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An autobiographical sketch

Charles Franklin Palmer

Born: September 2, 1924

Birthplace: Plainfield, New Jersey

Troop Carrier Pathfinder Group World War II

I graduated Scotch Plains HS in June of 1942, little knowing we would later be called a part of "The Greatest Generation." I did the gas station bit full time for \$12.00 a week as the summer slowly passed. On my 18th birthday I took the Air Corps written exam in the Newark Armory. I passed it and took a physical exam the next day, which I also passed. I signed some papers and I was in the Army, an Aviation Cadet and all I could think of was "what have I done?" Two weeks later "after putting my affairs in order," 4 or 5 of us were assembled in Newark and went by train to Ft. Dix, NJ. for about 4 weeks or so. I remember going home one weekend and walking past the high school while a football game was in process. Mr. Adkins let me through the gate, a freebie, and I ended up sitting on the bench. That evening there was a party at somebody's house and I was the center attraction. On leaving I had to kiss all the girl's goodbye. A couple of them were patriotically enthusiastic which made me wish I could stay a little longer. Charlie Ferguson and a couple of guys drove me back to Ft. Dix, a concession as there was gas rationing in those days.

One thing I learned early on, Army food wasn't bad and for the first time in my life, I could eat all I wanted at every meal. I put it away and started putting some weight. Our days at Dix were accomplished at Dix and we boarded a train, a passenger car not a Pullman and off we went for San Antonio, Texas. Part way, we stopped in East St. Louis for several hot hours and decided to rearrange the seat backs flat, so we could stretch for the night. Unfortunately this rearranging started at both ends of the car at the same time. Naturally, they didn't match properly in the center. I don't remember who arranged it, but one end had to rethink.

It was a long haul to San Antonio and we soon learned those magazine ads showing freight trains being held on a siding so a troop train could steam through, was propaganda. A train was held alright, but it was us who waited. Eventually we arrived a day late, without any water or food. We ended at a Reception Center for about a month mostly marching back and forth on the parade ground. It was here we were also given a battery of psychomotor test's that determined for what we would be trained, a Pilot, Bombardier or Navigator. After we were classified, I got Pilot which is what I wanted. Later we marched across the base for Preflight Training.

There we were Under Classmen, Group 6A, for a month where we were harassed daily by the Upper Classmen. It was rigorous, classroom work, marching and occasional guard duty overnight. I don't think we were ever allowed off the base to go into San Antonio. Instead we heard Gene Autry singing

Charles Franklin Palmer

September 29, 2014

"San Antonio Rose" over and over, plus endless commercials for Dr. Pepper at 10 - 2 - and 4. I went for month's wondering what that was and when I found out I hated it. I remember being homesick just once, Christmas Day 1942. We had the day off and I went to the movies and saw Pittsburgh, with John Wayne and Marlene Dietrich. Eventually, we became Upper Classmen and it was our turn to be harassers. We finally graduated and Group 6 won two prizes. We in A, won for best marching, B won the prize for high scholastic achievement. No Medals, Cups, or Cash were awarded. My personal prize was Primary Flight Training and I was off for Muskogee, Oklahoma.

Our Training at Muskogee was in the Fairchild PT 19, as conducted by the Spartan School of Aviation. It was a prominent flying school and I remember my first flight. We were garbed in a leather flying suit with a furry sheepskin lining. There was also a helmet with a white adhesive tape stripe thereon, denoting we had not soloed. I was quite anxious while taking off and then strong armed the controls when they were turned over to me. My instructor was Dick Makowski and he was patient with me. After an eternity we landed, maybe thirty minutes and I had all I could do to retain my breakfast. However I did stretch out on the grass until the world stopped spinning.

We flew daily, had some ground school and some physical training was thrown in. We could go into town on weekends, but all we did was stand around on a corner to watch the passing parade. I guess a couple of guys met some gals, but I didn't. Pat Patterson had his wife join him which was rare. It was a difficult and expensive to find a places to rent, but they managed it as he couldn't stand being without her.

