

Oliver Perkins The Duke Scholarship



Aviation has been a huge part of my life for as long as I can remember, and I have always taken every opportunity possible to get myself up in the air.

Hence, I was thrilled to learn of my successful application for the Honourable Company of Air Pilots' Gliding Scholarship. Prior to the scholarship, I had been fortunate enough to have experienced two glider winch launches - experiences that stick in my mind as being far more adrenaline inducing than I had initially expected from the supposedly tranquil sport of gliding.

When I arrived at Middle Wallop on the Friday this was at the forefront of my mind as I met with the other students who I was to spend the week with. I was immediately impressed with the standard of both my fellow students from HCAP and those from the Fleet Air Arm Officers' Association Gliding Scholarship who we would be sharing our experience with at PNGC.

The first two days of gliding at Middle Wallop began with an impromptu bacon roll in the bus and the first launches of the week. It quickly became apparent that many of the instructors were ex-military and they worked hard to coordinate an efficient launch point so we could get as many flights as possible in the week. Being flung off a winch again was fantastic fun, (although slightly unnerving at first) and it was refreshing to do a form of flying that allowed time to enjoy the view and appreciate the sensation of dangling from two wings in mid-air. The standard of instruction was also very good and I quickly learnt just how much rudder you need to use to get a glider to turn! On the second day I was also fortunate to get a couple of flight in the Duo Discus, a high- performance glider with upgraded avionics.

The remaining five days would be spent at Upavon airfield where we continued our training and began to refine our efficient launch point. Unfortunately, on a few of the days our time flying was curtailed due to poor weather and in one instance, A400M parachute trials taking place nearby on Salisbury Plain. Sadly on one day, the weather stopped flying altogether, but we made the most of it with a tour around one of the Army's brand-new Apaches and a look around the Museum of Army Flying. As we neared the end of the week, we began practicing winch failures in run up to solo - something quite alarming to watch from the ground but all essential training for first solo. At Upavon we also had the opportunity to fly in a Grob 109 motor glider - a very unique experience and not something that I had ever done before.

Aside from the flying, we massively bonded as a group – not only between students, but also with the instructors and the Navy holding officers looking after us throughout the week. The evenings were also an opportunity to hear from various people from the aviation world, including a Concorde pilot, various



Navy pilots and an Army pilot. As someone applying to the Fleet Air Arm, I found it especially convenient to be sharing the course with other Navy applicants and to listen to the interesting guest speakers in the evening.



In summary, I expected a week of gliding and ended up with not only a week of gliding but also a fantastic opportunity to make new friends, learn about my desired career path and benefit from the wealth of knowledge amongst the instructors. I also found gliding to be even more enjoyable than I anticipated, have since flown at my local club and, as I write this, am hoping (weather permitting) to go back to PNGC this weekend to fly solo. Thank you to Dave, Nigel, HCAP, James and Hal, and all the instructors at PNGC who gave up their time for this fantastic experience. If you're thinking about applying, it's an experience that I would strongly recommend and most definitely not one to miss.