



FLIGHT TRAINING UNDER THE GI BILL

Some 22,000 vets are getting their advanced flight training courtesy of a familiar rich uncle. If you hold a private license, here's how you could be one of them

■ ■ If you wore dogtags sometime within the past 18 years, there's a good chance you've got educational benefits coming to you, compliments of the Veterans Administration (VA). Greenbacks are available to get the veteran through law school or even into a cockpit.

The Veterans Readjustment Benefits Act of 1966, generally referred to as the GI Bill, provides educational assistance money for any U.S. Armed Forces veteran who was discharged under other than dishonorable conditions after serving at least 181 days of continuous active duty, any part of which occurred after Jan. 31, 1955. A vet is eligible for these benefits for eight years after release or, in the case of flight training, until Aug. 30, 1975, whichever date is later.

Unfortunately, flight training has become the GI Bill's bureaucratic boondoggle, plagued by red tape, misinformation, and frustration. The primary function of the bill's flight-training benefits is to prepare the ex-GI for a career in aviation. However, some VA officials have placed so much emphasis on that *primary* purpose that many of their own men apparently are not aware of the full scope of the flight-training section. Consequently, many vets who actually qualify for flight training might be dissuaded from applying for what is rightfully theirs.

Aside from providing aviation-career training, the law says that qualified veterans can take flight training if such training is shown to be "ancillary to the pursuit of another vocation." Simply stated, that provision means if a quali-

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fied vet needs an instrument or multi-engine rating in furtherance of his career as a doctor, salesman, deacon, or whatever, then he's probably eligible for VA flight training. You don't have to aspire to be a professional pilot to qualify for these flight-training benefits. And you don't have to get a commercial license, either.

If someone—anyone—tells you otherwise, they're wrong. Period. That's the word from VA headquarters in Washington, and that's the word from William Reynard, director of the AOPA Air Safety Foundation's Special Courses Department. Reynard helped author the "ancillary" provision, which Congress added to the GI Bill in 1967.

Both the aviation-career and "ancillary" provisions set forth as the purpose for VA flight-training benefits have career enhancement as their goal. The GI Bill is now, and always has been, designed to get the veteran a job or an academic degree. There have been abuses of this design. Too many good-timing "grunts," returning from the "Big War" 28 years ago, cashed in their VA chips for dancing lessons, bartending courses, and the like. Some learned to fly. And all too often in such cases, bartending, dancing, or flying careers did not result. Times have changed.

The GI Bill is "for readjustment, not for fun," one administrator explained. "It's not intended to provide benefits for joy flying." Congress seems to be in total accord with that observation.

The current benefits act is the third of its kind. Consequently, the Congress and the VA have had enough working experience to plug some of the abuses allowed by the predecessor bills. Those abuses were committed by students as well as by some unscrupulous flight schools. The hallmarks of the new GI Bill's legislative and regulatory "plugs" are immediately identifiable: red tape and foot-long forms from the Government Printing Office.

Now to the basics of flight training 1973, courtesy of the GI Bill.

To bar would-be weekend pilots from getting their wings on taxpayers' money, the current bill stipulates that any vet seeking VA flight training must possess *at least a private pilot's license* and a *second-class* medical certificate at the time of his application.

In the case of those seeking a career in aviation, the VA asks only that the applicant be sincere in his stated career intentions. He need not submit a list of job prospects or any other specific evidence showing the likelihood of achieving an aviation career. Of those ex-GIs applying for flight training under the ancillary provision, the VA asks that they explain how such advanced training will benefit their careers.

So, if a vet did serve sometime after Jan. 31, 1955, does need some higher ratings for his career, and already has a private license and a second-class medical, he would probably qualify for

VA flight-training benefits.

Benefits. The GI Bill allows a qualified vet a flat \$220 per month, for up to 36 months, in benefits. That's a maximum of \$7,920. Only those veterans who served at least 18 continuous months of active duty after Jan. 31, 1955, are eligible for the full 36 months of educational aid. Qualified vets who served less than 18 continuous months (but more than 181 days) are credited with 1½ months of educational aid (\$330) for every month spent on active duty after Jan. 31, 1955.