Training was in two stages, eight or so dual hours until you soloed and a second stage when you went aloft solo to practice what you had been given to do. I'll never forget my solo. Makowski had me up with him doing practice landings and takeoffs, when he told me to park the plane. He started to get out and I knew what was coming next, I would solo. After a couple of last minute gems of wisdom, off I went to circle the field and to perform three landings. I sang the Air Corps song at the top of my lungs as I performed those three landings. I taxied up, proud as punch at my accomplishment, only to be chastised for overshooting one turn onto the landing leg and having to correct for it. We came back to the home field, Hatbox by name, and I stripped off my skunk stripe before climbing out. Two others of our flight had soloed the same day, so we all had something to talk about. Makowski was pleased also, as he had been a little behind the other instructors in soloing his fledglings..

I changed instructors once I had soloed and drew Bill Fedeshin. He was also a good instructor and I liked him. I flew for him, passed and was allowed to take off and land on the other side of the field. One day I was up practicing and decided to do a loop. I stuck the nose down, got up speed, and hauled back on the stick heading up. Then I was slowing down a little soon, but then much too soon. Controls got a little mushy, then I was starting to stall. No problem I knew how to recover from a stall, but not like one of these. I hung there for what seemed an eternity. Then the plane started down, fast, tail first. I started doing what is known in the flying business as "killing snakes" in the cockpit, pushing the stick in all directions trying valiantly to regain some sort of control. Nothing worked. This was a whip stall, something one does not really want to do. Finally the nose dropped and was heading downhill quickly, then very quickly. After another eternity, I pulled back on the stick and regained control. In about an hour, or so it seemed, I leveled out and concentrated on getting my heart out of my mouth, back where it belonged. I was shaking, then recovered a bit and sat there wondering what in hell had gone wrong.



Charles Franklin Palmer

September 29, 2014

Back on the ground I realized I was not as hot a pilot as I thought I was and I don't think I told anyone what had transpired. The next day I tried another loop, same result, then I told Bill about it. We went up together and I demonstrated. He yelled, drove the stick down further and I did a good loop. A few days later I was having difficulty doing just about everything he was teaching. After a session of this I asked for a check ride, maybe I wasn't meant to be a pilot. A check ride meant going up with the Senior Instructor, performing what I should be able to do at this point. I did not do well and I had a ride with an Army check pilot a couple of days later. It all came together and I made that test in good fashion. Thus, I would graduate from Primary after all and was sent to Basic Training, in Greenville, Texas.

We flew Vultee BT 13's, affectionately called the Vultee Vibrator. That's exactly what it did, it shook, rattled, but is a good tough airplane. Initially I had trouble landing it and my instructor Lt. Cowall was displeased with me. On one flight we had to use a different runway. As I was approaching the take off point, everything seemed to me to fall into place and I greased it. Cowall shouted in the intercom, "Go around again." This took a little effort as one had to manually crank up the flaps, pull the prop lever switch to low pitch, all the while keeping it straight on the runway, then pour the coal to it. Off we went around the pattern and another grease job. I was fine.

After that I soloed and we started formation flying. If there is anything I can really be proud of it's Formation flying. I loved it and couldn't get enough of it. Another exercise I liked was called Hurdle Stages. In this one a couple of vertical poles were placed close to the end of the runway. They were spaced about 15' apart and had a rope strung between them about 10' high, with flags hung from the rope. We had to approach this at reduced speed, cut the throttle and land before a line defining the end of the landing area. This exercise was designed to teach us how to land in case of an emergency, into a small unimproved field, before running out of space. When one has a problem and has to land now, there are always trees at the end of the field, which has a tendency to focus one's attention. Anyway, one day one Cadet came in at a slow speed, cleared the rope but stalled out immediately arriving on the ground in what can charitably call a semi-controlled landing. There was a cloud of dust and attendant matter. Bear in mind a pilot's dictum however, "any landing you can walk away from is a good landing." Another misjudged his height and caught the rope with his tail wheel motoring it around the pattern, flags flying. Later, back at the home field, his instructor was heard to yell, "Where is that knucklehead O'Neil?"

