

THE SOARING ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

Its Development and Program

By James A. Simpson

The Need for a Canadian Gliding Organization

THE history of the Canadian gliding movement is one of many disappointments. A wave of enthusiasm followed the first demonstrations of long distance soaring flight by German pilots in 1928, and in the early years of the last decade scores of gliding clubs were formed in towns and cities throughout the country. Most of these were very short lived. Their enthusiasm led them to construct the first glider brought to their attention by the popular press, usually from inadequate drawings, and rarely with skilled supervision. There were no qualified instructors available to get these groups started along the right lines: the result was frequent accidents, and few clubs were able to survive their first serious crash.

At the time of the outbreak of the present war in 1939 there were only three strong gliding clubs left in Canada: two in the western province of Alberta, and one in Montreal. Even these were not very active, however. Although each of the western clubs had one training glider and an intermediate sailplane, and the Montreal club had two primaries, and one secondary and one intermediate sailplane, there were not in the whole country more than a dozen C pilots, and one of silver C category. These groups, and the many other little clubs that were still forming from time to time, only to die out within a year or two, were severely hampered by the dearth of instructors, the lack of constructive and protecting government regulations, and the absence of any organization which could provide information and assistance to newly formed clubs, and coordinate the activities of the established ones.

Meanwhile, some of the more farsighted Canadian gliding enthusiasts had joined the Soaring Society of America or the British Gliding Association, and through subscription to their publications soon learned how much farther the sport had advanced in other countries. Canadian training methods were evidently ten years behind the times, and it was realized that the only way to catch up was to gain first hand experience of modern techniques. A member of the club in Montreal was able to go to one

of the large English clubs, and there take instruction from expert pilots who had themselves been trained at the schools in Germany. Although he was able, on his return, to pass on his knowledge to members of his own club, and to some others by correspondence, this was a totally inadequate solution. More instructors, more administration, more help, was badly needed.

The Present Position of Gliding in Canada

Since the start of the war all the clubs that were strong at that time have virtually disbanded, but their most enthusiastic members, though scattered, are still in the country. A number of strong new clubs have been formed, and at present there are approximately twenty gliding clubs or active gliding groups in Canada, with a combined membership of nearly five hundred. On the other hand the war has brought a number of experienced glider pilots to Canada. Some of these are Canadians who have returned from gliding activities abroad; others are gliding enthusiasts among a group of Polish engineers who have recently come to assist in Canada's war industries. Unfortunately the latter, although eager to help, are concentrated in one or two large cities.

Although the new clubs have had a better start than those of ten or twelve years ago, in that they have at least had some help in choosing suitable aircraft, and have for the most part built them carefully and well, the revival of interest in gliding has brought in its train the usual accidents, culminating in three very serious ones last summer, two of which were fatal to the pilots. Investigation by the Civil Aviation Branch of the Department of Transport showed that these accidents were in every case traceable to inadequate supervision and instruction, rather than faulty equipment, and therefore the Department quite rightly insisted that the clubs concerned cease operating until proper supervision could be provided. The result was a deadlock: instructors could not be obtained.

As a direct outcome of this condition a number of gliding clubs spontaneously suggested that a national organization to promote and control the sport was badly needed.