JOB DESCRIPTION: Army Pilot

Flying aircraft is a coveted career in the United States armed services, and the process to become a military pilot is a competitive one. Most candidates need at least a bachelor’s degree to apply.

The exception is the Army, where the fleet consists mainly of helicopters rather than fixed-wing aircraft. Becoming a helicopter pilot in the Army does not require higher education or prior enlistment.

“We have a program called ‘High School to Flight School’,” said Lisa Eichhorn, a spokeswoman at Fort Rucker in Alabama, where the Army trains its pilot recruits. The program allows high school graduates to apply to become warrant officers, a rank necessary to attend Army Aviation School.

To get into that fast-track program, you must write an essay, get letters of recommendation and meet the same requirements as every other Army flight school candidate.

Here they are, step by step.

**Age Requirement**

You need to be at least 18 years old when you enlist in the Army, and you have to appear before the military board that selects candidates for flight school before turning 33 years old. If you’re 33 or 34, it is possible to get a waiver.

**Citizenship**

You must be a citizen of the United States. If you’re not a citizen, you can apply to become one as soon as you enlist, no matter how long you’ve lived in the U.S. Usually, you’d have to put in five years here as a legal permanent resident to apply. Not in time of war and not under a July 2002 executive order issued by President George W. Bush to expedite the process for members of the military.

**Testing**

If you meet the first two criteria, you’ll face a battery of aptitude tests. You’ll have to take the revised Flight Aptitude Selection Test and earn a score of at least 90. In addition, your general technical score on the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery must be 110 or better.

**Physical Condition**

You’ll have to meet the Army’s height and weight standards. There are also two levels of physicals you must take: the one that every Army recruit takes at a military entrance processing station and an additional Flight Class I physical, to be approved by flight surgeons at Fort Rucker.

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You can’t have vision worse than 20/50 in either eye. To remain on flight status after training, pilots can’t allow their vision to deteriorate beyond 20/400. You can’t be colorblind or have problems with depth perception, either.

All physicals need to be done within 18 months before the selection board meets to weigh your qualifications for helicopter pilot school.

**Training Overview**

If accepted, first you’ll have to attend nine weeks of basic combat training and six weeks of warrant officer candidate school. A warrant officer is a technical expert who specializes in a particular battlefield skill, such as flying choppers. Unlike commissioned officers, they continue working in their specialty, rather than moving up the chain of command.

- **Classroom Instruction:**
  - Once through with warrant officer candidate school, you’ll proceed to the flight training program at Fort Rucker. The program begins with classroom instruction on the intricacies of rotary-winged aircraft. You will learn basic flight physics, flight systems, emergency procedures, and you will learn how to draw and read flight maps.

- **Flying:**
  - The training advances quickly to Warrior Hall, where new pilots learn to fly helicopters in simulators with spider-like metal legs. Once you have 7 ½ hours of simulator time under your belt, you’ll learn combat maneuvers used by Army pilots in trainer TH-67 helicopters. Then you’ll become an expert in one of four helicopters: the OH-58 Kiowa reconnaissance aircraft; the UH-60 Black Hawk, built for medical evacuations and search and rescue missions; the AH-64 Apache, the Army’s primary attack helicopter; or the CH-47 Chinook, a transport chopper. Depending on the type of aircraft you specialize in, you’ll log between 70 and 150 hours of actual flight time before becoming a helicopter pilot.

You will also be taught how to fly with night vision goggles mounted on the front of the flight helmet, which limits your field of vision to 40 degrees.

The entire program typically takes a year, but a new initiative called Flight School XXI began churning out combat-ready chopper pilots in only nine months in October 2005 to meet demands in Iraq and Afghanistan.

**Fort Rucker Flight Training**

It is where officers not only learn to fly their specific Army aircraft, but also to employ aviation assets to assist United States forces. Students usually spend 15–18 months in aviation school, learning a wide range of subjects, and finally graduating with their "wings" or Aviator's Badge. When second lieutenants arrive at Fort Rucker after

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graduating from their commissioning source (USMA, ROTC or OCS) they secure housing, they attend the two month Basic Officer Leadership Course (BOLC B) at Fort Rucker. Upon completion, they join the rest of their classmates, usually junior Warrant Officers, many of whom have previous enlisted experience. Before starting academics, students must complete Dunker training and Army SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape) school. They move on to Junior Officer Professional Development, a short course covering Army basics, from soldier support to instruction on military law. This course is followed by BOLC IIIA, the first half of what was previous called Aviation Branch Officer Basic Course. Classes during this three week course are more specific to the aviation branch, including the aircraft maintenance process, general aviation doctrine, and US and foreign vehicle and aircraft identification. After BOLC IIIA, students transition to Initial Entry Rotary Wing Aeromedical Training, or "aeromed" at the US Army School of Aviation Medicine. Here, they learn how flight affects physiology, toxicology, gravitational forces and other subjects pertaining to flight and the human body. The information taught in these classes remains testable information throughout flight school, and is asked frequently by instructor pilots (IPs).

**Links to more Army Pilot Information click below:**

[Army Regulation 611_110, Selection and Trng of Army Aviation Officers](#)

![Image of Blackhawk Helicopter](#)

Courtesy: US Army