

# **DARK DAYS AT THE AIR FORCE ACADEMY**

When the soaring program was established at the Air Force Academy last year (SOARING, July-August, 1957), it represented the successful culmination of a long campaign against great odds by a group of devoted Air Force partisans, both in and out of that service. Opposition ranged from indifference spawned by ignorance to active opposition on the part of some Air Force brass who considered soaring a childish pastime at best and at worst, a dangerous sport. Fortunately, strong support was forthcoming at the highest levels in the Air Force, and the Academy program was established. It provided for a brief introduction to sailplanes and soaring as part of the regular curriculum, with the aircraft also being available for club activity on the cadets' own time.

In December of last year, disaster struck in the form of a freak windstorm which seriously damaged much of the Academy soaring equipment. Instead of arranging for its repair, the Academy authorities swiftly cancelled the whole soaring program and ordered the remaining equipment shipped away from the Academy. In view of the unseemly haste with which this action was taken, we can only assume that someone was looking for a chance to kill the Academy soaring program and found this a heaven-sent opportunity.

We recently asked General Briggs, Superintendent of the Academy, to comment on this situation, and his reply is reproduced in full on page 17 of this issue. We welcome his professed desire to have the soaring program restored, although we do not agree with his feeling that this must await the establishment of more elaborate flying facilities. As of the time of this writing the situation of the remaining Academy equipment is still in doubt. A petition by over 300 cadets requesting that it be held for use by the soaring club on the cadets' own time apparently is being ignored by the Academy authorities.

In the meantime, what will be the reaction of new cadets who have seen soaring activities featured in the booklets, catalogs, movies and other Academy promotional literature? It was our hope that we would eventually see an Air Force Academy soaring team engaged in competition with the soaring clubs at other colleges and universities. In the Naval Academy, sailing has an important part in the curriculum as well as being an active intercollegiate sport. The Navy knows that experience under sail is the basis for true seamanship. In like fashion there is no power pilot, however experienced, whose technique and competence are not enhanced by soaring experience. The cadets graduating from the Air Force Academy will be safer and better pilots if the soaring program is continued.

The Soaring Society of America feels it is its duty to the country to see that we have the best possible pilots in our military and civil aviation and that soaring experience is one of the essential factors in insuring this. We shall campaign vigorously in Washington and elsewhere to get the soaring program restored to the curriculum at the Academy as soon as possible. If this is really dependent on getting added facilities we will try to help the Academy get them. If it requires educating a new crop of Air Force officers on the importance of soaring, we will do that too. Here is a place where our members on active duty and in the reserves can render a valuable service to the country, the Air Force, and the SSA. Let's get soaring restored to its proper place at the Air Academy.

—H. S.