Eagle Tales

Accounts of the Embry-Riddle Faculty
Before they were faculty

"Back in the day..."

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Dedication

This book is for all who have wanted to fly,
no matter in what form–from hang-glider pilots to
crew chiefs to weekend aviators to shuttle pilots to
airline pilots. Each sought the sky for
his or her own personal reasons.

Each did so by reading–and studying–along with
a lot of other hard work.

And of course, this book is dedicated to
all the teachers and flight instructors
who took their time to patiently help us
learn about and understand airplanes
as well as how to fly.

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Editor's Note

In the process of learning to fly, you have to gain flight experience without busting your . . . well, you know . . . We're going to try to keep it G-rated here. An important point in gaining flight experience is the concept of learning. To this end, one thing humans are capable of which other species are not is the capacity to maintain a sense of history and record that history. In other words, we can "write" and "read."

Our ability to read and write is an amazing skill. Imagine if you will, a time before books. Prior to the Chinese invention of the printing press and Johannes Gutenberg refinement of the process in the 1400s, writers hand-scribed the Bible and the other few books in existence. The telling of tales went from one generation to the next by spoken word. Not only did stories pass through generations this way, early man passed on their genealogies and other important records orally.

Learning has many forms and it is a fascinating process. There is so much to it–from memorizing the mundane, to developing tactile skills, to experiencing an event for the first time. In the aviation business, learning is an important priority. It carries such weight that individuals and organizations have devoted entire careers and millions of dollars to the task of teaching new pilots this very serious business of flying.

Consequently, new students must read textbooks, complete flight training, and pass checkrides. It will be hard work! But it will also be fun! Flight instructors and college professors alike will tell you which books to read and when. And, oh by the way, those books have to be read yesterday. Additionally, it will seem as though your flight instructors and professors will demand you read a certain book for their class. This means your evening reading will be always too much.

Sometimes the reading is difficult, to say the least. Some of the authors who wrote the books your professors will soon assign you should not have written them. Another way to say it, the words they put to paper some time ago are as boring today as when they were written.

Wait! Did I actually say that aloud? Did I really write that thought down on paper?

I am, in fact, one who enthusiastically encourages students to read. I have found, however, many students do not like to read. This is distressing, especially for the student who does not like to read. Those who choose not to read miss a lot life has to offer. If you don't believe it, go to the library and check the research. Find out who is making the most money–you will discover those who read bring home the biggest paychecks, as opposed to those who do not.

In terms of aviators, the readers will fly better airplanes than the non-readers; they will pass their checkrides each time on the first attempt; and over all, they will perform solidly as pilots rather than as mediocre "airplane drivers." This happens because they have learned from their reading. They will know more than the pilots who did not take the time to read. And because they know more, they will excel in their careers leaving the non-readers behind. The truly heartrending thing about this is that those who don't read have no clue–and here's the irony–because they don't read.

The important thing about reading is that it opens your mind to the innumerable possibilities of your field, or your life.

If you are reading, you are learning. If you are learning, your mind is active. If your mind is active, you are going to live a more productive life in terms of making money, making promotions, making a difference in the world, and most importantly–making family and friends.

I have theories as to why many people prefer not to read today. One of my favorites is technology. In these times of the Internet, cable-TV, cheap movies, and a constant influx of Hollywood media, many don't have time to read, which is a shame. When it comes to gaining information, there truly is nothing better than reading.

Another of my favorite theories is that many students never learned how to read. Oh, they learned the mechanics of reading, but what their teachers failed to teach them was *how to read for fun.* Reading for fun involves reading material you are interested in rather than reading from "a required reading list."

I once had a student try the argument on me that movies were like pictures, and a picture is worth a thousand words. "So why waste time reading the book when you can see the movie?" he asked. Obviously, he did not get it.

Yes, you can get the story by watching the movie, but that is all you get. When you go to a movie, or sit in front of the boob tube, your mind is disengaged, requiring very little effort to process the images and sounds coming through your eyes and ears. That's the way producers and directors designed their media–they made it mindless *on purpose*.

And that is the problem in a nutshell.