Vets discharged because of service-related injuries need not have served the full 181 days to qualify for educational benefits; however, benefits are rated on the one-month-service, 1½-month's benefits scale.

While benefits are figured on a monthly basis, the veteran is not limited to \$220 worth of training per month. In fact, theoretically he could spend all his benefit money in a single month if he wished. He simply wouldn't be getting any more checks from the VA once his benefits were exhausted.

It should also be noted that the veteran must contribute 10 percent of the cost of the flight program out of his own pocket; the VA foots the bill for the other 90 percent. For example, if one month's training amounts to \$400, the vet must pay \$40 and the VA will pay the balance (provided, of course, that the veteran has \$360 in benefits remaining). There is no legal way for the vet to circumvent his share of this payment. The law says he must pay 10 percent.

Application. Before applying to the VA for aid, a veteran should select the flight school where he plans to take training. The school must be approved by FAA and the proper state agency (usually the state's education department). Any flight school will be able to tell the prospective student if the school is authorized for VA training, and if it is, it should have a letter from the state approving agency to prove it. The vet can also check with his local VA office to determine whether the school is qualified.

After successfully locating an approved flight school, the vet should complete an "Application for Program of Education." The form (VA Form 21E-1990) can be obtained from any VA regional office or VA hospital. (At press time, the VA said it was planning to replace this form with a new one—VA Form 22-1990—that will contain clearer instructions.) Upon completing the form, the vet should mail it, along with a copy of his "Report of Separation or Discharge" (DD Form 214), to his VA regional office.

If everything is found in order and the vet qualifies for training, the VA regional office should mail the applicant his "Certificate of Eligibility" (VA Form 21E1993) within two to six weeks. Some vets, however, have complained that this process takes considerably longer. VA officials admit delays do occur, especially, they say, when applications are incomplete or incorrectly filled

out, or when they are mailed during the VA's heavy paperwork periods prior to the start of college semesters.

The VA's Certificate of Eligibility authorizes the vet to enroll for specific flight courses in the school named in his application. The certificate shows the number of months of benefits to which he is entitled.

Once the ex-GI enrolls and begins his training in an authorized course, the flight school must complete an enrollment certification section on the back of the Certificate of Eligibility, then mail the form to the VA regional office. When it receives this enrollment certification, the regional office mails the student a "Notice of Authorization of Benefits." The VA says it takes between two and four weeks to get these notices to new applicants.

When flight training is under way, the VA student and the flight school must jointly complete a "Certification of Flight Training" (VA Form 21E-6553C) every month during which training was received. The school mails this form to the VA after it has been signed by both the student and the school. Government checks sent to the vet are based on the information in this form. When the student has completed the ground and flight instruction authorized by the VA, the checks for that particular course will stop, regardless of whether or not the veteran has actually won his new rating or license. Full payments begin again when the student moves on to the next course.

The process sounds relatively orderly, but that's not always the case. Even the best government undertaking can degenerate into a frustrating ordeal when it involves disparate participants and a blizzard of forms. Too often that has been the case with VA flight training, which VA officials contend requires a disproportionate amount of attention. So the vet who wants to take to the skies on government money would be well advised to familiarize himself thoroughly with all the rules of the game before joining in.

Asked to focus on a few of the more commonly troublesome areas in flight training, VA men were quick to respond with this list:

1. Once the vet enrolls, the flight school should give him a copy of the course outline for each flight-training course he plans to take; a schedule of tuition fees and other charges; regulations pertaining to absence, grading policy, rules of operation and conduct. The course outline must also include the types of aircraft to be used in each course. If the school fails to furnish any of this written information, the veteran can almost be assured that he is going to run into problems with the VA or the flight school.

2. The student should not sign any blank Certification of Flight Training forms. These monthly forms should be signed after each month's training is completed, and then only after the veteran carefully compares the figures with his own records.

3. VA funds are released for specific

course training at the one flight school selected by the veteran. Each course, be it for an instrument rating, a commercial pilot's ticket, or an ATR, is subdivided into specific hours for specific phases (e.g., 100 hours of ground school, 60 hours of solo, 100 hours of dual) which, when added together, amount to the total hours of allowable flight training. The VA will not pay for any training in excess of this total hour figure, but it reportedly does permit some leeway if the student encounters difficulty in a specific phase. Also, the courses are approved for specific aircraft, and the VA will not pay if equipment other than that prescribed for the course is used.

