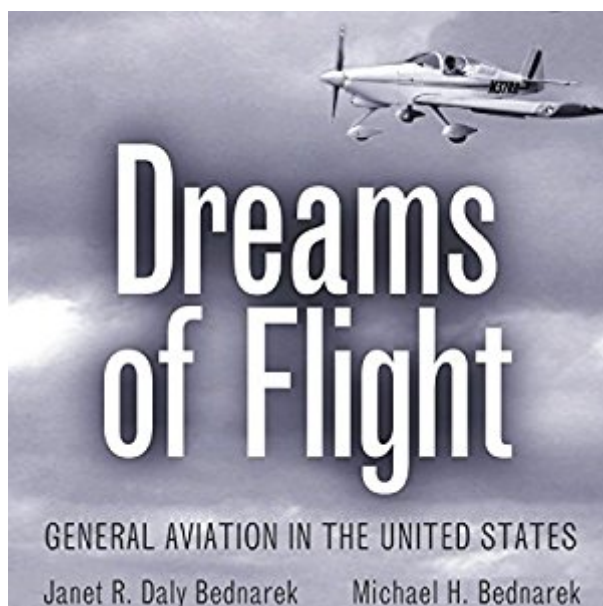


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Dreams Of Flight: General Aviation In The United States



Synopsis

General aviation encompasses all the ways aircraft are used beyond commercial and military flying: private flights, barnstormers, cropdusters, and so on. This history examines the many airplanes used in general aviation, from early Wright and Curtiss aircraft to the Piper Cub and the Lear Jet. The authors trace the careers of birdmen, birdwomen, barnstormers, and others who shaped general aviation - from Clyde Cessna and the Stinson family of San Antonio to Olive Ann Beech and Paul Poberezny of Milwaukee. They explain how the development of engines influenced the development of aircraft, from the E-107 that powered the 1929 Aeronca C-2, the first affordable personal aircraft, to the Continental A-40 that powered the Piper Cub, and the Pratt and Whitney PT-6 turboprop used on many aircraft after World War II. In addition, the authors chart the boom and bust cycle of general aviation manufacturers, the rising costs and increased regulations that have accompanied a decline in pilots, the creation of an influential general aviation lobby in Washington, and the growing popularity of "type" clubs, created to maintain aircraft whose average age is 28 years. This book provides listeners with a sense of the scope and richness of the history of general aviation in the United States. An epilogue examining the consequences of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, provides a cautionary note. The book is published by Texas A&M University Press.

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Customer Reviews

Bednarek highlights the varied uses of aircraft with additional themes on women and African

Americans in aviation. In discussing aviation, it is important to understand what is meant by the term "general aviation." Prior to the 1950s what was known as "private or personal aviation" distinguished this category from the airlines or the military. Author Janet Bednarek's explanation, given in the alternative, is quite descriptive: "General aviation is not the scheduled commercial airlines and it is not military aviation. Pretty much all other aviation activities...fall under this broad heading." (xi)