Next came cross country. This consisted of plotting out a triangular course well out of range of our home field, Majors, in Greenville, Texas which is about forty miles northeast of Dallas. On one flight, I remember the first leg was to easterly to Shreveport, LA and then southwesterly to Tyler, TX and then home. It was a piece of cake and I made it in good shape. This was not the case with "Pappy" Pierce, an older Cadet at the top of the age bracket. He had been a Sergeant in the Regular Army and ran our section. He got lost en-route and landed at Paris TX, another flying field. Next day when we fell out into formation for phys ed, we greeted him with a chorus of "The Last Time I Saw Paris."

We also had night flying and the first time out it was a bit scary, as we couldn't see the ground clearly to navigate. Thus we had to use our instruments or as we called it, "flying the dials." Our first triangular course wasn't really extensive and I made the first leg right on the nose. We were to announce our arrival, by signaling in code, using a landing light and I did so in good order. I then turned to start the next leg and checked my compass. I then knew immediately something was wrong, my compass had



Charles Franklin Palmer

September 29, 2014

gone out of whack. So I made a complete circle back to the check point, signaled who I was and started again for home. This time I looked over the nose and luckily could see the lights of our field, so I knew I could get home. I then looked at my compass again and lo and behold it read the correct heading to the field. My compass was fine, it was me who was out of whack earlier when I started on what I thought was the correct heading. What did I learn from that? Well it is easy to become disoriented particularly at night and not realize it. The only solution to this condition is the trust your instruments, they are right. I never forgot that lesson.

We were flying almost daily now, often cross country flights. It was an interesting time and I enjoyed it. Only a few washed out in Basic, as we were getting better. After graduation, I was sent to twin engine Advanced Training, at Ellington Field, Houston, Texas. It was now July and August and Houston is as hot today as it was when we were there. Air conditioning, what's that?

The instructor for our flight of 4 or 5 was an Englishman, an RAF Pilot, Nevile J. Dussin, who shared his skills and knowledge with us. We were flying twin engined Cessna AT 10's, with a few hours in the Curtis AT 9. I really liked the latter plane, but we only had a few and we couldn't get much time in them. We eventually were declared safe to fly with another cadet and that's what we did all the time. We had a lot of cross country stuff and a lot of night flying. I had a couple of memorable moments, some things good and a couple bad.

I recall one clear night, full moon and no clouds. We were up motoring around, I was in the left seat, the one technically called the pilot's, and my copilot had gone to sleep. I was tired too, so I was half asleep and thinking about a gal back home. All of a sudden I heard a beautiful chorus, the "Angels" were singing. Pilots tell of situations like this. You don't hear them for long, but I can swear I heard them for just a moment. I snapped awake instantly, but they were gone and I have never heard them again. On writing this, the thought hit me that maybe I too fell asleep and the Angel's awakened me as danger was at hand. Interesting.

On another night O'Neil and I got lucky and caught the first takeoff slot. I had just finished plotting the course when an announcement was made of a change. We were to fly the course in the opposite direction, Beaumont, Yokum and return instead of the reverse. I made some sort of noise to what I thought was to myself and started over, plotting the revised course. I soon learned what I thought was a sotto voice was not so sotto at all. Our Flight Leader sort of glared at me and asked, "Are you upset Mister?" Well we had been taught there 3 answers for any problem, "Yes sir, No sir, No excuse sir." Feeling I should tell the truth, I responded somewhat lamely, "A little sir." "well" he said, "We can fix that. You don't have to fly at all and while you're around, strap on a parachute and march back and forth on the grass. I'll tell you when to stop." So much for the early flight and early to bed that I would have liked. So I started my hike and a friend asked what had happened. I started to tell him, when I heard, "Knock off the talk Palmer, just keep walking." Great Charlie, both barrels. Eventually the Flight Leader called me in and gave me a little straight talk about masking my feelings. Which was good advice. I have tried to follow the dictum and to mask my feelings with others. I don't always do it, but when I don't I usually later think that I should have as the consequences for not so doing may be very unpleasant.

