



MILITARY-TO-AIRLINE TRANSITION GUIDE



AIR LINE PILOTS ASSOCIATION, INTERNATIONAL

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1. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the ALPA military-to-airline transition guide!

Whether you're an experienced military aviator or a service member completely new to aviation, this guide will help you begin your journey into the airline industry. We'll cover areas such as qualifications, certification, the application process, and interview tips. But first, let's talk about why you should consider a career as an airline pilot.

Part of any discussion about a career change will involve the financial impact/benefit of a change. There is often apprehension about leaving the stability of active-duty employment to pursue an airline career, but the long-term financial benefits need to be analyzed for you and your family's particular situation.

Some of the benefits of an airline career are flexibility, financial freedom, and the ability to reside almost anywhere in the world. Many active-duty members choose to continue service in the Reserve or National Guard while flying for their airline, which can afford them the opportunity to earn a Reserve retirement while actively working for their airline. Members can also continue to use military benefits such as Tricare and base amenities.

It is no wonder that many military service members find transitioning to an airline career to be a logical move after leaving the military. Factored into that decision will be comparing military and airline pay scales, pilot-retention bonuses, and the numerous tax-free benefits of military service.

2. QUALIFICATIONS

Let's start by looking at qualifications required, such as licensing, flying hours, and experience.

To fly for the airlines, there are a few things you'll need, such as:

- A current passport
- Meet FAA requirements 61.159 or 61.160
- An FCC Restricted Radio Operator Permit
- An FAA first-class medical

The most important requirement is the Airline Transport Pilot Certificate (ATP) under FAR 61.159 which you can receive at 23 years of age, or the Restricted – Airline Pilot Certificate (R-ATP) under FAR 61.160 which you can receive at 21 years of age which as a military pilot offers a path into entry at significantly less total flight time, cross country time, and a younger age. The biggest of the flight time requirements are:

- ATP – 61.159
 - 1,500 hours Total Time
 - 500 hours total cross country time
 - 250 hours total PIC time in airplanes, including
 - 50 hours in class of airplane (e.g. multi-engine) for rating sought
 - 100 hours cross country
 - 25 hours night

- R-ATP – 61.160
 - 750 hours total flight time for military pilots
 - 200 hours cross country time in airplanes
 - Please refer to FAR 61.160 for complete reductions and requirements

Once you have the minimum requirements, you'll need to complete an ATP Certification Training Program (ATP/CTP) and pass the ATP written exam. These courses are offered by flight training centers that have experience in training airline pilots. While some people pay for their own course, many airlines will send their new hires to an ATP/CTP course at no cost. This sometimes requires an obligatory period of work in return.

Most airlines will not require you have the ATP prior to starting but rather have the requirements so that when you complete your FAA type ride for the aircraft you will simultaneously receive your ATP or R-ATP Certificate. However, you will need the civilian FAA Commercial Pilot Certificate requirement to begin the above process.

If you fly fixed-wing aircraft in the military, you may not need to worry about this. The FAA allows U.S. military pilots qualified in a military class and category of aircraft to obtain the civilian equivalent commercial and instrument pilot rating. For example, if you fly Gulfstream aircraft for the Air Force, you would be eligible for a commercial airplane multiengine and instrument rating. If you haven't already done so, contact your local Flight Standards Safety District Office to provide them with the appropriate documents to receive your civilian licenses.

As a rotorcraft or powered lift pilot, you have a similar benefit in qualifying for your commercial helicopter or powered lift certificate and instrument rating. This will make pursuing your fixed-wing ratings much easier since much of that flight time is credited towards a fixed wing ATP certificate.

If you don't have any previous flight experience, don't worry, we have you covered! The next section of this guide will walk you through the different ways you can obtain your pilot ratings.

3. GETTING YOUR CERTIFICATES

If you already have your ATP requirements for the airlines, feel free to skip this section. We're going to explore some of the common ways in which pilots obtain their FAA ratings.

