

# Pilot enjoys his life in the sky

BY KATERINA MIHAILIDIS  
OU News Bureau

There is more to being a pilot than just taking off, pressing the autopilot button and landing.

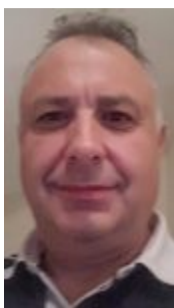
Even when the airplane is on autopilot, the pilot must still monitor everything, said Panagiotis Lezis, a professional pilot for Blue Air in Romania.

With a passion for flying from a young age, Lezis realized his dream, became a pilot and now soars in the skies over Europe.

Born and raised in Athens, Greece, his interest for flying began with building remote control airplanes with his friend as a teenager.

“Since then, I liked the idea of becoming a pilot,” he said.

The idea followed him to Michigan, where he moved at the age of 20. Lezis had started pursuing a degree in computer science at Wayne State University. A semester later, he changed course and began studying piloting in 1987.



Panagiotis  
Lezis

“I better liked the idea of doing something ... how should we say this ... that wouldn’t have me locked up in an office looking at a computer screen,” he said.

In his first flight, Lezis flew a single-engine aircraft with a flight instructor at 3,000 feet. The flight lasted less than 15 minutes. From his experience creating remote controlled airplanes, Lezis understood the mechanics, the physics and the flight theory.

“Not everything was known to me, but I was quite familiar with the subject,” Lezis said.

A few days later he signed up for ground school and it wasn’t long till he started flying. He attended ground school at Oakland Community College and performed most of his first flights at the former Detroit City Airport.

After having done 10 hours of flying with his instructor, Lezis had to perform his first solo, where he had to fly by himself, take off and land three times.

## Getting a license

The three types or stages of piloting licenses are private pilot license, instrument flight rules and commercial license, the latter of which allows pilots to fly multiengine, more-advanced aircrafts.

“To become a professional pilot, you have to go through all three stages,” he said.

The next license is a flight instructor license.

Even with a commercial piloting license, airlines will not hire new pilots because of their insufficient number of hours in flying. Becoming an instructor first allowed Lezis to gain the experience that airlines require.

“There’s a logical progression,” said Christian Lambeth, pilot instructor at Eagle Flight Center, a flight school at Willow Run Airport in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Finishing the commercial license, pilots are at about 250 hours.

Companies require pilots to have at least 1,000 to 1,500 hours of flight experience. Through instructing, pilots can gain flight hours.

Lambeth started flying in 2014. He is a senior at Eastern Michigan University, finishing his piloting schooling. There are other jobs a low-time pilot can do, according to Lambeth.

“In my opinion, instructing is the best one, it teaches you a lot,” he said. “It’s how you learn to be a better pilot.”

## There’s a catch

Pilots are always in communication with ground radars and surrounding planes. They receive and obey instructions on demand, according to Lezis. Instructions may include increasing and decreasing speed or altitude.

Communication with ground radars and other pilots is in English, even in domestic flights.

The universal piloting language was established so that pilots are aware of and can communicate with nearby aircrafts. They can understand instructions from ground radars when flying over different countries.

“For a pilot’s license to be valid, it must be accompanied by a medical certificate,” Lezis said. “You renew it every year.”

The tests don’t end there.

Every six months, pilots have to retake an operational proficiency check and a license proficiency check.

The size of the airport doesn’t necessarily matter for the pilot, Lezis said. Bigger airports mean more facilities but more traffic. Smaller airports mean less traffic, fewer facilities and sometimes difficult landings.

“In execution, landing is harder,” Lezis said, adding that take-offs are more critical because more things can go wrong.

## Lezis’ career

Lezis instructed in the U.S. and in Greece before becoming a commercial pilot in 1994. He performed charter flights from Greece to European countries through Venus Airlines.

Several years and companies later, after having flown for the Macedonian, Cronus and Aegean airlines, Lezis switched to flying private aircrafts through Citation Bravo and Lifeline Aviation. Lezis did medevac and VIP flights for Lifeline Aviation.

He stayed in both companies for 10 years and said that he enjoyed flying private aircrafts the most.

“It’s a more restful operation,” he said. “You fly less hours and the money is better. You also have more free time to have a second job, like I had for about 10 years.”

Airlines limit the number of hours pilots can fly to about 1,000 per year and no more than 100 hours per month, Lezis explained. Pilots working for airlines cannot fly more than six days straight and must have a sufficient resting time in that period.

“It’s really easy to get fatigued in the plane,” Lambeth said. “For the airlines, it’s just a lot of jet lag. It’s got to be rough on the body.”

Pilot instructors don’t have the same limit, according to Lambeth. An instructor can theoretically fly eight hours a day.

Lezis now flies for Blue Air, a Romanian company that has its main base in Bucharest. He flies commercial 737 Boeing aircrafts through scheduled and charter flights.

## Bright future

According to both Lambeth and Lezis, the future for pilots is looking good.

The golden age for pilots, according to Lezis, was from the 1960s through the ’90s. But things have improved in the past six to seven years. Between 2005 and 2025, the demand for pilots is expected to double, he said.

“There’s about to be a massive shortage,” Lambeth agreed.

“A lot of jobs are opening up. The pay is increasing dramatically,” he said. “So, at the moment, becoming a pilot is a good way to go. You’ll make a lot of money and you’re basically guaranteed a job.”

“I haven’t regretted it,” Lezis said.



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