

# I think it's hard getting to work?

■ Try being a pilot who has to make it across the country to start a shift.

By Charles McCarthy  
The Fresno Bee

Just like Madera-to-Fresno highway commuters, Valley residents Dave Cobb, Jim McNab and Bob Boehringer worry that fog might make them late for their regular jobs in New York, Pennsylvania and Texas.

Because all three fly airplanes for a living, that's where their jobs begin. They cross time zones like city blocks.

"I think I watched the football game here Monday night," Cobb said. "Time is a blur."

"He's on New York time, or Copenhagen or Vienna, whatever," wife Carol Cobb said. "Usually, he comes in directly from Europe."

Fog anywhere in Europe or the Middle East can make Cobb, a Delta Airlines pilot, late getting back home to tend the cows on his Madera County ranch.

McNab flies all over the Atlantic seaboard for USAir, then hops back to Fresno in time to roar out over the Pacific Ocean in an Air National Guard F-16 fighter jet.

Boehringer either flies or drives from his Fresno home to Southern California, where he catches an overnight air freighter to Houston via Louisville, Ky.

All three said they commute because that's the only way they can continue to work as pilots. Cobb, 54, and Boehringer, 60, are retired Air National Guard fighter pilots.

McNab, 44, expects to keep on flying jetliners after he quits flying F-16s. Only Boehringer talked about another occupation — maybe learning the real-estate business next year.

Cobb said he started with Pan American in 1967 but hadn't gotten enough seniority for a regular job until 1987, when he finished 18 months as full-time

## Commute: Valley pilots enjoy work challenges

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Air National Guard fighter detachment commander in Ramstein, Germany.

On furlough all those years from Pan American, Cobb flew for smaller airlines and, for a few months, he was chief pilot of short-lived Far West Airlines, based in Fresno. After flying Air Force F-105 fighter-bombers in Vietnam, he also continued his military flying with the Fresno-based Air National Guard, retiring as a colonel in 1992.

Now, fog is the enemy.

"Three or four times a year, I'll have to rent a car in San Francisco or Los Angeles and drive home in the fog," Cobb said. "I'd much rather fly and land in the fog than drive in it."

A love of flying keeps McNab on the move from his home in the Fresno County foothills to the Air Guard base, where he's flown fighter-interceptors since 1975, or to Pittsburgh, Pa., where he continues an airline career that started in 1981.

He planned to spend some of the holiday season at home, sort of.

"I get on the red-eye," he said. "I go to Pittsburgh and work Saturday through Tuesday. And then, Wednesday morning, I go to the Guard. I'll spend three days at the detachment we have down at March Air Force Base [Riverside], sitting alert."

"Then, I get back Christmas Eve and that night, I go back to Pittsburgh and start a trip Christmas Day. It's pretty crazy."

For "Bo" Boehringer, it's just as crazy even though he retired in 1988. After 33 years flying fighters, Boehringer had reached the rank of colonel. With the Air Guard, he'd won the 1982 Top Gun award for his combat flying skills, and after retirement he accepted the opportunity to become the "bad guy" who challenges fighter-interceptor pilots to sharpen their skills.

But Boehringer came out of retirement to fly Lear jets in Fresno with Flight International. Government contract changes found him working for Georgia-based Phoenix Air.

"We go from Jacksonville to Phoenix," Boehringer said. "I guess I just wanted to keep flying."