New pilots will generally start by getting their fixed-wing private pilot license (PPL). This is the first step in building those minimum fixed wing flight hours toward your instrument, commercial, and, ultimately, ATP minimums.

After your PPL, you'll get your instrument rating, followed by your commercial single-engine and/or multiengine airplane rating. Some pilots will also pursue their certified flight instructor license to build flight time by teaching others how to fly. As mentioned in the previous section, if you already hold a Commercial & Instrument Rotary Wing Rating, it is possible to skip the PPL, and do an additional category and class add-on of Commercial Airplane Single Engine Land (CSEL) and then Instrument Rating.

You'll want to find a flight-training program that meets your individual needs and understands the different options available for your specific situation. Some things to consider:

- How long will it take me to finish flight training?
- What is my availability?
- What is the instructor's availability?
- How will I finance my flight training?
- Do I want to stay close to home or train further away?
- Do I want to pursue a college degree at the same time?

Flight schools are generally divided into three categories: Part 61 schools, Part 141 schools, and college/university programs.

Part 61 schools are often beneficial for those who need flexibility during their flight training. There is no standardized curriculum requirement across Part 61 schools, so you will be able to work with an instructor on your specific maneuvers based on your individual progress. You can fly as much or as little as you want depending on the instructor and aircraft availability. The ground school portion, meaning nonflight instruction, can be completed either through the school or through a third-party training program. How quickly you obtain your ratings depends on how well you do on an individual level.

Part 141 flight schools tend to be beneficial for those who like a more structured approach to flight training. Part 141 schools have additional FAA requirements that mandate a curriculum. Your training will be conducted in stages and at the end of each stage, you'll undergo a stage-check to determine your proficiency. Ground training is conducted by the school itself. Because Part 141 flight training is so regulated by the FAA, you'll have reduced minimum requirements for your flight ratings.

Another way to obtain your flight ratings is through a college/university that offers a degree in conjunction with a Part 141 flight-training program. The university and degree program must be approved under the FAA Institutional Authority List found at https://www.faa.gov/pilots/training/atp/media/institutional_authority_list.pdf. In this case, you'll be able to obtain your degree while getting your commercial licenses at the same time. If you graduate with an associate degree through this program,

your R-ATP total time minimums will be reduced to 1,250 hours. With a bachelor's degree, these minimums can further be reduced to 1,000 hours of total time. If you qualify for the military aviation R-ATP minimums though, your minimums are still reduced to 750 hours regardless of your educational background. Keep in mind that the length of flight training may be much longer than a traditional flight school because of the time it takes for you to complete the degree program.

Trouble deciding on a school? The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) is a nonprofit organization that provides general aviation pilots with helpful resources. One of them is the flight school finder, which we've listed in Appendix B.

One common concern in aviation is figuring out how to pay for your flight lessons. Fortunately, there are many organizations that offer scholarships in pursuit of a career in aviation. Organizations such as RTAG, Women in Aviation International, NGPA, the Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals, and AOPA give out millions in scholarships each year. You can find these and many more scholarships online with a quick search, but we've linked the FAA's list in Appendix B.

As a military service-member or veteran, you can also use your GI Bill for your flight training. Currently, the GI Bill will only cover your private pilot license if it is included as part of the curriculum of a collegiate program, and if it is not part of that program, then you'll have to finance this in a different way. Once you have your private pilot license, your GI Bill will pay for your instrument, commercial, instructor certifications, type ratings, and even your ATP, depending on the type of GI Bill you qualify for. Keep in mind, it can only be used at Part 141 schools, qualified training programs, or for college/university degree programs. For more information on using

your GI Bill for flight training, visit va.gov or follow the link in Appendix B. In addition to the aforementioned link, there is an article published by RTAG Co-Founder, Erik Sabiston, that covers a multitude of options for how veterans can fund their flight training. You can read it here: <https://www.rtag.org/about/news-updates/vets-can-become-airline-pilots-for-free>

4. CHOOSING YOUR AIRLINE

Your qualifications and experience will determine the companies you are able to apply to. Some airlines may require pilot-in-command turbine time experience. On the other hand, ultra low cost carriers and regional will hire pilots with R-ATP minimums.

