

# Starting them young in the ATC



**Foreword by Mick Elborn:** *In the October 2011 issue of General Aviation we brought you the story of Jack Havery, who at the age of 13 got on his bike and went searching for his own way into aviation. In this issue, continuing the theme of how to attract new and younger blood into aviation without breaking the bank, we bring you the story of a young pilot in the Air Training Corps, a perhaps-forgotten aviation gem. Pictures by Bob Girling*



By Andrew Rennie

The Air Training Corps, also known as the Air Cadets, is an organisation for 13-20 year olds. It is not a recruiting organisation for the Services, it's simply for people who have a genuine interest in aviation or the RAF, and it is designed to bring out your potential. Anyone can join, wherever you come from; there are almost 41,000 members in over 1,000 squadrons around the UK. There is a small annual fee; depending on which squadron you join the annual fee is around £90 and is extremely good value. For more information or to find your local squadron go to <http://www.raf.mod.uk/aircadets/>.

The father of the Air Cadets is said to be Air Commodore J A Chamier who retired from service in 1929 at the age of 50. He first formed the ADCC (Air Defence Cadet Corps) in 1938 with the aim of having 200 squadrons and 20,000 cadets in the first three years. The first 50 squadrons would be given the letter F for founder after their squadron number. For example, Leicester was 1F – the first ever – with Watford being 2F. But by the end of just two years there were already over 20,000 cadets and 207 squadrons, so his aims had been met. Camps were being arranged, and RAF flights were also being organised for cadets. With a peak enrolment of 240,000 cadets, the ADCC became the Air Training Corps (ATC) on 5th February 1941. This is still how it is known today.

## Organisation

The UK is split into six regions, and in those regions you have about five wings. Within those wings you have a certain number of squadrons. You have the Commandant Air Cadets, which is currently Air Commodore Barbara Cooper, and each region has a Group Captain in charge of it and each wing has a Wing Commander at its head. Within the squadron you have either a Flight Lieutenant or a Squadron Leader in charge and then a certain number of other officers with the rank of Pilot Officer or Flying Officer. There are also civilian instructors and a civilian committee. Finally there are NCOs (non commissioned officers); some squadrons have adult NCOs and all squadrons will have cadet NCOs – cadets who have proved themselves worthy of promotion. You go from cadet to Corporal to Sergeant to Flight Sergeant and then finally a Cadet Warrant Officer which isn't nearly as common as the others; Corporal is the most common.

**Top: the smile says it all – Andrew Rennie pictured just after his first glider solo**  
**Left: Andrew is promoted to Flight Sergeant, the highest rank open to under-18s**

## Why become an Air Cadet?

One of the very first things you will be asked after joining the air cadets is "so... why do you/did you want to join the Air Cadets". Looking back to when I was 13 I remember my answer was "because I was very interested in aviation, learning to fly and glide", which I got to do very quickly. I flew solo in a glider at 16 and am hoping to go solo in a light aircraft very soon thanks to the Air Cadets Flying Scholarship.

I really liked the idea of the annual camps to Gibraltar and numerous RAF stations. Some people join because they have friends, or know others, who are already Cadets. It wasn't like that for me, I joined as a 13 year old who knew no one and simply really wanted to do it, but some of the new cadets never seem certain of why they actually wanted to join. I've now been a cadet for three and a half years and, as of 25 June 2012, have achieved the rank of Flight Sergeant, the highest rank for anyone under 18.

There is a commitment when joining the Air Cadets. To be an Air Cadet you have to attend two evenings every week, which last two hours, but can vary depending on the Squadron. Occasionally you will be expected to go to charity events to raise money for Help for Heroes or the Benevolent Fund. These usually end up being extremely fun and, personally, I get a



**Above: Andrew at the controls of an ATC Vigilant motor glider**

lot out of it.

By being an Air Cadet the opportunities are endless. You can go flying, gliding, attend outstanding air shows, complete the Duke of Edinburgh's award, BTECs, music, camps abroad, drill, shooting. You can also get scholarships for flying and gliding to get training to solo standard, as I personally have done at 16. You can get numerous extra qualifications including radio qualifications, public services BTEC, aviation studies BTEC, which all cadets

automatically do, or a music BTEC, all of which I have done and enjoyed thoroughly when doing.

I have also recently completed the Qualified Aerospace Instructors course which is a new six-month course allowing me to instruct on the Air Cadet simulators and wind tunnels around the country, and the activity centres. I'm hoping soon to start more shooting and complete the flying scholarship I have in October.

The Air Cadets, a new challenge, a new experience, always something to do... meet some amazing new people, and develop yourself as a leader and a person. A truly amazing thing to do. ■

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