dane County Airport and found the blimp tethered there by the 20-person support team. We were directed to enter the blimp’s gondola and discovered that there were only six passenger seats. The majority of the space was taken up by the equipment needed to operate the external blimp advertising lighting display.

For the next 45 minutes, we thrilled at the experience as the blimp circled the region at a height of about 1,000 feet. On the ground below us, we saw many people staring in awe as we flew above them.

In 2017, the Goodyear blimp wafts over the Los Angeles Coliseum in California. (GOODYEAR)

**Tremors in a B-17**
ROGER J. MORTON, BALDWINSVILLE, NY

The words usually used to describe it are “vibration” or “shake.” Strapped to a seatless floor cushion, my thought is “tremors”.

There is, to be sure, vibration, shaking, noise—God, lots of noise—but those four steadily pulsing engines strike me as dominant, the underlying piece of the cacophony that never changes.

Seven riders are aboard this B-17—two in the radio room, the rest ignominiously sitting, strapped by old-style belts to the floor. Can’t see a thing, yet there is a lot to look at. The construction, for instance, circles of framework, stringers, and multiple sets of cables reach out of sight to the tail feathers.

An increase in the tremors, loud moaning sounds. Uneven pavement transmits itself through the frame. I glance rearward, startled to see the giant shock system pumping up and down for the tail wheel. A piece of the sky can be seen, looking up through the waist gunner’s opening, the machine guns are turned to the side.

“Oswego, we have liftoff.” (The pavement joints disappear.) We eye the crewman for the hand signal allowing us to unbuckle and run rampant, to go anywhere except the rear gunner’s position. Eager tries quickly reveal the lower ball turret will also not open to us, though no passengers appear modest enough to acquire the fetal position necessary to get in. The view! We are low—1,500 feet. Being up in the bombardier’s bubble is spectacular, a kind of grand, curved IMAX, clarity distorted by the plastic. It’s maximum loud and in this “theater,” the seat shakes. (Tremors.)
Rescue by a Starlifter
DOUGLASS G. WOOD, PALM COAST, FL

In 1968, I was an aircraft commander flying a C-141 Starlifter. We were off-loading cargo at Tan Son Nhut AB, Saigon, South Vietnam, when an Army Beaver aircraft crashed off the end of the runway and caught fire. The two pilots managed to get out of the aircraft but were badly burned. A decision was immediately made to reconfigure my aircraft for a medical evacuation flight and we were to fly the two pilots, two doctors and four nurses to Yokota AB, Japan as quickly as possible. The US Army had a hospital with a burn center located not far from Yokota AB. The doctors said that if we could get them there ASAP, there was a good chance the pilots would survive. As we refilled our flight plan for Yokota, the medical team set up a mini burn center in the rear of the aircraft and loaded the pilots. As I entered the aircraft I could see both pilots’ flight suits were still smoldering. Everything stopped at the airport as we taxied out and took off. The word was sent out to all the air traffic control agencies en route as to our mission. As a result, I got whatever I wanted in the way of altitudes and routing. I kept the airspeed on the “red line” the entire way, and changed altitudes three times to get the least headwind. When I was 200 miles from Yokota, Tokyo control cleared out all the airspace below me and I made a high speed descent into the Tokyo area. Three miles from the runway I slowed, dropped flaps and gear and as soon as we landed I stopped on the runway and the loadmaster opened the rear cargo doors. An Army helicopter set down right behind me and the pilots and medical crew were off-loaded in seconds. At this point I was so exhausted I had to have the ground crew come out and tow the aircraft to our parking spot. That night, while lying in bed, it occurred to me that we never got the names of the two pilots, and to this day I am haunted by the fact that I will never know if all that effort by so many, many people saved those two pilots.
During the summer of 1957, I was 16 and worked as a Lineboy at a Will Rogers Airport FBO [fixed base operation] in Oklahoma City. A customer had hired an ex-military jet pilot to fly it for their business. He needed to build time in the powerful tail-dragger and late one night called our office. Taking the call, I was instructed to pull the plane out of the hangar for a flight first thing in the morning.

Upon arrival, he called to get a weather briefing and proceeded to pre-flight the plane. After a few minutes he said, “Hey, want to go for a ride? What time do you get off work?” Was he serious? Excitedly, I stuttered, “Sure...8 o’clock!” He said we wouldn’t be more than an hour as there was a large storm approaching from the southwest. That was fine by me! I’d have been happy to taxi around the ramp!

This P-51D had been modified with a jump seat behind the pilot, new avionics, and a beautiful paint scheme. We took off and flew southeast to an area of uninhabited farmland for some practice maneuvers. No aerobatics, but some steep turns and climbs. I believe he was still “feeling” the plane out. I asked how fast we could go, so he did a speed run and reported back, “About 400 mph!” I was ecstatic! On the intercom he said the storm was moving steadily toward the airport and he was headed back.

When he lowered the main gear on his approach, however, only one of the two green indicator lights appeared on the instrument panel. After quickly recycling the gear with no different result and having air traffic control (ATC) verify the situation, he advised he would fly around trying to get the other gear down. Minutes later, he had tried numerous times but with the same result. He even tried steep climbs and dives to see if gravity would help!

Meanwhile, the brooding storm had intensified and was noticeably closer. Then he tried the gear’s emergency hydraulic hand pump several times. Still no change. With the storm looming and malfunctioning gear, the pilot received permission to attempt a belly landing on the grass beside the main runway. He then told me what was likely to happen: We might spin like a top on the large radiator mounted on the plane’s belly! ATC informed us that the crash team had been notified, and I saw fire trucks pulling away from a garage. Now I was really nervous!

As we lined up for the grass landing and were maybe 150 feet in altitude, he tried the gear selector once more and as he did, miraculously, the tower controller screamed, “Both your gear are down!!” With two green lights, we smoothly moved over to the concrete and landed safely. The storm broke over us at that very moment!
We All Fly Reader’s Stories

Cable News Star

JOHN WYLDER, PORTLAND, OR

I woke up on the morning of December 12, 1997 so excited that I did not bother to turn on the news. My best friend, Charlie Patterson had told me this would be the day I would a ride in the airplane he built, a Van’s RV-6.

He gave me a long safety pitch, telling me all the risks and that I needed to verbally state that I was willing to take those risks. I happily agreed.

When I got to his hangar, there was a CNN news crew interviewing his hanger mate, proud owner of another homebuilt aircraft. The news crew looked bored listening to the details of aircraft construction. I asked what was going on. “Hadn’t you heard? John Denver died late yesterday in a crash of a homebuilt plane. We are filming for a big story.” Wow. Charlie ignored everyone, eventually helping me to get settled in the cockpit and telling me what NOT to touch.

The CNN reporter came over to me and asked to interview me. Sure. “Do you feel safe flying in a homebuilt plane, especially after hearing about John Denver’s crash?”

I smiled and said, “I have watched my friend build this plane. I doubt any commercial plane I have flown in is as well built. Charlie said to me that if I was going to fly with him I needed to believe that I had led a good and full life as today might be a good day to die.”

My interview ran for weeks on CNN.

Ballooning Original

GERALD RISELEY, PUNTA GORDA, FL

I was one of the original hot air balloon pilots in Texas, flying Raven balloon s50a N1930R. The FAA inspector had never seen one before and he told me he would watch as I took off.

Our flights were just north of Dallas, flying in the 1970s for a total of 11 hours. Many interesting photos and newspaper articles of landing in farmers’ fields.

I have all entries in my log book.
Air & Space
We All Fly Reader's Stories

Peaked at 16

Thomas Hughes, Jacksonville, FL

The College Park Airport (CGS) was established in 1909 for Wilbur Wright to instruct military officers to fly. In 1960, I was 16 and wanted to walk in these Army pilots’ footsteps and learn how to fly a plane.

The instructor pointed to a small yellow aircraft, and I thought it was the prettiest thing I had seen. It was a J-3 Piper Cub. He told me to bring the plane over to the hangar area, and we would do a pre-flight inspection. So, I ran to the plane and pushed and pulled as much as possible to move it. I didn’t notice if he was laughing, but he got up, walked over to where I was struggling, reached down, grabbed the tail wheel of the aircraft, and walked it over to where he wanted it. I was amazed! This bundle of canvas and wings would take us into the air.

He outlined what we would be doing, but all I heard was that I would be flying this plane once in the air. The side door can be completely open during flight, and it is exhilarating to have that view. We leveled off at 2,000 feet, and the view was amazing. I was flying for the first time in my life. I could turn and move the airplane anywhere I wanted. I wanted a leather helmet, goggles, and a long scarf! I was a pilot! I have yet to experience anything as delicious as that moment in my life.

Happy To Be Alive

F. Clark Boles, Huntsville, AL

I was a passenger on Delta 256 on a May 13, 1999 flight taking off on runway 26L from El Paso toward the mountains five miles away. Just after the MD-88 left the runway, a loud “BAM” and shudder from the rear gave a big adrenaline jolt. Then “BAM” and “BAM” again. I heard both engines throttle-back and felt the sink. The throttle advanced again until the whole “BAM-BAM” cycle repeated. I knew what compressor stall was but had never experienced it. Both engines were damaged and the pilot was trying to find enough power to prevent a crash. Had they lost lateral control too? Burning tire odor filled the cabin. Were we on fire? Then it hit me. I was going to die. A strange calm came over me and an even stranger thought, “I have lots of insurance, so my family will be fine!”

In less than two minutes, we finally started a mushy left turn away from certain death. Finally, “Folks, we hit something on the runway. We’re going to fly by the tower so they can assess the damage.” We took our “crash” positions and landed on 26L with damaged tires and engines. As shaky passengers de-planed, the sweaty pilot said goodbyes. The little granny behind me asked, “Is this plane going to Dallas?” The pilot’s expression was priceless. “No ma’am, this plane is not going anywhere today!” Delta sent an apology letter the next week and offered a coupon toward another ticket. I never used it.

Lifting off from Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson Airport on July 12, 2015, a McDonnell Douglas MD-88 operated by Delta Airlines begins another flight. (Colin Brown Photography)
Kidnapped

DUANE A. COPPOCK, CLAREMORE, OK

An FBI manhunt in an HU-16E Albatross? Yep, from West Palm Beach to Fort Myers and beyond along the Intracoastal Water Way over Lake Okeechobee and west. Florida is flat there.

December, 1968, Barbara Mackle kidnapped near Emory College, Atlanta, and then buried in a well constructed box that was ventilated and stocked with water, some food, and other supplies. The ransom was $500,000 in cash. Everyone was following the news. The suspect was traced because the bank that supplied the cash recorded each serial number. Good news later.

On the fourth day, U. S. Coast Guard Air Station Miami was called to fly two HU-16E Albatrosses to carry two FBI agents each. We got our airplanes in the air, and then I placed one agent in the right seat and the other by a rear open hatch (with a safety belt). We followed the route and on the Gulf side, we spotted a suspect boat speeding along. I made a low pass (40 feet) and the agent gave me a “thumbs up”. We circled and called in the location.

Soon two helicopters came south from Coast Air Station St. Petersburg. The suspect made a hard right turn and grounded on a mangrove island. You can’t walk through mangrove so he stayed along the beach. He was apprehended about 12 hours later. He had the money for about 36 hours.

The suspect had called the FBI and gave good directions to the box. The agents found it and recovered Barbara. When she was taken out she said, “You are the most beautiful men I have ever seen.”

Surprise from the Wind

GARY D. WALKER, PORT ORCHARD, WA

The wind was strong and turbulent with a tailwind reported at each end of the east/west runway at Brown Field, San Diego. I was flying the Cherokee Arrow downwind with my three Japan Air Lines student pilots aboard. With the landing checklist complete, I turned onto base leg and began my descent for the landing.

I was “working it” with the turbulence judged at least moderate. At about 800 feet above ground level, before I knew what had happened, we were inverted. I couldn’t believe an airplane could roll that quickly, especially a light, non-aerobatic aircraft like the Arrow. We hadn’t rolled enough to correct with a full roll. Instead I rolled back to wings level. My Navy flight training had been invaluable that day. Adding a few more knots to my approach speed, I turned final and completed the landing without further incident.

What caused that violent roll I can’t say, but the tailwinds probably met at just the wrong place for us. In my more than 30 years of flying, this had to be my scariest experience and taught me and my students that you never know what might happen in aviation.
Bill Lear’s Funeral Flyover

ALBERT ACKERMAN, LAS CRUCES, NM

During 1970 and 1980, I was a member of the Dee Howard team and involved in certification of thrust reversers on the model 20 and 30 Learjets. In that time, we made numerous trips to Reno and I performed several reverser demonstrations for Bill Lear.

In 1978 I was honored to be a member of the Learjet formation flyover at Lear’s funeral in Reno. The funeral was held in the middle of town. I flew right wing and was glued on the flight leader when I noticed my copilot getting uncomfortable. I took a glance down to discover we were roaring across downtown at no more than 200 feet in complete violation of FAA regulations. We made two passes, the final to the west to express the aviator traditional farewell, “He has gone West.” Never heard a word from the FAA. Perhaps Bill’s spirit saved us.

A friend who attended the funeral was walking back to his car several blocks away and came across a family in their yard looking to the sky. They asked “Do you know if that airshow is coming back?” Moya Lear, Bill’s widow, sent me a photo of the flyover with the following inscription:

Dear Al, None of us will ever forget this moment. He left his wonderful spirit and you helped so much in saying Aloha. Thank you. Moya Lear May 17, 1978.

Bird Dog Rollercoaster

MICHAEL P. GLEASON, BANGOR, MAINE

In 1969, as a member of the U.S. Army, I was assigned to the Seventh Aviation Battalion, Seventh Infantry Division, in northern South Korea. One particular summer day, after having a lunch of greasy U.S. Army spaghetti, I was invited to accompany one of our pilots on a flight in a U.S. Army Cessna O-1 Bird Dog (the only Army aircraft classified as capable of aerobatics). During the flight, we engaged in a simulated “dog fight” with a U.S. Army UH-1 Huey, somewhere near the Korean DMZ, during which the full range of aerobatic qualities of the Bird Dog were put to the test!

Fortunately for me, the back seat windows of the Cessna could be opened. Not only did I puke all over South Korea, but I also lost my U.S. Army headset, torn off in the slipstream. After we landed, I continued to have “dry heaves,” since there was naught left to upchuck. I have not been on anything even resembling a rollercoaster since then.
We All Fly Reader's Stories

**Aligned with the Moon**

WILLARD WAYNE ROUND, FAIRHOPE, AL

On one of those cold winter nights, still, full moon and bright, I had my throttles pulled back to idle enjoying that ice-smooth, slipping turn through 1,500 feet to enter the break at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina.

Looking over my left wing, I rolled my F-4B Phantom farther over into a 60-degree bank to be confronted with a very bright white light over the tip of that wing. Instinct caused me to jerk level and since I had never seen anything like it, UFO entered my mind.

But no....another airplane? What?

So I rolled back to investigate. Not until I again reached a 60-degree bank was it visible again, but there it was!

Something was following along and then I noticed it flashing, and it took better form as a white ring of light. Holding position.

Then the mind took over; and, I understood. It was the moon!

The light from the moon was coming through my canopy and projecting a ring of light down onto the earth below. The flashing was created by reflective light on pools water in the marshes.

As the beam was refracted through my canopy onto the ground, dirt, and vegetation, you could not see it, but when the ring of light hit the water, it reflected back to my sight.

Hence it looked like a flashing circle of bright white light following me down below.

My one and only encounter with a UFO that lasted only a split second. Just think of all that had to align to cause such a encounter!
That Fire in the Distance
DON HUFFMAN, BETHEL PARK, PA

I was about to take my very first flight. A classmate and I were senior engineering students at Pitt, en route to Cleveland from the Pittsburgh airport, to visit a chemical plant and interview for positions at the plant. It was Easter Sunday night April 1, 1956, and we were to take a Capital Airlines flight leaving about 7:30 p.m. It was starting to get dark; we got out on a taxiway and stopped. We sat and observed a fire fairly far away. The stewardesses said it was probably a house fire, but we were delayed by incoming flights. After a wait of perhaps 20 or 30 minutes, we got to the main runway and took off.

The flight was maybe an hour and a half long. The stews came around for food orders; mine asked me if I wanted a meal, and I, the seasoned (ha-ha) air traveler, said I would take my meal later. She said, “You eat now or you don’t eat.” Oops! I said okay.

We finally got to our hotel in Cleveland and settled in. That long ago, there were no TV’s in the rooms. I turned on the radio which was built into the bed’s headboard and tuned to a newscast. First thing I heard was that there was a plane accident at the Pittsburgh airport earlier in the evening, TWA flight 400, which crashed just after takeoff, about 7:20 p.m., erupting in flames past the end of the runway. There was a loss of life of 22 passengers including one crew member. My classmate and I got on the phone and debated whether to call home to say we were okay, but since our parents knew we were on a Capital flight we decided not to.

Next day’s flight back was very nerve-wracking.

Travel in Ecuador
ROGER W. GROSSENBACHER, LANCASTER, OH

In 2001 I travelled to Ecuador with a birding group. After birding around Quito (10,000 feet elevation), we took a small plane east over the volcanoes to the upper tributaries of the Amazon. We made a jump to an army base in a King Air turboprop on Icaro Airlines. We did get close to the sun, but the wings did not melt. At the base, our small group got aboard a Pilatus Porter, a Swiss aircraft with ugly rectangular flying surfaces and short-takeoff-and-landing capability. Porters have a big rectangular side door for loading cargo. The seats were canvas on aluminum frames so they could fold down out of the way for cargo. The tour leader had to sit next to the door (which was closed but would not latch properly) without a seatbelt. After a short flight into the jungle, we landed on a tiny dirt strip.

After a week of birding we returned to the strip on a rainy day. We flew back to Quito in a Cessna Caravan. Watching the plane coming in to get us was an experience! The pilot reversed the prop pitch to slow the plane. The reversed prop sucked up muddy water from behind it and shoved it forward through the prop, making a curious buzzing slurp.

The single pilot kept busy tuning his navigation radios. Above 10,000 feet, one passenger pulled down an overhead oxygen mask but nothing came out. Somebody failed to fill the oxygen tanks! The fellow facing me was upset. I tried to reassure him that most people don’t need oxygen above 10,000 feet if they are in good health. He replied that he had a heart condition! What else could I say? We had nice views of Cotopaxi and its neighboring volcanoes and we landed at Quito with no more problems.
There’s a Little Good in Everything
MARK BRANCIAROLI, ELKINS, WV

Gliding down short final approach in my beloved C-336 SkyMaster, enveloped in the calm air and early morning summer sunlight, the Beckley, West Virginia airport was crystal clear after an uneventful but gorgeous flight over the Appalachian Mountains. The altimeter wound down to 200 feet above the ground, while the runway threshold grew in the windshield. My passenger made a comment on how relaxing the flight had been.

CRACK! The aircraft shuddered and abruptly entered a stall and a left inverted spin with the passenger screaming! Fortunately, my acrobatic training kicked in, and I recovered control scant feet from the ground and well left of the paved runway in the grass. It wasn’t the prettiest landing, but nobody was injured.

The flap cables to the left wing had failed. The SkyMaster has four large flaps allowing the aircraft to fly much slower when landing. If the two flaps on the left side retracted, the left wing, in essence, just wasn’t there anymore. The airspeed was too low for the wing to produce any lift while the right wing with its flaps down provided tremendous lift, causing the aircraft to roll violently.

The area the cable broke was extremely difficult to inspect. The FAA immediately put out an alert finding identical issues in SkyMasters. There were several past unresolved fatal SkyMaster accidents piloted by high-time pilots crashing just short of the runway. I know I contributed to saving a few pilots. My passenger never flew again.
Dream Flight to Disneyland
RICHARD MILLER, WOODSTOCK, MD

American Airlines began non-stop, coast-to-coast flights in 1959 with Boeing 707s. My older brother, Ron, had already worked for American for years and was entitled to fly “stand-by” anywhere American flew, and at that time, take immediate family members—for free. The only charge was that the flight taxes had to be paid, which were quite minimal.

The summer of 1960, when I was 13 years old, he and I took an American jet from Baltimore to Los Angeles—my first jet flight. With so few passengers, the stewardesses (at that time not called “flight attendants”) offered us all the snacks we wanted—and all the champagne we could drink, catering to Ron’s employee status. I do not remember the rest of the flight other than the incredible beauty at 30,000 feet of the Rocky Mountains at sunset gleaming red, casting sharp shadows to the east.

As though that was not enough, upon landing at L.A. International, we helicoptered over to Disneyland in a Sikorsky S-58 piston helicopter. That’s when you know you’re flying!

Hard Focus, Hard Memory
RAYMOND F. FOSTER, MARIETTA, GA

As a captain for a major airline, I have many memories of the aftermath of the terrorist attacks that brought down the twin towers on September 11, 2001. One, in particular, sticks in my mind.

On my first trip after that fateful day, I saw a man sitting in the boarding area. He was clothed in the traditional garb of the Sikh religion—a long flowing beard, robe, and turban. His head and eyes were downcast as if afraid to catch anyone’s gaze. Pinned across his chest was a large American flag. The pain on his face was palpable. It was as if to say, “I love America and I had nothing to do with this.”

I didn’t talk to the man, but I wish I had. At the time, all my focus was on security. I remember many glances toward me (including from my crew), looking for some sense of assurance that all would be well. At the time, it was the most important thing I could provide.
We All Fly Reader's Stories

Cargomaster Tales
KENNETH ABLETT, CHESAPEAKE, VA

Our Air Force C-133 Globemaster was out of Dover Air Force Base for the airfield, Lajes, in the Azores. As always, we closely watched weather forecasts for our arrival time. It was fine at the equal time point, the point of safe return, and the point of no return. It was not fine when we arrived.

The crosswind limitation for the four-engine, high wing propjet was 25 knots. The winds gave us a 50-knot crosswind component. Our alternate, the island of Santa Maria, 30 minutes south, was no better. It would be our problem to get it on the ground with the least possible danger and damage.

In final approach our nose was probably 30 degrees right of runway heading. Our 180-foot wingspan limited how low I could hold the upwind wing at touchdown. A few feet above touchdown, I slammed the right mains down and, at the same time, kicked the nose into runway alignment. Then, with differential reverse, kept us on the runway.

I’d rather not do that again.

Another occasion: For a change when returning from Vietnam, Hickam Air Force Base in Honolulu had no cargo for us, and there was no need to stop. We fueled to full tanks and took off that morning for Travis Air Force Base, California. We had exceptionally good tail winds. As we approached the California coast we determined we had fuel enough, with reserves and caution, to overfly for our home base, Dover Air Force Base, Delaware.

We had been step-climbing, as weight permitted, in our Cargomaster. We reached the top of our performance data information at about 32,000 feet. It may not have been a record flight, but to our knowledge, no other C-133 flew nonstop as far as we did. As I recall, but am not certain, flying time was 16 hours, plus or minus.

Happy Birthday?
DAVE STEINBREUGGE

On October 15th, 1996, I was deep asleep in Show Low, Arizona, when my phone rang at 1 a.m. One of my nurses on our air ambulance crew said we were requested to fly an “at risk” pregnant woman to Phoenix to deliver her baby. I reminded him that I was scheduled to return the chronically ill Aero Commander 690 we had leased back to its owner in Colorado that morning. I was begged to take the flight from the entire medical staff. I finally agreed.

Shortly after take-off for the 30-minute flight, I noticed a drop in hydraulic pressure followed by complete failure. Following the emergency gear-extension procedures and conferring with my director of maintenance, I confirmed that the blow-down gear system was inoperable. We looked and felt like a wounded duck. I declared an emergency, briefed the crew, and was cleared to land on runway 26R. The landing was smooth and the sparks off the belly spectacular! We came to rest abreast the emergency equipment. The egress went smoothly. I went over to our patient in the ambulance to apologize for all the excitement. She said no need, that “I’ll have the most incredible story to tell for many birthdays to come.”

I took a look at her vitals and over the course of the incident, I noted that blood pressure and heart rate never (unlike mine) fluctuated. I spent the rest of the night managing the relocation of the Commander to Sky Harbor FBO and talking to federal authorities. The hydraulic failure was caused by a broken brake line, and the failed blow down by a stuck Nitrogen bottle gauge (empty bottle showing full). I credit training, situational awareness, and professionalism for the successful outcome of this story. Sharon gave birth to a healthy nine-pound baby boy that morning.
Life Changer
LEE COBB, EAST TAWAS, MI

One of my favorite stories is about my first flight. A neighbor flew from a grass strip behind his house. Vic was probably the coolest person I knew. He was an aerobatic competitor, flew airshows, and had offered to teach me how to fly. Two weeks before my 16th birthday, I screwed up my courage, got permission from my parents, and walked to his house for my first lesson. It was a beautiful Michigan Saturday in early May 1971.

Vic walked me around his Piper Cub, pointing out features, doing preflight checks. Time to go flying. Vic folded the window up, and wired it to the wing, left the door hanging down. Did I mind flying with the side open? Ah, OK. I put my heels on two stubby brake pedals while he spun the prop. I’m thinking: I’m 15 sitting in an airplane, by myself, engine running. How cool is this?!! Vic jumped in, soon we were in the air, ground falling away. I cinched that seatbelt tight until my legs started to tingle.

We flew for an hour. I was definitely getting my license: Maybe I’d be a fighter pilot, or an astronaut! Vic shouted, asking if I wanted to be dropped off? Sure! He lined up on the clover field behind our house and landed. As dignified as I could be with numb legs, I unbuckled and climbed out. I walked to our house floating about four feet off the ground.

I found my mom picking up pieces of a broken plate. She was furious. She knew I’d gone flying, watched us through the kitchen window, and thought we were crashing. Oh, she was mad, and relieved. She made me promise never to land in the backyard again! I did go on to get my license, became a computer scientist instead of an astronaut, and forever valued the discipline I learned at that young age.

Land it Right Now
ROBBY GAINES, ARTESIA, NM

I almost died on my first flight as a pilot. I flew into Topeka, Kansas, for my checkout flight to become a pilot. After landing, I found the checkout pilot, flew, and passed. I obtained a weather briefing, then took off.

The flight was uneventful until suddenly, a dark, ominous cloud developed right in front of me in the clear blue sky. Within minutes, I was surrounded. Then the turbulence hit. I rapidly climbed 500 feet and immediately experienced 2 Gs. Then just as quickly I dove 500 feet. Everything not fastened down flew up to the ceiling.

The flight controller scrutinized his radar scope showing a sea of red, indicating rough, turbulent weather. In the middle of that was a white dot with my callsign.

I heard the controller’s concerned voice calling me, “Foxtrot Bravo, turn heading 270.” I turned. Still bouncing violently. “Foxtrot Bravo, turn heading 360.” Now with the turbulence came thunder and lightning.

Suddenly my left wing violently pitched up, trying to roll me over. The last thing I needed was to be upside down.

“Foxtrot Bravo, turn 090. Have you spotted the tornado?”

“Tornado?” Oh, that’s why my left wing was.... Urgently, “Foxtrot Bravo, land it right now!”

The flight controller silently said a prayer as I disappeared from his radar and lost radio contact. I looked down, spied a cornfield, and executed a soft field landing.

I landed in a farmer’s backyard. He asked, “How long have you been a pilot?”

I answered, “One hour.”

Stunned, he shook his head.
After spending a year in North Africa in the Air Force, my next duty base was Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona, home of the famous “Boneyard,” where obsolete airplanes are sent to be mothballed. My mom, who worked for the government—and apparently had some pull—informed me that she had arranged for me to get to my next base via a T-33 jet trainer that was to be mothballed. I reported to the Air Force base in Montgomery, Alabama, and was fitted with a helmet, oxygen mask, flight suit, and a parachute. The pilot who would fly us there was courteous and curious as to why I was going along for the ride. I gave him a snappy salute and a general answer.

After we got into the cockpit, he explained that if, during the flight, anything went wrong, he would blow the cover of the cockpit off. He said if that failed, I should pull the red handle by my right knee and a charge would shoot me through the cockpit cover, and I should scrunch my head down before pulling the handle. Thoroughly terrified, I just said, “Yes sir,” and hoped to survive the trip. Once we were airborne, we had small talk on the radio with each other, exchanging home towns etc. After being up for an hour or so, he told me to put my hand on the stick and he moved it side to side. The plane had dual controls so when he moved his stick, it also moved mine. Then he hit the left rudder pedal, so we banked a bit, and he said, “See what those controls do?” Then he threw both hands in the air and said, “Okay, son, you’ve got it. You’re the pilot now.” I almost fainted, but with his encouragement, I began to experiment with the controls, and was soon able to move the plane gently from side to side and a little up and down. He let me fly it for about an hour, and I was literally in heaven for that hour. We even flew near a B-47, the type that I had guarded in North Africa many a night. Soon we had to land, and even though I threw up just a bit in my mask on the final landing approach, I just walked away as a proud pilot. Highlight of my life—I had actually flown a jet airplane.
In 1951 I was commissioned as an Ensign USN. My first ship was an escort carrier, which transported the first U.S. Marine Corps Combat Helicopter Squadron to Pusan Korea.

