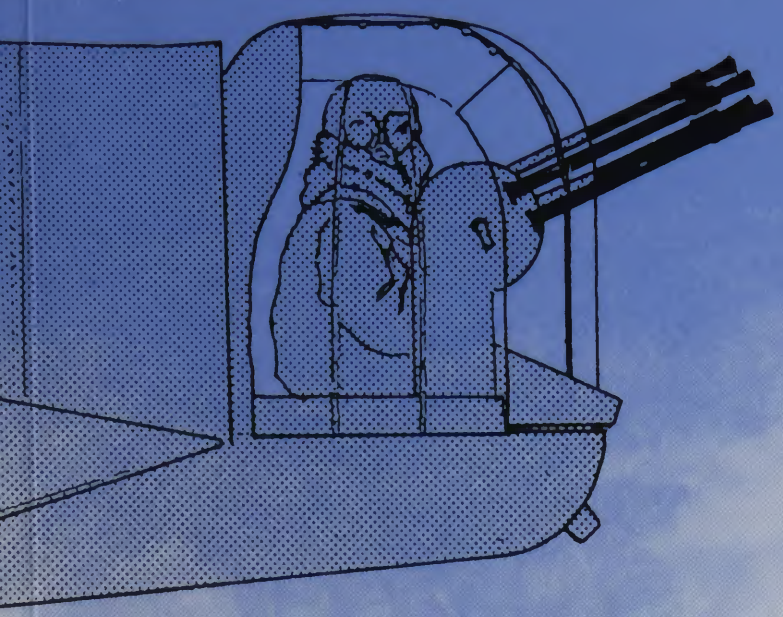
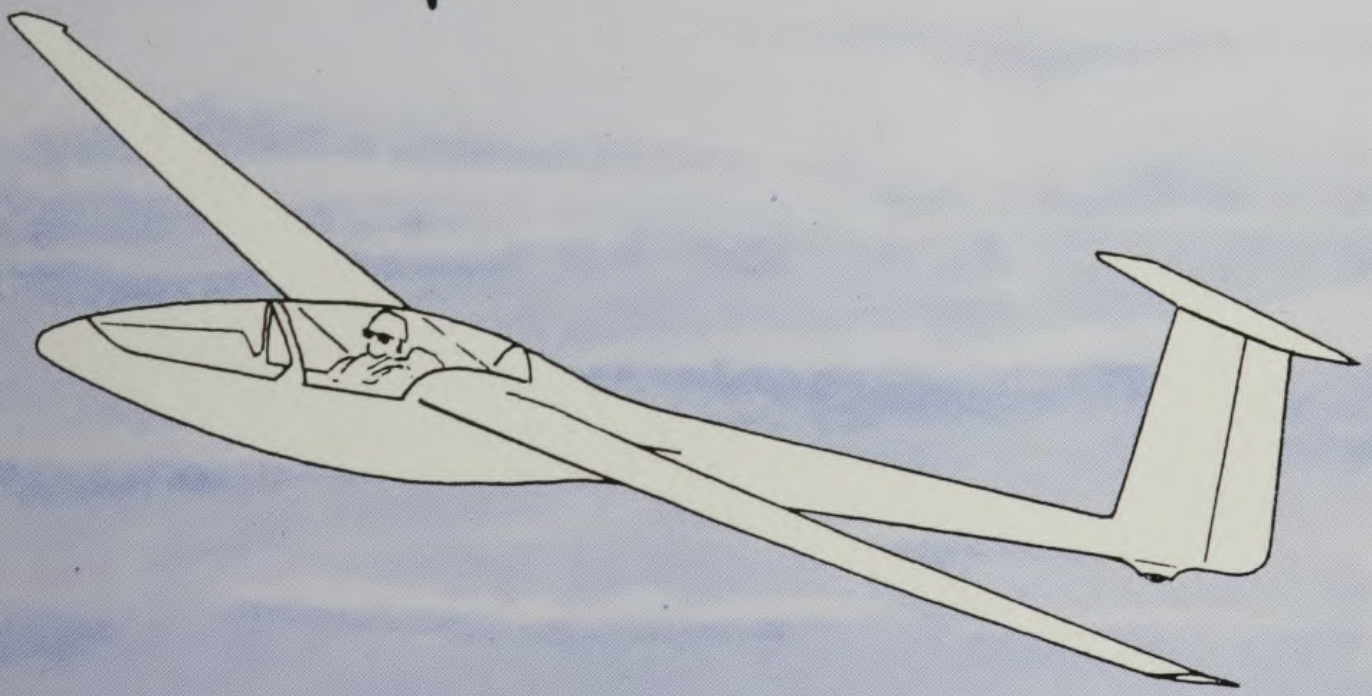


WHISPERING WINGS



David Millett

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ERRATUM WHISPERING WINGS

page 31 line 13, delete *lear* insert *clear.*
page 45 last line, delete *Thing* insert *Thnking.*
page 55 line 20, delete *of the glider* insert *at the.*
page 55 line 23 delete *is* insert *of.*
page 95 line 16 delete *not* insert *no.*
page 95 line 36 delete *day* insert *way.*
page 114 line 18 delete *canter-in* insert *centering.*
page 144 line 18 delete *wold* insert *would.*

DEDICATION

In memory of Jim Webster

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Lancaster May 1924, the son of a local dentist, David was the youngest of a family of six. He lived in a happy and affluent household until the premature death of his father left the family in financial difficulty and they moved to more humble surroundings.

Dyslexia led to wasted and frustrating years at school until the father of his closest friend, a gifted teacher unlocked the door of learning. His skill and understanding allowed David to achieve a standard of education which enabled him to pass the Air Crew Selection Board in 1942.

David left gunnery school with the rank of Sergeant and the highest 'air to air' hits the school had recorded. David missed out on three months at an Operation Training Unit when he was asked if he would leave his assigned crew, in order to replace the injured rear gunner in Sgt. Alty's crew.

Sgt. Alty and crew - later Flight Lieutenant Alty DFC - went on to complete a tour of thirty operations with No. 49 Squadron, Bomber Command. David's original crew were killed on their second operation. The teacher's son, David's friend, was shot down on what would have been his last flight for the completion of his tour. After completion of his tour David, now a flying officer, volunteered to go to Ringway (Manchester Airport) where he completed an instructor's course in parachuting to train the Army.

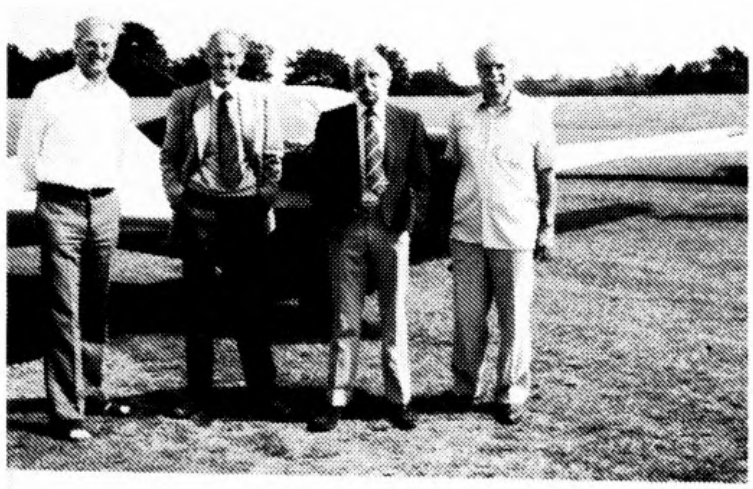
After demobilisation he worked as a representative in the hair dressing trade before 'discovering' gliding, a sport he eventually made his living by for many years, teaching others the joy of soaring flight.

David found time to grab a full Gold Badge with a Diamond Goal. Diamond heights were also gained several times but none were documented due to lack of barograph proof.

