

Rhys Parker Gliding Scholarship Report

In the summer of 2023, I was one of a lucky few that got the opportunity to spend a week learning how to fly gliders as the Portsmouth Naval Gliding Club in Middle Wallop.

Aviation and aerospace have always been key interests of mine, from a young age I wanted to be a pilot but later realized that I was keener in engineering (not that there was any love lost for flying mind). Working as an engineer in the aviation industry has allowed me to have many incredible experiences with regards to powered flight, however until this course I has no experience with gliding.

The reason I applied for this scholarship was down to the fact that I have never experienced this type of flight before and its something that I felt that I wouldn't be able to stop thinking about until I had experience behind the controls.

During the week I knew that it was something that I had to do more of. The structure of the week was well organized and after the first few launches, we were all working as one team which is incredible when you think none of us really knew anything and the staff and volunteers at PNGC had us working like we were all seasoned veterans. The hands-on way of learning is much easier for me to grasp than anything I could read in a book or flight manual so this I feel really helped with my understanding of the principles of how the aircraft operates.



An additional bonus of the course being residential meant that we could go flying for the whole day, for seven consecutive days. This coupled with the excellent patience and teaching by the instructor allowed me to go from shadowing the controls to doing full circuits, take offs and landings included. Something I did not think I would have been able to achieve. Although the nerve wracking, at the start, after the first couple of launches behind the controls everything sort of just fell into place. Nothing can beat the feeling you get the first time you gain lift in a thermal, circling around and soaring over all the tiny people on the ground. Words cannot describe it.

There are so many more tasks than I was aware of that needed to be done, from helping the instructors to carry out their daily inspections, reading and interpreting the NOTAMS and even sitting at the launch point that I had no idea how to do at the start and by the end was fully competent in. Something like this is something you can only learn on the field; no books could help you learn like experience can. It wasn't just on the airfield either, we were lucky enough to be able to stay at a nearby army base and use all the facilities there and spend the time between meals meeting some incredible people that took time to talk to us about their careers and how they got to where they are in the world.

As good as the flying was, there needs to be a massive thank you to the staff behind the scenes to make it all happen and everyone, including the brilliant team of scholarship winners, with everyone showing a high level of camaraderie and professionalism.

A little extra advice from me to any future scholarship applicants who will read this, or for anyone else who may be interested in what I have to say, make notes, everything happens so quickly when you are in the moment so be sure to jot things down here and there so as not to forget. Try gliding beforehand so you can get used to the sensations and not have to rely on tablets to stop you feeling ill! Brush up on general airfield etiquette and preflight checks to help you get out of the learning phases faster and spend more time learning to fly.