



RACHEL BURTON

Air Pilots Benevolent Fund Gliding Scholarship

Earlier this year, following my application and Zoom interview, I feel very grateful to have been awarded a week-long gliding scholarship by the Honourable Company of Air Pilots. I was allocated a week in August down at Portsmouth Naval Gliding Centre (PNGC). Prior to this week, I had only sat in a glider a handful of times as an Air Cadet, and was quite nervous at the thought of flying one myself. But when the day came, I packed my car with much more stuff than I needed and drove myself down to Middle Wallop.

The first evening consisted of dinner in the Army Air Corps Officer's Mess at Middle Wallop, where we were lucky enough to enjoy both breakfast and evening meals throughout the whole week. We got the chance to meet other students on the course, had our introductory briefings to set us up for the week, and were divided into initial syndicates (which later changed). After a quick chat at the bar, we went back across the road to our accommodation in the transit block at Middle Wallop and got some good rest ready for the week to come.

The first full day was a relatively slow and relaxed day. After breakfast, we changed out of our smart mess dress into our airfield clothes, and shared lifts to the airfield; a routine we quickly became acquainted with. For the first two days, we launched at Middle Wallop airfield, where PNGC usually fly from. We had an initial brief regarding safety, and then were thrown straight in with some basics about effects of controls in the glider. After the briefing, we weighed up with our parachutes and figured out our individual needs for ballast while flying. With this in mind, a few of us were then reallocated into a new syndicate, me included, and assigned a glider. I flew in N7 for the duration of the week.



After a quick introduction to the glider and its instruments, I did not volunteer myself to fly first. This meant I began learning the other tasks on the ground that played a huge part in being able to launch. This included moving the gliders and positioning them correctly at the launch point, fetching winch cables, holding canopies, attaching cables, and holding wings during the launch. It became evident as the week progressed just how important these tasks and efficiency are to help everyone make the most of the day and maximise the number of launches.

During the day, I managed to get three launches, with two soaring flights. I quickly grasped the basics thanks to my previous flying experience, so had a change of instructor who was allowed to teach me a bit more. The weather was excellent so finding thermals wasn't particularly difficult, and I thoroughly enjoyed all my flights! It was a perfect first day. To finish it off we had a barbecue at the club, and it was also very nice when everyone wished me happy birthday with some champagne! We then followed this up with some card games back at the Officer's Mess.



The next day we remained at Middle Wallop airfield, but launching from a different point, which resulted in quite a long walk towing the gliders across the airfield. We just tried to get into a good



rhythm of collecting gliders efficiently ready to launch again. I managed one soaring flight around Middle Wallop in the glider that day, but I did also get a flight in a motor glider. It was an interesting experience, and I found the controls quite difficult to handle as the aircraft really lagged behind the movement of the control column. But it was a somewhat homely feeling flying with an engine!

The second day was also when I began flying with my instructor who would remain with me for the rest of the week. I definitely progressed the most with him and really appreciated his way of teaching. We gelled well, and it had a very positive impact on my flying and my confidence in the glider.

Furthermore, at the end of day two, I was chosen from my syndicate to fly our glider cross country to Upavon airfield, where we launched from for the remainder of the week. I was ecstatic, and it was a thrilling experience indeed. We were towed up by the club tug plane, and across to Upavon. My instructor gave me control for a short amount of time, which was honestly terrifying, and turned out to be very difficult trying to stay at the right height behind the tug plane while turbulence was throwing us around. But I mostly just watched out of the window as it was pretty mesmerising. Upon landing at Upavon, we cleaned and covered the gliders, and then got a lift back to the mess for dinner.

That evening was also the first of four different talks that were held in the Officer's Mess after dinner. We had talks from a British Airways pilot who was also involved in Speedbird recruitment, two Royal Navy aircrew, and a member of the Army Air Corps. All the talks were interesting, and all very inspirational. They highlighted the various different ways of accessing aviation careers and gave information on how to do this and what you could achieve from those careers.

The rest of the week was flown from Upavon airfield, which was a further drive and a smaller airfield, but it was nice to have our own space. We would start the day by prepping the gliders, followed by a theory brief. Starting with effects of controls all the way to stalling and spinning, which were then signed off in our logbooks. We did our best to get as many flights a day as we could, and our efficiency in ground tasks improved massively.





It was great fun driving the club vehicles around the airfield when collecting and towing gliders, and the competition to get in the driving seat was fierce! I also went down to see the winch, and the retrieval of the winch cables which was interesting. I managed to sign off a good chunk of my logbook, and the final few days were mostly about perfecting my landings in preparation for going solo as I was flying the circuit by myself.

Although, we were very disappointed to learn, a few days into the course, that we would not be able to go solo. They explained this was due to a self-declaration medical that was required, but it could take up to ten days to come through. Ever hopeful, I put in my application for this medical, as suggested by my instructor, and hoped all week it might come through in time. Unfortunately, the medical came through at 1400hrs on our last day, about the same time as we finished flying for the week. I was gutted, however, I walk away with the knowledge that my instructor would have sent me solo if it were possible, and also that I put in a great effort throughout the week to get to that point. I am proud of how much I learnt and achieved regardless.

Our final day was bittersweet; the week didn't seem short, but still we seemed to be saying



goodbyes all too soon. We flew in the morning, and I had one launch, a soaring flight, and my best landing yet. Other than a suspicious noise on launch (which turned out to be some loose tape on the elevators) it was a perfect final flight for the week.

We had a small ceremony where we were presented with our certificates. We gave cards and thank you gifts to our instructors, and the course organisers, and then took plenty of photos before making the journey home.

I am so grateful to everyone involved in the week; instructors, volunteer club members, returning scholars, and the other students. The week wouldn't have been possible without them. I also want to say a huge thank you to HCAP for granting me a place on this course. I have learnt so much and gained so much motivation and inspiration in so many ways. I am excited to see what my aviation future holds!