

Flight Lieutenant Margaret Bell RAF VR(T)
Officer Commanding
22 (Sandy) Squadron ATC

Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Wing
Air Training Corps

1 The Crescent, St Neots, Cambs. PE19 1EQ
Tel.: 01480 352290 Mob: 07810 486412 Email: 22Sqn@BedsCambsWgATC.org



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PRESS RELEASE

Air Cadet Drops Out

An Air Cadet's experience on his Parachute Course

On Tuesday 14th of July 2009, Air Cadet F/S Akeel Shaikh from 22 (Sandy) Squadron, got the opportunity to throw himself out of a Dornier G92 aircraft from 3500ft at RAF Weston-on-the-Green on his Parachute Course.

He arrived, at St George's Barracks in Bicester, on the Sunday afternoon to be given shared rooms for the course. It wasn't long before everyone started socialising; there were 60 on the Course from across the UK, so lots of new faces. Briefings followed and they had the evening to socialise with football and tag rugby.

On Monday, it was a 0600hrs wake up, breakfast at 7 and be ready by 8 for a coach journey to RAF Weston-on-the-Green. At arrival, they got straight into the day's training in groups of 12. First of all, they got shown the student parachute canopy, they would be jumping, and then the exit procedure followed by malfunction drills and the Parachute Landing Form (PLF). Throughout the day, they saw professional skydivers briefing, jumping and debriefing, this was very inspirational. After this intense and tiring 6 hour training day, they headed back to the Barracks. At this point, I, personally, felt quite unwell and was sick on the way back to our accommodation block. Therefore, could not eat dinner and had to have an early night.

On Tuesday, they had an early start, as they had to be coach-ready by 7am. As the skydivers finished and winds dropped, some of us got the chance to jump. Now, there were 6 groups of 10, where the first four had to jump on empty stomachs. There were only 20 student canopies available; this meant each one had to be individually packed between jumps by a professional packer.

The first two groups got kitted up and waited for the twin turbine Dornier G92 aircraft to taxi. As the first group took to the skies, the atmosphere lifted and hopes were high, waiting on the first jumper. Then, it happened, first out, second out, parachute's open and they glide to the Drop Zone, following the landing procedures to ground and landing. Then the second group were taken up and jumped. We then had to wait as the parachute canopies got re-packed for the next 20 people. I happened to be in group 3, the next to go up, as we boarded the aircraft it became a reality, taxiing down the runway to take off felt uneasy on the uneven ground. Take off and climbing brought out the nerves, this is it, no turning back, the pulse is racing, watching the first and second out was energising. Now, there was no time to think about illnesses, everything happened at a quick pace.



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The ATC/ACF Cadet Centre, Alnwick Close, Sandy, Beds. SG19 1UA (no mailbox facility)

Website: www.sandy-aircadets.org.uk Charity Exemption W182/00

As the fourth out, I just went for it, we were given the commands “in the door” “look up” “Go” and that’s it, free like a bird! After 4 seconds of freefall, the canopy opened and there was my sigh of relief. I did have a “nuisance factor”, had some twists in the lines which sorted themselves out. At this point, I just glided around doing “control checks” and keeping an eye on my altitude to be ready to carry out the landing procedure, whilst having an earful of instructors guiding people to the drop zone and landing. So, it’s my turn next, after the downwind (at 1500ft) and crosswind (at 800ft) legs, going into-wind (at 500ft) was a rush. Coming in to land at 15ft half-flare, 6ft full-flare and roll onto the grass. What an awesome experience!

Whilst collapsing, the wind re-inflated my parachute and it started to drag me around, where I just collapsed it again and held on tight. When it was deflated, I just gathered it up and took it back for re-packing. Whilst on the way back, it was unbelievable what just happened. This felt like the cure to any illness. From here, I headed to breakfast with guys who had jumped and we relived our experiences.

At this point in the day, the winds had picked up; the fourth group were stopped halfway down the runway. Whilst, the fifth group were in the air, 6 of them jumped, the rest had to wait for it to calm down, as many of them were landing backwards. Therefore, 14 people had to jump the next day while everyone else went home, I imagine it was a terrible feeling.

All in all, it was the greatest experience; the social scene was also admirable, recommended to anyone who wants to push themselves.
by Cdt F/S Akeel Shaikh

If you would like more information on how to join as a Cadet a member of Staff or Civilian Committee please call 01480 352290, email 22Sqn@BedsCambsWgATC.org or log onto the website at sandy-aircadets.org.uk and follow the link.

Margaret Bell
Flt. Lt. RAF VR(T)
OC 22 Squadron

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Encls: F/S Shaikh jumps



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