

Meet one of nation's youngest commercially licensed pilots

21-Year-Old Credits CAP with His Success

By *Mitzi Palmer*

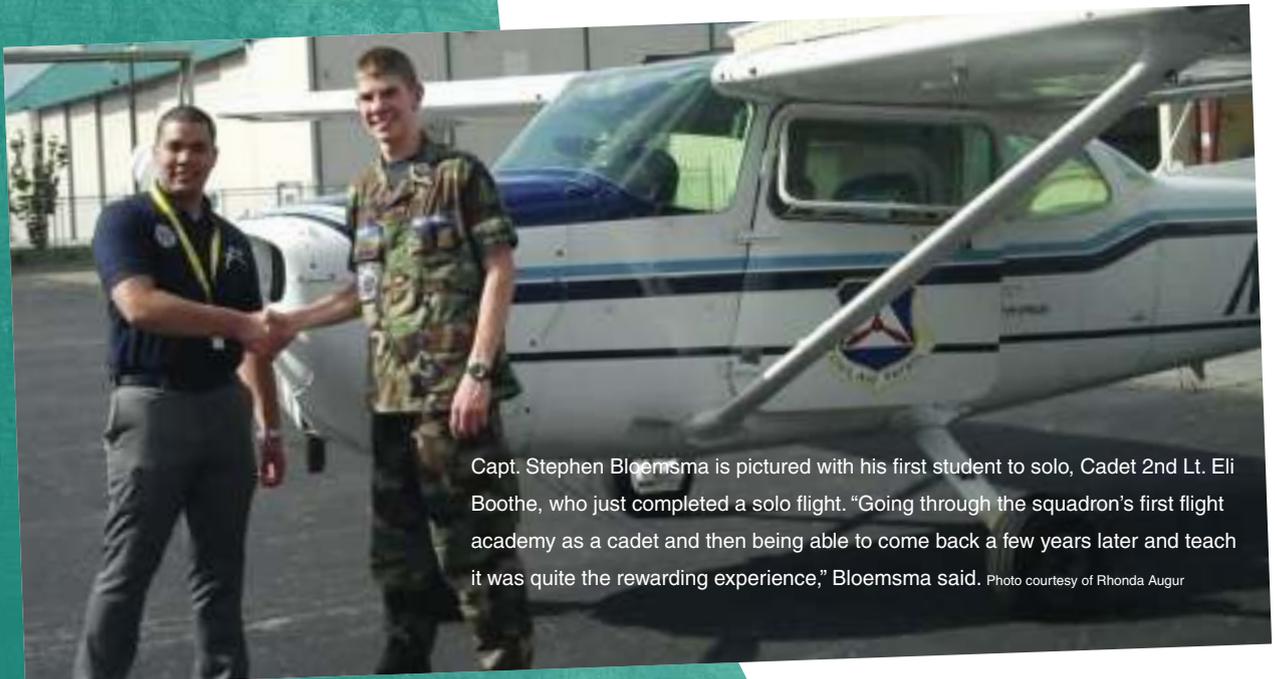
Stephen Bloemsma's 16th birthday was one he will never forget. While most teens his age are in hot pursuit of a driver's license as a top priority that day, Bloemsma had higher aspirations, literally — his first solo flight!

"I remember after my first takeoff thinking to myself, 'Well, I'm committed to landing the airplane now. There is no turning back at this point,'" he recalled. "I also remember my confidence growing after every landing, and having a big smile on my face during the last one."

Now, at just 21, Bloemsma, who has both his private and commercial pilot's certificates, is one of the nation's youngest commercially licensed pilots. He credits Civil Air Patrol with his skyrocketing aviation career's rapid advancement.

Fueling an Early Passion

"I thought I would join and see what it was all about," he said. "I had completed some Young Eagles flights when I was 12 or 13 that initially sparked my interest in aviation. Then after joining CAP and completing my cadet orientation flights, I knew aviation was the career field I wanted to pursue."



Capt. Stephen Bloemsma is pictured with his first student to solo, Cadet 2nd Lt. Eli Boothe, who just completed a solo flight. "Going through the squadron's first flight academy as a cadet and then being able to come back a few years later and teach it was quite the rewarding experience," Bloemsma said. Photo courtesy of Rhonda Augur

Through the program, Bloemsma learned how to fly airplanes and a whole lot more.

He gained leadership skills through participation in four cadet encampments — two as a basic participant and two as a flight sergeant and squadron commander. He participated in multiple emergency missions, too, and added the Glider Academy and Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training Familiarization Course to his resume, which also includes a degree from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

Officially a commercial pilot in 2012, Bloemsma has been putting his skills to good use as a flight instructor at Western North Carolina Aviation and as a mission pilot, cadet orientation pilot and instructor at the Asheville Composite Squadron's annual flight academy. Just recently, he was offered a job with Great Lakes Airlines; he starts training soon.

Instrumental Forces

Mentors especially dear to his heart are CAP Lt. Cols. Rich Augur and Ray Davis.

Augur, a U.S. Air Force Academy graduate and major in the Air Force, was deputy commander of the Asheville squadron's cadets when Bloemsma was a cadet. Davis was Bloemsma's primary flight instructor who helped him prepare for his solo flight on his 16th birthday.

Bloemsma described Davis as "very focused and committed to learning and applying that knowledge toward successful completion of his goals." These traits, he added, influenced his career success.

"Lt. Col. Augur really helped me develop leadership skills and was one of the two instructors who helped in my training for my private pilot's certificate, which I received after my 17th birthday," Bloemsma said. "And as I have progressed in my aviation career, Lt. Col. Augur as a Delta Airlines captain has helped by advising me in the steps and decisions I should make in order to fly for the airlines."

"CAP gave me an opportunity to fly at a young age and sparked that interest in aviation that led me to continue on in my training, and I am very grateful for that," he said. ▲



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