



Newsletter of the Skyline Soaring Club for October, 2025

SKYLINES

COFFEE WITH A NEW PILOT - NICOLAS MEEDER

Edited by Marcelo Morichi

1. When did you take your practical test?

A: Sunday, 8/24/2025

2. How long did it last?

A: we started around 9:45am. We finished as it began raining. My student certificate was punched and I was handed my pilot certificate around 1:30pm.

3. Who was the tormentor (Designated Pilot Examiner)?

A: The one and only Piet Barber.

4. What were the flight conditions that day?

A: The air was smooth, but rain and convective activity was predicted to form in the afternoon. The rain came right as we began landing on the last flight.

5. How many flights did you complete? What do you remember most vividly about that flight?

A: We completed two flights.

On the first flight, I briefed my 'passenger' to not touch anything, especially not the yellow ball, and to just enjoy the ride. I made sure he was strapped in. I climbed in, I did my checklist, communicated on 123.0, was pushed out onto two-eight by the ground crew, and hooked up to the tow plane. I closed the canopy, finished my checklist, which included the emergency plan - "...turn to the right and land on one-zero if at or above 200' AGL, 900' MSL." I gave the thumbs up to the wing runner, gave the rudder waggle, and watched for the tow plane's waggle. He wagged and the tow plane's pulling power started the takeoff roll.

"This is it. Here it goes," I thought to myself as my heart rate picked up. I didn't think about the examination, I focused on making it a normal flight, just like I'd do if I was receiving instruction, but now transitioning into a fully rated PIC. Flying is also my happy place, so while I was anxious, I also knew my abilities and prevented second guessing thoughts or worries from intruding.

I called out my emergency plan as we lifted off. "Air speed alive...Land straight... Land overrun...Land in fields... Land in fields to the left...There's 200', 900 MSL...Turn right, land one-zero."

I anticipated the PTT release. We kept climbing. I continued calling out the emergency plan. But then, nothing happened.

"Okay, maybe not this flight," I thought to myself. So, I slowed my emergency call out and began mentally preparing for boxing the wake and slack line recovery.

Then, around 1,000-1,100' MSL, I heard a noise. I watched the tow plane and tow line pull away as the glider decelerated.

"Well," I thought to myself half humorously, "Here's the PTT." We had so much altitude, I wasn't even nervous. I had been calling out my emergency plan, so I began executing it. I turned right and came back around for one-zero. I made my call for final on one-zero, maintained airspeed, and used the spoilers to bring us down into a nice flare and rollout.

We made it to the end of the runway and stopped (Robb Hohmann got an excellent pic of us rolling down the runway after landing). We opened our canopies to air out the flight deck. The ground crew pulled us off and we waited for the tow plane to land.

As we waited, I said to my 'passenger' in a playful tone, "I said not to touch anything, especially the yellow ball! What happened?"

Piet: "I don't know. I'm color blind and there's a dangly ball back here, but it's grey, and I decided to pull it."

We and the ground crew shared a good laugh. It was good to discharge some of the tension.

The second flight, we faced a nimbus cloud headed towards the airport over the Massanutten Mountains further away. However, it would soon be at FRR. So, we went through the take off sequence and up to

3,700' MSL. On the way up, there was an attempted distraction to do the box below 1,500' AGL, but I didn't fall for it. Once above 2,200' MSL, I did high/low tow transitions combined with boxing the wake, and then slack line recovery.

We got off tow and I began the maneuvers. Right as I finished up the maneuvers, I could see the first tendrils of rain fall beginning to make it over the airport. We were next to the fish hatchery, so I slipped and used spoilers to bring us down to about 2,000' for the 45..

I called 45 for two-eight and went through the landing checklist. I added 5 knots to the approach speed. Rain began spattering on the canopy.

On the downwind leg for 28, more rain started streaking over the canopy. I checked the wind sock. It was obscured a little by the streaks of rain on the canopy. In addition to the added approach speed, there was at least a 5 knot tailwind. I verbalized and mentally prepared for a faster than normal ground speed. On base and final I put in my slip to landing. I used dive brakes to bring us down. I transitioned and bled off the airspeed into a flare. As we went into the flare, I closed the dive brakes just slightly to make the landing a little more smooth, but we still ended up touching down just a little sooner and a little harder than I had desired. It was still a great landing, just not perfect. It was my first time landing in rain :).

