

# DAVID MORRELL

## RAMBO PILOT

David Morrell describes himself as a “Method-actor kind of novelist.” When he’s researching a novel, he’ll often become proficient in the topic to make the details authentic. So in 2008, while researching *The Shimmer*—about the mysterious Marfa Lights in West Texas—he took flying lessons so that he could write knowledgeably about the small aircraft used to track them. He earned a private pilot certificate and now is working on an instrument rating. His 1972 debut novel, *First Blood*, introduced the world to a Vietnam veteran named Rambo. He has written 28 novels, six nonfiction books, and numerous short stories.

### EARLY CHALLENGES...

I have a liberal arts background. In high school, trigonometry and other forms of mathematics gave me a headache. When it came to flying, though, I quickly realized that I needed to expand my mind. The practical application of mathematics soon fascinated me.

### HARDEST LESSONS...

No news here. The various types of landings gave me trouble. I flew the pattern so many times that I literally dreamed about it. Then one day, I surprised myself by flying the airplane rather than thinking about it.

### FAVORITE FLIGHT...

My wife and I watched the John Ford/John Wayne film, *The Searchers*. We were so enchanted by Utah’s Monument Valley that, for my wife’s birthday, I flew her there [from Santa Fe]. Flying over those canyons and spires was breathtaking.

### ADVICE FOR STUDENTS...

Everyone learns at a different rate. Sometimes I got frustrated because I was stuck in a particular part of my training. But eventually I learned to visualize what I needed to do, to fly the lessons in my imagination. If I paused or got confused in my mind, I knew that the same thing would happen in the air. The items that made me pause are what my instructors and I discussed on the ground and then emphasized in flight. 🛩️

**WHO:** David Morrell,  
writer

**TOTAL TIME:** 500 hours

**AIRCRAFT OWNED:**  
Cessna 172

**EXTRA:** Morrell’s novelizations for Rambo (*First Blood Part II*) and *Rambo III* are available as e-books, with revised texts and in-depth introductions. See the website ([www.davidmorrell.net](http://www.davidmorrell.net)).



**PLUS** Read an expanded interview  
with David Morrell.