

Texas A&M Flying Club

Club members relish thrill of flying

By James A. Johnson

Of The Battalion Staff

If you're tired of the world looking down on you, then perhaps it's time to reverse the situation. Since the mid-1970s, one Texas A&M club has given students and faculty that opportunity.

The Texas A&M Flying Club has kept Aggies flying high for more than 10 years while offering both transportation and a bird's-eye view of the area.

Tom Adair, faculty adviser for the flying club, said the goal of the club is to promote aviation safety while giving students and faculty a diversion from their scholastic endeavors.

Club members buy \$250 refundable shares each semester. Through membership in the club, participants have access to several of the planes at Easterwood Airport whenever they need a getaway or just a chance to relax by taking to the air.

Flying is fun, but, like any other worthwhile activity, it's not free. Adair said that costs depend on how far an individual plans to travel.

For an average member, that could mean flying over Bryan-College Station. But some members find it convenient to use their club share for vacationing overseas. Adair said one member flew as far as Europe and back with his wife, and another member occasionally uses his membership as a round-trip ticket to visit Canada, his homeland.

It's also not unusual to see the club's planes at out-of-town school events, Adair said.

"I've even seen them at Lubbock before," he said.

Adair said students often have "plane-pooled" to minimize traveling expenses. They just hop in a four-seater Cessna 172 and arrive at football games in about one-fourth the time it takes a typical motorist.

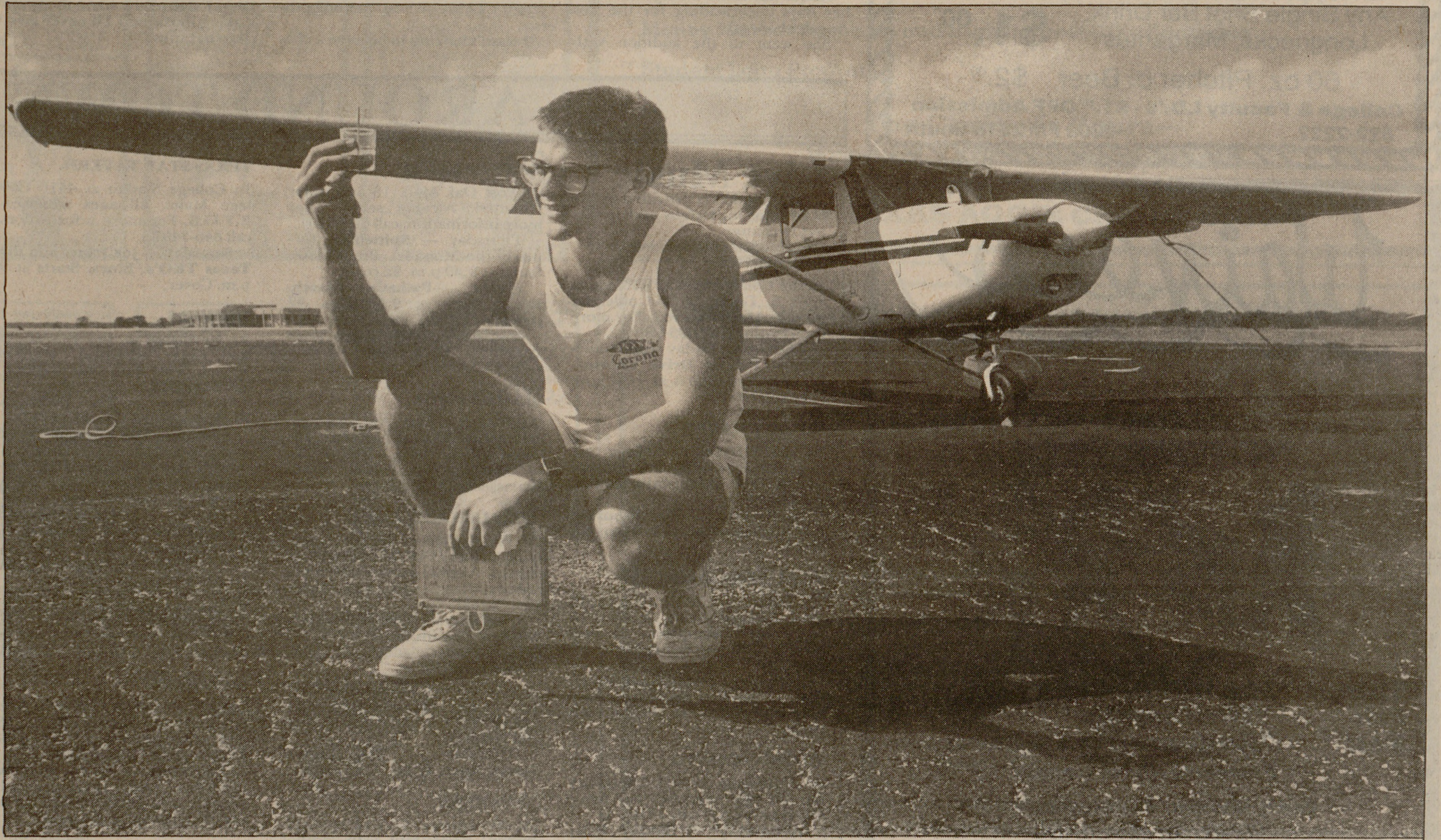
In addition to paying the cost of shares, members also pay for the use of a plane each time they travel. The cost varies depending on the caliber of the aircraft.

