

from the Federal Air Surgeon's
PERSPECTIVE...

BY FRED TILTON, MD

'GOOD HEALTH AND SAFE FLYING'

Hello Everyone

This is my last editorial. In fact, as you read this, I will be retired.

First, I want to commend all of our aviation medical examiners (AMEs) for your dedication and service. Each year, you perform over 400,000 certification examinations for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Office of Aerospace Medicine (OAM).

Some of you are AMEs because you are pilots yourselves; some of you were trained as flight surgeons by the military and wished to continue practicing aerospace medicine as a civilian, and some of you simply enjoy working with people who are reasonably healthy and love what they do.

Regardless of why you have chosen to be an AME, thank you so much for doing so. We could not possibly fulfill our safety mandate without your service, dedication, and aerospace expertise.

Next, I salute all of the OAM employees. Some of you have highly visible jobs such as those who work on medical certification, whereas others may be invisible to the public because your job responsibilities mainly deal with internal FAA operations. No matter what specific OAM position you fill, you are absolutely essential to the accomplishment of our mission, and OAM would fail without you.

Aviation medical examiners and the OAM staff make up the largest, the most complex, and in my opinion, the most effective aerospace medicine team in the world. Working together, you have helped to assure the safety of the national airspace and the people affected by it. Well done!

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as the Federal Air Surgeon for the last eight years. I wish you all the best in the future.

FLY SAFE!

—Fred

Until a permanent replacement is named, Deputy Federal Air Surgeon James R. Frazer, MD, becomes the acting Federal Air Surgeon. —Ed



Dr. Fred Tilton

FAA Photo by Chris Rossi

Dr. Fred Tilton retires from the Office of Aerospace Medicine after 14 years, eight of them as Federal Air Surgeon. His aviation career began with the U.S. Air Force, for which he served 26 years and logged 4,000 hours as a command pilot flying trainers, transports, reconnaissance aircraft, and fighters.

He also spent 11 years in the medical corps. Prior to joining the FAA in 1999, he was the corporate medical director for The Boeing Company. Under his leadership, his department received the American College of Occupational Medicine's prestigious Corporate Health Achievement Award as one of the best industrial medicine programs in the nation.

Before Dr. Tilton became the FAA's Federal Air Surgeon or even went to medical school, he was a pilot in the U.S. Air Force. For three of his 26 years in the service, he flew high-altitude reconnaissance missions.

One of those missions required him to take off from a base near Fairbanks, Alaska, whenever scientists spotted a solar flare, and head for the North Pole, flying 60,000 feet above the earth. His job was to fly his plane through the radiation while onboard instruments recorded



the number of protons (positively charged particles) that rained down from space. The RB-57F aircraft Tilton flew (shown above) was an impressive 66 feet long and 122 feet wide.

"We were concerned about SSTs (supersonic transports)," Tilton said. "We wondered what kind of radiation passengers would get."

In the 1960s, there was much discussion of whether people were safe at high altitudes during periods of particularly intense solar activity. Supersonic transports, civil aircraft designed to carry passengers at speeds greater than that of sound, were first flown commercially by Concorde in 1976. Even today, NASA researchers question how protons might affect the cells of astronauts in deep space.

But 40-plus years ago, Tilton didn't worry about the effects his missions might have on him. If it involved airplanes, he was game.

"It's my first love," he said.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION PROVIDED BY FOCUS FAA