

Any similarity between piloting a light plane and flying, is purely imagined by the self-styled pilot, himself. It is safe to state that literally anyone can learn to fly. That is, if you consider the word "flying" in its loosest sense. Flying shall hereby, then, be considered in its loosest sense.

There is a fraternity in this country with one purpose in common. How common that purpose is, we shall examine at length.

These people are loosely called "pilots." This means that, like the witches of Salem, they stagger into the blue and back again, with fine disregard for the laws of gravity. Generally speaking, the techniques of flying employed by the witches were far superior to the general practices of modern sportsman flying, although it must be admitted that broomsticks are now considered a bit unconventional.

A "cub" is a trade name for a light airplane, recognized by everybody that flies, and far into the ranks of those who don't. The word "cub" is symbolic of light planes, and doesn't do too badly in describing the pilots who fly them.

Other light aircraft of popular design are the T-craft and the Aeronca. These three are the Ford, Chevy and Plymoth of the aircraft industry. These names in light planes are the stand-bys that have been foremost in the industry of light-plane-making for the past few decades. Not that there haven't been thousands of others flown and marketed successfully. There have. Lately on the market have appeared newer types of light planes. Whether they will ever assume the popularity and importance of the big three will remain to be seen.

A human being, provided he is not too human, can learn to fly a light airplane in four hours, or less. This is assuming that the human has only one head. If he has two heads he can learn to fly in less than four hours, every time.

In saying, "learn to fly," it must be noted that the expression is being used even more loosely than before.

Stated in its simplest form, learning to fly, as applied to the sportsman pilot, means having someone show him how to take-off and land, and guide through the air, a small, slow aircraft.

The aircraft is designed in such a manner that it is very stable and will practically fly itself, if the controls are not too badly abused.

Learning to fly, then, means abusing the light and sensitive controls of a sweet little aircraft in such a manner that the heavy-handed will of the "student pilot" is forced on the plane, which is such a thoroughbred of modern design and construction that it will respond, even to rough and callous mis-treatment.

This technique of mis-instruction is passed on from "pilot" to "pilot," for after four or five hours "instruction," the student becomes a pilot and never takes any more instruction. Of course, if he wants to go on and get his "privates," he must get a few more hours of instruction and amass a grand total of forty hours in the air. Some of this time, also, must actually be flown and not just logged with a heavy pencil.

The word "privates," is a word which has been handed down from "pilot" to "pilot" and, due to the incidence of illiteracy, has been slightly distorted, although it is in common usage today, even among "pilots" that can read and write.

Originally the phrase was "private license." This is a degree conferred upon "pilots," enabling them to carry passengers legally. It is usually assumed that the private license is the ne plus ultra of conceivable flying merit. Therefore it is generally employed as a sanction to instruct and carry passengers for hire. The holder of his "privates" is generally referred to by the "pilots" in any and all matters requiring a decision in aeronautical matters.

Before entering the field of actual flying, there are other degrees of flying education. The commercial pilot's license and the instructor's license. The holders of these border critically upon the actual field of flying and some of them overflow into the realm of the airplane.

The airplane is a flying machine of a few thousand horsepower, usually with two or more engines, and is designed to carry passengers and freight from one point to another in calculable margin of safety, regardless of weather conditions. This type of flying has no bearing on "piloting" light aircraft.

The instructor pilot and the commercial pilot may or may not have flown airplanes during the war, or with any of the air forces or airlines after the war. If he has, he was just wasting his time as far as teaching students to become "pilots" is concerned. For, to the potential learner, a man who has any rating higher than his "privates" is in such a lofty realm of education that it falls into the summa cum laude and masters degree class, which, of course, is incomprehensible to the lightplane "pilot" holder.

The law of gravity applies only mildly to light-plane flying, the law of common sense not at all. The old expression, "there is no substitute for brains," is not applicable, for no brains are needed.

Anyone who can see enough light to walk through the door without his glasses can pass the eye test which will entitle him to legally learn to fly. He must read a large line of print at twenty paces, but for this he may make use of his bi-focals or binoculars or whatever it takes to conjure up what the ophthalmologists humorously refer to as "twenty-twenty vision."