Somewhere along toward the latter part of training, we had a long cross country to Des Moines, IA. I don't think it was a straight shot as it is almost a north heading, so we may have made a detour to



Charles Franklin Palmer

September 29, 2014

refuel or something. However we were fine to Des Moines, but going home I managed to blow it. We were under pressure to get going for some reason and I had to hurry to plot our course. I neglected to recheck our first heading, a mistake. We were a just few minutes into the flight when another of our bunch was seen on our right. They were not flying the same heading we were. Who was right? I think I'm right. Well it soon turned out the things we saw on the ground were not on the map where they should have been if we were on the right course. We tried swooping low to read the name of one town's water tower, but that didn't work either. We just had to try to regroup. Eventually, we decided to head in the direction of the Gulf, straight south, we couldn't miss that. This was o.k. until it got dark when the cockpit lights failed. Poor Pat Patterson was trying to find read radio call number's using the sparks from a lighter to illuminate the dial. It was a knuckle biter flight till we saw lights from a big city ahead. After circling it a couple of times we concluded it was Beaumont, TX, so we were only 80 miles from home. What a relief to get to the barn. What did I learn?, what a carpenter does, "Measure twice, cut once."

We also experienced the Hurricane of 1943. A prior one to this changed course and it missed Houston, but our planes had been flown to what they thought a safe haven. This time they thought the same thing might happen, same situation but wrong both times. We were out on the field holding on to the tiedown ropes, in an attempt to keep the planes on the ground. The one I was on broke and the plane went up a ways, flew backwards and landed on another one. This happened numerous times as the wind was clocked at 124 mph.

For a week or so afterward there was no flying as all planes had to be checked out. When we flew again, I went up with my instructor to see if this plane was o.k. Everything was operated electronically and our wheel's would not come down. We landed wheels up and both props were never the same again. There was a big investigation to determine why there had been so many accidents or failures. We were in the big Administration Building and when we told to stand if you were in one of the casualty planes, half the room stood up. We were then told to sit down and the investigation was over.

August 31, 1943 finally arrived and Graduation ceremonies were held on the athletic field. It started to rain and we adjourned to the Chapel. No matter, we all got our wings and 2nd. Lt. bars, we were now officially Pilots. Officers and Gentlemen. We also got a ten day delay in route to our next assignment and thus were able to get home. I think I flew into La Guardia, in New York and had a few days at home before going to Del Rio, TX and B-26 training.

Before going to Del Rio, let's pause in the action and review what has happened to yours truly. For all intents and purposes I accomplished what I had intended to do, be a pilot. In all honestly I don't remember sitting down and thinking this through to reach what comes next, however I think I was aware of the lesson's that were there to be learned.

I had started with an objective in mind and it turned out to happen. On proof reading what has preceded this point, I think I had successfully botched things up a number of times along the way. Some of these could have washed me out Cadet's, or even caused me to "buy the farm" as crashing is called. Fortunately it didn't happen and I made it after all. I think I just rolled with the punch and persisted in what I was doing. I have a paper weight on my desk with the following motto, "Press on, nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not: nothing is more common than unsuccessful men



Charles Franklin Palmer

September 29, 2014

with talent. Genius will not: unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education alone will not: the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent." I look at that paperweight every day and whenever I am involved in one thing or another, I think of it. This is especially true if things are not going the way I think they should and I begin to wonder if I want to put up with this nonsense. So I read my paper weight again. Most times I simply persist and generally think better of the whole situation. However, it turned out that I didn't do this at my next assignment.

I was now at Loughlin Field, Del Rio TX and B-26 Training. This turned out to be a disaster for me, as I thought I just wasn't able to fly this airplane. In thinking back on the experience, I think I rationalize the situation. I think I wasn't strong enough for it and that I wasn't using elevator trim tabs properly, but the latter is a bit dangerous on take offs where I was having the most trouble. I fought it for a while but this is one time that I wasn't persistent and I just quit despite the fact my instruction Lt. Somparak offered to work with me, giving me added instruction. However, I turned him down and just quit. I've never forgotten that decision and often wish I had tried harder. But I had made the decision to ask for something else, and was sent to Kelly Field, San Antonio to fly AT 6's and to show what ability I had left. Soon it was to be Bergstrom Field, Austin, TX and C-47's.

Actually I took to this airplane like a duck to water and went through training and was sent to Georgia, Ft. Benning, a paratroop training facility. I was here for a couple of months and was then sent to Grenada, MS, which was a Troop Carrier base. We went through the usual things here and then off to Alliance, NE. This was a change from the south as it was cold here in winter. Luckily, we didn't get much snow and we did have practice towing CG 4A gliders. I took a few rides in these just to see what it was like. It was o.k., nice and quiet after dropping the tow rope, but I like the sound of those two Pratt and Whitneys banging away in my ears.