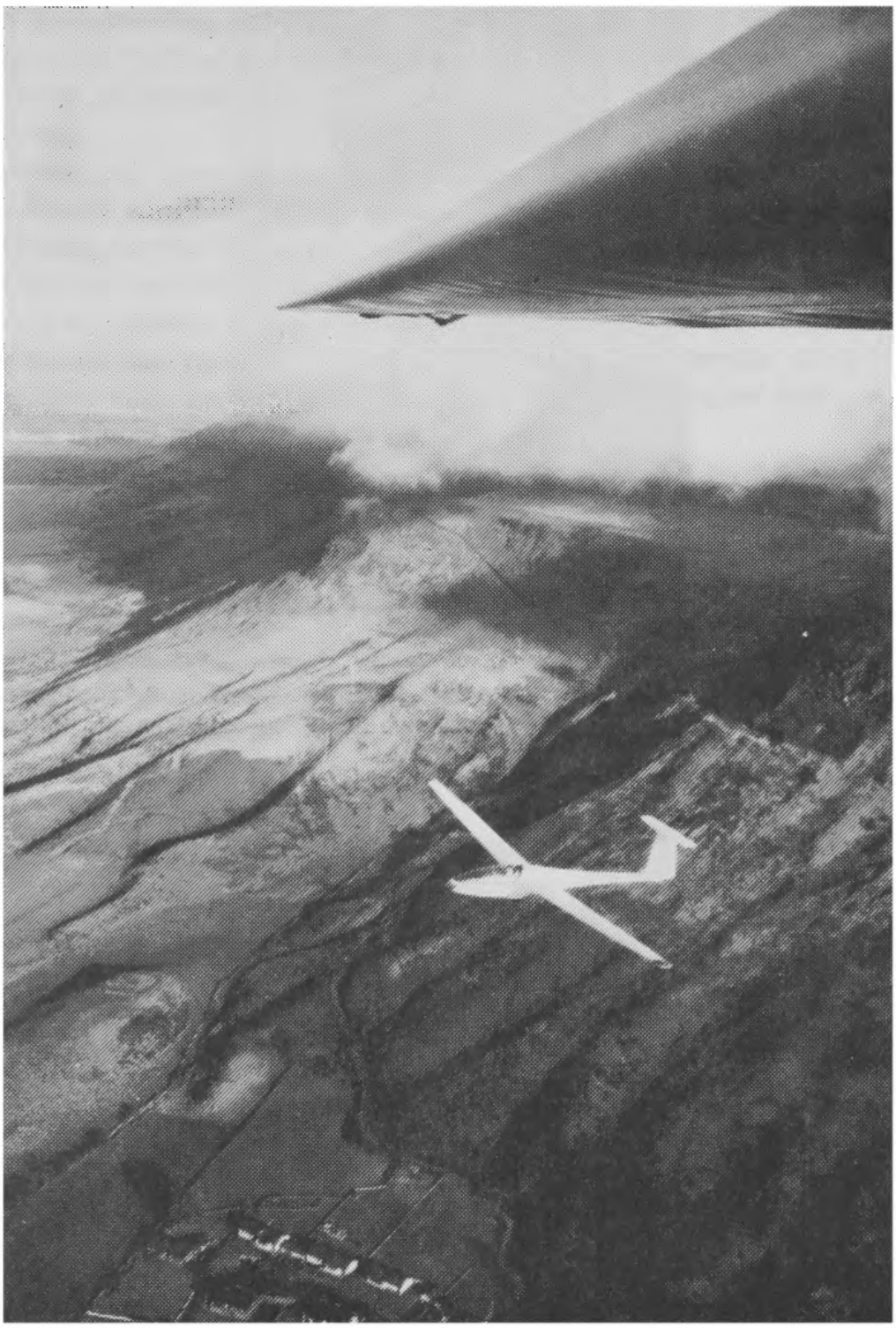
At the age of 53 David suffered a pulmonary embolism, with a one in a thousand chance of recovery, and lived to fly again.

David has two daughters. Now retired, David still enjoys flying his rather ancient wooden glider and occasionally occupies the instructor's seat, to give others the benefit of his vast experience.

Author after an operational tour with 49 Bomber Squadron. The unusual badge beneath the ribbon indicates the completion of a parachute instructor course at Ringway, Manchester Airport 1945.



The remainder of the crew of 49 Squadron EA-Dog. From left to right: Flight Lieutenant Norman Alty, DFC, skipper. Flying Officer David Millet, rear gunner, Flight Lieutenant Bob Waggot, bomb aimer. Flying Officer Ken Manning, wireless operator, navigator and engineer deceased, history of mid upper gunner not known.



Chairman of the Scottish Gliding Union and son hill soaring
off the Bishop Hill, Portmoak.

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

FOREWORD

Many of you may be wondering what on earth an old golf professional is doing writing the foreword for this book. Well I have a confession to make. Ever since my National Service with the RAF Regiment, circa 1940-1951, I have been a frustrated pilot. Frustrated even further by the fact that my wife and a friend own and fly a delightful little four seater, known as a Robin 315, which they keep down at a local farmer's field about two miles from our house.

After completing my National Service, my first ever overseas trip was to South America. The journey seemed to take forever. In fact, about 3 days. The engine noise was horrendous and I don't think the fuel capacity was all that much because, if memory serves me right, we went London - Lisbon, Lisbon - Dakar, out across the South Atlantic to Recife, on to Rio de Janiero and finally, Buenos Aries. At the end of the journey we were totally frazzled. But I had the flying bug although I was a bit queasy on more than one occasion.

I felt unwell a lot of the time in those early days and it wasn't until I had my first experience of small aeroplanes that I started to feel more comfortable, rather like the tight suspension of a sports car, more 'comforting' than the roly-poly suspension that occurs when you are a back seat passenger in some swish limo!

Gliding and golf have a sort of affinity. They both take part in relative silence. I have always marvelled at the scenes around the final green of a great championship, anything up to twenty or thirty thousand spectators, all hushed, waiting for the final putt to be holed. It must be the same zooming up there in the clouds with only the sound of the wind whining through the struts and wires to keep you company.

Many years ago I used to play quite regularly at the Dunstable Downs Golf Club, high up on the chalk belt and very close to a great gliding centre. How often I stopped and watched those graceful machines curving their way through the sky. Over the years I have gradually worked my way up from the tail end of aeroplanes and am now greatly privileged, while working for the ABC Television to travel across the Atlantic sitting right at the very front, which I must confess is very comfortable indeed!

I am not sure the seating arrangements in a glider are 'very comfortable' but the sheer delight and the exhilaration of the flight must more than make up for that.

I remember going to America some years ago with my broadcasting colleague, Henry Longhurst. We were fortunate enough to travel on Concorde. It was in the early days of the service between London and Washington. When we arrived we were met by a colleague from ABC Television and various chums from the world of journalism. They bombarded us with questions, "Did you really get a sensation of speed?" "Did the champagne flow like bath water?" "Was it real Russian Beluga

caviar?" Endless questions and then one question from the back of the room, "Aren't the seats a bit small, is it a bit tight?" Longhurst drew himself up to his full 5'8" and said in that wonderful rich voice, "Yes, the seats are a little tight and I confess it is not as roomy as a 747 but then a 747 is not as comfortable as the Queen Mary." Puzzled looks from American colleagues but the situation summed up quite beautifully. Three different modes of transport all doing precisely what they were asked to, in great style.

I only hope that before I take off for the great country club in the sky, I will experience the joys of gliding, if only someone would be brave enough to risk the extra weight!

I know you will enjoy Whispering Wings, a super read, even if you've never been off terra firma - but you don't have to believe me - over to you, Laddie, and out!

Peter Alliss

The author receiving the Lonsdale trophy from Mr Fred Slingsby of Slingsby Sailplanes Limited for the best cross-country flight with the Lakes Gliding Club, 1959.

The author in his Olympia 463 waiting for the take-off at Cockhill - Blackpool and Fylde Gliding Club.

INTRODUCTION

Reading Peter Alliss's Foreword and then David Millett's compelling and often agonizing narrative, I remembered a remark I once heard Peter make in one of his golfing commentaries on television. One of those little asides one would have liked to think of oneself.

The occasion was a Walker Cup match between the golfers of Great Britain and Ireland and those of the United States at Muirfield on the east coast of Scotland. At a crucial moment in one of the foursomes, an American player hooked his side's ball into a nasty pot bunker on the left of the 17th.

His partner failed to remove it. The culprit, who had put it there, tried again, also without success. The partner stepped into the hazard for a third attempt at extraction, crossing himself like a devout Christian as he did so.

'Ah,' muttered Peter, amid the tension, 'calling on an Agency Outside the Match.'*

Thinking back to World War II and flying single-engined aeroplanes with the Royal Air Force, the only times I recall being really frightened, and having to invoke the Outside Agency for help, was when, for some reason, the motor stopped unexpectedly in flight. Suddenly, an electric current would shoot round the body leaving the blood to run cold in the veins. In a twinkling, in place of noise and vibration, all was eerily quiet and smooth. Instant demands were offered up for supernatural assistance as frantic decisions had to be made... Was there sufficient height to stretch a glide to some distant haven and, if reached, would the terrain justify a try for a 'wheels and flaps down' landing?... Or would it be safer to slide in on the belly?... The urgency and excruciating anxiety were enough to induce a seizure...

And then the relief - oh, the blessed relief of it all - when, after an eternity of worry, a resting place was found and the aircraft, 'whispering through the wind,' landed gently and silently upon it. Every residual drop of nervous energy had been drained from the body...

