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RAFCT Gliding Scholarship Report - 2025

While there are many thrills and joys you'll come across in life, you'd be hard pressed to find anything more fulfilling than strapping yourself behind the controls of a glider and launching into the infinite blue sky to gain a view of the world only angels saw for the vast majority of human existence. The Honourable Company of Air Pilots (HCAP) and Portsmouth Naval Gliding Club (PNCG) gave me memories that I'll hold dear to my heart until my final day on this earth. Until then, let me tell you about my weeklong gliding scholarship at Army Aviation Centre Middle Wallop.



Only one word can describe my emotions arriving at the place, anticipation. I arrived at the base, said my goodbyes to my grandparents that drove me, and was greeted by soldiers with rifles who handed me my pass. I arrived in the officers' social area where fellow scholars slowly trickled in, quietly sitting down, and it was clear I wasn't the only one feeling nervous. But the club members and helpers were extremely welcoming and prodded us to open up about ourselves and ambitions. Upon hearing a few scholars share military ambitions similar to mine, it was inevitable I ended up in the bar with them later that night.

I'll admit I was extremely nervous owing to a previous experience I had where I was too frightened to complete a winch launch. The chairman had found this out and when he called me to talk to me I was extremely apprehensive to discuss it, however now I'm forever grateful for his advice. He told me to communicate with my scholars and instructors as the best way to combat my nerves. He later told me "There's another Jack I'm not seeing." before shaking my hand and wishing me luck. The following day his advice helped tremendously.

Speaking of, that day will forever be etched into my memory. When my nerves began to creep up when I saw the gliders for the first time, I'd talk to my scholars, "God, it feels so real now. . !" When we sorted ourselves into syndicates, the instructor asked "who's nervous?" then glanced at me and immediately went "I know you are, I can see it in your eyes!". When I talked to him further about my worries, it was decided then I'd be first in that syndicate to fly.

The instructor was brilliant. As I steel myself forward and strapped in, he talked me through the pre-flight checks, instruments, controls, and the launch as a glider in front of us rocketed into the air. Though there was no time to dwell on my fears, by the time he finished talking it was time to close the canopy. I watched the cable slowly take up slack. Next we are at 60 knots and airborne. "WWOWWW!!!!" I screamed as we suddenly rocketed forward then went into the climb. The launch wasn't even finished when I started telling myself "My god! I did it! I did it!". Then there was a bang and the cable released, leaving me and the instructor suspended in the atmosphere just below the cloud base. What a thrill!



For the next few days I practised coordinated turns. My first instructor was extremely impressed with my turns, secretly telling me I was the best in my syndicate. However my next instructor complained I was pirouetting too much on the horizon during my first attempt at thermalling to gain height. That day I learnt that bad flights did happen and I ended the day slightly demoralised as others moved onto circuit planning. So Monday I marched up to my new instructor for the day and told him I wanted to move onto something more advanced. After a flight with him showing me around a circuit,

next launch I called off because I felt sick. *I'm not getting anywhere today!* I thought.

However this was a blessing in disguise as this resulted in me finding the instructor I'd stay with for the rest of the course, John. After an hour passed I felt better and told him the same thing to the previous instructor, I want to move on from simply practising turns. So he showed me around stalls and steep stalls. If during the first demonstration the instructor was careful not to make me feel sick, I like to imagine I was starting to make the instructor feel sick by the end of the flight. I threw my glider into a steep stall and recovered, and did it again and again. It was so fun I couldn't get enough of it!

Then he briefed me on the circuit. The high key point, low-key point, final approach and landing,



which he did not brief me fully on. I took control during the second part of the launch keeping my wings level, then the cable released. I knew I needed to enter the circuit at 800 feet, but I was at 1,400 feet! I asked my instructor what to do and he just told me to fly around for a bit. For the first time ever the glider was truly within my control. I chose to fly around a nearby village, periodically checking my altitude and the position of the airfield to ensure I could make it back. I entered the circuit at the right height and completed the circuit entirely on my own albeit needing to work on my speed. Then the instructor coached me through a landing and as we touched down he said "You landed it before I even briefed you!" My confidence was sky high as we exited the aircraft

and debriefed. Next flight he laughed "shall we brief you on landings?" The following landings I performed were actually worse, undershooting then bouncing and all sorts. However, I ended the course being able to take off, recover from stalls, and land (mostly) on my own. The last day of the course was beautiful and I climbed to 3,000 feet using thermals on my own.

But it wasn't over when you were on the ground. After long days at the airfield launching and flying gliders, we got brilliant talks from people in aviation. First was from a girl called Philippa who was helping out at the airfield. She was only 1 year older than me but sporting a Royal Navy uniform. She is training to become an observer and gave a brilliant talk on Royal Navy basic training. Another was from a pilot called Austin, flying for Draken and giving his experience and advice, and Emri, a club member who was studying for his ATPL. Austin said he had submitted hundreds and hundreds of CV's before landing the job and had an extremely inspiring story. The coolest ones were from a Major in the Army flying Apache helicopters and a Royal Navy Lieutenant Commander who ended up flying Eurofighter Typhoons. It was a privilege to listen to their stories and gain invaluable insight into the job I want to do.

However it was the bar that was easily one of the funnest places to be after flying. Why? It was Austin offering to sit down with me and give his life advice and experience, Philippa who talked to me when my morale was low, telling me not to take the hammerings from grumpy old instructors personally but as motivation to do better. It was Emri who always made us laugh (and bought us drinks!) and my fellow scholars which I laughed and talked with until late at night. "Forget the flying, this is what your scholarship is about, finding out who you are." Austin had told me. The scholarship really was worth it for the people, let alone the flying.



The scholarship was an absolute joy. If you want to get into aviation, apply for this scholarship. rewrite your application, loads. Get people to proofread it. Practise interview questions you think they'll ask. And when you feel anxious strapping into the glider for the first time, steel yourself forward. Soon you'll be waiting for your next flight, in disbelief you once had reservations about flying. Thank you HCAP, PNCG, instructors, helpers, RAFCT, and fellow scholars. You gave me the time of my life.