

Careers in Aviation



Flying

Captain Rod Winhall



I spent my whole career working as a professional pilot.

I retired from flying in 2015, my last job being a Senior Training Captain with corporate jet operator NetJets – more about this company later.

My career was unusual for a professional pilot in that I never worked for a 'traditional' airline company. My story provides several examples of flying as a job, but there are many others. Can you think of any?

Air Training Corps
Flying and Gliding
THEN



Chipmunk



Sedbergh

Like many professional pilots, my first experience of handling the controls of an aircraft came during my time as a cadet with 565 Squadron of the Air Training Corps. The Air Training Corps is part of the Royal Air Force, and the cadets wear uniforms very similar to those worn by RAF personnel.

Here are two examples of the types of aircraft I flew. The top picture shows the de Havilland Chipmunk, I got my very first flight in this aircraft, a fully aerobatic basic trainer. The bottom shows the Sedbergh glider – nicknamed the 'Sled'. At one time, the Air Cadet Organisation operated the world's largest fleet of gliders, and older cadets had the opportunity to be trained to fly them to solo standard. My gliding course was at Sherbourne in Elmet flying the Kirby Cadet III, more like a flying brick than a glider.

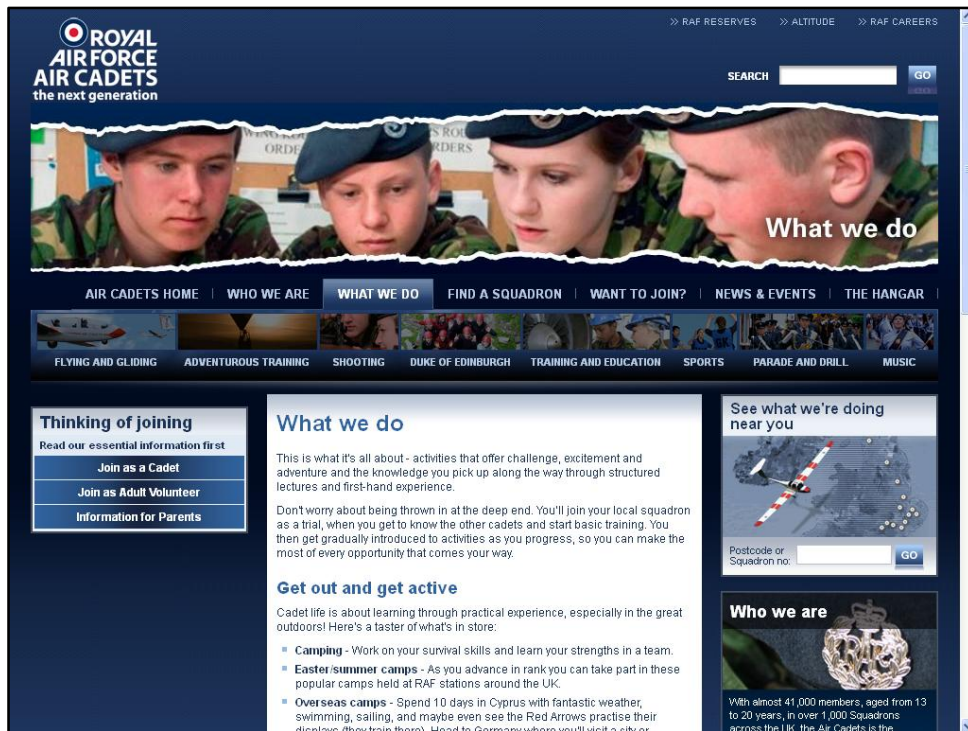
Both of these aircraft types have long been retired from Air Cadet service, but...

Air Training Corps
Flying and Gliding
NOW



....the Air Training Corps is still very much in existence. These days, its aircraft are (top) the Grob Tutor, fully aerobatic basic trainer, with gliding training undertaken on (below) the Grob Viking.

The Air Training Corps is not just about flying and gliding though...



...its many activities prepare you for life in general and equip you with many of the personal qualities which would be advantageous when seeking employment as a pilot.

Membership of the Air Training Corps is open to young people aged 12 upwards. There is no commitment to joining the RAF at the end of your service (current maximum age 20), although many cadets choose to do so.