Come to think of it, such a hideous experience of powerless flight - or something uncommonly like it - is just what the author of this book actually elected to suffer for most of his exceptionally skilled professional life. Whoever would want to become the out-standing Chief Flying Instructor of a distinguished gliding club (which is what David Millett was) and go through the torture, day after day, sitting with a pupil in some engine-less flying craft, searching for thermals and wind currents which might never be found?

I can think of better ways of earning a living!

That the author is a brilliant exponent of the gliding art, bestowing his skills for the benefit of others, few who read this extraordinary story will doubt. But his tales of the more disturbing moments of his long career, and the somewhat bizarre habits

* In golf, a ball removed by an Outside Agency carries no penalty. It may be replaced.

of a few of his pupils, leave one wondering how he ever managed to survive the hazards of such an exacting life.

The answer, of course lies in precision, - critical, disciplined precision in everything to do with activity in the air. And this, in turn, set me thinking about what this single, dominant feature of the great instructor's work must have meant to hundreds of his pupils whether it be in the sphere of gliding or later, perhaps, in the realms of engine-driven flight.

Let me illustrate my point.

Like thousands of other aircrew in the Commonwealth Air Forces (and every member of air crew, remember, was a volunteer) I learnt to fly early in the war in Canada under the far-reaching Empire Air Training Scheme, a match-winner if ever there was one.

It was October, 1940 and 50 of us were cadets on the first course at the Elementary Flying Training School at Cap de la Madeleine, a civilian airfield owned by Quebec Airways and located mid-way between Quebec and Montreal. It lay in the centre of the French-Canadian heartland.

My good luck was to have an unusually skilful civilian instructor, one George Clarke, the Canadian nephew of the president of the Clarke Steamship Line on the St Lawrence River, to take me through and oversee the first 50 hours - the first 50 vital hours - of a pilot's training. George, himself an accomplished and experienced aviator, was precise, strict and yet human in the air - just those attributes which enabled the author of the story which follows, to take his place among the elite of the natural teachers of the gliding art.

Only once was it necessary for my mentor to say through the speaking tube as he sat behind me in the little Fleet Finch biplane (Canada's answer to the Tiger Moth),

"Lucas, I've told you already to climb this airplane at 70 mph. Why, then, are you now climbing it at 72 mph? If you're going to live in the air, you'll have to learn to fly accurately. And I mean accurately!"

It wasn't long afterwards that I realised that the words of the preacher were wise. They were a passport to survival.

I had done 8 hours dual with Clarke and no more than 2 hours solo on my own when disaster struck.The primitive petrol gauge in the Fleet was a small test-tube like affair suspended from the top mainplane and placed roughly in front of the cockpit. When the tank was full a little bobble rose to the top of the tube: when it was empty the bobble sank to the bottom. Yet, for the nervous novice, it was surprisingly easy to mistake a full tank of petrol for one which was empty.

This day, Clarke had sent me off to do 30 minutes local flying. "Take that ship over there," he said, "go through the sequences I have taught you and when you come back to the field show me a nice and soft, three-point landing."

Ten minutes and 3,000 feet later, the motor in the little Fleet Finch cut dead to sent a dagger straight through my heart. Here, for all the world, I might have been one of Davis Millett's pupils on an early solo, but with one difference. My 'glider' had an engine which had stopped and wouldn't re-start. Why, I knew not.

An Agency Outside the Match took control from the distraught, palpitating pupil and landed the biplane gently and lightly on three points in a tiny grass field set in the middle of one of Quebec's tobacco farms. A thousand hours flying time later, I doubt whether I would even have attempted a landing in so meagre a space.

Within an hour after the telephone call, the manager of Quebec Airways, a legendary French-Canadian bush pilot named Monsieur de Bliquay (no one ever called him anything else) had put his aircraft down immaculately beside mine. As he dismounted from the cockpit, he lugged a 5 gallon petrol can with him. Without so much as a glance at my aircraft or the reason for its engine failure, he handed me the can. "Here," he said, "I guessed some gasoline might help."

A year later, another ignominious performance told me, again at first hand, all about the traumas which must face an embryo glider pilot as he wrestles with his aircraft and the elements to achieve a mastery over powerless flight. It also underscored, in my inexpert mind, the need to inculcate in a pupil pilot, early on, the governing importance of precision and accuracy in the air.

It was now the late summer of 1941. A raw and barely operational fighter pilot, I had been with No 66 Squadron and its Spitfires at Perranporth, at the western end of the Cornish peninsula, for little more than three months. Dogsbody that I was, my Flight Commander, a hardened Battle of Britain 'ace', took me aside one morning just as the Squadron had come on dawn readiness.

"I want you to do a calibration test," he said brusquely. (It meant nothing to Pilot Office Prune.) "You are to climb away from here to 32,000 feet over Plymouth and from there you will fly an accurate compass course, at an indicated air speed of 160 mph, and maintaining height, for Southampton. After that, turn on to a northerly heading for Oxford before letting down and returning to base. Now, work out the times and headings for each leg and get off as quickly as you can. Ops want us to test out the accuracy of our radars and the various reporting systems so it has got to be done accurately. Come and see me when you're back."

The Spitfires with which the Squadron was then equipped were the so-called long-range, Mark II version. Under the aircraft's port wing was slung an appalling fixed excrescence - a 30 gallon extra fuel tank, shaped like a sausage. It ruined an otherwise lovely aeroplane; but it was 120 miles across the English Channel to the western French port of Brest, where the German battlecruisers, *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* (soon to be joined by *Prinz Eugen*), were holed up and Fighter Command thought we needed the extra gravy for the bomber escorts.

(We used to go about once a week with Bomber Command's Halifaxes to bomb

the ships. After a few weeks of it, we were told that, with all the destruction, there wasn't a hope of the battle cruisers ever being able to leave port. A couple of months later, the warships were racing up the Channel in broad daylight, through the narrow Straits of Dover and up into the North Sea, putting a couple of fingers up at all and sundry as they went.)

The trick with the long-range Spitfires II was to take off on main tanks, then switch over to the 30 gallon wing tank and run that dry before going back again on to mains.

High up over the western seaport of Plymouth, with the Rolls-Royce engine purring smoothly, I set course eastward for Southampton, adhering strictly to times, height and speed. The sun, by now well up, was shining out of a cloudless sky. Southern England was stretched out to the horizon, as far as the eye could see. Visibility was unlimited. God was clearly in His Heaven and all seemed right with Pilot Officer Lucas's inexperienced world.

Then the motor cut dead, right over the top of Portland Bill on the Dorset coast. Try as I might, Rolls-Royce's product wouldn't respond. In the unnerving silence which followed, I prepared to glide the 32,000 feet down to earth.

Once again, Peter Alliss's Agency Outside The Match took control: and once more, I was living the nightmare, which at some time or other, must have woken every glider pilot in the country at 4 am as the subconscious mind begins to anticipate the hazards of that morning's solo flight.

I was barely conscious as Someone manoeuvred the Spitfire cautiously down to earth, there to settle wheels and flaps down, on a small grass airfield which I was later told was Warmwell, only a few drives and pitches away from Dorchester, one of Flight Command's forward bases.

A corporal fitter from one of the Spitfire squadrons on the airfield jumped up onto the wing. "Bit of trouble, sir?" he courteously inquired. Then, peering deeply into the cockpit, his practised eagle eye swept the instrument panel, and the petrol levers down below. His discovery made him momentarily catch his breath. "Blimey, sir, but excuse me, the effing main petrol cocks are turned to off."