We stopped at the midfield pull off. We quickly got out and closed the vents to keep rain from getting inside. We were about to get soaked. As we got out, I asked Piet if I got all the maneuvers done.

He said, "Yes, you passed. A little feedback on your landing: when it's wet, don't land on the center line. The tires tend to lock up and skid when on the painted line. When they make contact with pavement while locked up, it can cause a flat spot on the tire."

I chuckled inside and was slightly bewildered. First, I was shocked that I passed and was metabolizing that. Secondly, the one time I'd think getting the centerline mattered, it would've been better to stay just to the side of it, haha. And, it was a confusing way to find out I had completed my check-ride...or so I thought.

They sent two gators down. One to pick Piet up and the other to tow the glider. I walked 321K back in the rain and pondered how anticlimactic it felt to find out I had passed.

So, when I made it back to the FBO, I was still a little unsure if Piet was serious or not. So, I waited, and struck up a conversation with my wife. People stood around. Nothing happened...so, I kept talking as we waited for the rain to subside.

Then, the ADO asked if I needed the glider for another flight. I said, "No, it's your glider. I passed all of the maneuvers." The shock on everyone's face was comical.

"What!?" They said, "Congratulations!" And they shook my hand, haha.

Then, Piet came out and punched holes in my student certificate and handed me my temporary pilot certificate. It began to sink in. I had just achieved a lifelong dream! I couldn't have done it without the support of the club, instructors, and my friends and family.

Providentially, the three instructors who played major roles in helping me were at the airfield for this big day. I made sure I got a picture with all three of them: Ron Wagner, John Noss, and Piet Barber. It meant a lot to me. It was an awesome day, but not without its danger, bewilderment, and glory. It ended happily and was made all the more by overcoming the stress and challenge of the test.

Thank you all!

6. The knowledge test tends to be something many student pilots procrastinate on. What's your helpful advice for them?

A:

1. Tactically:

- Get Dauntless software and set a goal for studying. My goal was to do all questions in the battery (845 at that time), 25 questions per day for six days a week. That was the beginning of spring this year. In summer, I upped it to 50 questions per day, six days per week. Then, I narrowed it down to the ones I struggled most with. I did several practiced exams using Dauntless and once I was in the upper 90s consistently, I signed up online for the test. Additionally, Dauntless has a nice feature where you can separate questions you get wrong and correct into "stacks" (Thank you for helping me with that Piet). It also analyzes the knowledge areas you get most incorrect or correct.
- Ask an instructor if it's time for you to get the knowledge test done. John Noss asked me one day what was between me and my check ride. That meant a lot and motivated me to start studying harder for the knowledge exam. I interpreted it as the Instructors considered I was ready to prepare for the big test.

2. Strategically:

- Create a vision: Create a mental picture of the future day you are handed your pilot certificate. Picture the moment vividly and how great that will feel to shake the hand of your examiner as you receive it. Have several times throughout the week that you connect with this, especially on the days you don't feel like studying. That's how I kept myself motivated. Each time I opened Dauntless and began the studying process, I'd think about how important it was for me to learn this to become an excellent pilot. I also thought about making the CFIs proud and that motivated me.
- Know yourself. How do you like to study? For me, analytical reading isn't pleasant. I'm naturally talented at sports, but reading and comprehension is not a natural mode for me to learn, unless I'm reading a story or interacting with something. I work REALLY hard at analytical reading and comprehension. So, I went to the library after work, created a comfortable, distraction free environment, put on some focus music, sipped on a good drink, and studied, even if it was for an hour or two. That helped a lot. And, give yourself a break sometimes when you need a day off and to let your brain wonder elsewhere. It's good to pace yourself.
- Ask for help. I could not have done it without the support of the club and instructors. For me, asking for help is difficult because it makes me vulnerable. But, it's the only way to grow. I asked several instructors for help, especially on the knowledge areas I struggled with.
- Take responsibility and ownership. Ask for help, but also doing your own work is vitally important. Don't expect or anticipate instructors doing all of the work for you. You'll have to apply yourself, but know when you need help and open yourself up and ask for help.

