

# Become a Pilot in Air Medical Transport

A Guide to Achieving Your Career Goal

## Introduction

Becoming a pilot for an air medical transport company is a rigorous yet rewarding journey that requires a combination of specialized training, certifications, and experience. These pilots play a crucial role in providing rapid medical assistance and transport, often in life-or-death situations, making their qualifications indispensable. The air medical transport industry employs both fixed wing (airplane) and rotor wing (helicopter) pilots.

## Required Training and Certifications

Aviation training happens through flight school. Some flight schools are connected to community colleges and provide degree options. This section focuses on civilian options; information for military options are below. There are two types of flight schools Part 61 and Part 141. Part 141 schools are typically affiliated with a college or university aviation program and follow an FAA outlined training syllabus, while part 61 schools have the freedom to develop their own syllabus and are sometimes less expensive.

### 1. Basic Pilot Training

The journey begins with obtaining a Private Pilot License (PPL). This requires:

- A minimum of 40 flight hours, including 20 hours of flight instruction and 10 hours of solo flight.
- Passing a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) written exam covering aviation knowledge.
- Completing a practical flight test administered by an FAA-certified examiner.

### 2. Advanced Certifications

After obtaining a PPL, pilots should pursue appropriate advanced certifications:

- Instrument Rating (IR): Allows pilots to fly in various weather conditions and solely by reference to instruments. Requires 50 hours of cross-country flight as pilot-in-command and 40 hours of actual or simulated instrument time.

- Commercial Pilot License (CPL): Enables pilots to be compensated for their services. 250 flight hours, including 100 hours as pilot-in-command and 50 hours of cross-country flight.
- Multi-Engine Rating (MER): Essential for flying aircraft with more than one engine. Involves additional flight training and passing a check ride.
- Airline Transport Pilot (ATP) Certification: The highest level of pilot certification, required by most air medical transport companies. Requires 1,500 flight hours, including 500 hours of cross-country flight time, 100 hours of night flight time, and 75 hours of instrument time.

## Financing Training

The cost of pilot training can be substantial with a total cost of over \$100k, but several options can help finance this journey:

- Military Training: Many pilots receive training while in the military.
- GI Bill: Military veterans can use their GI bill to pay for flight training as well as additional costs like housing.
- Federal Student Loans: For students enrolled in accredited flight schools or aviation programs.
- Scholarships: Many aviation organizations and foundations offer scholarships for aspiring pilots. There are some links to organizations that have scholarships below.
- Grants: Federal and state grants may be available for students pursuing aviation careers. These are usually only available to schools and academies that are accredited as Title IV programs.
- Private Loans: Financial institutions offer private loans specifically for flight training.
- Work-Study Programs: Some flight schools offer work-study opportunities, allowing students to work in exchange for flight training credits.

## Opportunities for Youth

Several organizations are designed to provide opportunities for youth to learn to fly. These are excellent places to start.

- [Red Tailed Hawks Flying Club](#) – Based out of Renton, Washington, this flying club is geared towards engaging youth from underrepresented communities.
- [Urban Wings](#) – Based out of Portland. This club is designed to expose urban youth to the world of aviation.

- [Civil Air Patrol Cadet Program](#) – This is an auxiliary of the U.S. Air Force created to prepare youth ages 12-18 for the aerospace industry.

## Military Training

One of the most affordable options for obtaining your pilot's training and gaining experience is through military service. You will receive training at no cost to you, while also earning a salary. While military service may not work for everyone, it is a great option for some.

- To become a pilot in most branches, you must be an officer first. There are several ways to do this:
  - Participate in ROTC at a College While Obtaining a Bachelor's Degree
  - Attend a Military Academy (US Military, Air Force, Coast Guard, or Naval)
  - Attend Officer Training School
  - This Route Still Requires a Bachelor's Degree
- A far less common way is to become a Non-Commissioned Officer in the Army and apply to pilot training.
  - Obtain a Minimum Ranking of Lance Corporal with a recommendation for Corporal
  - Minimum of 4 Years of Service

## Building Flight Hours and Gaining Experience

The air medical industry is not entry-level. It requires a significant amount of experience, but there are ways to gain this needed experience, and the reward is worth it. In general, it is good to have diverse experiences flying. Life Flight Network looks for a varied path of more and more challenging positions, aircraft, flying environments, nature of work, etc. It is important to accumulate as many "hard" hours as you can, meaning night, mountain, and instrument flying.

- **Flight Instructor**
- **Aerial Surveying and Photography**
- **Utility – Logging, Construction, Firefighting**

- Wildlife Management
- Law Enforcement
- Banner Towing and Skydiving Operations
- Fire & Oil Industries
- Volunteering for Humanitarian Missions
- Freight Industry
- Essential Air Service
- Touring/Sightseeing Operations
- Electronic News Gathering
- Agricultural Spraying
- Touring/Sightseeing Operations

## Scholarship Opportunities

[Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association \(AOPA\)](#)

[Whirly Girls – Scholarships for Women in Aviation](#)

[Experimental Aircraft Association \(EAA\)](#)

[UAA Janice K. Barden Scholarship](#)

[Women in Aviation International](#)

[Nintety-Nines Scholarship for Women](#)