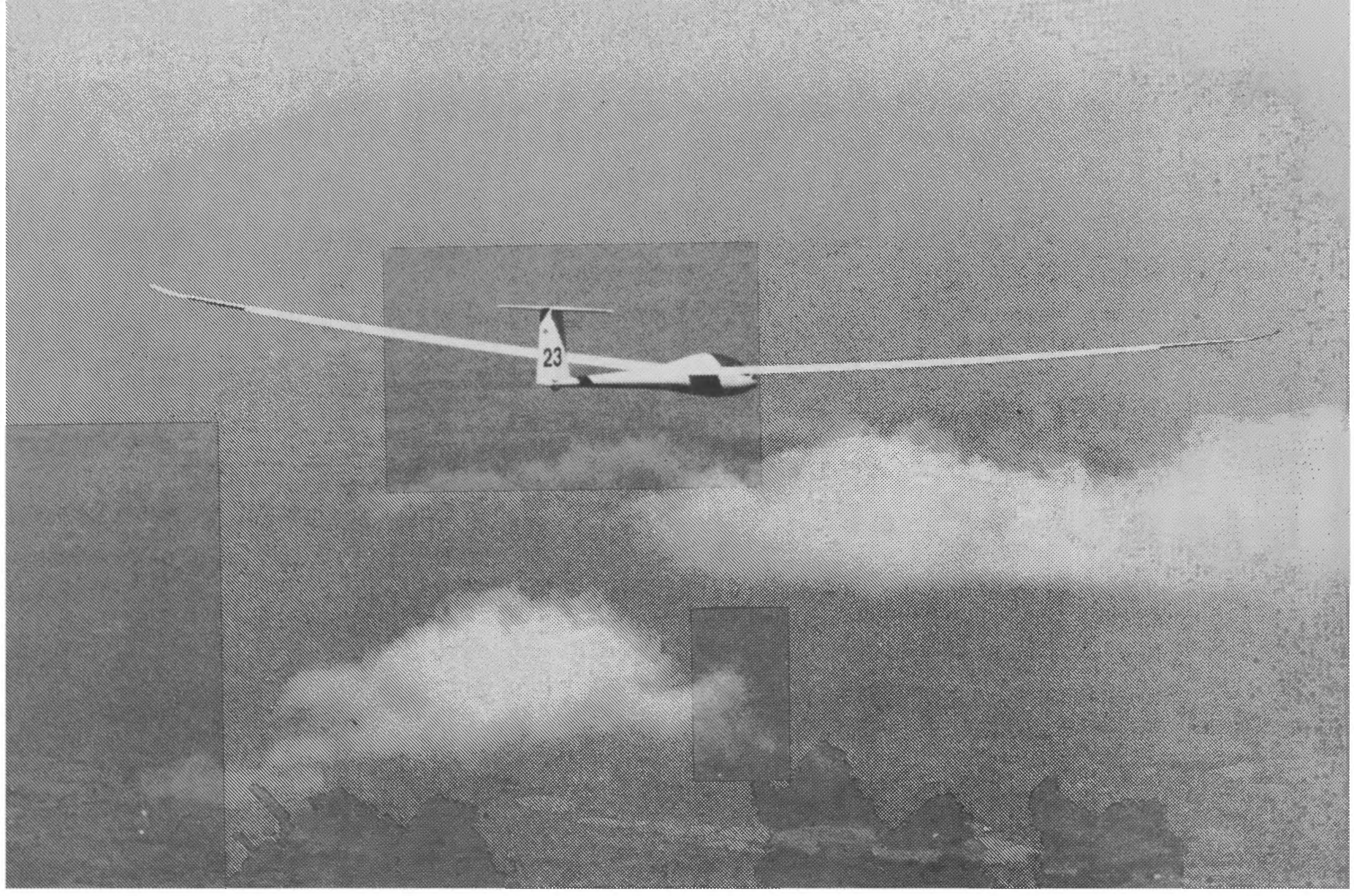
News travelled fast in Fighter Command of the Royal Air Force in the late summer of 1941. By the time I landed my fully serviceable aircraft back at Perranporth, my flight Commander had heard the story. He listened incredulously as my small oversight was painfully disclosed.

"Jeez," he said, "are you trying to get a posting on to bloody gliders or something?"

I rather think the author, given the chance, might have made something of me...

Read on, absorb this splendid story, and see if you don't agree...

Laddie Lucas CBE, DSO*, DFC.



A Nimbus from Walney Island (The Lakes Gliding Club) in recent times.

CHAPTER ONE

INTO BATTLE BACKWARDS

The small green blip on my radar gun-sight moved from its central position where it had for hours been stationary. Now it was leaping back and forth from centre to lower left at seven o'clock. Through the headset came the pip, pip, pip at intervals of a few seconds. Each crew member of this Lancaster bomber would hear the same sound and all would know that a radar contact had been made with another aircraft. The question each would be asking himself was, is this another Lancaster or is it a night fighter? I would soon know the answer to that.

Quickly I coordinated the bead of the gyro gun-sight to swing it towards seven o'clock until it superimposed the swimming green blip. As the two coincided the blip stopped its leaping and became almost stationary again showing only a slight quiver like a wobbly jelly. I knew that my guns were laid on the target and it was time for me to peer through the small fixed telescope. Would I see the flashing white light indicating it was friendly, emitting from the aircraft, invisible to all unless received through the secret telescope?

There was no light!

"Rear Gunner to Skipper. Fighter, fighter - starboard quarter down." Seven o'clock was starboard because 1 was flying backwards.

"Prepare to corkscrew starboard."

"Ready to corkscrew starboard," came back the reply.

Ken, the Wireless Operator, was singing out the range: "Twelve hundred yards, eleven fifty, eleven hundred." The pip, pip, pips were speeding up. The interval between each pip shortened as the fighter closed in. The whole crew knew what this meant and the atmosphere grew tense. They also knew that when Ken read out seven hundred yards I would open fire. This was the range at which we were ordered to fire. In the meantime the little radar blip had sprouted wings which grew in size as the target came nearer. If my aim strayed the winged blip would dance back and forth from my bead to the direction of the fighter. I must keep them superimposed if I were to hit the Hun.

"Eight hundred yards, seven hundred and fifty." There was controlled excitement in Ken's voice. The blip and bead were one. Any moment now. Seven hundred yards was a ridiculous distance for my four Browning 303 machine guns but seven hundred was the order, "That is when you will open fire." Of course there was not the usual tracer with my bullets, there was no need for them, I could see the target so why advertise our position? The Commanders were right, of course, for if an enemy aircraft was being hit, albeit rather ineffectively at that range, he would almost certainly dive away into the darkness and try to find an unsuspecting target. The gunner's primary job was to safeguard the crew. To shoot down the enemy was secondary.

We approached Darmstadt, the target was already burning which meant the fighter had a light backcloth against which our Lancaster would be silhouetted whereas he had the black night behind him and as usual he placed himself just below the horizon where it was even darker. "Seven hundred," came Ken's voice. Everything coordinated. I opened fire. At the same time tracer shells from the fighter raced just under my turret, so close that my fingers straightened involuntarily, releasing the triggers and my four Brownings fell silent.

"Go, go," I shouted and at once I felt the negative G as the Lancaster fell away in a dive to starboard and only my straps prevented me from leaving the seat. Everything now happened so quickly. After the initial shock my brain at once clicked back into gear and a thought flashed through my mind. I had stopped firing involuntarily after only a short burst but I knew all my equipment had been lined up correctly and I must have scored hits, feeble though they might be at that range. Then as the enemy's cannon shells passed so very close under my turret I had stopped shooting. Would the Hun think he had hit and silenced me? I thought he might for though I carried no tracer he must have noticed as he fired that he had been hit. If he was still there in the darkness behind us could I convince him I was out of action? Yes, I could, and I knew how.

"Skipper, just keep that corkscrew going."

"OK, Dave."

I knew that the Five Group Corkscrew which had been devised by Leonard Cheshire would not allow a fixed gun fighter to lay a bead on its target. How many times during practice had we pulled the leg of the Spitfire pilot when the film from his camera gun had shown no more than our wing tips, while he, on the other hand, had presented a good target. Our corkscrew could be easily countered by my revolving turret. However, the Lancaster still had all the bombs aboard. There was close on eight tons hanging in her bays and the time would be limited during which Nobby, my skipper, would be able to keep the necessary degree of accuracy in carrying out the manoeuvre with the heavy aircraft.

Immediately after that burst of enemy fire I had let my four guns swing skywards way out of line of his aircraft. There were no more pips to be heard in our headsets as the radar pulses, now also directed upwards careered off into space at the speed of light. The small green blip was again stationary in the centre of the screen and quite inactive. All this time the Lancaster was corkscrewing its way towards the city reaching towards the bright light from the flares, the fires, searchlights and the bursting flak shells. The bomber's silhouette against this macabre backcloth would become more and more distinct to the eyes of the German pilot if he was there. Was he there, intent on his work of snuffing out yet another bomber and its crew, and, before the bombs fell if possible?

Without moving my turret, to avoid showing signs of life, my eyes searched

behind and downwards. If the enemy were about that's where he would be found. Behind and below where it was not possible for the two guns from the mid-upper turret to get a sight on him. I peered out into the darkness which was now not quite as black as it had been. I, too was receiving some slight benefit from the glare of the night's target, even though my back was to it. Was he there? I stared and searched trying to will him into my vision. What was that?

"Rear Gunner to Skipper, he's there I'm almost sure."

"Hell, Dave, it's getting bloody heavy. Are you sure you see the bastard?" came back the reply.

"Er.... I think so. Yes, He's there. By God he's there. He's getting big now, Skipper, stay with it a little longer, just a little longer." Now I could see him all the time, the shadowy object was getting larger and larger but still he could not get a bead on us. Nobby, with aching arms, was doing his work well. The manoeuvre remained accurate but he would not be able to hold the heavy machine much longer without getting sloppy at the edges and the Hun knew it. Then would be his moment. He would be able to lay his guns and blow the bloody Lancaster out of the sky and the crew to kingdom come. In the meantime, keeping clear of the mid upper guns, he considered himself safe. The rear gunner was clearly dead or at least too wounded to act, his guns plainly silhouetted and pointing skywards, no movement at all in the turret. Yes, he could wait. It could not be long now.