Upon return from my first tour to Korea, I decided to become a naval aviator. I passed the flight physical and the psychological exams. Months later orders arrived stating “Detach and proceed to Pensacola for flight training.”

After several weeks at Whiting Naval Air Station near Pensacola in 1952, I had soloed and was now in the acrobatics phase of the curriculum. Safe-For-Solo had required a third check ride before I was released alone with the government’s valuable SNJ and my life. In the acrobatics phase, each day students flew a solo, one-hour, practice hop. I never practiced acrobatics below 10,000 feet. Part of my hour was consumed climbing to altitude.

One day I was practicing slow rolls with acrobatic power setting at 10,000 feet. While inverted, I let the nose fall through. I was soon headed straight down with acrobatic power—plus gravity—moving me rapidly toward solid earth. I finally had enough sense to pull back on the throttle. Then I had enough sense to pull back on the stick. At 4,000 feet, I recovered straight and level flight. Both engine RPM and air speed maximum limits were exceeded. Engine power was also exceeded. I may have been the fastest SNJ on the planet.

The SNJ has transparent inspection plates so that the pilot can verify the wheels are down and locked. On the top of the plate, the pressure is the same as the top of the wing. Because of the open wheel well, the pressure on the bottom of the plate is the same as on the bottom of the wing. At high speeds, this is a high pressure differential. In fact, it was high enough to cause both plates to fly-off into the airstream. In the parlance of aero-dynamic engineers, high air speed creates high “q” or dynamic pressure.

The wing for a SNJ is attached to the wing box by 80 small bolts. (The 80 is a guess but the bolts are small; enough bolts are sufficiently strong.) The junction has a black gasket for sealing. In my power dive, the black gasket was sucked into the high speed airstream.

When I returned to Whiting, I reported the missing inspection plates and the lost gaskets. I never did receive any feedback such as the obvious question “How did you do it?”

Power Dive in an SNJ
ALLEN E. FUHS, CARMEL, CA
Long First Flight
CHARLES FOREMAN, AUSTIN, TX

My first airplane trip, December 9 to 12, 1953 (just fifty years after the first powered flight at Kitty Hawk, December 17th, 1903), New York to Dhahran with overnights in Amsterdam and in the air.

In May 1952, my dad took a job with the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) in Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabia. Due to a housing shortage, my mom, my sister, and I couldn’t accompany him. Finally, in early December 1953, we left Kansas City via train to Chicago and then overnight to New York City. It was my first really long train ride—wonderfully fascinating for a six-year-old. But the best was yet to come—my first airplane ride. We spent a couple of days in New York at ARAMCO’s 505 Park Avenue office getting oriented for Saudi Arabia. ARAMCO owned three DC-6s, The Flying Camel, The Flying Gazelle, and The Flying Oryx, which made the New York-to-Dhahran run every week. For the trip, we were given large green flight bags with the ARAMCO logo on them. Since we were a family with young kids, we got to fly in the rear lounge of the plane (i.e., when the rear of the airplane was designated as First Class). We left Idlewild Airport (now JFK International) on the evening of December 9th on The Flying Gazelle. The first stop was Gander, Newfoundland, to refuel, and then we flew all night (plus some) to finally land in Amsterdam on the 10th. I remember looking out the hotel window and seeing a mass of people on bicycles on their way home in the cold drizzle. There were more bicycles than cars! I also remember that the hotel bathtub was as big as a swimming pool.

The next evening, December 11th, we flew overnight from Amsterdam to Rome then on to Beirut and Dhahran. I saw my first palm trees as we were landing in Beirut. It was raining when we landed in Dhahran on the afternoon of December 12th. Never mind the new sights and smells and Dad, who I hadn’t seen in 19 months; I was looking at those gray clouds. Now you have to understand that the summertime thunderstorms in Kansas City used to really scare me. My dad had written and said that it didn’t rain very much in Saudi Arabia. So when I got off the plane and it was raining; scared me had to point out to Dad that, “You promised me no thunderstorms.” It turned out that 1953 was one of the all-time wettest rainy seasons in the Eastern Providence. Afterwards, it got reeeeeally, really dry. First impressions can be so very wrong!

My first airplane trip was also the first for my mother and sister. You might as well start your flying experience with a 7,115-mile, three-day (= 60 hours), first-class trip on a four-engine, propeller airliner.
Nonpilot Zero-G

JACK VOORVAART, WEATOGUE, CT

I was a third class aviation electrician in Air-Anti Submarine Squadron VS-27. When I was given the opportunity to fly as a crewman I jumped at the chance. A choice I will never regret. We flew Grumman Guardians, and my seat as radar operator was directly behind the pilot. My hatch was directly over head and with the hatch closed I only had a very small window on my right. I needed to operate the radar in the dark. This story is about my learning (almost fatally) all about Zero gravity.

Any time my pilot flew I was along for the ride (and flight time) in my little space even if I had nothing to do. When I had nothing to do I would open the hatch and enjoy the view. One day we set out to shoot rockets, and again I had nothing to do. I sat there on my parachute seat with all my straps disconnected and the hatch open. The procedure was for the pilot to start a steep climb and then nose over to aim at the target and fire. At that point I learned all about Zero gravity. I somehow managed to hook my feet under my instrument panel and only came out about half way. At the bottom of the hill I came crashing back in. On return to NAS Norfolk I received a severe instruction period.

Landed Boom Down

JOHN SCHULTZ, WINSTON-SALEM, NC

I was a newly minted U.S. Air Force Flight Medical Officer assigned to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in October, 1962 after finishing the Air Force School of Aviation Medicine. My first flight was in a KC-135 tanker. We took off and headed for the Statesboro refueling range, which runs over Georgia and South Carolina. We refueled several B-47s and headed back to our home base. Fortunately, there was a B-52 awaiting take-off as we approached the base. The B-52 pilot called that our boom was down. Our pilot applied full power before we contacted the runway, but the boom did make contact, damaging it to the point where we began losing hydraulic fluid. We circled the field for quite some time, burning off fuel. The navigator and boom operator were able to manually raise the boom. The runway was foamed, and we made a safe landing. Only later did I realize how fortunate we were to have been landing during daylight, and that the B-52 was there at that time.
To Impress Girls
BILL THOMAS

In 1963 when I was 18, a friend of mine who was a pilot and an air traffic controller at Denver Center, invited me to fly with him to Cheyenne Wyoming. He said two girls were interested in flying with us in his Cessna 172. We would fly to Cheyenne, stop there for an evening snack, and then fly back. Nice little Friday night date.

I met him and the girls at Denver’s Stapleton Airport and we took off at about sunset. I sat in the back seat with one of the girls and the other girl sat up front with him. He liked to tease people so I was listening to his discussion. About half way to Cheyenne he asked her what she thought pilots do when they encounter a flock of geese. I noticed that he was slowly reducing the throttle. The girl said she really didn’t know. He said the pilot just honked at them to get out of the way. She replied, “No, airplanes don’t have horns.” He looked at her solemnly and said, “Oh, yes they do. Let me show you.” At that moment he adjusted the controls and the stall warning beeper went off! She was not only surprised but shocked! She had never heard of an airplane horn before. She was so impressed at her newfound airplane knowledge that she didn’t even notice him looking back at me and winking.

The rest of our flight to and from Cheyenne was of course much less exciting!

Unusual Arrival
ROBERT ERENSSTEIN, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

In 2001, I worked for an international organization in Kosovo. After the war, the country became independent and was in the process of building up its democracy. Those were interesting times and we all worked very hard. As part of a rest-and-recovery initiative, the United Nations organized a trip to Istanbul from Pristina Airport for a reasonable price. They chartered a DC-9 from the meanwhile ceased Macedonian Airlines.

After the airplane was parked, we saw people were waiting with flowers at the stairs. We went through customs in a huge, but completely empty terminal. In the bus to the hotel, our local guide revealed the secret. We had the honor to be in the first official airplane landing at the brand new Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen International Airport that opened only a few weeks earlier. For security reasons and the preference to keep this trip low-profile, there were no large festivities organized.

Meanwhile it is not the newest airport in Turkey any more, after the opening of the main international Istanbul Airport in 2018.
We were an F-111A out of Takhli Royalf Thai Air Force Base, Thailand. Date was sometime in December 1972, time was around 0200, altitude roughly 300 feet AGL, airspeed 495 knots indicated. We were armed with 12MK 82 high drag bombs, the target was just northeast of Hanoi, the dock area on the Red River. We were roughly 25 nautical miles from target, a little over 3 minutes out, heading 040 degrees. We were controlled in pitch by the Terrain Following Radar (TFR). Jimmy Lee in the left seat was controlling heading manually so we could avoid a steady heading. I was in the right seat, handling the attack radar, pretty much had it nailed down, I could now break out the dock area, just short of the river.

I could hear Jimmy grumbling about the altitude, we had the TFR set for 200 feet AGL. “This danged thing is riding high, we’re almost at 300 feet,” came the complaint. “Dang, we’re getting some fire now.” I looked up and could see some tracers coming up. Yep, radar altimeter showed about 280 feet. Glanced at the attack radar, nailed, on target. More tracers. “Dang that’s getting pretty accurate!” from Jimmy. “I’m going to change channels.” “Ok,” I said, “Targets nailed.”

I looked in the scope and suddenly I felt light in my seat. I pulled back and looked at the radar altimeter, pulled to it like a magnet. I saw the needle going down, getting close to the line that depicts the ground. I started to feel strong G come in, pulling, I saw the altitude needle hit 25 feet, then start back up. Jimmy had changed from the right channel to the left channel, and we got a heck of a fly down. “Let’s not....get too low,” I said, voice a bit high-pitched. “Heh heh, I’ve got it,” he says. “Let’s just let it fly at 300,” I say back. And we quit messing with the TFR. It was determined to fly high, so we let it be. But we made sure the avionics tech heard about it! I believe that event is the closest I have come to death and survived.

F-111 Terrain Navigation Radar

PHIL DUNLOP, HURST, TX
Looking through my logbook of flying time, I was reminded about one of my student flights. I was taking my night cross-country flight, we had to fly at least 100 miles in the night sky.

I chose to fly from Frederick to Ocean City, Maryland. The plane I drew that night was a Cessna 172 with the N number N747UA. We took off and made it Ocean City without any problems.

The flight back however was laced with excitement and misunderstandings. As we had completed the requirement for the flight, we wanted to get back as we had to work the next morning.

I chose to contact Pax River approach and ask if we could fly through their airspace. The controller cleared us as they had no activity that night. Little did I know what was about to happen.

We cleared their airspace and was offered a clearance through the Class Bravo which made for a quicker trip home. The controller handed me off to Baltimore approach and the excitement started. The exchange went something like this.

Me: November 747 Uniform Alpha, Baltimore Approach.

There was no reply. I called again and was told to stand by. The controller in a rather excited voice came back: United 747 heavy contact approach. No response.

After a few minutes I called back and the controller confirmed my squawk (transponder code) and asked my destination. I was instructed to climb and increase airspeed. He then told me I was too large for Frederick.

After a few minutes of conversation, we suddenly realized the N number was entered into the controller’s system as a United Airlines 747 and not the Cessna Skyhawk I was flying. This continued three more times as I was handed off from sector to sector until I reached Frederick.

It was quite the night, and my instructor said he never had such an experience. Needless to say, I never flew that airplane again. I found out later the owner was a United 747 Captain.

On another occasion: I was on a Southwest Flight from BWI to Chicago Midway. The approach into Midway is steep at the end and rollout short. Southwest likes the smaller airports, and their pilots are experts at short field landings.

This was my first flight into Midway, and expected a normal flight. As we descended, everything was smooth, then the last 200 feet or so, the plane dropped out of the sky and touched down on the runway and came to screeching halt. As we taxied into the gate, everything was smooth and normal again.

As I deplaned, the captain was standing at the door. We shook hands and I asked him how long he was in the Navy. He responded, “I was in the Navy for...How did you know I was in the Navy?” I replied, “That was a textbook carrier landing.” He smiled and we commented how small Midway is compared to other airports.
Turbulence
COY PRATHER, MONTALBA, TX

It was the early 1980s and we were all young and full of ourselves. We were ecstatic when Doug bought the Piper Comanche. Being all horse racing aficionados, we knew we finally had a way to fly from Oklahoma City to Hot Springs. Doug had been flying for several years; he was a good pilot and worked at FAA and part time at Aero Commander, overhauling small airplane engines. We had rented several planes to fly to the horse races before, but it was costly.

Lonnie, Van, and I were all firefighters. Lonnie and I had flown with Doug several times before; for Van, this was a first trip in a small plane. The trip over was uneventful. We had a great time, and Van won some money on a horse named Flick-a-bugger. The trip home to Downtown Airpark in Oklahoma City started off okay, but it got dark quickly. Doug was not instrument rated. Then the turbulence hit. We were being tossed and whipped up and down in a powerful head wind. Van was still so happy with his winnings, he wouldn’t shut up talking. Up front, I heard Lonnie over and over, “Doug, stall light, stall light!” Van kept yapping—we seemed to fall 10 feet at once. “Van, shut up,” yelled Lonnie. “Are we in trouble?” replied Van. He suddenly realized, we could hear airline pilots talking about the fierce turbulence. Doug fought it all the way home and landed with the plane seemingly coming in sideways on the runway. I’ll never forget Van kissing the ground over and over. He never flew with us again.

Five Minutes of Fuel
RUSS OLSON, SAN DIEGO, CA

With less than five minutes of fuel remaining, I knew that the highway underneath me was my only hope of return to earth in one piece. Though the two-lane road was narrow with telephone and power lines on both sides, it was miles long and very straight. I lowered the gear and flaps, slowed to approach speed, but then noticed cars on the highway ahead of me. I made the decision to go around and make one more orbit, hoping the traffic would clear.

As I came through the last 90 degrees of turn on my approach, I dirtied up again and settled in on my final landing speed of approximately 165 miles per hour. I touched down a few hundred yards in front of a semi that had just entered the straightaway, deployed the drag chute and began to slow, quite happy that I was back to earth safely. Just then we approached a small concrete bridge that appeared to possibly infringe on the 38’ wingspan of the jet, but that passed by without any scrapes.

Slowing to normal taxi speed, I continued down US Hwy 83 to a farmhouse, but it turned out to be just an abandoned shack. I pulled to the right as far as possible without dropping a main gear off the asphalt, folded the wings and made a broadcast on Guard that I was down and safe. My transmission was picked up by another flight of F-4 Phantoms from our Navy squadron, and recovery efforts began.
Ted wanted to be a pilot at age seven. It was during the Second World War, and there were bombers, fighters, cargo airplanes, and blimps flying everywhere. His dad, a biologist, encouraged him to follow his dream, be an aviator. Upon graduation from high school in 1955, Ted enlisted in the U. S. Air Force and became a boom operator on a KC-97G tanker. He joined the Westover Air Force Base aeroclub to receive flying lessons. His orientation flight was in a tail wheel canvas covered single-engine Aeronca Champ. At the conclusion of a detailed preflight, Ted was seated in the front seat for the engine start. The airplane had no electrical system, no starter, no radio, no lights, no intercom system. So Ted received another briefing about the brakes, magneto switch, and throttle, and what to expect to get the engine started, and how to keep it from moving.

The instructor propped the engine. It started right away. Taxi and run-up was accomplished without incident. All went well until after take-off and initial climb. Ted, the boom operator, smelled a strong odor of fuel during the climb. He shouted back to the instructor his concern. The instructor immediately turned the Aeronca to return to the runway. He pulled the throttle back to idle and before entering the downwind leg, the prop stopped. The instructor elected to make a downwind dead-stick landing that he accomplished skillfully. After landing, we pushed the airplane back to the parking space and found that the fuel leak was from a crack in the filler neck at the top of the gas tank. Fuel was gushing down the back of the firewall to Ted’s feet. Ted’s training on his tanker made him acutely aware of fuel spills and odors emitting hazardous fumes in the aircraft. No other damage was done, and Ted’s orientation flight was cancelled and rescheduled for a future date.

Why the crack in the filler neck? Over the years, the line boys would place the fuel nozzle in the neck of the fuel tank and lean on it to see how full the tank was. The neck finally developed a crack from the stress.

During Teds’ career his fuel leaks continued to occur. Did this discourage Ted from continuing his goal of being a pilot? Not at all. Ted retired 36 years later with 9,000 hours on airplanes and mostly medevac helicopters. Why so few hours? Legs for medevac patients average about 20 minutes each. So he has lots of take-offs and landings, but not so many hours.
**Surprise at Pearl Harbor**  
**DAVID VOLIN, SCOTTSVILLE, VA**

Flying the EC-135 TAC Command Post, we got to Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii at least once a month and always made a point of enjoying the Mongolian Barbecue and Mai Tais at the officer's club. One afternoon, after the long flight from North Carolina, several of us were nursing our drinks while looking out over Pearl Harbor. It was a cloudless day, and we were enjoying ourselves thoroughly when we heard an unlikely sound, something out of history: propellers, lots of them. The drone got louder and louder, and we looked at each other quizzically. Suddenly, a flight of several dozen Japanese Zeros flew right over the harbor, the base, and us. They circled several times and repeated the assault, but never broke formation or went into the dives we expected. We looked at each other, then at our drinks, and speculated that someone had spiked them with an hallucinogen or we were trapped in a time warp. For God's sake, this was 1972, not 1941! Next day's Honolulu paper finally provided an explanation. They were filming the movie *Tora! Tora! Tora!* and the airplanes were actually old T-6 trainers that looked remarkably like the Zeros. The producers had scoured the islands for past-generation pilots willing to fly the old birds and offered them $100 a day. They had plenty of takers. If you ever see the movie, some of the aerial shots show the spot where we were.

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**Long Live the Beech 18**  
**JOHN CASEY**

Flying a Beech 18 into Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport on a routine return morning freight run from Brownsville, Texas for a small-business airline, I was advised to expect 35R. It was a beautiful clear day with virtually no wind. I went through all appropriate check lists, captured ILS inbound, lowered gear and flap at the marker, when I looked to my left and was startled to see paralleling me inbound to 35C was the Concorde SST with the colors of British Airways. I could not help but marvel that I was in an airplane designed in the thirties, older than I was, still relevant, still in the game, still competing in the flying world with one designed in the seventies, the latest sophisticated technology of the time. It made my day!
Rain in the Gulf of Alaska
TOM BATES, BEAVERTON, OR

In August 1988 I went with friends and family to Alaska to fish. We took off from Cordova, and flew to the island we had planned to go to in the Gulf of Alaska. Circling it, we saw thousands of dead Chum salmon. We then flew to Montague Island. My brother, a friend and I were the first group. We landed after a longer flight than expected. After the plane left we discovered we had no food, guns, drink, maps or shelter. Kodiak bears were on this island. The weather was getting worse, and the pilot was not sure he’d make the second, let alone a third, flight. Two flights later all seven of us were on the island. It then rained for four days. The Nellie Martin River rose several feet. We were sure lucky we all made it before the storm. Of course there was no salmon fishing for quite a few days, but we ended up catching a number of fish.

The last day, in nice weather, we took off from the beach on the return to Cordova. On the flight home from Alaska, we got a great view of Mount St. Elias and Mt.Logan, tops above the clouds.

Just Not Ike’s Day
DENNIS DARRAH, PLAINFILED, NJ

I was the aircrewman on a Navy C-1A [carrier onboard delivery aircraft] in 1983. We were departing Larnaca Cyprus for home (USS Dwight D. Eisenhower—IKE) with mail and cargo. While flying along the coast at about 5,000 feet our right engine, a Wright 1820, failed. I saw a part fly forward out of the engine, then back in before the pilots shut the engine down and feathered the prop. The #1 jug had failed. Royal Air Force base Akrotiri was in sight off of our right wing. The pilots declared and emergency and we landed with the fire trucks in pursuit.

In a couple of hours, the Eisenhower sent a UH-3 helicopter to pick us up so we could get to the ship for tools and parts. We got in the helo, as we departed the beachline, the cabin filled with smoke and the #2 fire handle lit up. We were on fire. The pilots declared an emergency and we landed...with the fire trucks in pursuit (again). As we climbed out of the helo, the fire fighters said, what, you again?

The UH-3 was spotted next to our oil-covered C-1A—quite a sight, both of IKE's cargo carrying aircraft down at the same place, on the same day! (Oh yeah, the part that flew out of the engine and back in, it was a flattened-out valve head from the jug. I still have it, it's a good paperweight.)
Gear Down...or Up?

JON PAYNTER, LOPEZ ISLAND, FL

While flying over the Everglades in a Lake Buccaneer amphibian, our pilot remarked that one benefit of the aircraft was you could land anywhere—water or land if there was trouble. With that comforting thought we landed briefly at a small airport for a pit stop.

When we took off for the return home, the pilot went to retract the landing gear, and we heard a loud bang. He repeatedly cycled the gear hoping for the green gear lock light to come on for the front gear. No luck. Were the gears down or up? If they were down were they locked so they wouldn’t collapse on landing? We guessed water landings were out. The remainder of the flight home was carried out in total silence, each in their own thoughts. When we got to Homestead airport, the presence of fire trucks and men in silver fire retardant suits lining the runway were a grim reminder of what might ensue on our landing.

We circled the tower several times and it was determined it looked like all wheels were down. But were they locked since the instruments said no. Finally, it came time to land. The pilot made a slow approach and kept the front gear off the ground as long as possible. Finally, it touched down, and held. We were ok. It turned out the loud bang was the pin holding the piston that retracted the front gear. It broke due to salt water corrosion from those water landings. Without the piston, the gear couldn’t retract. Whew.

Land at your Own Risk

GENE LASSERS, LAKEWOOD, CA

1976, Northwest corner of the state of Utah, airplane Cessna 210 turbo Centurion.

Not finding the airport I said, “maybe the dirt road was the runway.” I was in my third year of flying for a cardiovascular surgeon with ranches, horse breeding facility and homes from Montana to the Mexican border. It was that or flying to Bonneville and a long drive. “No, let’s do the road,” he said. “Ok, its your plane,” I replied, and I dropped down to parallel the dog-legged dirt road. My prayer was that the evening news lead was not light plane crashes on a remote rural road.

The road was a dead end and I hoped to stop before it did, exactly where two men from the county were working on the telephone line and wondering if that crazy plane was going to land on the road.

The approach was perfect, the road was not in that it was very narrow, and when the plane touched down the left wheel slipped off the lip of the road and was brought back up with heavy rudder pressure. We stopped just short of a metal cattle guard. The road turned out to be only a foot wider than the gear. The linemen told us that the runway was covered with brush and never used.

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No wonder the Airman Guide notated Land at your own risk.
I would like to relate a single experience I had as a naval flight surgeon with service from 1969 to 1972. My first assignment was at Naval Air Station Pensacola Florida for six months of training which included actual flight training. The most important thing I learned was that I did not have the aptitude to be a pilot although I enjoyed it greatly. Naval flight surgeons are required to have four hours of flight time per month in order to maintain flight status and become familiar with actual flying. I flew in nearly every naval aircraft at that time from C-47 Gooney Birds to F-4 Phantoms. I then spent the next year as station flight surgeon in Keflavik, Iceland and my last year was on the USS Independence with Carrier Air Group 7 as one of the two flight surgeons.

Other than maintaining flight status, my duties included pilot and aircrew health. This was generally easy as these were healthy young males who wanted to be flying. Another important duty was accident investigation.

A memorable incident that I experienced was when I went on a check ride of an F-4 Phantom that had undergone routine maintenance so it could be put through some of its paces. I ended up breaking the sound barrier. On the takeoff, or “shot,” we had both engines at full power with afterburners assisted by a steam catapult which accelerated the plane from 0 to 150 mph in less than two seconds and that generated 2 Gs of backward force. When the plane leaves the bow of the ship there is a short, sickening drop while the plane acquires enough speed and lift to start to rise. The pilot asked if I would like to go faster than the speed of sound, and of course, I said yes! In order to do this, we ascended to 20,000 to 30,000 feet and then went into a fairly steep dive. That’s when we broke the sound barrier and began to ascend which resulted in 4.5 Gs of force. With the downward G force and the upward force, my G suit was inflating against my legs and abdomen, and I felt like I was in a vice with the force coming from all directions. I do not recall feeling any unusual sensations as we broke the sound barrier, but I would not have realized this unless I was told.

The last part of the flight was the landing or “trap.” This is where we approach the back of the carrier deck at around 150 mph to catch one of the four 2-inch-thick arresting wires with the tail hook of the aircraft. The engines were at full thrust because if the trap was not successful, the plane would need enough power in order to lift off. This made the stop rather abrupt and I was told to hold my hands against the front of the cockpit to help prevent myself from being thrown violently forward. Unfortunately, the view from the back seat of the Phantom was limited, but I had the opportunity to fly in an A-6, which had a side-to-side configuration with a bubble canopy and the view was much better and more exciting!
In 1955, the 92nd Bomb Wing at Fairchild Air Force Base was going to Guam on TDY [temporary duty]. We flew on a C-124 Globemaster, loaded with several B-36 flyaway kits and three complete B-36 engines ready to hang. There were 50 guys on board, part of 92nd FM.

We refueled at Hickam Air Force Base, Oahu and took off, headed for Wake Island. About 1,500 miles out, the number three engine blew a jug. The aircraft commander shut down the engine and feathered the prop.

We flew on with three engines. We were pretty heavy, but we made Wake okay and landed at dusk. Wake was not an Air Force facility; it was a refueling and crew-rest base for Pan Am. There was an Air Force captain named Carter stationed there to arrange refueling. We couldn’t find him.

We did find a wild-eyed, semi-naked, sunburned half-crazed guy who got us crew-chief stands and billeting. We suspected he was Carter, but he wouldn’t admit it.

Since the C-124 had R-4360 engines, the same as the B-36 engines we had on board, we decided to cannibalize a jug and piston from one of them and put it on the C-124.

The engineer set about doing that with our help. It was blazing hot, and the work went slowly. Even slower when we noticed all the stewardesses swimming in the pool and the lagoon.

The food was good, Pan Am Super Connie passengers’ food. The bunks were great and the lagoon had snorkeling. We were in no hurry to leave, but after a week, the airplane was repaired.

There was a problem. It was so hot even at 2 a.m., and with our load and low barometric pressure, the slip stick computed we didn’t have enough runway. We did a run-up and power check, and we just didn’t have the power.

Since Wake was not an Air Force base, we could not off-load anything. We men volunteered to stay behind, but the aircraft commander said no.

On the third try at 1 a.m., with a slight breeze, we backed up on the overrun apron till the tail was over the water.

The aircraft commander and navigator had walked the runway and put down "go-no go" flags. We fired up, and gave it all the manifold pressure we could, and started our roll. I could tell by the sound that we didn’t have the power or speed. The flag passed by and the commander aborted.

We turned around, taxied back, backed down over the water, and he gave it another run.

The engines sounded a little stronger and we accelerating when the flag went by.

We pulled off of Wake like an aircraft carrier launch clawing for altitude. The aborted run had burned up a lot fuel, and the air had gotten cooler. We flew at our wingspan altitude for about 40 minutes until we got lighter and the air got even cooler.

About 10 hours, later the canabalized jug and piston decided it didn’t like being on an old C-124 and departed. So we shut down and feathered and flew on to Guam. That was the second time a C-124 tried to kill me.
Needle in the Clouds
BARNIE SLICE, PAWLEYS ISLAND, SC

When flying to Alaska in 2007 I was excited to know we would stop over in Seattle for a plane switch. I have always loved the Space Needle in Seattle and had always wanted to see it in person. As we approached Seattle I was disappointed to see the clouds had it socked in solid and my chance to see the Needle was none. Mount Rainier protruded from the clouds but that was all we could see. Clouds covered everything else on the ground. I had a window seat near the rear of the plane and was looking down as the pilot rotated the plane to make final approach to Seattle’s airport. Suddenly, there was a hole in the clouds below about a quarter of a mile across. There, protruding up through the center of the hole, was the Space Needle! My dream was fulfilled if only for a brief glance!

Aerial of Red Rocks
GARY RITTLE, AURORA, CO

We were flying back to Denver from the Big Island, Hawaii in mid-March of 2020. After a layover in LA, we had an early morning flight to Denver and saw Red Rocks amphitheater in the morning light during our approach to Denver International Airport. A nice surprise after a long journey!
Bird Strike!
JAY ROMITI, SANTA CLARA, CA

“Courage is not the absence of fear, it is moving forward despite it.”