We also practiced what was not taught and is not legal, buzzing. This is flying low over the flat terrain, seeing if we could stir up the dust. One day I was hauling it along and saw a car ahead. I scrunched down a little lower, thinking to pull up after a bit. Unfortunately I did not see a telephone wire that was stretched along the top of a snow fence. I hit it with the props and I was really in the soup this time. A friend of mine, Jim Schumacher commented, "Well if they had strung the wire on a phone pole where it belongs, you could have flown under it." No sympathy here. There was a court trial and I was found guilty of low and reckless flying and fined. Low I admit, reckless no, a matter of opinion of course. I stayed on flight duty and went on about the business, at a higher level this time.

Time was accomplished and the Group received orders for Europe. We went overseas from New York aboard the Queen Elizabeth, in December, 1944. I think there were 3K of us aboard. I remember my cabin, M 141, where 14 of us were crammed into bunks. Clearance was minimal and if two of us rolled over at the same time, we banged hips. After the war we were in Ft. Lauderdale on vacation and the QE was a a tourist attraction. I looked for and found M141 to be equipped with one double bed and a fold out for a child, a far cry from 14, but then, we didn't pay for the cruise. The voyage was uneventful, but a different experience indeed. We landed on the west coast of Scotland, Greenock, and received orders for the Pathfinder Group in England.

Our Group station was Chalgrove, outside Watlington which was close to Oxford. We were housed in Quanset Huts which did not earn the name of luxurious. There was a small coal burning stove



Charles Franklin Palmer

September 29, 2014

in the center which heated an area of about a foot all around, but we did have blankets or we would have been half frozen. We flew just about daily first learning the English countryside and hauling all sorts of stuff to the continent. As a result we began seeing a lot of Europe in a short time. One day we drew Le Bourget Field in Paris. I just couldn't get over seeing the city we had all heard about. What an experience for a 20 year old.

All our planes had a circular navigation radar unit called British Gee. It hung suspended a couple of feet or so, below the belly of the plane. With it our navigator could locate our position almost exactly, but it also slowed us down about 20 mph. I recall one day when we were headed to Chartres, France [which was then our home field] in low cloud and fog. We couldn't really see precisely where the field was, so we asked the navigator to find it for us. After a couple of turn right, turn left turn right command's, he said you're on the downwind leg and sure enough there was the field just to the left of me. Really great and we used it regularly as it relieved us of the need to follow the maps so closely to reach our desired destination. This was crucial of course, as we were flying all sorts of merchandise and equipment for the troops. We flew out wounded on a couple of flights. Litters were hung from the ceiling and nurses attended the wounded. Later, we also flew 5 gallon cans of gas for Patton as he was sweeping across southern Germany. The first flight of the day would leave Chartres at or just before dawn. We usually went to Frankfurt and would unload, fly back home, where another crew would reload and take off for Frankfurt. We all pitched in on the loading and unloading when needed and we really flew a lot.

We went on some special duty to Tarquina, Italy. This was long distance Loran training for the Navigators. We flying over the Mediterranean, as Loran was mainly used on over water flights. This took us to close to North Africa and we finished training, we flew into Cairo. Talk about the navy seeing the world, we really did it on this trip. On the way back, we flew some British who had been POW'S, to Marseille. I asked one how long had been a captive, and he cheerily responded, "Only three years". Wow.

At this point we moved again, to about 20 miles southwest of Paris, outside Bretigny in the little village of Ver le Grand. We were housed in a Chateau owned by a Parisian family. This was great as we were out of tents. We would sit on a deck and read during the long twilight's thanks to double British summertime. After the war, my wife and I went on a trip to France, so we looked for and found where I had stayed. It was owned by a family who invited us in to see their home and we enjoyed discussing my stories and their current life. The husband worked for Westinghouse in their jet engine division and both of them spoke excellent English. I later sent them a picture I had taken of the chateau in 1944 and I have framed my copy. Great memories.

