

MEMO

To: Everyone
From: Ted Warnock
Date: 7 September 2010
Re: First Solo - Cessna 172R

It has taken me a few days to reflect upon what words I might use to tell of this 35 minute flight. To those who know I am working towards my private pilot's certificate, please indulge me one more story. First, it is important to thank my wife of many years (who, when her grandmother passed away and left her a small inheritance) said to me, "I want you to get your pilot's license. I know you have wanted it for a long-long-time". So began my trek towards a goal or dream that I often through might never happen.

Last week, as we were exiting the runway after a pretty good landing, Mike (my flight instructor) asked "do you have any questions or concerns" and I said no. Then the long-awaited conversation took place. "Pull the plane alongside the hanger and shut down the aircraft". After a total combination of 119 touch and goes with my instructor next to me, it was time to Solo.

Mike has been a great instructor and I have learned that when he believes that I have mastered one skill area, he proceeds to challenge me on the next. So, it was with confidence that I felt I was ready. Even so, the reality quickly sank in when Mike got out of the Cessna and leaned inside his door to give me the following instructions. "You will complete every phase of this flight the same as if I were with you. Remember that it is no disgrace if you feel uncomfortable with your approach and feel the need to go around. You will need to do a minimum of three landings and return here. While not required, you might want to use the term 'Student Pilot' when identifying yourself. And - remember to have fun".

What followed seemed almost mechanical. After starting the aircraft, and listening to ATIS (airport weather and airport information, etc.) , I called Peachtree Ground - "Student Pilot Skyhawk 109 Tango Juliet at the West Ramp.." and quickly found myself with the aircraft run-up complete and waiting instructions to proceed to runway 20R. Yes, I know that what generally follows my call to ground is the directions to "proceed to the runway, hold short, and monitor tower". Still, I did not hear "proceed to runway 20R". All I



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heard was "monitor tower". So, I switched to the tower radio frequency and waited for Peachtree Tower to give me instructions. After what seemed like too long a wait, I called tower for instructions. Peachtree Tower quickly informed me that I needed to return to Ground for instructions. So, with a bit of first time solo radio confusion, Ground cleared me to runway 20R and I monitored Peachtree Tower. Peachtree Tower, in turn, cleared me for takeoff.

I am sure that the feelings I had as I turned right onto the runway has been shared by countless student pilots. That is - the reality that I am alone and the person that so faithfully guided me to this point is not sitting next to me. Yes, there was that brief feeling of joy and exhilaration as I made the turn. And yes, there was also a feeling of emptiness in my stomach that reminded me that this was to be a serious, humbling, and rewarding experience.

Now, back to the mechanical. "Clear for takeoff on runway 20R and stay in the pattern, Skyhawk 109 Tango Juliet". I slowly advance the throttle, cross the hold short line, turn onto the runway, lineup on the centerline on the runway, heels on the floor, advance the throttle full forward, add slight pressure to the right rudder, and watch the airspeed indicator. As one might suggest, what follows next is a quick trip down the pavement and an even quicker leap from the runway. From the mechanical back to reality. I am now flying alone - no one sitting next to me! Memory and training take over - Climb out to 1,500 feet (500 ft above ground level), turn right on Crosswind, and then right onto Downwind and level off at 2,000 feet. Peachtree Tower calls and says "niner Tango Juliet, cleared for the option on 20R" and I reply "cleared for the option on 20R one zero niner Tango Juliet". Abeam the numbers, I reduce power to 1,500 rpm add 10 degree of flaps, and descend. Turn right onto Base and at 85 knots, place flaps to 20 degrees. Turn right onto Final, add remaining flaps and descend towards 20R. Keep lined up on the center line, watch the airspeed, keep an eye on the glide slope lights, make the runway and reduce power to idle.

Remember to fly the runway and flair the plane. Small bounce - sorry mike! Flaps up, full power, apply slight right rudder and the process repeats itself again. Final landing is much smoother and I clear the runway and come to a full stop holding short of taxiway A. No one told me that without an instructor, the Cessna would be lighter and handle a little differently. Cleared of the runway, I call Peachtree Ground and they approve my return to the West Ramp. Normal checklist followed, I secure the aircraft.



Peachtree DeKalb Airport: 20L, Concrete; 20R - Paved

Mike comes out of the hanger to greet and congratulate me on my first solo and photos are taken. Still more greetings of this accomplishment come from the staff at PDK Flight Academy. Yes, this day will be remembered as a major achievement. And, with less than 1 percent of the US population having some form of a pilot's certificate, this flight takes me one step closer to towards gaining access into this select group of accomplished persons and moves me one step forward in a goal long waited and sought after.

Mike (my instructor) has reminded me that there is still much to learn. True, the solo was a defining moment in my life and a turning point towards achieving my goal to fly. Next up - short field takeoffs and landings and training in preparation for cross country flights - just not too long to start.