I was downwind, about to turn base after a nice decompressing flight in a rented Citabria. When a Hawk with about a three-foot wingspan came soaring up to my level from below and slightly to my left. He was so close I could see the glint in his eye and the details of his face.

Alarms went off in my head. BIRD STRIKE! BIRD STRIKE!! I was certain that if he made it past the prop he would be coming through the windshield so I began to cover my face with my arm and brace for the impact. The expression on that bird’s face seemed to ask, “What are you doing in MY SPACE?” And then with a deft flick of his wing tips he rose straight up about 20 feet, and I passed directly under him.

That day I learned that although we humans build wonderful flying machines, it’s good to remember who the real flyers are.

Between the Clouds
JESSE STONER, PALM COAST, FL

Now retired, I have flown many times on business trips. One flight that always stands out in my memory is when I was sitting in a window seat on the left side of the north-bound plane and we were descending to land. We passed through a high level of clouds, and there was another level of clouds below us. As we broke through, the sun was setting in the west. The red/black color of the two cloud layers, one above and one below, was eerie. I have always wished I had a camera to snap that view. It was really spooky!
As an instructor in the back seat of a T-33 jet trainer, with a weak but rated pilot in the front seat, I was overseeing arrival at our home base for a night landing. The front-seat pilot made a pitchout to the downwind leg, rolled out, and dropped the gear and flaps. Then we were told to extend the downwind leg to land behind a B-47 bomber currently on final. The pilot failed to add power for the extended pattern until I finally directed him to do so. By then, we needed 100 percent. He dragged it in on final very low and barely above a stall...but we were going to make it all right. Suddenly, as we crossed the overrun, we hit jet wash from the B-47 and our T-Bird flipped into a 90-degree bank to the left and turned about 45 degrees left, AND THE PILOT PULLED THE THROTTLE TO IDLE.

I yelled, “I’ve got it,” slammed the throttle back to 100 percent, stood on the right rudder pedal and threw the stick full right. I got the wings level and managed to keep the T-Bird from touching down, but we were off the runway and heading directly at a six-story brick building with the control tower on top. We were too low to drop a wing and barely above stall speed. I gently pumped the right brake pedal and swung the nose away from the tower and past a ramp of parked National Guard F-86s. The controls were so mushy I was holding the stick with my fingertips so as not to over control and stall.

Finally we were heading north over a north-south taxiway. I could have landed on it, but believed that would result in an investigation—which I preferred to avoid. The improved ground effect over the paved surface allowed us to gain enough speed to safely raise the landing gear and climb up to traffic altitude and the downwind leg. I made a routine landing and parked the airplane.

Afterward, while filling out the Form 1, I asked the front seat pilot why he pulled the throttle to idle. He responded, “I knew we were gong to crash and I didn’t want to crash with full throttle.” I told him, “Lieutenant, you haven’t crashed until the airplane is rolled into a little ball and burning. Until then, you fly it with every ounce of skill, energy, and determination you can muster.” The next day, he turned in his wings.

Thirty minutes later, when I turned in my flight plan at Base Operations, the dispatcher remarked that I was still as white as a ghost. This roughly 60 seconds was the longest “moment of stark panic” I experienced during my 20 year career.
Back in the 60s, I was learning to fly at Springfield, Ohio airport (SGH). I went through the usual paces to get my license: pre-flight planning, weather reports, pre-flight inspection, etc. And then there was the pattern-work—touch-and-go’s, over and over.

But I was not the only one at SGH doing pattern work, and touch-and-go’s. I had to share the single runway and pattern with others a tiny bit bigger than me and my little ole’ Cessna 150—like BUFFS! SGH is just a few miles as the crow flies from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, where B-52s and KC-135s were stationed...and flew often. I was told by my flight instructor at the time that SGH was blessed with a longer runway (believe it or not) than Wright Pat, and so it was ideal for those two slightly-bigger-than-my-trainer jets to practice the same things I was practicing...at the same time! They would often show up (mostly the B-52s) and ‘share’ the runway. By “share,” I mean pretty much take over, understandably. I asked my instructor if I should defer to them completely, and shut down to try for another day. No, he said, “It would be good practice for you.” So, I stayed up in the air whenever those monster bombers showed up.

It’s a stretch to imagine that we were 50-50. Yes, we were on the same side, and I know their rear guns were removed, so I was safe from getting attacked. Still, psychologically, it was a bit intimidating. We were a bit close at times; I gave the ’52s wide space, but they didn’t reciprocate—it seemed. They would often sneak up on me on final, or beside me in the pattern. It might have been fun and funny to them, but not so much for little ole me. The tower would often order me to keep my speed up on final, because “someone” was coming up quick from behind (same with my touch-and-go’s: “Hurry!”) My max speed wasn’t probably anywhere near the ’52s minimums. But I often kept my max speed over the fence, then dropped those barn flaps Cessna singles are known for, and do the quickest touch-and-go’s in Ripley’s history. All so I wouldn’t be eaten up by those eight turbojets pointed and screaming at me!

Ah, the memories I’ll never forget of interacting with BUFFS repeatedly—in the air, within a small area! Just me and them. What a team!
In January 1965, I was catapulted into the night air off the USS Hancock in a U.S. Navy F-8 Crusader on a Barrier Air Combat Patrol mission. About a half hour into the mission, I noticed I was not transferring fuel from my wing tanks into my fuselage tank, which in turn pumps fuel into the jet engine. I called the carrier to request an earlier landing time but was given a vector to Da Nang Air Force base instead.

When I got to where I thought the Da Nang runway should be, I looked around but couldn’t see it. About that time, I heard a voice on the radio saying, “Aircraft orbiting over Da Nang, turn off your running lights. They are shooting at you.” I called Da Nang tower and told them I wanted to land. They had me line up on a heading for the duty runway with wheels and flaps down and said they would turn on the runway lights for me. I did as I was told, and as I approached the base, the runway lights came on, and I landed. On rollout the lights went off, and I saw a Jeep at the end of the runway with a “Follow Me” sign. (The base was somewhat controlled by the U.S. Air Force during the day, but at night the area belonged to the Viet Cong, who sometimes targeted the base with rockets.) He taxied me to the Navy Detachment area on the base.

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I left the club and went over to the barracks to spend the night. I was told to find an empty bunk and crawl in. So that is what I did. I saw mosquito nets around each bunk, but paid no attention. BIG mistake. Woke up next morning with over 200 mosquito bites on face and hands.

I grabbed a breakfast at the mess hall, went down to the flight line, and checked on my aircraft. A closed fuel line valve was now open. I flew a test flight—and made a tour of South Vietnam. I landed back at Da Nang, spent the night and flew back to the ship next day. I lucked out. The doctors aboard the Hancock found no malaria.

First Night in ’Nam
GEORGE B. GREGORY, ANAHEIM, CA

Turns out, DOOM stands for Da Nang Officers Open Mess.

An Army Special Forces captain came in and sat down beside me. I was glad to have someone to talk to, and we struck up a conversation. He asked me about flying missions in North Vietnam. I told him about a few I had flown. I asked him what he did. He told me how seven to 10 Special Forces would be heloed in to the jungle and spy on the enemy, and report to headquarters about enemy actions. I told him that what he was doing would scare me outright. He said he would rather live in the jungle for a week than to fly a mission up North.

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Soul on Board
VAREL FREEMAN, OCALA, FL

As a young college student in the late 1960s, I would take almost any flying job. One of the more unusual came from a local mortuary, transporting the deceased in their workhorse Piper Cherokee Six.

Trips were generally tranquil. I could enjoy the scenery as well as the thrill of being a pilot with a small paycheck.

One trip, though, was different. Clear weather turned cloudy; I obtained a clearance on an instrument flight plan to cover the last leg of the trip. The ride was smooth as the airplane climbed into the clouds, enveloped in the white fluff of moisture.

Presently, there was a burp from the Lycoming up front, followed by a few more before the engine quit. Pilots train for this—fly the airplane, head for the best possible landing spot, attempt to restart, and advise ATC of the emergency and your intentions.

Air traffic controllers are a helpful lot, but they often ask questions. “How many souls on board?” The answer was clearly “At least one.” Being a pilot, not a philosopher or theologian, I gave a more complete answer while descending out of the clouds. Time for another attempt to restart the motor...it is my lucky day. It starts, although running poorly, but ensures that I reach the airport safely. I thank the controllers and taxi to the maintenance shop.

A defective ignition harness shorted from moisture inside the clouds. A brief repair, and I completed the flight with a passenger who didn’t complain about the ride and detour.

Post-flight research: “Souls on Board” refers to living persons, except in the U.K., where the deceased are evidently counted as well. My minister also confirmed the correct answer was “one.”

Climb Out of Danger
STAN STALLBAUMER, WICHITA, KS

My brother and I were on a weekend return flight from Branson, Missouri to Wichita, Kansas. The early morning sky did not tip its hand as to what lay ahead.

As the Cessna-182 crossed into southeast Kansas, thin gray clouds started to pop up. I studied the map with the eyes of a VFR-only pilot. Independence airport was coming up, and it seemed like a good idea to land before the ground disappeared. My brother protested. He did not want to risk missing work the next day.

I studied the horizon and thought maybe we could drop a bit lower and stay in the air. Within minutes, the horizon disappeared. There was a tall radio tower somewhere ahead. I tried to radio Kansas City Center for some help. But we were too low. It was time for plan B.

During a steep turn, spatial disorientation quickly took hold. I do not know why, but I felt a sense of calm and resignation. I let go of the yoke and waited for the sound of smashing metal. But to my amazement, the plane was almost straight and level. If we are not going down, then we will go up. I pushed the throttle to the wall and put the plane in a slow climb. At 7,700 feet, we saw the welcomed rays of a bright sun.

Eventually, Kansas City Center and Wichita Approach got us home. Did I kiss the ground? Absolutely!
Cold Flights during the Cold War

LEROY CLEMONS, WA


On typical missions, we’d take off from Ladd and fly to Nome, Alaska, refuel then fly out to the St. Lawrence Island site, or go north to Tin City, located over the Bering Straight. The site looked down on the Diomede Islands and Russia.

B-29 weather plane departures from Ladd on cold mornings could close the field in ice fog. We planned our departures around the B-29 departures. There was heavy smoke in the cockpit when the heater air scoop was not installed and deicer fluid got into the heaters. We’d vent the heaters then continue mission.

On some missions, we’d fly to Galena Air Force Base located on the banks of Yukon river. This field was used during World War II when airplanes were being sent to Russia as part of the Lend-Lease program. Two F-89s were on alert here. After refueling, we’d fly north to Cape Lisburne, located on the extreme northwest corner of Alaska.

On one flight, the Flight Engineer discovers that the No.1 engine had no oil. After coordination with Ladd maintenance, we got the OK to use oil used in the steam plant. We got a warm barrel and used a fork lift to lift the barrel up on the wing and then pore the oil into engine oil tank. Regulations required that we only fly when the temperatures were above -45 degrees. Galena was having a steam valve problem and the temperature was -65 degrees—a hazardous situation for personnel and the alert mission..

After dropping off the steam valve, we discovered during the run-up that the propeller controls were frozen. We ran the engines up to warm them then reversed the propellers to pull the heat forward over the propeller controls. This worked and the controls were freed.

I flew numerous missions to the Arctic icccap. The Arctic icccap rotates in a clockwise direction. A remote ice station established near Greenland then drifts west until it becomes supplied from Alaska. We would fly to Point Barrow, refuel then fly out to the ice station(s). On one mission, my wife had put a can of ready-to-eat soup in my flight lunch. After take off, I put the can in front of the cockpit heater vent. When it was time for lunch, using the traditional GI can opener, I punched a hole in the can.

Wow! Out came soup under pressure. I will let the readers visualize what an aircraft cockpit looks like after it has been spray painted with tomato soap.
Tragedy Over the Radio

ALAN DOMINY, THE WOODLANDS, TX

One November 2002 flight stands out not so much for the flight itself but the surreal exchange between an air traffic controller and another aircraft. After departing Brenham, Texas (11R) airport after lunch, I steered my Piper Archer toward Houston’s Hobby Airport. Nearing the limit of the Class B airspace for IAH/HOU I dialed up Houston TRACON for clearance. [Terminal Radar Approach Control] Radar contact established, I listened for the occasional traffic callout or heading/altitude instruction. Near Hempstead, I heard an excited voice call the approach controller to inform him “my passenger just jumped out of the airplane.” I remarked to my right-seater Charlie, “Don’t they usually say jumpers away?” The controller then asked the pilot if he had a parachute to which the young pilot replied, “No sir.”

By this time I think the controller was as stunned as Charlie and I. He offered to vector the pilot back along his course (presumably to look for the guy?), but the excited pilot stated he just wanted to return to the airport.

The whole episode was surreal as tragedy unfolded—in real time—right before our ears. Later news accounts reported the “jumper” was an engineer who worked for a NASA contractor who was being investigated by law enforcement for having a restricted government computer at his home. He arranged for a flight lesson and convinced the young instructor to take him to 9,500 feet. When that altitude was reached, he opened the door of the Cessna 152 and exited. It took several days to find his body which made a depression in a remote, soft pasture near Waller, Texas.

It was a sad event for both student and instructor and one that the instructor, nor I, will soon forget.
Grandest Canyon

MICHAEL BUSH

On a flight from San Diego to Chicago, the upper air turbulence was fierce enough for the pilot to fly at a much lower altitude. It was a truly clear mid-morning flight that took us over the Grand Canyon at about 11,000 feet. I had a window seat and could see almost the entirety of the Canyon roll by me. It was magical.
The DC-3 and Me

ZYGMUNT PRZEDPELSKI, CLEMSON, SC

I had a few memorable encounters with the DC-3/C-47. While attending the Air Force survival school on Okinawa our class witnessed a simulated rescue of a downed aircrew. The C-47 landed in a small clearing, which would have been challenging for my tiny L-19 [Bird Dog]. It picked up the “downed” crew and was airborne with JATO in less than one minute.

Years later, I was a passenger on a DC-3 flight from L.A. International Airport to Palmdale. The flight was billed as the last scheduled DC-3 flight by a U.S. major airline. As a result of weather delays, the short hop turned into a 90-minute flight. The captain opened the bar, but the stewardess was too young to serve alcohol, so we helped ourselves.

Two years later, when at NASA Ames at Moffett Field in California, I was offered a ride to Edwards Air Force Base on the NASA DC-3. When I saw the wrinkles on the wing skins, I was ready to back out. My host explained that the aircraft was subjected to high G maneuvers during early weightlessness testing, but was thoroughly inspected and deemed airworthy. Assured, I got on board. In command of this flight was NASA chief test pilot Fred Drinkwater. The flight was so smooth that I was not aware of when the wheels left or returned to the ground.

I would like one more DC-3 flight. This time on “That’s All Brother”, the Commemorative Air Force C-47, which led the June 6, 1944 invasion of Normandy. It was saved from the boneyard, restored, and flew again across the channel during the 75th anniversary of D-Day.

Trailing Smoke

WILLIAM E. MCKINNEY, WESTON, CT

Climbing out of 600 on a crystal clear morning departing from Santa Fe, the tower announces, “92 Whiskey, be advised you’re trailing smoke.” Looking around, I couldn’t see or feel anything alarming. “What are your intentions?”

“Well … er, um … I guess I’ll land.”

“Cleared to land. Any runway. … Shall I have the crash vehicles standing by, sir?”

“Don’t think that’s necessary just yet.” After landing, I taxied over to the FBO. Then after three hours going over the engine thoroughly, they were puzzled but pronounced it airworthy.

On departure from the 5,500-foot (mean sea level) altitude Santa Fe runway, some leaning of my 235-horsepower carburated Lycoming engine was called for, and again I paid special attention.

Our second takeoff was without incident and we flew for three and a half hours over the Green River basin, canyonlands, Lake Powell and of course the Grand Canyon.

After a great flight, we headed south for Flagstaff and Pulliam Airport. The landing here got really interesting. As I reduced manifold pressure the engine died—on one mile final with a number of 90-foot white pines between my frozen prop and the threshold.

By some miracle I was able to get the fan going by playing with the prop speed, mixture, and manifold pressure to get us enough power for a smooth landing.

Here I learned that the carburetor float valve had absorbed some water and its malfunction was causing the engine to flood, sending many unburned particles out the exhaust.

Eddie Rickenbacker acquired DC-3s for the Eastern Airlines Great Silver Fleet. One of them is exhibited at the New England Air Museum in Windsor Locks, Connecticut in 2019. (PETER MILLER)
I worked as an FAA air traffic control specialist at the Wichita flight service station in the early 1970s. We were encouraged to go on familiarization flights with local pilots when offered an opportunity. One night during a midnight to 8 a.m. shift, a Wichita-based charter pilot called for a weather briefing and filed a flight plan to Denver with a continuation flight plan to Portland, Oregon in a Learjet 24. He explained that he was to pick up cargo in the form of 200 Ford Pinto wiring harnesses which were needed to start the Pinto assembly line in Portland at 8 a.m. The cargo had been on a Continental 727 that was grounded at Stapleton with a maintenance problem and wasn’t going to make it to Portland in time. He then surprised me by saying, “You should go with us.” I asked my shift supervisor and he said, “Go.”

The flight to Denver was uneventful, and we got the cargo loaded by cutting open the two large boxes (which were too big for the air stair door opening) and tossing the harnesses into the cabin, which took up most of the seats and floor of the passenger compartment.

The flight on to Portland was also routine, and we arrived at 7 a.m. and were met by a van from the factory. After refueling and grabbing breakfast, we headed back to Wichita at flight level 410, and I got to ride in the right seat and press the transponder button when ATC asked for “Ident.”

At one point we met a 747 westbound on the airway at flight level 390. ATC repeatedly verified our altitude and, with a closing rate of about 900 knots, the big bird zipped by under us and still looked huge 2,000 feet below.

The trip may have stretched the definition of familiarization flight, but it was one I’ll never forget.
Flying with Grandpa
TODD A. VOGE, FARIBAULT, MN

One of my fondest memories of my grandfather was flying with him in his Ercoupe when I was just three or four years old. Grandpa had been a pilot for many years, having trained to be a pilot in the Army Air Corps during World War II. Before he got the Ercoupe, he had owned a J-3. He got rid of that before I was born, so I did not get to fly in that one.

It was a lot of fun for us to head to our local airport and watch and ride. I’d come out and say to Grandpa, in front of all the other pilots, “Hey Grandpa. How about a ride around the patch?” The look of awe from the other pilots to see this little kid come out there and speak the lingo! Grandpa would put boat seat cushions piled up in the right seat for me so I could see out the window. It was awesome!

That started my interest in flying that has continued to this day (I am now 54). While I never became a pilot, I enjoy every time I get to go up in a general aviation plane or even a commercial airliner. And my grandpa set me on that course!

Boxing the Wake
JOHN RUGGIERO, BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MI

I had just graduated from college, and I always wanted to fly sailplanes. So I was taking lessons at a classic little grass strip. My instructor was a gruff, true stick-and-rudder man. He could have been a twin for Ernest Borgnine.

Many a flight, I would receive a smack on my back when he wanted to get my attention. We were half way into a few lessons and I was doing well. I knew my solo was approaching. That day he said we would be “boxing the wake,” a requirement for the flight test. Boxing the wake is flying a square pattern behind the tow plane. When he said this I looked at the sky. The cumulus clouds were growing. That meant strong thermals and heavy turbulence. So I needed my A game.

We strapped into the sailplane. The usual procedure, since it was a high wing trainer, was to have a wing walker. When you are ready to go, you would raise your thumb, and he would lift the wing and rotate his arm. This would signal the tow plane.

Bill said, “Let’s see what you got today,” and up went my thumb. As expected, it was a bumpy ride and it was tough going. After about 5 minutes, Bill called out “box the wake.” I was concentrating hard to do my task well. When I was finished, I called out, “How was that?” Bill gave me a big whack on the back. “That was really good except for one thing.” Puzzled, I ask him what could I have done different. He said, “Next time do it without your thumb in the air.” I never heard heard him laugh so loud.
Make It to Deadman’s Key
MIKE ZOROVICH, SHREWSBURY, MD

After several years of commuter airline flying, and with local government help, my family started a lobster-fishing operation in the southern Bahama Islands.

As a licensed commercial pilot, my primary job was flying the company-owned Twin Beech 18E configured for cargo. One way out of Miami was typically three and a half hours. Trips consisted of flying in supplies and flying out frozen lobster (and later fish).

On one necessary Saturday trip, I had my brother along to bring in a load of equipment. We were to drop it at one of the airfields where we had a freezer unit and return home. On a perfectly clear, calm day at 10,000 feet and two hours out over the Atlantic Ocean, the left engine failed (determined to be a broken oil pump). I knew the island chain well, so I knew where we would make our emergency landing. My passenger brother was not a fan of flying and excitedly asked where we were going to land. Expecting Miami or Nassau he was immediately deflated when I said, “Deadman’s Key!” It was a good safe airstrip somewhat remote on Long Island. I learned of his high anxiety when we landed as he jumped over my lap, out the wing door, and bounded down to kiss the ground! A reminder that it is all in the name.

In another week I returned (alone) with mechanics, swapped engines, completed the flight and delivery.

Through a Gap in the Mountains
DENNIS COTTER, GROSSE POINTE PARK, MI

As a Peace Corps volunteer in Honduras in the late 1960s, I had to avail myself of whatever mode of transportation might be available. Bicycle, mule-back, bus, jitney, passenger car, jeep, truck, train, and shank’s mare were all fair game. I was thrilled for the opportunity to ride in a DC-3 on occasion. One memorable trip required us to approach our landing field traversing a gap between two mountains, where the wind rushing through created a great deal of turbulence at uncomfortably low altitude. That DC-3 seemed like a bucking bronco trying to get rid of us. Although the turbulence decreased significantly once we passed the mountains and descended toward the airfield, the pilot did not actually touch down but applied power and turned around to go through the whole hair-raising approach again before finally landing. I was informed afterwards that the reason for the first pass over the airfield was to chase the cows off the grass runway.
I made aviation history flying the world’s first helicopter aerial dogfight over Vietnam.

I landed our UH-1 Huey at the logistics loading area of an Army airfield. As we rocked onto the sandbags, a grunt leaped onto the skid and yelled through the door window. “How many ya wanna take, sir?” He pointed to a hapless cluster of five other grunts each with a German Shepherd dog on a tight chain leash.

You can see it coming can’t you?

It had been a scalding, dusty day of continuous supply flights, not exactly “slipping the surly bonds of earth and reaching out to touch the face of God.” That’s my excuse, anyway.

With my finely tuned 21-yo combat aviator’s mind I estimated the weight of men, dogs, and fuel. “All of ‘em!” I shouted. Thus were five soldiers and five BIG dogs nervously packed into the seatless, doorless confines of a Huey cargo bay.

We’d made it a few curled-lip, growling miles to 3,000 feet when the crew chief asked permission to test the door machine guns. A truly epic aviation milestone was nigh.

As his wing man watched, he jettisoned the left blue room canopy. Using hand holds built into the side of the fuselage he crawled up the side of the aircraft and turned the knob to roll the front cockpit back. He accessed the cockpit, strapped back in, called his wing man and told him if he told anyone he would kill him.

When I got the aircraft parked, I went up on the wing to help the pilot and debrief him. I asked what happened to the left blue room canopy, and he said it blew off on a strafing run. Later when he rotated back to the states, his wing man told what really happened that day.

Top THAT, fighter jocks!
Eerie Northern Lights

GEORGE M. ANDRÉ, CREVE COEUR, MO

It was the dead of winter, 1956, and I was a 21-year-old, second lieutenant newbie in my first operational fighter squadron.

I was tasked to fly a target flight, solo in a T-33, taking off about midnight, for an air defense exercise. My mission was to depart from Moses Lake, Washington and fly north up over the Canadian Rockies about 350 miles, turn around and act as an incoming bomber attacking the U.S. mainland.

Two things made that flight memorable that I am still recalling after six decades.

At 40,000 feet, I experienced my first clear air turbulence. Why was the plane jumping around; is it about to fall apart? The icy winter terrain below me was extremely hostile should I go down or eject, and survival would be quite questionable.

The second issue that night was that I saw the northern lights for the first time. I hoped it was that and not World War III had just started, and I was seeing flashes from nuclear explosions.

Alone as I was, in the dark, vivid imaginations can play some dirty tricks on one’s mind. I don’t mind saying I was scared, but my bird delivered me safe and sound back to base and I was never happier to be on the ground.

Epiphany

DOUGLASS G. WOOD, PALM COAST, FL

I was flying a C-141 Starlifter from Vietnam to Okinawa. My cargo was 10 pallets, each pallet containing 12 metal coffins. We had departed Vietnam at night, and halfway to Okinawa, I left the cockpit to go down into the cargo compartment to the latrine. When I opened the door to the cargo compartment, it was very quiet and the loadmaster had lowered the lights. I stood on the ladder and looked back at all those young men who were on their final flight home, and a wave of emotion overwhelmed me to the point that I could not move. I stood for many minutes as I seemed to become a part of that group. I started to cry; and for the first time; war and its horrible results hit me like an electric shock. I shall never forget that night over the Pacific Ocean when I became one with 120 brave young souls.
Saved by a Watch
JOHN W. MACDONALD, MISSOULA, MT

I was about to get washed out of Air Force pilot training. Most of my class had soloed already, but according to my instructor, who seemed to enjoy emphasizing my mistakes and disparaging me, I probably never would be ready to solo the T-6, a 450-horsepower, World War II advanced trainer. He put me up for a check ride with the Flight Commander, Major McDonald.

Very nervously I performed the preflight and taxied out for takeoff. After lifting off the runway, I reached down to retract the landing gear and my watchband snagged on something. Sweat-soaked and rotted from the Texas heat and humidity, it broke, dropping my $60 Gruen watch in the belly of the plane. (Cadet pay was $50 per month in 1949.) For the rest of the flight, my concentration was on my watch and not on the Major in the back seat.

Amazingly, I flew an exceptional ride—all maneuvers were done perfectly, ending with a smooth three-point landing. After we climbed out of the plane, Major McDonald asked me, "You don't always fly like that, do you?" "No, sir," "I was worried about my watch, which had fallen in the bottom of the plane." "I thought there was something different!" was his response.

He arranged for me to have a different instructor, and I soloed soon after.

I retired after 20 years with the rank of major, a command pilot with 6,000 hours in C-47s, B-47s and C-130s, thanks to a Gruen watch!

Fire and Ice on a C-47
TERRY K KAISER, RAPID CITY, SD

It was early 1971 and we were flying out of Phu Cat Air Base. Our mission took us in the mountains near the Vietnamese/Lao border. We were trying to pinpoint enemy high-frequency ground transmitters.

At 9,000 feet, it was quite cold in the cockpit; so we disconnected the defroster hoses and ran them up our sleeves into our flight suits. All of a sudden, the plane was filled with toxic smoke, and the smoke evacuation procedures were almost worthless. I had about 900 hours in the old Gooney Bird, and my copilot had less than 100. Nevertheless, I left him in command and went to find what ended up being burning insulation from an electrical fire (the defroster circuit?). I eventually got it under control, but we had to take turns flying and vomiting. I let him fly the last leg to the turn on base, then I took over and made something close to a jet approach and planted the old girl on the runway as quickly as I could. We all walked away, so a good ending to a scary flight.
**A Jumper’s Final Exam**  
**ROBERT MOYER, SAN ANTONIO, TX**

In the 1970s, the Navy’s Parachute Rigger school utilized a modified version of the Douglas DC-3 (Navy designation C-117D), for the program’s final exam—the requirement was to rig a parachute, ascend to 3,500 feet, egress, free-fall, properly deploy the canopy, and descend safely onto the landing zone.

Mechanical problems delayed our flight. We trained for the real thing using ground-based equipment. The day finally arrived. We checked our rigs constantly and filed onto the old airplane ready to jump in seven-man sticks.

A military airplane’s aroma is unmistakable: a mildly pungent combination of hydraulic fluid, fuel, canvas, hot rubber, perspiration, and faint traces of vomit. Although a mild spring morning, the air on board was very warm and stuffy. With the discomfort of severely cinched parachute harnesses and nervous apprehension, we were anxious to get airborne. The rattling plane rose slowly off the runway.

We stood up facing the open door, but without static lines that airborne troops would use. This was a free fall—students were required to manually pull the ripcord. Standing at the open door, I saw the previous jumper rapidly diminish below. The jumpmaster hollered, “Go!” Hitting the wind blast, I pulled the ripcord frantically, foregoing the prescribed “frog-modified” posture. With a quick glance at the receding airplane, I fell head first as the parachute streamed out between my legs. Suddenly jerked upright, I dangled beneath the fully opened canopy. Floating in serene silence, I soon landed on the LZ’s grassy surface.

I had passed the course!