Quickly, and with some excitement, I took hold of the hydraulic controls, placing each index finger around the two triggers. The turret swung speedily and smoothly. The night fighter was very close. It was a JU88 and it filled my gun-sight. It was impossible for me to miss. Both fingers squeezed and the four Brownings came to life. The JU88 seemed to pause in mid air. I thought that bits were flying from the aircraft but the light was too dim to be sure. Then the enemy fell away and flames lighted its plunging track.

"Resume course, Skipper, he's a flamer, he's a flamer...."

CHAPTER TWO

THE WEAKENED LINK

Now that the war with Nazi Germany is over the crew of Lancaster EA-D.dog, having survived those exciting days, were spread North and South of the country pursuing a more normal way of life. But normality did not settle immediately on several of my old colleagues as they returned to civvy street. All had escaped physical injury, but the heavy guns and the night fighters of the Third Reich had left their mark on our nerves.

Norman the pilot, weighing in at around twelve stone found himself slightly over nine stone at the conclusion of operations. Len, the engineer, finished up taking shock treatment, while Alf, the mid-upper gunner became unsociable, withdrawn into himself.

However, when you are young recovery can be quick, so that now the boys were settled down doing a normal job of work. As the years passed we held reunions, wonderful affairs they were, but always Alf was missing. Now the reunions are thin since Ted and Len have long since passed away. In each case the heart failed. But never their spirits. Let's hope their spirits are free. Perhaps waiting patiently for the next full reunion. What laughs there will be should it materialise, so to speak.

So much for my colleagues, what of myself? Was I fit and well? What had the war done to me? Those nights over Germany with the heavy flak around our Lancaster. Blasting it sometimes. The tracers from the 20mm guns of the Nazi night fighters which seemed to crawl so slowly through the night sky until they almost struck you, suddenly moving at the speed of sound. What of the thumping shrapnel tearing metal where gaping holes appeared. The inferno becoming even brighter as the bomber over there blew itself and all aboard to pieces with its own bombs helped by hundreds of gallons of high octane. The empty beds of the crew sharing your billet who had been there just long enough to get to know. Nice chaps usually. No, always, we all had something in common; exhilaration, high spirits and fear, unless you became 'flak-happy' in which case fear diminished while the spirit climbed to a real high - for a time - after which anything could happen. And those wild mess parties, the bigger the losses the wilder they became. What had all this done to me?

At first I thought nothing, odd as it may seem, I felt as though I had thrived on it. Life had seemed full. The friendship of the crew beyond description. The adrenalin flowed and I lived.

But where was I going now, here in civvy street? Things were flat. At home I would hear, "Oh for goodness sake, David, will you sit down!" I would not know I was pacing the floor yet again. I was O.K. I had no nerves; and yet I had to admit a strange thing had occurred for I could not spell and was hardly able to read. I first discovered this when I tried to fill in a form for a job and found I could not do it. I could not spell.

I went red, now I knew real fear, my hands were shaking terribly with utter embarrassment. I had been a rear gunner, what's more I had been a commissioned officer in the RAF. A rare thing indeed for a gunner! Now I was unable to fill in a simple form. What on earth had happened?

Deep down I knew what had happened. A link had broken, the weakest link in my chain. The link had not stood the strain. The flak and the fighters had weakened it more, now it had given. The name of the link? Dyslexia.

The trouble I had at school, the reading and spelling bit. Of course no one had known about Dyslexia then, this being so you were marked down as being backward. No one tried with you, they didn't understand as they do today. I tried though. It was the father of my friend who tempered this link to make it strong enough to pass the Air Crew Selection Board. He was a teacher. What a teacher! But what of his son, my friend? He had passed the selection board easily. Wish he hadn't though, now he is dead. Shot down in the cold North Sea.

So, what job could I do? There had to be something, one which did not require the broken link in my chain. Of course I realised that any such job could not be up to much, probably with no scope for advancement and near the bottom of the social scale, a beggar can't be a chooser. Well, maybe he can choose to be a bum - No way!

On the promenade at Morecambe while with a girlfriend I was accosted by a Happy Snap camera man. This was a business which at that time could be quite profitable due to the postwar shortage of film. The people of Britain were starting to take summer holidays again, and most liked a photographic record of the event. I wondered how long it would take to learn to use a camera and process my own films. I could use the camera during the day and work in the darkroom at night.

A few sums relating to the cost of equipment and renting premises shut the door. I had no collateral on which to borrow. True, I had received a gratuity on leaving the RAF but that had gone. No, I had not blown it on wine, women and song, someone else had done that for me. I had been restless and needing excitement, some new adventure, when there in cold print it stared at me as I made meaning of the words. My heart quickened for here indeed was an adventure; a sail around the world on a forty foot yacht, broad in the beam, suitable for such a journey. To learn more, please contact Captain Charles etc.

I did contact the Captain and asked many questions. What complement had he and how many were experienced? Could I be useful as a none sailor? Would the monies raised from the members be enough? What was his experience? And so on. His answers to me, a young man, seemed satisfactory. The crew were experienced seaman except for myself and an ex-army officer who had before the war been a reporter. His main task was to write a book on the adventure. The Captain showed me correspondence from a Sunday newspaper prepared to pay for the privilege of writing up the story as we progressed around the world. There were telegrams of

confirmation from numerous newspapers situated at ports of call who were to publicise the adventure before tying up. The idea was the public would be charged a fee to come aboard for a "look see." The Captain was convinced that with the right publicity, hundreds would want to come aboard.

There were many more assurances all backed up with more than words. I asked to see, and saw, his captain's ticket. On my return home I called in to the Citizens Advice Bureau and laid before them all the information I had, asking if they were able to check this man out. Calling back a couple of weeks later I was given the assurance the Captain Charles was bona fide. My money was duly handed over.

I kissed my mother goodbye. With my rucksack on my back I waved farewell for a couple of years.

'The Witch' was tied up longside at Conway in North Wales and on stepping aboard I met two of the crew, the others had yet to arrive. I was surprised the Captain was not aboard but learnt that he had been and would return soon. Before long we were our full complement, apart from Captain Charles. The boat was without stores but we were sailing on the morning tide to Ireland where the boat was to be victualled.

It was about ten-thirty when we heard the sound of boots on the deck above. The boots clattered down the steps and were worn by two policemen.

"Where is Mr Brown?" one asked sternly.

"Brown. What Mr Brown? We don't know anyone of that name," someone replied.

"The so-called Captain," smirked the other officer.

"Captain Charles you mean. He went ashore some time since he should be back anytime," remarked another.

"Oh, Captain Charles is it? Well it will be the last you see of him my lads, he is wanted for a list as long as your arm."

The next morning a crestfallen bunch of would-be adventurers, sadder but wiser, and lighter in the pocket made their journey home.

So, due to this previous financial folly I could not start up a Happy Snap business, but a few miles down the road from the promenade is Middleton Sands, where there is a holiday camp. Within this camp was a Happy Snap set up where I quickly learned to use a camera. It was only seasonal work with long hours since during the evening time I continued with flash photography. A surprising thing about the camp when considering the war was not long over, was the proprietor. He was Japanese.

A middle-aged rather stout man dressed in a black and white checked suit approached me. "Do you play the gee-gees?" he asked.

"The gee-gees, what do you mean the gee-gees?

"Horses, do you back horses?

"No, I never do."

"Well, I'd like to do you a favour. Put a pound on the nose of Black Tarquine next Saturday but keep it to yourself mind."

"Why should you tell me this? Anyway a pound is a lot of money." So it was with a weekly wage of about £4.

"I'll tell you why I'm telling you. This is my second week here and I've been watching you, you work bloody hard and long hours so I want to do you a favour, see?"

Smiling at this rather loud man I asked, "But how do you know this gee-gee is going to win?"

"Big head told me."

"Who the heck is big head?"

"Why, Gordon Richards," Looking at me as if I was daft.

"You really know Gordon Richards?" I said incredulously.

"Sure I do. I was playing snooker with him before coming on holiday and I said to him. "What's going to win the big race and he said, 'I wish I were riding Black Tarquin.' Now I'm telling you son, put a £1 on to win and do me a favour as well as yourself."

I did. It came in at 14 to 1.

It was a good public-speaker system used by the camp for announcements and by the disc jockey for playing music to the campers. The sultry voice of Jane made the blood tingle in many of the male campers, few could know as I did, the embodiment of the voice. In fact the source of this human sound, sweeter than a Summer breeze sighing through a meadow, was a blonde of quite breath-taking beauty with soft shoulder-length hair framing a face so perfect, so elegant, that one simply gasped. Twinkling blue eyes laughed back at you and a slight, fascinating twist to her smiling mouth exposed perfect teeth, while her skin was pale and smooth. As for the body of this beauty, Venus herself could not have lived under the same roof.

