

A SURVEY OF BRITISH GLIDING

(Continued from page 3)

The World's Distance Record is held by a Russian, with 465.6 miles, while the British record is 209 miles. The World's Altitude Record is 22,434 ft., held by Germany, with a British equivalent of 15,000 ft. The Duration Record is also held by Germany with 36 hrs. 35 mins. (beaten during the War by a fellow countryman with a flight of 52 hrs., but disallowed with all other records made during the War years) with a British equivalent of 15 hrs. 47 mins. The British records were put up by a handful of amateurs, almost entirely on foreign machines, bought with money from their own pockets. With financial support, and its effect of allowing many more people to obtain advanced training and generally widening the market, really high-performance British machines could have been available, and the World's records attacked, with consequent gain in national prestige. Instead of being imported, high-performance machines could have been exported.

The Pre-War Clubs

At this point it may be of interest to give an idea of the state of affairs at the outbreak of the War. There were 16 major clubs in existence, situated within reach of the centres of population, and 17 to 20 smaller clubs, or branches, which did elementary training only, registered with the B.G.A. Between them these clubs had an active membership of 2,500-3,000, and had in nine years gained 3,327 certificates.

The major clubs were fully equipped for all elementary training, and for soaring to the stage where the pilot was ready to try for his Silver "C." The few high-performance machines available for pilots at this stage, however, often made it difficult to allow the qualifying flights to be made, particularly that for distance, owing to the numbers awaiting their turn to fly.

These clubs had adequate hangarage, residential, and catering facilities. Instruction and maintenance were on an efficient basis.

The monthly official publication of the B.G.A. had many foreign subscribers, and received and published news from all over the World.

In nine years the Gliding Movement in this country had, from the smallest beginnings, built itself up to a position of high quality although in small quantity. Its smallness was its only real drawback, as in the countries where gliding was encouraged, the number of gliders in use within the country was sufficient to bring the price for export purposes well below the figure at which this country could produce them.

Amongst the most visible results, for war purposes, and worth far more than the £5,000 given, were the immediate availability of the original British-produced Kirby Kites for the Glider Pilot Regiment, together with the necessary nucleus of glider-trained personnel. The original A.T.C. trainers were also drawn from the same source, together with numbers of instructors and ground equipment.

The Present Position

In 1943 the B.G.A., as controlling body, called a Council Meeting of 15 representatives to discover the

position of the clubs. A large attendance was not expected, as members were scattered, and the War was occupying a great deal of attention. To the surprise of the Secretary, 29 people turned up! Since that meeting the B.G.A. interim committee, and now the Council, has met regularly, reconstituted the structure of the Association to bring it up to date, and has really got down to the job of assisting the clubs.

One and a half years after the end of hostilities in Europe, and twelve months after the raising of the ban on civil flying, and twelve months after the Director-General of Civil Aviation had offered "every assistance in his power short of subsidy which the Treasury saw no justification for granting, as it had been proved that the clubs had contributed nothing to the defence of this country," the position is as follows:—

Of the 34 clubs which have joined the B.G.A., three have not yet had their requisitioned sites given up. All of them have practically no aircraft, due to requisitioning. The clubs were paid approximately 50 per cent. of the pre-War cost of the machines, or what amounts to about 20 per cent. of to-day's replacement cost. Of the above clubs at least seven have no aircraft at all.

After the defeat of Germany thousands of suitable gliders were captured in the western zone. Hundreds of these went to France. Numbers were broken up. A few are in use in Germany, and about thirty odd were brought over here. Of these thirty, nineteen have been burnt owing to the damage received in transit. Four others are not repairable.

With regard to new production, permission was not given to manufacturers to divert any material or labour for civil production until two weeks before the ban on civil flying was lifted, and seven months after the end of the War. Consequently, nine months later, the manufacturers have only just managed to get jiggered up for full production—and of that production about 50 per cent. must be exported. Of the existing production most goes to the A.T.C., even though the A.T.C. took over, without any option, the clubs' fleets.

The ground equipment position is similar; many of the winches, etc., were taken over, and in spite of repeated applications to the Ministry of Supply, and promises of help by the Ministry of Civil Aviation, the Government has offered surplus ex-Service equipment, much of which is being broken up at the taxpayers' expense, at the following rates:—

Non-convertible Beaverettes (nearly new), £150 each (\$600.).

Non-convertible Beaverettes (well used), £100 each (\$400.).

Bren-carriers (well used), £50 each (\$200.).

Balloon winches (immobile and unconverted), £150 each (\$600.).

Such prices are quite beyond the finances of the clubs, with aircraft at to-day's prices to be purchased first.

The extent of the Ministry of Civil Aviation's assistance with aircraft is that six unserviceable ex-German gliders, two of which are secondary trainers, and three of which are incomplete or beyond repair, were loaned to the clubs for one year, on the following conditions:

(a) The clubs to pay for putting them in order, the estimated cost of repairs averaging £200 per machine, and the gliders remaining Government property.