Bednarek's definition needs to be clarified in one respect. Just as a passenger will buy a ticket on an airline, he may charter an airplane not operated as a scheduled air carrier. The mode of transportation is the same but the rules under which airlines and charters operate differ. Scheduled airlines are common carriers and more stringently regulated, whereas charters are operated "on demand" and governed separately. Personal flying is the least regulated of all passenger air travel. One pays his own way and a friend can fly along too, but not for pay. Acting as the pilot, one must hold at least a private pilot license, possess a valid medical certificate, remain current for landings and instrument flight, and have successfully completed a biannual flight review (BFR). Clearly a higher level of fitness must be demonstrated to fly; a much higher level of competence, it should be noted, than that required to drive an automobile. The different requirements for airline, on-demand, and personal flying are delineated within particular parts of the Federal Aviation Regulations (the FARs can be accessed online at [...]) which govern all flying within the United States except for the military. Scheduled airlines are regulated under Part 121, "Operating Requirements: Domestic, Flag, and Supplemental Operations," of the FARs. Charter operations are covered in Part 135, "Operations Requirements: Commuter and On-demand Operations and Rules Governing Persons On Board Such Aircraft." General aviation operators must adhere to Part 91, "General Operating and Flight Rules." If, as Bednarek says, General Aviation is everything other than the airlines or military, it is correct to assume general aviation must therefore embrace a wide range of activities; many of which are conducted for hire. Fees are collected for services such as sightseeing, instruction, rental, aerial applications, helicopter services, etc. Services offered by general aviation operators are as endless as human innovation is fertile; even some unimaginable just a few years ago. Images of a helicopter installing a steeple on a church and large aircraft converted to slurry "bombers" to suppress forest fires come to mind. As far back as in the early nineteen-twenties aviation and agricultural technologies merged when calcium arsenate was dispensed from low flying aircraft in the fight against the cotton boll weevil. So many thousands of hours are flown for purposes for which no statistics are compiled that the true scope of general aviation is masked. Military aviation, in contrast to the oversight of civilian flying by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), is controlled by major military commands - Army, Navy, and Air Force. For

convenience and safety reasons the military normally operates within the domestic air traffic control system operated by the FAA. Military flights adhere to the FARs and international flight procedures except for reasons of operational necessity (national emergency, war, etc.). Airline and general aviation pilots, without exception, must operate in accordance with the standards and regulations of the FAA and FARs while exercising their flight privileges. In the very early days of aviation there were no scheduled airlines or military airplanes. Historically all flying thus came under the broad category of "general aviation." As aviation evolved and matured this changed. WWI spurred development of the airplane as a war machine and transport aircraft became increasingly useful during the 1920s with the carriage of mail and passengers. Air power strategists and air minded bureaucrats promoted the air forces and airlines by courting a public and private constituency. As exemplified by the court-martial of Billy Mitchell, an outspoken proponent of air power and the postal service struggle to develop air mail, the evolution was fraught with uncertainty. For general aviation it was even more challenging. Not to be deterred independent entrepreneurs persisted in designing personal aircraft during the 1930s. They were able to use the data from experiments conducted at McCook Field in Dayton, Ohio. In 1994, NASA sponsored the Advanced General Aviation Transport Experiments (AGATE) "program...designed to develop affordable new technologies, new methods of manufacturing and certifying general aviation aircraft, and improved flight-training systems." (145) This and follow-on programs, such as the General Aviation Propulsion (GAP) program and Small Aircraft Transportation Systems (SATS) whose purpose was to improve aircraft engines and navigation infrastructure, have had little success in achieving their goals and the prospects for advancement of these low priority programs remains uncertain. In particular the SATS program was highly criticized by a NASA commissioned study of the National Academy of Sciences Transportation Research Board (TRB). The plan's inability to deal with the projected increase in air traffic was a stated concern. As manned flight moved beyond the realm of laissez-faire, flight became more structured. Beginning with the Kelly Act of 1925 and Air Commerce Act of 1926 a federal bureaucracy, with dual, sometimes contradictory, purposes of both regulating and promoting aviation, was established. Two provisions of the Air Commerce Act, the licensing of pilots and aircraft certification, had the greatest impact on general aviation. Henceforth a pilot must be licensed. Similarly aircraft had to meet specific standards and be approved as airworthy by regulators prior to entering production. Abruptly, for the personal pilot, taking to the air suddenly became less spontaneous and more costly; two significant factors which retarded the development of ubiquitous personal air transportation. The purpose of Dreams of Flight, while ambitious, is constrained by editorial limitations which restrict its scope to a discussion of heavier than air flight

only. That general aviation is such a broad category, this is understandable but brevity is responsible for the book being less inclusive than the subject deserves. There are other shortcomings as well. Inexplicably, despite a focus on women aviators, any mention of Amelia Earhart, even in passing, is omitted.

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