

Honourable Company Of Air Pilots Gliding Scholarship 2017

Portsmouth Naval Gliding Club

James Blackburn

Receiving the news that I was fortunate enough to have been selected for a Gliding Scholarship was amazing and August quickly came around. It brought an intense week of Gliding at Portsmouth Naval Gliding Club in which I had the pleasure of being with 5 other passionate and enthusiastic students. We had a group of fantastic instructors to coach us through gliding plus the luxury of glorious sunshine everyday. This was a recipe for an amazing week, and that it certainly was!

The week started with meeting our main tutor Dave who introduced us to everyone at the club and showed us around the airfield and grounds. From then on it was full steam ahead into a safety brief and getting to know each other ready for our first day gliding where we would be working as a team. We all stayed together at the clubhouse and became part of a great community by the end of our scholarship.



The first day began at 0645 and that set the precedent for the rest of the week. I would eat breakfast and then get out to the hanger to start learning about setting up and inspecting the gliders before towing them out to the runway. There were a core team of instructors, including Chris, Graham and Ben who came in everyday to take us gliding in the ASK-21 gliders. On the first day to say I was excited, but a bit nervous was an understatement! For my first flight I was aero towed to 2000ft getting a quick go on the controls behind the tug. I then got straight into practising gliding straight at level and making coordinated turns as well as flying the approach into landing. By the time I had touched down I was smiling ear to ear and the team all had the same feeling after their first flight.

As the days flew by our skill level improved and our love for gliding did also. In addition to the gliding we were lucky enough to have a chef to help us cook our meals. This meant we could all eat and talk about the day together at the dinner table. Every evening we would invite guests to our meals, whether it be our instructors, club members and current serving pilots or guests with aviation based careers for us to learn about their journey and what is involved in their dream job.

This made me and the rest of the team feel part of a brilliant community and that was enforced on the third day. A club member, Nigel, came and flew us in his deHavilland Gipsy Moth over Portsmouth Harbour, The Edge of the Isle of Wight and The Spinnaker Tower with the chance to take control and

fly the open cockpit 1930 aircraft. This was honestly fantastic and all of us came down on a high. Living local to the area meant that the chance to take a navigational flight in the Grob 109 self launching motor glider was great. I was able to see my local area and where I would normally go walking with my family and dog.



Gliding above the solent and having a view over the beaches towards the Isle Of Wight with the Harbour to the left was breathtaking and really made every flight special. I was constantly learning and everyone agreed that there was so much to take in. We all thrived in this environment and shared what we had been taught in each flight.

By the end of the week 3 of the team, Stephen, Joe and Will had gone solo which was a fantastic achievement and soon after on the following Wednesday I went up on my own! Returning to the club was something that I had to do as I loved it too much so the following week I spent every gliding day building on what I had learnt and getting fully solo on both the Aerotow and Winch.

The week ended with an awards evening and buffet for all our family to meet our wonderful instructors and special guests including the Mayor, Club Chairman and the Past Master of the Honourable Company Of Air Pilots. I am incredibly thankful to everyone involved in making the Scholarship possible and will carry this experience with me for the rest of my life. It was a truly inspiring week and I would love to help others in the future come together and enjoy the aviation experience I was lucky enough to be a part of at Portsmouth Naval Gliding Club.

Thank You!

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