

GERMANY STARTS BACK

By F. B. LANE



The author surrounded by 40,000 spectators at the Wasserkuppe, 1951.

On April 26, 1951, the Allied High Commission opened up gliding in Western Germany by exempting certain categories of gliders from prohibited aeronautical activities under the occupation military security laws. The design limit was set at two-place, twenty meter span and weight empty of not more than four hundred kilograms.

The effect on the German gliding groups was electrifying. The Deutsche Aero Club blossomed out overnight and showered the member clubs with literature. The framework of the DAeC, controlling hundreds of the local groups was in operation. Everybody wanted to fly.

A sober look at the situation showed the difficulties and delays ahead. There just weren't any gliders. The last German machines were built in '43, possibly a few in '44. All in the American Zone had been burned, it is said, by order of the then Commanding General of the 7th Air Force. Those in the British Zone had been confiscated. Of these, several boat loads had been sent to England, according to eye witnesses. There remained about sixty in the hands of the RAF (BAFO) flying clubs, including every remaining two-place. These, of course, were unavailable for German use. The only hope of gliders were any that might have been illegally hidden away.

Furthermore, there was no licensing, inspecting or approval machinery. All of this would take time to install. All that there was was enthusiasm. The spirit of a German "Segelflieger" group given back their flying after six years of prohibition is something that has to be experienced to be appreciated.

As an interim measure, while Bonn was organizing an airworthiness office, the Civil Aviation Administrators of the High Commission of each district were requested to supervise the licensing of pilots



Mu-13 on the starting line. Rhon, 1951. British owned Kranich on the right.

and machines, and were instructed to act as "god-fathers" to the local groups.

I thus found myself as a kind of minor dictator over the gliding activities of a large section of North Germany. A situation Ripley would appreciate.

During the first months there was some delay in completing the authorization for the Germans to build and own gliders. The situation was not yet clear and the German clubs were in fear of confiscation if they appeared with gliders. In order to save time, I therefore gave the local group an order to build me a Baby Grunau and made out an American ownership certificate for it.

The next day we proceeded to a farm and dug the Grunau out of a hay loft in a barn where it had been resting for a long time. Subsequently three primary gliders were secured in the same way.

It is typical of the German system that although these machines had all been hidden by individuals, ownership automatically reverted to the club, a branch of the DAeC.

About twelve old gliders were thus provided for all of Western Germany.

The pilots were also a problem. With possibly a hundred thousand "C" or better pilots in Germany, none of whom had flown for six or seven years, and with no method for dual check, since Germans were forbidden airplane time, the situation seemed ripe for crashes.

Flying of the rejuvenated machines started about the middle of July. By that time the Aero Clubs had appointed their local club instructors and these men now had the responsibility of saying who could or could not fly.

Our local instructor, delegated by the DAeC was well known to me. He, incidentally, had been a pro-