



15th July 2009

Top Cat

Low level flying and confined space landings were the order to the day when Sergeant Ryan Sharples, 15 years, flew for an hour and a half with 33 Squadron Royal Air Force in a Puma HC1 helicopter, on Monday 13 July 2009.

The flight was to mark Sgt Sharples achievement of being the Squadron Cadet of the Year in 2008 and as such he was allowed to sit in the jump seat directly behind the pilots in the Puma. From this privileged position he was able to see for himself how the pilots operated the aircraft as they undertook the sortie.

33 Squadron fly from RAF Benson in Oxfordshire, where the Pumas are used as battlefield helicopters within the Joint Helicopter Command. They provide tactical troop and load movement by day or by night. The aircraft can carry 16 fully-equipped troops, or up to two tonnes of freight carried either internally or as an underslung load. The other major role is that of casualty or medical evacuation support, for which up to six stretchers can be fitted.

Sgt Sharples, who himself hopes to join the Royal Air Force as aircrew, said of his experience "It was great, being able to fly at low level was a fantastic experience and I really enjoyed my flight."

Warrant Officer Paul Taylor who organised the flight said, "Sergeant Sharples thoroughly deserved this reward and I hope that it will inspire him to pursue a future career in the RAF. The air cadet organisation has much to offer its young people and the more they put in, the more they will gain from the experience."





