

# IN-FLIGHT SAILPLANE PHOTOGRAPHY - PART 2

by PETER M. BOWERS

(All photos by the author except as noted.)

A few pointers that apply to air-to-air photography from either airplanes or other sailplanes follow.

Use high shutter speeds, even up to 1/1000 sec., if the light conditions and film speed will permit. This is aided by the fact that the light is usually stronger up in the air, permitting either doubling of the shutter speed or use of a higher f-stop. Shots taken toward the ground require more light than ones taken toward the sky, or at least toward the horizon. The photographer in an air-

respect to the camera while the upper surface of the wing will reflect direct rays right into the camera. When close-in mug shots are desired, reflections from the canopy of the subject must be considered. Correcting this is easily accomplished by slight changes of heading or position, requested by the photographer through hand signals to the subject pilot when in straight-line formation flight, but is a matter of luck in circling flight.\*

Photographers used to shooting only on the ground, or to shooting ground subjects from the air, will find it hard to realize that better air-

craft flight pictures can usually be made without a haze filter than with one. Since the sailplane will usually be at least 50 feet away and the camera focussed at or near infinity, the background should come out as sharp as the subject. If the background contains much detail, or is of a color not contrasting with the subject, the subject can easily get lost in it. A couple of thousand feet of light haze can de-emphasize the background nicely. Even without a filter, the sailplane may not always stand out against the background, so the photographer should keep looking ahead to see if a more suitable background is coming up.

\*For closeups where the subject pilot is to be recognizable in the final picture, he can help through deliberate "posing." Sometimes this is as simple as removing the sun glasses, but more often it consists of moving his head a bit to give the camera a clear view unimpaired by surrounding structure or to get his face clear of the shadow of the canopy frame.



Photo by Dennis Allen

Fig. 1. The author in his old "Wolf," shot from the rear cockpit of a TG-2 during circling flight. Notice that the photographer has made the best possible use of the available background. Formation set-up by the author and Heasley Entz.



Fig. 2. Peter Riedel flies a 1-26 upside down. He half-rolled after release and held a straight course while the towplane pilot did all the forming. Darker ship would have been lost in dark background on heavily overcast day.

plane can usually evaluate light conditions by experience or with a meter, and change his settings as needed, but the cameraman in a circling sailplane will find things changing too fast to keep up with unless he decides to shoot always on the same side of the circle. Shots taken against the light, with the near side of the subject in shadow, require at least double the exposure of shots taken with the light full on the subject if detail is to show. The circling pilot/photographer can only make an average setting and hope for the best.

One special problem that will frequently occur, especially in circling flight, is simultaneous over and under-exposure. The side of the subject sailplane may be in shadow because the sun is behind it with

Fig. 3. Flat-top L-K shot from rear seat of Piper Cub towplane as it comes up from behind following release. Overcast day usually cuts down contrast between subject and background but was not a problem with this all-white ship.

