

And God Laughs...

The Arthur Jones Autobiography

www.ArthurJonesExercise.com

“Why I should expect you to believe me is more than I can say; I don’t even believe myself about half the time.”

Ray Olive

Thousands of pilots were trained during the war, and afterwards many of these men wanted to keep flying. The airlines expanded rapidly for quite a long time, but even they could not use all of the available pilots; when they did hire an ex-military pilot they were primarily interested in people who flew heavy bombers or transport planes during the war. Nobody wanted to hire former fighter pilots, so a lot of these opened small flying schools to teach veterans to fly under the provisions of the G. I. Bill, which would pay as much as \$2,000.00 for flying lessons.

Such flying schools were started all over the country, literally thousands of them; the usual rate for flight instruction was \$7.00 an hour for a plane that was flown solo by a student and \$8.00 an hour for dual instruction. But it cost less than a dollar an hour to fly such a plane so it was a very profitable business for schools that could find enough students. And a man in Oklahoma City, Keith Kayle, figured out a way to make it far more profitable than usual: he put a time clock in his office but then parked his planes nearly a half a mile away, so he was then charging his students not only for the actual flying time but also for the time it took them to walk back and forth to the planes, and for the time required to untie and later retie the planes. Thus a student might fly for thirty minutes but be charged for an hour and a half.

He made so much money from this practice that he could start a small airline using four-place, single-engine Beechcraft Bonanza airplanes at first and later getting some war-surplus Douglas transport airplanes that could haul twenty-one passengers. He called his new business Central Airlines and eventually sold it to one of the major airlines.

Practically everybody and their dog wanted to start an airline, and a lot of people did; surplus airplanes were dirt cheap, spare engines were readily available in huge numbers for very low prices and gasoline was almost free. Copilots could be hired in any number required for fifty dollars a week, or less, and a captain was not paid much more. Chuck Yaeger was paid only \$250.00 a month as a captain in the military when he first flew faster than sound.

In addition to surplus transport airplanes large numbers of bombers were converted to cargo planes and many others were used for executive transport by many large corporations; both Howard Hughes and Bendix Corporation used B 25 medium bombers for that purpose, and I have owned several of them myself.

Within a very few years after the war there were several hundred small airlines operating in this country and back and forth between here and South America; but pressure was brought to bear on the Federal Aviation Agency by both the major airlines and the people who were building large transport airplanes. Money changed hands and the FAA started trying to shut down all of the small airlines. And a new law was passed that then made it impossible to obtain the certificate required to start an airline.

That law remained in effect until about ten years ago, and not a single new airline certificate was issued during a period of about thirty years. When the CIA wanted to start Air America even they could not get the required certificate, so they had to buy an existing airline just to get its certificate, but by that time there were very few small airlines left, most had been shut down by the FAA for one excuse or another.

They ended up buying Southern Air Transport, in Miami, from an old friend of mine, Doc Moore, who by that time was almost out of business anyway; but he was about the only game in town so they had to pay him far more than his business was worth. Even today, if you look on the bulkhead of a CIA plane you will see that it is registered in the name of Southern Air Transport.

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About 1950, Doc Moore bought a helicopter in Fort Worth, Texas, took a brief course there to learn how to fly it and then flew it to Miami. When I asked him what flying a helicopter was like, he said . . . “It’s like a quadruple amputee playing a Hammond Grand organ and pumping his own air at the same time.” And it is, as I learned a few years later.

For a while Doc Moore raced very fast boats that used three huge surplus engines from fighter planes; normal power for such an engine was produced by using a manifold pressure of 60 inches, or less, but these boats used a cruising power setting of 140 inches of manifold pressure, which meant that they were constantly on the bare edge of blowing up. All three of the engines had to be junked after every race, but could be replaced very cheaply. While running at cruising power, if one sparkplug failed to fire the engine would instantly disintegrate. Those boats were dangerous as Hell. Chuck Norris sometimes races such boats even now but he will try damned near anything.

They used to, and perhaps still do, issue a license to FAA Inspectors that was utterly ridiculous, it said: Airline Transport Pilot, ALL RATINGS. Which implied that he could fly literally anything, and nobody who ever lived could do that because there are hundreds of different types of planes, and all planes weighing 12,500 pounds or more, and all jet powered planes of any size, require a so-called Type Rating; you have to attend a school to get such a Type Rating, then have to pass both written and practical tests.

During the years that I lived near New Orleans I was one of a very few pilots who was qualified to fly many surplus military airplanes, nobody connected with the FAA was qualified to do so even though their license implied that they were. So I would conduct the flight check rides in such airplanes while the FAA Inspector sat in a jump seat behind the copilot’s seat and told us what he wanted to see us do. Since I had very little respect for anybody in the FAA I frequently amused myself at their expense.

