

# Night Flight

By DANA L. DARLING

NOW that a year has elapsed since the army closed its basic glider schools, I see no reason for not telling a few of the experiences at one of the schools. I will not dwell long on day flying as most everyone reading this has had that experience. But I will say, that after instructing for 92 hours in 24 nights I would never complain of any kind of daylight flying weather.

The way you get into night work is generally quite pleasant. The chief instructor springs it on you some night when there is a full moon. He takes you up on a familiarization flight; points out all the lighted cities, landmarks, etc. He comments on the smooth air (at the time) and makes you think there is nothing like it. You say you'll try it and you're a night instructor right away. He doesn't tell you about tow-ropes breaking on moonless nights letting you down miles from any light, with high tension wires, woods, lakes, and buildings serving as an airport. He also probably never had the towplane or other glider (double tow) lights go out while your eyes nearly leave their sockets and the sweat starts with the ground temperature at 15°. Also you find it common to fly in winds up to 40 M.P.H. with gusts running higher.

I am going to tell something now that a good number will not believe, but it happened to me and operations ended as soon as those lucky enough to be on the ground saw it. A student and myself took off in a 3 place, on single tow, it being too rough for double. The town about 3 miles away which we generally passed at from 200 feet to 1,000 feet was never reached. We went up like a giro and in a short time were at 5,000 feet. Feeling a little uneasy, I took the controls, cut the rope and made a 180° turn arriving over our field in nothing flat. Knowing if we turned again we would never get back to the field, we just sat there headed into the wind watching the altimeter and the kerosene smoke pots lining the runway below. At first it was hard to tell if we were going ahead or backing up, but as we settled to around 1,000 feet we could tell which. At about that altitude I got over the down wind leg of the pattern and *backed* to the base leg, over which we sideslipped into position for the landing leg. The landing was accomplished by a 45° dive to the field where we rolled a few feet and were caught by several of the ground crew. Operations quit for the night.

To go back to the start of my night work, I would like to tell about my first ride as an observer with a student on his last night flight. He was supposed to be O. K. so I didn't offer any suggestions. We took off in a two-place sailplane and after a good tow arrived back at the field. Never having been in this model before I asked to fly awhile. Giving the controls back I noticed he paid no attention to the field, wandering around as if he had 450 h.p. on the nose. As we entered the landing pattern I began to think of ordering a dozen like this after the war if we made it O. K. The Base Leg was much further back than necessary, and I began to visualize about how much we would clear the fence bordering the field. We didn't—there was one grand crash as we hit the top posts and landed in a swamp. My hatch was open due to the crowded conditions, and I called to the student as I got out, but got no reply. I soon found out he was not hurt, but too mad to talk. The wings were wrecked, otherwise little damage was done.

On another flight we were all ready to set down when I noticed a wing tip of a single wheel glider directly in our line of flight. The other glider had landed short and had not rolled off the runway. We put our glider into a steep bank as the other wing tip cut the underside of ours from leading to trailing edge. We landed in one piece, but I can't say if it was a three-point landing.

Many flights would come in without the slightest sign of lights on them and one student overshot and rolled into the take-off lane. While sitting there calmly waiting for a jeep, a tow plan chewed off a wing with the prop while taking off with the next tow. (Next page)



Myron Powers sets off Dana Darling who has grown his beard to hide the effects of night flying.