



JEFF SKILES

COMMENTARY / CONTRAILS

Looking Through My Logbooks

A record of an aviation life

TUCKED AWAY IN A drawer, or a box, or carried with us on every flight is something that all pilots from Lindbergh to the newest Young Eagle share. A pilot logbook. Logbooks may be utilitarian records required to meet FAA requirements for training and currency, but for some, they can be so much more.

Early pilots recorded their flight time in minutes. Perhaps the flights were so short that minutes were a better representation of

their experience. By the time I made my first entry, tenths of an hour were the accepted means of keeping track.

I have three logbooks actually. My initial logbook is one of those hip-pocket versions. A burgundy one. Most logbooks seem to be burgundy or black for some reason. I have



examples of each. The edges are all worn from carrying it around with me on my flights. The first entry? "April 17, 1976, Cessna 150, 63547, MSN, local, fundamentals, taxiing, pre-flight checks." A quick check of the FAA registry shows that N63547 is now located in Kenai, Alaska. Having flown to Alaska and back this summer, I know that must have been quite a haul in a Cessna 150.

My first logbook has all my early training carefully noted right up to my CFI checkride, 329.1 flight hours, and then nothing more. Apparently, I must have decided that with a brand new CFI certificate I was now a big-time professional pilot, and I needed a big-time professional pilot logbook. So I immediately bought one of those black master logbooks. In fact, it is The Standard Pilot Master Log, model SP-6. The word "Master" must have appealed to me. Certainly, it is far superior to The Standard Pilot Logbook, model SP-4, that it succeeded.

MY 'MASTER LOG'

I must be a "Standard" logbook man because all my logbooks are of their manufacture. Each logbook comes complete with a jet airplane logo on the cover with what looks like satellites orbiting around it. I believe the Pilot Master Log, model SP-6, comes only in black. I've never seen one in burgundy. I'm guessing the black color is supposed to reflect the gravity of my new professional pilot position in life. It's big and clumsy, and I obviously haven't carried it around much because it is pristine in comparison to my first one.

I'm sure that, at the time, I thought I would never fill the pages of such an immense logbook, but it turns out that I filled it in only six years. Within its pages are carefully recorded my history as a flight instructor and cargo pilot. Names I have long forgotten are cryptically recorded with a letter and a dash before them to denote the type of training they received. I must have thought that the letter before their name would be important, but it doesn't seem so three decades in the future.

I have a very fancy record of all my CFI sign-offs and recommendations in the back of the logbook. I am surprised to find that I ushered 29 new pilots into the world, as well as recommending a wealth of instrument ratings, commercial certificates, multiengine ratings, CFIs, and instrument instructors.

I seem to have cornered the market on multiengine instructor recommendations in my area. Most of those multiengine instructor recommendations were accomplished in a Cessna 310. A Cessna 310 wouldn't be my first choice in a multiengine trainer, too fast and difficult to fly. But I also conducted some of that training in something called a

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No earth-shattering
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PA-34-200. I'm a Cessna guy, not a Piper guy. All those Piper designations are still a mystery to me. A quick Internet search reveals that a PA-34-200 is a Piper Seneca. Hmm... two minutes ago I would have sworn to you that I have never flown a Piper Seneca. Turns out, I have 28 hours in one.

Around that same time, I flew several flights to International Falls, Minnesota, in a Cessna 421. No memory of those either, not of the Cessna 421 and not of International Falls.

By the time I had started my second logbook, I had moved to recording multiple flight legs on one line, a clear departure from my first where I recorded every leg separately, as if it were an event worth celebrating. By logbook's end, I had 4,199.5

hours recorded in its pages. Not much really for a logbook that, when I bought it, seemed so vast it would last a lifetime.

This is turning into a forensic investigation of history...my history. No archaeologist could show more interest than me, as I pore over these pages and Google search the N numbers chronicled therein. Where are all those aircraft now? Some are far afield like that first Cessna 150 in Alaska. Some are still close to home, like the Cessna 150 I soloed, N7796U. It's only one state away in Michigan. Most of the Convair 440s I logged time in flying cargo are aluminum cans now. And, I find that a surprising number of the Aero Commander 680s I flew came to a bad end. When I search their N numbers I get NTSB reports, not registration data. Young guys like me who just took their eyes off the ball for a moment and paid the ultimate price.