Matching where you want to settle down geographically to different airline bases and domiciles is part of the initial decision-making process as you rank your dream airlines. Do you want to live in-domicile so that you can be on call at home? Perhaps you want to fly long-haul international flights? Or maybe you prefer day trips that allow you to be home most nights. As you research the different airlines, you will discover what domicile bases each airline has, as well as the relative seniority in those different bases.

After many years of constant moves with new duty stations, most military service members are ready to settle down—and remain in one home for more than three years! If you have a family, make sure to include them in the discussion as you prepare to join the airlines. After all, they have endured the burden of separation and multiple moves throughout the years, and your subsequent career after the military is often the first chance to place their needs first.

Other things to consider when picking an airline:

- Pay scales/hiring bonus
- Interview opportunities or flows to major airlines
- Seniority and captain upgrade opportunities
- Anything that effects your quality of life and what is important to you

5. APPLICATION

Most airlines have an online application system, either through their own website or a third-party service. It can be surprising how much information is required, so get started on gathering those details even if you're still working on those airline qualifications. Aim to have your applications completed and submitted no later than one year out from separation.

Airlines typically request personal and professional information spanning the last 10 years. This can include employment history, previous residences, flight-training history, and education history. It's important that the information be accurate, so be sure to search through any relevant records.

One of the greatest challenges will be translating your military skillsets and qualifications into a language that mirrors those that airline employers desire. For example, when listing employment history, it isn't enough to note "Supply Officer, 2011–present." Instead, you will need to translate military jobs into civilian employment qualifications. List each permanent duty station along with the military role you held for that applicable period.

Each successive duty station usually brings more responsibilities both in and out of the flight deck. This is where you learn to translate your nonflying job of "assistant operations officer" into the language of "operations manager" responsible for the day-to-day operations of 11 aircraft and 23 personnel. By the time you reach the nine- to 10-year mark in the military, you will have moved into higher level senior

leadership positions which would translate into “vice president/director” positions on the civilian side. As you focus on each duty station, remember to highlight your nonflying duties along with your flight responsibilities to create a more accurate picture of your qualifications and professional talents.

Flight training is another easy batch of information to account for, as your military records will usually list these training tracks in a meticulous fashion. Most military training records can be broken down into periods of training based on squadrons/aircraft types, with a brief description of the type of training conducted. If you have taken civilian flight training, you’ll want to list each rating and include when and where it was obtained. Make sure to keep those logbooks!

Your places of residence are also relatively simple to track by referencing your military records. Be sure to include complete addresses and timeframes as it will be cross referenced with the airlines’ background checks.

Education and qualifications will perhaps be the most difficult to translate into civilian-relatable skills. A service member who lists “JPME 2017-2018” leaves airline hiring representatives scratching their heads to determine what that means and, more importantly, how it translates to a desirable skill for their company. But when they add “Joint professional military education. Post-graduate level education attaining advanced qualifications in leadership, management, and executive decision-making processes,” it becomes a military education qualification that highlights your abilities. As you complete your application, you will begin to see how important it is to effectively translate your military qualifications into valued civilian skillsets.

Many airline applications will also ask about your driving record, criminal record, and any adverse situations that you would like to disclose. This is a good time to invest in a thorough background or driving record check to ensure you haven't forgotten a speeding ticket from seven years ago when you were racing to the hospital and missed the 55 to 45 speed limit transition. When it comes to adverse situations, honesty is the best policy. If you failed a check ride, and the application asks about a time you failed a check ride, be honest and forthright. Highlight what you learned from the experience and your excellent record since that event.

