

ROYAL AIR FORCE GLIDING AND SOARING ASSOCIATION

by

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It may come as a surprise to some readers of "Soaring" to hear that the Royal Air Force Gliding and Soaring Association owes something of its origins to the Soaring Society of America; but most readers will be well aware that the link is maintained in the person of the present Editor of "Soaring," Life and Founder member of our Association, and British National Soaring Champion in 1951.

The Association was founded in London in the Winter of 1949 by a small team of enthusiasts, who believed that Gliding and Soaring is a natural field sport for aviators and that it could fulfill the same function in an air-minded nation as sailing small boats has hitherto fulfilled in those with a maritime tradition. The writer arrived at this conclusion very largely during a year's residence in the United States, culminating in a most enjoyable visit to the 1949 Soaring Meeting at Elmira. The hospitality and friendliness of SSA members whom he and his wife met there is something that will never be forgotten. And the enthusiasm which this visit stimulated had a direct bearing on the writer's determination to help form the Royal Air Force Gliding and Soaring Association.

Our Association began in a very small way with one glider, a Slingsby "Prefect," located at Detling in charge of Jock Forbes. We had about fifteen members. And a second aircraft which we bought in 1950 was destroyed in an accident. Things did not therefore start too well, and we were very early confronted with two problems which I believe are fundamental to all gliding clubs. They are:

First, Gliding Equipment is expensive, and healthy growth is only possible if enough people take part to ensure economic utilization of resources. This is only another way of saying what Air Lines know only too well, namely that an aircraft on the ground is lost dollars.

Secondly, that time on the ground can only be reduced if there is a good soaring location available, and a good organization to operate it.

The result of this thinking has been that the RAFGSA has concentrated all its effort since 1950 on the creation of "Gliding Centres" located at various airfields, so chosen as to be accessible to the greatest possible number of enthusiasts. At the present time, we have eight such Clubs in the United Kingdom and one in Cyprus. Our aim, which is about half way to achievement, is to provide each Club with two two-seater trainers, in which dual instruction can be given, one intermediate soaring aircraft (Grumau type) and one sailplane of good performance and rugged construction, such as the Olympia built by Messrs. Elliotts of Newbury. In addition, we aim to provide a winch, and a retrieving vehicle.

Naturally, all this costs money, and we expect a Club to be able to find half the first cost of all its equipment, and to pay the full cost of all subsequent maintenance and replacement. The Association finds the remainder and, in addition, pays each Club a small annual subsidy with the object of enabling Clubs to keep flying costs to a minimum. Our total membership in the United Kingdom has now passed the 500 mark.

In addition there are the Service Gliding Clubs in Germany, which are affiliated to the RAFGSA. These operate with ex-German equipment, and in addition to providing a considerable amount of flying, serve to indoctrinate large numbers of newcomers to gliding and soaring.

Finally, no word about gliding in the Royal Air Force would be complete without mention of the Air Training Corps, which is a "pre-Service" Training organization whose aim is to provide a source of recruits for the Royal Air Force. This organization does a large amount of elementary gliding, and during 1954 achieved over 99,000 launches.

Up to now, we in the RAFGSA have done more elementary gliding than advanced soaring. This has been a necessary part of building up the Association; now the time has arrived

when we hope to do more soaring, and we hope, this year, to enter three and perhaps four teams for the British National Contests. Two teams will fly Olympias; one, a Gull IV; and the fourth a Kranich. Our ultimate aim is to provide enough soaring both for officers and airmen to encourage those who have begun their gliding in the Air Training Corps, to continue soaring when they join the Royal Air Force.

Finally, may I end by wishing the Soaring Society of America and its members, and particularly those charming and hospitable folks we met at Elmira, continued success in the fine work they do for Soaring.

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