BOOK THREE

I must have decided that my third logbook would be my final one. I was at the airlines by that point, and for two years I recorded my time by the day and then inexplicably moved to recording it by the month. It was more a running total just for interest's sake than a record of my flying career. This might seem like an abandonment of aeronautical convention, but it puts me head and shoulders above the vast majority of airline pilots who don't keep a logbook at all. Flying time only has a purpose when you're trying to meet the requirements of a new rating or attempting to get a job. After a point it has no value.

Before I get a lot of mail about FAA logbook recording requirements, let me say that pilots who are part of an airline training program are exempted from all those niggling little currency regulations. As a practicing airline pilot flying 800 to 900 hours in a year, I would regularly go out of night landing currency over the summer and instrument currency at any time of the year, as defined by FAR 91. We fly under Part 121, however. Part 121 says that hotshot airline pilots like me don't have to follow those rules, and the airline has your training record that proves your competency.

People have asked me how I recorded the "Miracle on the Hudson" in my logbook. Between you and me, I put it down as "Jan 2009, Airbus, 37.1 hours." No earth-shattering comments here. No words of wisdom. But that reflects how I felt about the incident, so it is appropriate for me.

I have always been rather sparing in my entries. At best they are bare-bones documentation. Here to there, time and aircraft. Not a lot really to grab a hold of, but I have a friend who has just the opposite approach.

AN AVIATION DIARY

We'll call him Larry because that is his name, after all. Larry is one of those people who use their logbooks as a diary of their aviation lives, and he certainly has had a varied and interesting one. We worked together 30 years ago for that cargo airline I mentioned earlier, and we're still friends. Recently, I was asking him some questions

about those days for a column. Larry always was better at record keeping than I was; a better pilot, too. He went to the trouble of copying off all his log pages and putting them in the mail.

Wow, what a record. Larry's comments were only limited by the size of the remarks line of the logbook. Each page was rich and full of detail. A sample? "IFR Procedures, Thunderstorms, deviation, moderate turbulence, sleet, snow, ice, ILS 30 LBF."

That's one line in Larry's world. Sounds like quite a night!

Larry even recorded the progress of the turkey we bought and cooked for

Thanksgiving dinner one year, after flying a trip to our maintenance base in Billings, Montana. It had one of those little poppy things that was supposed to pop up when it was done. Ours didn't pop. As I recall, we didn't know enough to thaw the turkey before putting it in the oven. We cooked it for 10 hours. The entry? "Thanksgiving pay! Lunch at Sambos. Roasted Turkey at Alliance, finally done at 1AM."

When I was recording my time monthly, one page would suffice for a year and a half of airline flying, but now that I am flying more varied aircraft, the pages have become richer. Probably the most interesting one is my current page



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that holds entries for only two and a half months. Yet, in that time, I have trained for, and passed, checkrides for a seaplane rating, a CFI renewal, and a DC-7 second-in-command type rating.

I am inordinately proud of my CFI renewal. It was expired for 24 years, but as we both know now, it appears from my logbook that I was quite the flight instructor at one time. I don't have a student yet, but I think I have a lot to offer. So, if you know someone looking for instruction, please send him or her my way. I'm in the book.

I am now less than halfway through my third logbook, but I'm thinking this will be my last. The total has reached 20,743.1 hours. I'm not sure if that's a little or a lot, but it represents who I am, as surely as does the box of family photos on the shelf in my closet. The columns don't add up just right anymore from some

accumulation of mathematical errors over the years. And, I don't know why I transfer some of those columns to new pages, but I do. For instance, I dutifully transfer my

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glider time forward, 7.1 hours, even though I haven't closed the canopy on a glider in 32 years. But, every time I transfer it, I

think of Gunter Voltz, the World War II Luftwaffe pilot who taught me. I think of a Schweizer 2-33, sunny skies, and puffy clouds, and I think of that thick German accent emanating from the rear seat commanding me to step on a rudder and center that string of yarn.

These three logbooks are my diary, a record of me, the only one that I have. But maybe they're more than that, too. Maybe they're about Gunter, and Larry, and turkey dinners, and ice, and thunderstorms. Things lost to memory, but brought back to life in words. Maybe their yellowing pages are an archive of the lives I have touched, and those who have touched mine. That's a powerful thing for a worn Standard Pilot Logbook, model SP-4. A powerful thing. *EAA*

Jeff Skiles, EAA 336120, is EAA Vice President of Chapters and Youth Education and flies a 1935 Waco biplane.

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