- To the younger students, it's a heavy weight to consider becoming a PIC (something Ron talked a lot to me about). You're in your teens and not quite yet a full fledged, legally responsible adult. So, look at gliding as a sort of initiation into adulthood. One of the ways you'll get there is by having older men (i.e. CFIGs) helping to initiate you into taking ownership and responsibility for commanding an aircraft. So, befriend the CFIGs. Find ones you like and gel with. Ask them questions and for help. Embrace the process of becoming an adult and taking responsibility for your learning and desired future. It's a growth process. You don't become one instantly and you'll fail along the way. Sometimes I still feel like I'm figuring out adulthood.

7. Who was your first passenger after you became a pilot?

A: My lovely, supportive wife, Kate, whom I couldn't have achieved this without. She was there for the sleep deprived nights as I prepped for the check ride, stressing over studying and what I knew or thought I didn't. Her friendship, words, reassurance, and reminding me who I was, and why I wanted this were invaluable pieces. She requested that she be my first passenger. It was a dream come true for us both...and thank you Chris Wuerker for playing "Take My Breathe Away" (Top Gun's love song) on your phone as Kate and I were pushed onto 28 for launch.

8. What is your most memorable flight since you became a pilot?

A: Well, I'll never forget my check-ride or the one right after with my wife. I'll cherish these memories forever.

9. What are your goals as a glider pilot for the next two years?

A: I haven't decided. I'm first going to have fun, enjoy, and celebrate my achievement. I'll explore different aspects of soaring and aviation and see which ones really peak my interest. Cross country sounds risky, which feels fun to me. Aerobatics are also an interest. I'd like to see what competitions are like and what I'd have to become to participate. I definitely want to experience flying up to 10,000' or higher in wave. I also hope to get some ridge soaring in this fall. So, my goal is to explore, learn, and have fun. Then I'll decide which area I want to focus on.

10. If you met with Nick when he started his flight lessons, what advice would you give him?

A: It is not advice, but instead, a question: What story will you live out? Any good story has a complication, a tragedy, a setback, or something that could threaten the protagonist from a good ending. The challenges the protagonist faces reveal where he/she is weak or flawed and must become someone more with the help of a guide and others. You must become someone more than who you are. Will you let the inevitable challenges, disappointments, failures, and negative experiences cause you to shrink away as you have in the past, or, will you grow and allow your flaws and shortcoming to shape your character for the better? All good protagonists do. You must struggle with your own flaws and the forces that come against you. But you must persevere, because you desire to live out an embodied gospel, and you are loved by people who know you well.

11. What are the two things that Skyline Soaring Club does well in developing new pilots? What is the one thing that could be improved?

A: I think my stories speak for themselves as to what the club does well for developing new pilots. For improvements, my thought goes to long term strategy. Front Royal continues to grow. It may become

necessary to find a place of our own as FRR gets busier. I could foresee a future improvement where SSC has its own field and doesn't have to wait for traffic to push out, etc.

Thank you's:

I want to thank Rob Jacobsen for taking me on my first guest flight back in 2023. That was my introduction to it and I think we got up to 7,000 feet.

I thank Rufus Decker for taking me on my first fast flight.

I thank Ron Wagner for believing in my ability, seeing my potential, and helping me the whole way to my check ride.

I thank John Noss for his wisdom and instruction. Without it, I would not have overcome my fear of smashing into the ground during the transition and flare phases of landing. You're quite humble, yet a great pilot. I liked looking on Flight Radar and seeing the endless trails of NG flying around FRR's vicinity. And thank you for challenging and teaching me for the check ride prep.

I thank Piet Barber for his amazing instruction and showing me how much fun gliding can be while being competitive and excellent. And thank you for sending me your notes on weather and airspace. Your notes made it fun and easier to understand. I thank you for the PPL-G certificate!

I thank Joel Hugh for his instruction, encyclopedic knowledge, and showing me how to take care of and repair ropes.

I thank Joe Lingavitch because he signed off for me to solo back in 2024. He also helped me with my transitional phase from final to flare.

