

A Worthwhile SUGGESTION

by Robert Eikenberry

(The following letter was received from Robert Eikenberry, a former instructor in gliding at the University of Michigan and now assistant professor of Aeronautical Engineering at Notre Dame University. His remarks were prompted by the recent SSA questionnaire.—Ed.)

The man who was until recently the supervisor of CPTP in the Chicago office of the CAA, told me that in his estimation the main thing in the way of obtaining Federal backing for gliding is that hardly any two glider pilots can be gotten to agree on what they want. I think you will agree that there is a whole lot too much truth in this. To me it seems that the most important thing for the SSA to do is to formulate a really sound and practical policy and then get behind it and push. I gather from your letter that it is something of this sort you have in mind, and am therefore taking this opportunity to give you my notions as to what this policy might be.

Many of the claims which have been made regarding the advantages of glider training as a part of national defense flight training I am convinced are not supported by facts, and could hardly be expected to be given serious attention by men as experienced in flight training as the personnel of the CAA. I think that the prevalence of such ideas among the gliding fraternity is largely due to the small number of glider enthusiasts who have taken up power flying. I have now managed to collect something over a hundred hours in power, and I am sure it has changed my viewpoint quite a bit.

The most obviously specious claim, I believe, is that time could be saved by starting trainees out on gliders. I think there is no doubt that, for a given length of time in the air, the elements of flying are learned quicker in a glider, where the student cannot lean on the instructor. The catch is that in gliding the total expenditure of time is very large compared to the actual time in the air. This is true because ground handling consumes such a large percentage of the time, especially with inexperienced pilots. A further difficulty is that gliding is much more subject to weather because of the low speed of the ships. Upon examining my log book, I find that I averaged about 45 minutes actual flying time per semester in the first two years of my training at Michigan, and I was always on deck. Compare this with the 45 hours gotten in in the same length of time under the CPTP, and I think we have the answer. The disparity is too large to be argued away. I am convinced that to introduce glider training as a part of the present college CPTP would be to invite a black eye for the whole movement because of the delays that would be bound to result. I think that the glider-trained man would be a better and safer pilot, but right now the thing is speed.

The other argument most frequently advanced is that glider training would save money. This cannot be definitely settled without more experience. To get a real answer to this question will require that groups be trained in controlled glider courses and then passed on through CPTP courses as fast as they can progress. My own feel-

ing is that it will be found that there is a small saving, but not enough to justify the loss of time under present emergency conditions.

It might seem by this time that I have pretty successfully argued gliding out of the picture, but I think on the contrary that glider training has a very definite place in the picture.

I have always maintained, and still do, that the real place of gliding is as the king of all sports, and it should stand on its own feet rather than tag along as an adjunct of power flying. However, we must face the fact that at the present time of emergency we can hardly expect to attract much support on that basis.

Another unique advantage of gliding is that it can be started at an earlier age than power flying. Here, I think, we have our greatest chance at the present time. We should promote the introduction of glider training among boys too young for CPTP. This would not only enable us to save time in the ensuing power training, but should also enable us to catch the majority of those lacking in innate flying ability before they get to the airplane stage. Such training could be introduced in high schools and in the freshman year of college (CPTP does not accept freshmen). In the case of high school boys, it will probably be necessary to do the training in the summer because their school schedules are not elastic enough to give them enough time during the rest of the year. Because of the small number of qualified instructors and certificated ships available, any program will have to start in a small way and build up. I am very definitely in favor of doing the job in the same way as the CPTP—that is, by offering contracts to private organizations at such a figure that they can buy ships and employ mechanics, etc., and still make a profit. I also favor local operators as much as possible rather than large central camps, as we would get much more gliding for our money if the government does not have to pay board. It will, of course, be necessary to exercise very close supervision of the training in order to insure a good safety record. That this can be done is indicated by the excellent record of the CPTP. The same methods should be used: a definite course of instruction should be set up and instructors should be given refresher courses and examinations for a new instructor's rating to insure uniform and high grade instruction. I might say that the half dozen CAA men with whom I have had a chance to discuss glider training seem to be unanimous in agreeing that the place for it is with the younger boys.

In consideration of the above, I should like to submit my idea of a reasonable program which the SSA might push:

The SOARING SOCIETY OF AMERICA wishes to propose to the Civil Aeronautics Administration the following program of glider training, which it believes would be valuable in promoting both civil aviation and national preparedness:

1. Establish glider training units similar to present CPTP