

AGAIN, COULD THIS HAVE BEEN YOU?

A Summary of 1955 Sailplane Accidents

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This year's listing of accidents bears a strong resemblance to the 1954 listing in that they are all due, with one exception, to pilot error. One would think that the more experienced pilots would not be so likely to be involved and that the majority of errors would be made by students, but this is not the case.

There were eight pilots involved in as many accidents. Larry Edgar's trouble in the wave was not due to pilot error and is listed only for the record. Of the seven remaining pilots, the flight times of two are not known to the Safety Committee. Five pilots had an average total flight time of 640 hours each with 70 hours being the minimum individual time. All five were proficient sailplane pilots as well as power pilots. Four of the accidents, for which these five were responsible, occurred in the landing phase of their flights. Of all accidents, six occurred during landing, one on takeoff and one in mid-air.

It is a bit of a shock to realize that one does not have to be a student to get into trouble. The facts indicate that the necessary lack of judgment required to produce an accident is not easily come by; it develops only through experience. As with all forms of human action, familiarity sometimes breeds carelessness. It is with the safe pilot that familiarity breeds respect.

TG-3A—A commercial pilot with an instructor rating, having over 1000 hours power time plus 380 hours glider time, took off by means of auto pulley tow on a hot day, from a high altitude field, at minimum airspeed, in a ship with the inboard section of the ailerons locked in place and having very little or no stall warning, due to an extensive "clean up" program. When the tow line unexpectedly released at a low altitude, a spin into the ground followed. The pilot later died of injuries received in the crash.

CAUSE: Failure to fly the sailplane with a due respect for the limitations of field height, temperature, method

of tow, and ship characteristics. When the always possible happened, the pilot had no control over the situation.

1-19—During a meet at which 13 gliders were flying, a 1-19 was landing at the downwind end of the active runway. A 2-22, with both pilot and passenger in place, was parked in the center of the active runway in preparation for the next winch takeoff. The pilot of the 1-19 landed directly on top of the left wing of the 2-22 at the inboard end of the aileron. Both ships pivoted about 70 degrees after the impact. None of the three persons in the sailplanes was injured, but the left wing of the 2-22 sustained major damage. Minor damage resulted to the 1-19.

CAUSE: Failure to keep the runway cleared for landings and failure on the part of the 1-19 pilot to observe the basic safety rule of not trying to land at the extreme downwind end of the runway.

L-K—A private glider pilot with 775 hours total flight time, including 120 hours in gliders, was on a cross-country flight during a contest. The flight was on schedule until a large area of weak convection was encountered. A short time later it became obvious that a landing would soon have to be made. When the pilot was down to 1000 feet above the terrain, he chose a suitable field and began the approach. An incorrect estimate of the wind velocity resulted in a premature turn on to final, and the pilot put the sailplane into a right slip. Touchdown was made at mid-field with the right wing low. The wingtip caught in the deep grass and pulled the sailplane around 180 degrees in a violent ground loop. The L-K received major damage to both wings. The pilot was not injured.

CAUSE: Failure to correctly judge the height of the grass and to land with the wings level.

Pratt-Read Pilot—70 hours total flying time, 15 of it in gliders, took off with aero tow for his first solo flight in the P-R after three dual flights. He released at 2200 feet above

the field and soared for about 30 minutes. The approach to the field put him directly downwind of the end of the strip where he proceeded to lose altitude by flying in a figure 8 pattern. He then initiated a 360 degree turn away from the field. After approximately 180 degrees of the turn was made, the pilot steepened up the bank excessively and opened the spoilers. The resultant vertically-banked diving turn could not be controlled by the pilot in that more back pressure on the stick only increased the speed. He did not realize he was in a "graveyard spiral." After three complete turns, recovery was finally made within inches of the ground by releasing the controls completely. A wing tip contacted a tree during the pull-up and the sailplane rolled into a line of trees upside down. The pilot was unhurt but the wings of the sailplane were totally demolished. Damage to the fuselage was superficial.

CAUSE: Failure to fly a standard power plane landing pattern, thus forcing the pilot to attempt maneuvers for which he did not have the experience or training.

TG-1A—A private pilot with 118 hours, including 50 glider flights, took off by means of winch tow for an indoctrination flight with a passenger in the front seat. The tow was released normally at 1100 feet and the pilot made a normal flight to the downwind end of the runway. Several S-turns were made off the end of the runway and the pilot was just turning to the right on to the final approach at about 250 feet and at minimum airspeed when a spin to the right developed. The pilot attempted normal spin recovery after a full turn but there was no response from the controls. The ship hit the ground after completing about three turns of a fairly flat spin. The passenger suffered a punctured left eye, cuts and bruises. The pilot bit his tongue. It was discovered that the passenger had unfastened both shoulder harness and safety belt. The fuselage of the sailplane was a total loss but the wings were repairable. The CG of the ship was later discovered to be about 20 per cent too far aft of the limits due to the weight of the occupants.

CAUSE: Failure to load the sailplane properly and thus stay within the CG limits, and failure to fly a standard landing pattern with a reserve of speed.

1-19—A commercial pilot with 854 hours time, including 275 glider

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