

Bradley Hildreth – Grayburn Scholarship



For as long as I can remember I have always wanted to become a pilot. From a young age, I hounded my father to attend various air shows, fortunately he was also mildly interested. I was first able to influence my own future at age 10. I joined 9th Orpington Air Scouts to satisfy my ambition of flight. It was here that I was able to secure my first flight at Biggin Hill with an instructor in a P28A Piper. This became a defining moment in my life and a career in aviation was hardwired into my mind. It was also with the scouts where I discovered my natural aptitude for flight, I entered a

'Difficult Landings' competition at the Scout Aviation Centre (a Comet 4 Airliner cockpit with a built-in simulator). I was unfortunately delayed getting to the briefing and became the only candidate without a pilot/co-pilot pairing. I was given 5 airports to land, with a joker to play for one landing. I used the joker for what was considered the most difficult, Kai Tak. Having all odds stacked against me I successfully landed at all 5 and won the competition.

As soon as I became eligible to join the ATC at age 12 I joined 1924 Squadron. I became frustrated at the length of time it was taking to complete my First Class exam which would enable me to take part in air experience flights. I sought an alternative and transferred to 2427 Squadron (Biggin Hill). Two months later, I qualified as a First Class Cadet. From here my dreams began to become a reality with more exposure to flying, simulators, inspiring speakers, and aviation in general. I completed air experience flights at RAF Benson and MoD Boscombe Down and following compliments on my flying a simulator, at the SUN 'n FUN Aerospace Expo Air Cadet Camp in Florida, I was awarded the Air Cadet Pilot Scholarship. This was a 2-week course incorporating 12 hours of flight with the aim to bring the candidate to solo circuit standard. I completed this last year at Tayside Aviation in Dundee flying an Aquila A211. I achieved solo standard at the course minimum of 10 hours, with an 'outstanding' post-course report.

Through the Air Cadet staff I was made aware of the Honourable Company of Air Pilots PPL Scholarship. This amazing opportunity to gain my PPL fitted perfectly with my university summer break. I could think of nothing better than the possibility of flying all summer and working towards a PPL. I cannot explain my excitement when I was offered the Grayburn Scholarship and what this meant to me, I was completely overwhelmed! Having surveyed other schools as part of the application process, I chose to complete my PPL at Redhill Aviation Flight Centre, located at Redhill Aerodrome. This became a great choice; their tuition and professionalism were outstanding. On my first flight, I was reminded of what my happy place felt like and that I was pursuing my best career.



The first part of my flying training mainly included familiarisation and general handling, I completed in a shorter amount of time than usual due to my previous flying experience. This led me nicely into solo flight and the truly great feeling that it gives me! We then covered navigation routes with many fascinating views of South-East England, progressing to solo

navigation. During a solo navigation flight, and one I will never forget, I came across two spitfires who gave me a personal formation fly past.

The next step saw me working towards solo cross-country flying with 'land aways' to Lydd and Earls Colne. Flying over the Thames and doing an ATZ penetration through Southend airspace were the best, most exciting and memorable parts. My solo cross-country assessment was postponed due to bad weather, but this somehow made it even better, when I was able to complete it. I flew up to Earls Colne, then after a short break down to Lydd passing through Southend airspace and over the Thames. The final leg from Lydd back up to Redhill.

Before I knew it, I had my Skills Test booked and I was really close to achieving my licence. It is true that time really does fly when you're having fun! After the flight, I was thrilled to hear that I had passed, I was actually a pilot! This day, I will never forget either.

The journey through the scholarship was challenging at times but genuinely the best time of my life so far and I will always remember the summer of 2022. I would like to thank everyone at the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, their Past Master, Michael Grayburn and Redhill Aviation for making this possible.

I am currently in my final year studying towards a Mathematics and Statistics degree. I have embarked on a military pathway, flying and training with the University Air Squadron. I am, however, keeping my options open and looking to further my civilian career with commercial flying or scholarships opportunities.