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**Thunderbird Code: Eject and Carry On**  
**ROBERT EARL HANEY, ALBUQUERQUE, NM**

Early on May 2, 1967, we began our take-off roll at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada enroute to Europe for a 30-day airshow tour. We were flying F-100 supersonic fighters. Our first fighter refueling was over Kansas at 26,000 feet. We were in an eight-ship formation. There were two KC-135 tankers, one for each four-ship formation. As we completed the refueling, we began the rejoin into the eight-ship formation. As the second flight of four aircraft approached, while in a turn, my aircraft collided with the aircraft on my left wing. My aircraft caught fire and I ejected as it exploded. My parachute opened with a shock. I almost lost my good Rolex Thunderbird watch in the process. During the descent, I encountered a TWA Boeing 707 apparently descending into Kansas City. As I passed behind the airline, the wake of the large jet caused my parachute to oscillate. I cut four parachute lines, a procedure to decrease the oscillation. I landed in a 35-knot wind in a farm field. Both the other pilot and I involved in the collision were helicoptered to McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas.

My compatriot suffered major injuries. We proceeded on to Europe the next day. I boarded a camouflaged F-100 for the remainder of the Europe tour. It was quite a contrast with the red, white, and blue fighters. We completed the tour by the end of May and left Paris, France on June 2, 1967 for a near 14-hour (seven refuelings) nonstop flight to the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs for a demonstration honoring the 1967 Graduation.
Pioneer Polar Traveler
BARRY THOMAS

On March 23, 1958, I was a 16-year-old immigrant flying from London to Los Angeles on a DC-7C Pan American airplane. Half way, I was invited up into the cockpit where I stayed for quite some time, and the navigator showed me his sextant and took bearings through a roof window. Northern lights were bright when we landed at Frobisher for fuel. There I saw my first “eskimo” on the wing—dressed in a parka with fur-lined hood fueling the plane. Shortly after landing, I received the certificate from Pan Am declaring me a Pioneer Polar Traveler. This was the start of a love of flying and the ultimate purchase of a Maule (N9854M) allowing me to fly myself throughout the West. I wonder where it is today?

UH-34 Dog Reunion
WAYNE STAFFORD, MONROE, WA

Jim Moriarty flew his restored UH-34D Sikorsky helicopter from Houston to Marine Corps Air Station Miramar for the Popasmoke Reunion and the Miramar Air Show. It was a gathering of Marines who returned from Vietnam over three decades ago. Sunday afternoon, one of the guys informed me the plane was going for a joy ride and I was part of it. The helicopter was towed to the end of the ramp and fired up. The roar of that Wright R-1820, and the smell of oil and hydraulic fluid brought back memories of flying as a gunner over northern I Corps. We taxied to the runway in front of the now-empty grandstand, lifted off, and saw many young Marines standing at attention saluting as we flew by. They had learned their history well. We cruised around the hills behind Miramar for about 30 minutes reliving the days when we hauled Marines into the field, supplied them with the tools of their trade and retrieved them when finished, wounded, or KIA.

The old Sikorsky was taxied to the ramp and shut down. We all exited the plane with big smiles and a euphoria beyond belief. The four days at the airshow had been a long awaited gathering of old Marines renewing bonds and receiving a “Welcome Home” long denied. The warm greeting and fine treatment we were offered by the Miramar Marines showed we were all still members of a special family. It was a high that took almost a week to wear off.

The Sikorsky H-34 began life in 1954 as the U.S. Navy sub hunter Seabat, while its Choctaw variant later flew for every U.S. armed service and as commercial model S-58. (EVERGREEN AVIATION MUSEUM)
We All Fly Reader’s Stories

Eclipse Viewing
MICHAEL KOSTA

A solar eclipse one can easily see in the United States is a rare event. We wanted to see it from the best viewing area (full eclipse with the longest time) but did not want to deal with the crowds that would be in the best viewing areas. What would be the best way? Fly to a remote area and view it from the middle of nowhere! With no one else around!

We contacted a farmer in eastern Nebraska and he granted us the use of a rye field that had not taken that year to use as a landing area.

Three of us and our passengers flew our Piper Cubs up the day before the eclipse and landed in that remote field to camp for the night. We gave the farmer, his family and friends airplane rides that afternoon. That evening he invited us to his ranch for a BBQ dinner! People came from miles around! We gathered in his tractor barn, ate, found some guitars and played music until late evening. A unforgettable time was had by all!

The morning of the eclipse was foggy which made for some amazing pictures! That dissipated as the morning progressed. We watched the eclipse from its early stages to complete which was stunning and lasted about eight minutes! A flying trip none of us will ever forget!

Then we packed up our camping gear, departed our “airport” for home and watched as the bumper-to-bumper traffic slowly snaked its way on the highways below us!

Wingtip Vortex
MARLENE CHUBB, LANSING, MI

My husband and I were flying to Alaska for a cruise and I took this picture from the window of a Boeing 737 and if you can see the wingtip vortex, you can see a wing at work. I was not able to see the vortex until I developed the picture. (Look closely for the faint gray circle with its left arc just aft of the winglet.)
As a new flight instructor, I wanted to fly day and night, regardless of the weather. I was working late one rainy night when suddenly a man appeared outside my office window. We stared at each other. Suddenly he dashed for the door. I rushed to get to it before he did. I lost. The stocky man was distraught and crying. He told me his mother in Pennsylvania was dying and he needed to go see her right away. Someone had driven him to the airport and given him money for the flight. The airport in Wilkes Barre was about 175 miles away. I told him it would cost $325. He gave me $500 and told me to keep the rest. I wanted to find a co-pilot but it was late so I decided to go on my own. Big mistake.

I knew flying at night in a single-engine airplane was risky, but the only plane I could find with full tanks was my Cherokee 180. I strapped my husky passenger into the rear seat (a decision which may have saved my life). We took off, climbed to about 5,500 feet and soon we were in the eerie darkness of the Pennsylvania hills, no horizon, no checkpoints. I was flying by instrument and radio navigation alone. About an hour into the flight, my passenger began crying. I tried to calm him down, but he began shouting, “I want to die!” trying frantically to unfasten his seatbelt. It seemed he was trying to reach for the co-pilot’s controls. I was flying with one hand and wrestling him with the other. He kept struggling and screaming, “I want to die!” I prayed, “God, please let his seatbelt hold.” Soon I saw the lights of Wilkes Barre ahead. Tired from wrestling my hysterical passenger, I started a power-on descent and I hollered at him, “We are landing!” He began to settle down. I powered onto the runway and hit the brakes hard. As we taxied to the terminal, I saw a group of men standing outside. When I parked, they approached the plane. “Are you Mr. Spanjer?” one of the men asked. Surprised, I told him I was, and asked who he was. He flashed a badge. “I am a special agent with the FBI. Your passenger escaped from suicide watch at Rockland State Psychiatric Hospital. You have just transported an escaped criminal across state lines.”

One of the agents took him into custody and said to me, “You can go; we’ll be in touch.” I didn’t hesitate. I cranked my Cherokee up and taxied out. I sat at the end of the runway for a long time, trying to calm down. Why had his seatbelt not come open? I thanked God that He prevented that. I flew home to Spring Valley, New York. To my relief, the agent never contacted me. But I will never forget that rainy night, my crazed passenger, and our run-in with the FBI. It was the beginning of a memorable career.
I was a copilot on the KC-135, the U.S. Air Force’s refueling tanker. The refueling version of Boeing’s 707, but loaded down with extra fuel tanks below it decks and a refueling boom below the vertical stabilizer.

We were loading cargo and passengers for the flight form Okinawa to Beale Air Force Base in California. It was raining hard with a 25-knot direct crosswind, right at the maximum allowed for takeoff. I was hoping the winds would increase and we could delay until the storm blew over.

We buttoned up the aircraft. There were aircraft engines and other cargo filling the centerline of the aircraft and 72 passengers in web seating along the sides of the cargo bay. We started engines, taxied to the end of the runway. I rechecked the crosswind, but it was just within limits.

We taxied onto the runway. I set the engine power and hit the water boost. Brakes off, we accelerated up the runway and I did a final power adjustment, put a hand on the yoke to help hold the nose firmly on the runway and then I gave the 80-knots call for the navigator to time our acceleration to 120-knots, to make sure the bird was accelerating properly.

At that moment, the pilot’s seat slid all the way to its back detent. The pilot couldn’t reach the yolk or the rudder pedals. He hadn’t locked his seat to hold it in place. He yelled “Don’t abort. You got it.”

I put both hands on the yolk and feet on the rudder pedals. I could feel the bird reacting to the wind. The wind was from the left, and the bird wanted to turn into the wind. A little right rudder kept the nose headed down the runway then the left wing started to come up. A little left aileron to hold the wing down. The navigator called the time hack. We were a go.

A little more right rudder then a little more left aileron. More and more aileron, more and more rudder as we roared up the runway. I held the bird on the ground for an extra 10 knots. I wanted to pop off the runway when I rotated for takeoff. By then, I was fully crossed controlled, full left aileron and full right rudder. I had nothing left.

I rotated. The bird popped of the runway and I quickly neutralized the controls and the bird gently yawed about five degrees into the wind, and all was well.

All in all, it was a good takeoff and I suspect that none of the passengers had any idea of the battle going on in the cockpit.

We were flying through the night on the great circle to California.
Follow that Tsunami
RON BURDA, GILBERT, AZ

“It’s gonna be a rough ride.” The 1986 Reno Air Races saw a radical new raceplane, *Tsunami*, raced by famed pilot Steve Hinton. My friend Bob Love, Korean War F-86 ace and race pilot, was tasked by the race committee with ensuring that *Tsunami* could withstand racing’s six-G forces by following Hinton in an ever-tightening, 350-mph spiral. I asked Bob if I could ride backseat in his P-51 Mustang, for air-to-air pictures of *Tsunami*. As the Gs increased, I “went to sleep” after my camera became too heavy to hold. I could hear the sound of a far away Rolls-Royce V-12 engine and realized it was ours, as Bob unloaded the Gs. Hinton split-essed (rolled inverted and doubled back down) to run the race course.

A white flash close to our cockpit was Skip Holm in another P-51, *Color Tile Special*. One ex-fighter pilot challenging another. Bob did the instinctive thing: He yanked back both the stick and throttle, going vertical, ensuring we stayed behind the “enemy” aircraft. At the top of our climb I had my first experience with negative Gs—not fun! Bob asked, “Wanna rat-race with him?” I replied, “Get it on the ground, quick!” Bob split-essed and greased his Mustang onto the runway. If I could hold my lunch long enough to get to my car, I wouldn’t embarrass myself. Somewhere in the parking lot, a bunch of well-fertilized flowers are growing to show the price I paid to get *Tsunami*’s pictures, which were featured in several aviation magazines.

Not at All a Drag
ROBERT McGEE, COLLEGE STATION, TX

The year 1998 was to be my last time to fly in the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta. I had flown there since 1992. That morning we were in the first row to launch and were one of the first balloons to launch.

After gaining about 100 feet, we were caught in a north wind that was not balloon friendly. I immediately started looking for a place to do a high-wind landing. If there was no place to land, we would have to fly all the way to the Albuquerque Airport. I did not want to do that.

Ahead in our flight path, I spotted a large grassy lot and determined this would be my last opportunity before the airport. I vented and started to lose altitude hoping to hit the edge of the lot so we would have enough room to drag. My passenger was the wife of one of the members of my sponsoring group. I told her when we touched down the basket would fall over and drag and for her to drop to her knees and hold on to an upright and don’t get thrown out. When we contacted the ground, we turned over and dragged. She did exactly as instructed and while we were dragging, she said “wheeee.” When we came to a stop, she crawled out and said, “That was fun.”
No Loitering at 15,000 Feet
CHARLES VORSANGER, PASADENA, CA

Early in my days as a glider pilot I had a scary experience which taught me an unforgettable lesson. I had learned the effects of oxygen deprivation on pilots during a session in a hypobaric chamber at Edwards Air Force Base in California. The chamber mimics the effect of flight at altitude to train pilots to recognize the early onset of lack of cognitive ability and inability to complete routine tasks.

And yet, on that fateful day, I was soaring without supplemental oxygen over the Mohave Desert in mountain wave conditions, which enable a pilot to reach very high altitudes. I was rising rapidly towards the lenticular cloud which marked the proximity of the wave. I reached it at 15,400 feet MSL. Once there, I left the cloud, and decided to do a bit of sightseeing to the ski area east of the gliderport. Losing altitude gradually, I noticed with detachment that I was flying east very fast, but that was of no concern me.

My addled, oxygen-deprived brain did not process why I was going so fast. I soon found out! Turning back towards the gliderport to land, I realized that the strong wind which had pushed me so fast was now an equally strong headwind. I could see my runway in the distance, but I was losing altitude steadily while making very little headway. I knew by then, still at 8,000 feet (4,580 feet AGL), that I would not be able to reach the runway and that I would have to land somewhere in the desert with no suitable landing place.

Salvation occurred when the wind pushed me a bit north and moved me into the secondary wave. I climbed rapidly back to 12,000 feet, high enough now for me to push the glider nose down, accelerate and penetrate into the wind. I arrived back at the gliderport with enough altitude for a safe landing, but scared and stupefied by my decision to loiter at altitude without oxygen, with potentially disastrous outcomes.
I didn’t expect such a dramatic ending when, in late afternoon in December 1968, I left McCullum field in Kennesaw, GA in a Cessna 182 to fly northwest to Rome to do touch-and-go landings. On approaching the Rome airfield I noted another airplane coming from the south. I turned into the traffic pattern on a downwind to runway 31. On final, another aircraft flew from south to north a little above me. I performed a routine landing and climbed out for another.

I did not see the other airplane again. On short final I felt a jolt, a propeller cut through my engine cowl, a nose gear crashed through the windscreen stopping about a foot in front of my face. At the same time a main gear crashed through the overhead and came to rest on top of the back seat. Since this impact was essentially on my center of gravity I was able to complete the landing with the two airplanes still locked together. We rolled out 1750 feet while I quickly cut fuel and the master switch. I jumped out and saw a Cessna 150 on top of my aircraft. Neither of us was hurt.

The pilot said he was a student. Since the 150 owner refused to repair my airplane, we sued. At trial, he testified that after crossing over me on my first final he turned upwind, gained 1000 feet and then came back to pattern altitude. He then followed me on the second landing. When I extended downwind beyond what he considered appropriate, he assumed I was leaving the pattern. He then focused on landing and didn’t look to the right before turning final. I couldn’t see him because he was above me, to the left and we were landing into the setting sun. The fact that the FAA pulled his license was not admissible.
On the afternoon of March 16th, 1967, I was signing out to take a Naval Reserve A-4A on a cross country flight to Naval Air Station Pensacola.

I arrived at NAS Pensacola at early darkness. NAS Approach Control handed me off to the Ground Control Approach (GCA) Unit and as we made radio contact, I started my first GCA practice approach. I went through my landing checklist, “Gear Down!” The landing gear handle down and the familiar “clunk” of the gear swinging forward into the down and locked position. The right main landing gear had a “barber pole” instead of the “locked” indication. I was sure it was down, but just to make sure, I broke off my approach and called the Control Tower for a visual gear check. The Tower got out their powerful handheld spotlight and flashed it on my A4 as I flew by. The Tower called me, “Navy 2166 You only have two main landing gear down. Your right main gear is still stowed up!” I still had lots of fuel. Being a “Weekend Warrior” and having a close schedule with United Airlines as a DC-6 Flight Engineer, I better return to Jacksonville. I called the Control Tower and requested that they file an IFR flight plan for me, “Direct to NAS Jacksonville and let them know that I have a deferred landing gear problem.”

The Tower called back and said that they had filed my flight plan for me and I was told to go to NAS Approach Control. I contact Approach Control and told them I would like to go through all of my landing gear emergency procedures to try and free the hung landing gear. None of my procedures worked, not even pulling “gs” to pull the gear down. It was time to go to Navy Jax Approach Control. I told Approach Control that I was ready to make my approach and landing with the landing gear “UP” and would land on my two 300 gallon wing tanks. I put down my flaps and set my approach speed to 125 knots. The Tower also informed me that the Crash Crew was on station. As I approached the runway landing area, I made a smooth touch down on the drop tanks and the airplane handled very well. As the airplane slowed, it went over on the lower portion of the nose and came to a stop. I shut down the engine and released my harness and jumped out of the cockpit onto the runway. The Crash Truck was right there and foamed down the aircraft right away. The duty Flight Surgeon was right there and asked me how I was. I replied, “OK!” He took my pulse and my blood pressure. I think my pulse was about 200 per minute.

I was commended by the Navy Accident Board. They found that a gear door had got out of sequence and the first door to go down was held up by the second door. It was a sequence valve problem.
Nearing the end of my first season as an agricultural pilot, my brother came to help with some of the loading and mixing tasks. We were called to work a half-day at a distant airport, but the loader truck driver left without taking my brother. He would have to fly with me. So, I crawled into the old Stearman, sitting in his lap, hunched over to avoid the airstream! There was only a single seat. The flight would be over northeast Alabama, across vast forestland, no clearings. We navigated simply by following a huge high voltage power line, which passed within a mile of our destination airfield.

As I flew the downwind leg for the landing … the engine quit! Just stopped running. Like that. My brother thought I had just retarded power to land. I was able to made an easy dead-stick landing. Only a couple hundred feet of runway remained after rollout, since I had to cut the downwind much shorter than usual. The airplane rolled to a stop, and I climbed down. My brother sat there, wanting to know why we didn’t just taxi in to the ramp.

“The engine quit!”

After a terse explanation to an incredulous brother, we pushed the old bird off to the side, and walked in to the ramp.

The engine quit from fuel starvation. We ran out of fuel! The float-type fuel gauge stuck in the indicator tube, because the indicator pin was bent. The gauge was showing a third of a tank. But the tank was bone-dry. We never did figure out how the float pin got bent. I still get cold chills thinking about what might have happened had we took off with just a gallon less fuel over all those tall trees.
Nothing to Talk About
PAUL ROALES, TULSA, OK

I was a petroleum geologist in the late 1970s on a business flight from Tulsa, OK to Hobbs, NM. We were in a Learjet operated for Amerada Hess Corporation. There were two pilots and four passengers including myself, my boss and a couple other Amerada Hess employees.

We were flying out to inspect some oil producing properties owned by Amerada Hess in West Texas. The flight had been uneventful and we were almost to Hobbs. Everyone was having a good time and joking and laughing.

We were flying at 43,000 feet when a buzzer sounded in the cabin and the pilot immediately put the aircraft into a steep dive. I looked forward and saw the pilot and co-pilot grab their oxygen masks and put them on. In the cabin the tiny face masks dropped from the overhead panels, but because we were diving so steeply mine was almost out of reach. I was so startled that I did not put it on.

By the time I recovered my composure, the pilot had leveled off and announced that we could remove our oxygen masks. The jet had suddenly lost partial cabin pressure. We landed in Hobbs and drove to our West Texas business. By the time we were done with our business and re-boarded the Learjet, the crew had fixed the problem. But the flight back to Tulsa was much quieter than the flight out.

C-54 over Boca Chica
GEARY SCHWEMMER, HAMPSTEAD, MD

As a college co-op NASA intern in summer of 1974 at Wallops Flight Facility in Virginia, I worked under a scientist developing airborne laser bathymeters. We tested the instruments in NASA's C-54 research aircraft. After a few test flights in the turbid waters around Virginia's Atlantic coast, it was time to test it in the clearer waters surrounding Boca Chica Naval Air Station.

It was August and we had to fly no higher than 1,000 feet to collect enough signal for measurements in water deeper than 20 meters. In the clear waters we could see shipwrecks, sharks, sea turtles, and beautiful coral reefs. I brought a 35mm camera on each flight to capture some of that on film. The temperature inside the un-air-conditioned cabin rose quickly in the hot summer sun. To keep the scientists comfortable, the flight engineer would remove the cargo doors to promote airflow, cording each opening with a single strand of half-inch rope, instructing passengers not to fall out.

Since our instruments were fairly automated, I had ample time to take photos. The passenger windows were not of the best optical quality, so I tried to get better shots through the unobstructed forward cargo hatch. I asked a fellow intern to hold my ankles while I lay prone halfway out of the aircraft to snap photos of the incredible underwater scenery. I was hooked at that point on airborne experimental research and went on to a 30-year career of it at NASA.
My flying story is about a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get a ride in an aerobatic airplane. A co-worker who has an aircraft-repair business with his father, has a friend who flies a Sukhoi Su-29 and said he could get me a ride in it. I have been to many airshows and always admired the talent of professional stunt pilots like Mike Goulian, Sean D. Tucker and Rob Holland. I would get to experience a little of what they do. I said yes of course.

It was warm and sunny on the day of my flight. The pilot, Hans, gave me a few preflight instructions. I was very nervous—especially when I had to strap on a parachute, required when flying in what’s classified as an experimental aircraft. I climbed into the front seat in the cockpit and strapped myself in. This plane has dual controls, so I had to put my feet on the control pedals and move my feet when Hans made maneuvers.

He closed the canopy and started the engine. What a great sound coming from the radial engine right in front of me! He had also mounted a GoPro in front of me to video the flight. We taxied out and started to take off. My heart was beating a mile a minute. I was impressed with the incredible acceleration of the aircraft. We were only a couple of hundred feet up when he yanked on the stick and shot the Sukhoi straight up into the sky. The force of him pulling on the stick so suddenly made my head snap forward to my chest. I loved it! He started with some mild maneuvers. We did a couple of rolls and flew upside down for a bit. He asked me if I was ready for something a little more daring. I asked what he had in mind, and he said how about a hammerhead turn! I didn’t think that was a good idea. I don’t get motion sickness, but I felt that was a little advanced. So we then performed a full Cuban 8 which was incredibly cool. Hanging off the seat when inverted, nothing but the harness holding me in was a feeling I’ll never forget. The pilot then asked if I wanted to take the stick. I said thanks for asking but declined as I was unsure and nervous. I’m sure Hans could of pulled us out of any trouble that I got us into. We made a low pass over the Plymouth airport and then flew around once more to our final approach. The landing was smooth as silk. Once the aircraft was parked and the engine shut down, I climbed out of the cockpit on jittery legs. I thanked Hans for the flight and realized how lucky I was to be able to experience just a little of the exhilaration that aerobatic pilots feel.

Jittery Legs

ANDY LAFOND

Passenger Andy Lafond is captured in giddy inversion by a GoPro camera mounted in the front seat of a Sukhoi 29. (COURTESY ANDY LAFOND)
Honeymoon Haze
STEVE LEKWA, NEVADA, IA

My new wife and I were returning from our honeymoon on Mackinac Island in a rented GA Tiger back in 1970. We filed VFR for Escanaba, Michigan, for a fuel stop, and then on to Boone, Iowa. Conditions were five miles in haze. We flew at 2,500 feet a mile off the north shore of Lake Michigan for smoother air. Clouds began forming below us, obscuring ground contact. We flew inland and dropped through a hole to maintain ground contact. The cloud deck continued to lower. Visibility dropped to about a mile, and as little as a quarter mile when hitting patches of scud. We flew just above the trees down a highway reporting road signs to the FBO at Manistique, Michigan, on Unicom. We were advised to look the other way "right now" when I reported a junkyard under the left wing. I could just make out the end of the north-south runway, turned hard right over the FBO, rolled out of the turn on short final for the east-west runway, and landed. We could barely make out the runways as we tied down. The old couple who ran the FBO thankfully knew every rock and tree in the area, talked us in smoothly, and had time for a nice visit after we called to close our "VFR" flight plan. The remainder of the flight home the next day was sunny and clear.

Expanded Horizons
ALEX ALVAREZ, MIAMI, FL

In 2003, I went with family on a flight from Miami to the Dominican Republic. It truly was an experience flying out of the country and exploring a foreign country and culture.
**Youngster in a Tri-motor**
WALTER CARRIER, LANCASTER, CA

As a seven-year-old farm boy from northwestern Pennsylvania, during the winter of 1937/38, I was vacationing in Florida with my dad and grandparents. We were passing the Miami airport and saw a banner hanging on the fence advertising 30-minute airplane rides over Miami for five bucks. We went in, and there was one seat left on their flight just before noon. Dad told the attendant he would take it if the boy could also go sitting between his knees. The pilot said if we could get the seatbelt fastened it would be ok. The plane was a new Ford Tri-motor and accommodated 10 or 12 passengers, as I recall. The takeoff and landing was tense; however, the 30 minute flight over the city and beach impressed me immensely.

**Parade for LeMay**
JOHN SCHULTZ, WINSTON-SALEM, NC

As a college student in the 50s, my summer job was measuring land, primarily tobacco fields, to determine their acreage. I was working about 15 miles west of Winston-Salem. One day I had stopped at a country store for my usual lunch of a slice of bologna and bread. As I looked up I saw B-47s in rows of three, and I began counting. There were 96 B-47s and they were followed by 24 B-52s. They were initially on a SE heading, but then turned to a NE heading. It was an amazing sight! At the time I had no idea what was going on. Later, I found out about the retirement of General LeMay as Commander of SAC and his becoming Air Force Chief of Staff, and realized that the flyover in Washington occurred on that day.
Candy Bomber
GLENN ABEL, BROOKLYN, NY

During the week of December 16, 2019, the Berlin Airlift Historical Foundation was part of ceremonies at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina to induct Gail Halvorsen, the “Candy Bomber,” into the Paul E. Garber First Flight Shrine.

Our vintage C-54, The Spirit of Freedom, piloted by Tim Chopp, flew there for a reenactment of Gail’s famous candy drop during the Berlin Airlift in 1948-49. I, as Load Master, was given the supreme honor of assisting him in the drop. At 100 years old, it would probably be his last reenactment.

Six hundred children and parents awaited our flyover and candy drop at Manteo Airfield. The drop was perfect, raining parachuted Hersey chocolate bars on the kids below. We were later told by organizers that it was the best candy drop ever. A great way to culminate the ceremonies for Gail.

Passenger Doolittle
CHARLES RHODES, TOMBALL, TEXAS

I got my pilot rating and my aircraft mechanic license at the age of 23. In 1957 I was told of an individual who was looking for a pilot/aircraft mechanic in the San Francisco area. I met with the gentleman at his home, where I noticed two small Bendix Air Race trophies. He seemed a bit surprised that I knew what they represented. He then advised me he had won the Bendix air race in 1937 and 1939. His name was Frank Fuller Jr.

I got the job, and for the next 10 years I flew and maintained the 1946 Grumman Mallard he owned. His circle of friends included many from the “golden age of aviation.” One of them was Jimmy Doolittle. I will never forget the first time I met him. We were enroute to a duck club for a hunt. Jimmy came up to the cockpit and sat down. Here I am, a 24-year-old green pilot, flying Doolittle! I asked if he would like to fly the plane for a while. His reply was, “Sonny, I have flown so many planes, I would rather watch you.”

Over the years I flew him and many other great aviation personalities and enjoyed hearing them relive (and enhance) their great stories. Later I was offered a job with Shell Oil, and since General Doolittle was on the company’s board, I ended up flying him again on special occasions, including his last flight on a Shell Oil aircraft. I have an autographed copy of his book, I Could Never Be So Lucky Again. That makes two of us!
Cold War Corridor
EVAN GERARD, CAMPBELL, CA

The year was 1970 and I was working as a tech rep for a company which had a contract on a government program that was operating in West Berlin. Behind the Wall. At that period of time anyone with my kind of job was required to fly American Carrier into and out of Berlin. This meant Pan Am. Pan Am flew the reliable Boeing 727 aircraft into Tempelhof Flughafen in West Berlin. This was of course the famous route of the Berlin Airlift a couple of decades prior.

The flights were required to fly within the limits of three flight corridors to and from cities in West Germany. These corridors were quite narrow, basically a cylinder 40 miles in diameter at an altitude of 10,000 feet. The corridors were strictly enforced by the Soviets and the East Germans. Straying outside of them was not an option. In fact, there was a much earlier incident where a straying commercial airliner was attacked by Soviet MiGs. Imagine that a 727 flying at cruising speed would have only seconds before straying out of the corridor if it drifted too far off course.

My incident happened as a passenger during one of these flights from Frankfurt am Main into Tempelhof. We were flying along during a severe thunder and lightning storm at the required 10,000-foot altitude. The pilots could not go around or over or under the center of the storm due to the flight restrictions. All of a sudden a huge flash of lightning and a loud clap of thunder shook the aircraft. It lurched up and down and side to side. The pilots kept control, but I will always remember the usually fearless appearing Germans hollering Ach du Lieber and Mein Gott! I probably did the same, only in English. Needless to say we continued on to a safe landing. The ground felt good upon deplaning.

Banner-size Smile
CHRIS VAN HEST, NAPLES, FL

During the summer of 1978, I towed banners from Ormond Beach Municipal Airport (KOMN). A crew was repaving a runway and I noticed a young boy sitting under an umbrella watching his dad working on the runway. I’d wave to him as I taxied by and he’d wave back.

