

The Noblest of the Sports

LIGHT PLANE PILOT LEARNS ABOUT MOTORLESS FLIGHT

by EDWIN D. MERRY

On last August 27th the sun did not come up bright and sharp against the flatiron mountains west of Boulder, Colorado. I know about this for I was there. This was the day that I was to fly a glider.

For years I had mooned about climbing into a sailplane and getting myself towed up some two thousand feet. I'd tug on that bright red ball which would release the tow line and leave me soaring, quiet and graceful as the eagles. Then indeed I would experience that high loneliness I had often read about.

One glider man had said, "When I get up there, I can't help feeling that I'm mighty close to God and a long way from everybody else. You like mountain-climbing? Why go to the trouble of working your legs when you can let the wind do the work for you?"

The Waco tow plane was coughing along to pick up our nylon line. My glider companion grinned back and broke the news, "No soaring today. No updrafts anywhere. I'll cut her loose at 2,000 and you can spend your altitude any way you like. All set?"

The grass blades of the runway became a blur. The single wheel trundled under us. Then we were up and smooth on the air. But the red Waco remained earthbound. At the first upwind bank and turn, I took a snapshot, and then I started checking things: lake, roads, snow-capped mountains to the left. We could hear and feel the tow plane laboring upward and dragging us in long, easy turns. Suddenly it was very quiet. I saw the rope pull away, lashing the air as it diminished.

"Just remember," Bolter Smith was telling me, "you can't use too much rudder when you fly a glider. It's not like your T-craft. Hold her 40 mph indicated.

"How about stalls?" I wanted to know. (I can never feel right about any ship until I know how she acts when slowed to flight failure speed.)

About the Author:

He is now an Editor of "EVERY WEEK," after twenty-five years of teaching school. This article was written after a flight provided by Bolter Smith and Dave Stacey as a feature at the CAP - University of Colorado Sponsored Workshop, at Boulder Colorado. Mr. Merry says, "The best flying that I have done has been when I was giving free rides to my high school students, passing along the thrill of being airborne to the very fine youngsters of our country." "NOBLEST OF THE SPORTS" is published by special permission of "EVERY WEEK," the weekly high school current events newspaper, published by American Education Publications.



Dave Stacey inspects the wing of his Schweizer 1-21 while the author rests his arm on a wing at the "Workshop."

"Okay," squawked the head before me. "You bought so much altitude. There's no free soaring today. Spend what you've got any way you like. Just save enough to get us back into the field."

I stalled her. You know — stick back all the way till it gets so quiet you'd swear you were in your grave, with a Plexiglas lid. Down we dropped. Vertical. Like a starved fish hawk going in. And as we plummeted, I shoved the stick forward in the approved light plane style. The wind built up to a scream and so did Mr. Bolter Smith's voice: "No, no! Don't shove the stick away. Hold it right back in your lap. Do another one."

After that I did two stalls in a manner that kept Mr. Smith's eyes straight forward, so I guess they came off all right. Always I shall remember that unearthly quiet that came at the "break." There is no other silence

like it. Go up some time and find out for yourself.

After the stall I just sat in the easy sky and spent my altitude until Mr. Smith was again advising me: "Come in plenty tall. You better allow for plenty of drop. Expect downdrafts. We can always let her settle. We can't get out and push."

Good coaching. Very good. I came over the little lake, upwind, a good 100 feet high, Smooth, straw-colored grass under me. Then she settled! She



Marilyn Knight, one of many 9th graders who became flying enthusiasts with Mr. Merry in his Taylorcraft

did not fall. Just off the earth I restored life and let her float — and float — and float. Fun! She touched on the runway like an elderly maiden aunt with a basket of country eggs. "Let her roll," said Smith's voice, which I had forgotten about. "The hangar is dead ahead. Let her trundle. We'll push her up onto the nose skid when we get close enough."

That is exactly the way my first glider flight came off. I don't know when I shall get to go up again, but I am going. Gliding is the *noblest of the sports*. Try it yourself some day and you will know what I mean.

One of the very few soaring groups of the world to own its flying field, is the Philadelphia Glider Council, which owns a "Gliderport" of about 80 acres with a hangar and other improvements.