

At age 16, Micheal McIlhenney is one of the youngest pilots in the U.S. He completed his first cross-country solo flight in a Cessna 152.



High Flying

**CY-FAIR
STUDENT**

MICHAEL MCILHENNEY, A JUNIOR AT JERSEY VILLAGE HIGH SCHOOL, GETS HIS WINGS

Written by John McIlhenney and Marlena Solomon

Since he was a young boy, Michael McIlhenney has dreamed of flying an airplane. Recently, his dream came true. At age 16, the Jersey Village High School junior completed flight ground school training and performed his first cross-country solo flight in a Cessna 152. He is one of only 191 other young flyers in the United States who have completed their first solo flight before their seventeenth birthday. “Ever since I was five years old, when I was able to sit in the front seat of Grease Lighting at Astroworld, I wanted to fly,” says Michael.

When McIlhenney graduates from Jersey Village High in 2011, he hopes to attend the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, CO. Known as one of the most selective colleges in the country, candidates for admission are selected on their academic achievement, demonstrated leadership, athletic ability, and

character. To gain admission, candidates must pass a fitness test, undergo a thorough medical examination, and secure a nomination, which usually comes from the member of Congress in the candidate’s home district.

FLYING SOLO

“Flying is all that Michael has talked about doing for as long as we can remember,” says Michael’s father, John. “We stayed within Jersey Village High School district so he could attend the Air Force JROTC program lead by Major Martinez and TSgt. Campbell. The end goal has always been the Air Force Academy,” he says.

After returning from his leadership training at the Air Force JROTC Honor’s Camp at Kirkland Air Force base in Albuquerque, NM, Michael completed his drivers education program. Because

of Texas law, he will have to wait six months before he is eligible to drive solo to College Station, but he can fly there on his own. "The acceleration of take-off, the wind blowing in my face, and the final freedom of flight has always been my dream. Being able to fly solo this summer was finally being able to live my dream," says Michael.

A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE

Michael then traveled to the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, CO for a guided tour of the academy led by recent graduate, 2nd Lt. Whitney Evanson. Lt. Evanson explained the different educational options available to cadets at the Air Force Academy. Michael hopes to study aeronautical engineering at the academy. Reflecting on his tour of the academy, Michael says, "I see graduating from the Air Force Academy as being the pinnacle of achievement for any cadet whom has the ambitions to server, our country as an Air Force fighter pilot. The Air Force Academy function is to create Air Force officers of character. The demands and challenges that a cadet faces during the few short years at the academy are only stepping-stones on the journey to the final goal of being a fighter pilot. Where else can you travel to work at Mach 2+?"

Michael later met with Major General George Douglas (ret.) to tour the Space Command Museum at Peterson Air Force base in Pueblo, CO. His next stop with Gen. Douglas was the Doss Aviation complex, to tour the Air Force Pre-screening Flight School. All future pilots spend four weeks of intense training there before obtaining their flight wings.

Gen. Douglas later surprised Michael with a guided tour of the Cheyenne Mountain complex, the home of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and the United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM). The NORAD-USNORTHCOM Center serves as a central collection and coordination facility for a worldwide system of sensors designed to provide the commanders and the leadership of Canada and the U.S. with an accurate picture of any aerospace threat. They also track the thousands of objects orbiting Earth.

EARNING HIS WINGS

Michael's final stop on his summer tour was to participate in a ceremony at the U.S. Space Command center in Los Angeles, CA. During the ceremony, Major General Thomas D. Taverney the Vice-Commander, Headquarters Air Force Space Command presented Michael with his Ground School and Solo Flight badges. General Taverney, a 1968 graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy has been involved in space operations and space systems development for over 38 years.

Initially, Michael's family thought his whirlwind summer trip might cause him to question his long time goal of being an Air Force officer, but they were wrong. "It only cemented his resolve and strengthened his commitment to attend the Air Force Academy," says John. Michael adds, "Being able to see and talk to people who have gone through the academy just validated my reasons to attend the Air Force Academy. This was a once in a lifetime trip with a grand finale. I just hope my deeds in the future will make everyone proud." Michael will have to wait until the spring of his senior year to learn if he has been accepted in to the Air Force Academy. CFM

MARLENA SOLOMON would like to thank John and Michael McIlhenny for sharing Michael's story.



AIR FORCE ACADEMY ADMISSION

- 1 Be a citizen of the United States*
- 2 Be unmarried with no dependents
- 4 Be of good moral character
- 5 Be at least 17, but less than 23 years of age by July 1 of the year of entry
- 6 Meet high leadership, academic, physical and medical standards

*unless nominated by an official of a country invited by the Department of Defense



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