Flight time, flight time, flight time! Capturing this data is quite possibly the most labor-intensive aspect of any airline application. Most general aviation pilots log flight time from engine start to engine shutdown. Most civilian commercial operators log flight time from "block out to block in." Military flight time is usually logged as beginning of takeoff roll until landing. Because of the lack of accounting for ground time when operating the aircraft in the military, many airlines have a conversion factor that military fixed wing pilots must account for in their applications. Rotary wing time generally does not have a conversion factor. Because each airline is different, the military member has an increased workload to account for accurate hours in their military logbook as they apply the different conversion factors. Make sure to read the application carefully to find out what they need. Be prepared to explain how you applied the conversion factor, as many airlines will review your logbooks to ensure accuracy and compliance.

All the time you invest in completing your application and providing a quality product to the airlines will pay off when you get the call for an interview. Then the hard work really starts!

6. INTERVIEW PREP

While having an application submitted is highly important, many airlines utilize job fairs and career seminars to identify hiring applicants and network with potential employees. These events can provide you with a foot in the door by connecting you with hiring department representatives. Organizations like Women in Aviation International (WAI), Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals (OBAP), NGPA, and RTAG regularly host job fairs, seminars, and similar events that allow you to get some valued exposure at the airlines. When attending a job fair or seminar, remember to dress appropriately to make the best impression. Bring along several paper copies of your resume to hand out as you meet with hiring representatives. It is also a good idea to have on hand business cards. If you do not have any for your current job, that's okay. You can easily make your own generic ones online or at a print shop, with your name and contact info. You never know who you will meet, and who you will want to network with, and having a card ready will help make these important connections.

Before you are contacted by an airline for an interview, it's time to brush up on your interview skills. Don't wait until they call to schedule—be ready. This can vary from an expensive interview-prep company to having a friend film you answer questions as you prepare for your interview. The interview process at most airlines occurs in three phases: testing, personal interview, and a situational-based scenario to test your decision-making and crew resource management skills.

Whether you are a civilian or military pilot, aviation or nonaviation job hunter, every job interview will require you to “tell your story.” You will be asked to tell them

about a time that “something” happened to you to highlight the various skills the employer is looking for. Practice your storytelling abilities using your military experience to answer questions prospective airline employers may ask—for example, think of a time when everything went off course and how you handled the situation. Thinking about the possible questions and practicing your responses will make your story flow. Repetition is key to being at ease. Also consider filming your interview prep as this will help you identify any nervous tics that you may be unaware of—e.g., the way you nervously blink and look to the left before every single answer! The more time you invest in preparing for an interview, the more relaxed you will be and the better you will perform.

We would be remiss if we didn’t mention airline interview-prep companies in this section. A quick online search may leave you feeling overwhelmed at the number of choices available. You will also find that some interview-prep companies specialize in interview techniques for specific airlines. This is a good time to reach out to your squadron mates and fellow military pilots at the airlines. They can offer their personal experiences and recommendations for how they prepared for interviews and which company they may have used. Investing in a professional interview-prep course or doing informal prep at home is a personal decision; the price of using professional services may be a small cost toward ensuring success in your job search.

7. INTERVIEW

After all the hard work and preparation, the big day has finally arrived. Being called for an interview means that your application has been scrutinized and compared to thousands of other applications, and you have been selected as a competitive candidate for employment. Now it's time to go out and get that job!

The obvious interview rules apply. Dress for success. Don't overlook the nice shine to your shoes and a matching belt. Don't be the person wearing their military Corfam shoes to the interview—you don't want your appearance to stand out, and nothing screams lack of conformity like a pair of high-gloss tuxedo-style Corfam shoes!

Don't be flashy. Invest in a good interview suit, keep jewelry to a minimum, and show up looking the part. This includes maintaining good personal hygiene habits, not overdoing it on the cologne or perfume (or consider skipping it altogether), and having your hair cut/styled a couple of days before the interview. In addition, look at purchasing (or borrowing) a nice attaché or briefcase to round out your attire. Again, this is where showing up carrying your resume and paperwork in a blue government folder or a backpack will cause you to stick out. People often joke that the interview holding office looks like a Secret Service office because everyone looks the same. You will have plenty of opportunity to stand out from the crowd once behind the interview door; your dress and appearance should match the expectations of your prospective airline employer.

