

ARE WE LUCKY?

Letter from England to Bob Stanley in America

TEST PILOT'S OFFICE

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Dear Bob:

I am writing to you for no other reason than that you are a kindred soul. I have just put down the March-April SOARING after reading it from cover to cover, and it has made me mighty jealous of you fellows who can still take a couple of days off at a week-end, and get aloft in a sailplane.

You know we in England who used to live only for the week-end have been unable to glide for two whole years now. At least most of us. There are a few who can, in fact must, glide; but the where, why and how is not for publication, and in any case is not like pre-war sporting gliding.

The main English Gliding Clubs today are a sorrowful sight. I often shoot up the sites while delivering aeroplanes. Very occasionally, one sees a hangar door slightly open, and a couple of enthusiasts doing a spot of maintenance, but mostly there's just the hangar standing there all alone and no sign of any activity at all. It is most depressing. One well-known club in the north has had its clubhouse dismantled and removed to pay off debts.

One of the reasons I am choosing you to write to is that you are, like myself, a test pilot. I am chief here and have two other gliding blokes on my staff, Ken Lingford as pilot and R. F. Stedman as observer. It is my experience that blokes who are keen sailplane pilots are much more reliable as a rule in a power-flying job than those who have no gliding experience at all.

One of the troubles with people who are only interested in power flying is that it is frightfully difficult to convince them that aeroplanes fly because of their shape. Nearly all our designers here in England can think only in terms of frontal resistance, wing loading and power,—witness the strangely misshapen monsters of which we are so proud. If only they were the right shape they would be so much better than they are.

I should like to say here how well appreciated are the aeroplanes you are sending us. I have not had the opportunity of flying the Caribou, yet, but the R. A. F. test pilots are very favorably impressed. The only American types I have flown myself are the Grumman Martlet and the Douglas Boston DB-7, and they handle better than the equivalent English type. I think there is a lot in the saying that "if it looks wrong, it is wrong." A lot of ours look wrong. But so do the Jerrys.

To change the subject back to more pleasant things, I seem to remember seeing a photo of a sailplane which I believe you made, with an unorthodox tail lay-out. I also understand that you did pretty well with it. I would appreciate it if you could give me your opinions about it, and I dare say that the editor of *The Sailplane* would be interested if you could write a short article describing it. I know he is finding it almighty hard to find anything to put in *The Sailplane* these days, so much so that since the printers got blitzed last winter, they have not been able to produce it. I tried out that tail arrangement on a model, but I didn't get any further than that it worked. The model I tried it on was not an ideal machine for the job.

Well, Bob, I hope you don't mind me writing to you like this. When one cannot glide or read much about it, the only thing is to write about it to some one who can. You keep right on gliding and recording your experiences. Exiles from gliding like to know that enthusiasts still exist who are carrying on. Maybe America will be able to hold the first post-war international meeting, in which case we'll be there, somehow or other.

My greetings to Wally Setz, and thanks for the many postcards he has addressed to me from various meetings since 1937.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) JOHN C. NEILAN.

Editor's note: We have learned in a more recent letter from the British Isles that the authorities are allowing gliders to operate again for training purposes. This will, without doubt, make Mr. Neilan much happier. And we wish him and all the others the best of luck.

STATISTICS

According to the Department of Commerce, as of November 1st, 1941, the number of Student, Private and Commercial Glider Pilots in the United States, and the NC and NX licensed gliders, were as follows:

166 Certificated Glider Pilots—80 Private and 86 Commercial; 556 Student Glider Pilots; 60 Certificated Gliders (NC and NX included); and 114 Uncertificated Gliders.