

Delanne 60E

Gliding IN FRANCE

by Shepherd F. Smith
photos by the author

It was an interesting change to be in the quiet halls of the Aero Club of France in Paris after a trip of over 5000 miles in a 109 foot schooner, on which we crossed the Atlantic Ocean and cruised in the Mediterranean. One of the first people we met was Monsieur Nessler, champion soaring pilot of France, and, of course, the subject was gliding. The next thing we knew, I and my friend, Dr. Charles Robinson, also of New York, were established in a little country hotel in Beynes, Seine et Oise, ready to learn gliding at the Club Aeronautique Universitaire, which had an airport near-by. But before continuing, a few words on the gliding situation there might be of interest.

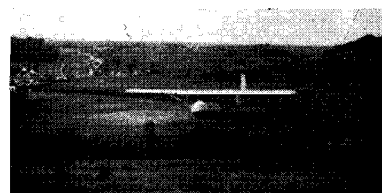
In France there are numerous gliding centers, some of which are private, self-supporting clubs, and others are subsidized by the French government and open to public membership. In the latter group is the Club Aeronautique Universitaire, located thirty-five miles outside of Paris in the rolling farm country beyond Versailles. It was started ten years ago by a group of enthusiasts who purchased an elementary training glider, which they towed out from Paris to a field near Beynes each good flying day. After the glider had been assembled, it was launched from the side of a hill by hand shock cord. A horse rented from a local farmer was used to pull the glider up the hill again. At the end of each day the glider was disassembled and returned to Paris. As the pilots improved and more people became interested, a field was rented and a hangar built. Monsieur Nessler joined and became its leading pilot, as well as greatest inspiration.

The French government became interested and, a few years ago, started to assist financially, with the result that now the club is a very active place. The facilities consist of two good-sized hangars, a clubhouse, on a field running east and west, about three-quarters of a mile long and, at the narrowest place, seventy-five yards wide. There is another small field across the road, running north and south, which is used only for the elementary glider unless only a short distance is needed

to launch a soaring plane for slope soaring on one of the two hills available which lie near-by. The two hills for slope soaring are just adequate for five hours and are only good when the wind is in the southeast to west sector.

For launching, the club has an old war period rotary motored Caudron aeroplane and three winch cars. Two of the winch cars are converted Cadillacs having two drums on the rear axles with dual controls so that the operator can face the direction from which the plane is taking off. A special steel cable of about 12 strands, 5/32" in diameter and 3000 ft. long, is used. Under very good conditions, it is possible to ascend to at least 1000 ft. in one of the secondary training planes, the Avia 15A, launched with this equipment.

The first day at the field it was too windy to use the primary glider, but there were several performance planes slope soaring. I remember timing one ship which remained in one spot in the air for five full minutes. Right then, I made up my mind that some day I was going to do that. Therefore, I was pleased the next day when the wind dropped enough so that we were told to get out one of the three primary gliders. There was still enough wind so that each of us took off the first time we were in the glider. What a sensation! In ten days' time, we each had our first two licenses and progressed to the secondary glider, Avia 15A.



Avia 15A

The second time I ever flew the secondary, I was instructed to climb as high as I could, probably around 1,000 feet, without pulling too much on the stick. After detaching the cable, I was to make a figure eight and land where I had taken off. When I had climbed scarcely 125 feet, I noticed the plane was losing speed, so I leveled off and almost at once the cable automatically detached. Being desirous of carrying out orders to the letter and being very inexperienced, I decided to turn very sharply and attempt to complete the figure eight. In my excitement, I put the plane into a steeply banked turn to the right without attaining the proper speed. At once it began to plunge toward the ground. I even went so far as to figure the exact spot where I would crash and had begun to anticipate the results. I jammed the stick to the left and forward. Almost immediately, the wings leveled and I pulled out of what had become a fast dive at about 6 feet altitude and landed smoothly. Afterwards, I learned that the operator of the winch had thought that I was only to be pulled to about 150 feet. It was caused by a mistake in orders which in this case did no harm, but taught me a lesson I shall never forget, namely, that one should never go into a turn without proper flying speed and at low altitude. A month after that incident, I saw another student pilot put the same glider into another beginning of a spin with barely 50 feet to recover and land safely.

Besides the Captain in charge, there were three instructors, a mechanic, and a skilled carpenter regularly