Of course there is a superficial medical exam which is comprised of a few questions by ~~your~~ family doctor. It is assumed that the potential flying student does not have the mentality to give the qualifying answers, so the gentle and beneficent family physician words his questions in such a manner that any fool would give the right answers. Here are a few examples of questions that must be answered in the negative in order to qualify to learn to fly according to the law:

"Have you ever had epilepsy, car sickness, syphilis or ~~any~~ other vile, low class or foul diseases?"

"Do you wet the bed?"

"Was your Mother or Father ever consigned to an institution for the mentally insane?"

"So far as you care to remember, have you ever done much time in a federal penitentiary?"

Anything to produce a negative answer. And a negative answer is all that is necessary to convince the family doctor that the candidate is mentally, physically, morally and psychologically equipped to learn to fly.

An advanced type of private pilot, usually more literate and progressive, is the character who has money enough to

indulge to the fullest degree the passion for flying. Here, indeed, is the Sportsman Pilot rampant. The only difference among "pilots" and their capacity to endanger the lives of rural and urban dwellers alike, is the amount of money they have to spend.

The rich pilot does a lot of "navigation." This means he goes from his home airport to another place by flying. Through his ability to spend money, he can usually be identified by an expensive airplane, but still in the light-plane field. The horsepower of his shiny steed may even mount to two or three hundred. This gives him more speed and also provides more seating capacity, so that he can take his family, or other blissfully non-flying innocents, with him on his careering adventure through the wild, blue yonder.

Picking a day when the yonder is at its bluest, the wealthy pilot, replete with family, baggage and money drives the family Cadillac to the airport which houses the family airplane. He climbs into the left front seat and starts the engine. Then, with the lethal blade of the propeller whirling merrily around their ears, the kids and mama climb into the plane.

Father will fly and navigate.

This means that, under a clear sky, with visibility at least ten miles in every direction he will, by devious and diversified methods passed on to him in a total of from ten to twenty hours of dual instruction, fly his shiny, fast and beautifully designed American Built sports plane, to his destination -- following railroads, highways and directions given him by other pilots on enquiry, as he lands at other airfields along the route.

As a result of the war a few new names have appeared in the sportsman pilot's vocabulary transposed, as it were, almost in their original form from the air force, without notable

-5-

embellishment. This is because they came into use so soon after the war, that illiterate usage was forced into the proper pattern of pronunciation before the mass of the "pilots" could exert their grammatical influence upon the new words. These new words, by the way, were very short. An example is PT. Another is BT. As you can see, brevity itself probably preserved the proper pronunciation of these words for posterity, protecting them from the grammatical ravages of the "pilots."

A bi-winged beauty, the Stearman was called a Primary Trainer. That's where the PT comes from. It was used by the air force for many years, during the war and even as late as a couple of years after the war.

The Stearman, or PT-13 was preceded by other similar types, dating right on back to where the old "Jenny" or JH-4, was finally abandoned.

The first of the PT's was the PT-1 and had the well known OX-5 engine. The best known was the Consolidated PT-3, which was powered with a Wright engine of 225 horsepower.

The PT-13 was the latest primary trainer, and the nicest, up to the outbreak of World War II. But they were expensive, and as a method conceived solely of economy, other PT's were mass-produced for the hundreds of primary schools that developed from the war effort. This began in 1939, when Randolph Field, Texas, the "West Point of the Air" ceased to be the only Air Force training source in existence, giving way to civilian contractors in the vast field of primary training.

The BT's were basic, or intermediary trainers. These and the PT's worked their way into the files of the aeri-ally unwashe-d by the route of War Assets.

War Assets was an abortive plot to sell out all the obsolete equipment left over from the war, and at the same time to "help aviation."

This help was just what aviation needed to put it flat on its astringent aftermath.

To begin with, the War Assets Administration proposed to sell war surplus material to GI's. The men and women who fought the war were to have first choice on all items sold, large and small. The planners, however, overlooked one small detail. The GI's didn't have any money. The powers that be then began a degeneration of all the idealistic chatter about loyalty to "our boys" and put out an order to get rid of the stuff.

Here's where people got into businesses that they had never heard of before. Grocery merchants got into the airplane business. Hock shops got into the airplane business. Anybody that had enough money was subject to being convinced that the airplane business was a good thing.

The airplane business went to Hell.

Flying under the GI "Bill of Rights" was thrown into the breach to keep private flying off its uppers.

