



# Higher Living

On June 14th I was home when I received terrible news. One of our planes had crashed near Siler City. There were two fatalities. A check of our airplane scheduler told me it was Mic Abernethy and Justin Strauss in our Piper Cherokee N515DH. In a few minutes I was driving to the crash site and was met by highway patrol and firefighters there who directed me to stay back from the site and wait for the FAA team to arrive in case they wanted to speak with me.

When the FAA team arrived, I answered their questions. The next morning the FAA collected all the airplane inspection logs from our office and interviewed our mechanic regarding them. They said the NTSB would be arriving onsite soon and would begin their investigation.

On my drive to and from Siler City I was trying to imagine a scenario that would lead to this and could not. I still can't. I was

the first to fly the airplane when it returned from its most recent inspection and noted no problems. There were several other flights following mine that also had no issues. Mic reported a problem over the radio just prior to the crash. But we don't know what it was.

On June 26<sup>th</sup> the NTSB released a preliminary report detailing information about the day of the flight. No cause for the crash was yet identified. You can read the report here:

<https://data.nts.gov/carol-repgen/api/Aviation/ReportMain/GenerateNewestReport/194471/pdf>

I have flown since the crash and continue to have full faith in flying. At the time I write this there is no final report from the NTSB, and we don't have a timeline for when that will be available. I hope some answers can be found in that report.

- David Williams, Editor

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## What Can You Do with a Private Pilot Certificate?

Getting your Private Pilot Certificate is a significant achievement. It allows you to fly aircraft for personal and recreational purposes. Here are some things you can do with a Private Pilot Certificate:

The primary purpose of obtaining a Private Pilot Certificate is to fly aircraft. You can act as the pilot in command of an aircraft and carry passengers. In the US you can fly nearly anywhere subject to some restricted areas.

You can use your pilot certificate for recreational flying, exploring new destinations. You can take friends and family members on flights.

There are numerous advanced certificates and endorsements you can pursue as you increase your flight experience. It is a starting point for those pursuing advanced certifications, such as a Commercial Pilot Certificate or an Airline Transport Pilot (ATP) Certificate. You can use this time to build flight hours and gain experience.

While additional training may be required for

more complex or high-performance aircraft, the Private Pilot Certificate generally allows you to fly a variety of single-engine aircraft.

You can participate in aviation events and fly-ins. This provides opportunities to meet other pilots, share experiences, and stay connected with the aviation community.

You can pursue additional ratings and endorsements, such as an instrument rating, which allows you to fly in a wider range of weather conditions, or a high-performance endorsement, which qualifies you to fly more powerful aircraft.

Remember that the Private Pilot Certificate comes with certain limitations, such as not being able to be compensated for your piloting services. If you wish to pursue a career as a professional pilot, further training and certification will be necessary. Always adhere to the regulations set by aviation authorities and continue to enhance your skills and knowledge throughout your flying career.

## What Can You Do with an Instrument Rating?

Obtaining an Instrument Rating is a logical next step after the Private Pilot certificate, as it allows you to operate an aircraft solely by reference to instruments when the weather won't let you see out the windows. Here are some things you can do with an Instrument Rating:

One of the primary benefits of an Instrument Rating is the ability to fly in a wider range of weather conditions. Pilots with an instrument rating can operate in clouds, low visibility, and other challenging weather situations where visual reference to the ground is limited. You just need to recognize your level of experience and never let yourself get into conditions you can't deal with.

The Instrument Rating enhances a pilot's ability to maintain control and navigate in adverse weather conditions, reducing the risk of spatial disorientation and other hazards associated with flying without visual reference to the ground.

For those pursuing a career as a commercial pilot, the Instrument Rating is often a prerequisite for the Commercial Pilot Certificate.

Instrument-rated pilots can plan and execute flights more reliably, making it practical for business or personal travel in a variety of weather conditions. It will prevent you from being marooned at a location when the weather is marginal but still safe to fly in.

Pilots involved in charter and air taxi operations are required to have an Instrument Rating. This enables them to conduct safer and more reliable services to clients.

Some aircraft rental operations may require pilots to hold an Instrument Rating to rent complex or high-performance aircraft.

It's important to note that obtaining an Instrument Rating requires additional training beyond the Private Pilot Certificate. The training includes both ground instruction and flight training, focusing on instrument flying techniques, navigation, and procedures. Maintaining proficiency through regular practice and recurrent training is crucial for instrument-rated pilots to ensure safe and effective operation in instrument meteorological conditions (IMC).

## What Can You Do with a Commercial Pilot Certificate?

Here are some things you can do with a Commercial Pilot Certificate:

A commercial pilot can act as the pilot of an aircraft for compensation. This means you can be paid for flying, including transporting passengers or goods.

With additional training and obtaining a Certified Flight Instructor (CFI) certificate, a commercial pilot can become a flight instructor and teach others how to fly.

Commercial pilots can engage in banner towing operations, towing advertising banners behind an aircraft for promotional purposes.

You may be able to perform aerial photography missions, such as for real estate, surveying, filmmaking or news reporting.

Some commercial pilots work in skydiving operations, flying aircraft to carry skydivers to altitude and ensuring safe exits.

Commercial pilots can be involved in agricultural flying, commonly known as crop dusting or aerial application, where they apply pesticides or fertilizers to crops from an aircraft.

Commercial pilots may work for charter companies, flying passengers or cargo on a non-scheduled basis.

You could be employed for pipeline or powerline patrol, monitoring the condition of pipelines or powerlines from the air.