At least once each day Jane's voice caressed my name, "David, this is especially for you. 'Those Little White Lies.'"

My season with the holiday camp quickly passed. It had been hard work, but good fun, a wonderful atmosphere with a large staff of happy people. Now was the time to move on and look elsewhere.

Most of the people I knew, who had been fortunate enough to return from the war, were at university getting themselves a degree. Whatever my next job may be it could hardly be as much fun as the last one. But what could I do? I recalled with longing the parachuting instructors-course I had completed at Ringway, now Manchester airport. It had amused me that RAF personnel were instructors to the army because none of us aircrew knew anything about parachuting, this being

discouraged so that we would be more likely to get damaged and valuable aircraft back home. Of course the RAF instructors to the army did know their business and were in fact rarely aircrew. Still, on the completion of my tour of ops and with the war near its end I had volunteered for the parachuting instructors-course which had been great fun but a waste of taxpayers money, as I was de-mobbed shortly afterwards.

Hell, things did seem dull now, but what was I going to do? Before long, I found myself taken on by Hoovers for training as a maintenance salesman. The interview had gone well; it had been oral, thank God. There were about a dozen of us for training, taking about ten days. On Day Three whilst taking notes the instructor looked over my shoulder. On Day Four I was out - Shown the door.

The depression which followed the ignominious termination of the Hoover course remained for weeks. The hopelessness of trying to cope with the written word and yes, the fear of finding myself at a house party with bright young men and pretty girls, a pencil and a sheet of paper placed on my knee with which to play a party game. I got out of that one by leaving the room to wash my hands, but then the first game was followed by another. For this game I accidently broke my pencil but some lovely creature passed me another from her handbag.

"No, I'll help you," I suggested to her.

"That's not fair," commented another. I stuck to my guns as I trembled a little, my face drawn, my stomach tight, and sensed the general disapproval. They thought of me as a rotten sport!

CHAPTER THREE

TEBAY

It had not been a good day. Barrow-in-Furness had been my working area. I did not like Barrow in Furness. My sales were almost always poor, my customers seemed to be unavailable so much more in this town than others. The atmosphere somehow never seemed quite right and furthermore during the early morning as I approached the town I had a blow-out in my front off-side wheel and only just avoided colliding with an oncoming car. I did not like Barrow-in-Furness.

The town was now forty miles behind me and the unpleasant taste, still lingering in my mouth, triggered a memory. I had heard somewhere that a fine, new coffee bar had opened in the square of the small town through which I was now driving. I turned left at the lights instead of going through towards Lancaster. A hundred yards up the road a square opened out at one side, and there facing me was 'The Flying Dutchman'. Three small buildings had been knocked into one to create a new coffee bar. On entering the coffee smelled as good as the place looked. It was large and comfortable, the decor being unusual showing much imagination. But the real surprise for me was meeting the proprietor who was a man I knew well from my boyhood days but had lost track of a few years back.

Of course we reminisced bringing each other up to date. Then he asked if I had heard about the new gliding club at Tebay. No, I had not, but by God I had now.

It was 1956 and once again I found myself in the air. I was 1,200 feet over the village of Tebay, sitting in an open cockpit glider. It was a Slingsby Tutor, an intermediate glider of those days and I was using it to do my first solo flight. The fells were beautiful as was the distant scenery, but somehow whilst carrying out one's first solo flight, these things go unnoticed. Instead my mind was filled with such things as flying at the correct speed and keeping to the circuit, the right distance from the field, etc. to be sure to turn in for the approach at the proper height, whilst not allowing one to be too far back or too close in. Then came, one hoped, a steady approach followed by a smooth round-out at just the correct height, and a hold-off which would allow the glider to sink gently onto the ground.

Tebay opened a whole new world for me. I had already come to the conclusion that gliding must be the best side of the flying business. Cheaper than power it certainly was, but inferior never. It was becoming obvious that the glider pilot had so much to learn before becoming accomplished at the art of soaring. Using the air with its many different moods and behaviour, knowing where to find the bubble or column of uprising warm air, known to the gliding fraternity as a thermal. Or that other form of lift where air is deflected upwards from the face of the hill, be it caused by the wind striking it or by solar heating. Knowing when to turn and run from the down draughts which could bring the glider down through hundreds of feet in a minute. Knowing how to read the clouds which are associated with all these

things. The not always reliable promise from a Cumulus that a thermal is to be found. The sudden forming of Orographic cloud around the hills, ready to engulf the unsuspecting pilot. The often high and beautiful cigar shaped cloud named lenticularis, len for short, which are the indications associated with the lift which may take you climbing smoothly, so very smoothly, to such heights which were at one time undreamed of. So high that one world-famous glider pilot once described it as, 'where no birds fly.' To where no pilot dare ascend without carrying oxygen. But even this wonderful, gentle and dreamy lift can turn into the most powerful down-draughts of up to thousands rather than hundreds of feet per minute if the pilot allows his aircraft to wander into the wrong part of the system. Albeit the air remaining incredibly smooth until perhaps he descends into the rotor at the bottom of the stable air. It is then that he is glad that his straps are still tight until he has passed into the rather less turbulent air below the wave-system he has left.

All this for me was still in the future. It was sufficient to safely conclude early solo flights and to consolidate my flying during the coming twelve months, gradually developing my skill.

It was years later that I fully appreciated the value of receiving my training at Tebay with all its rough terrain, the deep valley on the Westward side with no landing place at all. The strong curl over or down draught on a windy day when approaching to land to the south. The difficult touchdown when landing to the north, due to the land continually falling away if you over-flew a dip in the ground we named 'the saddle'. During the north launch - the takeoff must be either from the north or the south at Tebay - with the glider well down in the bottom of the saddle. It meant that the take off run and the initial part of the climb was invisible to the winch driver, coming into his view only as it came over the lip. If the cable were to break with the glider less than a hundred feet over the lip then there would be much difficulty in bringing it safely back to earth, due to the ground falling none too gradually away. A pilot had to have many solo flights to the south before being cleared for a north take-off.

A launch to the south by the winch placed on the high ground would give us good heights, as much as two thousand feet above the takeoff point. Then if the wind was southwest we would fly south to the 'Point'. This is where the hill, or mountain, for that is what it really is, turned round to the left through a hundred degrees or more. Also it was at a position opposite the Point where the east-facing hill at the other side of the narrow valley came to an end, thereby leaving the south west wind unobstructed to continue its passage from the direction of Kendal to play on the face of the Point. Here, Tebay pilots learned to handle rough conditions. Our Chief Flying Instructor, Ron Reid, was once turned over on his back whilst flying a Tutor there. He immediately reacted by performing the second part of a loop in order to put matters right. His rather pale complexion when landing testified how near the ground

he had been on 'pull out'. A matter of only a few feet. One is not expected to loop a Tutor anyway!

The formation and development of the Club at Tebay had been similar to may other gliding clubs in Britain in that one had started with nothing more than a stretch of land. In our case very rough land, which was both difficult to operate from and difficult to reach, up a crude track strewn with stones and small boulders, calculated to test the springs of any vehicle. We had at first only one glider which was a side by side two
seater, not unlike the Slingsby T21. Only two of this type had been made and were named 'Venture'. We acquired ours from the Midland Gliding Club. During the early days this machine was responsible for training all the pilots who reached solo at the Lakes Gliding Club.

When the Club was formed by Ron Reid and Matthew Hall there were no trained pilots amongst its members other than themselves. We soon had two or three power pilots who joined our numbers, one of whom, John Young, took over as Chief Flying Instructor after Ron had trained a good nucleus of pilots and got the Club onto a sound footing. John had enjoyed himself flying Spitfires and Mustangs during the war and now became an enthusiastic glider pilot. Ron had also been in the RAF during the war and had flown Blenheims with Bomber Command before being posted as an Instructor to South Africa.

In South Africa he was introduced to gliding and one day found himself in a cumulo-nimbus thundercloud. He had climbed up to the relatively low base of this monster in a small strutted, open cockpit, Grunau Baby. Then he found he was being sucked up through the dullness, climbing ever higher and higher and not being able to do anything about it. Eventually, at a little over 16,000 feet, the altimeter needle started to unwind as the little Grunau stumbled into a down draught cell of the giant cloud and a rapid descent began. Without blind flying instruments, Ron would not know whether he was diving with nose down, banking left or right or even if the nose of the glider was pointing to the heavens, for he would still be descending with the cascading air. Finally he burst out into clear, warm air doing some sort of a spiral dive from which, with a thankful and racing heart, he was able once again to put the glider on an even keel. Soon the ice broke away in pieces from the wings, though not quite so soon did his shuddering limbs stop their shaking. After all a thin vest and shorts are not quite the clothes with which to encounter a cu.nim.

