

Lucas Stephens

The David Hockings Gliding Scholarship

Sponsored by PM Dorothy Saul-Pooley



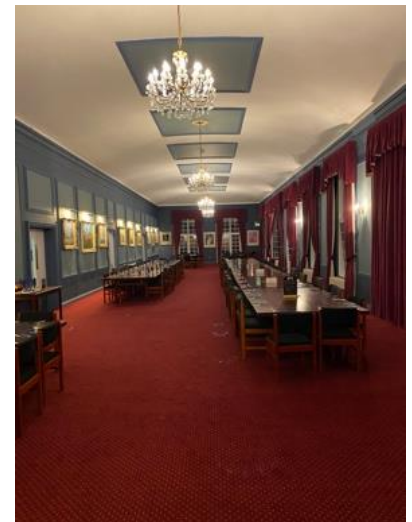
The week at PNGC, both the flying component and experience of military life, living at Middle Wallop Army Air Corps Base, provided invaluable real-life insight into the world of military aviation I aspire to join.

Having concluded the course, normal life has felt incredibly tame and boring in contrast to the thrill of flying that I have experienced during the course.

Structure of the Course

For the duration of the week, our group of 9 HCAP scholars were joined by a further 7 scholars from the Fleet Air Arm Officer's Association.

Each day was an early start, with the alarm sounding at 06:00 each morning. We would then walk across the base to be seated in the dining hall of the officers' mess by 07:00.



Arriving at the Airfield in the morning, we would de-rig and clean the gliders, complete the daily inspection (DI), and tow the gliders out to the launch point using the gators.



Our syndicate of four students were assigned an aircraft and two instructors whom we flew with for the week. Both of which in our case were ex-RAF and ex-Navy respectively.

We aimed to start flying by 09:00 and stop flying at around 17:00, which allowed for up to four flights each day, doing two flights each and then rotating within our group. By the end of the week, I had accumulated 21 flights and over four hours of flying time.

For the first two days, we flew out of Middle Wallop, where I had the opportunity to fly in the high-performance Duo Discus, in addition to practising touch and goes in a Grob-109 motor glider. For the rest of the week, we flew K21s out of Upavon, with an incredible view of Salisbury Plain surrounding the airfield.

Each day of flying was followed by a talk in the evening after dinner. This included an AH-64 Apache Pilot, a British Airways 777 pilot, and my instructor Nobby, who gave the most engaging talk about his life as an ex-Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician (underwater bomb disposal technician). We all greatly benefitted from the knowledge and guidance of course guests and instructors with careers in both military and commercial aviation, the majority of whom established their careers through their

foundation in gliding. Most notably, we were fortunate to be joined by a Supermarine Seafire pilot who joined us for our final afternoon of flying.

Skills You Will Learn During the Course

A very significant part of the course, almost more so than the flying, is taking responsibility for different ground tasks and contributing to the operation of the club for that week. Almost all gliding clubs are run exclusively by unpaid volunteer members, so we were equally responsible for the success of each day's flying.



We were taught how to do the DI (The 'daily inspection' done each morning before flying), launch the gliders (hooking them onto the winch and running the wing), retrieve the gliders using the gators, as well as logging each flight at the launch point.

Whilst one team member would be flying, the rest of the team had to fulfil one of these roles. As soon as one of our team landed, it would be our responsibility to retrieve the glider asap, to get it back to the launch point.

Despite an incredible Aerobatics flight from 4,000 ft - I couldn't register what was happening, but this apparently consisted of 3 consecutive loops, a quarter cloverleaf, a few hump-tee-dumptees, a 4g 360-degree turn close to 90

degrees bank, and a few vertical stalls (pulling the nose straight up to the sky, killing off all speed and simply just letting the aircraft fall onto its back – my most notable flight highlighted the unbelievable skill of my instructor Nobby. Pitching the nose down straight down at the ground from 2,000ft, we pulled up at around 30ft off the ground at 140 knots. We (He) flew a low-level 'beat up' through a low-lying valley next to the airfield, which was below the actual height of the airfield.

Exiting the gulley run, he performed a sharp and steeply banked switchback turn no more than 50-60ft off the ground, we then 'landed long' right up to the other end of the airfield.

When the glider had stopped rolling, it had ended up parked in an area no bigger than half a tennis court in the exact parking spot where our glider was stored that morning. I find it quite hard to try and articulate exactly how impressive and skilful this was, so if you are fortunate to be instructed by Nobby for your scholarship, ask him to try and do this again, and do a better job of giving it justice in your report.

What I've Gained from the Scholarship

Concluding the course, all of us were now flying all stages of each flight, with one Fleet Air Arm scholar going solo with no prior experience.

The course allowed me to develop a strong foundation in manual flying skills, finishing the week 3 launches away from going solo.

I will continue to build upon this foundation by progressing my gliding training at Lasham Airfield, facilitated by my employment, for the foreseeable future. I am also looking forward to pursuing powered flying through the Bristol UAS, where the airmanship developed from gliding will greatly benefit me.

This scholarship has certainly provided me the opportunity to reach one step closer to my goal, allowing me to get my foot in the door of an aviation career.



I feel incredibly fortunate for both HCAP and Dorothy Saul-Pooley affording me such a valuable foundation for my intended career as a pilot.

I almost didn't apply for this scholarship, automatically assuming that my chances of being successful were unlikely. I could have easily justified some excuse for not risking applying, but this approach clearly holds very little value if it were to prevent me from experiencing this course, so apply!

Advice having completed the Scholarship:

Learn the pre-flight checks:

The instructors do talk you through and teach you the pre-flight checks from the first time you get in the aircraft, however, this did take several days for people to learn properly. We were asked to learn these checks as homework during the course, so familiarising yourself with them in advance will make a good first impression with your instructor, whilst also maximising the opportunity to get off the ground and into the air ASAP.

- Pre-flight checks: <https://www.midlandgliding.club/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Pre-Flight-Checks.pdf>

Try Gliding Beforehand:

- I found it valuable to develop the basic manual flying skills prior to starting the course. It shows good initiative if you are able to self-fund gliding beforehand, which will reflect well on your application and for the interview process. You will also know whether you suffer from nausea. I flew multiple times prior to the scholarship before I got used to the sensation. I had to cut many of my self-funded flights short due to feeling sick, but doing a few flights before the course meant this no longer affected me.

Making Notes:

- It is also helpful to make brief summary notes on your phone for what you are learning during the course. This means you can refresh your memory if you pick up flying again a few weeks after the course.

One of the very low-level fly-bys on the final day of the course