If you are interested in a career in aviation, particularly as a pilot, it is well worth considering the Air Training Corps to give early training and experience. It is a lot of fun too!

More information, including how to find your local squadron can be found at the Air Cadets website – www.aircadets.org.

Royal Air Force Basic Flying Training



On leaving school in 1962, I applied to join the Royal Air Force and was selected for pilot training. After basic military training, and achieving a commission, I was introduced to flying jet engine aircraft like these Jet Provosts at RAF Acklington near Newcastle.

After 8hrs 20 minutes of training I was allowed to fly solo, and a year later was awarded the coveted Royal Air Force “wings” (to be worn on my uniform) in July 1965.

I could now fly an aeroplane, now I had to learn to use it as a military system....



This stage of military flying training is termed Advanced Flying Training.

Initially I was streamed to become a front-line fighter pilot and flew fast jet trainers like the Folland Gnat shown at the top at RAF Valley in North Wales. This was a very small aircraft and was the type used by the Red Arrows before they equipped with the Hawk aircraft they operate nowadays.

Unfortunately, the Royal Air Force decided at that time that they needed fewer front-line fighter aircraft and the crews to fly them, so I was re-rolled as a pilot of multi-engine, large aircraft. The aircraft I was trained on could hardly be more different from the small, streamlined Gnat – it was the lumbering Vickers Varsity, a development of the Vickers Wellington bomber aircraft of the second world war! I flew these at RAF Oakington in Cambridgeshire.

Royal Air Force Operations



At last, after 4 years of training, I was posted to an operational Royal Air Force squadron, in my case number 42 Squadron based at RAF St Mawgan in Cornwall. The type I flew was another second world war bomber development, this time of the Avro Lancaster. The aircraft was the Avro Shackleton. Like the Lancaster, the 'Shack' had four powerful engines. Unlike the Lancaster, on the Shackleton each engine drove two propellers which turned in opposite directions. You can see them in the photographs. Two propellers were needed on each engine because the Shackleton's engines were much more powerful than those on the venerable old 'Lanc'. I flew two different types of Shackleton, the mark 2 (top) and the mark 3 (bottom). Can you see the difference? (The mark 2 has its third wheel at the back – a tail wheel, while the mark 3 has its third wheel at the front – a nose wheel. Aeroplanes with a nose wheel are usually easier to land, take-off and taxi)

My job flying the Shackleton was Maritime Reconnaissance – note the MR next to the mark number. Maritime Reconnaissance involved a lot of time flying over the sea, looking for enemy ships and (probably more importantly) submarines and, if at war, sinking them. I was also involved in many search and rescue operations including monitoring the oil spill from the oil tanker Torrey Canyon which had run aground on coastal rocks near Lands End. 30 million gallons of crude oil were lost. Shackletons are only found in museums today, but the Royal Air Force is just deploying a new fleet of Boeing P-8 Poseidon jet aircraft at RAF Lossiemouth to do the same job. After a year flying the 'Shack', the RAF again reduced its requirement for pilots so I left the RAF in 1969.



After leaving the RAF, I trained as a flying instructor and was employed at the West London Aero Club based at White Waltham near Maidenhead in Berkshire. This was where I had my first flight in a Chipmunk many years before. The job involved teaching people to fly in small, civilian light aircraft like the two examples shown. I taught many people to fly, including 36 ATC Cadets who had won Flying Scholarships, some of whom went on to gain a Private Pilot's Licence.

White Waltham is an 'interesting' place to learn to fly, being located immediately below the easterly approaches to London's Heathrow Airport! This location imposes significant discipline both on those learning to fly and, to an even greater extent, on those teaching them.

Working as a flying instructor is a good way of building the hours, experience and confidence to progress as a pilot and many people do this.

After instructing for 7 years, I moved on to pastures new.

Company Pilot (1),
Vickers Shipbuilding
and Engineering Ltd

VSEL



Piper PA31-310 Navajo



Piper PA31-350 Chieftain

In 1976 I joined Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Limited at Barrow-in-Furnace as a company pilot, and I used my multi-engine flying experience gained in the RAF, together with my civilian experience gained as an instructor. My job involved ferrying company and Naval personnel around sites in the UK ranging from RNAS Lee-on-Solent {Portsmouth} and Dounreay on the north of Scotland in one day, and to many other locations in the UK and Europe.

