

SOARING PILOTS AND SKY-DIVING

This editorial was originally scheduled for later in the spring, but reports of injuries sustained by at least two soaring pilots while sky-diving during the past few weeks has caused us to postpone the comments we were going to make this month on strictly SSA matters in the hopes that we may prevent some more injuries, or perhaps save some lives as far as our SSA members are concerned.

The sport of sky-diving, or parachute jumping in its varied forms, has caught on like wildfire in the past couple of years in the United States. By the end of this year there may be more people jumping than soaring. This has been viewed with mixed feelings by soaring pilots. In general they welcome the sky-divers. Now, at long last, the pilots can point to someone on the same airport and say, "If you think we're crazy, what about those fellows?" Some look upon parachuting as just another fine sporting aviation activity. To a few of our SSA pilots it offers another type of challenge which they want to tackle personally. The latter are the ones to whom these comments are addressed.

The United States group which has jurisdiction over parachuting for the F.A.I. is the Parachute Club of America, like SSA an affiliate of the NAA. Not only does the PCA have charge of records and official contests, but they also have very strict safety regulations and procedures that must be followed by all clubs affiliated with the PCA. These are the result of much study and experience, and the PCA has had a phenomenally low accident rate on account of this. Recently we asked Jacques Istel, President of Parachutes Inc. and one of the creators of the safety regulations of the PCA to write a short article on their practices for SOARING. Some editorial comment such as this was expected to accompany it, but in view of the happenings mentioned above, we decided not to wait for the article, which we will publish when it arrives.

Approximately half of the parachute jumpers or sky-divers in the United States do not belong to PCA. There are various reasons for this non-affiliation, perhaps one being that some rugged individualists do not want to be bound by rules and regulations even though they are humanely designed for their safety. Because of this, there appears to be a higher accident ratio for the non-PCA groups. Some of these groups give a minimum of instruction before permitting sky-diving and the jumper is "on his own" even on his first jump. The PCA, on the other hand, insists that your first *five* jumps must be with a static line attached to the aircraft to open the chute, while you pull a dummy rip-cord at the same time to prove to the jump-master that you will not "freeze" when you are finally permitted to jump without the static line.

As many of you know, we travel around the country a lot and some of the parachuting incidents we have personally seen at some airports are almost beyond belief. For example - a non-PCA group taking off with a group of jumpers after sunset between gusty rain-squalls. It was so dark at take-off that the ship had to use landing lights, and on board for jumping was at least one soaring pilot *who had never jumped before!* As the running lights got higher we couldn't take the strain and retired out of the rain into the hangar, not wishing to watch any longer. Happily, they finally came back and landed in the dark at the airport without having jumped.

We are not against sky-diving or parachuting. In fact, we will probably have a try ourselves one of these days. But it will be with a PCA group operating under the rules and regulations of the PCA. In addition to various PCA clubs, there are PCA approved schools at Orange, Mass., and Hemet, Calif., which will give you a one-day course culminating in your first jump in full compliance with all PCA rules. We urge our members, in the interests of safety, to limit their parachuting activities to those groups which adhere strictly to the rules of the Parachute Club of America or at least to follow the safety regulations established by the PCA. Write the Parachute Club of America, Box 212, Mt. Kisco, N.Y., for the name of the club nearest you.

H.S.