I think it was in early April 1945 when I experienced combat for the first time, Operation Varsity. This entailed the paratroop drop across the Rhine River, just above Wesel, Germany. Our Group was fortunate in that we only flew across the river for two minutes and dropped troops to reinforce the British. Two minutes equates to about four miles, the rest of Troop Carrier went four minutes across, which means they flew about eight miles and dropped behind the German lines. We sustained no damage at all, however since this was a daylight drop the Germans could readily blast these low and slow targets. The others really caught it.



Charles Franklin Palmer

September 29, 2014

A few miles south of the Rhine we started slowing down to reach the drop speed of 110 mph. About this time I looked at my right arm and all I could see were bulls eyes on it. All I could think of was that I would be shot in the arm. As we neared the river, I could see the smoke and then the smell of the firing. I reached across the pilot to turn on the red jump light, which was the signal for the jump master to tell his men to hook up their parachute cord to the static line that ran the length of the plane. [This was done so their chute would automatically open after they had jumped.] It also told the jump master there was two minutes to jump. Then we could see the troopers leaving the planes ahead of us, so I called our crew chief "Kick 'em out." He did and the stick jumped.

Earlier, I had started calling off air speed to the pilot. After the jump, the Colonel started a slow turn to the right as planned and the group started to follow. I added some rpm's to the props as our air speed reached 105, then 100, 95, 90. The pilot yelled, "We're getting the hell out of here". My response was quickly 95, 100, 110, 120 and I looked up to see us in a diving burn. He then leveled out and started looking for the group, to see we were the only plane to break formation. He then jockeyed us back into position and turned the controls over to me to fly us home, which I did. We landed, we head to debriefing, none of which I remember. However, I still remember bailing out of the formation.

A sidelight to this occurred a few years ago. I read a column in the paper about an annual reunion of the 17th. Paratroop Division, which was the one we flew into Germany. I made contact with the chairman and was invited to Branson, MO to share thoughts with them. I was hoping to get lucky and meet some of the men we dropped. While there was no luck with that, my wife and I had a great time with them.

So this was it, my first and last experience in the serious business of war. It was a milk run, so all my anxieties were for naught. Unfortunately it was no milk run for the rest of Troop Carrier. They flew four minutes across the Rhine and dropped behind the German lines. They were clobbered, badly, and experienced real losses. I ran across a friend in another group and he told me out of the 36 planes that started out, only 3 were flyable the next day.

The war was officially over on May 7, 1945, but I learned of it the day before. I was in Paris and walked out of the Follies Bergere to be met by a vendor hawking newspapers that told the story. It was a glorious day to be in Paris, except for those of us who had to be back on base that evening. However, the next day made up for it. Our crew drew an assignment to fly to London and pick up a General and few of his staff. The town was jumping, centered on Trafalgar Square, and they were really celebrating. After seven long years of war, they certainly deserved to let go.

The next day we picked up the General et.al., and flew to Nice, on the Riviera. Unfortunately for us, Nice was a rest camp for enlisted personnel only, so we could not join in the festivities there. The next day we flew back to Bretigny.

Now that the war was over here, we expected we would be heading for the Pacific. All that worried us was whether we would fly home or go by boat. A Colonel on Staff was a primary backer for our Pathfinder Group and he saw to it that we would fly. We were then briefed on the southern route and soon headed for Casablanca. We had a minor glitch with the plane, so we stayed over a day and had a tour of the native quarter and the market. I can still small that experience. Next day we flew south to



Charles Franklin Palmer

September 29, 2014

what is now Ghana and that night we could hear the drums banging away in the jungle. Next day it was Ascension Island in the South Atlantic, then on to Belem, Brazil, which is just south of the Amazon River. Then it was on to Puerto Rico and then to Savannah, GA. Here we turned over our plane and received orders for our next destination, Battle Creek, MI along with a ten day delay en route.

The Group settled in At Kellogg Field and we resumed flying. About this time the atom bomb was dropped and the war soon ended. Although the fighting had ceased, we were still functioning as an active group, so we figured Troop Carrier was going to be part of the future planning. To bolster this, we were getting new pilots, those who had graduated Cadets, but had not yet been assigned to a functioning unit. There was a need to train all of them, as most had only their Cadet time. Thus, those of us who had not mustered out were designated as instructors, to teach them how to fly the C-47.

