Aerial photographs in which the horizon appears are known as "High Obliques" and ones where the ground fills the entire frame are "Low Obliques," or in special cases, "Verticals." Most air-to-air sailplane shots will be of the first two types. In high obliques, try to have the subject either entirely above or below the horizon. If the subject is below the horizon, the final print can be masked to a low oblique for better balance and composition. Splitting the subject sailplane with the horizon is undesirable except for special pictorial effect or in fairly close-in views where the subject dominates or nearly fills the scene and the horizon is diffused by haze or cloud.

It is not necessary to shoot from an open cockpit airplane, or even an open-side model like a Cub. If the window is clean, good pix can be taken through glass or plastic. Plastic has a bit of a filter effect, so the exposure should be increased slightly. In open types, try to avoid getting the camera in the airstream. The picture is apt to be blurred by the buffeting and bellows-type cameras can be damaged by the 50-60 mph air blast. When shooting from an airplane, don't rest elbows or the camera on the aircraft structure while shooting as engine vibration will blur the image. When shooting through the glass in an airplane or sailplane, keep the lens as close to it as possible to minimize reflections.

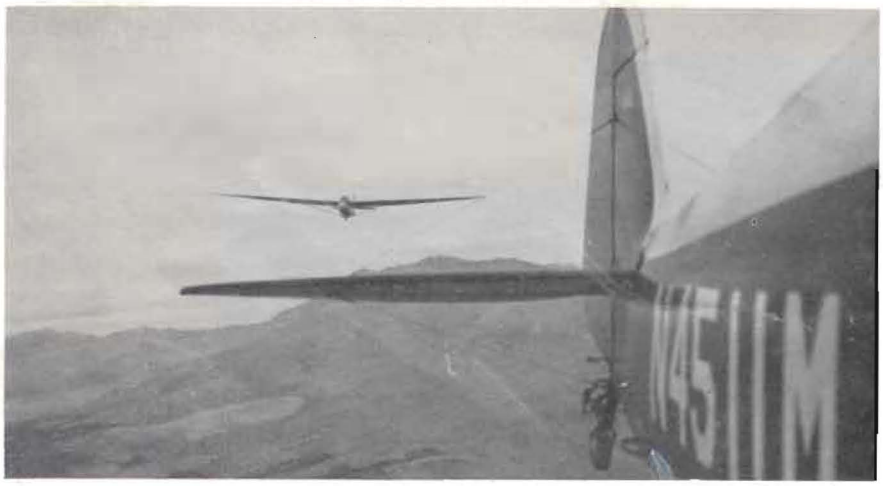
Photo by David R. Bowers

Fig. 4. The author in his 1-26, shot from Cub towplane. 1-26 is completely above the horizon with perfect lighting. Composition is excellent for "Technical Study" photo but not close enough for a really good "Mug Shot."

A camera with a direct eye-level finder is easiest to sight and shoot from aircraft, but watch out for parallax. Don't have the finder above the window sill and the lens below it! The quarters are usually too cramped and the windows too shallow for effective use of reflex types or big press models like the Speed Graphic. Have plenty of film, and don't shoot just one or two frames and be satisfied — the cost of film is usually the smallest item in this type of operation. Shoot several in each position, but try to keep a frame or two in reserve or have a second camera along. The author has often been frustrated by having the best setups occur AFTER all the film was used or while he was changing film.

Fig. 5. Notice how easily the blue and yellow 1-26 could get lost in the background, even in bright sunshine. Pilot Al Wilson is looking apprehensively at end of tow rope, flapping a safe wingspan away from his left wingtip.

Fig. 6. The Professor doesn't always practice what he preaches in this article. TG-2 shot by holding bellows-type camera at arm's length outside Cub towplane and pointing it aft. Focus was no problem with subject known to be exactly 200 feet away. Such distance is too far for anything but "Atmosphere" shots.



Try also to avoid the almost universal tendency to shoot when the subject is too far away. Good action and atmosphere shots can be made from a distance, but technical studies and mug shots are a waste of film if the fuselages of the camera ship and subject are much more than 50 feet apart. With airplane wingspans between 30 and 40 feet and sailplanes at a minimum of 40, this means formation flying with wings overlapping in order to get a good setup, which is a job only for expert pilots.

These few paragraphs and illustrative examples do not completely cover this highly specialized subject by any means, but it is hoped that they will encourage greater activity in this field and that the SSA calendar, the covers of *Soaring* and the SSA photo contest will benefit. Remember, however, that formation flying is tricky business at best, and it is far more important to PLAY IT SAFE than to get a spectacular picture.