



## Bucket List Checkmark

by John "Pepe" LaDue

Ever wondered if you can still do that backflip off of the diving board? How about hitting that curveball from your baseball playing days? How about flying that trainer you flew in flight school? I have, and although the first two questions will remain unanswered, the possibility of answering the third question just needed the place and the opportunity. This past June, the planets lined up, and I found myself at the controls of what I thought to be the modern version of the venerable 'Mattel Messerschmitt', the Hughes TH-55A. It wasn't the aircraft I trained in (the H-23), but it was the aircraft I flew as a primary IP for two years, in 1968-69, at Ft. Wolters.

Earlier this year, an out-of-the-blue phone call from Bill "Moon" Mullen (the new VHPA President) set in motion a series of

events that led to another checkmark on my bucket list. I had recently joined the VHPA, Bill had seen my name and address on the new member list, noticed that I lived only 45 minutes away, and invited me to meet him for lunch. We met, answered the prerequisite "Where were you, who were you with, and when were you there?" questions, and I apparently left him with a good enough impression that he invited me down to an annual fundraiser for his local airport. The "where's and when's" were listed on a flyer he gave me, and I noticed that they were going to offer helicopter and airplane rides. That perked my interest and I contacted the airport to find out who was going to conduct the helicopter rides. Hi-Tech Helicopters (at the Pocono Mountains Municipal Airport) was the answer and I found out that they offered the gamut of helicopter flight training from private to CFI flight ratings. Hmmm, I thought, this is getting interesting. When I asked what kind of aircraft they flew, the answer came back, "it's a Sikorsky Global S-300CBi". The time, place and opportunity had finally come together. A number of phone calls and e-mails ensued to coordinate schedules and I booked an hour's worth of stick time for the end of June.

When the long awaited day finally arrived, my cousin (a helicopter FNG) and I drove down and met the instructor. We went through the basic info, and the instructor and I took off for a local area flight. It was a beautiful day for flying. We toured the area, flew a couple of traffic patterns, and hovered for a few minutes. I had a great time, although I did question why a grizzled, 66 yr. old, veteran combat helicopter pilot would have allowed someone who looked like he had just graduated from 8th grade take him up in any kind of aircraft. My senior bias had been very quickly allayed, by the instructor's professionalism and personality. After 40 minutes we landed and I let him take my cousin up for his first ever helicopter flight, for twenty minutes. In retrospect, I graded my own flight at about a C, maybe a C-. A little overcorrecting, a little late on the throttle adjustments, and a little too much time with my head in the cockpit. No pink slip, though. Not too bad after a 38 year hiatus, and most importantly, it was fun.



*Now if I could just find a generous Huey Owner :)*

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