

Overcoming Challenges to be Able to Live the Dream

BY PAUL RYAN

My obsession with flying started at the early age of eleven when, on my confirmation day my parents organised a surprise flight with Gerry Humphreys from Coonagh airfield, Limerick. From that day onwards, my love of flying has just grown and grown and I was delighted to have been the first Irish Young Eagle.

From birth I have had medical monocular vision, which essentially means the sight in my left eye is below 20/200 (first letter on the eye chart).

When I turned 17 I contacted the IAA medical department about getting a class 1 or class 2 medical to enable me to get my licence. A few days passed and I was contacted by Dr Roodenburg of the IAA whom I explained my condition to and was informed by her that flying would be an impossibility for me and to pursue other interests. To say I was disheartened was an understatement but I didn't give up and started looking at the American FAA route. A few years passed and Dr Kileen in Dublin managed to secure a Class 1 FAA medical for me with the need for a medical flight test to gain a SODA (statement of demonstrated ability). With this medical, I began to look at the European (JAA) medical situation again. Once again I approached Dr Roodenburg but was greeted with the same unsatisfactory and negative answer. Even though the JAA should have the same medical requirements for each member state I decided to contact the UK CAA to see if this was the case. From the beginning, the CAA could not have been more helpful. I had an in depth conversation with Dr Adrian Chorley who invited me over for an extended ophthalmology report. A few weeks later I was on a

flight to CAA headquarters at Aviation House, Gatwick. After two hours of in-depth eye testing Dr Chorley was satisfied with my vision even though I did not meet the official standards as set out by the JAA. He then invited me to take an initial class 2 medical examination following on from my ophthalmology results. JAA standards state that monocular vision is satisfactory if it occurred after the age of 5. This seems ludicrous as it would make more sense to be monocular from birth which would mean that the person has never experienced a better standard of sight. After a tense wait and to my delight I passed the initial class 2 medical. However, a number of conditions were placed on my medical which include having to wear eye protection during zero G manoeuvres and open cockpit flying and also completion of a medical flight test during my skills assessment as part of my flying exam. This essentially meant that my examiner would have to complete a form during my test which stated that he/she was satisfied in my ability to control the aircraft safely. I was also advised to complete my training before April 2012 in case any new regulations were introduced by EASA in the meantime.

With my medical now secured, I flew to Bournemouth and completed a one week intensive ground schooling programme with Derek Davidson. With my ground schooling finished, and on a tight time schedule, I decided that an intensive PPL course with one on one tuition was my best option. I narrowed down my venue choices to Sue Virr in Limoges France and booked my course to commence on the 26th of September 2011. In the meantime I joined Limerick Flying Club based in Coonagh and began taking lessons to start my training. The staff and instructors were a great support to me and I owe a huge debt



Paul Ryan with Gerry Humphreys

of gratitude to the instructors, in particular, Neil Rankin and Gerry Humphreys. The week before I was due to depart for Limoges, I received word that Sue Virr had been taken ill and would be unable to facilitate me on her course. Unfortunately, a few weeks later, Sue Virr passed away and my thoughts and condolences go out to her family at this sad time.

I began to look for alternative schools from where to pursue my training and must thank Neil Rankin for his help and guidance at this time in finding another flight school. I settled on a flight school based at Sandown airfield located on the Isle of Wight which was run by Jim Bernie. My decision to pursue my training here came on the back of the recommendation of Derek Davidson who facilitated my ground schooling. Over the 5 weeks I spent in Sandown, Jim and Brian Cheek trained me to skills test standards which I completed on the 1/11/11 at Old Sarum airfield with just over 47 hours logged.

I would say to anyone in a similar situation as mine not to give up until all avenues have been explored and exhausted time and time again. I will always be grateful and will never forget all those who helped and supported me during this whole experience. Without these people I would not have gotten to where I am today and would not be holding in my hand my much sought after PPL.