The Club maintains three kinds of planes. Cessna 152s, which have smaller engines than other planes, cost \$29 an hour, fly slower and carry two people. Cessna 172s are rented for \$37 an hour, have larger engines, travel up to 125 mph and carry four passengers. The most elaborate plane offered to members is the Mooney Executive, which flies at a speed of up to 160 mph and costs \$55 an hour. Active dues are \$25 per month, while inactive dues are \$2 per month.

Members of the flying club also are responsible for the maintenance and appearance of the planes.

Adair said that 80 percent of the club's plane usage, though, concerns training.

Before renting a plane, each member is required to have a license. A private pilot's license can be



Flying club member Chris Jones examines a fuel sample during a pre-flight check. Fuel is checked for purity, clarity and the presence of pollutants.

earned by completing 25 hours of guided instruction and 25 hours of solo flying.

Adair said safety is mandatory while flying.

"Flying is unforgiving of mistakes," he said.

He added that the biggest barriers to safety are pilots who can't handle weather changes and pilots who don't pay attention to control of an aircraft.

Adair also said it is important to abide by the law when flying. One of the most common aviation laws requires that pilots fly no closer than 500 feet to the ground and no closer than 1,000 feet to the highest obstacle.

"Federal laws are very strict," Adair said.

Before taking off, pilots must thoroughly check out their plane for fuel and for wing deflections.

Weather conditions play an important role in both the smoothness of the trip and in visibility.

"On a clear day, you can see the skyline from Navasota," Adair said.

Chris Jones, a senior from Hous-

ton majoring in building construction, has seen much farther.

"I've seen Lake Livingston many times," Jones recalled.

Jones said he joined the Flying Club because of its convenience.

"The flying schedules are flexible and you can make appointments in advance," he said. "They (planes)

"I've been flying since '53. And I'm still learning."

**— Tom Adair,
Flying club adviser**

are always in excellent condition and gassed up."

Jones said that every once in a while, he'll fly to Galveston to enjoy the beaches.

Some local businessmen also participate in the club.

Tom Gray, who owns a bicycle shop in College Station, has been with the group for only one month, but now finds himself spending more time with airplanes than with bicycles. He said he anticipates his visits to the airport.

"My neighbor has been flying for quite a while, and I figured what better way to join in the fun than to learn about flying in a local organization," Gray said. "I've had a heck of a time, but it's not a poor man's sport."

Students who don't realize that it sometimes helps to know how to fly an airplane before flying one have created problems at Easterwood.

A few years ago, a plane was stolen by a student who thought a free plane ride for his friends would enhance an all-night party. The student apparently forgot (until he approached the runway) that he didn't know how to land. The plane eventually crashed at Easterwood airport, but the "pilot" and his friends sustained only minor bruises.

The incident didn't surprise Adair.

"It never ceases to amaze me how some people will trust anyone," he said while looking at a picture of the incident on the club's bulletin board. "Doing one thing wrong can do you in."

Benefits of membership for some past members didn't end when they graduated. Those who gained extensive experience in the club and earned their license in Easterwood's flying program went on to become professionals. Adair said that three former members are now flying with American Airlines while four others are flying for American Eagle.

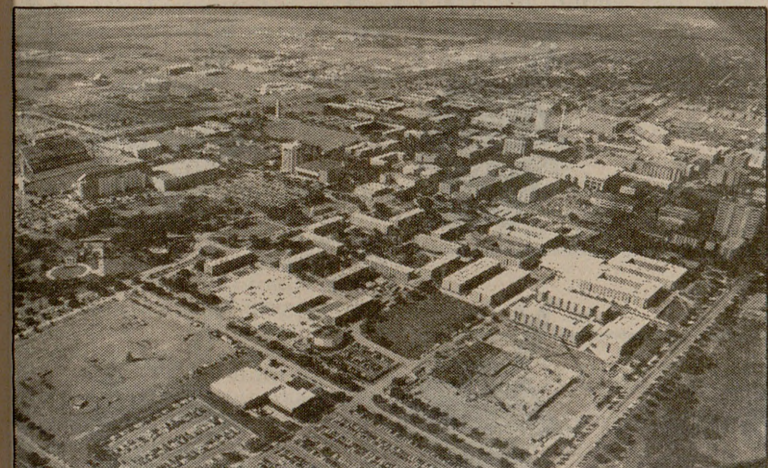
Adair said a pilot never ceases to gain insight from his experiences.

"I've been flying since '53," he said, smiling. "And I'm still learning."

Students who are interested in the flying club can contact club president Bodie Kirby at 822-3788 or attend the club's meetings on the third Tuesday of every month at the clubhouse located at the northeast end of Easterwood Airport. The clubhouse number is 845-3329.



Chris Jones cleans the windshield of a Cessna 152-T during a pre-flight routine.



Views such as this one of the A&M campus are common sights for members of the flying club.