

GLIDER TRAINING IN CANADA

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Photographs by the Author

LIKE thousands of others, the powerful urge to pilot an aircraft occurred to us more than a few times. However, this desire was usually mentally dismissed for a number of reasons. Being a sedate thirty-three, we felt ourselves lacking in proper coordination, judgment, and feel for the job. The Air Force requirements of perfection in physique did nothing to allay these fears. Most of them, however, proved groundless.

The Air Cadet League of Canada, a service sponsored by the government and connected with the Royal Canadian Air Force, whose function was to train pre-flight youngsters between the ages of fifteen and eighteen years, has decided that not only can the so-called "gaffers" in the middle thirties be taught to fly and instruct Cadets, but that these Cadets can be taught the fundamentals of flying via glider training with very little trouble and in perfect safety.

But what is the purpose of this motorless training? What good can it do, especially now when speeds of five hundred miles per hour are not uncommon? Firstly, as a sport, gliding is indeed unsurpassed. It is economical compared to power flying, although there is the occasional repair to be done due to awkward landing. This can by no means be compared to the same repair on damaged airplanes. For this very reason, the R.A.F. in England in 1940, began training fliers in gliders first. Thus they were able to weed out those who had no real aptitude for flying, and save much expensive equipment which may have been damaged in this preliminary training.

The British were not the only ones to avail themselves of glider training. The Germans were ahead of the rest of the world. To give the reader an idea of why the Luftwaffe was so successful in their organization and in the excellence of their pilots, we must recall that the peace treaty with Germany after the first war did not allow for the building of airplanes in any great quantities. To avoid trouble with the Allies the Germans inaugurated a very elaborate government sponsored glider program which paid off when they were finally ready to train their fighter and bomber pilots. Thus the thousands of boys who had been gliding since the age of twelve or fourteen needed very little powered aircraft training before they were ready to join the Luftwaffe.

It can be seen then that glider training previous to power flying assures the student of being a better pilot in many ways. He has a knowledge of cloud formations and winds which the power flier cannot equal, and he has an assurance and feel for the aircraft which a rookie pilot can only get after considerable flying time has been piled up. In other words, he has learned to fly with no instruments but by pure instinct. The wind in his face indicates his safe flying speed. He adjusts his gliding angle automatically and his knowledge of a stall is a very intimate thing, for he has learned how to come out of it by his experience in hundreds of soaring flights.

Perhaps we should recall that a great deal of our early knowledge of powered aircraft came from the early pioneers of gliding. The airplane could never have been put into the present worldwide use without the efforts and experiments of Lilienthal, or Octave Chanute, a man of sixty-four, who began experiments in gliding in 1896 and who had no accidents in over two thousand flights, or the Wright brothers who first saw clearly the great possibilities of flying and first made gliding flights of approximately ten minutes duration. These men were not flying at first, they were gliding.

Thus flying has been built up to some extent from the experience of soaring pilots themselves. In the last twenty-five years, thermals, which are the very strong ascending currents found in the atmosphere, were discovered by those who were experienced in soaring. Much valuable data was uncovered. Many an aircraft design has been tested as a glider first (by the Germans recently) and many new construction features were first used in gliders to determine their possibilities.

Although due to the war flying has been given a great boost and has made more people airminded, we were still not fostering flying nor doing a great deal to encourage its rapid progress. The Europeans were ahead of us in flight training in 1938. For example, Germany had 816 Silver "C" pilots, Poland 159, France 29, England 50, and the United States 17. (A Silver "C" pilot is one who has on two or more flights, travelled a minimum of 32 miles, reached an altitude of 3280 feet or more, and attained a duration of 5 hours in a sailplane.)

In England, Poland, Russia, and Germany almost all gliding training was given at government sponsored schools. It cost the student nothing to learn and thousands of boys obtained a wonderful introduction to



Chief Instructor F/L Don MacClement briefs his students.