

# SOARING

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## THE AIR CORPS

### *Investigates Soaring*

Gliding and soaring has suddenly sprung into the limelight and drawn the attention not only of the civilian public, but also the attention of the military as well. It took a master stroke, like the German use of gliders in the Crete Campaign, to arouse the "doubting experts" to the point where they had to admit that the glider did have some military value.

It seems a shame that it took such an event to get the governmental and military leaders to lend an ear to what the glider pilots have been trying to tell them for years. The Navy experimented with gliders as long ago as 1933. Their experiments were to determine whether or not preliminary glider training should be included in their flight training syllabus. After what has been construed as a half-hearted attempt, it was determined by them as not worthwhile, so the program was dropped.

This was the sad part because if the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics had not quit and had the Army Air Corps not turned a deaf ear to our pleas, they might have discovered several years ago the potential military uses of gliders. Perhaps it does take a little imagination to think of a glider as a military weapon, but other military powers stretched their imaginations and found a useful weapon.

Early in June, however, the Army Air Corps suddenly took an intense interest in gliders, just a week prior to the Crete invasion. They found that the small but hardy group of glider enthusiasts in the United States had been carrying their torch high and had not been idle the past twelve years. This group had constantly been improving the design and efficiency of their craft through competitive flying at sporting contests.

The Army Air Corps called a group of expert pilots and manufacturers from the East and Midwest to Wright Field for a hasty conference. A week later it assigned six officers to the Frankfort Soaring School and a like number to the Elmira Soaring School for a three weeks intensive training course in motorless aircraft. They found both schools well equipped with two-place sailplanes and competent instructors prepared to carry out this program.

If any skepticism existed in the minds of these twelve Air Corps officers as to the merits of soaring, it has long since vanished. They have all been most enthusiastic in the reception of their training. A spirit of rivalry sprang up between the two schools almost immediately, each group of officers trying to outdo the other. Major Fred R. Dent, Jr., ranking officer of the Elmira group, jestingly sent a telegram to the Joliet group as follows, "Understand that your group is ready for its first solo flight. Happy landings." The following day he received the following reply from Major J. K. Gerhart, ranking officer of the Joliet group, reading, "Have just completed first cross country flight. How do you like the slope soaring at Elmira?" The wire was sent from Lafayette, Indiana, 100 miles from Joliet. All of the Air Corps glider students attended ground school in conjunction with their flight course.

The three weeks' course is over now and the gliding and soaring world is anxiously awaiting the outcome. The first indication that the Army Air Corps plans to deal further with the field of motorless flight is the news that they have ordered a sizeable number of two place sailplanes.

It is our sincere hope that at last the efforts of that small but enthusiastic group of glider pilots and manufacturers from coast to coast will bear fruit. May this be our small but important contribution to the cause of national defense.

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This month's cover photograph shows a J-5 Standard towing three Schweizer two-place sailplanes. These ships were piloted by Stanley W. Smith, John Robinson, and Joseph Steinhauser.

The occasion was the gliding and soaring demonstration staged at Elmira, New York, for the benefit of high ranking government and Army officials. It was partly as a result of this demonstration, sponsored by the Elmira Area Soaring Corporation, that the Army training program was undertaken.