

The pinnacle of my time in the school RAF section was the school visit to RAF Valley in Anglesey. Most 17 year olds are seen in driving school cars in residential areas moving at the pace of a snail, but unlike most 17 year olds I have now hurtled at speeds in excess of 500 mph over the welsh coastline! RAF Valley primarily trains fighter and search & rescue pilots so that they can be released on to the big boy's toys such as the Jaguar, the Harrier, Sea King and the Eurofighter.

Once on the base we were treated like the regulars and everyone was very accommodating. Sitting in the coffee room surrounded by fighter pilots is definitely a surreal experience. In order to fly I had to be kitted out with all the equipment that you need. This is the only downside of flying. Once all the kit is on you, not only do you feel 10 times heavier, but you look Darth Vaderesque. Worst of all was hearing that the sea temperature was going to be below a certain level which meant that I also had to wear the dreaded immersion suit. Whilst wearing the immersion suit you are unable to walk in a normal fashion.

The call came to say that the plane was ready and so I began the infamous walk towards the beast that is the Hawk T1. I Clambered up the step ladder to the cockpit and was greeted by lots of flashing, interesting buttons that looked very tempting. However, my main objective was to get the ejection seat pins into their places without accidentally ejecting at 690mph onto the runway. We were ready to go. Unfortunately this was somewhat of an anticlimax because the plane had an engine fault, so we had to board a different jet. After repeating the same procedure, we taxied to the end of the runway. One final check by "Fruitbat" (the pilot) and we were off. Everything was going fine and you didn't realise the speed until Fruitbat pulled back on the stick and we were spinning and rolling through valleys at breakneck speeds only to the annoyance of welsh villagers and Greenpeace protestors. The hour long flight included barrel rolls, loop the loops, corkscrews, wing overs, dives, vertical and downward spins, zooms and more that I simply cannot remember. After this flurry of red arrow manoeuvres, "Fruitbat" did something very foolish - he gave me control of the £18 million jet. He showed me how the aerobatics were done and then I was able to perform what many may only dream of. Heading back to landing we ran through some circuits which is what the RAF do to keep fully trained on a daily basis. A circuit is a take off and landing with an aerial lap in between, simulating the problems that could occur. Once we had landed, I found it difficult to wipe the grin off my face for the rest of the day.