

NYPD's First Female PIC Loves The Challenge

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Growing up in Brookhaven, Long Island, Erin Nolan knew at an early age what she wanted to do when she grew up; she wanted to become a pilot. Her dad was a private pilot and took the family on day trips with rented airplanes from a local flying club. After these exciting and thrilling flights, she was hooked.

"My dad tried as best he could to fly us to a lot of different places, and we had many great flights. I fondly remember going to Hershey Park with my dad in an airplane." Nolan recalled. Her dad remained her mentor and greatest influence as her passion and eagerness for aviation grew. Although her dad was her greatest influence, he almost inadvertently scared her out of flying.

As a young girl, Nolan accompanied her dad in a Cessna 172 for a biennial flight review with an instructor. After a series of stalls, with the stall warning horn blaring, Nolan was nervous. "My dad and the instructor did not explain what would happen, nor did they explain about the stall warning horn. After that flight, I told my dad I would never fly with him again. Our next flight together was after I earned my private pilot certificate and took him for a ride," she said.

Nolan attended Bellport High School on Long Island and then enrolled at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Florida. While attending Embry-Riddle, Erin earned all her airplane ratings, including airplane instructor ratings. She also became a licensed aircraft dispatcher and earned a Bachelor of Science in aeronautical science.

While attending Embry-Riddle, Erin interned at TWA. "The internship was incredible, and I learned a lot about the aviation industry," Nolan remarked. "Although I was grateful for the opportunity, I realized that I could not do airline flying full time. I was looking for other challenges."

A relative working in airborne law enforcement encourage Nolan to explore law enforcement flying. She examined opportunities at the FBI and DEA, as well as local agencies. She stated that law enforcement flying seemed to offer the challenges she desired, as well as a stable career with excellent opportunities outside of flying. Law enforcement flying could combine the best of two worlds that Nolan was seeking: a desire to help people and a desire to fly. "I looked at various opportunities and decided to join the NYPD."

Nolan decided that if she could not get into the NYPD Aviation Unit, she would still have a career with numerous opportunities. "I could still have a great job as a police officer and fly on the outside," she said. But the last job Nolan wanted was a boring desk job.

The NYPD only uses sworn officers as pilots, so Nolan had to take the entrance test and pass the medical, psychological and physical in order to enter the police academy. Six months after entering the NYPD Academy, Erin Nolan was Police Officer Nolan. She was initially assigned as a patrol officer in the 69th Precinct in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn.

Ironically, this area lies right under the approach and departure path for NYPD's helicopters operating at Floyd Bennett Field.

"My assignment to the 69 precinct was great, and I really enjoyed helping people," Nolan remarked. "However, I admit I always had one eye to the sky, especially when an NYPD helicopter flew by." After almost five years on patrol and several interviews, Nolan was accepted into the NYPD Aviation Unit as a helicopter pilot.

Having already earned her private pilot helicopter certificate, Nolan was eager to begin the NYPD helicopter training. "Police flying is unlike any flying I had ever done before. The combination of busy class B airspace, a mission that requires us to be low and the demands of police work make for very challenging flying," she observed.

Nolan earned her commercial and instrument helicopter rating and honed her skills in the unit's Bell Jet Rangers and Agusta A119 patrol helicopter. "Without a doubt, the demands of police flying made me a better pilot. I truly learned what crew resource management means!" she remarked.

In recognition of her accomplishments, Nolan was promoted to detective in early 2007. Although her flying career was progressing, she still wanted to fly the "heavy iron" of the NYPD fleet: the unit's Bell 412EP Search and Rescue (SAR) aircraft. "Like most pilots assigned in the NYPD Aviation Unit, we all hope to one day fly as pilot-in-command of the Bell 412EP," she said.

After being selected for Bell 412 training in 2006, Nolan attended FlightSafety International and completed the NYPD in-house curriculum. In late 2007, she earned her Bell 412 PIC designation. Erin remarked on the training to become a 412 pilot: "I really enjoyed the training. The mission profiles are very diverse including air-sea rescue, tactical insertions, bambi-buckets and executive transport." The huge responsibility of being pilot-in-command of a five-person crew is not lost on Nolan. "The fact that you go from a two-person flight crew to a crew of five is very challenging. There is a lot of teamwork and communication, fortunately, and all the crewmembers are very professional and do not compromise, especially on safety".

Although she didn't know it, Nolan also made NYPD Aviation Unit history. She was the first female NYPD pilot to be designated as PIC in the Bell 412EP. "I never looked at any of my accomplishments from the female perspective. I always felt very proud of them as a pilot."

Detective Nolan now pulls duty in both the patrol aircraft and the Bell 412. She looks forward to the busy upcoming summer season, when water-related assignments increase dramatically.

One water assignment that stands out in Nolan's mind was the rescue of two pilots that had ditched their airplane in the Hudson River. The pilots were flying a single-engine aircraft that lost power. After ditching, they were exposed to extremely cold January river water and were quickly succumbing to hypothermia. The NYPD and United States Coast Guard conducted a joint rescue and recovered both pilots.

Nolan said that all parties involved still keep in touch, and it was a very rewarding rescue. "It is the best of both worlds; helping save a life and flying."

Nolan expects to continue her ascent through the ranks in the future. She is completing her Master of Business Administration degree with a specialization in Aviation Management from Dowling College in spring 2008. "I hope to advance my ratings and fly for the NYPD for many years," notes Nolan. "The flying is always unique and challenging, and I really get a great deal of satisfaction helping people. After my career here, I might explore corporate flying or another aviation challenge." She still works part-time as a freelance airplane CFI and has over 3,000 hours in both

airplanes and helicopters. Whatever the future holds, it is a safe bet that aviation will remain a very large part of her life.