



THE HONOURABLE COMPANY
OF AIR PILOTS
incorporating Air Navigators



Air BP Sterling Scholarship Report

Max Ellison

Ever since I was young I have always had a love for aviation. Both of my parents are retired from aviation along with my grandad who was a flying doctor and my great grandad who was an Royal Flying Corps pilot, so all of this family background influenced me from a young age. When I was a youngster, I spent my summers attending aviation summer camps at my local aviation museum, which laid the foundations for my passion for flight. Fast forward 10 years I began volunteering at this museum to where I now work part-time today.

I first heard of the Honorable Company of Air Pilots through a past Air BP Sterling scholar who is now a classmate of mine in university. Living in the west of Ireland, opportunities to fly are very limited so after learning of the scholarship programme I was eager to apply. After applying in 2019 and 2020 without making it to the interview stage, I was determined to try again in 2021. What felt like hundreds of drafts later, I finally submitted my application. I remember the excitement when I heard I had been offered an interview. After years of applying I felt like I was finally in with a shot of winning a scholarship. After weeks of preparation I completed my interview and was satisfied, no matter the outcome, I had tried the best I could.

A week or so later, sat in my room completing one of my online university exams I saw an email come through from the Air Pilots. I couldn't resist the temptation to open it. After reading the first few lines, I finally got to the word I had waited three years to read, "congratulations". Describing how I felt in that moment would be impossible, all I can say is it's a feeling that I hope everyone feels at least once in their life, I'll cherish that moment forever. Filled with excitement and disbelief I burst out of the room to tell my mum the news, I couldn't believe it!

I started my training in early June at Redhill Aviation Flight Centre on the Cessna 152. Moving from Ireland to London on my own was a massive change for me which included a two hour commute to and from the airfield. While living on my own was tough, away from friends and family, it allowed me to commit every moment of my time towards studying. Over the next three months my days consisted of commuting or flying all day followed by studying and planning in the evenings.

Training started on basic air work where my previous 10 hours flying the Tecnam P2002JF really helped. Covering stalls and incipient spins was one of the more enjoyable elements of air work. I can remember the smile on my face when my instructor Harry first demonstrated to me the recovery from a fully developed spin. Watching the world go round as our altitude dropped was a surreal sensation you could only experience in aviation. To keep me on my toes, when returning to the airfield, without any notice Harry would pull the carb heat and close the throttle followed by saying "engine failure". PFL's were always exciting as it required focus and critical thinking under pressure, all under the time constraint of gravity. After developing competency in stalls, EFATO's and PFL's it was time to move onto circuits.

Starting circuits was a highly anticipated part of the course for me as I knew the next step big step, my first solo flight, was slowly becoming a reality. As I gained proficiency in circuits I was introduced to glide, flapless and short field landings, crucial skills before going solo. On July 5th I completed my first solo. Independence Day may have been the day before, but on that day I never felt so free in my life. I felt nervous before my flight but once in the cockpit it all became standard procedure. After landing I remember glancing to my right just to verify my disbelief that I really was on my own.



After completing all of the necessary solo circuit hours it was time to move onto navigation, map reading and advanced handling skills. Flight planning finally allowed me to get a real sense of what flying as pilot in command would be like. For the first time I was now in charge of where we flew and how we navigated around controlled airspace.

Some of my favourite moments over the summer were seeing Spitfires and Hurricanes out of Biggin Hill. In particular, while solo, completing a zone transit over Southend, hearing ATC contact me "Golf Yankee Lima, traffic ahead same level 12 o'clock, Spitfire!" is something I'll never forget. After carrying out the appropriate manoeuvre to the right, I saw the Spitfire race past me on my port side only a couple hundred yards away. Truth be told I was a very happy lad when I remembered by pure luck my GoPro was pointing that way!



You'll have to take my word for it that that's a Spitfire...

In preparation for my qualifying cross country (QXC) I had to demonstrate my ability to land solo at two different airports, in this case Earles Colne, a grass airstrip in Essex and Lydd Airport, on the coast of southern Kent. After completing solo landaways to Lydd and Earls Colne I was ready for my QXC. This 170nm trip took me over the Thames estuary and Tilbury Docks to Earles Colne before doing a zone transit over Southend, enroute to Lydd then finally returning to Redhill. After a long day of brilliant flying I was happy to get back to Redhill and stretch my legs. This was the last major step before my skills test.



To address any gaps in my knowledge that may have gone unnoticed I had a mock skills test. After mostly positive feedback I was sent on my final solo brush up flight, where I practised my air work

and navigational skills enroute to the white cliffs of Dover. On the return leg I covered stalls and steep turns before returning to Redhill to practise some glide, flapless and short field landings. Seeing the cliffs from the air was something I always wanted to do, so passing them on my final solo flight was a really special feeling. The weather was beautiful, the cliffs magnificent and the sea along the coast was a bright turquoise. Two jet skis were cruising below me and on any other occasion I would have been totally jealous of them. On this occasion however, as I watched them from 1000ft, days before achieving my dream of completing my PPL, I wouldn't have changed were I was for the world!



The day of my skills test finally came. I thought I would be nervous but I was anything but. After months of continuous flying and studying, in my mind the skills test was just any other flight. By chance, the flight I had booked home to Ireland was the morning after my test. This served me as some gentle encouragement to pass the test and get home for the first time in three months. My examiner Lawrence was great at making me feel at ease, making the flight feel no different to any other. During the flight, in the distance we watched a Spitfire pull straight up into the vertical, as if a final farewell before it disappeared into the clouds. As we taxied off the runway for the final time I was told I had passed the test. Talking to Lawrence afterwards, putting a cherry on the cake he told me my flying was of a very high standard! After passing the test, I was filled with mixed emotions. I had finally completed a lifelong ambition, on the other hand I knew the best summer of my life had finally ended. While the application for my licence took longer than expected, it goes without saying I was delighted when two months later it arrived in the post!



I would like to thank the Air Pilots and all of the team at Redhill Aviation, in particular my brilliant instructor Harry, for giving me an unforgettable summer. After three years of applying for this PPL scholarship and hundreds of drafts I can comfortably say it was worth every second of waiting! Thanks to the Air Pilots' scholarship programme and Air BP's generous funding, I have had the best year of my life, kickstarting my career and giving me opportunities I wouldn't get anywhere else! While the commitment needed to complete the PPL course should not be underestimated, the sense of achievement is immeasurable. Not only is the support the Air Pilots give



throughout training second to none, but also the opportunities they provide after completing the PPL should not be overlooked. Now being a member of the Air Pilots, I have the opportunity to be a part of the Young Air Pilots (YAPs). Already I have had the chance to attend the annual Trophies and Awards ceremony in the Guildhall London and two separate excursions to the RAF Club. It goes without saying that the Honorable Company of Air Pilots is a fabulous organisation offering unmatched opportunities into the world of aviation. I would thoroughly recommend anyone with a passion for flight to apply for this scholarship programme, you may not get it on the first try but as someone once told me, you make your own luck!