

Junior ROTC cadets off, flying in Chief of Staff of the Air Force Flight Academy Scholarship program

By Lt. Col. Vanessa Saks, Headquarters Air Force Junior ROTC / Published July 09, 2018



Cadet James Huang, North Gwinnett High School, Suwanee, Georgia, sits in the cockpit of a trainer aircraft at Auburn University, Alabama. Huang is one of 120 cadets selected for a Flight Academy scholarship by Air Force Junior ROTC. The Chief of Staff of the Air Force Flight Academy scholarship program allows selected Air Force Junior ROTC cadets to attend an accredited aviation program at one of six partnering universities to get a private pilot license. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman Matthew Markivee)

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, Ala. -- The inaugural class of Air Force Junior ROTC cadets participating in the Chief of Staff of the Air Force Flight Academy Scholarship program this summer are off and flying, many already hitting their solo milestone.

While Air Force Junior ROTC's primary mission is to develop citizens of character, these 120 high school students will also earn their private pilot's license and up to 12 college credits. For many students, this program has highlighted a career pathway that may have otherwise been unthinkable.

Cadet Ruth Robey, Hixson High School, Hixson, Tennessee, had other interests and applied to the Flight Academy on a whim based on a recommendation from her Junior ROTC instructor.

"I didn't expect to get (the scholarship) seeing that I had no prior experience with flying," she said. "I have wanted to be a mechanic for the last couple of years, but since this opportunity came about I've been wondering myself about the road after this. I will most likely pursue a field in aviation, whether a pilot or a mechanic."

Robey, who is attending Flight Academy partner Liberty University in Virginia, said the course has been challenging so far, but through the support of her classmates she's making it through.

"I take a deep breath and look all around me" she said. "Most everyone else here is going through the same thing of not knowing anything and it's definitely a hard course."



Her solo flight gave her a bit more confidence for getting through the program, and concerns about maintaining focus wasn't as difficult as she had thought.

"It's what you want to focus on," Robey said. "The whole time here had been leading up to that moment, so it's natural almost to only focus on flying."



Cadet James Huang, North Gwinnett High School, Suwanee, Georgia, said he had not considered being a pilot as a career.

"Being a pilot was never a goal of mine until I was introduced to the program." He said. "Now I don't think I could see myself doing anything else."

Huang, who is taking the program at Auburn University, said living on the college campus put him at ease with the flying curriculum, but when the instruction gets tough he's got his methods for dealing with the stress.

"I shut off the phone, the music and hunker down into my notes and focus all my concentration on them," Huang said. "If that doesn't work I go for a run or a swim to clear my head and then return to my studies."

His prep work and concentration on his studies paid off on the day of his solo.

"When I first started taking off I was terrified," Huang said. "My feet were no longer on the ground and the wind was blowing the plane every which way. After the initial shock of it though, I felt calm as I was able to start focusing on the mechanical aspects of flying. Then it becomes fun, like a roller coaster."

Also attending Liberty University's program is Cadet AbdulMalik Ariyo, Lovejoy High School, Hampton, Georgia, whose love of flying came about in an unusual way.

Ariyo's interest in becoming a pilot began at an early age when he and his family lived in Nigeria, and his father worked for Delta. He wanted to do what his father did, and he remembers his father sharing stories about flying. As he got older he realized that although his father wasn't actually a pilot, the interest in flying was already there.

As far as getting through the challenging requirements of the program, Ariyo said your mindset is everything.

"Take every day precious and look toward your end goal: Graduation."

Although program completion is the short-term win for the students, everyone acknowledges the nation as a whole will



reap the long-term gain.

“These students will be impacting and leading the aviation community for the next 40 or 50 years,” said Col. Paul Lips, director of Air Force Junior ROTC. “I can’t begin to say how proud I am of these young men and women and what they are accomplishing. When we’ve talked with the instructors at the universities, I hear nothing but rave reviews about how exceptionally well they are performing. They are exceeding standards in the classroom, on the flightline, in the cockpits, but most importantly they are cadets of character representing both their families at home and Air Force JROTC.”



Air Force Junior ROTC’s Flight Academy supports the Air Force Aircrew Crisis Task Force. One of the tasks of the ACTF is leveraging Air Force Junior ROTC’s 120,000 students, Civil Air Patrol and general civil aviation to bring back the excitement of aviation to high school students and increase diversity in aviation fields. The Chief of Staff of the Air Force Flight Academy scholarship program allows selected Air Force Junior ROTC cadets to attend an accredited aviation program at one of six partnering universities to get a private pilot license.

The flight academy program is designed to grow over the coming years. This year, Air Force Junior ROTC awarded 120 cadet scholarships, and if financing continues, potentially increasing to 250 next year and 500 the year after. There are also plans to open the program to Army, Navy, and Marine Junior ROTC programs as well as Civil Air Patrol cadets by 2020.

The application process for the Summer 2019 program will begin in late August or early September. For more information

on the Chief of Staff of the Air Force Flight Academy Scholarship program or becoming an Air Force Junior ROTC instructor after retirement, visit <http://www.airuniversity.af.mil/Holm-Center/AFJROTC/>