Sitting in a movie theatre or in front of your television, the images and sounds do not require you to employ your mind. With a book, however, you have to use your imagination to fill in your perception of what the main character looks like, what the villain did that was so dastardly, or what colors complete the tapestry of a scenic overlook. Or, in the case of aviation textbooks, you have to really think about and process what you

need to learn. Pictures and visual aids help, but the learning is in the reading.

There is more to reading than merely studying procedures. You can enjoy reading about aviation and more importantly, you can learn from the experiences of other pilots by "going on" flights with them in context of reading what they have written regarding their own flying experiences.

As our species moved into the Twentieth Century, a few men and women looked to the sky and wanted to go there, to see as the birds, to discover what Leonardo da Vinci speculated in his early studies of aviation. At the end of the 19th century, Otto Lilienthal took us into the lowest realms of the atmosphere and the Wright brothers actually took us into the sky shortly after the turn of the century. Others advanced on their early work taking humanity higher. Then, on July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon! What a magnificent thing to have witnessed. For those not old enough to remember the event first hand, the trick and the wonder and the magic of experiencing the lunar landings is in reading any of the several accounts of the event.

All along the way, from the first few steps Lilienthal took with his gliders to the step on the moon and beyond, writers and pilots recorded this great journey–and what great stories!

When we read, we can see through their eyes and learn vicariously by their experiences. This gives us the knowledge needed to go further. From their written exploits, we can learn what it was like to fly the Wright Flyer, a Sopwith Camel, a sailplane, seaplanes, or a Boeing 777. We can experience the solitude of flying in the bush in Alaska, we can know what it is like flying combat in heavy bombers over Europe, or discover the excitement of a well-flown approach to a number three wire on a pitching carrier deck. All through the magic of reading!

All of this and more waits for us and our imaginations–all sparked by the embers of a well-written story. It only takes

reading to learn anything about aviation, or any other subject. There are many great aviation textbooks and wonderful nonfiction titles to enhance your knowledge of flying. However, studying aviation is not about merely plodding through manuals and procedures. Sometimes, you have to take a break.

When your brain is full and you are having a hard time digesting more weather information, procedures, aerodynamics, or other nonfiction information, it might be time to take a flight of fancy. Perhaps you should join "Rinker" Buck and his brother as they fly their Cub across America in his great story, *Flight of Passage*. Or, you might want to try flying F-84Es with Richard Bach in *Stranger to the Ground.* Maybe you should check out what it was like for Lindbergh when he flew solo across the Atlantic in *The Spirit of St. Louis*. There are also some very good aviation novels written by pilots who can spin a yarn as well as they can spin airplanes. Some of the tales you start reading you may not be able to put down until you are finished. The neatest thing about it is that when you go flying with Richard Bach or Ernest Gann, even though it is not "technically" a textbook, you will still learn a great deal about this wonderful obsession we call aviation.

If you are interested in learning more about flying through some fun reading and have no idea of where to start, begin with this book. This is not to say the storytellers in this volume are some of the best, but many of these stories are good. At the end of the book, there is a reading list of only a few aviation authors and some of their titles.

I am sure you will find one or two of these books extremely fascinating and very well worth your time.

Joe Clark
St. Augustine, FL
February 2007

Eagle Tales

Securing Your Cargo

By Ted Beneigh

I was working as an air-taxi pilot based in Western Pennsylvania. It was interesting, challenging flying. Our trips were usually low-notice, on-demand charter flights flown in either twin or single-engine aircraft, depending on the budget of the client, or the weather conditions.

It was a hot, hazy mid-August day in Columbus, Ohio. A stagnant high-pressure system had settled in over the northeast, leading to light winds and a daily increase in haze with deteriorating visibility. The charter scheduler called me and said the company had a confirmed freight trip from Columbus, Ohio, to Pittsburgh, Pa. I would ferry from our home base in Beaver County, Pa to Columbus–CMH–to pick up the freight.

The flight to CMH was uneventful. The load was rather unusual: four 55 gallons drums of cooking fat. (I haven't a clue why someone would charter an aircraft for that.) I was flying a single-engine Cessna 206, which was an excellent freight aircraft due to its powerful 300 horsepower engine. The big engine allowed for heavy loads and the large double cargo doors behind the high wing made it easy to load and unload bulky cargo items.