You could fly for companies that conduct air tours, providing scenic flights for passengers.

While limited to smaller aircraft, commercial pilots may be involved in cargo operations, transporting goods on a smaller scale compared to major airlines.

Commercial pilots may work in traffic reporting, providing real-time information on traffic conditions to news outlets or transportation agencies.

It's important to note that while a Commercial Pilot Certificate allows for compensation, there are still limitations on the types of operations and aircraft a commercial pilot can be involved in. Further ratings and endorsements, such as a type ratings for specific aircraft, may be required for certain roles. Additionally, gaining experience and building flight hours are essential for career advancement in the aviation industry.

## What is the Difference Between a GCO and an RCO...and what are they anyway?

Let's pretend it's a cloudy day and you have an instrument rating in your pocket, and you would like to go flying. If you are at an airport with a control tower you just communicate your intentions with the Clearance Delivery folks there and they will get you on your way. Nothing else to do. But at a non-towered airport, like TTA, you can't just launch into the clouds. If the clouds were at about 3500 feet and you could climb for a while, stay VFR, call ATC and get your clearance that could work but what if the clouds are much lower? That's where the RCO and GCO come in.

RCO is an abbreviation for Remote Communication Outlet. Normally at a small airport you can't directly reach ATC at a distant control tower via radio. The RCO places an antenna at or near your airport which can pick up your radio call to the towered airport and relay it directly to them. So, the resulting communication is like you were in the air talking to them. It's the easiest way to get a IFR clearance at a non-towered airport. KTTA does not have an RCO.

At KTTA you have a GCO or ground communications outlet.

It is like an RCO in that you can talk to ATC and get your clearance for IFR takeoff, but it doesn't fully use radio. It is a hybrid system using radio and a phone line. At KTTA the GCO is at a frequency of 135.075 MHz. You click your mic either 5 or 7 times to cause a phone to dial the approach or clearance controller at KRDU. It works but since this is a phone line it will automatically hang up if it senses nothing is being said. So occasionally you need to click your mic if you are waiting for ATC to answer so it won't automatically hang up.

A third method of getting a IFR clearance on the ground at KTTA is to use your cell phone. The phone number to KRDU for an IFR clearance is (919) 380-3144. If your headphone has a Bluetooth connection to your phone it can work quite well for this.

Nearly every non-towered airport has a way to use the cell phone option. See the Airport Supplement for the phone numbers. Many other airports will use either the RCO or GCO method to let you get on your way on a cloudy day.

## What is a Transition Altitude?

If you are instrument rated or working towards the rating you should know that all over the U.S. once you climb beyond

18,000 feet you immediately set your altimeter to 29.92. Whatever it was on the ground no longer matters. The reason for doing this is to save fast moving aircraft, those normally flying above 18,000 feet, from having to constantly change their altimeters every time the air pressure changes as they cross the U.S. Using 29.92 does create an error in altitude but the error is shared by all the airplanes, so it causes no problems. This is the reason that we use the phrase Flight Level for altitudes above 18,000 feet. Because due to the air pressure error they aren't exact altitudes. This point where we switch from using precise pressures to 29.92 is known as the transition altitude. Above, or at, the transition altitude you switch to 29.92. It doesn't matter what it is when you took off. When you descend below the transition altitude you use AWOS or ATIS to find out what the correct barometric pressure is and reset your altimeter to that.

If you ever get to fly in other countries, you will find out that transition altitudes vary. It isn't always 18,000 feet as it is here. For example, at Gatwick airport in England transition altitude is way down at 6,000 feet. In the area of

Orly, France the transition altitude is 5,000 feet.

Personally, I'm glad the U.S. keeps it simple at 18,000 feet everywhere.

## How Does a Mechanic Weigh an Airplane?

All of you have seen the official weight and balance information that we get from a mechanic. Weighing an airplane is a very important process to ensure it complies with weight and balance limitations specified by the aircraft manufacturer. This task is performed by certified aircraft mechanics or maintenance personnel. In general, here's how it's done.

First, the aircraft must be on a level surface during the weighing process. Mechanics use a leveling device, such as a bubble level, to ensure the aircraft is not tilted. If not level, then the weight

distribution between the wheels will be inaccurate.

The aircraft is lifted off the ground using jacks. Care is taken to lift the aircraft evenly to prevent any stress or damage to the structure.

Weighing scales are positioned under each of the landing gear.

The mechanic adds up the individual weights on each landing gear to determine the total weight of the aircraft.

In addition to total weight, the mechanic recalculates the center of gravity. This involves determining the distribution of weight fore and aft as well as laterally. Ensuring the center of gravity is within specified limits. The figures obtained during the weighing process is recorded. This information is crucial for updating the aircraft's weight and balance records.

Some aircraft may require corrections for items like fuel, oil, or other fluids during the weighing process. These corrections are

applied to obtain accurate weight and balance data.

The information obtained during the weighing process is used to update the aircraft's weight and balance records.

It's important to note that the process may vary depending on the type of aircraft and the specific requirements outlined in the aircraft's maintenance manual. Additionally, the weighing process is typically performed when modifications are made to the aircraft that could affect its weight and balance.

## Question of the Quarter

**What airline is the world's largest purchaser of caviar, buying over 10 tons per year?**

Answer:

*Lufthansa*

You just learned something new.

The "Higher Living" newsletter editor can be reached at [david@execft.com](mailto:david@execft.com) Your feedback and article subject suggestions are welcome.