[A sidelight to our thinking per the above, General Eisenhower was later quoted as saying, "Without the Jeep and the C-47, we wouldn't have won the war"]

One day I was scheduled to fly and the duty officer called me over and told me the plane we were to fly had just come out of Squadron Maintenance and to "slow time" it during our session. O.k. and we headed for the flight line. Before cranking up, I went through a cockpit check with him and realized he was really not sure of what he was doing. We started up, he had trouble doing that. I called the tower for taxi instruction's and were cleared to the active runway. I told the student to start taxiing and he was having more difficulty here. Awareness number two. We got to the runway and he could not do the proper run up procedure, so I helped him through that. I asked him how much time he had in this plane and he said a few hours. Oh, why the problems? Awareness number three. We received our clearance to take off and I said to myself, "Charlie best you follow through on the controls with this guy." So I slid my feet onto the rudder pedals and as he applied full power, we started off.

He was O.K. as we started down the runway, But as we started to lift off. I heard the left engine make funny noises and then felt extreme pressure on the right rudder pedal, so I knew we had lost an engine. I yelled, "I got it" and took over. I looked at what was left of the runway and decided we were really too close to risk aborting and trying to stop before taking out the perimeter fence. I then pushed everything forward on the control pedestal looked up and pushed the left feather button. All of this took all of about two seconds. There is a set procedure in order to properly feather a propeller. Feathering means turning the prop blades from being able to grab the air to propel the plane forward, to a knife blade like thickness entering the air, and it reduces drag (speed) on the plane. However, I didn't think about all of that, as we had far more pressing problems. [Actually, I had thought of doing this in case I would have this happen to me.] What I had just done was to bypass the procedure, or as we say things today, I went to the bottom line.

My student looked at me with a look of surprised horror on his face. "I yelled at him to, "Pull up the gear." His response, "What?" I repeated, "Pull up the gear." I went through the retraction process and began pulling up a bit to gain altitude, still with full throttle on the right engine. I yelled, "Call the tower" Answer, "What?" I repeated and so did he, so I called the tower, but got no response. After two right turns, I was on the base leg and I pushed things to lower the gear and called the tower to make an emergency right turn to land. Again, no response. I quickly looked left to see if there was a plane on the landing leg, saw none, so made a right hand turn on to the approach leg. Part way down



Charles Franklin Palmer

September 29, 2014

the leg I heard the tower call for ambulance service, "There is a plane on the approach with a landing gear problem."

We landed fine and started slowing down for a turn off the runway. This was done in due time and I decided to try to taxi back to our spot on the ramp. No could do, so I called the tower, told them I was shutting down where I was. When stopped, I shut off the right engine, giving thanks to Pratt and Whitney for making a wonderful engine, picked up the flight log and started to climb out of the plane. All the while I was trying my best to show that my hands weren't shaking which they were. Somebody once said flying was 90% boredom, and 10% terror. He's right.

People began to arrive. My squadron officer, a couple of civilian guys from Maintenance, the Ambulance team and some others I don't recall. I described what had happened and that was my flying for the day. The squadron leader and another pilot unfeathered the left prop that afternoon and cranked it up and started to take off. As with me, just after breaking ground, the left engine quit on them too. However, they were ready for it and stopped the takeoff. No recriminations for me and I kept on flying.

Since the war was over, I had been doing some thinking on what I should to next. Should I stay in the Army and see what comes next? resign and see if there any possibility for an airline pilot's job? go to college on the GI Bill, but take what? After thinking about these options, I decided I would resign and try for college and the airlines at the same time. I told my Squadron Leader of my decision and he just looked at me and sighed. I guess I was wanted after all.

Thinking back, I often wonder what would have happened to me if I had stayed in for at least eighteen more years. That would have meant Korea, the Berlin Airlift, maybe even Vietnam and who knows what else. Would I have lived through all of that? Maybe, but who knows?.

It's time to ask what did I learn from all those three plus years? I guess it means repeating what I think I had learned after graduating from Cadets, only that it's all more firmly entrenched in my mind. That and I was also aware that I had grown up.