I landed at CMH, secured the aircraft, and went to the freight operator to clear the air-bill and have the "Six" loaded. A truck backed up to the aircraft, and a forklift transferred each drum from the truck to the airplane, each of which weighed over 200 pounds. With the center and rear seats removed, it was rather easy to load the aircraft. As they were loading it, I went into the freight operator's building to drink a cold soda and escape the 90-degree heat (a decision that later proved to be mistake number one). After about 30 minutes, the loaders completed the job and I signed the delivery receipt. I looked out the building's window at the airplane to see where the drums were loaded (mistake number two). I used the weight as depicted on the delivery receipt to calculate the CG–which was near the aft limit but within tolerances–and filed an IFR flight plan from CMH to PIT. I finished my soda, chatted with the freight operator for a few minutes, then went out to the aircraft and did a cursory walk-around pre-flight (mistake number three).

I fired up the big Continental engine, received my clearance, and taxied to the runway, with the tail noticeably lower than when I had landed earlier. Run-up completed, radios tuned, I called Tower for takeoff. "November 9140 Mike, Columbus Tower, fly runway heading, cleared for takeoff." I acknowledged the call, taxied on to the centerline, and slowly eased in full throttle. The loud din of the big engine stabilized and, not surprisingly, acceleration was much slower than when I left Beaver County earlier in the morning.

Finally, the Six made it up to takeoff speed and I applied gentle back pressure. As I rotated, the aircraft assumed a much higher pitch attitude for climb. I heard a "clanging" noise and the nose continued to pitch up of its own accord. I applied forward pressure, with little effect. I then started trimming the aircraft nose-down,

ultimately applying full nose-down trim. With full nose-down trim, and about 20 pounds of forward pressure on the controls, I was able to stop the pitch-up. I was about 10 knots above a stall.

Once I stabilized the pitch, I called Columbus tower and declared an emergency. I told them I had minimal pitch control, and needed to return immediately for landing. They put a ground stop on all moving aircraft, and cleared me to land on any runway. I flew a final approach speed of 120 knots (30 knots above normal) and kept the flaps fully retracted. With full nose down trim and significant forward pressure, I landed safely. Now, the hard part: I had to keep the tail from dragging on the runway… I maintained power after touchdown to maintain elevator effectiveness, and "dragged" the brakes during the brief taxi to the ramp. On reaching the ramp, I pulled the throttle to idle and full lean mixture simultaneously, and waited for the "big bang". I was not disappointed–as soon as the power was reduced, the Six rapidly converted from a nose wheel aircraft to a tail-dragger. CRASH–as the tail tie-down hit the asphalt.

I opened the pilot's door and jumped the three feet to the pavement under the watchful–and smiling eyes, I'm sure–of the crash, fire, and rescue personnel. We walked to the back, opened the cargo doors, rolled one of the 55-gallon drums a few inches over and revealed the cargo securing net on the floor under one of the other drums that had shifted back.

After all cargo was returned to the original position, *I secured* the cargo restraining net….an action that was accomplished about 30 minutes too late! I departed CMH about 45 minutes later and the flight to PIT was uneventful.

The lesson learned….when you are the pilot-in command, it is *YOUR responsibility* to make sure the

aircraft is safe. My assumption that the cargo handlers had done this nearly cost me my life. When the Six and I departed again, it was a much wiser pilot at the controls.

A Lieutenant's View of the Cuban Missile Crisis

By Tim Brady

From time to time in my position as the Dean of the College of Aviation at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's Daytona Beach campus, I serve on search committees for senior administrators. Many times when we get to the first round interview stage, we invite the candidates to a neutral site, a place that's comfortable and non-threatening. At least that's the theory. In reality, any job interview is threatening and one could be in the Taj Mahal in such a situation and not be comfortable.

One of these "neutral" sites for the university is the Hyatt Regency Hotel at the Orlando International Airport. On one such occasion a couple of years ago, I was taking a breather between candidates and was in the foyer by the elevators on the second floor. As I looked out over the airport admiring the lush, green, tropical setting, I saw something, some shape, some feature, some "something" out there that triggered a flood of memories. All at once, I was back in 1962, back when Orlando International Airport was McCoy Air Force Base, back when John F. Kennedy was the President of the United

States, and back when the country was going through an event called the Cuban Missile Crisis.

