



A Soldier's Adventure

Dave Smith

PIA 2015 Hagerstown Branch Campus, MD
Program Aviation Maintenance Technology (AMT)
Length 16 Months
Employment ... Martin's Famous Pastry Shoppe, Inc.
Position Airframe & Powerplant Technician

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL?

At the time I was working for the Navy as a (civilian) system engineer and I came to realize that I didn't enjoy primarily working behind a desk. I wanted to pursue a career where I could work more with my hands. My lifetime goal is to one day become a missionary pilot overseas. I already have my helicopter license, which I obtained in the Army, so the next step was to obtain an A&P license. Most missionary organizations require that along with flying, you must also be able to repair your own aircraft.

HOW DID YOU DECIDE WHICH CERTIFICATION TO PURSUE?

My goal with going back to school was to obtain an A&P license and how to obtain it in the shortest amount of time. When it came down to it PIA had the best program in my area and I could complete it in 16 months.

HOW DID YOU RESEARCH YOUR MILITARY EDUCATION BENEFITS?

In order to find out what I was eligible for, I contacted my local education benefits office on my base. They were able to give me helpful info about eligibility and how to sign up for benefits. Also, it was very helpful to ask input from other soldiers who used education benefits.



WHAT CERTIFICATION DID YOU EARN?

I earned a certificate in Aviation Maintenance Technology, which resulted in me obtaining a FAA Airframe & Powerplant license (A&P). This gave me the ability to enter a career where I could legally maintain aircraft in the United States.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR CURRENT JOB.

After graduation I entered into an A&P position working for Martin's Famous Pastry Shoppe. They operate five planes used to support their company operations. As I





work as an A&P, my goal is to continue to learn the ins and outs of aviation maintenance. I want to advance my skills so I'm fully prepared to fix an aircraft in an isolated area with limited support. When my obligation with the military ends, my wife and I will, by God's will, transition into a career as missionaries.

WHAT ARE SOME LESSONS LEARNED THAT YOU WOULD SHARE WITH OTHER MILITARY STUDENTS?

Don't wait till it's too late to look into using your military education benefits. Even if you don't use them, take time to understand what is available to you. It's up to you to pursue your dreams and goals, no one else will do it for you. There are many people that can help, but you are the one who will ultimately make things happen.

DID YOU USE THE GI BILL?

I used the Montgomery GI Bill Selected Reserve.

HOW DID YOU COVER THE EXPENSES THAT EXCEEDED YOUR GI BILL?

I applied for every other scholarship I was eligible for. In the end, God was good and I received five extra scholarships. This helped pay another 1/3 of my school expenses. It was a no-brainer to me to apply for scholarships. A scholarship is free money and if you don't apply there's no chance you will ever win one. Apply to any and all that you are eligible for. It takes time and effort, but it's completely worth it if you win.

DID YOU HAVE ANY DIFFICULTY ADJUSTING TO CAMPUS CULTURE?

The biggest adjustment for me was not having a job at the time. Going from working full time and receiving a steady paycheck to going to school and not living on as much money was a big adjustment. When I graduated I was looking forward to working full time again.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER STUDENTS TO HELP THEM ADJUST TO CAMPUS CULTURE?

When you go back to school truly try and better yourself. Don't point your finger and blame others if things are going bad. Forget what others are doing, search yourself and find ways that you can overcome obstacles. You are the only one who stands between you achieving your goals.

WAS IT CHALLENGING ATTENDING CLASSES WITH 18- TO 20-YEAR-OLD CIVILIAN STUDENTS?

It was a learning experience. About half of my classmates were straight out of high school and I could see a difference in their maturity. I always tried to set a good example and help them out where I could.

WOULD YOU RECOMMEND YOUR SCHOOL TO OTHER MILITARY AND VETERAN STUDENTS?

If your goal is to obtain an A&P license I would suggest PIA to other students. PIA has been around for many years and they know how to run their program. They support veterans through education programs.