Many airlines will provide transportation to the interview site. From the moment you step out of your home, *you are being evaluated!* What that means is that every

single person you meet along your journey has the potential to impact your success. Treat everyone—the ticket counter representatives, gate agents, flight attendants, flight crew, hotel employees, bus drivers, receptionists, and others—with dignity and respect. Be aware of your surroundings and comport yourself in the most professional and courteous manner. The image you project outside the actual interview spaces may very well be the image that your prospective employer measures you by.

Once you arrive at the interview site, ensure that you are well-rested and ready to go. Most people choose to arrive the day prior so they have a night to prepare and get a good night's sleep before the interview. When you get to the interview spaces, be friendly and courteous with your fellow applicants while maintaining an air of quiet dignity. This isn't the squadron ready room, and boisterous behavior and the telling of "there I was" stories should be reserved for your next squadron function.

Most importantly, *relax* and breathe. You have invested a tremendous amount of time, money, and effort in arriving at this point. You have been invited for an interview because the airline wants to hire you, so go into it and shine. Try your best to allay any fears or nerves that arise and be yourself. Because of your intensive preparations, you will most likely have answers to almost any question an interviewer will ask. Although you will be familiar with the outline of the interview process, be prepared for interviewers to deviate from the script. There are different types of interviews, including written testing, simulator evaluation, scenario-based, personal conversations, and traditional human resources interviews. Nothing is more embarrassing than giving a canned answer to the wrong question! Listen carefully to what you are being asked and take a slight pause before calmly answering.

Once you leave the interview spaces and begin your travel home, you still need to be on your best behavior. There have been instances of applicants treating airline employees with disdain on the way home, and that information made it back to the hiring department, resulting in the withdrawal of a job offer. It really is a simple rule: treat every single person you meet with dignity, respect, and courtesy. This applies to both an airline interview and life in general.

8. POST INTERVIEW

Whew! You made it back home and have your first airline interview under your belt. Now comes the hard part—waiting. Each airline has a distinct process for notifying successful candidates of a job offer. You will likely be familiar with the process from secondhand information from your peers. Job applicants will often exchange contact information at the interview and keep each other apprised of communication they receive from the airline. In an ideal world, you will receive notification that you have been extended an offer of employment from your dream airline. This conditional job offer may often be contingent on your passing a drug test and final criminal background check. It is a rewarding experience to get that call and realize your dream of transitioning to a successful airline career.

Some folks will unfortunately receive a call thanking them for their time and informing them that they were not offered a job. While this would be disappointing, it is not a reason to quit searching for a career at the airlines. Many airline pilots were turned down on their first interview only to get hired after their second or third airline interview. Failing to get hired your first time out needs to be viewed as a learning experience as well as an opportunity to course correct for the next interview. Don't become discouraged. Instead, learn from any mistakes and show up even better prepared for your next interview.

With either outcome, you should take the opportunity to pass along your experiences and lessons learned to your fellow peers; hopefully you had a positive experience and are now in the hiring pool waiting for a class start date.

A short caution on social media as a potential new hire. It is highly recommended that you refrain from posting interview information on any social media websites, blogs, or chat groups. Most airlines have social media policies and monitor social media sites. There have also been instances of new hires having a job offer rescinded because they posted interview details such as questions, scenarios, and profiles on a social media platform. As you are probably aware from your military service, social media can be an operational security pitfall and anything you put out there can and will be monitored. Please exercise professionalism and proper decorum in your social media habits as an airline employee or potential employee.

9. NEW HIRE

Congratulations! If your timing is perfect, you will complete your active-duty commitment and start at your airline job within a month or two of finishing in the military.

For military pilots who will continue in a reserve/guard status, you might have some downtime before starting at your airline. This is a good time to complete any military requirements before you begin the arduous training process at your airline.

Coordinate with your unit so that you're clear from any long-term military commitments during your initial airline training. While this isn't always possible, every attempt should be made to complete initial new-hire training before departing for long-term military leave. The airlines operate in a different environment than you are used to in the military, and you will need to focus on learning these new processes. Things as simple as transitioning from your military approach plates and charts to a different format of charts at the airlines will offer challenges in the training environment.

