

End Man on the Rope

By "MOE"

"Moe" is an anonymous person whose views do not necessarily represent those of the Soaring Society.

It would be a lengthy chore to give you a complete picture of the muddle which the Army Air Forces Glider Program is still in . . .

The possibilities of gliders and glider-borne forces have been amply demonstrated in combat where gliders have been used to good advantage several times. But let us leave strategy out of this and concentrate on the technical and administrative angles.

If you are one of the fellows wearing wings with the "G," that automatically entitles you to a fair amount of pushing around. You are to a great extent ruled out from most jobs that other flying officers occupy, except probably the ungrateful task of glider operations officer, and as such you'll have to conform and comply with the willy-nillies of the power operations officer. He of course doesn't know much about gliders (he might even tell you that), and cares less about them. Usually he won't tell you that, but you'll find out about that in very short order. Overseas, you are a very likely candidate for a job as mess or transportation officer. As long as it hasn't much to do with flying—you'll get it.

Right now there is a strong rumor that all future glider pilots will come from the ranks of trained twin engine pilots. If so, where are you going to wind up, with your one or more invasions and/or several hundred hours time as co-pilot in C-47's. Your guess is just as good as mine. But do you remember the day when somebody put his expert opinion on paper stating that anybody could be a glider pilot in 30 hours? The subject of promotion for glider pilots is best left alone.

Let's have a look at our line and inspect our gliders. Well, there is the good old CG-4A. It has probably stood through several summers and winters and if it could walk it would probably have lumbago. Go around and see how many gliders we have in 1A condition, complying with all modifications and safety devices, and for lack of which a goodly number of good guys are sailing in seventh heaven right now. You might find a few, and these most likely overseas, where they have to do their maintenance with a pair of pliers and a screwdriver among five mechanics. "That spot where the dope peeled off? Oh, that's just so you have more light inside. That ring-worm up on the nose fabric? Makes a nice pattern, doesn't it?"

The engineering officer will tell you that there are not enough glider mechanics to do sufficient maintenance. But no doubt we could find some mechanics here and there, maybe even some spare power mechs. But that

could not be done, they haven't got enough training, and they might even be sergeants; a glider mechanic couldn't be more than a corporal anyway. These glider mechs work really hard, but I have never heard that they were recognized or encouraged.

There are a good number of gliders (as well as glider pilots) that have been damaged in forced landings due to failure of the tow mechanism on the tug. It does take a couple of hours to install a safety lock on one tow-ship, so, let's forget it. The Service Command hasn't been able to do anything about it; samples of the lock have been sent from overseas (where it was developed) and so far nothing has happened. They didn't have very much time, just a year or so. Mind you, it could be done right in the shop at the field.

I have heard of cases where glider pilots were strongly urged to fly some gliders which they did not think in very good condition. The Army Air Forces have one of the best aircraft inspection systems in the world, and our inspectors are experienced and resourceful. But it seems that gliders do not fall under the classification of aircraft as far as our Air Inspectors are concerned. As long as the wings don't droop too obviously, and the tail doesn't fly off on a solo hop, why, that glider is perfectly well flyable. Preventive maintenance is something you read about in Technical Orders and such, but do not apply to gliders.

We have great hopes for our later model gliders, CG-10, CG-13, and CG-15, but very few glider pilots have had a chance to fly any of these, and who knows when we shall be lucky enough to get some?

The only possible cause for all this lack of interest is, that Squadron, Group, and even Wing Commanders were confronted with gliders without knowing what to do with them. Practically all that has been done with our gliders is due to the hard work of a few. Some splendid opportunities had to be passed up for lack of cooperation. We just got off to a wrong start and can't get in step now. After all, you can't expect a break from your C. O. when he thinks that gliders are just good enough to rot away—but not to fly. There just are not enough people around that have the glider program on their minds and have the intention to do something with it,—and have enough rank to make themselves heard.

There is only one consoling thought. Gen. Mitchell was criticized for his attempt to prove aerial bombardment. But they got around to it, so, we still have a chance, don't you think?