



United States Office of Personnel Management

Office of Merit Systems Oversight and Effectiveness
Digest of Significant Classification Decisions and Opinions
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Standard: [Aircraft Operation Series, GS-2181](#) (January 1988)
Factor: Nature and purpose of assignments
Issue: Maintenance test vs. flight test assignments

Identification of the Classification Issue

This issue arose in an Office of Personnel Management region's adjudication of a classification appeal. The appellant contended that his position should be classified as a Flight Test Pilot, GS-2181-13, rather than Maintenance Test Pilot, GS-2181-12, based on performance of functional flight tests on various rotary wing helicopters to determine their airworthiness following approved maintenance or modifications. The appellant noted that the depot installing modifications had no flight testing program and that he performed the flight test on these modified aircraft. The Office of Personnel Management had to determine whether the performance of such flight tests justified the requested title and grade.

Resolution

Flight Test Pilots are primarily involved in rigorous flight testing of the handling characteristics and performance of developmental or substantially modified aircraft to determine airworthiness. Substantial modifications are those which are significant enough to influence the flight characteristics of the aircraft to a pronounced degree.

Maintenance Test Pilots are primarily involved in functional flight tests of aircraft after repair or replacement of worn or damaged components or the addition of approved modifications. Approved modifications are those which have been developed and flight tested on initial aircraft prior to being incorporated into the aircraft being tested.

Flight test assignments at the GS-13 level require evaluation of aircraft operational procedures and mechanical deficiencies to recommend a new procedure or corrective action. Such assignments serve to determine aircraft performance and flight characteristics under critical flight conditions after substantial modifications. These activities develop the "approved" modifications which are then installed and subsequently tested on the additional identical aircraft by GS-12 Maintenance Test Pilots.

The Office of Personnel Management concluded that the appellant's testing of aircraft after approved modifications were made met the criteria for Maintenance Test Pilot, GS-2181-12.