I was an Air Force navigator in those days, having recently made first lieutenant. It had been a good career trip for me so far, coming as I had from a family that was probably classified on the economic scale as lower middle class (and that's being generous). Not that it seemed to matter much, to me anyway. My dad, stepdad actually, was a rig-builder, an oil field laborer. We chased oil booms around from Mississippi, where I was born, to Odessa, Texas where I attended and graduated from public high school. My childhood was fine–a good loving home, plenty of friends, lots of school activities, and work. I always had a job–paper routes, short order cook, and some oil field stuff.

The jobs were enough to let me buy a motorcycle, a super little BSA 125, and later a car, a non-descript 50 model Plymouth. (In the Plymouth, if you unbolted the gear shift lever and mechanically switched it from the right side of the steering wheel to the left, you could shift gears with your left hand, which freed your right arm so you could put it around your honey. Nice.)

I can't pinpoint exactly when I realized that I wanted to fly. I think it was when I saw that Alan Ladd movie where he was a Korean War hero and test pilot. He and I were of similar stature (not tall), which gave me confidence. It didn't occur to me that the pilot he was portraying, Capt. Joseph McConnell, may have been six foot three inches tall.

After high school, I attended the junior college in Odessa for a semester, but I was floundering, not knowing what I wanted to do. A friend of mine wanted to study pharmacy so I thought I'd give that a shot also. I went to Houston to live with he and his family that summer, the summer of 1958. There, separated from my family and on

my own, I grew up. I realized I did not want to be a pharmacist; that was my friend's dream, not mine. I wanted a career in the air.

I returned to Odessa with $15 in my pocket, got a job as a short order cook, and persuaded my family to let me join the Air Force. I tried to get into flight cadets but didn't make the cut, so I joined as an enlisted man. A year later, I was a two-striper (airman second class) radio mechanic at Altus Air Force Base in Oklahoma. I decided to try again for cadets, but this time I would study for the exam, an IQ-like test called the AFOQT (Air Force Officers Qualification Test). My studying paid off and I was accepted into the cadets.

To my horror, I was accepted as a navigator cadet. My application had said "pilot first choice; no second choice," so I thought my choice must have been overlooked by whomever accepted my application. A quick phone call to Headquarters, Personnel at Randolph Air Force Base told me why. Flight cadets for pilots had just been closed out permanently, so if I wanted a commission and wanted to fly, becoming a navigator cadet was my only choice. While I would have preferred pilot training, I jumped at navigator training thinking that later on, I would somehow go to pilot training. (This actually did happen a distant six years later, but that's another story.)

I graduated from navigator cadets and received a commission and my wings in December of 1960. My assignment was to Dyess Air Force Base, Texas to fly, well, I didn't know what. My assignment was to a detachment of the 839th Air Division, a unit of TAC (Tactical Air Command).

This was confusing because Dyess was a SAC (Strategic Air Command) base through and through. It took me two days to find the building I was assigned to report to, and that was with the aid of the base security

police who had never heard of the unit. We finally found it located in a converted day room nestled among the enlisted quarters. I was one of seven officers - two second lieutenants, two first lieutenants, two captains, and a major. The major was a non-rated personnel type, the rest of us were rated. The captains and first lieutenants were "seasoned" veterans, pilots, and the two brown bars were navigators.

The other navigator had graduated from the same class and at the same time as I had at Harlingen AFB, Texas, but I had never met him. He was commissioned through ROTC prior to the start of nav training. We lowly cadets didn't know any of the officers; we shared no classroom instruction, no flights, and certainly no social activities. During the ten-month's worth of training, the officer and the cadet trainees were totally segregated.

Since most of the Dyess detachment officers were rated, we were sure that we were supposed to fly something, but there were no airplanes, at least none that would have been assigned to a TAC unit. The flight line was full of B-47 bombers, KC-135 tankers, and C-124 Globemasters. In those days, SAC owned its own transport aircraft. I asked one of the pilots what model of aircraft was going to be assigned to us and he threw me a Dash-One and said, "Memorize this."

The Dash-One was for a C-130A. I was overjoyed, happy that I had not been stuck with flying the C-124 and delighted that I'd be flying the hot new C-130. The picture of the C-130 on the cover of the Dash-One was beautiful to my young eyes and remains so today.

