

Henry Hodgson Air Pilots Gliding Scholarship



As a first-time glider, I wasn't sure what to expect. Despite a burning enthusiasm for aviation and a basic idea from a handbook I read in the weeks previous, I was nervous on the journey up to Midland Gliding Club. Not only because of the forecast weather but also because of the intimidating ridge that I suspected would become my greatest ally and worst enemy in the coming days.

Once I arrived at the clubhouse, my anxieties could not have evaporated quicker. The staff and instructors were an absolutely fantastic, friendly group of people to be around and learn from. Soon after arriving, I met with Harry and Toby (two of the three fellow scholarship winners) with Ceran arriving later; all the way from the Isle of Man! Although we had never met each other before the course, we instantly clicked as a team.



Our instructor at one point described how we 'acted like we had been friends for years'.

The accommodation itself was very comfortable with plenty of room for both Harry and I, plus our belongings. Down a short corridor, you entered the dining area featuring large panoramic windows that gifted us stunning views from the top of the ridge. The clubhouse was also equipped with a briefing room, plenty of board games, and a gliding simulator where we could practise in the evenings.



Every day would begin with a cooked breakfast at 0800 followed by a briefing. The briefing would consist of a run-through of the weather, followed by the airfield configuration/landing circuit (high key, low key). You would then talk through your personal objectives with your instructor so you knew what you were going to do before you even got into a glider.

Next, came a very expensive game of Tetris known as unpacking the hangar, as well as this, every glider needed a battery, parachute and pre-flight checks.

Once ready, the gliding would commence: 70% of the

time on the airfield is not flying, but on the ground retrieving and launching other people. This requires a constant level of awareness especially next to cables.

Once it was my turn to go up, secured my parachute and clambered in. There is no better feeling in gliding than your first winch, an experience that was both exhilarating and nerve-racking. During the flight the instructors let you fly for pretty much the entire flight, (only taking over for demonstrations,





tricky situations, takeoffs and landings) this meant that you were learning and practising from the get-go which I loved.

To end the day, gliders would be packed away in another game of high-risk Tetris, and then a swift debrief would commence where our instructor would sign off our progress in our logbook. Once that was all over, you would then sit and eat dinner where you could chat with your fellow course mates (not just the other scholars) and eat some delicious food. At this point we were free to do as we pleased, this ranged from practice on the sim to games of

Cheat.

The days to follow followed the same pattern with cooked breakfast, lunch and dinner being ordered in the morning/ day before so that there was minimal wait for it to be cooked. You were given around £30 a day to spend on your meals, which left us with plenty to get snacks and drinks.

By some miracle, we had dodged the forecast treacherous weather and been able to fly on every single day of the course, although some days were better than others. On the days when soaring was impossible and the flights were cut down to 4 min each, we were able to get multiple launches (3 to 4). This came as a blessing for me as I was able to witness and learn from multiple launches and approaches/landings. This resulted in me progressing enough to be able to land on my own by day five.

Another highlight from my gliding experience was on day 3. This particular day was due to be miserable with bad ridge lift but by the time it came to my launch, the sun had poked out enough to allow me to catch a thermal to cloud base (nearly 2000ft), a flight I couldn't have repeated on any of the other days.

By day five I was very surprised at how far I had come from near to no experience flying to landing a glider on my own, this would have been impossible without the excellent instructing from Alan and Dave throughout the week. I was also surprised at how quickly my fellow scholars and I had gotten on together and worked well as a team with the other course mates. This was largely down to how helpful and friendly everyone at Midland Gliding Club was,



meaning that by the end of the course, we were working as a unit on the airfield and as a family in the evenings.

This was truly one of the most exciting weeks of my life and will forever stick with me as my first proper taste of aviation in my future career.

Thank you, Midland Gliding Club and most importantly The Honourable Company Of Air Pilots for such an amazing opportunity.