The government contracted to pay for the flying of any "veteran," according to his entitlement, or length of service. Anyone who had just stuck their noses into the service, even long after the war was over, arbitrarily had sufficient entitlement to teach them how to fly.

The bona fide operators, as well as the merchants who found themselves in the flying business, went into the GI Program headlong. They really got their feet wet. Thousands of dollars went on the books as a result of the thousands of hours flown. The "get in quick and get out quick" operators got fat. The ones who tried to comply with the rules got stuck and stuck plenty.

In the first place, the government, with all its usual and customary blind generosity, contracted to pay fantastic prices to the operators for training the veterans. Whereas the operators were accustomed to get six and eight dollars an hour, solo and dual, for flying time on light planes, the government decided they should get ten and twelve dollars an hour.

To top this off, if the contract was accepted by the operator, they must demand the same rates from the poor, struggling orphan who was not a GI, and who had to pay out of his own pocket for his flying time.

This put out of contention the people who were to be needed later to support aviation. The people who are leaving it alone in large numbers now. The non-veteran. (After all, we couldn't expect our crop of veterans to hold out forever.)

Next, the government, becoming indignant over the outrages that had been perpetrated upon it, started bickering over prices. Most of the crooked operators had bled the program of all semblance of ethics and then lammed. The ones that were left, found that it took longer and longer to collect their money. Finally, with as much as 90 to 120 days having elapsed since a payment had been made them, the operators' books began to show thousands of dollars worth of flying time.

With their airplanes wearing out and their capital and gasoline supplies running low, the government asked them, pointedly, to give reason why they should be paid.

The operators that survived this are the ones that you see now. They are a hard bitten lot. Whenever a dollar presents itself they make a grab for it, even if it overbalances them in the doing.

It would be hard to judge whether they are doing "aviation" a favor or an injustice, in renting their aircraft to anyone who has the money to hire it, without asking too many questions as to the type license held by the prospect.

Rates, in spite of inflationary trends in other businesses, are surprisingly low in airplane rentals. If they are not low enough, the prospective "pilot" may get them reduced to a startlingly low figure by a little bargaining. Private aviation operators are grimly holding on, hoping to weather the roughest storm in the comparatively short span of aviation history.

Presiding over all this, with notable aloofness, is the Civil Aeronautics Authority.

They have, as their concern, all the flying of every type that is conducted in this country. Administered by the Department of Commerce, they are organized into two main branches, The Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA) and The Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB). This organization is relatively new. It will be interesting to see in what manner they seek to avoid the duplicity and wasted effort that is certain to occur in the maintenance of the two authorities. The CAB is the directing agency and the CAA is the outfit that goes out and gets its hands greasy.

The brains and the know how are contained in the CAA. Inspectors of the CAA have been in the airplane business long enough

to know airplanes, both practically and theoretically, from top to bottom.

They are sadly understaffed, but the work they ~~do~~ supposed to do is all-embracing. From being policemen, observing and acting upon all the minor infringements and circumventions of the air laws, to the supervision of the airworthiness and licensing of aircraft used in the public service, this handful of trained airmen are constantly trying to keep their fingers in the dykes against the flood of airline traffic as well as exert supervising responsibility over the field of private flying.

The CAB, the directing and policy-making agency, is a political set up. Rules and regulations and policy for the propagation of flying in the United States, originate here.

Measures of governmental economy have been felt in this important organization more than in any of the other services.

Although War Assets planes are still very much at large and a glut on the market, manufacturers of private airplanes were beginning to get their heads above water, designing and producing late models -- up until the time the present shortage of steel and other essential materials was felt.

Instead of passing laws which are so stringent in obtaining a "privates" that the candidate is almost required to know how to read and write, it might be better to lean heavily on the know-how of the manufacturers and call upon them for that much heralded but never forthcoming family airplane of the future.

Right now, with a few light planes scattered about here and there, the chances of getting into the blue are very slender without going into organized aviation training. What will be the ultimate fate of private flying is a matter of such consuming interest

that it would be worth staying in good physical training, so as to live a few years longer than a normal span ---- just to find out.

-30- fmc August 31, '51

Some folks allow
That raw, red whiskey
Suits every taste
And makes one frisky

While others avow
That more sobriety
Results from the use
Of the cooking variety