There are certain definitions relating to solo time, pilot in command (PIC) time, and instruction time, which are explained within the regulation. Pilots are advised that since they alone are responsible for maintaining the log books, knowledge of these definitions is necessary. Reviewing section 61.51 is appropriate. Should questions arise, a pilot should consult with the local Flight Standards District Office (FSDO) for interpretation.

Aircraft Log Books

14 CFR section 91.417 addresses the requirement for aircraft maintenance records (commonly referred to as a log book), and what the record must contain. All time recorded on the aircraft must be reflected in the maintenance record, and it is the responsibility of the owner or operator of the aircraft to ensure that the records are correctly maintained.

Flight time in a balloon is defined as that time beginning when the balloon is first made buoyant and lasts until the balloon is deflated. Balloons do not have a hour meter, as an airplane or other aircraft does, and the pilot must consider the fact that burner activation on inflation would equate to an engine start on an airplane. *[Figure 8-13]*

Figure 8-13. *Aircraft log books or maintenance records are for aircraft time and not for passenger names and flight experiences.*

There are some pilots who do not, for whatever reason, record aircraft time conducted while on tether. This is an incorrect practice. A balloon on tether is in flight, or more precisely, in a flight configuration, and conducting operations under the provisions of part 91. All inflated time of a certificated balloon should be noted in the maintenance records to ensure that inspection times are met.

Crew Responsibilities

The general theory regarding expectations of crew help at landing is if the pilot cannot land the balloon without help, he or she should not be flying. It is not always possible for the chase crew to be at the landing site, so plan to land without assistance.

Most balloon pilots have strong opinions regarding whether or not the crew must be present for a landing. Those who do not see a need for crew to be present have some solid reasons.

- It is not always possible for crew to be there. Traffic, wrong turns, and pilot decisions to land early or fly on can thwart their best efforts.
- With no formal training, enthusiastic crew might interfere with the landing or do the wrong thing and create a problem where none would have existed.
- Crew racing to every potential landing site may drive inconsiderately and even recklessly, endangering everyone on the road and creating a poor impression for ballooning.

Pilots who favor crew being on hand have a number of equally convincing arguments.

- In any branch of aviation, takeoff and landing are the most critical maneuvers. In ballooning, landing is number one. The vast majority of ballooning accidents and injuries occur on landing. A mistake during inflation or launch usually means calling a repair station; burned throat fabric is the leading repair nationwide. A mistake during landing often means calling the insurance agent. One insurance survey found accidents involving bodily injury on hard landings occur twice as often as damage to equipment or even power line strikes. This trend clearly identifies a need to improve safety at the end of every flight.
- The leading factor in accidents is wind. Highly variable surface winds often speed up, slow down, stop, turn, and even go backward. Crew onsite can radio the pilot regarding surface wind speeds and directions prior to landing, which factor into landing at a particular site, if at all.
- Landing approaches put the balloon at its closest to power lines, trees, buildings, and the ground. Potential risks increase, and the closest first responders able to handle the balloon and trouble are most likely to be the crew.
- When flying low or into the sun, a pilot may not see hidden power lines, antennas, or other obstacles which crew can easily spot while assessing the landing site.
- Crew can confirm the quality of a landing site. From a distance, a pilot cannot see what may rule the site out: livestock gathered under a tree, standing water,