

No Field? No Fly!

By Otto Hoefner

Some shrewd advice from a man who has spent many a Sunday searching and who was instrumental in finding The P. G. C.'s new field.

WHEN we started the Philadelphia Glider Council in July 1941 our opening meeting was attended by a number of "Old Timers" and we were fortunate to get their advice. Our first task, as pointed out by Captain Barnaby, was to secure a soaring site or a training field. This was disillusioning because we only wanted to fly gliders, presupposing somebody would be willing to let us operate on his ground. Since little or no noise is connected with the launching of silent wings, we felt farmers should be, and would be, only too glad to have such a fine sport illustrated right on their more or less useless fields. An occasional ride for our generous friend should more than compensate him for the trifling inconvenience caused by the storage of our equipment in his barn.

There are many books on gliding for the use of newly formed groups, giving in detail the workings of various budgets. But nowhere do you find listed amounts for field rent, lease or amortization. So beginners take it for granted that the field situation will take care of itself and that equipment will need all the attention. True, we have some instances where groups have worked along these lines and had no field problems. I have in mind the many sites in California, the cheap fields of the Middle West; the places where people are few, lots are big, and a square mile of desert is always available. Unfortunately, these are not the sites accessible to most people, as the majority of clubs are started in large cities and in regions thickly populated, and most of the local ports are in the hands of prosperous power plane people.

Many promising glider clubs have started in this type of location and have all gone, with a few exceptions, the same way. After a good start they found some farmer or owner who let them use their facilities, either after the crop was in or all year around. This went on until the novelty wore off and owners thought things over which takes a season or two. Then the group was asked to look around for a new location. The first few moves are taken casually because new sites beckon and always there is someone else who is either public spirited or just doesn't know what he is in for. However, in time they all find out it is just one merry field

chase after another and, the more vagrant clubs become, the more members drop out, until. . . . Some of the old groups developed fine glider fields only to see the more prosperous power pilots drop in and gradually take over developments. Yes, glider enthusiasts did some outstanding pioneer field work. Few enjoyed the fruits of their labors. As you go down the list of successful clubs you will find that on the whole they are the groups who stayed with a permanent site. War has put a temporary halt to their activities, but you will see them come back strong when the war is over. They will remain the leading clubs.

With new developments coming off the line in ever increasing numbers, one might be inclined to put field problems again at the bottom of the list. Glider pick-up, auxiliary retractable motors, jet units for quick launchings and many other innovations promise launchings out of your back yard. Once more the future holds unlimited possibilities. If it weren't for the ever increasing number of students and instructors who like a lot of "elbow room" the size of training fields might shrink.

Choosing a proper site takes good judgment, endurance and a measure of luck. You may scan countryside for years before you pin the thing down. The actual "pinning down" is something a lot of field hunters have found difficult to do. You may discover the most ideal spot and then not be able to do anything with the owner. It pays to track down the most minute detail, get all the information you can, look over the neighborhood for extensions and talk the whole situation over with the various landholders in the vicinity. Many a small port has gotten some long runways by just such an agreement. Figure approaches, notice how well the land drains and save yourself a lot of expense by avoiding grading. Of course, buildings have to be considered; what can be done with them and how they are located.

Never start to improve a place until you know how long you can stay. If at all possible, try to get at least a five-year lease. It is also very advisable to have an option to buy in the lease. Then you don't mind putting work into the project; it will be a home for the