Within the next year, we began to build the unit to the point where we could receive the first C-130. I remember our crew boarding a Trans-Texas Airline DC-3 (we called it Tree-Top-Airways) in blues and carrying parachutes, much to the wide-eyed dismay of the other passengers. We then

headed to Sewart AFB near Nashville to pick up our first bird. The pilots had been checked out in the machine before they arrived at Dyess, but I had never even been inside the airplane. During flight planning for the trip back home from Sewart to Dyess, I took out a featureless Mercator map and drew a straight line to Dyess, just as I had been taught in nav school. "What the hell are you doing?" the gristly aircraft commander asked me.

"Flight planning," I said and showed him the course line I had drawn from one set of coordinates to the other on the pale yellow chart.

"We're flying airways," he said.

This statement brought no recognition to my recently acquired store of navigation knowledge. We had learned sun lines, night celestial, map reading, pressure pattern, loran, drift meters, and a ton of other stuff, but not airways. That was pilot stuff using ground-based aids, which we all knew would be knocked out with the first nuclear strike. So we were taught to navigate mostly using navigational aids that couldn't be bombed: the sun, the stars, land features, weather patterns, and dead reckoning. I was the training epitome of the influence of the cold-war Strategic Air Command thinking on airborne combat tactics against the Soviet Union.

But this day I was at Sewart AFB, not a Russian in sight, and I had to navigate the airplane using the airway aids that were available. The pilots taught me how to navigate on airways using VORs, Radio Beacons, and the ultimate cheater, TACAN (Tactical Air Navigation). This equipment transmitted a signal, which provided a numerical readout of the distance to or from the station. So despite my navigational limitations we managed to get the airplane from Tennessee to Texas. By the time I received my first official instructional flight from an instructor

navigator several months later, pilots had already corrupted my knowledge.

Together, we continued to build the wing at Dyess and by now, the fall of 1962, it had acquired a designation, the 463rd Troop Carrier Wing. We had two squadrons, the 17th and 18th Troop Carrier Squadrons. I was promoted (automatically) to the grand rank of 1st Lieutenant.

In mid October of that year, planning activities in the wing were stepped up. In the trenches, we weren't sure why the frenzied activity was going on at the head shed, but the evening news reports indicated that the rhetoric between the U.S government and the Soviets had heated up. We had our suspicions.

On the 21st of October, the entire wing mobilized and we flew off to Ft. Campbell Airfield in Kentucky, the home of the 101st Airborne Division. On the evening of the 22nd, while sitting in the stag bar of the Ft. Campbell officers club, we found out why. That evening President Kennedy delivered a dramatic television address to the nation in which he talked about nuclear missiles in Cuba and a naval blockade. In this address he stated, "I have directed the Armed Forces to prepare for any eventualities…" The next morning, we loaded up our C-130 with airborne troops from the 101st and flew to McCoy AFB, Florida (the current day Orlando International Airport).

McCoy AFB looked then like a military Oshkosh would look today. There were hundreds of tactical military aircraft of all breeds sitting on the ramp in clusters: short range B-66s for the tactical bombing mission; F-100s for the air supremacy and air-ground attack missions; F-101 interceptors; RF-101 Reconnaissance aircraft; and of course several squadrons of C-130s, some for the troop drop function and others for heavy equipment drops for items such as light tanks, jeeps, and other ground attack vehicles.

There was no doubt about it, we were going to war.

We unloaded our Army troops and they bivouacked in the grass between the ramp and the taxiways. We crewmembers were sent off to the BOQs and transient airman quarters. I was assigned to a BOQ room with four roommates and three beds. As the lowest ranking officer, I slept on a mattress on the floor. The others in the room were an F-100 pilot, and RF-101 pilot, and a B-66 navigator.

The next morning we attended a briefing in the only building on the base that could accommodate all of us–the base gym. We sat in clusters, much as our aircraft were assembled on the ramp. As the briefing unfolded, we got the big picture of what was going to happen. Our target was the Havana International Airport. The bombers were going in first, supported by the F-100 CAP (combat air patrol) to ward off any enemy MiGs. Then the F-100 ground attack fighters were going to bomb and strafe the target area. We would follow in a sixteen ship C-130 V-formation to drop our troops, followed a half-hour later by the C-130s rigged for heavy equipment drops. The theory was that the troops we dropped would secure the drop zone and be ready to receive the equipment and supplies from the second section of C-130s. Otherwise the equipment would fall into the hands of the enemy.