This flying was very demanding, involving operations from small, poorly equipped airfields in all weathers, and all single pilot, no co-pilot.

Company Pilot (2),
Digital Equipment Corp.
(and others)

digital



After flying for a private owner, a business man, I was invited to become a company pilot for the American computer giant, Digital Equipment Corporation when it opened a large plant near Ayr.

I flew the fastest turbo-prop aircraft then available, the Rockwell Turbo Commander 690B. Later this aircraft was replaced by Super KingAir until it was also replaced by the Citation jet aircraft. For the first time since training in the Royal Air Force, I was flying a jet powered aircraft. The Citation jet was based at Prestwick in its own purpose built hangar, by which time the flight department had become very busy carrying over 3,200 passengers a year, flying over 1,150 hours a year all over Europe and beyond so I had to employ four other pilots.

When Digital was taken over by Compaq, the aircraft was sold.

Fractional Ownership, Netjets



Hawker 750



Hawker 800XP

In 1997 I joined NetJets who are 'fractional ownership' operator of corporate jet aircraft, like the 'Hawkers' shown. Fractional Ownership means that each aircraft is owned partly by companies that wish to use them, and these companies pay only the operating costs when they use their share. It is a very popular means of accessing corporate aircraft without the huge costs on owning a whole aircraft, which might not see much use.

The 'CS' on the tails is the international registration mark of Portugal as this is where NetJets, an American company, chose to locate its European operation. The top picture shows CS-DUA wearing an unpopular and short-lived company colour scheme designed by the famous architect, Norman Foster. The aircraft is shown just before landing at Prestwick Airport with me at the controls. We had just crossed the North Atlantic in the record breaking time of 3 hours and 55 minutes, courtesy a 150 knot tailwind. At one point our speed across the ground (or water) showed 543 knots, which is very fast for a Hawker.

The other picture shows another Hawker, this time a Model 800XP, registration CS-DRW. I did not deliver this one, but I have included it because the registration (DRW) matches my initials.

I was the 23rd pilot to join Netjets Europe and there were just five Hawkers and three Citations at the time. When I finally retired there were over 1,200 pilots and 160 aircraft of six different types. My flight logbook shows that I flew 17,600 hours, flew into over 1,800 airports. During the last four years with the company I also ferried 13 new aircraft across the Atlantic, from the USA where they were built, via the “ Blue Spruce Route” to Prestwick and onwards down to Lisbon in Portugal. I also did many test flights on Hawkers, after they came out of the maintenance workshop, to check that any defects had been fixed.



Here is a view of my office – the flight deck of a Hawker 1000.



...and here is the passenger cabin. Clearly the pilot of such an aircraft will have a much closer relationship with his passengers than the average airliner equivalent.

What sort of people do you think would fly in this sort of aircraft?



Here is a Hawker undergoing some work on the undercarriage – the aircraft is supported on jacks and the wheels are retracted. Note how clean and tidy the hangar is, this is typical of aircraft maintenance facilities. Aircraft are meticulously maintained – otherwise pilots wouldn't fly them!



Here is another example, where the aircraft's skin is being replaced, having been damaged by an abnormally heavy landing. This shows the internal structure. All aircraft are very light, otherwise they would be unable to fly!



Flying with Netjets often took me across the North Atlantic. The range of the Hawkers I flew was usually insufficient to take us all the way to the destination. This necessitated using 'Blue Spruce' routes between some very remote airfields located around the edge of the North Atlantic Ocean and shown here as red dots. This was very interesting flying.



Once in the USA, I flew to destinations all over the country. Around the American cities, airspace is much busier than the equivalent seen in Europe.



The nature of the job meant that we never really knew where we would go next. You would be told where that was after you had landed, put the passengers in their taxi and sent them on their way. On one occasion things were changing so rapidly that I had four changes of destination in the space of twenty minutes. Not many airline pilots can say that.

In all, I think I had a much more interesting time in the air than an Airline pilot. I certainly went to many more places and met many more interesting people. Passengers ranged from pop stars to politicians and from princes to princesses, with the odd dog or cat.

I retired from flying in 2015.



Who would have thought that a Hawker could smile?

The Queen of the Skies