

## A Pilot's Perspective, #6

By Fred Benton

### JUST A LOGBOOK?

These days, with respect to wildfires and other natural disasters, it's a good idea to have a "grab and go" list to remind us what to take in case of evacuation. My top five items include my pilot flight logs. In monetary terms, they are essentially worthless. As handwritten archives of my time in the sky they are priceless. This small stack of logbooks, with page upon page, line upon line, of brief, cryptic, mostly numeric entries is the complete record of my lifetime flight experiences—from lesson #1 with Bill Frost, my first flight instructor, to my most recent flight a few days ago to Trinity Center.

Part 61.51 of the Federal Aviation Regulations covers pilot logbooks. Proper recording of FAA-specified flight time is mandatory; flight time not mandated for inclusion is optional. It is the rare pilot, however, who would choose not to make a logbook entry for every legitimate flight as pilot-in-command. An exception would be a very senior professional pilot who has accumulated so many thousands of flight hours that continuing to document each flight has become a chore and a bore.

Probably the first aeronautical item purchased by most new student pilots is a logbook. Trust me, it is a moment to be savored when your instructor asks for your logbook and then records the very first entry in all those blank pages. For sure, those white, unmarked pages can be intimidating. However, if you have seriously committed to earning a pilot's license--and perhaps advanced ratings--then the entries will come on a regular basis and you will be gratified as pages are filled and your logbook gains a bit of "respectability".

What information goes into a flight log? Formats vary, but a typical logbook is set up like this: hard cover, front and back, about 5 x 9 inches; about 100 pages for flight hours, plus additional pages front and back for personal data, address, ratings and certifications held, biannual flight reviews, etc. A typical entry will include the following:

Year and date; aircraft make and model; points of departure and arrival; remarks and (if any) instructor or check pilot endorsements; number of landings; hours and minutes flown, by category—single or multi-engine; cross country time

flown; time flown at night (if any); time flown with instructor—or as pilot-in-command; total duration of flight.

So that is what a non-pilot sees when examining a friend's flight log. Pretty mundane and unexciting stuff—a bunch of numbers, with a few brief comments here and there: names of passengers, purpose of flight, 3-letter identifiers for airports (LAX, RDD, SIY, etc.) Each page consists of lines and columns, and all numerical entries are totaled at the bottom and carried forward to the next blank page.

What isn't seen is what the pilot saw and experienced during each one of those trips, whether it was a simple local flight to practice landings at the home airport, a fire reconnaissance mission, or a complex cross-country trip requiring careful flight planning, navigation and fuel management.

Reviewing a few entries in my logbooks every now and then is a great way to keep myself reminded of the joy, the challenge and the satisfaction of flight—and to recall many good friends in the aviation community. Each entry, each line of data is a story unto itself and can be re-lived at the pilot's discretion. I'm flipping pages right now and here, once again, I'm taking off from Susanville at oh-dark thirty with my buddy Dan Forster on a round-trip flight to Denver in a 1947 Stinson 108-A:

*8/25/71 Susanville to Elko, Stinson 108-A, N8446K, 1-landing, 150 HP, 2.5 hrs. cross-country, 2.5 hrs. pilot-in-command.*

I still remember, on takeoff, the jackrabbit that darted across the runway, illuminated by the landing light beam. I remember the wonderful smell of hot coffee as Dan poured me a cup from his thermos. I remember FBO Dave Barr saying, the afternoon before, "You boys have a good safe trip—and don't forget your sunglasses 'cause you'll be headed east into a breaking day..."

The images come flowing back as I study the subsequent entries: looking down at marked and identified wrecked airplanes on Nevada mountain-sides; mustangs grazing in a remote canyons; the leg from Elko to Provo, where we had to land and wait-out a thunderstorm blocking our route through the Uintas; another storm cell over Craig, Colorado, forcing us on to Steamboat Springs for a fuel-stop. Then, the feeling of relief as we topped the Rockies at Rabbit Ears Pass and looked down across the jumbled front-range toward our destination...

Well, I think you see what I'm getting at here. This unimposing little book in my hands--this dry, hum-drum collection of departure points, destinations, aircraft types, passenger names, hours and minutes, etc.—is much more than what it seems. Just a logbook? No, it is a locked treasure-box.

And I have the key.

####