The V-formation was a tactic developed in World War II, which in our case, maximized the number of troops we could put on a drop zone with the least amount of longitudinal dispersion. It was great from that perspective but lousy from a defensive posture. The C-130 had no defensive weapons so this large formation would make them a tempting and easy group of targets for an enemy fighter force. We depended on the F-100s and F-101s to protect the formation from enemy fighter aircraft.

When the briefing officer pointed out the anti-aircraft missile and gun emplacements, each location was identified by a small red circle. He showed the map around the Havana airport first without the circles; then he overlaid the circles.

Everything turned red.

While there was a collective sigh, no one jumped up and ran out of the briefing room. It was simply a fact of the mission. After the mission briefing, which included engine start times, taxi times, and take off times for each of the various attack elements, each of our groups went to a separate part of the room to do our flight planning. An hour later, we boarded crew buses and they delivered us to the aircraft. When we arrived, the flight engineers were completing the pre-flight and the loadmasters were in the process of loading the troops. Within half an hour, the aircraft commander had briefed the crew and we were all at our duty stations. Our instructions were to complete the before-starting-engines checklist and the starting-engines checklist up to the point of pressing the starter button for number three engine, the first one to be started. This was called "cocking" the aircraft. We completed cocking the aircraft and then waited, listening on the command post UHF radio frequency for the word to go.

We waited. And we waited. Outside the airplane, we could see the other crews and pilots doing the same thing. Waiting. Waiting to go to war.

It became eerily quiet. There were no jokes over the intercom, none of the usual bantering and chatter. We were all afraid such noise would make us miss an important message.

We didn't know it then but our friends who were flying B-47s and B-52s had been ordered to the final hold line before penetrating Soviet airspace. These aircraft were fully armed with nuclear bombs and missiles. They were

orbiting, waiting, as we were, for the final word to go, to drop nuclear bombs on Russian targets.

We waited for what seemed like an eternity, but in all likelihood, was no more than a couple of hours at most. Then suddenly a voice boomed over the command post frequency and told us to stand down and to report back to the gym for another briefing. That's when we got scared. That's when all that red around Havana airport sunk home. That's when we knew we had dodged a huge bullet.

In retrospect, it was the largest bullet in the post World War II world up to and including today. It would have been World War III.

But Khrushchev blinked and the war that never was, ended.

Today, it feels wonderful to be looking out over the lush green of Orlando International Airport.

Solo!

By Joe Clark

There is only one time, that time you get to fly an airplane solo for the first time. This is what it is like.

As I drove eastward toward the airstrip, I thought of how little time remained before I had to leave for college. I watched the windshield wipers track back and forth knocking water away from the windshield and wondered how much more flying I could complete before leaving for school. The rain seemed to get heavier as I continued east. I was beginning to think of the long drive back.

Passing through Plant City, the rain began to ease. Then the sky began to lighten just a little; maybe it was my imagination, but I believed it was improving. I was praying it would clear. The further I pressed on through town, the more I thought the weather was breaking. I really wanted to fly this afternoon, more than anything.

Reaching the County Line Road exit, the impossible happened: the clouds broke and sunshine came out and I could see a little blue sky. The winds stopped blowing. There was freshness in the air, a freshness found only in Florida right after a summer thunderstorm has passed. As I turned up Highway 92 toward Charlie's, I drank in that freshness and thought of the sky and what I would soon be doing up there in only a few more short moments.

I was not surprised at all when Charlie said he could only fly me in the pattern. The fact that he said I would not be able to solo went in one ear and out the other. The only thing I was interested in was perfecting my landings to the point where they were good and safe. I really didn't care about the weather, leaving the pattern, or soloing. I just wanted to practice my landings and get them as close to perfect as I could make them.

We went to Charlie's newest and my favorite of all the Cubs, N6269H. I gave the airplane a quick pre-flight and once I was satisfied it would fly, I climbed into the back seat and strapped in. The old man stood at the front of the airplane and called, "Switch off!"