One day after I finished towing, I taxied over to say hi and show him the plane. His father said he loved watching the planes and wished he could get a ride. To his amazement, I said, “Let’s go!” and strapped him in.

After a short sightseeing flight down the beach, we returned for a low pass so he could wave to his dad. I have never seen a bigger smile in my life.
Skydiving Advice  
STEVEN BROOKS, SEATTLE, WA

When my friends and I arrived at the airstrip for our skydiving adventure, I was a little under the weather. I was feeling drained with a scratchy throat. The previous weekend we had received our training but the jump was cancelled at the last minute because of high winds. We therefore all had a week of nervous excitement leading up to the big day. I wasn’t going to let a little pain and fatigue stop me!

The tandem freefall was as exhilarating as it was terrifying. As the thrill and fear was reaching a crescendo, the chute was deployed. The more we descended, the more pain and pressure I felt in my inner ear. Despite the severe pain in my head (and the hard landing), it was the most amazing experience!

Later that day I went to the school clinic to get checked out. Both physicians who looked into my ears promptly said, “EW!” Never before or since has a physician said “EW” when examining me.

They informed me that I had an inner ear infection, and were aghast when I then told them I had gone skydiving earlier in the day; I could have done some serious damage. Lesson learned: If you feel sick, don’t jump out of a plane.

Record Shortest Flight?  
TOM GAUTHIER, RENO, NV

With all my flight arrangements made by the corporate travel department, I have no recollection why this scheduling occurred, but the memory of the event is vivid.

Headed home from an overseas business trip my destination was Oakland, California. But the first landing on the mainland was just short—at SFO, San Francisco International. I was instructed by the flight attendant (still stewardesses back then) to sit tight. Seated in Business Class of a Boeing 747 and handed a cocktail by a pretty girl made it easy to comply. Weary after a long flight I sat tight and sipped.

Soon the aircraft was pushed back from the terminal and I found myself surrounded by eight stewardesses, grinning at me as they ran through the entire routine about seatbelt use, exits, seatback/tray table secure and “our flight today is 10 miles…would you like another drink?”

I was the sole passenger on the 10-mile repositioning flight from San Francisco to Oakland. It took 30 minutes and we never gained much altitude as I could see both airports at the same time.

Short story but being “king for a day” with all that attention has stuck with me for decades.
Air & Space We All Fly Reader’s Stories

Unlucky at Logan
Michael P. Gleason, Bangor, ME

My first-ever flight was at age 15, on American Airlines in November 1962, as my father and I were trying to get from Cleveland, OH, back to Maine for my grandmother’s funeral. It was supposed to be “one of them new-fangled” Boeing 707’s. The plane broke, and we had to wait while they sent in a four-engine, propeller-driven DC-7 to replace it for the flight. It was dark before we ever even left Cleveland, and cold and raining. It was still dark and raining as we approached Boston. I don’t know if you’ve ever landed at Boston’s Logan Airport, but—unbeknownst to me at that time—the runway ends right at the Atlantic Ocean. We came down through the clouds, and all I could see was water and big ships, and I thought with alarm, “We must be ditching!” Finally, the runway hove into view, and we landed! (We were so late getting to Boston that we missed the last bus to Maine, and had to spend the night in the Boston Greyhound terminal—a night I’ll never forget.)

Creve Coeur Swail
Ray R. Bradbury II, Green Mountain, IA

My experience as a 100-plus-hour student pilot soloing on a practice day, taking off from the Creve Coeur, Missouri private airport in my 1947 415-C Ercoupe, 85 hp (improved carbonation) Continental powered, aluminized and “rudder-peddled” airplane in July 1984.

As I was accelerating at FULL THROTTLE southbound on 36/18 asphalt runway through 50 to about 54 knots (my Ercoupe take-off speed is about 57 knots) I was suddenly hit by a 30- to 35-mph crosswind directly from the west. The wind got under my 5-degree-dehedril right wing, lifting my right main landing gear off the runway in seconds and pushing the airplane off the left side of the runway towards a 5 to 6 feet deep grassy swale. As I was pushed off the runway my left wing-tip was just inches from hitting the runway as it passed on down into the swail.

In the words of one of my flying heroes Bob Hoover, “FLY THE AIRPLANE into the crash!!” Which is what I did, praying for air speed!!

As the airplane flew into the swail I was actually flying by “ground effect” with my right wing-tip about 6 inches above the runway, I was still accelerating at FULL THROTTLE, through 55-56 knots as I flew along in the swail for another 50-to-75 yards, until I started to raise up out of the swail at 57-58 knots and fly away. WHEW!!

A little later when I came back around and landed, I taxied over to the office area where there was a small group of pilots. When I “shut down” and got out they all came congratulated me for my recovery of what they all thought was going to be a bad “ground loop” crash and were amazed to see me disappear then fly out of the swail, as I was gaining air speed and “climbing out” and FLYING THE AIRPLANE!!
Ego Deflated
F. CLARK BOLES, HUNTSVILLE, AL

I was 10 years out of college with a fancy aerospace engineering degree. I had gotten accustomed to seeing the looks of admiration, respect, and sometimes envy I received when strangers found out that I was an engineer. In Huntsville (Rocket City), Alabama, nearly everyone was an engineer so an engineer had no special status there. But elsewhere, an engineer was a big deal. I was pretty full of myself. But in the 1970’s, I had my big fat ego deflated by a 10-year-old boy on a flight from Huntsville to Orlando where I was presenting a paper at an aerospace conference.

I sat in the aisle seat and he was sitting in the middle seat. After takeoff, he started up a conversation. Eventually he asked what my job was. I replied, “I’m an engineer.” Then with a look of awe and admiration on his face he said, “What kind of train do you drive?” Then I had to see the deep disappointment on his face when I had to explain that I wasn’t an engineer on a train and didn’t drive big locomotives. At least I wasn’t as embarrassed as a friend at Lockheed-Georgia in Atlanta who found out his 1st-grade daughter told her whole school that her daddy drew and colored pictures of airplanes at work. He was chief designer for the C5-A cargo plane.

Getting Familiar with a 747
TIMOTHY C. HATFIELD, WICHITA, KS

I worked as an FAA air traffic control specialist at the Wichita Flight Service Station in the early 70s. We were encouraged to take familiarization flights with local pilots when offered the opportunity. One Sunday morning during a midnight to 8 a.m. shift a local charter pilot called for a weather briefing and filed a flight plan to Denver and a continuation flight plan to Portland, Oregon for a Lear 24. He explained that he was to pick up a cargo load of underdash wiring harnesses that had been on Continental airlines 727 that broke down and had to be in Portland by 8 a.m. when the Ford Pinto factory opened. Then he surprised me by saying, “you should go with us.” I checked with my supervisor and he said, “go!”

The flight to Denver was uneventful and we got the cargo loaded by cutting the large boxes open and tossing the harnesses into the cabin...the boxes being too large for the air stair door open.

The flight to Portland was also routine and we arrived at 7a.m. and were met by a van from the factory.

After a quick breakfast we headed back east at flight level 410 and I got to sit in the right seat and trigger the transponder button when ATC asked for “ident.”

At one point we met a B747 westbound on the airway at flight level 390. ATC repeatedly verified our altitude and with a closing rate of about 900 knots the big bird went under us and still looked huge 2,000 feet below.

I may have stretched the definition of familiarization flight but it was one I’ll never forget.
Midair at Oshkosh

DAVID PEARCE

A few years back my grandson and I decided to fly my Cub to Oshkosh. I put him in the front seat as he was just learning to fly and we departed Dulles airspace early one morning. The Cub cruises at about 90 miles per hour and we had the constant western headwind so it required an all-day flight to reach Fort Wayne. Departing the next morning we flew directly to Oshkosh. The procedure for a Cub type aircraft was to proceed to a lake, circle it while searching for other air traffic, and then follow the railroad into Oshkosh. We contacted the FAA temporary tower and reported our position as per the directives to arriving aircraft. They responded by giving me the tower frequency which I dutifully dialed in and was rewarded with a loud “Crash.”

I did a very quick inventory as to the condition of our Cub and found the engine still running with a very heavy vibration. I reported a “Mayday” to the tower and they directed me to proceed directly to Oshkosh.

The engine was vibrating so bad that I expected it to depart for places other than on the front of the Cub. I was directed to land on the main (active) runway even though the wind was about 20 knots off my right tail. I made a landing on the edge of the asphalt to avoid a 4-engine B-17 that was completing its rollout. I left the asphalt in order to avoid the B-17. We taxied to our tiedown space, shut down and found that about six inches of one propeller blade was missing. The remainder of the propeller was bent forward about 80 degrees. The airplane that collided with me was a retractable Cherokee “6” and he was lying in a ditch adjacent to the runway.

Insurance paid for the prop and engine replacement.

Round Trip on a Goose

TERRY TARWATER, WESTMINSTER, CA

On a damp, dreary day we arrived at Long Beach Airport (LGB) to check in for the first airplane flight I would take and the only flight my family ever took together. We were flying 32 miles across the Pacific Ocean to Santa Catalina Island.

As a crew member resembling comedian Soupy Sales loaded luggage into the aircraft, I eagerly admired our plane, a G-21 Grumman Goose.

The aircraft fired up its Pratt & Whitney engines and prepared to taxi out. All of a sudden everyone in the cabin looked back and began to emphatically gesture to me. I have always been hard of hearing and the noise from the engines didn’t help matters a bit. I just couldn’t figure out what they all wanted and they eventually gave up.

Weather forced us to land on the 3,000-foot runway perched 1,600 feet above sea level and take a van on a hair-raising 10-mile trip down a two-lane road that was scarier than the flight.

The flight home was much more exciting. We drove out to a nearby motel where the plane was waiting for us in the parking lot. We taxied down a ramp into the water. The pilot reached overhead and pushed the twin throttles forward. We skimmed over the water, climbed up onto the step and lifted off.

When we were feet dry, I dug out my two-dollar 1920’s Kodak Brownie Camera, aimed it out the window and snapped my first aerial photo. It was the first roll of film I ever developed!

Why was every one gesturing at me prior to takeoff on the outbound flight? The pilot was inviting me to sit in the copilot’s seat for the flight!
December 28, 1958—from my journal: "today I soloed"

By law I couldn’t solo in an airplane before I was 16 years old. I looked forward to the day that I would be able to fly by myself, and finally that day came! Paul was my instructor that day, and we were practicing takeoffs and landings, and after about 20 minutes I made a perfect landing and taxied to the end of the runway for another takeoff. After a check for incoming traffic, I pushed the throttle open and to my surprise it came back! I push again and it came back again! I turned around and asked Paul in the backseat what is going on, he grinned and said “I gotta get out, you take around by yourself!” OMG, this was THE moment you look forward to, flying an airplane all by yourself. Then the fear hit me, what if I screwed up, did something wrong, made a mistake, there wouldn’t be anyone there to take over to correct my error! At first, I was very scared but if Paul felt I was ready, I WAS READY. Again, checking for traffic, I lined up on the runway, slowly pushing the throttle open and was very surprised at how quickly my airplane jumped into the air without that extra weight. I was airborne faster than I ever remember and as the ground dropped away, I kept talking to myself out loud “keep it straight, keep it climbing, don’t stop, wait till you’re over the river, when your altimeter reads 400 feet, turn left 90 degrees, climb to 500 feet, turn left again, climb to 700 feet and run parallel to the runway.” At this point I realized that it all worked and I was exactly where I was supposed to be, that I started singing out loud over the roar of the engine! All too quickly though it came time to make my approach to land. Oh God, another series of rules to remember, check for incoming traffic, cut the throttle, pull on carburetor heat, watch your speed, watch the altitude, turn left at 500 feet, crack the throttle a little bit, check your speed again, the altitude, then another left I was on my final leg. God, that runway looks so small! How can I possibly land on it? So far it looks good, I am settling just right, no need to slip, it’s time to clear the engine again, don’t stall! I see Paul standing at the end of the runway with a bunch of pilots watching me, “Gene don’t screw this up!” The ground comes up faster and faster now, pull back on the stick SLOWLY idiot, I yell to myself! Please don’t blow it now, I look out the right side of the plane and it looks about right so I flare out and bam, I touched down perfectly! I am ecstatic, as a taxi back to the end of the runway, I want to do it again but Paul motions me in. I taxi into the slot and shut down the engine; as the prop stop spinning, I unbuckled my seatbelt. As I now sit in the silent cockpit, I take a deep breath and my mind remembers all those war movies I watch, I felt just like the pilot who just finished his mission, so proud, so happy that he lived through it! I walk toward the office grinning ear to ear. The “guys” applauded me, patted me on the back and shook my hand. I gained the respect, I was now one of them, I WAS A PILOT!
Check Ride in a Cobra
JAMES REYNOLDS

In 1971, I was deployed to Tay Ninh, Republic of Vietnam, which is close to the Cambodian border. Tay Ninh was a forward operating base of the 1st of the Ninth Air Calvary. I was an avionics specialist which meant I took care of the radios and especially the SCAS (Stability and Control System) which kept the Cobra (AH1G) on course during a rocket run. I had been working on the SCAS system of a Cobra one evening. It was still light but it was getting late. I had just finished when the maintenance officer asked me if I would like to go on a check ride because the CAS system could not be checked while the Cobra was on the ground.

We took off and tested the system but continued to fly (I seldom got to fly front seat on a Cobra). When we got back to Tay Ninh it was dark. At Tay Ninh the landing lights were two 55-gallon drums holding burning rocket boxes and Air Traffic Control was a private with a PRC-25 (FM transceiver). We contacted the private who told us we were in sight and so we started descending. He assured us that he had visual and to continue descending. I did not see the burning barrels and I was looking intently for the ground. I saw rice paddies and yelled, the pilot pulled up to climb and we popped up several thousand feet. The private apologized and said he was watching a LOH (OH-6). We returned to Tay Ninh without further incident.

Sightseeing, Interrupted
THOMAS WELCH

I was flying a Cessna 172 on a beautiful VFR day with a friend. My route for the flight, designed to maximize the views while avoiding SFO airspace, involved turning west from San Carlos over the coastal mountains, and then flying north along the coast to the Golden Gate. After turning east over the Golden Gate bridge, I turned north heading up Napa Valley.

Just as I was roughly even with Sausalito, I saw a fighter jet approaching from 11 O’clock and slightly above me, and noted that its relative bearing was not changing. Never a good sign.

I immediately turned left, with the expectation that I would pass comfortably behind the jet. Just at that moment, the pilot of the F-14, who had been tracking me on radar, decided that I had not seen him and turned right so that HE could pass behind ME.

The view through the top of the cockpit glass of an F-14, when you are flying a Cessna 172 and closing at a combined 300 knots, is startling. I could see the helmets and visors of both pilots, though happily not their very annoyed expressions. The F-14 pilot flipped his plane in an instant into a left banking turn, and that gave me a chance to see, at very close range, just how many rivets there are on the underside of those fighter jets.

I dove to the left, and once past the jet, I eased off the power, leveled off, and turned back towards Napa Valley. The whole episode lasted 15 seconds, five if you don’t count the time to recover from the diving turn.

My friend, after a short pause, asked in an uncharacteristically small voice, “Can we go back now?”
In 1993 I was stationed at McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas, flying B-1B bombers. I was flying a fairly typical nighttime B-1B mission involving formation work, air refueling, and a low-level with a scheduled weapons delivery. It was a hot Kansas evening with the forecast for mostly clear skies and the chance of a thunderstorm. We entered the low-level route one minute behind our wingman at 500 feet and 550 knots on automatic terrain following. Up ahead our wingman entered the bomb run and radioed back to us that they saw a flash of lightning and a storm off to the right side of the bomb run.

As we approached the bomb run, we could see the storm well off to the right of the route and on the radar. I determined that it was about 10 miles away. We continued the bomb run and everything was looking good until all of a sudden and without warning there was a huge explosion and a blinding flash of light. Although we were safely away from the storm, it is a well-known fact that thunderstorms can sometimes “throw” lightning 10-20 miles downrange. We had been hit by lightning, and I was struck in the foot and lost consciousness for a few seconds. There is a strange phenomenon known as ball lightning and it is literally a “Ball of Lightning” that forms when a bolt strikes and discharges electricity. In this instance, the strike hit the nose of the aircraft and a ball of lightning emerged from the center of the cockpit and hit me in the foot!

As I came to, I could see that the entire cockpit was black and without electricity. As background, the B-1B is an electric jet, and the bold face for complete electrical failure is “Ejection Handle Pull!” As I was regaining consciousness my hands were reaching for the ejection handle, but somewhere in the distance I could faintly hear my crewmember saying, “It is okay, stay with us!” When I heard my crewmember, I overrode my trained instinct to eject. I quickly realized that the lightning strike had disrupted the terrain flowing system which put us into an automatic fly-up away from the ground, a safety feature built into the B-1B Terrain Following System that probably saved all our lives that night. After a few seconds, which seemed forever, the jet came back to life and all systems & computers came back online.

Not knowing the full extent to which the jet might have been damaged, coupled with my loss of consciousness, we declared an emergency and returned to base. When we landed, I was escorted to the hospital where they did a full medical examination and released me later that night. I had no untoward effects and was back on the flight schedule within days, although I did try to slow down a bit and count my blessings.
Rickenbacker Himself

TOM CABE, VERONA, VA

Autumn, 1946. I was a freshman at Yale. December. Christmas. I flew home for the holidays, New Haven to Richmond, Eastern Air Lines. The planes were DC-3s. There was a steward, no stewardesses yet. There were stops at New York, Philadelphia, Washington and on to Richmond. At Washington the plane landed and moved to a grass apron. DC-3s sloped down to a back exit. Passengers were moving down the aisle. I heard a familiar name: "Rickenbacker. Then I recognized him as he came, Eddie Rickenbacker himself. World War One top ace, winner of The Congressional Medal of Honor, famed race car driver, survivor extraordinary, now President of Eastern Air Lines! I had flown with Eddie Rickenbacker! I was seventeen.

Lesson Learned

MICHAEL T. MOORE, GAINESVILLE, VA

In the early 1970s I was a young maintenance officer assigned to the 36th Tactical Fighter Wing at Bitburg, Germany. I joined the base aero club to work on my private pilot’s license. On Sunday August 23, 1970, I departed Bitburg Air Base on a solo cross-country in Cessna 150 N60626 to Egelsbach, a small German airport near Frankfurt. It was perfect weather for a cross-country; clear skies and calm winds and I was enjoying my flight over medieval castles along the way. After landing at Egelsbach and getting my log book stamped, I departed immediately for Bitburg. All went well until I flew into a rain squall. Forward visibility was zero and I had virtually no instrument training, but I could see cars on the wet road below which helped me avoid panic. Almost immediately I heard the pilot of a small aircraft call the tower at Hahn Air Base, which was on my route, and I knew the squall was localized. I was much relieved just a few minutes later when I popped out of the squall into bright sunshine. My very early lesson: always check the weather for the return flight.
All Was Well With the World
KEN JOHN, CHUBBUCK, ID

We were scheduled to fly the embassy run during Thanksgiving. I was totally surprised that we were loaded with 10,000 pounds of frozen turkeys. It was explained to the crew that we were to drop off turkeys to the embassies, which in the 1950s were quite isolated. The overriding impression was how important it was to the Americans that we would fly more than halfway around the world so the people at the embassy could have that special dinner.

My next flight was the same embassy flight, except this was to be over Christmas. Me being single, it meant one more married person could celebrate Christmas with their family. We departed and flew uneventfully to Saudi Arabia and back to a well-deserved 33-hour rest at New Delhi. Our maintenance crew noticed we had problems, and we were delayed approximately 24 hours. This presented quite a few problems. One of the functions of the flight was to pick up and deliver highly classified communications (Diplomatic Pouches) to Washington. Delay was not acceptable!

To make up time, the aircraft commander decided to cut short the time in Calcutta and Bangkok. Flying at night normally was prohibited, because from the Saigon/ Bangkok area westward you flew VFR (Visual Flight Rules). Because of what we had onboard, we flew on anyway.

Passengers! We had passengers. Normally we were restricted as to the number of children allowed on the aircraft. We had to have a two-to-one ratio of grownups to children. On this flight, we had more children than grownups. The Grinch had not been thought of yet, but no one was going to forbid a child a flight. Remember, this was Christmas eve.

We were droning over the South China Sea at night. Thinking of the kids, the crew took over. The Chief Flight Engineer came to me and said “You are going to be Santa.” We are going to tell the kids Santa is on the radio, and they can talk to Santa if they wish. Kids were brought up to the navigator’s station so they could talk on the intercom. I did my best “Ho! Ho! Ho!” and asked the kids what they wanted for Christmas. I’m afraid my voice at the age of 19 did nothing for the kids. After a while Santa got old, and the sounds of Christmas carols came emanating from the cabin.

There was no traffic on the radio except for me and the ground stations, who had nothing to say as it was Christmas Eve.

Then it began: Mats44062, this is Manila.
Manila, 4062, go ahead.
Merry Christmas.
Merry Christmas (gulp).
44062, this is Saigon.
Saigon, 4062, go ahead.
Merry Christmas.
(Gulp) Saigon, 4062, Merry Christmas.
It went on—Tokyo, Guam Wake, Hickam. The flight engineer looked over his shoulder and saw a tear coming down my cheek. “What’s with you?” A person can feel alone anywhere. We landed at Clark at midnight, and all was well with the world.
Merry Christmas
TOM SALES, SOMERSET, NJ

Each year, in the mid-1960s, the New Jersey Police Athletic League and the New York Port Authority sponsored a Christmas party for the kids from St. Joseph’s School for the Blind, in Jersey City. It was held in a hangar at Newark Airport. Phil Rizzuto and Santa would always attend, and I would play Christmas songs on the accordion.

The highlight, however, came when we all boarded a small jet, (donated, on alternate years, by either Mohawk or Allegheny airlines), for a half-hour sky tour around New Jersey and Manhattan Island.

You might think that only sighted children would enjoy this, but the kids absolutely LOVED IT! Each child brought along a sighted chaperone, to describe the view out the window, and the Captain also provided a running commentary.

More importantly, the children got to experience the “unseen sensations” of flying: the feel of a pressurized cabin, the anticipation of taxiing, the rising whine of the jet engines, the shifting G-forces as the plane accelerated to enormous speed, then rotated for takeoff, etc. They would “ooh” and “aah” at each bank of the wings, and at every change in altitude.

It was like a gentle roller coaster ride...complete with my 12 year-old self playing Jingle Bells on the accordion!

To this day, I marvel at the generosity of Newark Airport, and of the two airlines. These Christmas parties also mark MY earliest flying experiences, and they remain among my fondest.

Open-cockpit Bragging Rights
DWIGHT WELLS, PROSPECT, OH

In 1965, I was seven years old, and my dad bought me a ride in a double-cockpit, red biplane. I sat forward of the pilot with a seat belt that fit me like my 16-year-old brother’s jeans. I remember the pilot saying, “What ever you do, don’t grab the stick.” I saw pedals going up and down, levers back and forth but nothing to grab a we lifted off. I was so small the pilot apparently felt compelled to bank hard to give me a view of what we were flying over. I was certain I would fall out but I didn’t and I had a great wind burn on my nose to brag about with my baseball teammates. It was better than a home run.
As a new 1st lieutenant in late 1960, I was assigned to the 438th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Kinross AFB, about 20 miles south of Sault St. Marie, Michigan.

We were equipped with new F-106s with tape gauges. My "Additional Duty" as Personal Equipment Officer brings me to this event. Higher Headquarters sent us a new Navy designed Quick Donning Pressure Suit to test. It was a one-piece suit that zipped up from your left knee to your right shoulder and blew up around you, much like all suits now. It was orange in color, of course! It had a fish bowl type helmet with a rubber neck seal.

Since I was going to be at high altitude for the test we decided I would simulate a high altitude "target" for our Interceptors to practice on. Upon donning the suit for the test, the rubber helmet seal tore. I replaced it with my own P-1 pressure suit helmet!

I took off and headed north over Canada for several hundred miles at our best cruise of .93 Mach at 43 thousand feet. At the designated point I turned south, lit the after burner, and started to climb. Shortly after starting the climb the MA-1 power dumped. As I reached over to reset it the main power also dropped off line. When I reached to reset it, the inside of my P-1 face plate fogged up and I was suddenly IFR inside my helmet! Realizing I was still in A/B and climbing I pulled it out of A/B and eased the stick forward, as I could not see the instruments. I was about to pop open my helmet face plate when a drop of moisture dripped down the inside of my face plate. Through the clear slit I saw the Altimeter at 58,000 feet, and fortunately, noted the cabin altitude the same! I had been so involved that I had not realized the pressure suit worked as advertised, sans regular helmet. Later investigation revealed the face plate heater circuit was on the aircraft non-essential Buss. The problem was soon rectified fleet-wide.
Early—Make That Late—Arrival
DENNIS DARRAH, PLAINFIELD, IN

I was on an American Airlines MD-80 from Indianapolis International to Dallas-Fort Worth, and the pilot announced with great pride, a few times, that we would be arriving early. We indeed landed early, and because we were early, there was no gate for us to park in. We waited out on the ramp until the airplane that was there left, and we pulled in, still a few minutes early. Then the jetway stopped working. They messed with it for some 25 minutes. Finally they let the rear airstairs down (MD-80) and we walked off the plane onto the ramp and up the stair into the terminal, about a 20 minutes late. Oh well!

A Seat Outside
MARK BENNETT, APACHE JUNCTION, AZ

In 2019 I was invited to photograph helicopters operating in Puerto Rico, an assignment which would also yield images for a magazine article. One operator, ROTAK Helicopter Services, had two of the same type of aircraft: a pair of Kaman K-MAX supporting the repair of the island’s infrastructure that was damaged by Hurricane Maria.

The K-MAX is singularly designed to sling loads on a line attached to its unique trolley system, up to 6,000 pounds at a time, hundreds of times daily if required. It is so singularly designed that it has but a single seat — the pilot’s. The narrow cockpit allows the pilot to lean out either side to see the load at the end of the line, but except for a small storage and maintenance access compartment, anything that isn’t part of the aircraft must ride on the line.

Some individual helicopters of that model were factory-equipped with fittings for another seat: a simple, skeletal, folding metal structure that clips onto the airframe. On the outside of the airframe. Facing sideways.

That’s the seat I rode twice. Once to capture photos from that aircraft in flight, to include elements of the aircraft and, more importantly, once to photograph their other K-MAX as they trained carrying a person on the end of a line, in what is known in the industry as human external cargo, or HEC.

The ride was surprisingly jouncy, but the views were tremendous.
Hello Deer

BEAU CHRISTIAN, SOUTH PITTSBURG, TN

My first powered aircraft was an Eipper Quicksilver weightshift, powered by a 15-horsepower Yamaha go-cart engine. It was capable of cruising at about 16 mph and that was fine with me. Home base for me was at a privately owned grass airstrip. The grass runway, even at about 3,000 feet, was almost long enough for a short flight, from one end or the other.

On one afternoon, as was my custom, I extended the glide. As I did so, a deer joined me on my left, trotting just beyond the left wing tip. My fear, of course, was that the deer would either sideswipe me or run directly in front of me. So help me, as I looked at the deer, trying to decide whether to power up and go around, or get landed and stop, the deer looked me directly in the eyes. Still gliding, I yelled, "Shoo!" as loud as I could. With that, though surely not because of that, the deer turned and dashed back into the undergrowth.

As I taxied to a stop, one of my hangar mates had observed the whole incident and was laughing hilariously. He yelled over to me, "Most hunters would use a deer rifle, seems to me!"

For me the whole objective with the ultralight Quicksilver was to fly. Merely to fly.

Fuel Crisis

MARK FREY, SALINE, MI

It’s 1985 and our two US-3 CODs (Carrier Onboard Delivery, also known as “Miss Piggy”) were orbiting over a fixed point in the Indian Ocean hoping that the next tanker could pass us fuel. The day before, one of our planes had broken down on the USS Midway while it was transiting to a port call in Perth, Australia. Since the Midway didn’t have the parts to fix it, we launched a rescue mission from our home base, Diego Garcia (Dodge) at midnight, arriving at dawn on board the carrier. We were going to fix the airplane and launch back to Dodge.

Unfortunately, the repair took too long. The Midway was steaming hell-bent for leather toward Perth, away from Dodge, and now we didn’t have the fuel/range to get home. A plan was hatched to get us more fuel from an A-6 tanker once we got airborne, extending our range. The first tanker’s system failed, and by the time another A-6 was launched we couldn’t make it to Dodge. So we diverted to Cocos (Keeling Island), fueled up there, and continued home. This involved negotiations with the Admiral’s staff for diplomatic clearance to land in Cocos, a low-fuel bingo profile back to the second A-6’s ship, and a hero’s welcome on Cocos (they didn’t get much company then).