CHAPTER FOUR

ONE CAME BOUNCING IN

One of the earlier requisites the Club acquired was a small hut to give some kind of shelter on a poor day. Also it was used as the 'dining hall' in which to eat the marvellous 'Tebay Stew' concocted by the ladies of the Club.

I was not quite a founder member of the Lakes Gliding Club so it was during my first or second visit I found myself sitting on one of the long wooden seats which reached along the full length of the hut. Since the day was poor the hut was crowded. We sat there yarning away the time and enjoying the companionship of people with a like interest. I soon found myself relating an incident which had occurred during the Christmas period of 1945.

It was the night of December 23rd/24th. The Station Mess had been very quiet as the boys of 49 Squadron were flying to attack some target in Germany, but the crew of D Dog was not amongst them. It was our turn at last to be the stand-down crew and so we had enjoyed a quiet evening lounging in the Mess. The next morning we were up and about, but everywhere there was heavy fog. The Base was strangely quiet as if every creature had hibernated beneath the damp blanket. The boys had flown north to Scotland on their return flight. They had been signalled to change course for Dice Aerodrome at Aberdeen where the air was clear.

The crews spend much of that first day catching up on some sleep. There were twenty-eight bombers from 49 Squadron but the total number reached fifty when other Lancs from elsewhere were included. The crews only had their flying clothes, i.e. big polo neck white sweater and heavy flying boots. They had no hats or caps. This was not the attire for an airman to leave the Station, but under the circumstances special permission had been granted. Also an extraordinary pay parade had been laid on, for one did not take coins of the realm over enemy territory.

It seemed that the crew of D Dog missed out on quite a lot during this time. Our Christmas Day in the Mess was rather quiet and sedate. On the other hand the boys up north were having a whale of a time. The worthy citizens of Aberdeen had generously thrown open the doors of their homes to the Bomber Boys. All the places of entertainment were also at the disposal of the men who were easily recognised in the wool lined boots and white polo neck sweaters. It was truly the freedom of the City for these crews from Bomber Command.

On the second or third day they were ordered to take off and fly back south to their home bases. Lancasters one after another roared off down the runway, some to entertain their new found friends in nearby Aberdeen to the wonderful distinctive roar of the four Merlin engines as they swept low over the town. The crews had not reached far south before their wireless operators were again receiving instructions for the bombers to return north. The fog further south persisted in clinging to the home bases.

ONE CAME BOUNCING IN

As the last of the returned Lancasters was leaving the runway to head for dispersal, there was excitement running around the aerodrome. The crews were amazed to see a German Me 109 Fighter buzzing around the circuit.

"My God, would you believe it? If he had come a little sooner whilst fifty Lancs were around he would have been shot out of the sky," said somebody.

"This ruddy Hun," I said, "came onto the approach with flaps and wheels down and the clown held off too high. His engines roared again and he pulled away from the runway."

Seated on the bench opposite, Jack Paley's face seemed to be taking on some very unusual expressions, but I thought this must be due to my remarkable narrative.

"Anyway," I went on, "he climbed away, then minutes later came in for another try, only to make a forceful contact with terra firma, bouncing high as once more the engine roared. We though that this was great entertainment being laid on by one crazy Hun." Once again, Jack's face began to twitch and rippled into amazing contortions. What on earth was eating the man?

"A third time the Me 109 made his approach and this time, after bounding down the runway and over to one side, he came to rest. Bomber boys were running towards the enemy from all directions, eager to see this modern day Biggles. It was a Flight Lieutenant who reached him first. By this time the German had stepped down from the cockpit of his aircraft looking rather pale. The Flight Lieutenant, stopping a few paces short of the man, took up a posture with legs apart and hands on hips, looking the German airman up and down before welcoming him with the comment "Piss poor landing, mate."

"Sometimes it's good to be British," I said. "I like the Lieutenants's style."

The German had flown over from Norway where he had been training. He had decided to call it a day so took the 109 which was a strange aircraft for him and for which his training had not yet been adequate, and headed for Scotland.

It was obvious that my fellow members had enjoyed my story, but it was only now that Jack, with his face rather more composed than earlier, said, "David, let me introduce you to Reg, or in Germany better know as Otto Wolfe."

"Ah, how do you do?" I said to the large man with the thick strong neck who was sitting on my left."

"How do you do?" he said, with a rather heavy accent.

"And what did you do in the War?" I asked.

"I vos se bomb aimer of se Heinkel von von von," came the reply.

"And how is it that we have the pleasure of your company here?" I asked.

"I vos attacking shipping in ze North Sea ven I vos shot down. Then se British Destroyer he picked me up from se sea. It vos bloody cold, I can tell you."

"Oh," and I couldn't resist it, "for you se var vas over."

CHAPTER FIVE

LOSS OF A VENTURE

Our years at Tebay, which had been a happy time, reach from 1954 to 1963. During this period enormous efforts had been put into the development of the Club. Eventually, we tired of rigging the gliders every morning and de-rigging every evening. So a decision was reached, a decision of some severity, which meant that we would stop all flying and training for a period of seven months and instead we would build a single building which was to contain a clubroom, a kitchen, a bar and a bunk house above the ceilings. Last but by no means least, we would be able to walk out of the clubhouse directly into a large hangar and behold parked gliders all fully rigged.

This was indeed a testing time for the Club as the keenest members' would be fully stretched with some having to travel each weekend as far as sixty miles, whilst the nearest twelve miles. All building materials had to be bought up the fell over the atrocious track. It was therefore logical to commence by improving the track. We already had a tractor which had been necessary for retrieving the winch cable after a glider had been launched into the air and this was now put to use by pulling a trailer filled with shale. Countless times the trailer was brought up with its load to be emptied on the track, working our way higher and higher up the fell until at last the track was fit to accept loaded lorries with breeze blocks, timber and all the paraphernalia which went to make up the material for building.

Some time after the completion of our building we saw that a quagmire was forming on the forecourt of the hangar. Again one of our members volunteered the use of his lorry, and, after arrangements had been made with British Rail down in Tebay we secured five hundred tons of ballast which had been used for the rail tracks. This was laid in front of the hangar and improved the situation very much.

Over the years the fell had been badly torn by the tractor on its run from the glider launch point up to the winch from where it picked up the cable which was dropped form the glider during each flight. On some long summer days, but with little thermal activity, as many as a hundred flights were made. By the end of a year the tractor could have made the journey thousands of times. As a consequence the soft peat took a terrible hammering.

So, though a beautiful site, Tebay was not without its problems. There was always, of course, the funny side of things. One fine day Jack gave us a demonstration of first-class winch driving. He was at the time launching the two seater towards the south. Due to the fell taking on a gradient shortly beyond the flat take off area, then falling down into the saddle before finally climbing up to the winch, which was sitting high on the fell top, it was normal on a windy day for the glider to be well and truly airborne even though some of the cable had not yet lifted off the ground. It came as a surprise to us all on this occasion when we saw a sheep

appear above the lip of the saddle hanging by its horns from the winch cable!

As a result of the sheep's weight, a large bow developed between winch and glider. However Jack's skill was worthy of the strange situation. When he considered that the two seater was high enough to be safely handled according to the oddities of the site he throttled back the winch engine just enough to encourage the instructor to believe that the launch was accidently rather slow, which did in fact occur from time to time. Accordingly the pilot lowered the nose and gave the appropriate signal for more speed. In response the speed fell off even more, though very gradually since Jack did not want the pilot to abandon the launch by releasing the cable from the aircraft. Whilst this was going on it was fascinating to see the bow in the cable getting larger and the sheep gradually descending until the moment came when it again had contact with the ground. Jack then immediately slammed on the brake, stopping the reeling in of the cable. The sheep quickly picked itself up and was soon happily grazing the grass again. The pilot of the Venture released the cable as normal to execute a short circuit.

We all agreed that it had been a super bit of winch driving by Jack. We also thought that we had within our club the only sheep which had gained itself an 'A' Certificate!

Of course during our years at Tebay many thousands of flights had been made without anything untoward happening. Nevertheless, regardless of the fact that one tries to see and cut down on any possible mishap taking place, accidents will happen. Any sport or undertaking which calls for an adventurous spirit must by definition hold some element of risk. So it came to pass one Sunday evening at the end of the day's flying, Matthew, a founder member, took off with his pupil in the faithful old Venture. This was to be the last time that the flowing air would be passing over the wings of this gallant old bird. Never again would she quietly whisper her way through her element or bounce gallantly in the rough thermals.