Before a check flight I would always look at one of the main tires with an expression of grave concern on my face, then shake my head and walk away; and doing that always scared the shit out of them since blowing out a main tire on a big airplane was dangerous, and they knew it.

Then just before takeoff I would see to it that all of the engines were running rough as Hell, and that would give them more knots in their guts.

On one check flight in a B 25 we were flying north to the righthand side of the longest runway on Lakefront airport, planning a 180 degree turn out over the lake that would then put us in a position to land towards the south on a long runway; but just before reaching it, the FAA Inspector pointed at a much shorter runway that was by then almost directly underneath of us, and told us to land there.

The pilot that was being given the check ride looked at me with an expression of shock on his face and raised eyebrows that said more clearly than words . . . “What should I do?”

So I told him . . . “Do it.”

So he made an abrupt, steep turn to the left, chopped both engines back to idle power and put the flaps down . . . but he did not lower the landing gear, so as the throttles were pulled back with the wheels still up a loud horn located just above the FAA man’s head started honking; that being an automatic warning that you were about to land with your wheels up.

So the FAA man then started screaming . . . “Go around, go around, don’t land for God’s sake.” But we were already going around by then; so I turned around in my seat, looked at the FAA man and said . . . “Why were you so upset? We were just doing what you told us to do. I left the wheels up on purpose because I knew we would never be able to stop on such a short runway with the wheels down.” And the silly bastard believed me.

A pilots license never expires, is good for life, but an instructor’s license does have a time limit and then must be renewed; so when an FAA Inspector gave me a check ride for renewal of my Instrument Flight Instructor’s license he had me fly out to a big concrete circle that formed part of a new highway that was being built a few miles from the airport; then had me fly around and around that concrete circle a few times, and then we returned to the airport and landed, and he gave me the new certificate.

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So? So just what the fuck did that have to do with instrument flying? Sweet fuck all, nada, zilch. Then why did he do it? Because, I suspect, he was not qualified to fly instruments, and was probably afraid that I would become aware of his lack of ability if he tried to give me any kind of meaningful check ride. In my case no harm was done; but if he checked everybody in that manner, and I believed that he did, then he probably certified at least a few people who would have flunked a real check ride. Turned them loose with a certificate that they were not qualified to have; a piece of paper that might get them killed.

When I issued an instrument rating to a student, I always told them . . . “That piece of paper I just gave you does not mean that you are an instrument pilot, regardless of what it says on it; and if you believe otherwise you will not live out the week. What it really is intended to be is permission for you to slowly, very carefully start teaching yourself how to fly on instruments, and that will take you a year or longer. If you get caught in real bad weather before that you will not survive.”

One young man, a former fighter pilot, called me while I was working at Pan American Films one day and told me that the FAA had suggested that he call me. He had just bought a B 25 and planned to use it for hauling freight in the Bahamas, but he needed somebody to teach him how to fly it since he had no experience with either large airplanes or multi-engined airplanes. The people who sold it to him told him he could get a type rating for it with only about five hours of instruction; but I told him that he would need a lot more than that.

So we made a deal, I would use his plane for several trips to South America, with me buying the fuel, and he could learn to fly the plane during the course of these trips. On the first trip south, when we lowered the wheels just before landing for fuel in British Honduras, Central America, I noticed that the left wheel was wet, was covered with fluid. I suspected that we had a leak in the hydraulic system, which we did, but the pressure was still high enough to provide for brakes after we landed so I continued the approach, landed, and the brakes worked fine.

I looked for the leak, found it, and replaced a short piece of tubing that had broken, then filled up the hydraulic tank to replace the fluid that we had lost from the leak, and we took off again and started for Baranquilla, Colombia. In addition to the young owner of the plane I had my daughter, Joyce, and Leonard McGee with me.

We arrived at our destination just before dark, but the weather was very bad and that would require an instrument approach for a landing so I got into the left seat, the captain’s seat to fly the approach. But when I tried to lower the wheels they would not come down, and when I looked at the hydraulic pressure gauge it read ZERO. We had no wheels and would have no brakes if we did have wheels.

So I told the owner of the plane . . . “All right, listen very carefully, we have no hydraulic fluid or pressure, so we have no wheels, and if I am going to have to make an instrument approach followed by a belly landing I am damned sure not going to wait until after dark to do it. So you have three minutes to get the fucking wheels down; then after that, with or without wheels, or with the wheels only halfway down, I am going to land.”

