



LOGGING FLIGHT TIME

And other Aviation Truths, Near Truths, and more than a few rumors that could never be traced to their sources



William K. Kershner

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by William K. Kershner

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Cover photos *Upper right*: Getting the wings of the "Hellcat" folded on the USS Monterey off Pensacola; *middle left*: In the cockpit of an F8F-1 "Bearcat"; *middle right*: Standing by the wings waiting to give the "Meyers OTW" a prop; *middle (under)*: On Formosa Strait patrol; *lower left*: As a lecturer and flight instructor for a stability and control class at the University of Tennessee Space Institute (Courtesy of Elizabeth Motlow); *lower right*: Standing by the Aerobat at the Sewanee Airport; *backcover*: Taking off from Sewanee–Franklin County Airport for an aerobatic session.

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First Airplane Ride

I was lucky to have grown up in the time and place that I did. When I was 10, my mother remarried and we moved to the country 6 miles west of Clarksville, Tennessee, close to the Kentucky state line. Three years later Camp Campbell (now a fort) was built just north of us, and at the age period of 12 to 15 years I had the experience of seeing hundreds of tanks and half-tracks go by on the road within 40 yards of our front door. There were airplanes flying over as well, and I continued my ambition to be a fighter pilot, not sure whether it would be better to be a Navy or Army Air Force Pilot.

No pilot ever forgets his first airplane ride.

AOPA Pilot—August 1995

Fall in upper-middle Tennessee is the smell of dark-leaf tobacco being fired for market. The smoke of the sawdust burning on the earthen barn floor drifts upward through the tiers of dark leaves, absorbing the rich sweetness of the tobacco before slipping out through the eaves to join the smoke of other barns.

It is as if a million cob pipes have joined to make a smooth, sensual aroma that is all about and nowhere, an

aroma that congregates to be visible as a blue haze in quiet low places in the late afternoon. It is the smell of tobacco and wood smoke, and at the start of the firing time the wood smoke smell is predominant, but as the days ease on, the tobacco smell moves in, and as the firing time ends, the wood is gone and the tobacco is in control.

The farmer sniffs and notes the progress and is content—the hunter smells it and the hunt is made better—the hiker pauses to appreciate it and is rejuvenated.

Fall in that part of the country is not just turning leaves or coon dogs sounding down in the hollow on a crackling clear night, or that special solidity of the pockets of cooler air in the low spots that collect the smoke in the very late afternoon—it is this smell—a fragrance that makes the old men nostalgic and the young men glad for the autumns to come. It had been thus for a hundred years, and the war in this fall of 1944 had changed nothing.

There were barns near the small grass-covered airport.

The boy rode up to the airport fence and rested the yellow bicycle against it. He was extra skinny and wore overalls, a blue work shirt, and old high-topped black tennis shoes with holes worn in the sides where his outside toes were moving to get out. He had an almost-white thatch of hair, blue eyes, and ears that were much too big. One thought, upon seeing his ears, of a taxi going down the street with both back doors open, and he had been reminded of this too many times.

He was not well coordinated as he worked his way up the fence hesitantly. He kept looking at the line of parked airplanes as he eased up toward the line shack, where activity seemed to be centered. Beyond the line shack (which was a part of the fence complex and acted as a gate or checkpoint between the spectators and the active partici-

pants) the hangar stood large, containing several more brightly colored airplanes.

This was not his first time here; the 10-mile round trip by bike had been made on many other Sunday afternoons, starting in the previous spring. It was October and cool, but the back of his shirt was dark with the sweat of the ride. He kept his eye on the airplane that was taking up passengers and felt again for the damp two-dollar bills folded in the breast pocket of his overalls.

He did not know that his feelings would be labeled ambivalent by more learned and experienced thinkers. He wanted to get into that airplane and take his first ride more than anything he had ever done, but it was a time of extreme concern because his whole life—all 15 years of it—would be affected by this one airplane ride. If he got sick or didn't like it, or if he panicked in midflight, everything would be ended. Ever since he could remember he had wanted to be a pilot. He had built solid models of combat airplanes of the Allies and the Axis powers and also stick-and-tissue-paper flying models of prewar light planes (the J-3 *Cub*, *Rearwin Speedster*, and others). He had built a fighter cockpit (crude, but imagination helped) in the attic of the garage with stick, throttle, and a crosshair gun sight (a toilet-paper tube with threads pasted over the end served nicely). He even had a solid model of a Messerschmitt Bf 109 suspended on a thread "ahead" of the sight and was now a triple ace.

His only previous flight had been jumping off the peak of the roof of the smokehouse under an umbrella that failed approximately one-third of the way down, leaving him lying in chicken droppings, groaning in pain from a sprained right ankle.

He stopped his slow movement along the fence to



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This book is a collection of light-hearted anecdotes from industry expert William Kershner's most memorable experiences. In these stories, Kershner details some of the more humorous, humiliating, and helpful things he has seen in more than sixty years of flying. Readers are sure to find these stories entertaining, and those who are pilots themselves may find some incidents all too familiar. The stories range from the author's first flying experiences through his Navy career as a pilot in a night fighter squadron, to the later years as a corporate pilot and instructor. Kershner has always enjoyed drawing airplanes, and the illustrations in this book reflect his sense of humor.

Kershner began flying in 1945 at the age of fifteen and throughout his career he has held private, commercial, ground and flight instructor, and airline transport pilot certificates. Following his four years as a Navy pilot, he flew as a corporate pilot, then worked for Piper Aircraft Corporation demonstrating airplanes, flight testing, and acting as special assistant to William T. Piper, Sr. Kershner became the award winning author of "The Student Pilot's Flight Manual," "The Advanced Pilot's Flight Manual," "The Basic Aerobatic Manual," and more.

His impressive list of awards includes: 1992 FAA/General Aviation Flight Instructor of the Year; the 99's Award of Merit in 1994; named Elder Statesman of Aviation in 1997; inducted into the Flight Instructor Hall of Fame in 1998. For many years, Kershner has operated an aerobatic school in Sewanee, Tennessee.



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