4. The student must take ground instruction as a part of any course. However, if the student has already passed the FAA written exam for the rating sought, the VA will not pay for further ground-school instruction for that rating. The school cannot force the student to take the ground course if he has already passed the exam.

5. A vet can apply for any course (other than private pilot, obviously) that he chooses. If he states in his

application that his intention is to find a career in aviation, he must take a commercial pilot's course before all others. However, if the vet's stated intention is to fly in connection with his nonaviation job (e.g., salesman or rancher), he can forgo the commercial pilot's course and move directly into instrument, multi-engine, or similarly advanced training.

Since the student is not authorized to take any course other than those shown on his Certificate of Eligibility, he can avoid a lot of future paperwork if he requests, in his original application to the VA, all the courses he might want to take. If the applicant is eligible, the VA will authorize any approved course he asks for, regardless of how much money he has coming to him.

6. The flight school is required to give the vet "appropriate credit for previous training and experience." The school is supposed to gauge this credit by the piloting ability the vet displays during a flight check. Although the VA cannot dictate how much time credit the school can or should give each new VA "student" pilot, it will put its foot down if the school grossly abuses its

interpretation of just how much time credit is "appropriate."

7. The vet can have his Certificate of Eligibility, his checks, and all other VA correspondence sent to whatever address he chooses; however, officials say there have been cases where unscrupulous schools have intercepted the checks, endorsed and cashed them without the student's knowledge. Yes, that's illegal. Also, the vet should keep in mind that all his VA mail, not just the material related to flight training, will be sent to the same address.

Whatever paperwork mires the ex-GI may be forced to traverse, the VA's flight-training-aid program is a good deal—a very good deal—and certainly one well worth a pilot's patience and tenacity. For many veterans, entrance into the VA program can mean a windfall of \$7,000 or more for advanced flight training. That kind of money can buy a lot of ratings.

While problems may arise that seem insurmountable, they are not. Ask any of some 22,000 vets in flight training today who's paying their freight and the answer is the same: their rich Uncle Sam. □

NAVION REBORN IN SOUTHEAST TEXAS

The 'new'
Navion Rangemaster
soon to be
produced in
Wharton, Tex.,
will look identical with
this one photographed
in 1970



■ Although not rated for aerobatics, the venerable old Navion has sustained enough stress to snap every guy wire on the sturdiest Pitts Special. But the stress in Navion's case is psychological, not physical.

Born to North American in the late 1940s, the Navion has since then changed homes like some incorrigible orphan. From North American it went to Ryan Aeronautical and then on to Temco-Riley. The Rangemaster was born in 1960 and was produced by the Navion Aircraft Company. Production was continued by the Navion Aircraft Corporation, which itself changed hands twice and then died soon after acquisition by an Ohio firm called the Janox

Corporation.

Many's the pilot who will defend the plane's character despite the misfortunes of its many manufacturers. Foremost among the old bird's champions is Cedric Kotowicz, owner and president of CEDs, an auto specialty chain in the Chicago area. Kotowicz, a Navion pilot, is president of the "Navion Rangemaster Aircraft Corporation." Kotowicz says the new Navion company has purchased rights to manufacture the Rangemaster.

Kotowicz is very quietly setting up shop in tiny Wharton, Tex., and by the start of next year hopes to be rolling new Rangemasters onto the Wharton Municipal Airport ramp.

The "new" Rangemaster "will look

identical on the exterior" to the old Rangemaster, tip tanks and all, Kotowicz says. Similarly, the Kotowicz planes will be powered by a 285-hp engine, and will have a four-place/optional-five seating configuration. Some interior changes will be made, including a redesigned panel with full IFR instrumentation. The Rangemasters will sell for around \$35,000, Kotowicz says.

The Rangemaster assembly line will be computer assisted to ensure that parts, subassemblies, and fuselage all move along in an orderly fashion. Kotowicz hopes to complete one plane per week once the production gets rolling late this year. All sales will be handled through the Wharton office. □