More than 24 hours after launching from Dodge we touched down again at home plate. My logbook shows 16.2 hours of flight time, 1 trap, 1 cat shot, 2 landings, and 1 in-flight refueling (the sour plug isn’t recorded). It doesn’t reflect an exhausted crew or a relieved OIC (Officer in Charge), who could launch those aircraft to the USS Kitty Hawk in a few hours.
Flying with my Daughter

LOUIS ROSATI, DEER PARK, NY

My daughter and I have been World War II aviation buffs for the last two decades. During certain times of the year, a local aviation museum gives D-Day experiences. As a graduation present to my daughter, on Memorial Day of 2010, both my daughter and I took advantage of it.

We arrived at the museum in the late morning. We dressed up in full paratroopers uniform, which included a mock parachute. From there we were escorted into a briefing room and were prepared for our mission to Normandy. After the briefing, we were escorted to a vintage C-47, and we buckled ourselves on to the bench seats. Departure was so smooth that I did not even realize we were on the runway until I noticed that the plane was beginning to rise in the air. For the next 45 minutes, we got to see the south shore of Long Island like we had never seen it before. While in the air, my daughter and I spent the whole time moving about the plane and on our knees snapping pictures and taking videos of the outdoor view. We were in the air for about an hour and had a ball. A fellow passenger was able to take a picture of us with the pilot facing the camera from the background. Like all good things, the trip came to the end. We attached the pull cord from our parachute to the line in the C-47 and as we stepped out the aircraft, the mock parachute “deployed.” More than 10 years later, I still remember this experience like it was yesterday.

Wish for a Second Ride

JAMES M. BRYANT, SANTA FE, NM

I’ve enjoyed (most of) my flying experiences as a passenger or as a student. One experience that I wish I could have repeated is soaring.

On a June day in 1983, I accompanied my friend David to a North Texas soaring club that rented sailplanes. Seated in front of a Schweizer SGS2-33 with pilot David behind, we hooked onto a crop-duster tow plane. The ride upwards was loud and bumpy. Once above 1,200 feet, I yanked the big, reddish knob on the control panel, releasing the tow line. We began to search for lift.

The day before had been stormy, but conditions were now bright and sunny. Unfortunately, the wet plowed fields and pastures surrounding the glider port were not generating strong thermals. Our craft and a few other sailplanes moved lazily in spirals, no one gaining much altitude. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the quietude and the sensation—like that of a sailboat—being supported and sustained by the air.

Thermals were scarce and weak. Even the vultures who joined us for a few circuits failed to climb. Our flight was short-lived. Thanks to David’s skill, we soon regained the airfield. We rumbled along the runway on our single wheel until we gently listed onto one wingtip caster.

David and I always hoped to go soaring again, but weather failed to cooperate and life intervened. For my part, I have a lone entry in my skinny log book of some dual time in a sailplane.
Stearman Dreams
JEFFREY WEAVER, CINCINNATI, OH

Since I was very young, I have always wanted a ride in an open-cockpit biplane. I mentioned this to a friend at lunch one day, and he told me of a fellow pilot who had a Boeing Stearman that will take riders up for the fuel that will be used. I said give me his number. We made contact and tried to set a time, but the weather in the spring in 2019 in southwest Ohio was very rainy. But on June 6, the 75th Anniversary of D-Day, we were able to take off from Hogan Field. It was a beautiful early evening flight. I asked before we went up if it was possible to do a loop, and he said his plane could do many Gs, but he wanted to see if I had any motion sickness before trying anything like that. I have never had any motion sickness in my life and told him that, so he said OK hold on and we did the loop. I loved it! Then he asked if I wanted to try a Hammerhead and I said “Sure, what is that?” We did the maneuver, and I loved that also. It was a great flight, and Kevin was a wonderful pilot and a great guy. And one of my dreams came true.
I’ve been an aviation enthusiast and wanna-be pilot all my life. My first awe-inspiring exposure came when I was 9 or 10 years old when my dad brought me to the Schenectady County Airport to view a brand new Eastern Airlines Lockheed Electra that was touring the country. Long story short: Life happens, and I never realized my dream.

As I approached retirement in 2007, I frequently voiced the possibility of finally taking flying lessons. As a retirement gift, my children bought me an introductory flight lesson at Richmor Aviation, the FBO at the same Schenectady County Airport. I was excited beyond description! On a beautiful August afternoon, after a short ground briefing, my instructor and I boarded a Cessna 152 with me in the right seat. I was surprised at how small the cockpit was and a little disappointed that the right side of my headset wasn’t working. Before I knew it, we were cleared for take off, rolling down the runway, and the instructor told me to slowly start pulling back on the yoke. I was actually flying the plane!

I made a climbing turn to the left and headed north. It was exhilarating and I was excited to be able to identify highways and landmarks. We circled over the crowded Saratoga Race Course as horses circled the track during an actual race. As we headed back to the airport, I could see the runway ahead. My instructor verbally guided me in, as I lined up my approach and decreased my altitude. He did not take the controls until we were no more than a hundred feet off the ground. After a perfect landing, we were hardly off the runway when I heard a startling roar. I glanced over my shoulder and was stunned to see an LC-130 of the 109th Air Transport Group, New York Air National Guard landing directly behind us. Maybe because the radio transmissions were barely audible, I was totally unaware of transport’s proximity while we were in the air. The experience was once-in-a-lifetime and will remain so, as my cluelessness about my surroundings in the air convinced me that I wasn’t up to the challenge of learning to fly at this late date. I’m okay with that. The memory of that day remains one of the best of my life and I currently satisfy my flying urges via YouTube videos and virtual reality flight simulators!
Rainbow Flight

JACK WILSON, CLEVELAND, OH

When I was a student pilot, my instructor assigned a solo task consisting of an out-and-return flight, in our trusty Miles Hawk 3 aeroplane. After I took off and headed out to the turn point, which was a city, the weather was clear, and I had no problem seeing the turn point. Making the 180-degree turn to head back, I was surprised to see that the sky was grey and overcast, almost as though it might rain. Nevertheless I had no choice but to return, and so set the reciprocal heading. After about 15 minutes, I noticed that the sun had appeared behind me. Not only was the sun shining, but in front of me there was a rainbow. It was a complete circle, and I was headed directly towards the center of it. Even though this destroyed the theory that there is a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow, it was a magical sight, one that I have never seen again.

Happy in the Window Seat

BOB HALE, BROWNSVILLE, TN

It is 1962 and I am happy that I made a presentation to a scientific meeting at the University of Florida about our virus studies at our lab in Memphis. I am also happy that one leg of the return trip will be at night, on a jet. I have not flown either way before. After rental car trip from Gainesville to Jacksonville, then on an Electra to Atlanta, we board the Convair 880. I find my assigned seat by a window on the right side just behind the wing. We are pushed back and taxi over what seems like half of Georgia (even in 1962, this airport is big). From the long runway, we climb steeply and quickly. The lights of Atlanta are an enormous horizontal Christmas tree as we turn to the West. The high lift slats and flaps are retracted and the wing seems too thin to support the lights at its tip. Far below, seen through gaps in the cloud layer, lights of small towns are like hot coals spilled from some giant's fireplace shovel. There's a smiling stewardess making her way down the aisle. "Magazines?"
"No, thanks, not while I have this window!"
In 1981, I was a young staff sergeant in the U.S. Air Force stationed with the 56th Tactical Fighter Training Wing located at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. I was assigned to the 61st Tactical Fighter Training Squadron “Top Dogs,” and I was the dedicated crew chief for F-16A 79-0061, which happened to be the 61st Squadron commander’s aircraft. On June 1, 1981, I was promoted to technical sergeant and so happened I was re-enlisting on the same day. Additionally, I had been awarded an incentive flight because my aircraft exceeded a set of mission-ready standards over a 90-day period.

My reenlistment was really special, as I reenlisted in the back seat of an F-16B (061 was a single-seat), at Mach 1.1, 36,000 feet, upside down, over the Gulf of Mexico. The aircraft was being flown by Major Michael Ryan. Of course there had to be an American flag present during my oath of enlistment. It was carried in another F-16 by the 61st Squadron executive officer, Major Milan Zimer.

Shortly after takeoff, and a low-level flight over Avon Park Bombing Range, we headed out over the Gulf. We were about 20,000 feet when Major Ryan asked me if I was ready for my enlistment oath. Of course I was! He then began reading me the oath of enlistment, broadcasting over the UHF radio, as we began accelerating through the Mach, and into an almost vertical climb. Major Ryan timed the oath, so that as we rolled inverted at Mach 1.1, at 36,000 feet, he had me repeat the last line of the Oath of Enlistment, “So help me God.” I looked to my right, and in perfect formation, Major Zimer was waving a small American Flag. To this day, I cannot begin to express the overwhelming sense of pride that I experienced during that moment.

Major Ryan then proceeded to demonstrate some flight maneuvers to me, including a 9-G turn...that hurt. We also performed two air-to-air engagements with Major Zimer, again sustaining another 9 G’s. Upon returning to MacDill, Major Ryan demonstrated two simulated flameout (SFO) approaches. It was an action-packed ride-!
**An Old, Tired C-54Q**

RENE J. FRERET, PARON, AR

I was stationed at Naval Air Station Pensacola from 1971 through 1974. On several occasions I would ride on the Reservist flight to Naval Air Station New Orleans leaving Pensacola late Friday afternoon and returning late Sunday night. On one particular cold (for northern Florida) December Friday night I boarded an old and tired C-54Q where a combination of events backed up on the crew. As the flight neared bayou country, coastal fog increased.

Although the weather reports were not encouraging the pilot decided to make a GCA approach. Down to minimums and no runway in sight, the pilot executed a missed approach. While climbing out, sparks and fire were seen coming from outboard of the No. 3 engine. Suspecting the engine had blown an exhaust stack, the propeller was feathered, and the crew began to think seriously about getting their four-engine plane onto some piece of concrete with just three engines. All Gulf Coast fields were reported below minimums.

While climbing through 2,000 feet, flames were noticed coming from No. 4. (Later it was determined No. 4 was sick with magneto trouble and was pumping out raw fuel.) Power was reduced on No. 4 and an emergency was declared. Hattiesburg, Mississippi, was VFR, and the aging C-54 was rerouted. No. 3 was started for the approach and landing, then feathered again.

We all spent an uncomfortable night in the plane and in the morning mechanics were flown in for repairs. Nothing was found wrong with No. 3, No. 4 was repaired, No. 2’s generator was found loose on its mount with a sheared shaft. The remaining flight to NAS New Orleans was uneventful.

**Sopwith Strutter**

BRUCE E. KIMME, PROSPER, TX

It is a special day,—my first flight in a Sopwith one and a half Strutter.

Pre-flight completed, service the castor oil, and top off the fuel. Fuel tank air pressure is pumped up to 2 psi by the cockpit pump. Engine and air-frame are in condition for flight.

The Strutter is pulled into position on the grass. It is time to fly!

Chocks are in, engine prelude is completed, time to start the Gnome rotary engine. “Fuel on” is called to the pilot, when fuel comes out of the bottom cylinder, “Fuel off” is called. Two full engine rotations and “Contact” is signaled to the pilot. He repeats the command and I swing the prop. The Gnome starts with a roar and a cloud of smoke. I run for the rear cockpit, but am slowed by the prop blast. I struggle in and buckle up as the engine is put through its ground checks. The pilot signals for the chocks to be pulled.

We start to roll down the grass. The Strutter accelerates quickly, even with the full load. The grass rushes by and we are airborne. The rear cockpit is cozy, no prop blast here.

We climb away and tour of the area. All too soon it is time to land, down we go. A smooth landing and the end to a successful check flight, at maximum weight.
Gypsy Moth
LEROY DAY, ROCKVILLE, MD

I was driving through the sheep country of South Island, New Zealand when I came upon a small airport. I spotted an old biplane so I stopped to have a look. The plane was a 1920 vintage English Gypsy Moth, forerunner of the Tiger Moth, the primary trainer for all English fliers in World War II. I was told that the Gypsy Moth was indeed flightworthy so I asked if I might get a flight. Equipped with the customary helmet and goggles, I climbed into the front cockpit and the pilot got us airborne. After a few minutes, I decided I wanted to take the controls so I shook the stick (no intercom) and began to make S-turns, shallow dives and climbs. The Gypsy Moth was very stable and easy to fly.

After we landed, the pilot said, “You didn’t tell me you were a pilot.”

I replied, “I’m not, but I’m an aeronautical engineer and I know a lot about how planes fly. Furthermore, I’ve flown many radio control model airplanes.”

He laughed.

A “Supervised Solo”
DAN GIANOPULOS, FRESNO, CA

My first “supervised solo” flight was on December 15, 1981, at Bob Hope Airport in a Cessna 152. Following 10 touch-and-go landings, my instructor had me “fly the pattern” one time alone. No big deal. I was comfortable on the radio and familiar with the airport taxiways. The long runway is #15 and as I taxed towards the run-up area, I was number three to takeoff behind a couple of MD-80s (yikes) and Lockheed’s red and white B-737 (the one that ferried “Skunkworks” employees to-and-from Palmdale).

“Hmm, I better keep a good distance behind the B-737 because I don’t want his thrust to flip my plane on its back.” It was late in the afternoon and it started to get dark (I wasn’t checked out for night flying yet). Due to a high volume of landing airline traffic, it was taking long for the tower to synchronize the departures of the airliners in front of me, as it got darker outside (I’m afraid of the dark, just kidding). I completed my run-up while I waited.

FINALLY, it was just the B-737 and me left, and the tower called me, “Cessna 49048, taxi and squeeze by the Lockheed plane on his left side and you are cleared for takeoff. Lockheed such-and-such, that little Cessna is going to taxi right past your left wing-tip.” “Roger,” as I thought to myself, “He better not throttle up or else I’m toast,” so I flicked on my landing lights (it was dark), full right aileron and elevator down (defensive taxiing), and proceeded to takeoff, fly around the pattern, and land. It was nighttime when I parked, and my instructor was both horrified by my predicament and elated that I didn’t choke.
In 1973, I was able to fly around the United States with my friend, Brian McCarthy, in a Piper Comanche 6765P. Our first day was from Los Angeles to Rapid City, South Dakota. After our stop in Ogden, Utah, we were flying over the middle of Wyoming, and Brian asked me to check with Flight Service on the weather in Rapid City. Not much is happening in the middle of Wyoming, and a voice came on the frequency and said, “This is Western Airlines flight 967, and I think they are painting the runway in Rapid City today.” Yeah, right. Some airline pilots having fun with us amateur pilots. But Flight Service said they would check. In a minute, Flight Service was back on the line and said, “Guess what? They are painting the runway today, and it is closed…..but they are landing small airplanes on the grass strip.”

I looked up the airport in my Flight Guide, and it was an old World War II airfield with two runways forming a big X. They had paved one of the runways and the other sat unused. We called Rapid City, and they gave us permission to land. Well, if you have never flown to Rapid City, you wouldn’t know that the whole place is grass, and how do you find the grass strip in all that grass? Well, we lined up on one of the buildings and guessed right. But the strip hadn’t been used since World War II and was just bumps. Even with both of us on the brakes, we stopped just 10 feet from the newly painted runway. The tower called us and said, “Short, isn’t it?”

I flew the leg from Washington, D.C. to Miami. I was the junior pilot, and when I had a problem with the artificial horizon, I woke Brian, who had fallen asleep. He growled, “Always trust your instruments. Let me have the stick.”

He leveled the wings on the artificial horizon, but I quickly pointed out that we were in a spiral left hand turn downward as shown by the altimeter and compass. Brian said, “We have a problem. Give me a heading to the nearest airport.”

That was Savannah, Georgia. I dialed in the airport frequency. Brian said, “Savannah, this Piper Comanche 6765P, we have a problem and we’re going down….beneath the low stratus of 2,000 feet,” and described the problem. Just as he did that, I saw that we were heading straight over a Strategic Air Command Air Force Base runway at 1,800 feet instead of the required 3,000 feet. I dialed in SAC, but couldn’t reach them. We flew right over their 15,000 runway, and I thought that this was the end of our trip and our pilot’s licenses.

I dialed in Savannah, and they said, “Cleared to land.” Wow, we had 727s circling around in the landing pattern just so we could land. After we landed, the tower called us. What they heard was, “We have a problem and we’re going down.” The rest of the transmission was lost because we were in a spiral turn and our antenna was pointed away from the airport. They thought we were crashing and gave us an immediate “Cleared to land.”
Trip to Hawaii

CHUCK KELLY, COLORADO SPRINGS, CO

My wife and I took an anniversary flight to Hawaii in May of 1997.

After takeoff from LAX to KOA the flight crew on the United flight informed us that this was the 50th anniversary of United’s Hawaii route.

When we debarked in Kona we all received the customary lei and a gift bag of souvenirs from the governor of Hawaii. As we walked down the air stairs I turned and saw, draped over the nose and cockpit of our 757, a rather colorful and quite large Hawaiian lei.

Memories of my Dad

JOHN E. ROSS, ASHEVILLE, NC

During World War II, my dad, Sam Ross, was a civilian flight instructor teaching primary and basic with the 71st AAFSTD operated by Wiggins-Marden Aero Corporation at Camden, Ark.

To fly on Uncle Sam’s nickel after the war, he stayed in the USAF Reserve. Getting in his hours, he’d stuff my brother in me in a Piper J3’s rear seat, tell us not to bump the stick or touch the pedals, take off from Parks Watson Airport in Blue Ash, Ohio, and fly us over Gram and Grandad’s farm near Milford and our house in Terrace Park. Occasionally he’d shoot touch-and-go’s at Lunken, Cincinnati’s old municipal airport.

Dad learned to fly through Civilian Pilot Training while a student at the University of Cincinnati. I wanted to fly, but my eyes and asthma kept me out of flight training and, ultimately, ROTC.

Yet, as a contributing hunting and fishing writer for Sporting Classics and, at one time, Sports Afield, I’ve been fortunate to ride the right-hand seat in a number of float-equipped Beavers and Otters into Alaskan and Canadian backcountry. I can still imagine how Dad would’ve grinned when their big radials fired up.

I’m not sure how he’d have felt that morning, though, after my pilot and I harvested a couple caribou along a lake in Quebec’s Ungava, found the wind had shifted, and weren’t quite sure we’d clear the boulders rapidly getting closer and closer at the end of the lake. He would have done what all good pilots do and my pilot did... keep flying!
**Night Monsters**  
**PATRICK J. MCDONALD, DES MOINES, IA**

It is obscenely dark over the Florida everglades. I’m alone in a Cessna 206, cruising toward Vero Beach at 5,000 feet. There are no stars to guide my way or lights to mark civilization. I’ve never, in 2,500 hours of piloting, encountered darkness like undiluted black latex paint.

Miles of swamp, twisted vegetation and mangrove trees hide the night monsters, ready to feast on whatever is left of me if my engine quits. I remind myself to totally trust the instrument cluster in front of me, because I don’t want my life to end at midnight on May 20, 1984.

Night monsters also dwell in the depths of my anxiety-driven imagination and I fight not to turn them loose. If I feed my internal monsters, they’ll devour me as well, so I make a choice: overreact to an alien environment or go with the energy of the moment.

I secure the autopilot to continue my easterly heading, then turn down the panel lights to a dim glow. The darkness, the lack of any sensation of motion, the absence of a time flow, an absolution from preoccupation about direction, open up a deeper reality: images of total solitude. I become a disjointed consciousness, suspended somewhere in space a mile above my home planet, grateful for only the moment.

The spell is broken by Vero Beach approach control, welcoming me home. I return to flying chores. The darkness becomes a sea of Florida coastal lights. I am solidly home.

**Beech Baron Icing**  
**JOHN DIXON, SHAWNEE MISSION, KS**

In February ’71, flying an A55 Baron from Dayton to Kansas City, over Napoleon (now Blue Springs) VOR, ATC radioed me—23nm east of Downtown airport, “November 20 Tango, descend and maintain 4,000, pilot reporting scattered freezing-rain north and west.”

At 4,500, daylight fading, icing began to accumulate on wings, wind-screen, and props—10 minutes out with only alcohol for the props.

Two minutes later, throttles open, stall warning blaring, airspeed had fallen to 125 knots. I was eight minutes out and landing at Downtown (now Wheeler), requiring a 90 degree bank. Damn! Fairfax airport, across the river from Downtown had runway 33—closer to my heading.

Icing across the windscreen allowed only an inch or two of vision over the nose cowling. I asked Fairfax Tower for an emergency—straight-in-33 and to give me full-bright runway lights. Response was immediate with lights and, “Baron, report position.”

“Tango crossing 36 Downtown, over river, 1600, flashing nose light, gear up.”

“Roger that, Baron. Ease southward, looking good.”

Props were throwing ice into the fuselage and wind-screen as the plane crossed 33’s threshold, nose centered, airspeed at 115kts, settling 500 fpm, stall warning driving me nuts. I yanked its breaker, pulled the gear handle out and slammed it downward.

Three greens lights lit as Tango’s mains met concrete.

I took a very deep breath; knees trembling. Tower cleared me to taxi.
Lightning Strike, 1953 Japan
GORDON J. TWA, COTTONWOOD, AZ

It was a full moonlit night and we were flying at 17,000 feet halfway from Tokyo to our home base, Komaki air force base, just outside Nagoya, Japan. We were dodging through a field of cumulous clouds which towered above us.

The first indication of something strange was the UHF antennae on the nose of the B-17 started glowing green. Then the propeller disks became larger and larger circles of green. As I watched out of the copilot's side window, purple balls about the size of bowling balls started bouncing up and down the wing in the low-pressure area. A ball would form and go bouncing down the wing, then poof, it would disappear and a new one would form.

Suddenly there was a brilliant flash and a noise so loud I couldn't describe it. I couldn't see. I couldn't hear. My only thought was, "Son-of-a-bitch, I think we bought it."

Soon, I could hear the engines were still running. Then, I could see again. I was the flight engineer, and I immediately checked the instruments and everything seemed fine.

The radio operator and I checked the rear of the plane and the only damage we found was that the low-frequency transmitter had gone up in smoke and that the 200 feet of trailing-wire antennas that were out had melted off.

On landing we inspected the exterior for damage and all that we could find was that the wool static discharge tuff on the fabric control surface had all blown off.

Hold for a Rescue
JOHN KADUK, SAN DIEGO, CA

In 1975 I was a newly minted private pilot living in Phoenix, Arizona. I wanted to get some night landing practice, so I rented a Cessna 172 and brought along a pilot friend. We did a few touch and go's at Scottsdale airport and then landed and taxied back to the departure runway. At the time there was nothing but desert north of the airport. At the end of the runway, we contacted the tower for takeoff and were told to hold short for landing traffic. After a long wait, the tower called us and said that they thought that the incoming airplane had gone down. They asked if we could take off, turn to the north, and look for any lights north of the field. We did, and as soon as we turned north, we spotted a light that shouldn't have been out there. As we got closer, we could see that it was the red and green navigation lights of an airplane. The tower asked us to circle the aircraft so that the airport fire truck could find its way to the downed airplane. As we circled, we could see the lights of the fire truck headed our way. Soon after the fire truck arrived, the tower radioed to us that the pilot was okay. I never did find out what caused the airplane to go down. I've often been tempted to see if I could find an accident report but I guess I enjoy it being a mystery. I made a note in my logbook that night that reads "Crash rescue team"!
Faith in Workmanship
KEITH JONES, EL CAJON, CA

“Holy crap!” I blurted as the wing fell to my right. No doubt my eyes bulged with fright as I stared down the wingtip which pivoted towards the ground. My seatbelt failed to keep me secured to the cushion. The engine’s fiberglass cowling disappeared from view as we plummeted. I clambered for something to hold on to—anything—to keep me from striking the passenger window of the single-engine homebuilt airplane.

I had asked for it. Really, “Do you want me to do a stall?” my dad, a single-engine rated pilot for several years, had offered.

“Sure,” I replied, not knowing what to expect. “Just let me know when it stalls.”

The plane was not just any homebuilt. The project started as the tattered fuselage of an Ercoupe that we had dragged home behind his Chevy station wagon. My dad had taken five years to design, craft key components, install the engine and controls, and assemble his flying machine, all in the confines of our single-car garage. He drafted my brothers and me into his task. We helped buck rivets, handed him nuts and bolts, threaded cables through small sections, and taped parts for painting.

We learned that building it didn’t mean he could just take off. He obtained the appropriate FAA and EAA certifications, and even ran tests down the grass runway until his wings lifted him off for that first solo flight.

My dad explained afterwards that the stalling speed for an experimental airplane isn’t exactly predictable. As for my concern about a catastrophic failure, he smiled. “You helped build it, right?”

Mine Eyes Have Seen a Glory
WILLIAM G. BENDER, DIXON, CA

During my commercial pilot training at Wenatchee, Washington in the summer of 1970, my instructor and I left Fancher Field on a planned, dual cross-country flight to Olympia and Seattle. Due to deteriorating visibility and rain, we made it only as far as Tieton Pass and turned back.

While flying at 5000 feet over a light cloud base with the sun behind us, we saw it: a circular complete rainbow with our AA-1 Yankee’s distinct shadow below moving along over the cloud base surrounded by a brilliant rainbow.
My First Solo

LES EASTEP, SPRINGFIELD, IL

I purchased an Aeronca 7AC Champ in 1961, thinking it was a good buy and it would be nice to learn to fly. I had been up a couple of times, once in a DC-3 about 1948, and once in a Piper Colt about 1960; more than enough background for beginners. I also had a friend who had an instructor’s license and said it was easy to learn to fly. I didn’t know I had to have a medical certificate. I also didn’t know my friend’s license was not current and his last student had totaled a plane on a bad landing. But the bank liked my enthusiasm enough to help me buy the plane.

For 3½ years it was stationed at Southwest Field at Springfield, IL. I learned to fly in that plane and spent many hours “poking holes in the sky” over Springfield. But before I could do that, I had to be cleared for “solo.” The procedure was to (1) obtain a medical certificate, that was, in effect, a student pilot license, (2) engage an instructor and (3) accumulate hours, and trust of the instructor to safely take off and land in one piece. We began in October of 1961, but due to work schedules, bad weather, and an overly cautious instructor, it took until April of 1963 before being cleared for solo. It helped that I changed instructors in March 1963. I had logged time for “cross-country,” night time, simulated emergencies, and under the hood, or instrument flying, all before soloing.

It was a clear day in April, not a cloud in the sky, and the instructor and I took off for the practice area. After only a few minutes he said to return to the field and land. I did so, wondering if I had done something wrong. He was unusually quiet all the way back. Most of our time in the air he was telling me how to do things better. He was the new instructor and I had developed a few bad habits that he had been helping me to correct. But this time I followed his request and landed the plane. As I rolled to a stop on the runway, he got out and said, “go up there and get some more practice.” That was my first solo flight. I was nervous and excited, but not so much as to not forget to have him sign my log book before he changed his mind.

There are many memories and stories about those days. I even ran the airport restaurant for a few months and, contrary to tradition, they did not cut off my shirt-tail the day I soloed.

At one time, before my time, there had been a few shirt-tails tacked to the wall in the restaurant. But that’s another story for another time.

But for me that was a beginning of a new (and fairly expensive) hobby.

Sharing the sky with the birds.
Scariest Flight
SIGMUND GRUDZINSKI, ROME, NY

The absolutely scariest flight I was ever on, was flying from Busan, South Korea to Seoul. It was monsoon season and we flew through one. It sounded like someone was constantly firing buck-shot from multiple shotguns at us. The airplane was constantly rising and falling a few thousand feet at a time. There were children on the flight and they were laughing the whole time. They thought it was fun. All the adults were quiet. When the airplane dropped, everyone’s hands just flew up in the air like we were doing a wave. When the airplane surged upwards, everyone’s hands came down and grabbed the armrests. At some point, the Korean woman who sat next to me, grabbed my hand on the armrest and held onto it, even when our hands inevitably flew up in the air again and again. Once we cleared the monsoon and were in clear, quiet air, she looked at me, embarrassed. I shrugged, and she let go. We had both survived and were glad it was over. We all applauded the crew when we landed in Seoul.

Crab Boil
ROBERT J MARSEGGLIA, FRANKLIN, MA

I think that the most interesting story is my flight to Tangier Island in the Chesapeake Bay, where some flying buddies and I flew down to pick up some blue crabs to bring home for a Maryland-style crab boil. Shortly after take-off and due to the effects of decreased atmospheric pressure all 24 of the crabs became ‘agitated’ and when I reached into the cooler to get a soft drink, the now mutinous crabs exited the cooler and started scurrying all over the floor of the Mooney! An interesting flight indeed!
Big Thank You to Crew
ROBERT H. KNOWLES, LAKELAND, FL

A few years ago, my wife and I were on an airliner on the way to New Hampshire to spend Christmas with our son, his wife and our 5 grandkids. The flight from Virginia was going well until we began our descent into the Manchester, NH airport.

