



**WINGS AWARDED:** Acton Air Cadets Aaron Smelsky (left) and Ryan Martin, members of the 197 Typhoon Squadron accepted their wings from Commanding Officer Captain Richard Chapman during a recent ceremony at the Acton Legion. With hard work and Air Cadet flight school scholarships Smelsky qualified to fly gliders and Martin received his power pilot's licence. — Frances Niblock photo

## Cadets earn their wings

*By Frances Niblock*

Two Acton teens can thank, in part, the Air Cadet program for helping them reach their dreams of flight.

Without the scholarships available to senior cadets, it would have taken Aaron Smelsky and Ryan Martin a lot longer to get off the ground, but with the funding (valued at \$30,000 each) and hard work, both have their wings.

Flying is central to the Air Cadet program – its power program began in 1946 to whip up interest in Cadets during WWII and continues to this day.

Both Smelsky and Martin, members of the 197 RC (AIR) Typhoon Cadet Squadron, headquartered at the Acton Legion, saw cadets as a way to get their wings, but also enjoyed the focus on fun, discipline and self-reliance.

Following a rigorous application process, both received flight scholarships and attended six-week summer courses to earn their wings, Smelsky for his glider's licence and Martin for his power licence.

Smelsky, 17, a Grade 12 student at Erin High School, received his glider pilot wings after a gruelling six-week summer course that followed four years of ground school. His inspiration to fly came from his grandfathers who were WWII airmen, and from his father who has his pilot's license.

Smelsky joined the Acton Cadets five years ago and was "hooked," rising through the ranks to Warrant Officer First Class and

working towards his wings. He soloed on August 2, an "awesome experience."

"It is an amazing feeling. I can't get enough of it. If I could, I'd live up there. It's a wonderful feeling being 2,500-feet up in the air, floating above everything," Smelsky said, admitting that he was scared for the first half of his first flight, but now can't wait to go for his power licence.

Long range plans include studying aeronautical engineering and becoming a commercial airline pilot.

Smelsky, who belongs to the York Soaring Club in Arthur, also flies on weekends out of CFB Borden, building hours so he can teach other gliders.

For Martin, 17, the urge to fly came early – when he was three – and never left, leading him to the Cadet program, a lot of hard work and his acceptance to the six-week flight scholarship program.

"The Department of Defence pays for 46 hours of flight time and 45 hours is the minimum needed to get

a pilot's licence, so they need the best of the best in the program," Martin said, adding the hardest part was the first three weeks preparing for the Transport Canada examination.

Now licensed as a civilian pilot, Martin said he does not want to be a commercial pilot, but plans to study aerospace engineering at university. He currently is in Grade 12 at Acton High School.

He flies out of Guelph airport, renting a plane at \$135 per hour, to build his hours and will continue with the Cadet program until he heads to university.

"Cadets has brought me much more than just the wings. Now I'm helping teach the other guys that want to be pilots during the Squadron's ground school," Martin said.

Cadets are not part of the Canadian Forces and there's no expectation for Cadets to join the military.

In past years, Acton has had between 40 and 45 Cadets, roughly half girls and

*Continued on page 12*

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