

IT'S FLYING TIME, FOLKS

Bill Zulker – March, 2011

Shortly after moving to Richland, Lebanon County, PA in 2004 following thirty-seven years living in Wayne, PA, I met John Sibole, a Captain with USAirways. We immediately struck up a friendship, having many common interests including our Christian faith. Both of us had also lived in Delaware County and had friends in common.

John is a very experienced pilot, having started his flying career in the United States Air Force, and has flown numerous types of planes. His piloting has involved Trans-Atlantic flights as well as domestic flights to numberless cities. He has more than 24,000 hours flying time booked in his logs.

He also has his own flight-school based at nearby Keller Brother's Airport in Schaefferstown and at Deck Airport in Myerstown, just twenty minutes or so from our home in Richland.

THE CAP-10 -

Telling John of my life-long desire to be able to fly an airplane, he took me up in his private plane – a low-wing, bubble-top, tail-dragger – a CAP 10B. I found out that it was a French-made plane with a cruising speed of 150 MPH. It was beautiful; mostly red and white with a splash of black-streak here and there.

Immediately, I was hooked, and on June 7, 2005, at the age of seventy-nine, my flying career began. At first, my lessons were sporadic, but in January 2006 they were every week or two. More and more I enjoyed them, and couldn't really believe that it was happening to me. The thrill of flying casually above the country-side is hard to describe, but I think it is wonderful. It is also amazing to realize that flying is something that had been dreamed of through many generations and it became a reality just a little over one-hundred years ago.

To think that I only had to travel a few short miles to the airport, and that I had the privilege of having such an experienced instructor, made me realize how fortunate I was. John is a great instructor who inter-mixes the theoretical with the practical. Each lesson begins with ground-school instruction and then is immediately followed up with the actual flying experience. Learning to fuel up the plane, making the pre-flight inspection, mapping the flight plan, the post-flight inspection and returning the plane to the hangar, are all a part of his teaching.

John's private hangar is at Keller Bros, a privately owned airport with a grass runway, surrounded by farms. Though there are five small airports within twenty-miles or so – Keller, Grimes, Deck, Riegel, Farmer's Pride - and a small landing strip at Kountry-Kraft Kitchens, plus the large airport at Indiantown Gap Army Base - we seldom see planes while we are in the air. More frequently than not they are military helicopters. That made it much simpler for me than if we had been flying near Philadelphia.

FIRST "SOLO" -

Though it was not my intention, at my age, to fly alone or seek to be a licensed pilot, I simply wanted the satisfaction of knowing that I had learned to fly, had my

instructor's approval, and was comfortable in the pilot's seat. To confirm that I had accomplished all that, Captain John stated in writing that I had made my first "solo" on August 7, 2008. He put the word "solo" in quotations to signify that I, by myself, without his assistance, had successfully done all that was required in take-off, flying around, and landing, even though he was sitting in the adjoining seat. I considered him "My Insurance Policy and Pilot."

By that time, I had flown not only the CAP 10B, but also a Cessna 150, a Piper Cherokee, and had a flight in a Diamond Champ with my grandson-in-law pilot Jeff Newton.

ON A "ROLL"

A very thrilling and memorable flight occurred just before Captain John sold his CAP 10B. We had finished my lesson in the air when John said, "Let me have the controls." He then said, "Are you ready for this?" and I replied in the affirmative sensing what was going to happen. He then roared full speed ahead, went into a steep climb and rolled the plane over. He then said, "You do it. Full throttle, climb, and NOW, hold the stick far to the left and keep it there." Over we went in another roll, and I had accomplished one more "great adventure."

Learning to fly on the grass runway at Keller Bros was a lot of fun. But we also flew frequently to nearby Deck Airport, just a couple of miles away in Myerstown where there was a black-top hard-surface runway, as also at Riegel Airport between Annville and Campbelltown. Of course, they were narrower, which meant another challenge to a student pilot as I was.

We often flew to Farmer's Pride Airport in Fredericksburg, PA, which had a wide and long grass runway and I enjoyed landing and taking off there. We occasionally landed at Grimes Airport and at Riegel.

FLYING A HELICOPTER –

In 2007, John purchased a Schweizer 300 CB two-place helicopter and brought it to his Keller Airport hangar. Because I had almost 75 hours flying, he said that I should learn to fly the helicopter. My first flight on April 20, 2007 was less than an hour long, but without any arm-twisting, I accepted the challenge. After introductory ground-school instruction, another thrill was to take the controls and feel the copter turn left and right and then ascend and descend. But would I ever learn to hover without moving all over the place? Slowly and determinedly I kept at it until one day I realized that I had become the victor.

Though the initial steps in flying the helicopter seemed much more difficult than flying an airplane, I have now flown more than 50 hours in the copter and find it easier and much more enjoyable. I love the feeling of control in hovering from the hangar to the runway and then starting from most any point and taking off. Flying at 80 mph across neighboring farms at 500 or 600 feet above ground gives one the opportunity and fun of looking around and seeing things from a different perspective. And landing in one's own backyard is almost unrealistic, but we did it! And the neighbors were astounded and even wondered if it was a Medivac helicopter sent to our home. When it is time to end the lesson and return to the airport, the challenge is then to put the copter down at a given spot on the runway, What a wonderful feeling of accomplishment, when it is done.

Again, after 22 hours, I attained my first helicopter “solo” flight, in quotations of course, with John Sibole in the adjoining seat.

One of the unexpected results of this whole experience was in getting to know other pilots. Our new friends are Clyde Deck, his sons and wife, who own and operate Deck Airport in Myerstown, Ed and Cindy Kercher, and Don Klopp, all of whom also worship with us at the same church. Clyde has been the personal pilot for Mario Andretti, the racing car driver of fame.

AN 84TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION –

A real special thrill for me was in flying the helicopter on December 20, 2010, my 84th birthday.

Presently, I am not sure how much more flying I will do, for I have fulfilled my dream, I have accomplished what I set out to do. I have logged 50.8 hours in a helicopter and 93.7 hours in a plane for a total of 144.5. Not too bad for a late-comer.

I HAVE LEARNED TO FLY, BOTH A FIXED-WING AIRPLANE, AND A HELICOPTER, and I am happy.