You are now working in the civilian sector, which means that each airline will have a standard operating procedure that will be different from your military flying experience. Study, patience, humility, and motivation will go a long way toward succeeding in your new-hire training. Much like the military, your airline will have acronyms and nuances that will seem foreign to you at first. Take the approach of learning with an open mind and avoid the "that's not the way we did it in the military" mindset. When wearing your airline uniform, you aren't flying in the military. While much of the aviation knowledge, skills, crew resource management,

and commitment to safety are transferable from the military, the actual scheduling, procedures, and flying techniques are often a completely different animal. It will seem like you're drinking from a fire hose at first during new-hire training, but your previous military training will prepare you well for success at your airline.

During new-hire training, you will learn about the benefits of your airline union and how its efforts have contributed greatly to the safety, quality of life, and financial benefits of your airline career. Embrace your airline career and enjoy the new experience and challenges that airline flying will bring to your life. You've worked long and hard to attain this goal—we sincerely hope that being an airline pilot will be just as positive and rewarding an experience as your career spent serving our great country.

Good luck and see you on the flight line!

ALPA would like to express its appreciation to Phil Dillingham and the Dillingham Group for the information provided in this publication. ALPA reference materials provided by the Dillingham Group are for informational purposes only. ALPA has no legal affiliation with the Dillingham Group and does not endorse, promote, or underwrite the Dillingham Group's ventures, products, or services, and ALPA assumes no legal responsibility for information provided by the Dillingham Group.

ALPA would also like to express its appreciation to RTAG for reviewing information regarding rotary-wing transitions and contributing its experience in this field. ALPA has no legal affiliation with RTAG and does not endorse, promote, or underwrite RTAG's ventures, products, or services, and ALPA assumes no legal responsibility for information provided by RTAG.

APPENDIX A: AIRLINE TRANSPORT PILOT REQUIREMENTS

This appendix is provided as a handy checklist for meeting ATP and R-ATP aeronautical experience minimums. For more detailed information, please look at 14 CFR 61.153, 61.160 and 61.159.

A person applying for an unrestricted Airline Transport Pilot (ATP) certificate with an airplane category and class must have:

- 1,500 hours total time

Pilots who hold a qualified associate degree, completed 30 hours of aviation or aviation related coursework, and completed flight training as part of an approved Part 141 curriculum may apply for a restricted-ATP at:

- 1,250 hours total time

Pilots who hold a qualified bachelor's degree, completed 60 hours of aviation or aviation-related coursework, and completed flight training as part of an approved Part 141 curriculum may apply for a restricted-ATP at:

- 1,000 hours total time

Pilots who have graduated from military flight school can apply for a restricted-ATP at:

- 750 hours total time

Additionally, all applicants for an ATP certificate must have:

- 200 hours of cross-country flight time
- 100 hours of night flight time
- 50 hours of fixed-wing multiengine time (25 hours of this may be a full flight simulator in a certified training program)
- 75 hours of instrument flight time (actual or simulated)
- 250 hours of airplane pilot-in-command time (PIC), which includes:
 - 100 hours of cross-country flight time PIC
 - 25 hours of night flight time PIC

APPENDIX B: HELPFUL LINKS

Air Line Pilots Association, International

alpa.org

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR)

esgr.mil

Department of Labor (DOL)

dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/userra

Veterans Affairs: GI bill benefits

va.gov/education/about-gi-bill-benefits/how-to-use-benefits/flight-training/

FAA: Scholarships and Grants

faa.gov/education/grants_and_scholarships/aviation

AOPA: Flight School Finder

aopa.org/training-and-safety/learn-to-fly/flight-schools

RTAG: Veterans Aviation Charity

<https://www.rtag.org/>

Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals

<https://obap.org/>

Women in Aviation, International

<https://www.wai.org/>

NGPA

<https://www.ngpa.org/>