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Student Pilot Newsletter

AOPA Project Pilot Student Report

STUDENT PILOT JOURNAL

THE NIGHT LIGHTS IN GEORGIA

Touch and goes where the transports go

BY BRUCE BUCKFELDER

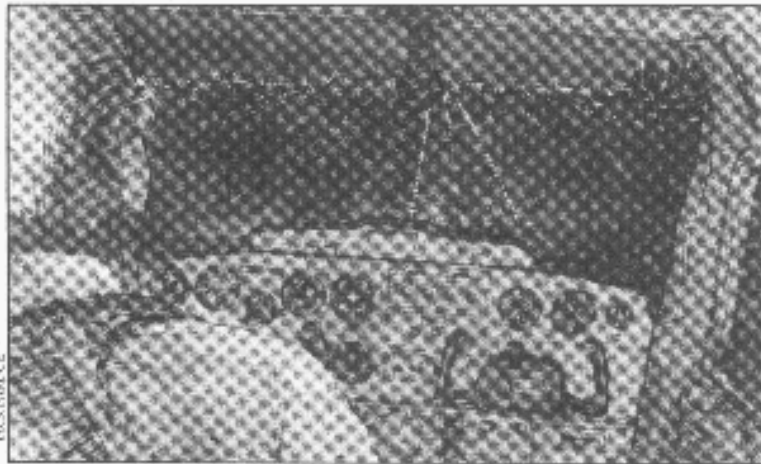
I'M a new private pilot with about 90 hours in my logbook, based at Cobb County-McCollum Field Airport north of Atlanta. One of my goals since moving to Atlanta has been to fly over the city's beautiful skyline. With the heat and haze of summer giving way to clear autumn skies, I started planning.

After considering possible routes over and around Dobbins Air Force Base, DeKalb-Peachtree Airport, and Fulton County-Brown Field, the three busy airports between McCollum and downtown, I had a brainstorm. Do the flight at night.

I got a weather briefing when I arrived home from work about midnight. After preflighting N48640, the Cessna 152 I took my check ride in, I was in the air by 12:45 a.m.

The visibility was as good as advertised, and I proceeded on course. When I was just south of Dobbins AFB, enjoying the spectacular view of the city, I spotted the huge red neon sign atop the hangar at the

William B. Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport. That's where I work as a mechanic. Next I had a bird's-eye view of the new Georgia Dome and Fulton County Stadium, still brightly lit after a Braves playoff game.



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I was flying my second lap around the stadium when I saw the big red sign again, now only about 7 miles south of my position. After listening in on Hartsfield's information frequency, I decided to try something.

"Atlanta Approach, Cessna 48640. . . ." I proceeded to ask for practice takeoffs

and landings at one of the nation's busiest airports. Touch and goes is the buzz word, and it means landings followed immediately by takeoffs—without stopping on the runway. It's a time-saving method of practicing that we use all

the time at McCollum. But would it work at busy Atlanta? After a few seconds of silence, the surprised controller responded, "Touch and goes where?"

I repeated my request, then heard, "Cessna 640, stand by." After a minute of circling, I was instructed to enter the landing pattern for Hartsfield Atlanta's Runway 26R. Terrific!

I turned onto the final approach course, then was cleared for the touch and go, knowing that the sight before me was something not seen

by too many of the private pilots in the area. Flaring to land, I was engulfed in lights. I found that the runway's raised centerline lights are a little humpy on the nose gear of a 152, so I steered left a little as I applied power for takeoff.

"Cessna 640, say your intentions," I heard the controller ask as I lifted off.

"Cessna 640 requests one more touch and go, then we'll be returning to McCollum," I told him.

"Cessna 640, make right traffic." Apparently, there was still no incoming traffic. The airport was all mine.

After the last landing, I made a right turn to the north. This put me back over downtown Atlanta and on course to McCollum. Flying over the stadium again, I allowed myself one more 360-degree turn to look inside.

GROUND TIME

Many students find early on that the term "flight" training is a bit of a misnomer. You will more likely be flying the airplane on your very first lesson, and, in fact, at every lesson, weather permitting. But for every hour spent flying, you'll spend almost that amount of time on the ground with your instructor.

That lesson usually starts with a brief instructor review, any subjects that need additional explanation. This is also the time that your logbook gets filled out and signed by the instructor.

Because instructors spend so much time preparing for lessons and then debriefing students, expect to pay for the time on the ground as well as the time in the air. Some schools charge a lower rate

on the ground with your instructor.

Each lesson usually starts with a briefing where you and your instructor will discuss the day's objectives. He or she will probably grab the airplane model that instructors seem to always have in hand and use it to demonstrate maneuvers or concepts you'll be tackling in that lesson.

After the flight, expect the model to reappear during your debriefing, as the

time on the ground as well as the time in the air. Some schools charge a lower rate for "ground instruction." (Your bill will note it as "pre-" and "post-"), but in any case, all reputable schools should be happy to share their pricing information. The trick to making the best of your ground instruction is to come to each lesson prepared. Remember to ask what the next session's topic will be so you can read up. □

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I headed for home through the crystal-clear night and three more landings at McCollum before calling it a night. Should the controllers I talked to that night remember N48640, I want to thank them for granting me the experience of a lifetime. □

Bruce Backfelder, NPS 3689901, is an A&P mechanic who has been flying for seven years.