

Triangle GLIDERPORT

by Helen Montgomery



During the winter of 1937-8, and for some time previous, Pontiac Airport had been host to Detroit gliding activities, restricted as they were. Considerable friction between the gliding groups and the power groups had developed. Naturally, since the proponents of gliding were paying no revenue other than the small sum of five dollars per month for hangar rent on each glider, they were consigned to the role of the underprivileged.

Once a tow wire was left on the airport for an unguarded moment by a gliding group by mistake; a powered plane inadvertently taxied over the wire, catching it on its tailskid and dragging it into the air and back down again. At once the feud was skyrocketed to monstrous proportions; we saw our doom approaching. According to the airport manager, there was only one answer—the gliding groups would have to withdraw from the premises.

We became itinerant fliers, operating as best we could from week to week, first on a cinder drive in a subdivision, then on a muddy stretch of land behind Farmer Young's barn. With such haphazard facilities existing, there could be no training program going forward. Some of the local operators of smaller airports, realizing that our activities would constitute a potential attraction for spectators during the summer months, were mildly tolerant of our proposals, yet wary of the conflict which they knew was likely to exist between the gliding and power-flying factions.

We practically exhausted the possibilities of obtaining permission to fly gliders on the more desirable fields when the manager of National Airways pointed out to us the fact that there was a small airport down the highway on which no commercial operator had been able to make a living in recent years. This field was known as Triangle Airport.

L. D. Montgomery and Steve Sund, two of the XYZ members, made an exploratory trip over the field with a car and, as a result, were almost totally unimpressed. The field was too small; it had obstructions on all four boundaries; it just didn't have the makings of a permanent place to fly. However, with the consent of the owner, it was tried out on Sunday, April 24, 1938, by the members of the XYZ Club. They were able to train students, and several of the members had the best flying day they had experienced since our ignominious dismissal from Pontiac Airport. Ideas began to crop up. Why not persuade the Detroit Glider Council to rent the field for the use of all the local groups?

When this plan was propounded before the Detroit Glider Council meeting the next Thursday evening, it



Photo by A. B. Schultz

Aerial view of Triangle Gliderport looking northeast.

was acclaimed as the present solution to our problem. If all these orphan clubs would promise to share the expenses, the Council ought to be able to maintain a stable financial status as well as a haven for stranded glider clubs.

The next Sunday, Johnny Nowak and L. D. Montgomery approached owners of the field with the proposition that they give us a one year lease on the field at a fixed monthly rental. Our diplomatic Johnny Nowak was able to handle the necessary price-dickering quite capably. It was a deal! At last we were to have a field with hangars and the facilities for training our students.

The field itself will bear description. It is far from the ideal which most glider pilots dream of, but even so, it is remarkable from the standpoint of its adaptability to our needs. It is a plot of ground 2,600' x 1,000', nearly rectangular in shape and containing 60 acres in all, located about two and one-half miles southeast of Plymouth, about 20 miles west of Detroit on U. S. 12. The soil is sandy, providing excellent natural drainage, a feature which has been a godsend on more than one occasion. During the heaviest winter snows and during the spring thaws, we encountered some difficulty, but were able, nevertheless, to use the car for retrieving the winch wire at all times. The field is covered with a growth of grass and weeds and is usable over its entirety. From constant usage, we have worn two intersecting runways diagonally across the field. The length of the landing area extends east and west in the direction of the prevailing winds. Whenever the wind happens to be directly north or directly south, we are compelled to take of cross-wind, as the field is too narrow for the practice of any other procedure.

On the west, the field is bounded by a large orchard; on the north and east, by telephone lines; and on the south, by high tension lines. Consequently, the instructors have had to be very cautious and have kept each student's progress under careful check. These obstructions have loomed large as contributing factors in the causes of the few accidents which we have been so unfortunate as to have since coming to this location.

We regret the fact that there is no possibility for expansion at Triangle Gliderport. However, with the use of the Meeker winch, utilizing hard steel wire for towing and a Model A Ford motor for power, we are able to obtain altitudes as great as 1,000 feet on days