

# BEEFSTEAK AND BUTTERFLIES

by GINI DULANEY CAMPBELL

The Germans say, "Flying isn't a sport. It's a disease!" and it is an illness which can never be completely cured. From my first flight at the age of sixteen until six years later I lived for flying. When I finally managed to turn this expensive hobby into a paying proposition I was completely at peace with the world, for then I could fly for money and in my spare time I could spend my money for flying. But then I got married.

As I was twenty-three and old enough to know how important flying was to me, I had extracted a promise from my husband before I married him that he would never interfere with this somewhat unusual pursuit of mine. He reciprocated by stating that he was only marrying me for free flying lessons anyway, so on that basis we signed the marriage contract. Neither of us could have foreseen that in Brazil, where we had agreed to spend the first three years of our married life, I would be unable to obtain a pilot's license, this privilege being forbidden to all foreigners. After some frustrating flights with Brazilian friends, I realized that not being able to do any flying was having a serious effect on my disposition. Rather like giving up alcohol or cigarettes, I decided to stay away from anything to do with flying and to find other interests.

For the following ten years, circumstances such as childbirth, living in remote places, etc., made it impossible for me to fly. By the time we moved to Germany, where motor flying was forbidden, flying with relationship to myself had become no more than something to tell my children about at bedtime.

And then one Sunday, six months after our arrival in Germany, my husband suggested we drive to the East Zone border and peek under the Iron Curtain. The weather had been terrible ever since our arrival in Hamburg, our contacts with the German people had left a lot to be desired and I was ready to throw in the towel and return to the States. When Clyde had come home two weeks before with the suggestion that

I might be interested in sailplane flying, since there was so much of it being done here, I wouldn't even go with him to see about it. I had always had the normal motor pilot's contempt for glider flying and my information concerning gliders was non-existent. I had the mistaken impression that they were open-air contraptions closely resembling the Wright Brothers' Kitty Hawk, only not so well put together and that they barely got off the ground. I practically told Clyde that that kind of flying was for sissies and not for an old-time hot pilot like myself.

This is the story of an American woman's experiences with a German soaring club. Its detailed description of their club activities will tend to give a proper perspective to the current expansion of soaring activity in the United States, besides revealing how the sport is pursued now in the country of its origin.

I don't know to this day if our driving past the flying field as Boberg was coincidental or if Clyde arranged it that way. But our plan to see the East Zone border never materialized that Sunday for, as we topped the crest of a hill, I looked down into a small valley and what I witnessed in those few minutes was to change the course of my life and, eventually, the lives of my family.

I saw what looked like a lot of small airplanes all resting on one wing with the other sticking up in the air. Clyde pulled the car over to the side of the road and we watched a take-off. A fellow was standing by the wing of one of the sailplanes holding it level and after a few seconds it started to move forward, then with a whoosh it seemed to rise straight up in the air. It was then I noticed it was being towed by a cable which was fastened to a winch at the other end of the field.

Within less than a minute the glider achieved an altitude of about 1500 feet, leveled off and the cable dropped to the ground. We watched

the glider for about half an hour while I kept insisting that it must have a motor since it circled and gained altitude and finally flew out of sight. Clyde tried to explain about thermals (updrafts of air) and so forth but I was sure I had forgotten more about flying than he'd ever learn so to prove his point he drove us down to the field.

Of all the things I learned that day I think the most important was humility. It was a fact that those pilots, starting with an altitude of 1500 feet, would use the updrafts of air, circling like the birds and rise up to altitudes of 6,000 feet. That Sunday we saw gliders landing which had been in the air for as much as two and a half hours and others which landed in eight minutes. We found out that if you didn't get a thermal or if you didn't fly good enough to stay in one after you got it, you would have to land within four to eight minutes, depending upon the kind of glider you were in.

When I saw this kind of flying going on I started twanging like a bow string (to quote Clyde) and decided to plop down my money and start flying. I was sure they would welcome me into their midst and they certainly looked as if they could use the money! I had never seen a more run-down, decrepit looking group of people in my life. The two buildings looked as though they would fall down any minute; the retrieving car (which brings the cable back after each start) looked like a fugitive from a junk pile (I later learned that it was!) and there were mud holes everywhere.

Instead of being delighted with my membership when I joined the club two weeks later, they made it only too obvious that I was a burden to the club. There is no question of paying your way, it's a question of doing your share of the work and since "a woman's place is in the home" is still the general idea in Germany, there was no room for women in this scheme of things.

I had forgotten the struggle I had had in the States trying to prove my worth in what was considered a man's field, but it all came back to me in those first weeks at Boberg. The general attitude is best expressed by quoting one of the instructors. I am told that as we were leaving that first Sunday he said, "I hope she pays her money and never comes back."

To a lesser degree the same sentiments were expressed by Karl-Heinz