

# SAFETY CORNER

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## Accident Report

It is time to take a serious look at the soaring accidents that have been reported for 1963 and the first part of 1964 to see if there is a pattern showing where the dangers lie, in hopes that awareness and increased vigilance can help reduce these accidents and very possibly save lives.

Examination of the tabulation for 1963 shows immediately that 17—or more than half—were landing accidents, and of these four were hard landings and five were undershoots at airports, while eight resulted from difficulties during off-airport landings. Here then is definitely an area for improvement and instructors should concentrate on making their students aware of the dangers involved, particularly when flying too slowly or in windy conditions near the ground. Also, proper procedures for selecting and getting into strange fields must be taught so that when the need suddenly arises, the inexperienced pilot will have some built-in guideposts to aid him in choosing a field and getting into position for a safe landing. All pilots, as they get ready to land, should consciously alert themselves in order to counteract any tendency to be careless as the result of boredom or fatigue.

Of the four fatalities during 1963 the one occurring on top of a ridge may never be fully explained but it would appear that the pilot flew into sinking air while too close to the ridge to avoid contact. In such circumstances it is difficult to know what is a safe separation from the ground, but obviously too much is infinitely better than too little and extreme caution is urged. The landing fatality resulted from injuries received during a ground loop into an obstruction, and serves to emphasize the general precautions urged in the preceding paragraph.

The high altitude flight fatality is believed to have resulted from hyperventilation, which is well cov-

ered on page 37 of the *American Soaring Handbook*, Chapter 7. The aircraft was last seen at about 14,000 feet under a 15,000 foot cloud base, and another pilot in the area reported very strong lift under cumulonimbus clouds. The aircraft subsequently came down minus one wing and with the pilot still in the cockpit, and in view of a report that the pilot had suffered hyperventilation during a previous flight in a lightplane it may be assumed that it occurred again due to apprehension resulting from the unusual weather conditions in or near the cumims. Obviously such conditions are not to be taken lightly, and any pilot intending to fly at high altitudes should seriously consider participating in an indoctrination course at an altitude chamber.

The fourth fatality last year occurred during airplane tow of a Baby Bowlus apparently due to the pilot's inability to control pitching motion of the sailplane after take-off, for although he had many, many hours in other types of aircraft, it was his first flight in the Bowlus. Since this is a well-known characteristic of this sailplane (at least one other fatality has occurred under almost identical circumstances) it is apparent that any remaining owners should stay well within the existing tow limitations for this aircraft and should be particularly careful if any other pilot is to fly it.

So far during 1964, fifteen accidents have been reported, including four fatalities. As before a pattern appears showing landing accidents to be prevalent, and when

three of the spin-ins (which occurred during landing approach) are added to the other landing accidents the category again accounts for more than 50% of the total. Two of the spins resulted in fatalities, and what more forceful argument than that can be put forward to persuade all sailplane pilots to keep their speed up near the ground, particularly during turns and in windy conditions?

Concerning the other two fatalities, the cause of one crash is unknown and of the other was airsickness which affected the pilot's lungs and apparently caused unconsciousness. Although this is not a common cause of accidents, the tendency to try and keep from being sick to one's stomach is common, and a warning should be given that it is much better to soil the aircraft than to risk distraction and possible unconsciousness while flying.

One other point has become increasingly clear during the last year and that is the tendency to cover up and withhold information concerning both minor and serious accidents. Many requests for information are ignored and unanswered, and dozens of incidents and accidents go unreported. This is a sad reflection on the persons involved and a great detriment to our soaring in general, for if we do not know what is happening and where the dangers lie we can do nothing to help ourselves and others following after us. Please cooperate in sending in the statistics so badly needed for the effective working of your Safety Committee.

ACCIDENT SUMMARY

	LANDING	SPUN IN	ON GROUND	HIT RIDGE	STRUCTURAL FAILURE	HYPERVENTILATION	AIRSICKNESS	ON TOW	MID-AIR COLLISION	UNKNOWN	TOTAL
1963	17*		4	2*	4	1*		2*		2	32
1964	5	5**	1				1*		1	2*	15

\*indicates one fatality