"Switch is off," I answered. He then began swinging the propeller back and forth. About every third or fourth swing, he pulled it through a complete cycle. From where I sat, I could hear the gurgling sound of fuel when the pressure of the intake sucked it into the carburetor. With a couple of more swings, Charlie positioned the propeller where he wanted it and then called, "Contact!"

"Switch is hot!" I yelled back. I wanted him to make no mistake that he was now handling a "live" prop–a prop that could take off an arm or leg, maybe end a life. With practiced ease, he gripped the trailing edge of the falling blade and pulled it through. The little Continental barked to life and chased away the post-thunderstorm stillness. Now instead of the still calm of the damp air, I felt the wind rushing by my cheek, cooled by the metal blades of the whirling prop, creating an instant wind-chill factor.

As Charlie settled into the cramped front seat of the Cub, he told me to go ahead and fly in the pattern and to work on my landings. As I went through the motions of taxiing out and completing the engine run-up, I noticed he seemed a little more quiet than usual.

Once I was certain the engine was warmed properly and ready for flight, I gave one last look around the pattern checking for other aircraft. Then I eased the

throttle forward and moved out onto the grass strip. Pausing momentarily, I took a deep breath to relax and eased the throttle all the way forward.

As the airplane began to roll, the nose began to swing ever so slightly to the left. I countered with just a bit of right rudder to keep her straight down the runway and at the same time, pushed forward on the stick to raise the tail off the ground. The noise, as usual, was deafening. The wind outside the open window of the Cub suddenly went from a strong breeze to hurricane force. The airspeed needle quivered over the "0" and then moved toward the "40" mark. As the airplane accelerated faster along the ground and through the air, the controls began to feel solid, to come alive! At 45 mph, I eased back on stick and the main tires became light on the ground. We bounced along the roughness of the pasture, and then lifted off! I was flying again and pleased.

Relaxing the backpressure on the stick, I allowed the airplane to accelerate to its climb speed of 55. Looking down, I saw the fenceline at the end of the runway pass beneath us. I looked over at the school bus stop along Highway 92. Back to the left, I watched the smoke blowing east from the stacks at the plant just southwest of Charlie's airstrip. I noticed the airplane was climbing a little better than 300 feet per minute according to the vertical speed indicator. Charlie was still quiet, not saying a word. An unusual feat for him, for usually, you could actually hear the old man yelling at his students over the noise of the Continental–all the way from the downwind–while you were on the ground! At 400 feet, I lowered the left wing and began my crosswind turn.

I became completely engrossed in the mechanical aspects of flight and forgot all else. And of course, I was absolutely consumed by my happiness in flying on a day I thought there would be no chance to do so.

Climbing out toward the pattern altitude of 700 feet, I was again amazed with joy I found in the controls of the

airplane as they bumped and vibrated and responded to my every input. The airplane seemed so alive! So much an extension of my body, my mind–it was a part of me!

As I turned downwind, I eased the nose over slightly to maintain my 700-foot pattern altitude. At the same time, I pulled the power back until the tachometer settled on 2100 rpm. I always enjoyed pulling the power back as it eased the noise level in the cabin of the little yellow airplane.

Looking down at the field, I made certain the airplane was tracking parallel to the runway. When I was directly abeam the approach end of the runway, I reached forward beyond Charlie's seat, eased on the carburetor heat, and idled the engine.

As the power dropped off the 65-hp Continental, I let the nose fall through when the airspeed settled on 55. The next step was to control the glide until reaching the point of flare, finessing it until touchdown using pitch and skill, instead of power. Charlie taught us that way–to land without the crutch of throttle.

That was the real difference between pilots taught to fly by Charlie and others taught elsewhere. There was no doubt Charlie's pupils could successfully handle an airplane in any engine-out situation without having a serious accident. We were learning how to fly and survive at Charlie's long before we learned how to sound good on a radio.

Now my concern was making the best of this half-hour God had given me between thunderstorms. Around and around and around. More touch and goes followed by more touch and goes. Time seemed endless and the landings improved. I had no idea of time for I was unconcerned. All that mattered was getting my landings just as smooth as possible. I did not notice the sun lowering in the western sky, nor did I notice the weather moving further away. The sky was now gloriously clear. None of this I noticed as any pilot of merit would. It

would be a long time before I was to hear the term, "situational awareness."

