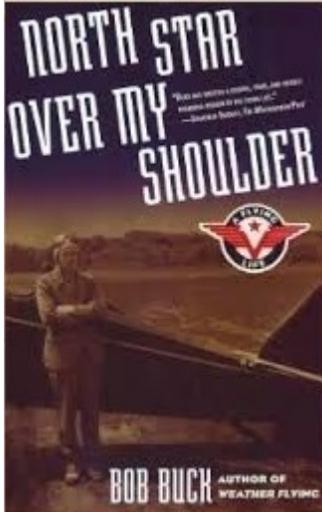


Book Review – North Star Over My Shoulder – A Flying Life by Bob Buck

Review by Chris Hope, Master CFI



Will an airline pilot ever again have the kind of life that Bob Buck experienced? I don't think so. Bob was born in 1912, and was 15 years old when Charles Lindbergh flew to Paris in 1927. He was already hooked on flying, and this event cemented the love affair. In the early 1930s, after a few years of cross-country flying, he learns that a new company, Transcontinental & Western Airlines, is looking for pilots? Could he do that? Might as well try. And so began an airline career that ended at the mandatory flying age of 60, nearly forty years later. (And, unknown today, a career marked by no furloughs, layoffs, bankruptcies or mergers.)

A couple of things struck me as I read this man's story. I too have been flying for forty years, and my flying story was just beginning as Bob's was ending. During my flying career, I have watched airliners progress from the Boeing 707 to the 777 - actually, in the big scheme of things, not a lot of change. Any 777 pilot could be transported back in time to 1970 and fall right into the flow of the airline world. But a new pilot in 1970 would have been totally lost, moving into the airliners of the 1930s.

Bob started with T&WA flying the DC-2 and DC-3. Flying unpressurized aircraft at 9,000 feet through all kinds of weather. Navigational instruments? How about a AM radio receiver that only transmits two Morse code identifiers – dah dit, and dit dah. Loud and clear on one and you are either north or south of the station. Loud and clear on the other and you are either east or west of the station. Silence? You are either over the station, or the weather (or static) has caused the signal to die out.

Flying from New York to London? Sure. You can do that - in about five legs. After the DC-2s and -3s came the big plane – The Lockheed Constellation and Super Constellation. And during the war years, there was ferrying B-17s to Europe.

The 1960s brought another major change in aviation, when jet engines were finally a reality of airline life with 707s and then 747s. And passengers could fly to Europe non-stop, above most of the weather.

In between all of the airline flying came the special assignments. Flying all over the world looking for icing conditions so the aviation world could learn more about that subject. An assignment to fly around Europe and Africa as the personal pilot for movie star Tyrone Power. Flights with the Bob Hope tour. And then his flight around world - Hawaii, across the poles, and back to Hawaii.

An interesting companion book to Bob Buck's is Ernie Gann's "Fate is the Hunter". Both men flew airliners during the same era, and both write exceptionally well of their experiences. Ernie writes more of individual experiences, plucked out of life of flying. Bob's story is much more matter of fact, less lyrical perhaps, but his is the kind of story that makes you imagine that you might be listening to him tell stories while you sit in front of a warm fire.

Read them both, and tell me what you think.

Chris loves to read, write, and fly, but not necessarily in that order

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And here are more favorites: www.ChrisHopeFAAFlightInstructor.com/books/books.html