

Book Review – Fate Is the Hunter

By Ernest Gann

First published – 1961 by Simon and Schuster

Review by Chris Hope, Master CFI

People who are new to the world of flying often ask my thoughts on aviation-related books. If I had to pick only one author to write about the beauty of flight, the magic of flight, the stark terror of flight, and the mechanical intricacies of flight, that person would be Ernest Gann. And if I had to pick only one of his books, it would be his autobiographical “Fate Is the Hunter.”

Ernie began flying in the late 1930s, and flew for various airlines from that time up through the 1950s. “Fate is the Hunter” is a series of recollections of flying episodes through that period. But it is more than a group of “there I was” stories. His writing is poetry, as when he describes his view out the right-side window in one of his early DC-2 airline flights.

“In spring the land below is charged with life. The fields are soothing green to match the easy configuration of the valleys, and the hillsides are speckled with fat brown cattle. The newly tilled soil in the flats and minor depressions along streams is a rich, warm umber. It blends delicately with the near black-green outlining the shaded roads, which are so pleasantly few and almost deserted.”

He brings us along in the early airline days, flying DC-3s at 10,000 feet through thunderstorms and ice, and sharing with us the atmosphere of airline flights during the days before radar controllers, and the days of flying cargo during World War II.

“Our heavily loaded airplanes were so soggy in spirit they responded like ailing whales and could not be urged above the overcast where we might have a chance for a sun sight.”

But, like today, he talks about the airline start-ups and bankruptcies, the vagaries of the airline seniority system, and the part that luck (Fate?) plays in all of our lives. Some things do not change.

And so fifty years after this book was first published, it is still available and still, in my opinion, one of the best aviation books ever written. It is worth your time.

What’s on your book shelf?

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