I started to add power on about the fifth or sixth touch and go when the old man in the front seat pulled the power back to idle. He turned to me and said it was time. I looked at my watch and sure enough, we had been airborne the customary 30 minutes. Damn! It seemed as though we had just started!

As I taxied the little J-3 toward the hangars, I slowed down a little too much. Giving the power a slight nudge forward to maneuver toward 69H's hangar, Charlie gripped the throttle in his left hand and stopped me from going any further. I had no idea why he would do it, as we were nowhere near the hangar; we were still out next to the runway.

"Well, what do you think?" he asked me over the chugging of the little Continental. "Do you think you could take this airplane around the pattern by yourself?"

Instinctively, I said yes. As I did, I wondered why my mouth said that. I was also acutely aware my body was turning to gelatin!

"What about the weather?" I asked.

"Don't worry about it. It's perfect," Charlie reported. "Now she is going to feel a little different and she'll fly a little better without my weight in here." He leaned in and adjusted the seatbelt of the seat he had just vacated–and had always occupied while I was flying. "She'll have a tendency to climb quicker and fly faster."

As he finished securing the belt, the old man looked at me and said, "You're on your own, now. Take it around once and bring it back to the hangar."

Charlie closed the door to the plane and suddenly I was fully aware I was *alone* in the airplane. He stepped away. I put a little forward stick pressure on the controls and gave the engine a little throttle to swing the tail around. Then I headed back to the runway.

This was the day I had been waiting for all of my life and now I was scared! Scared beyond description! I was all too aware I had lost feeling in my legs. The taxi back to the end of runway 27 was a long one, 2,300 feet worth of long to be exact.

As I taxied the airplane down the runway, I wondered if I would have enough strength left to run the rudders on take-off. In my mind's eye, I saw all those headlines!

STUDENT PILOT
CRASHES ON FIRST SOLO

STUDENT PILOT CRASHES
INTO CHICKEN COOP,
KILLS HUNDREDS OF CHICKS

STUDENT PILOT LOST
ON FIRST SOLO,
ENDS UP IN CUBA

In my mind, I could hear the broadcast media: "See it here first on News Channel 8 at eleven!"

I always knew aviators were supposed to be bold and brave. I believed I was born to be one and therefore had to possess all the bravado required, as all aviators before me. Right? Yea! Maybe. Perhaps . . .

Then why was I scared? And what was there to be afraid of? Thousands, hundreds of thousands, maybe even millions of pilots before me had soloed. Now it was my turn. As I taxied back along the runway, I wondered what I got myself into. And I wondered what of the outcome. But deep down, really deep down, somewhere in the cavernous, innermost reaches of my being, I knew. I really knew...

I knew I could do it!

The old man would not turn me loose if there were any doubt in his mind. Right?

I looked around one last time for other airplanes in the pattern and saw none. Then I brought the power up a little more and swung the Cub out into the center of the grass runway. With a deep breath, I eased the throttle all the way forward, pushed forward on the stick, and applied some right rudder.

The Cub picked up speed and as it did, I held the stick forward bringing the tail off the ground. I noticed the feeling had suddenly returned to my legs. As the airspeed needle began bobbing on the lower limits of the dial, I looked forward and out to the right where Charlie was standing. There were a couple of other pilots standing with him, caught up in this, the most exciting moment of my life!

I could feel the Cub getting light on her wheels and noticed the airspeed indicator was passing 45 mph. I eased on a little more backstick pressure making the load on the mains even lighter. A couple of more moments went by and the tires slowly eased off the earth. As I felt the tires break ground, I released a little of the pressure on the stick. When the airspeed indicator nudged 55, I brought the nose higher and we, the Cub and I, by ourselves for the first time, climbed away into the late afternoon Florida skies.

God! It was magnificent!

For the first time in my life, I felt as though I was in control over what was going to happen to me. No one else had input or a say-so or any other kind of influence over what was going to happen to me. It was going to be up to me. Me! Alone! I was the only one now who could cast a vote as to whether or not I would live or die, land or crash, end life or begin living!

I looked down to the earth as the J-3 and I climbed into the sky. I could see Charlie standing next to the runway as I passed over his house and the sheds, and