



Air Pilots Gliding Scholarship Report 2025

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Air Pilots Flying Club Scholarship Report:

When I first arrived at AAC Middle Wallop on Friday for the Portsmouth Naval Gliding Club course, I wasn't entirely sure what to expect. I knew it would be a week of gliding, learning, and challenge, but I didn't realise just how much it would give me. Not only in terms of flying skills, but also in structure, resilience, and a sense of well-being that I hadn't experienced in a long time.

From the moment I checked in, the welcome was warm. The gliding club members and fellow students quickly felt like a community, and the routine of military life in the mess gave everything a grounding rhythm. That structure, mealtimes, briefings, flights, and socialising, was one of the things that really supported my mental health throughout the week. It gave each day a clear purpose, which helped me focus and enjoy every moment.

Friday was mainly about arrivals, introductions, and getting oriented. I met the rest of the group, had my first look around the facilities, and we all shared a meal together. There was a quiet excitement in the air, each of us keen to get airborne the next day.

Saturday was when the real adventure began. I was placed into my syndicate and assigned to the Duo Discus, a beautiful and powerful two-seat glider. Because of my height, the K21s weren't suitable, so the Duo was a perfect fit.

My instructor, Ken, was patient, encouraging, and immediately helped me feel at ease. That first winch launch was nothing short of exhilarating! The acceleration pinned me back in the seat, and I was very much taken back by the rate of climb. I especially enjoyed the comparison of rudders between powered and gliders, with far more rudder input than I had ever experienced in powered flight required in the glider.

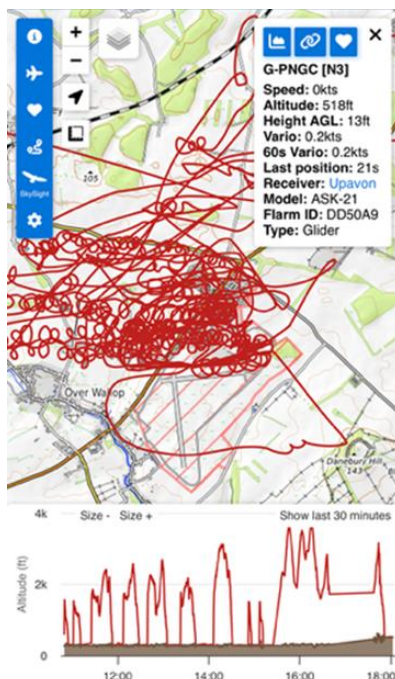


Later that day, I was also lucky enough to have a trial flight in the Grob 109B motor glider. This was particularly meaningful because I will soon be starting my training with the British Airways Speedbird Pilot Academy, and the experience connected beautifully with that next step. Flying with Lee, a British Airways pilot, was inspirational in itself. The Grob 109B was a challenge, quite different from what I had flown before, but it was a joy to handle, and it gave me a deeper appreciation of the range of aircraft used in training.



From Sunday onwards, each day followed a rhythm that I came to deeply value. Mornings started early, and I quickly joined others in forming an informal 6 am run club. Getting up, running as a group in the cool air before breakfast, and pushing ourselves physically set such a positive tone for the day. The sense of camaraderie and the discipline of sticking to it each morning did wonders for my mental health. It was grounding, energising, and gave me a sense of achievement even before stepping into the cockpit.

The flying itself was a mixture of steady progress and steep learning curves. Thermalling was something I was eager to try, though at first my enthusiasm for tight turns left me feeling a bit airsick. Still, every flight was a chance to absorb more about glider handling, energy management, and situational awareness. The instructors balanced encouragement with honest feedback, which made the learning process both challenging and rewarding.





When the Duo Discus had to return to its home club partway through the week, I was worried I might lose flying opportunities. Instead, the Portsmouth Naval Gliding Club went out of their way to make sure I stayed in the air, and I was given more time in the Grob 109B, this time with Tony, the CFI. Those flights became highlights of the week.

One particular flight turned into a little cross-country adventure. We flew to Thruxton to refuel, then continued over Southampton, speaking to air traffic control and fitting in among other traffic. For me, this wasn't just training, it was a chance to experience the kind of operational flying that professional pilots do every day.



By Thursday, Tony told me that he believed I was ready. The words “you’re going solo now” hit me like a wave of adrenaline. It was surreal, a mix of nerves, pride, and excitement. Being in the aircraft alone, I felt the responsibility settle on my shoulders. The dance in the steps and circuit was familiar, but this time every input was mine. The G109B responded just as it had all week, only now it was truly my aircraft. As I touched down and rolled to a stop, the sense of achievement was overwhelming. Flying solo is one of those milestones you never forget, and I’ll carry that feeling with me for the rest of my life.

To make things more special, my wife was also able to witness me complete 6 circuits solo!





Friday was a day of gratitude and goodbyes. Receiving my certificate was more than just a formal moment, it felt like recognition of how far I had come in just a week. I thought back to that first Friday, when I was uncertain and eager, and compared it to now, confident, more intuned with my flying ability, and feeling healthier and stronger in both body and mind.

The structure of the course, the early mornings, the run club, the flying, the shared meals and evenings with the group, is something I will forever remember.

The Honourable Company of Air Pilots, and the Portsmouth Naval Gliding Club didn't just give me flying experience; they gave me belief in myself, a community to belong to, and memories that will stay with me for life. This was without doubt one of the best weeks I've ever had, and I leave with immense gratitude, determination, and excitement for the future.