The Captain came on the intercom and announced that there were reports of ice on the runway and that he would be making what he referred to as “an aggressive landing,” and that we should have seat belts secured and be prepared to brace ourselves. The plane came in fast, landed hard, and began to skid slightly. As the plane rolled to a stop, all the passengers erupted into spontaneous applause. Aggressive landing, indeed. We were a little shaken but safe at the gate for exiting with a big thank you for the Captain and crew.

Herky Bird Above Alaska
ROBERT MOYER, SAN ANTONIO, TX

I worked in the survival/life-support shop at USCG Air Station Kodiak, Alaska and flew as aircrewman/dropmaster in HC-130H search-and-rescue (SAR) aircraft. My orientation flight in a C-130 was memorable and thrilling. Taking off from the base of 2,500-foot-high Barometer Mountain and climbing out above the Gulf of Alaska, we banked southwest over the craggy spine of Kodiak Island. At mountaintop altitudes, we wove nimblly amongst the snowy peaks. I gaped upon the wilderness landscape. We skirted over crystalline streams of icy snowmelt, startled Kodiak brown bears, then ascended to 25,000 ft cruising altitude.

After the initial exuberance of our departure, it seemed the aircraft was floating motionless above an altostratus cloud layer. I was summoned up onto the flight deck where the left seat had been vacated by the aircraft commander who motioned me to strap in and take the yoke. As instructed, I watched the attitude indicator, altimeter, airspeed, and engine function gauges. I smoothly steered in graceful left and right banks. Comfortable with my new flying skills, the co-pilot said, “Let’s see how she handles now,” as he turned off the autopilot and trim controls.

The altimeter dial twirled up and down. The AI jogged erratically as the huge beast porpoised alarmingly. After that experience and others during hundreds of hours in the Herky Birds, I gained a healthy appreciation for the capabilities of the aircraft and a huge respect for those that fly it in maritime Alaska, one of Earth’s most hostile flying environments.
Ripples From a Disaster
WOODY UNDERWOOD, KANSAS CITY, MO

Right after the Pan Am disaster over Scotland in 1988 the airline really came up with some super offers to Europe, so my wife and I booked a trip to Germany. We paid $500 for the both us round-trip from Kansas City. It was my first trip overseas, and it became memorable.

The flight over was easy. We landed in Frankfurt, rented a car, and spent a delightful week in-country. Departing from Frankfurt on a 747 bound for home was a different story. The security was immense. Every passenger on our fully-booked flight was searched so we left three hours late. But our 747 was the clipper Juan Tripp, the first 747 ever put into service. Cool.

We landed at JFK really late and ran with our luggage to the gate to catch our connecting flight, also on Pan Am. The airplane was empty. The airline had held the flight because of the security delay back in Germany. We caught that flight to Cincinnati, where we got off the airplane to have a look at the airport before the flight continued on to Kansas City. When we returned to the gate we joined a number of our fellow passengers to watch our airplane being pushed out from the gate. Oops. Back it came, and we reboarded and flew on to KC.

A thunderstorm had come in, forcing us to circle for two-and-a-half hours before the Captain told us we were running out of fuel and diverting to Omaha. That airport was empty except for the bar, where the pilot bought everybody a drink and paid cash for the fuel. Flying back to KC took about 25 minutes; we never got higher than 5,000 feet. Our friend who was waiting to pick us up in Kansas City had been in the bar for seven hours. She was stoned, so I had to drive us all home.

Moon Shot
GARY D. WALKER, PORT ORCHARD, WA

The morning began like many others on the road with a 4:30 a.m. wake-up. Providence, Rhode Island was overcast, a cool 50 degrees, and moist though the rain had ended the day before. It might have been called a dawn patrol if we could see the dawn.

After our 30 passengers had settled in and the doors to the MD-88 were closed, we taxied out for takeoff in the black. "Launch" was a literal description on this morning because we were at a light weight. We rocketed off of Runway 5 and into the clouds. Soon thereafter we turned west toward Cincinnati, continuing to climb in the smooth, cloudy air.

Suddenly a diffuse circle of light began to appear directly ahead. It sharpened rapidly, and as we burst out of the cloud layer a full moon greeted us. We rapidly left the bright white moonlit cloud surface below us and pointing toward the moon we raced the sun to Ohio. We lost the race but won the morning.
We All Fly Reader’s Stories

Weather in the Mountains
PETE ALEXANDER, SAN DIEGO, CA

Back in 1977, I was ready for the solo X-C portion of my flight training in a mighty C-150. The plan was to fly from Brown Field (SDM) straight north to Victorville (VCV), fuel up and then depart southeast for Yuma (YUM) for another splash of gas before heading straight west for home. I’d need some altitude for the final leg to clear the Jacumba Mountains (~4K) and the downslope into San Diego from there. An incoming weather system developed quicker than forecast, and over the mountains I suddenly found myself in the soup. When I failed to “pop out” the back of the clouds, I attempted to do a 180 and, in the process, became spatially disoriented and found myself in a slow spiral heading down—IFR. I took my hands off the wheel for about 5 seconds of disbelief and borderline fear, and then snapped out of it and got back to work. I reduced power a bit, started bringing the column back to level off and rolled to wings level. I then realized I’d popped out the bottom of the cloud layer—in a valley surrounded by rising terrain and obscured by clouds. My only way out was to climb back up into the clouds and pick a direction, hoping my minimal IFR skills would suffice. Feeling confident again, I chose west and, 20 minutes later, saw a hole in the clouds below and descended through it into misty but VFR conditions. It was only after I landed and tied the aircraft down did the shakes set in...

Zero-G Flight
FRANK LOCK, GAINESVILLE, GA

One of the teachers said, “It’s over already?”

In December 2008, teachers in Florida were given the opportunity to apply for a “Vomit Comet” flight with Zero Gravity Corporation. I completed and sent in the application and waited.

In mid-January 2009, I received notice that I was accepted to complete a Zero-G flight. I worked to finalize my proposed experiment, an investigation of centripetal force in free fall (weightlessness). A pre-flight conference was held two weeks before the scheduled flight, and all participants were prepared for and excited about the flight.

After spending the night at a hotel in Titusville, FL, I traveled to the Space Coast Regional Airport, from which the flight departed. We received our name tags, which were put on upside down. They were turned to right side up when we completed the flight. After boarding we sat in airline seats with a view of the area where we would spend time floating. Once sufficiently out over the Atlantic Ocean, we moved into the free-fall area, and began the parabolas. The first two parabolas were flown to simulate Mars gravity (1/3-G) and lunar gravity (1/6-G). Doing pushups in reduced gravity was fun. Then seven free-fall parabolas began. It was great fun to twist and float free. I was glad I didn’t get sick, though some did. It was close, but I did not vomit. For perhaps eight days after, I could remember the enjoyable feeling of floating in air.
Weather Woes
PATRICK J. McDONALD, DES MOINES, IA

I’m bathed in warm January sunshine, with a cloud deck below. Waterloo Approach confirms my earlier briefing: “There’s no reports of icing within 200 miles,” my controller affirms, as he clears me for a routine 20-mile approach into Oelwein, Iowa. “Oelwein reports five miles visibility under an 800-foot overcast.”

I enter the clouds with maximum pleasure, but pleasure turns to panic in three minutes. My windshield is iced over and the wings are loading up with ice. It’s gotta be freezing rain. I can’t climb because of the ice load. I can’t go down because of a city beneath. I have to follow the chart instructions and continue.

The icing intensifies and I need full power to stabilize my descent. As the bases thin out I see the Oelwein airport slide by 500 feet below through my side window. Ice does unpredictable things to any aircraft and a quick turn to make the airport will create a stall and I’ll crash.

I fight panic and begin to fly a long goose egg pattern back to the airport, with no more than a three-degree bank, keeping the airport in view through my left window. The landing gear comes down and locks. Full power now flattens out my descent, and I land while looking out the side window. The aircraft stalls at 90 knots.

In a warm hangar, I peel off chunks of ice, while listening to new weather: freezing fog and low visibility.

D.C. Airspace
BRUCE SQUIERS

“Hey kid,” he yelled, as he walked across the grass runway of the local flying club. “Didya ever see your house from the sky?”

With that, an excited boy got his first ride in an airplane. Still only a pre-teen growing up in the early 1960s, I couldn’t have been more excited than when the pilot said, “get in. I’ll help you with the seat belt.”

The encounter with the pilot of the yellow J-3 Cub wasn’t entirely accidental. A resident of a small upstate New York village, I often walked the highways and byways throughout the area, and those travels sometimes included following a pair of railroad tracks which directly passed a rural airport, really little more than a mowed field, a couple of hangars and a handful of light aircraft.

Often, peering in wonderment into those cockpits, I was spotted on one of many afternoon visits by one of the flying club pilots and, instead of scolding me, offered me a brief flight over my community.

When I finally returned to my home and told of my adventure, my family was surprised, but also excited to hear of my day of riding into the blue.

I’m now a retiree who never became a pilot, and over the years, I’ve flown many times, sometimes even in Huey helicopters flying over Vietnam, but I’ll always remember that summer afternoon when a kind stranger introduced me to the pathways of the sky.
In October 1965, I was a flight commander and led a flight of four F-105s to bomb a small bridge on the railroad track running out of China and into North Vietnam. It was also my yearly standardization evaluation check with the check pilot flying the number 4 flight position. All parts of the mission went as planned except for maybe one of the most important parts for me—accurate delivery of my six 750-lb bombs on the target.

During my dive-bomb attack, I was having a great deal of difficulty getting my pipper (electronic aiming dot on the gun/bomb sight) on the target and suddenly realized I needed to immediately initiate a “3P” maneuver to get myself and my airplane out a really bad situation. 1. PANIC (too steep, too fast, and way too damn low). 2. PICKLE (depress the bomb release button with great authority.) 3. PULL (rapidly pull the control stick back toward my crotch area.)

Everything worked as it should have. The nose of my aircraft was soon well above the horizon and I had the opportunity to bank my aircraft and look over my shoulder at what once was a nice little railroad bridge, but was now just one humongous hole in the ground with shock waves from the humid air rolling out and all kinds of junk being blown out of the hole by six bombs producing 4,500 pounds of iron and high explosive material. The other three guys in the flight dropped their bombs in the same hole or on the track close to where the bridge had been. Join up and return to base went without incident.

During the debriefing, the check pilot indicated he was really impressed with my bombing skills, and had no problems with my flight commander status or general fighter pilot capabilities. I refrained myself from telling him what actually happened during my dive bomb attack because I certainly didn’t want to spoil his day by having to write up a more extensive report. How thoughtful of me.
Ford Tri-motor
JEFFREY W. MASON, WALDORF, MD

I was in my early twenties in the summer of 1980. I had recently conquered my fear of heights by riding roller coasters while working at a Sandusky, Ohio amusement park. On July 21, 1980, my former college roommate, Rick, visited me and we used my day off to fly on a Lake Erie Islands Aerial Tour. It would be my first airplane flight and the tour company utilized a small but historic fleet of vintage 1929 Ford Trimotor aircraft—so it was a doubly exciting adventure. The large main engine located on the fuselage of the plane was supplemented by large motors on each wing. While it was a very noisy ride, as the engines drowned out any but the loudest verbal utterances, it was fun to soar over Lake Erie's scenic islands. Having my best friend along for the ride was comforting as he had flown many times before this. After we landed, we disembarked and Rick drove us around to the backside of a large hanger building—the first time I had been back there. I was shocked to see the remains of a crashed Ford Trimotor aircraft. He told me, “I dropped you off at the ticket office when we arrived here on purpose so you would not get psyched out of flying after seeing this wreckage from a few years ago.” I replied, “Thanks man, and you’re right, there’s no way I would have gotten on the plane if I had seen this first!”

A 10-Year-Old’s Adventure
WILLIAM R. MCDILL

In 1946, I was 10 years old and my parents decided to send me by airplane to my maternal grandmother in Missouri. In early June, I boarded a DC-3 in El Paso, Texas so as to fly to St. Louis.

After some adventures with the vomit bag, my flight flew over the Convair plant in Ft. Worth and I saw a “ginormous” six-engine plane on the ground—the totally unreported B-36!

Then I was bumped from my flight in Tulsa and had a nice chat with a man who claimed to be part of a group looking for Nazi technology—subsequently, this activity became public as ‘Operation Paper Clip.” I was reboarded in Tulsa and was flown to St. Louis three hours late—the passenger service area was closed. Not knowing what to do, I followed a limousine driver and was transported to the Jefferson Hotel in downtown St. Louis—where my paternal grandmother found me. Quite an adventure for a 10-year-old. I never had any other trip even close to it.
Coast Guard Memories
DENNY FREEZER, HALF MOON BAY, CA

After receiving my Wings of Gold in Pensacola, Florida, I was transferred to Coast Guard Air Station (CGAS) San Diego. In my very first Search and Rescue (SAR) case, we launched to medically evacuate a fisherman with a fishhook in his eye. We hoisted him from the boat as he held a beer can wrapped in a handkerchief over his eye, and delivered him to a nearby hospital. Many years, duty stations, and SAR cases later, when I was Commanding Officer of CGAS New Orleans, I had a standing offer to my crew that I would try to accommodate any special requests they had for re-enlisting. A crewmember in a non-aviation rate who had never flown in our helicopters said she would like to re-enlist at an altitude of 10,000 feet. So, we strapped her in the copilot seat of the helicopter and climbed to 10,000 feet for me to administer the oath of re-enlistment. My most vivid memory is that it was the highest I had ever been in a helicopter and in the thin air I could seemingly move the cyclic an inch or two in any direction before it had any effect. Now I’ve been retired longer than I was on active duty, and as I bicycle along the California coast, I’m often overflown by crews from CGAS San Francisco, flying updated versions of the same model helicopter I flew over 30 years ago in New Orleans. It brings back many memories.

Close Call with a Shopping Bag
RAYMOND MERRICK, ONTARIO, CANADA

I was inbound to Niagara District Airport from the south west of the Niagara Peninsula. Passing over the Niagara Escarpment to The Pen Centre shopping centre, I was at 1,300 feet above the large parking area with bright sunshine and temps in the low 80s.

Just 10-15 feet in front of me and about the end of my left wing tip, I saw a bright flash of white for a fraction of a second! Wondering what had just happened I went to full power in my little Cessena 150G and pulled up in a left banking turn. As I got back in line from where I saw the flash, I caught a few seconds view of a white plastic shopping bag rocketing into the clear blue sky! It was 2 or 3 seconds and the bag was out of sight. I had been at 1,300 feet and that bag went beyond 3,000 feet before I lost sight of it. Had I been a half second sooner and 10 feet farther to the left, I would have sucked that plastic shopping bag into my prop! That would have caused a forced landing on either a rolling golf course or a major highway, neither of which was very comfortable.

Even at altitude you never know what you can meet on a summer afternoon.
In 1955, I was a 19-year-old U.S. Air Force Airman based in Nellis A.F.B., Las Vegas, Nevada. And, I was excited to be on my first “leave” and fly home to our family in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania for the Christmas holidays.

My flight destination was to Pittsburgh, non-stop. At my boarding gate, my heart pounded with joy because our plane was a Lockheed Constellation!

Wow! Such a huge and beautiful aircraft to carry a young Airman all the way to Pittsburgh. I chose to sit at the window on the right side wing to watch the engines, propellers, ailerons and flaps as well as the evening lights below.

It was dusk and getting dark when we reached our cruising altitude, headed E/NE. With the Constellation’s lights flashing off and on, in the dark, I watched the colorful propellers pulling us through the air and as I studied the whole wing, I saw an open “HOLE” in the top of the wing with fuel being drawn onto and off the wing. The stream of fuel was just behind one of the engines spitting colorful exhaust flames!! THE HOLE WAS THERE BECAUSE THE FUELING CAP WAS NOT!!

I was afraid the flames from the engine would ignite the fuel and it didn’t take 5 seconds to get the attention of a stewardess who anxiously studied the sight of the missing fuel cap and fuel being drawn out onto the wing. She ran to the cockpit and brought a pilot with a flashlight back to investigate my finding, then briskly went back to the cockpit. In a few of minutes, she returned to report that “all would be O.K.,” then peeked through the window with the flashlight, showing me that the fuel was no longer leaking. (NOW I COULD BREATHE NORMALLY AGAIN.) No other passengers were aware of the fuel leak and I was asked to “HUSH”—keep the “find” to myself, which I did.

This beautiful Constellation did not change course to land and re-fill the fuel tank. Finally, we landed in Pittsburgh safely and as smooth as silk. “NO FIRE, NO FEAR” (except for me). As I was getting off the plane, the Captain, Co-Captain and two Stewardess’ thanked me for reporting the incident and wished me a MERRY CHRISTMAS. WHEW! That flight and fear has NEVER left my mind, whether I’m flying in today’s commercial aircraft or piloting a 2-seater Piper Tomahawk.

The flames from the engine and airborne fuel will always be hunted for by me while in the air and on the ground.

P.S. (I keep on wondering.....Was the fuel in the tank on my side dumped for safety, or used immediately to reduce the loss of fuel left in the tank.) YES.....or.....NO?.......or BOTH!
F-86s vs. Aeronca Champ
WILLIAM N. DAVIS, CORSICANA, TX

I was on the second of three legs of my solo cross-country AFROTC Flight Indoctrination Program flight in a bright yellow Aeronca Champion cruising at 90 mph at 4,000 feet when something happened which I will never forget.

I was over Lake Texoma heading west when I noticed two spots at 10 o’clock high coming my way. Then the dots were zooming in front of me about a half-mile away. They were F86s from Perrin AFB.

I was never in any danger and figured that they had just made a harmless “arrack” on a bogey, especially when they each did an aileron roll and headed up.

I completed my flight with no other incidents, but, like I said, I will never forget that flight—and that was 62 years ago.

Two Hair-raising Solos
KERRY AND LINDA KENNER, CHARLOTTE, NC

Every pilot remembers their first solo. My wife and I both had extra adrenaline rushes with our first solos. When I was cleared for solo, I was flying out of a mid-sized airport with an Air National Guard wing operating F-4 Phantoms. Tower cleared a flight of Phantoms to land on the intersecting runway while I held on the other. Phantom one, two, and three landed and chutes deployed, and I was cleared for takeoff. While I was applying full power, I wondered why only three planes were in the flight. Before I got airborne, I saw the fourth on short final. I applied brakes about the same instant my takeoff clearance was cancelled.

During my wife’s first solo, the tower cleared her to land behind the twin on short final. As the twin touched down, she was amazed at how quickly the twin stopped on the runway, just as the tower told her to go around. Then tower asked the twin if everyone was OK. (The twin had failed to lower its gear and no one was injured.)
Way back in my early aviation career, I had the bright idea to fly a small, single-engine aircraft to the Bahamas from Florida. So with a buddy from Massachusetts, we left for the adventure of a lifetime in my Cessna 172 Skyhawk. Keep in mind: I was a low-time VFR private pilot who had never flown this far from home nor over water longer than to Martha's Vineyard where you are never out of sight of land! The year was something like 1975.

So we arrive at Palm Beach International airport where, owing to the geography, it's only a 60-nautical-mile crossing to West End on Grand Bahama island where our final destination is Freeport. We fill out the international flight plan paperwork, file and get a weather briefing. Oh wait, do we wanna rent overwater survival gear! Huh? Yeah, we can rent you 72-hour wait-in-the-water life jackets or even a self-inflatable four-man life raft! This is getting interesting. We decide against the four-man raft after hearing a story of an inadvertent deployment of a raft while packed aboard. So off we go wearing our rented life vests with the emergency inflating cords taped out of easy access to help avoid accidental deployment.

Immediately after takeoff, we pick up an easterly heading which seems so wrong because it takes us away from terra firma and out to sea. I keep nervously looking back over my shoulder to see how far we are from land with the idea that we can still make a beach landing should the engine fail. Eventually, however, we are out of gliding distance from our point of departure. In another 20 minutes, we are out of sight of any landmass either behind us or in front of us! My heartbeat accelerates accordingly as I try to act nonchalant for my non-pilot passenger. Any engine problem occurring from this point on, and we are going swimming! I finger the activation cord of my life vest. In the hundreds of hours I have flown the airplane the engine has not so much as coughed.

I steel myself for a flight during which there is absolutely nothing to glimpse in any direction but cold, deadly ocean. My mind plays tricks on me, and I imagine our track is off by a couple of degrees and we wind up missing the island entirely and continue out to sea until fuel exhaustion and eventual splashdown. At about the same time the engine stumbles. Yes, it happens, at least that’s what I thought. But eternally optimistic, I casually check all my engine gauges and calmly continue on, being careful not the show my passenger my internal alarm. In another 20 minutes I see the cumulus clouds over West End, indicating the westernmost point of the island and soon thereafter I spot land and I begin our descent for our final destination at Freeport. The approach and landing are textbook, and we are soon taxiing on the ramp to the terminal for our appointment with customs. We clear customs, unload the aircraft and make for the terminal and ground transportation to our hotel. Halfway there my buddy turns to me and says, “You were real calm back there when the engine stumbled.” OH MY GOD!
Caught in a Cloud  
CRAIG P.J. WHEEL, NEWARK, DE

We had a late afternoon trip in our Agusta 109 to 60th Street Heliport, drop our passenger, and return home empty, and, with the reported weather and forecast to be clear with unrestricted visibility for the entire trip, we decided to conduct the flight under VFR (Visual Flight Rules).

We arrived in New York with the sun setting and the twinkling lights of the city casting a warm and welcoming feeling, which slowly ebbed away after we dropped our passenger and left the city to return home. With John flying this leg and while cruising into the dark of night at 1,200 feet, we suddenly found ourselves embedded in a cloud, which we did not see before entering into it, so we immediately climbed to 1,500 feet and called McGuire Approach, with whom we had been flight following, and advised them that we had encountered IIMC (Inadvertent Instrument Metrological Condition), and requested a clearance to Trenton-Robbinsville Airport. McGuire Approach immediately cleared us to 2,000 feet and for the VOR 29 while providing vectors for a straight in approach, which we completed with no further problems. Once on the ground, we filed an IFR flight plan to return home, refueled while awaiting our clearance and with our clearance in hand we departed, into a clear sky, with an uneventful flight the rest of the way home.

Missed Approach  
ROBERT F. MOYER

USCG Air Station Kodiak provides numerous essential services within the vast region of maritime Alaska. Several objectives are often combined on one flight.

My C-130 was taking supplies to the isolated LORAN C station at Port Clarence, about 700 miles one way up the west coast of Alaska. We were greeted enthusiastically by the 12 Coasties stationed there.

Flying back to Kodiak, we received instructions to pick up passengers at Elmendorf Air Force Base in Anchorage. Another Kodiak C-130 was grounded with a crew of trainees who needed to be taken back.

At Elmendorf, a 2-ton vehicle was added to our manifest. We loaded and chained it down securely, then accommodated the extra aircrewmen.

The HC-130's range is 3,000 miles. Anchorage to Kodiak is 250 miles and we had logged only 1,300. We did not refuel at Elmendorf. With 17 personnel and a truck filling the cargo area we departed for Kodiak.

At Kodiak airfield, visibility was zero from the ground up. The 7,000 ft. runway is approached from open water toward a mountain range at the end. Following the radio chatter, I observed through the scanner’s window—nothing visible until lights emerged midway down the runway. Engaging max power, we pulled up sharply—missed approach #1. After attempting #2, #3, and #4, the pilot queried: “Would it be feasible to drop the vehicle?” The extra load and effort caused high fuel consumption.

Question unanswered, we tried landing once more. Thankfully, the mighty Hercules came through for us again.
As a young child, I found the concept of flight totally fascinating. I learned to fly while in the Army, briefly considering a career in commercial aviation. Instead, I got my Ph.D., married my wife, Marilyn, and had three children. Busy, busy, busy working as a psychologist, coaching Little League, going to recitals, etc. In 2002, kids on their way to independence, while dining in an airport restaurant in Farmingdale, New York, Marilyn suggested I get back into aviation. I jumped at the idea.

In short order, I regained currency as a VFR private pilot (and subsequently earned my instrument rating). I purchased a Grumman AA5-B (Tiger), which had been based in Arizona. It needed a little work, so I contacted Fred Coon (late of Victoria, Texas), who was known to have particular expertise in that type aircraft and, together, we flew it back to Islip, Long Island. In the process, we formed a friendship and I deeply respected his thorough knowledge of Grumman aircraft.

In the summer of 2003, I came across an article indicating that the then current U.S. transcontinental speed record was set in an airplane that was foreign built. After some quick calculations, I concluded that I could break that record in my American designed and built Grumman. As the flight was too long to complete solo (sleeping on the job was not a single pilot option), I called Fred and he agreed to join me in this endeavor.

On October 16, 2003, we set the West to East transcontinental speed record for piston engine aircraft weighing less than 2,240 pounds in Fred’s plane. Our record was listed first in the National Aeronautic Association among the Most Memorable Aviation records for 2003. And it was the centennial year of aviation!

On July 22, 2004, we set the East to West transcontinental speed record in my Grumman. Despite the higher speed of my Grumman, headwinds, particularly over the Rockies, made this record more arduous. We were recognized as having set one of the eight most memorable aviation records of 2004. That record still stands.

In both years, the NAA awards ceremonies were held in Washington, D.C., and it was great to meet with, and give speeches to, an audience consisting of many renowned pilots and astronauts. The Walter Mitty in me imagined I was their peer (in reality, not so much).

If time travel were possible, I would love to go back to tell the eight-year-old me of the adventures that would be in store for him.

Cross-Country Speed Record, Not Once, But Twice
MARK STOLZBERG, BOYNTON BEACH, FL 33437
About 45 years ago, a group of us skydivers decided to form our own club in the Toledo area. One day during a slow skydiving day, one of our jumpmasters decided to take up a new trainee. Since we had an open seat in our Cessna 182, we took a spectator along for a ride.

The parachute is folded, and a long sleeve with a flap on the lower end is pulled over the folded parachute. The parachute lines are then folded over the closed flap in a zig-zag fashion held in rubber bands. This set-up keeps the sleeve closed until the parachute lines are fully extended before the folded chute can slide out so it can open. It ensures a gentler opening. The sleeve also stays with the parachute—tied to the apex of the chute—during the whole descent. The jumpmaster signals the novice who is connected to the airplane via a static line. It is also the jumpmaster’s task to pull in the static line and store it inside the airplane before either jumping himself or riding down with the plane.

As soon as the trainee exits the airplane, the jumpmaster follows him. On this day, the jumpmaster jumped without pulling in the static line. I felt a big jolt and was unable to move the elevator. There was also some banging along the fuselage. I turned around and looked at my passenger, a woman in her 40s I guess, and saw she had big eyes and was visibly scared. I tried to assure her that everything was okay, but I wanted to look out to see what was making the noise. It was not easy to hold the wheel with my left hand and look out of the still-open door to get a look at my tail section. I tried to pull in the static line, but was able to gather only a foot or so. Still, it stopped that banging along the fuselage. I still did not have any elevator movement. I turned around and asked the passenger to keep some tension on the static line. She complied and seemed to be much calmer than she was just a few seconds before.

Now my dilemma began: Since I was not able to see the full tail of my airplane by only leaning partially out, I had only two choices: Fly to the Toledo airport about 25 miles away and request a fly-by to see what is going on, or try to land as soon as possible. I started to get some little movement of the elevator and was also able to use my throttle do either go up or down. I therefore decided to land on our field, a grass strip which was fairly short and had a telephone line on the end of the runway alongside a country road with hardly any traffic. I added about 10 miles to my approach speed just in case I needed to go around. I aimed for the very end of the strip and since there were no cars to be seen I ducked underneath the wire to make a safe landing. Everything went fine, I thanked the passenger for doing a good job and not getting panicky, but I decided to quit at least for the day. Once on the ground, I found out that the canvas sleeve was completely wrapped around the tail on both the top and the bottom, restricting my elevator movement severely.
We All Fly Reader’s Stories

USAF Pilot Training Class 68B arrived at Craig Air Force Base in Selma, Alabama in September of 1966. There were 48 of us who eventually graduated, about a third of whom were recent USAF Academy grads. At that time the academy had no flight training of any kind, so we were actually a bit behind many of our classmates. The one who stood out was John D. Roberts. A serious football injury almost sidelined his flying plans, but he obtained his pilot’s license, played professional baseball, and joined our class. Through all phases of the training, from the T-41 (Cessna 172) through the twin-jet T-38, he excelled and was rated number one in the class.

