

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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I Just Wanna Fly

Student pilots balance time between airways and classes

By Lyndsey Sage
THE BATTALION

It's not everyday that one flies to another airport just to eat a hamburger. But if you're Steven Parkinson, a senior computer engineering major and licensed pilot, the "\$100 Hamburger," as the practice is called, might not seem so out of the norm.

According to Parkinson, the "\$100 Hamburger" is when the pilot flies to another local airport, eats at the restaurant and then flies back to his home airport for the price of \$100. Parkinson is one of many students who have taken their interest in aviation to a new level by earning their pilot's license.

Parkinson, who was certified in August to fly private planes, said that although he has always been interested in flying, he "never considered going and doing it" until last February when his wife gave him a discovery flight for Valentine's Day. The discovery flight, which is designed to acquaint passengers with the fundamentals of flying, was enough to convince Parkinson to begin training.

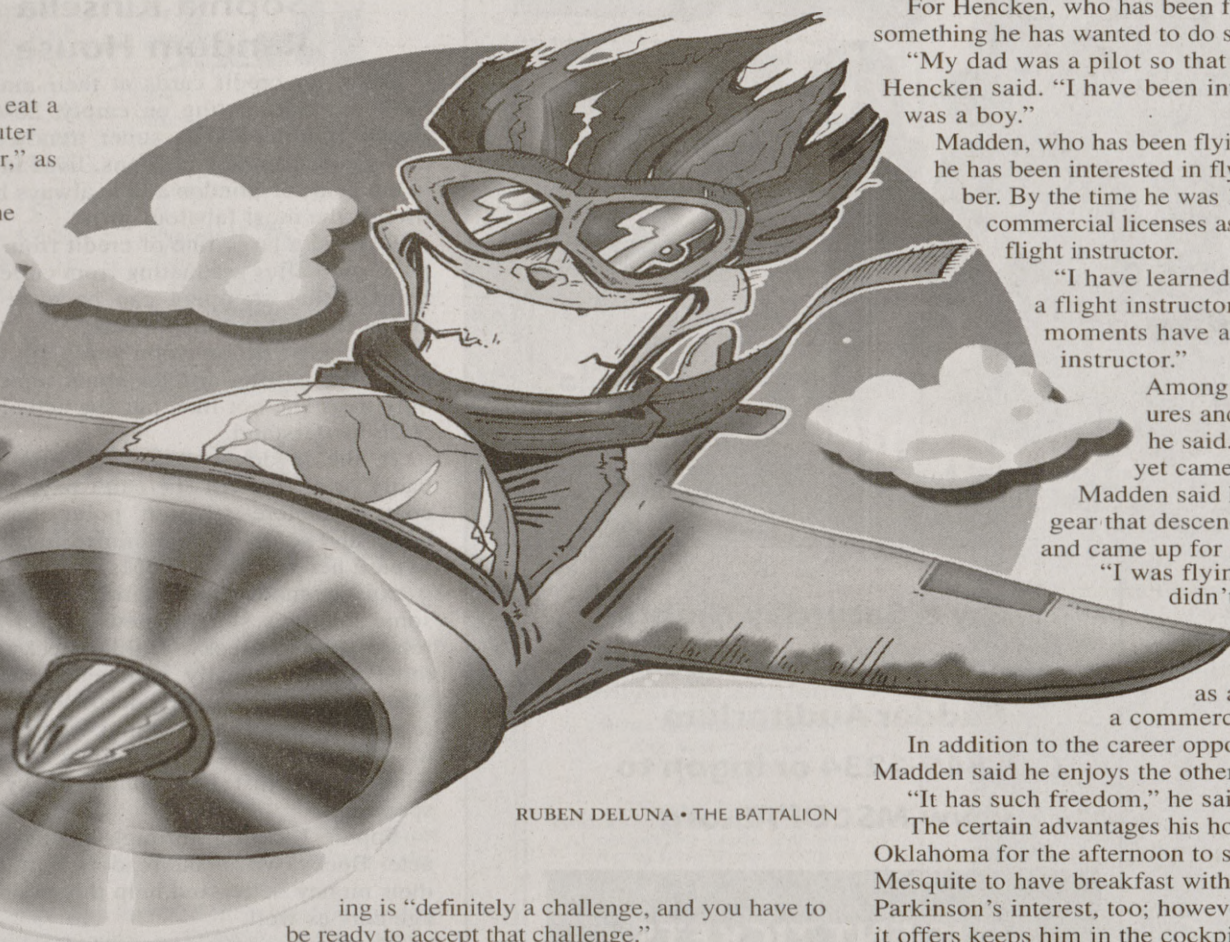
According to Jay Hencken, a senior computer science major and membership coordinator of the Texas A&M Flying Club, students learn to fly onsite at the Easterwood airport in College Station.

