1956 ACCIDENT SURVEY

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The following is a summary of U.S. glider accidents that occurred during 1956. It is late, but the lessons to be learned are not affected by time. Last year's accidents serve as examples of what to avoid as well as this year's.

1. TG-3A

The pilot, with 83 hours in gliders, 30 of it in TG-3A's, took off by means of airplane tow and released at an altitude of 1000 feet above the field. He started circling, but, finding no lift, re-entered the traffic pattern downwind of the field. Strong lift was encountered at 500 feet and the pilot turned into it in order to maintain altitude since he was not sure of wind direction. Encountered strong lift again at 350 feet and while completing his turn to line up for a downwind leg on the runway chosen, ran into very strong down. The pilot increased airspeed to 70 mph to get out of the down and to maintain control, leveled off 3 feet above the tops of the brush. He landed in the brush 75 feet from the runway. Damage to the ship was comparatively minor except for a cracked D-tube in the left wing. The pilot was not injured. Shoulder harness was being used at the time.

Cause: Failure to plan and carry out a proper landing pattern.

Comment: The safest pattern under all conditions is the standard powered aircraft type. This means that you are committed to a definite course of action at an altitude of not less than 600 feet above the ground.

2. Pratt Read

The pilot and his passenger took off for a cross-country flight by means of airplane tow. The pilot, with a private glider rating and 1100 hours logged time, released at 2400 feet above the ground in a good thermal. Soon afterward an extensive, strong down area was encountered and the pilot could not get out of it. Altitude was lost rapidly. It soon became necessary to land in the desert. Since no landing area was available, the pilot elected to stall the ship into a large Palo Verde tree. Neither pilot nor passenger were injured but the ship was a total loss. Shoulder harness was being used at the time.

Cause: An extensive down current, common in desert country; encountered while too low to escape.

Comment: None.

3. Nimbus II

The pilot and his experienced crew assembled the ship for another day of contest flying after several successive hard days of flying in high temperatures. Everything seemed normal except that, shortly after take-off, an unfamiliar creaking sound was heard directly behind the pilot's head. He thought no more of it until, about 40 minutes later, the creaking had become worse in the thermal turbulence. The pilot loosened his shoulder straps and looked around. To his consternation, he discovered that the two main wing spar-fuselage attach bolts were missing. His low altitude of 1500 feet above the ground made a bailout risky, so he continued climbing in the thermal to 7600 feet. A south wind and a position over the southern outskirts of a major city again made bailout inadvisable so the pilot set up a gentle glide with the wind over the city. The decision was then made to cautiously continue the flight. The course was completed with no further incident.

Cause: A hard flown meet, several days without rest and high temperatures reduced both pilot and crew to a point where a slip in assembly procedures almost caused a major accident.

Comment: An assembly check-off list, used every time the ship is assembled, is a must for safe operation.

4. Cinema

The pilot, with a private rating and 30 hours logged time, was flying from the rear seat in order to gain experience for an instructor rating. The front seat passenger, a power pilot, was depended on to call out airspeed and altitude. Take-off was by winch tow. At about 150 feet the towline broke. Request for an altitude reading by the pilot was not immediately answered by the passenger. The pilot was under the impression that he was too high to land straight ahead so he started a 360 degree turn to the right. The pilot immediately realized he would not complete the turn. He rolled level after completing about 180 degrees of the turn and stalled into a field of corn. The right wing tip caught and the ship ground looped. Neither pilot nor passenger were injured. The ship was not seriously damaged. Shoulder harness was being used at the time.

Cause: The pilot misjudged his altitude. This led him to attempt a turn at too low an altitude.

Comment: Never attempt a turn from a line break with less than 500 feet of altitude. A glider can be touched down at high speed and stopped by the use of forward stick, brakes and spoilers in a surprisingly short distance.

5. 2-22

The pilot, after a local soaring flight, came in for a landing. The wind was from the southwest at 10-12 mph. The landing strip was oriented in an east-west direction. The pilot landed directly into the wind, diagonally across the strip and, in an effort to clear the strip taxied too close to a tree on the boundry of the airstrip. A wing hit the tree. The leading edge of the wing near the tip was dented and the trailing edge buckled near the root. The pilot was not injured.

Cause: Failure of the pilot to be aware of obstructions.

Comment: It is always safest to follow a standard landing pattern, crabbing for wind as necessary, into the cleared area designated for landing.

6. Pratt Read

A student glider pilot with a student power ticket and 31 hours total time, 6½ of it in the PR, was on the base leg at 700 feet. Spoilers were opened and altitude was lost to 500 feet. The base leg was continued but sink appeared so rapid that the pilot shortened the pattern. Speed was kept high. The PR struck the tops of a clump of small trees on the edge of the airfield and, out of control, landed 4 feet from the edge of the runway. Both wings were substantially damaged. The pilot was not hurt. Shoulder harness was being used at the time.

Cause: The pilot was emotionally