As one might expect, when it came to soloing in the high performance T-38, John was the first in our class to be checked out. The procedure for this serious event was for the student to take off with an instructor in the back seat, fly to an area for aerobatic maneuvers, return to the traffic pattern, shoot a couple of dual touch-and-go’s, full stop, let the instructor out, reclose the canopy, taxi, take off, and make a couple of solo touch-and-go’s before a final full stop. I was just approaching the pattern with my instructor when John took off solo. I was on my downwind leg when John turned on final, cleared to make his first landing. After a quick check of my instruments, prior to turning final myself, I looked out of the cockpit and noted a large, orange ball several hundred yards short of the runway threshold. My instructor had seen the same thing and yelled, “Oh my God, there’s been a crash, I’ve got the airplane!” John Roberts, our best, had just crashed and been killed on his first T-38 landing.

That night the officer’s club was a somber place. As an eye-witness to the loss of John, I was questioned again and again about what happened. I had no explanation, but the accident report that finally came out after we had graduated stated that John had neglected to lower his flaps, raising the stall speed of the T-38 substantially. He had just run out of lift.

Although the next day was a Saturday when none of us were scheduled to fly, the decision was made to have every one of us get in the cockpit. We had just lost the best pilot among us and I guess the instructors did not want us to have time to develop any fears. I soloed that day.

Honoring John D. Robert
DAVID VOLIN, SCOTTSVILLE, VA
Not Funny!

PHIL LAZIER, SACRAMENTO, CA


Background: 1) When released, high drags pop open their fins, slowing the bomb down so the F-4 can escape safely. But the concussion from their detonation is quite noticeable! 2) Climbing into the cockpit, aircrew connect the hose from their G chaps to a hose connected to the aircraft. Next to our left hip is a silver TEST button, quite sensitive, which inflates the chaps rapidly. 3) GIB = Guy in the Back, i.e. copilot.

Here we go: Somehow my checklist had slid from behind the throttles to directly over the silver test button. Right after pickling off the six bombs, I feel the concussions, pull back on the stick aiming for my usual six Gs, and then the checklist pushes down on the silver button, inflating my G chaps. I yell “Ugh!” from the sudden pressure. Meanwhile, my GIB, who has never dropped high drags, interprets the concussions as ground-fire hits, a belief reinforced by my grunting.

Back to me: I can’t tolerate the overinflation, so I ease off on the stick, which leads the GIB to believe I am dead or wounded. So he grabs the stick in the back and pulls back to increase Gs, which I cannot tolerate, so I freeze the stick with both hands, which he interprets as hydraulic failure.

“Phil, we’re hit, should we eject?” Silence from me, from the effects of the overinflation, which further reinforces my poor GIB’s misperceptions.

Finally, I see the checklist problem and move it out of the way, explaining the situation to my GIB.

“Hey, was fun,” I say. “Wanna do it again?” His reply: “NOT FUNNY!!”

Their First Night Water Landing

ALBERT MARGESON, MELROSE, MA

I was serving on a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier anchored in Hong Kong when I was due to be released from active duty and return to San Francisco. The first leg was on a Navy DC-3 which was returning to southern Japan after an R & R flight to Hong Kong. Because the airplane was full, I was given a sort of jump seat with my legs propped up on a crated motor scooter to be raffled off at the base in Japan.

During the flight a propeller governor failed and we landed and waited in Taipei on Taiwan while a replacement part was flown in from the Philippines.

On landing in southern Japan the tower was asked if they could find a flight to Tokyo for me. The response was yes, and I boarded a waiting amphibian used to transport visiting VIPs. On takeoff the airplane gave a lurch prior to the wheels leaving the ground. I thought nothing of it. Later in the flight, after dark, a crew member left his earphones behind when he went forward to confer with someone.

I put on the earphones and heard the pilot talking to the copilot. The bearing in the right-hand wheel had seized up on takeoff and we couldn’t land on land again. We would have to make a night landing in Tokyo Bay with stone breakwaters and many small boats crowding our “landing strip.” I heard the pilot say, “You’d better land us; I’ve never made a night water landing.” His copilot replied, “Neither have I.”
Once More With Feeling
JEFFREY MUNKS, TEMPLETON, CA

In 2008, while serving as Deputy Executive Learning Officer for the U.S. Navy, I was escorting a dozen corporate officers on a visit to the U.S.S. Ronald Reagan off the coast of California so they could observe operations aboard an active-duty aircraft carrier.

A senior vice president from a major clothing manufacturer was sitting next to me on a C-2 Greyhound for the hour-long flight from North Island out to the carrier. She was terrified of flying, as evidenced by the fingernails digging into my forearm, for which she had apologized in advance.

I had verbally prepared our guest for the flight and for the trap landing, which my seatmate was dreading. “Please remain seated until the airplane comes to a complete stop. Otherwise, the stewards will steal your luggage.”

After taxiing for a long time, he asked if anyone knew what exit we needed to take on the Tri-State Tollway. He also asked us to stop by the cockpit and congratulate the pilot if the landing was smooth. He said the pilot was a grump and that we were lucky to have to fly with him only for today. The crew had to fly with him all month.

The best line of the whole flight came when the descent began. “We are now starting our way down,” he said. He waited about 10 seconds before continuing, “The pilot says I shouldn’t say it that way. We are now beginning our descent...”

Comedian for a Copilot
MICHAEL BUSH, KENTWOOD, MI

I flew to Grand Rapids, Michigan with a copilot/comedian. He kept up a running series of stories and jokes the entire flight. “We will be flying at 15,000 feet. That’s three miles above the earth,” he told us. “And we will be flying at one-one-thousandth the speed of light.” Another one: “Please remain seated until the airplane comes to a complete stop. Otherwise, the stewards will steal your luggage.”

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No Horizon
GORDON HARRISON, JUNEAU, AK

For 50 years I have flown throughout Alaska in small airplanes, for work and for recreation but never as a pilot.

I have crash-landed twice. Once in a Cessna 185, when we flipped on the beach in front of the Inupiaq village of Wales on the Bering Sea. A second time in a Helio Courier when our pilot dragged the landing strip to lay tracks in the snow so he could use them to take off after we landed. Five hundred feet off the end of the runway we clipped a birch tree and down we came. These mishaps occurred to fast there wasn’t time to be frightened.

The incident seared in my memory as half an hour of unabated terror ended in a smooth landing at the Fairbanks airport. It was a trip in a Cessna 182 in late fall to a provision cabin for a ski trip I intended to make there in January. The pilot was a colleague at the university of Alaska. He was an inexperienced flier, with no Instrument Flight Rules training or instruments. He, my girlfriend, and I took off from the remote strip at dusk in a drizzle.

“I think I will get a horizon once we’re in the air,” he said.

There was no horizon. It was pitch black. WE were flying absolutely blind in mountainous terrain close to Mt. Denali. My girlfriend and I kissed each other goodbye. The pilot managed to raise a flight service station in Nenana that told him where he was and what to do. It was 30 minutes before we picked out lights on the ground and knew we would make it home.

Too Windy for Students
GARY SJOLANDER, LITTLETON, CO

June 26, 1976, PA-28-140/491FT. I was a student pilot flying solo out of Holman Field in St. Paul, Minnesota. Conditions were windy with gusts to 18 miles per hour.

I took off on runway 14 and bounced over the Mississippi River. I decided to climb to 3,000 feet to try to find smoother air. It was not to be found, so I decided to return to the airport. At $25 per hour, I wasn’t having much fun.

On the downwind leg, the airplane was yawing about plus and minus 10 degrees. The indicated airspeed was between 60 and 120 miles per hour. The only steady instruments were the engine RPMs and the altimeter.

I decided I was okay, so I set power for standard descent, and turned crosswind to final. As I turned on final, I noticed my altitude hadn’t changes, due to thermals from downtown St. Paul. I was way above the glide path. The good news was that I had a strong headwind. Reducing power for landing was like going down in an elevator as I approached the end of the runway. “This isn’t too bad” I thought, as I contemplated a touch-and-go.

The engine was at idle and the wheels about to touch down when a gust of wind tossed me about 20 feet in the air. I went back to fully power and nose level, stabilizing the aircraft so I could settle in for a good landing. As I entered the Instrument Flight Training, Inc. office, I overheard a discussion of whether to let students fly that day. “It’s not a good idea,” I said.
Good Choice
MIKE STEED  CORVALLIS, OR

I was still a skinny little boy in 1966, having just started freshman year in high school. General Motors informed me that I’d won regional first prize with the car model I’d built in the past year and submitted to Fisher Body Craftsman’s Guild. This entitled me to a free trip to Detroit for the annual FBCG convention from my west coast home, traveling alone, in first class no less. As I settled in before the flight on this 707, one of the pilots passed through. I asked him about the little air intake atop the front of the engines, and why were only 3 of the 4 engines so equipped? He congratulated me on my powers of observation and answered they were for cabin air intake, and probably 3 was enough. Still not sure I buy that.

Early in the flight a stewardess offered me a choice of 4 or 5 drinks. I was overwhelmed by so many options and had a hard time choosing one. Then she added yet one more to the list, a word I had never heard before. OK, I thought, why not try it! She delivered it and asked if I liked it, and I answered yes. The drink was clearly carbonated, a bit sweet, but something was unlike other soft drinks. I eventually deduced it was champagne! I recall getting a refill, but heard at the same time that the supply was now exhausted. She and the other crew seemed quite amused.

Even In Aviation Bad Stuff Comes In 3s
BUD FORREST

Our Reserve Squadron flying P2V7 Neptunes was based in New Orleans and was periodically tasked to support active-duty anti-submarine squadrons based in Rota Spain. This meant a transatlantic flight; due to the P2’s fuel limitations, the trip was made in three legs.

The first leg was uneventful, but the second leg—Maine to the Azores—got exciting.

We were past the “point of no return,” filed as a flight of two with limited fuel to reach the Azores. This is when the “3s” struck:

1. Ocean Station Delta, a mid-ocean navaid was offline and LORAN was unreliable.
2. We were at minimum fuel to reach our destination.
3. My experienced navigator recommended a heading change of 30 degrees to the right!

A mid-ocean heading change of that magnitude is a Really Big Deal, but he advised that the lead navigator apparently had been putting in the wind drift from the wrong side, doubling the error. I took over the lead on the new heading and motored on, pre-tuning the Azores automatic direction finder (ADF) and waited….

Magically, after two and a half hours, the ADF needle came alive—Azores dead ahead!

Fun way to start my Spanish vacation….
As a Marine Corporal in 1962, I was assigned as a Plane-Captain preparing the T-33 (previously an Air Force F-80, a fighter used in Korea). This T-33 was a variant used as a two-seat trainer jet at the Los Alamitos Naval Air Station in California. It was attached to VMA 123 unit where I was stationed. I wanted to get a ride in it real bad. Over time, I steadily made pitches to the pilot(s) flying the T-33—tail number 192—to fly the back seat. Finally Marine Major Morin came out on the flight line ready for his hop after my maintenance flight check and said to me, “If you want to take the back seat go over to the Para loft and check out a flight suit now.”

I wasted no time dashing full speed to get outfitted, and it didn’t bother me one bit when I was given a suit that could not be laced up tight enough around my slim frame. Nothing was going to stop me from finally getting a ride. I raced back to the flight line sweating and climbed into the rear seat. I was familiar with the gauges and controls (not as a pilot), but I could observe and understand their function. The helmet and oxygen mask had the unmistakable rubber smell of all military planes. As my other crew members watched us taxi away, I couldn’t believe it was finally happening. My heart was racing, but I tried to stay cool in the back seat. After take-off we flew out over the mountains to the north to the practice area for some action. He made steep turns and other maneuvers that, thanks to my excellent ill-fitting flight suit, gave me some serious tunnel vision. Over the intercom I heard Major Morin say “How are you doing Corporal? Are you going to fill up your mask?” I immediately responded with a resounding “NO SIR! I’M OK.”

The Major instructed me to take the joystick and follow his instructions which I immediately did. The second I put my hand on the STICK, the vertigo and tunnel vision were instantly gone. He had me bring the nose up to a mark on the climb rate indicator and as I did so he said, “Slowly move the joystick to the right.” I was concentrating hard on the instrument panel and not feeling any strong G force, but when I took my eyes off the instrument panel and looked up, I was amazed to see the ground over my head. It was a perfect one G barrel roll in progress. He told me how to stop the roll and we went straight and level. He continued to let me execute other standard turns and maneuvers. This was an unforgettable, great life experience. I was flying high long past our landing and never did tell anyone about my ill-fitting suit.

Sadly, good old 192 didn’t make it to see 1963. Later that year at the Marine Corps Auxiliary Air Station in Yuma Arizona, two pilots attempted to take 192 on a practice run. The temperature that day was at least 112 degrees. I was alone in the shade of a hangar, sitting on a Tow Mule watching the take off. I watched as the T33 started the take-off roll and almost immediately recognized something was not right. The nose lifted up way too soon. It stayed nose high too long and eventually lifted off only due to the ground effect and then pancaked back down between the runways in a great cloud of dust. I started the mule that had a fire extinguisher and drove at full speed going for a rescue and was relieved to see that there was no fire visible. By the time I got to the crash site, the T-33 canopy was open and the two pilots were some distance away puffing madly on cigarettes. I believe the pilot in control in the front seat was an A-4D pilot who was used to the steep angle of attack of an A4. That combined with the extreme heat added to the problem. The landing gear smashed up through the wings and that was the sad end to tail number 192. It was great that the pilots got out safely. A day I have not forgotten. A tail number I have not forgotten and a flight in a fighter I have not forgotten.
My First Biplane Ride
SHARI PRANGE, BONNY DOON, CA

My husband Mike and I had gone to Madera, California, for the Gathering of the Warbirds. When the Sunday show was over, we were just relaxing, waiting for the parking lot traffic jam to clear. I was sitting under a tree, reading a book, when Mike strolled up and said, “There's a guy over there giving free biplane rides.”

Biplanes are my favorites, but I had never been in one. I was up and gone like a shot. I raced up to this perfect stranger and said, “I hear you’re giving rides.” He just smiled and said, “Sure, hop in.” I quickly ditched my hat, glasses and camera, and climbed into the front seat. This plane with the yellow wings, I learned, was not the typical Stearman, but a more rare Meyers trainer. We bounded down the runway and were airborne. I watched the ground fall away and away. When we had reached a decent height, he asked me if I wanted to fly it! You bet! So he let me take the controls, and he talked me through a gentle figure eight. Then he took control back and asked me if I would like to do some aerobatics. I was in heaven—literally! We did some loops and aerial dancing, and I was hoarse from cheering. Finally, he asked if I would like to do a tailspin. I said, “Only if you don’t do it like they do in the movies.”

“What do you mean?” he asked. “In the movies, when they go into a tailspin, they go all the way to the ground.” We did a tailspin, but pulled out comfortably above the ground. Then we landed, and it was all over too soon, but decades later it still paints a huge grin on my face.

Masters of the Air
RALPH E. TAGGART, EAST LANSING, MI

My adventure occurred while making a 25-mile flight in an ultralight gyroplane to a popular mid-September Dawn Patrol in rural Michigan. I had flown over 15 miles when the Unicom announced the airport was closed due to heavy ground fog, so I diverted to a nearby ultralight strip to wait for a possible change for the better. As I was about to swing south on a long downwind approach, I suddenly had company—a flock of Canada Geese passing me from behind. We were precisely matched in terms of heading and altitude and it only took a few seconds for my concern to turn to wonder as it became obvious there was no chance that the nearest goose, 20 feet away and watching me intently, was going to drift into my path. I never saw anything before or since that was so captivating. Canada Geese have a decided hump-backed appearance when flying as their wings sweep powerfully down and it was obviously hard work. I slowly throttled back to begin a slow descent and, when I turned on my down-wind leg, the flock was perhaps fifty feet above me. I had a last look as I banked and passed below the trailing birds, who appeared not to notice. As I rolled to a stop, I sat for several minutes thinking about what I had been privileged to see, before marching up to the farmhouse, hoping for a hot cup of coffee!
Surprises on the Concorde
BROOKS GIFFORD, SAN DIEGO, CA

I flew on the Concorde twice in the early 1980s, both times from London Heathrow to JFK in New York. At the time, the airfare was a first class ticket plus 50 percent, a bargain today compared with flying private and subsonic. As a pilot (single- and multiple-engine licenses, glider, and instrument) I wanted to learn as much as I could about the aircraft. On entering and being seated, the first thing I noticed was the absence of oxygen masks overhead. Whether true or not, I had read that the masks were useless because if an explosive decompression occurred at 60,000 feet, the passengers’ blood would boil. As reassurance, I also read that there was sufficient excess pressurization capability so that up to six windows could blow out yet a living environment could be maintained while descending. I also learned that the rear seats were always empty from LHR to JFK because if all seats were filled and sufficient fuel loaded for flight and the alternate airport reserve, the aircraft would be over gross weight.

Once we reached our cruise altitude, I was allowed to go into the cockpit. It was full of surprises for me. The cockpit was quite small for two pilots and a flight engineer. I expected high-tech instruments, but in fact, they appeared to me to be early 1970s vintage. The biggest surprise was the distance measuring equipment (DME), which had mileage numbers displayed on wheels similar to an automotive odometer. At Mach 2, these number wheels were really spinning!

The elapsed time for both of my flights was three hours. We departed LHR at 12 noon and arrived at JFK at 12 noon. As time goes by with no replacement for the Concorde in the near future, I feel really blessed to have had this experience.

Trikes at Kirtland Air Force Base
DONN FISHBURN, PLACITAS, NM

I enjoyed Robbie Culver’s story in the August/September 21 issue about his low pass at Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport. In April 2020 three of us trike pilots had a similar thought about available space at big airports because of the slow down in operations after the pandemic struck. We were given permission to do a touch-and-gos at the Albuquerque Sunport/Kirtland Air Force Base. (They share runways.) My friend Damien Beresford called ahead for approval.
Showing Off for the Lieutenant
THOMAS R. CABE, VERONA, VA

At the end of the Korean War I was at Eighth Army Headquarters near Seoul serving as a staff officer under General Maxwell Taylor. I was sent on a mission north, close to the DMZ. I arranged a flight. The old race track in Seoul was being used as an airstrip for light aircraft. The airplane was single engine, high wing, an artillery spotter airplane. I sat behind the pilot.

We started takeoff down the back stretch of the track, full throttle.

The pilot turned around to face me and put his hands to his earphones. I put mine on, expecting to hear tower traffic. No! It was Armed Forces Radio playing country music. The pilot continued facing back, smiling, waving both hands to the music.

We neared the end of the runway, a high fence ahead. I raised my hands in horror! He reached behind him and pulled the stick. I don’t think he even glanced ahead. The airplane shot up over the fence and that pilot laughed and laughed! At our destination, a little airstrip in a deep valley, the wind was at near gale force. We were kiting almost motionless over the ridge. The pilot dipped the right wing down and slid low, sideways over the trees all the way down that ridge and leveled off just above the runway, then set down ever so easy with almost no forward motion. If that pilot’s aim was to impress the lieutenant from headquarters, then he succeeded in spades!

She Didn’t Even See Me
LAWRENCE B. GOODMAN, GREENWICH, CT

Underwood, It was the summer of 1944, and I was a 19-year-old in the Navy V-12 Program at Dartmouth College. I wanted to be in the Navy V-5 Program for Naval Aviation, but my eyes weren’t good enough. But I could go to Bugbee’s Flying School in White River Junction and take flying lessons for a few dollars per hour.

One day I was trying to impress a girl from White River with my flying prowess. She said that she was going to Occum Pon on Saturday. I told her to look up at noon to see a yellow Piper Cub spiraling down, after which I would gun the engine, wiggle my wings, and fly away.

At noon the following Saturday, having climbed to 3,000 feet, I throttled back, pulled into a tight spiral, and peered out the window. At 2,000 feet I looked forward and saw a stopped prop. I had the pond, the trees, the river, and a farm field with high trees around it and farmers pitching hay onto a flatbed truck.

I chose the farm field and side-slipped over the trees onto the hay-filled field. I was too young and clueless to know any fear and I stepped out of the airplane to greet the farmers, who acted like this happened every day. They directed me to a house that had a phone. I called Bugbee’s, who sent out my instructor and a mechanic. The engine was fixed. The farmers cut a runway. The mechanic and I each took a wing strut and pushed the airplane until it was out of our reach.

That evening I called the girl and asked if she had seen me. The answer was “no.”
Flight into a Copper Mine
ROBERT KUSTERER, BRADENTON, FL

In the summer of 1966 I was in Tucson, Arizona learning to be a fighter pilot. I had recently graduated from Air Force Pilot Training and many of my classmates and I were stationed at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base learning to fly the F-4 Phantom. A typical mission was to take off from Davis-Monthan and fly to the Gila Bend Gunnery Range where we would practice hitting ground targets. A significant landmark on the way to Gila Bend was the Morenci mine, a huge open-pit copper mine about 1.5 miles in diameter and 2,000 feet deep. The Morenci mine is one serious hole in the ground, about 50 percent bigger than the Meteor Crater in Winslow.

Near Tucson there is a small airport, known as Rustic Ryan Field. I discovered a fellow there named Fred who had an Aeronca Champ for rent. I had learned to fly in a J-3 Cub prior to joining the Air Force, but many of my classmates had never flown anything other than a twin-engine jet. I checked out in Fred’s Champ and proceeded to take some of my classmates for rides and let them try to land it. For most—who had never flown a taildragger—it was a humiliating experience. I would do this away from Ryan Field so Fred couldn’t see the abuse his poor Champ was taking.

One of my “passengers” was Don Palky, the top graduate in our training class; Don and I were out doing some low-level flights over the desert in the Champ; Don was flying from the front seat and I was in back “coaching.” We flew over the Morenci mine thought it might be fun to fly below the rim. We flew about 50 feet below the rim and, after enjoying that sensation, I suggested to Don that he apply full power and climb above it. He went to full throttle, but the Champ continued to descend. This was Tucson in August, so that 65-hp Continental was probably putting out 50 hp at best. Don kept wanting to pull the nose up, so I was shouting at him “Don’t raise the nose! Just hold 60 mph—the best climb speed.” Even at full throttle and best climb speed, we kept sinking lower and lower into this mine. Half way across, we were about 500 feet below the rim. We were looking up at the ore trucks driving around the perimeter roads to the surface. We were obviously in a downdraft, so I figured there had to be an updraft somewhere; we needed to find it! At the mid point we stopped descending. The plan was if we got close to the opposite rim and were still looking up at it, we would turn and fly around the perimeter of the mine until we found the updraft. The opposite rim was getting closer and closer, and we weren’t climbing. I was just about to tell Don to start the turn when we hit the updraft; WOW, did we ever! An Aeronca Champ never climbed so fast! One minute we were looking 20 degrees up at the rim and the next minute we were clearing the rim by a good 200 feet.

We shared this experience with our classmates but not with Fred, the aircraft owner. From then on, when either Don or I flew the F-4 over the Morenci mine on the way to Gila Bend, that mine was more than just a landmark.
Welcome Back to West Palm Beach
KEVIN O’DONNELL, WELLINGTON, FL

On March 13, 1998, I made it to 100! Not years, flight hours. This was important because I was not able to rent the Cessna and take it on my grand adventure until I reached this benchmark. My grand adventure was Grand Bahama Island, 72 nautical miles east of West Palm Beach airport.

The Friday morning sky was cobalt blue and no clouds. In the days before GPS, I planned to follow the VOR signals so I would not miss the island. An hour later, I was standing at Bahamas immigration. The money was different. The taxis drove on the left. Lunch at the “straw market” was accompanied by a steel-drum band. After buying a colorful shirt, my wife and I were back at the airport. I was not concerned about missing Florida, so I ignored the VORs and just followed the compass.

An hour later, Palm Beach approach reported my position as 15 miles southeast of the airport. Somehow, I was south of where I wanted to be. The breeze from the NE had pushed me off course. With no landmarks, I didn’t notice. I adjusted course and planned to land on Runway 9 Right. Lining up for final approach, I sensed the strong left crosswind. “I’m a trained international pilot,” I thought. “I can handle crosswinds.” I adjusted my seat forward to have full control of the rudder. Left aileron down, full deflection on the right rudder.

What I didn’t realize was that I had stepped on the top of the rudder, which locked the right brake. The plane bounced. I released the brake and applied opposite rudder. Fortunately the control tower didn’t laugh on the radio.

After clearing customs, my wife told me, “You just crossed the Bermuda triangle, on Friday the 13th, with a full moon, yet we survived to have a great story to tell.”
Two Unforgettable Flights  
PAUL MILLER, COLORADO SPRINGS, CO

My first flight occurred on August 15, 1959, my 14th birthday. I was the youngest of four children and, until then, the only of the family who had never flown anywhere. That was frustrating, especially for someone whose great aunt (a couple of times removed) was none other than Amelia Earhart.

Understandably, I was pleased and excited when my parents gave me the gift of a ticket on a Trans Texas Airways flight on a DC-3 from Houston to Galveston, covering 50 miles in about 20 minutes. The trip was over far too soon, but I knew I had been given a great experience.

Now let’s jump forward another 20 years and a day to another “hop” involving an island, specifically from Hawaii to the mainland. I was gazing out the window from seat 2A on a Pan Am 747 when a flight attendant invited me to join a seated dinner in the upper deck dining room. Of course I accepted the offer and enjoyed prime rib and other indulgences, thereby creating another indelible memory.

I wonder whether anyone could conjure up a greater contrast than what I experienced on those two flights! Yet they did happen, and they illustrate perfectly the quantum advances in technology (and service) that developed over the intervening two decades.

I still keep a Pan Am frequent flier bag tag attached to my travel briefcase. It is, of course, commercially worthless but totally priceless.

Transatlantic to Colorado, Eventually  
ELIZABETH SYLVESTER-GRAY, WOODMANCOTE, ENGLAND

It was 1955 and I was on my first flight. My husband and I were, along with our two-year-old son, en route to Fort Carson, Colorado from Lancashire. We boarded a Dakota, a four-engine cargo airplane that had been converted into a passenger aircraft.

We hadn’t been airborne for long when I noticed flames shooting out of one of the engines. Everyone seemed to be asleep, so I rang the buzzer to call the Air Force woman who was serving as hostess. I pointed to the engine. “Oh my God, don’t tell anyone,” was her reaction. She disappeared into the cockpit and soon the engine stopped and it was announced we would be stopping in the Azores for a part to be replaced before continuing on to Idlewild in New York.

Eleven hours later we reboarded and took off again, only to be told the engine still was not working properly, and that we would be diverting to Gander, Newfoundland. Landing in darkness, we all trooped into a Nissen hut. No food would be available until the next day, and those of us traveling with hungry babies or toddlers were doubly unhappy.

An Air Force crew told us that to continue on our original airplane would be impossible. A Pan Am flight was on its way to take us to New York. Ten hours later, we boarded the Pan Am airplane, which was then diverted to Maguire Air Force Base. High winds kept us from taxiing close to the terminal so we had to walk across a tarmac that was soft from the heat. My stiletto heel sank into the ground. Removing my shoes, I carried my toddler into the terminal to catch a bus to Idlewild, where we would still have to clear Customs. The officials had heard about our ordeal, and they were very kind to us.
In 1969 I was flying a normal training flight with a instructor in the back seat. [I was a] Marine Second Lt. flying the T-2C Buckeye in training at McCain Field, Meridian, MS.

[One] Hot July day at a outlying field doing touch and go landings.

They always were harping on us to keep the pattern tight, the tighter the better as it limited the intervals and allowed for more practice landings....so they thought.

I was close behind another and watched him lift off ahead, we were at approximately 200 feet when in the blink of a eye, our plane rotated to the right and we were perpendicular to the ground, right wing down, in a uncontrolled instant.

Instinct and training kicked in immediately as the plane went out of control!

Full left stick....felt no reaction.

Full throttle.....yea, thrust.

Boards ...in!

Full forward stick.......nothing...

Kicked in full left rudder and the plane started recovery and rotated back to level whereby I slid off to the right to get away from whatever almost turned us into dirt.

When this began, it happened so fast that the instructor only had time to gasp so loud that I heard him on the intercom. He had no time to even try to take control. It was over before he could catch his breath.

Once recovered he only said “let’s depart the pattern,” which we did and went back to base.

He said nothing until we got back in the debrief, because you know, hot, humid, still summer day. No wind.

Stable wingtip vortices, hanging invisible in the air: we flew into those left by the T-2 whose ass I was following real close. Being new it did not bother me, but, the instructor had a better view and understood just how close we came in an instant to digging up dirt.

My debrief was fast. Good hop, five above average grades. See ya later!

Wingtip Vortices

WILLARD ROUND

A U.S. Navy pilot of Squadron Augment Unit Nine of Naval Air Station Meridian, Mississippi rolls a T-2C Buckeye inverted, intentionally, in 2004 while on a training mission over Key West, Florida. (NATIONAL ARCHIVES)