I thank Brian Clark for pausing between instructional flights to debrief and get to know my personality.

I thank Uwe for showing me what steep turns really are, for telling his stories about glider competitions, and about the crazy maneuvers they'll do at a competition. Uwe tends to be quiet, but he's a likable guy who knows a lot about gliding. I enjoyed getting to know you, Uwe.

George Hazelrigg - your excitement to teach about aerodynamics and anything related to aviation is delightful. Your stories and instruction were always a pleasure to receive and listen to when you're at the airfield. Thank you for instructing me on adverse yaw for the FAST flight. Thanks for the instruction on cross country flying for the C badge. Thank you for the prep material for the check ride.

Chris Norris - Thank you for showing me that my emergency plan needed to take into consideration the current conditions, not just default to landing on 10 once above 900' MSL. I was amazed to witness we could do a low, close to the airport, modified pattern for 28, with a strong downwind tail wind, after a high PTT.

Mike Osmer - thank you for our conversation back in 2023 at the Bealton Flying Circus. Without your engagement and willingness to share your stories as an ATP, I wouldn't have signed up for the club.

Thank you to all of the duty crews who helped push and make ops happen!

Thank you to my wife, my dad, my family, and friends.

Now, my Oscars acceptance speech has ended. :)



A GREAT JULY 2025 FLIGHT ON THE RIDGE

Andrew McGowan

In late July, the combination of gusty crosswind conditions and Piet Barber gave me a great opportunity to experience a memorable flight along the ridge south of Signal Knob. We spent much of our time above the North Fork Shenandoah River. It was a great experience that anyone should jump at.

How it started. I came out to Front Royal on a clear day with forecasted winds of about 7-8 knots from the west, with gusts. Several checks of the KFRR webcam in the morning showed few club members flying. I arrived around 1230 only to find the sustained winds and crosswind gusts a little sportier than anticipated and just outside my comfort zone. In the periphery, however, I could see Piet had QQ partially prepped to fly, but his invited guest was a no-show. Piet was looking for potential passengers when he spotted me not flying. He enlisted me in helping assemble his ship. That assembly apparently included a flight along the ridge as the forecast promised ridge lift.



This is where my apprehension grew. With Piet's reputation for finding lift anywhere, "Tiny Tank McGowan" did not want to be the cause of an early return. That said, by the time we were ready, it was 2pm and I figured it could only be a three-hour flight. At this point I was all in. I received my safety brief, a parachute, and overview of QQ.

Piet was great about explaining everything and I was soon at ease. The sky was clear and suddenly I was less a pilot and more an observer. Once airborne and sitting in the front seat, I had the rare opportunity to observe the world around me in a way that can't when PIC. The terrain below and sky above were both distracting beauties. It was the kind of day that reminded me why I became a pilot. Beyond that, searching the world below was a great area familiarization - a rare opportunity to examine distances, potential landout sites, the scary basin between the two ridges, Burner Field (both the grass airstrip and hangar were visible from the ridge), the Wal-Mart in Woodstock, Shenandoah North Fork, and the Muse Vineyards my wife and I had visited (four stars).

All of this preoccupation outside canopy made me quiet, which Piet may have interpreted as air sickness. Realizing this, I made an effort to be more of a conversationalist. Soon we were talking about everything.

Unfortunately, the ridge was not working as well as forecast. The prevailing wind was not hitting the ridge at 90 degrees and created only weak ridge at lower altitudes. The ridge lift was strongest near Riverbend Airstrip, and even with that Piet had to alternate between thermalling and running the ridge. Piet pointed-out the Riverbend airstrip several times, as well as another field near the river where he landed out once. It was great to hear decades worth of experience about all of these places.

Over several hours it was a delightful to experience how an experienced glider pilot flies. At this point, I am just over a year into my certified glider pilot journey. I focus on the science of flight. What I experienced in July was more the art of soaring. Piet explained what he was doing and why; it was a great learning experience. It wasn't an instructional flight, but just great to absorb how someone else flies. I'm certainly not at a point where I would venture solo around Signal Knob (if I had my own ship), but it was great to observe how Piet maneuvered QQ through thermals, along the ridge, explaining why he did figure-eight turns away from the ridge, and hear his verbalization of strategy.

