

POST-LIBERATION SOARING IN FRANCE

By CLEM LUEBKER

DURING the latter part of July, 1945, while in France "sweating out" redeployment, I contacted the French Air Ministry to visit one of their soaring centers. Through the courtesy of Monsieur Dessaleux, director of the soaring training center at Beynes-Thiverval, I visited this site as his guest on the 16th of August. I had planned to have a French civilian interpreter accompany me that day, but his services had higher priority that day, and I was forced to struggle along with my "pigeon" French.

I had the pleasure of meeting Monsieur Gasnier, chief pilot and instructor of the soaring center. Both Monsieur Gasnier and Monsieur Dessaleux are Golden "C" pilots, or Class "D" as they term it in France.

When I arrived at the site during the middle of the afternoon, training was in progress with advanced students in single plane tows. Two Castel 242 two-place sailplanes and a Baby Grunau were being used for this training.

The Beynes-Thiverval soaring training center is about 27 miles southwest of Paris, situated on fairly level land with the surrounding country suitable for emergency landings. There are two hangars and workshops, together with feeding and housing facilities for a small group of students.

The site is intended for thermal flying, the longest runway approximately 4,000 feet long and running in a northwest-southeast direction. Launching equipment includes three winches and four tow planes. Two of the tow planes are Fieseler Storch (German) observation high wing monoplanes with 240 h.p. liquid cooled engines. The other two are Luciole (French) two-place biplanes with 140 h.p. liquid cooled engines.

One of the winches was recently completed at the Ford Motor Company plant here in France. It is powered with a brand new Ford V-8 engine. Its general construction is similar to other early winches with the cable drums at the rear wheel positions. However the cable drums are really "schnozzy"—they are aluminum castings!

The tow planes are equipped with a slipstream powered windlass to wind in automatically the 220 foot towline as soon as the glider is released. I have been away from soaring activities for over four years now, so I don't know whether any one in the States has done anything to provide an automatic method of winding in the towline after release of the glider. I believe that some type of manually operated windlass has been built and used in the States, but I have not heard of any with the automatic feature.

Essentials of this slipstream powered windlass are as follows: A wheel about 18 inches in diameter with about 8 air scoops along its circumference (similar to those of an anemometer), and projecting in a vertical position in line of flight partly through the bottom of the fuselage, provides the power. A small drum driven by a chain from the air scoop wheel contains the towline. The towline passes through a tubular fitting near the tail skid.

In the performance sailplanes of French design I saw an Emouchete single-place sailplane, strut-braced, with plywood fuselage. I also saw the Avia 40-P and 41-P cantilever wing sailplanes with plywood fuselages. Some very good performances have been turned in on these two Avia types.

Several weeks before I visited the Beynes-Thiverval soaring center, on a day when the thermals were really "popping," three pilots took off and in approximately four and one-half hours flying time all three landed at points in Belgium. Monsieur Gasnier landed at Liege, Monsieur Lepanse at Aix-la-Chapelle, and Mademoiselle Choynet reached Brussels. Mademoiselle Choynet now is France's leading woman soaring pilot, having set several records during the spring and summer of this year. Records on the above mentioned flights into Belgium have not yet been homologated.

Before the war the veteran soaring pilot Monsieur Eric Nessler chalked up some notable records. In 1938 he made a distance flight of 382.4 km. (237 miles) and an altitude flight of 3,604 meters (11,821 feet). Since the liberation of Paris a year ago, a number of record flights have been made by Nessler and others here in France. On July 29, 1945, Nessler made a distance with return flight from Beynes-Thiverval to Orleans in a Kranich with a passenger, a distance of 200 km. (124 miles). On the 31st of July he made a 330 km. (204.6 miles) distance flight with a passenger, also in a Kranich.

The 370 km. (229.4 miles) of Monsieur Lepanse on the 20th of July to Aix-la-Chapelle, Belgium, was a distance flight with the destination of the flight announced.

During the past few months Mademoiselle Marcelle Choynet has made a distance flight (official) of 347.466 km. (215.915 miles); also, a distance flight with destination announced of 245 km. (152 miles) in the Meise "Olympic" and a distance flight of 237 km. (147 miles) in a Castel 242 with a passenger.

A week after my visit at the Beynes-Thiverval soaring center, I visited the office of the Service des Sports Ariens in Paris. Here I met Monsieur Gouvenot and Monsieur Hoppenot who are in charge of information for motorless flying in France. They kindly furnished me with a complete set of French and international soaring records, extracts of which are published herewith.

France already has quite a number of "C" and Silver "C" pilots, and a few Golden "C" pilots. Another soaring site where training is carried on, and where some notable records have been made, is at Montagne-Noir.

All the students at the Beynes-Thiverval soaring center are civilian students. However the center has the support and is under the supervision of the French Air Ministry. All this should insure a sound basis for the soaring program in France, providing the means of training sufficient instructors. Along with the recovery of France economically, real progress in motorless flight can be expected here.