"(The club) does instructions all the way from getting your private up through getting your commercial or instructor's certificate," he said. "We contract with instructors to offer training."

The Federal Aviation Administration requires a minimum of 40 hours of flight time and 20 hours of flight instruction, which amount to approximately \$3,000. However, in most cases, more flight experience is needed before certification.

Once all of the flight requirements are complete, which include a certain amount of night and cross-country flying, the potential pilot must pass a flight test with a Certified Flight Instructor and take a written exam before receiving his permit.

Mike Madden, a junior international studies major, said that train-



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ing is "definitely a challenge, and you have to be ready to accept that challenge."

"The first goal is to solo the plane, which is when you go by yourself without the instructor and do some landings by yourself," he said. "Once you get over that, that's when things get rolling."

Students who have completed their training find that taking a plane up for a spin makes for a good release during the hectic weeks of school. While time limits the amount of flight time for many during the school year, Hencken flies twice a week, weather permitting.

For Hencken, who has been flying for 3 1/2 years, flying is something he has wanted to do since childhood.

"My dad was a pilot so that helped me get involved," Hencken said. "I have been interested in flying ever since I was a boy."

Madden, who has been flying since he was 15, also said that he has been interested in flying for as long as he can remember. By the time he was 19, he had earned his private and commercial licenses as well as his certification to be a flight instructor.

"I have learned most about flying through being a flight instructor," he said. "Some of my scariest moments have also been when I was a flight instructor."

Among these experiences are radio failures and engines that are close to failing, he said. However, his scariest experience yet came when he was in the pilot's seat.

Madden said he was flying a plane with landing gear that descended when the plane was in flight and came up for landing.

"I was flying in for a landing, and the gear didn't come down," he said. "I had to hand crank it to come down."

Madden plans to continue flying when he graduates, either as a fighter pilot for the Air Force or a commercial pilot.

In addition to the career opportunities it has opened for him, Madden said he enjoys the other liberties that flying provides.

"It has such freedom," he said. "You can go anywhere." The certain advantages his hobby offers, such as flying to Oklahoma for the afternoon to shop for houses or flying to Mesquite to have breakfast with family, are incentives that draw Parkinson's interest, too; however, Parkinson said the excitement it offers keeps him in the cockpit as well.

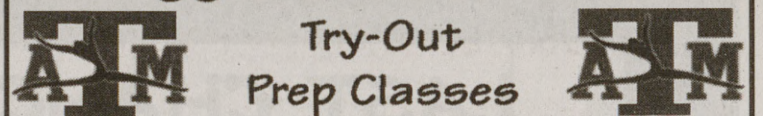
While some of that excitement can be a bit scary, like the time that a deer ran in front of his plane when he was doing touch-and-goes (where the pilot lands and immediately takes off again) and he had to come to a sudden stop, Parkinson said that the "fun environment" is what attracts people to this unique hobby.

"It's something that not many people have done," he said. "And most of the people who do it, they fall in love with it."

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