And he then said . . . “Everything I have is tied up in this airplane and I don’t have any insurance on it.”

So I said . . . “This is the only ass I have, too; and I would like to keep it in one piece. So you and McGee better start pouring and pumping like a son of a bitch because now you have less than three minutes.”

And they pumped and poured like mad men, and the wheels locked into the fully down position about a second before we touched down on the runway; but then, when I used the brakes, our hydraulic pressure dropped rapidly. It required the entire length of the runway to do it but I got us stopped without running off the far end.

The ruptured tubing I found earlier was not the cause of our problem, it was a result of the problem; the automatic shutoff valve that regulated the hydraulic pressure had failed, so the hydraulic pumps never stopped running and eventually the pressure would become so high that the weakest link in the hydraulic system would then fail. On another flight in that plane he changed all of the sparkplugs in both engines in an attempt to improve the plane’s performance, but used the wrong kind of plugs; I let him make that take off and when he raised the nose to start a climb the airplane remained on the ground; a B 25 was relatively heavy in relation to its wing area, so required a lot of power to fly, and would not fly without that power. Again he looked at me in shock, did not know what to do; so I took over,

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lowered the nose back down to reduce the drag and let the speed increase to far above a normal speed for takeoff; we did not have enough runway left to stop, so I had to make the plane fly with or without enough power.

When our speed reached 150 miles an hour indicated, by then very close to the end of the runway, I yanked the airplane into the air using its kinetic energy as the source of power that I needed, then made a very steep, very low turn and then landed on another runway. If he had been flying alone that young man would have been killed that day. But, eventually, he learned enough to get his type rating and departed for the Bahamas. I never heard from him again so don't know how his cargo business worked out.

A few years later, in Rhodesia, Barry Goldwater visited the country while I was living there; so I suggested to a government official that they might be able to get some good publicity if I took Barry in my helicopter and let him dart a large elephant while I filmed him doing it. But by the time permission to do this was granted Barry had left the country; so, a few days later, when Karl Hess, Barry's speech writer, arrived they suggested I take him instead. And I did.

But when I tried to move forward from a low hover the helicopter tried to roll violently towards its right side. Initially I assumed we were loaded improperly, but the real problem was something else: the gun/camera mount on the right side was tilted upwards at the back and when I tried to move forward this acted like a control surface and caused the helicopter to roll to the right. So I readjusted that and we started off.

We were heading for a small town called Beit Bridge, a long flight in a slow helicopter, and we made the trip at a very low altitude; the wind on the ground was very strong and gusty and the trees directly beneath us were whipping violently from the gusts, but the helicopter provided a perfectly smooth ride in spite of the high wind. A fixed-wing airplane, in those conditions, would have been bouncing violently, but the thin blades of the helicopter's rotors acted like shock absorbers by bending instead of bouncing.

When we got to Beit Bridge we could not find an elephant; the place was usually neck deep in elephants, but not that day. So, finally, I told Karl that we would have to dart a giraffe instead of an elephant and set out in pursuit of one. Karl was going to fire the drug-filled dart from a powerful crossbow that would drive the normal bolts used with such weapons clear through a large bag of sand. The bow itself was a spring from an automobile and cocking this crossbow was very difficult.

The giraffe ran through some high bushes with us close behind him; then, suddenly, the air was filled with large vultures, they passed under us, over us, close by on both sides, literally filled our chunk of space. How we missed all of them I will never know, and if we had hit one we would have both been killed. Apparently the giraffe ran over a dead animal that the vultures had been eating and that scared them up into the air directly in front of my flight path. As usual, we were spared by blind luck rather than skill. The more I flew helicopters the less I trusted them, and I finally quit flying them altogether; they are very useful machines in many situations but are dangerous as Hell. Danger that is clearly illustrated by the insurance rates charged for a helicopter; these are about thirty times as high as they are for an airplane.

But after our near miss with the vultures, I finally did locate a big bull elephant and Karl hit him with the dart; then we followed him until he went down from the drug and I filmed Karl examining him.

When I flew that helicopter down inside the narrow, deep gorge of Victoria Falls for filming purposes I made a mistake and used the wrong kind of film. I had intended for my forward vision to be entirely shut off by the mist in the gorge from the falling water but I forgot that orange light can see through fog and the film I used required an orange filter; so, instead of the total white-out that I wanted, the scene that I got merely showed some mist. A very dramatic effect that I wanted was thus missed. But doing it was spectacular as Hell anyway, the film could see through the mist but I could not, had to fly blind through the very narrow gorge. My youngest son, Edgar, refused to watch. He said . . . "I'm not going to watch my Daddy kill himself."