After several hours and a setting sun, we returned to KFRR. I thanked Piet for a wonderful experience. Piet and I exchanged emails in the week after the flight. For him it was a "hard-earned 85 points." For me, it was the best learning flight of 2025. Flying with any experienced club pilot about a year after passing the practical exam builds confidence and allows you to recognize skilled airmanship. If you have the chance to do this...do it.

PostScript. After landing at KFRR, I commented to Piet that I thought our proximity to Riverbend Airstrip, repeated mentions of it, and (at times) altitudes of 2500 MSL, gave us a 20% chance of landing out there. He quipped it was more like 50-50.

Thanks for a great experience.



OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS

Ralph Vawter

Imran Akram	10/12
Chris Baughman	10/15
Jonathan Faux	10/30
Rob Jacobsen	10/18
Richard Kitch	10/16
Nick Leonard	10/15
Jonathan Ruwe	10/28
Stephanie Zilora	10/31
Jim Kellett (turning 90!!)	10/14



UPDATE FROM THE SKYLINE SOARING EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Joe Llingeitch

The Skyline Soaring Education Foundation (SSEF) is a non-profit, 501 (c) (3) public charity established in 2010. Our mission is to promote aviation education for youth and young adults by providing the opportunity to participate in the sport of soaring.



The Foundation is distinct, but closely related to Skyline Soaring Club (SSC) and has its own board of directors. Members of the current board are Craig Bendorf (President), Tom Ward (Treasurer), Allison Diaz (Secretary), Ken Ring, Chris Zaboji, and Joe Lingeitch. The primary functions of the SSEF are awarding and administering scholarships, outreach, and fund raising. The SSEF board meets 5-6 times per year – we award scholarships at the beginning of the calendar year based on available funds and qualified applicants.

The SSEF board awards an annual Ryan Trexel Memorial Soaring Scholarship in the amount of \$2500 and regular scholarships in the amount of \$2000 toward soaring flight training. The Trexel scholarship is funded by Ryan's grandfather, Ralph Sharpe, and the regular scholarships are funded by donations from SSC members and others.

Skyline Soaring Club members are generous supporters of the Foundation in terms of their time and monetary donations. In calendar year 2025, we have awarded three scholarships - to recipients Christopher Billups (Trexel), Kobe Kerns, and Anatol Dziadek - with flight training provided by SSC. The SSC Board of Directors provides three SSC membership allocations per year so that scholarship recipients do not need to go through a wait list.

The Foundation is currently looking for new board members and help in designing and updating our website (<http://ssefva.org>). If you are interested in serving, please talk to a SSEF board member.

Thank you members of Skyline Soaring Club – you make flight training happen for our scholarship recipients.



Skyline
Soaring
Club, Inc.
is a

private, 501(c7) non-profit organization, dedicated to the enjoyment and promotion of the sport of soaring. SSC is based at the Front Royal-Warren County, Va. Airport and is an affiliate club of the Soaring Society of America. For information about the club go to www.skylinesoaring.org

Stephanie Zilora - President
Directors
Robert Jacobsen
Carlos Troncoso
Jim Perlmutter
Peter Ross
Erik van Weezendonk
Stephanie Zilora

Keith Hilton - Secretary
Ralph Vawter – Treasurer
Marcelo Morichi – Asst.
Treasurer

Chris Wuerker - Safety
Officer
Tim Moran - Membership
Officer
Shane Neitzey – Chief
Towpilot
John Noss – Chief CFI
Ken Ring - Hangar
Meister
Ertan Tete - Field
Computer Meister
Carlos Troncoso – Chief
Duty Officer
Mike Ash - Duty Roster
Chief
Piet Barber - Webmaster
Brian Clark - Assistant
Webmaster
Jim Kellett - Newsletter
Editor

Evan Dosik - ASK-21
(N321K)
Meister
Rob Jacobsen – Discus
Meister
Steve Paris – Tow Vehicle
Meister
Andrew Neilson –
Towplane Meister
Keith Hilton – ASK-21
Meister
Matt Vosica –
Organizations Liaison
Officer
Cindy Lawyer –
Merchandise Meister