Matthew took his launch with the comment that they would have a final fifteen minutes out at the Point. Shortly after, I took off in the Olympia with the same intention in mind before landing for the 'hangar flight' ready to put the glider away. I had a good launch of around fifteen hundred feet and on releasing the cable, settled down for the few minutes journey out to the Point which had been soarable all day. As it turned out I had to abandon my plan and return back to the circuit. My action was due to a wall of Orographic cloud which very suddenly appeared between me and the Point. It reached up from the ground to several hundred feet above my launch height. On landing I told a number of people what had happened and that it seemed to be a very dangerous situation for Matthew and his pupil in the Venture, but no one seemed to be interested in what I was saying. After all everyone was busy packing everything away for the day.

Now there was only the Venture remaining to be bedded down until the

following weekend. Someone said, "Where is Matthew? It's time he was back, it's getting too dark."

"Well, I was trying to tell you," I said. "A great wall of cloud appeared. It's between here and the Point. I don't see how he can get back."

"What's that you're saying?" Ron had pricked up his ears. "What wall of cloud?" I retold my observations, how the cloud had suddenly developed making it impossible for me to fly to the Point, but Matthew had already got there ten minutes or so earlier. "I tried to tell you but no one would take any notice".

The gravity of the situation was being realised. Suddenly people were leaping into cars which bounded off down the track and on reaching the road at the five barred gate, turned left in the direction of the foothills around the Point. Others remained to man the telephone in case of a call. The people in the cars rushed along the narrow roads, up winding tracks, many of which lead only to a dead end, or some remote and lonely farm. Even though it was almost dark, never for a moment were their eyes not searching the hills, crags and gullies for a sign of the glider, but as the darkness settled in completely they made their way back to the Clubhouse on the fell. One by one the cars came back but no one reported having seen a sign of the missing Venture.

Of course the incident had been reported to the Police, but it was a glum group which sat in the Clubhouse unable to take further action before daybreak. It was not pleasant to think of the two men out there alone in the dark hills and not knowing their condition. Then shortly after midnight the phone rang.

"It's him, it's Matthew!" shouted Derek who had picked up the receiver.

"Yes, yes, we're all here. Where are you? Are you alright? Give me a pencil somebody," ordered Derek, reaching out his hand. He scribbled on a piece of paper. "Yes, Matthew, I've got that, but did you say on the right after the fork or the left, and is it the first farm you get to? Ah, there is only one up that road anyway! Yes, OK, we'll be there as quick as we can. Yes, I'll ring Doctor Gill now. We have his number up here on the notice board. See you soon, cheerio."

At a pre-arranged point we met Doctor Gill then followed the instructions received from Matthew. This brought us to an isolated hill farm, the lights from which we had seen afar as a pinpoint in the darkness. On being invited in we discovered Matthew lying on the settee where he had been made as comfortable as possible, by the farmer's wife. She had brought pillows from the bedroom with which she had endeavoured to ease his many aches, for far from being 'alright' as he had suggested to Derek over the phone, he had in fact a badly damaged ankle, which was to take a longer time to mend than the three cracked vertebrae in his back.

Once again, on instruction from Matthew, we sent out a party on foot to walk over the hills and down the valleys guided by a single light emitting from a storm lantern held by a farm boy who was standing alone on a peak. We reached this peak

and then, with the farm boy, walked down into the valley at the side and soon were climbing again. It was some way up this other side that we came across the doomed glider. Still in amongst the wreckage was Andy Clough. With our torches we could make out the severity of the accident, and at once it became evident that the survival of the two occupants had been miraculous. The heavy high wing had been ripped off its mounting and now laid across the top of the cockpit. The nose of the glider was in pieces and compressed into the hill side, and somehow in this now confined space of what had been the cockpit, two men had survived. One of whom had actually extricated himself and found help.

Andy though, even if we assume he had the iron will of Matthew, could have in no was escaped the scene, for he lay there unable to move, his back broken. With the doctor having administered a pain killing injection all we could do now was wait with poor Andy for the day to break and the arrival of an RAF helicopter to fly the injured man out. It would not be a long flight as the crow flies to Kendal Green hospital.

But what of Matthew who by now was already in hospital? The man who over the phone had reported that he was 'all right' had by some incredible determination reached a distant farm, struggling over terrible terrain only to find that there was no telephone on the premises. Nevertheless he organised that the boy should go up to the high peak where he was told to stay with his lantern, even if it meant staying there throughout the whole of the night. Having satisfied himself that this had been done, he then borrowed a tractor with which he journeyed to another farm from which he could report by telephone - all this with a badly damaged ankle and three cracked vertebrae!

When we were able to discuss the accident in more detail with Matthew, we learnt that, on the fateful night the Venture had reached the Point. It almost at once became enveloped in cloud. With no giro instrument or compass he tried to fly straight and level in a direction he hoped to be southwest. That would have brought him over lower ground away from the high hills and the orographic cloud they were causing. It seemed that the left wing must have gone down slightly causing the glider to take on a slight bank, which in turn flew on a large arc, until finally it must have only just cleared the peak on which the farm boy with the lantern had later stood. Matthew said that he suddenly saw the ground and pulled back the stick, but it was too late.

After the stable door had been closed, a compass was fitted into every glider in the Club which did not already have one. Some time later, in response to a request form the Aviation Authority, several of our members again made the trek to the scene of the accident. This was because several over flying aircraft at different times had reported seeing a crashed plane. Since it was not possible for the remains to be moved we solved the problem by burning it.

CHAPTER SIX

ALL IN THE GAME

I was walking over the heather with my dog sniffing along at my heels. The fells had never looked more beautiful and the sun was shining hot on my back. My thoughts slipped back to one of my earliest visits to the club. They brought a smile to my lips.

That day of the past had also been hot and beautiful and since at that time I did not know many members nor much about the club I was pleased when a charming gentleman by the name of John Allen took me under his wing. We strolled over the fell, just the two of us, he was explaining some of the intricacies of gliding and made the analogy with the soaring birds. Gradually his talk moved further away form man flight nearer to that of the birds, for John it seemed was something of a naturalist.

From time to time I was not averse to the pleasures of nature, one of which was slowly manifesting itself as we neared a stationary jeep. For, protruding from beneath the vehicle was a shapely pair of ankles which obviously were not those of a male. Raising an eyebrow I looked at John and nodded in the direction of the jeep. His response was a faint smile. Now more leg was exposed, the lady, who was on her back, had begun to work herself out from beneath having no doubt completed the repair. As more and more of the creature was exposed it was evident she was no less than a Goddess. Again I glanced at John and gave a silent signal of desire. A moment later only the upper half of her body was left beneath the jeep and the day being so hot, the Goddess was wearing only the briefest of shorts which now were being held back as she eased her way forward. The vision was simply exquisite. I looked at John and then up aloft and imagined heavenly dreams.

At last the Goddess found her feet and the whole in no way detracted from the initial beauty. She had a gorgeous and happy smiling face and loose curly hair, which at this moment did not seem unlike a halo.

"Hello, darling," she said to John.

"David, meet Rosalie - my wife," was John's response.

A year or two later John went down to Lasham with several others from the Lakes Club; unfortunately I was not amongst them. Because of one event at least, the Lasham Society would remember their visit for some time. However, I imagine there would be other activities which may have left their mark since the people who made up the party from the Lakes were amongst the most notable characters of the Club. Nevertheless it would surely be John who was most remembered, or at least the event in which he was involved. For John went up with Derek Piggott, the Chief Flying Instructor of Lasham; the purpose of their flight to enjoy a spell of aerobatics. It was a bright day so John was wearing a new pair of rather superior sunglasses. All went well until suddenly during one of the manoeuvres, off flew the canopy, or at least part of it, as the two seater they were using was a Bocian which has a canopy in two parts. The rear part mounted on runners enabled it to be slid open and closed. It was

this rear part which had come adrift and in doing so hit the tail unit of the aircraft thereby jamming the elevators.

The Bocian became stable in a shallow dive so the nose could not now be raised. An effort was therefore made, by the use of the elevator trimmer to change the attitude of the glider, but the trimmer of the Bocian is notoriously poor. The effect was minimal. Since the aerobatic session was almost finished when the canopy flew off, there was not a lot of spare height in hand. The glider remained stubbornly stable in its shallow glide and clearly it was no place to be when it finally made contact with the earth.

"Loosen your straps and bail out, John," ordered Derek.

John unfastened his straps as ordered but then started to mess about with his pockets.

"What are you doing?" shouted Derek above the slipstream.

"I'm trying to find the case for my glasses," replied John. After all they were new and rather special. In fact he had bought them especially for the Lasham trip!

"For God's sake, John - to Hell with your glasses. Just Get Out!"

There must have been some authority in the CFI's voice for without any more ado John stood up and then leapt into space.

The story has it that on landing, John's glasses were in his pocket, safely in their case having been placed there during the descent. That is as it maybe, but what is certain, is that the departure of John from the front seat brought about a change in the centre of gravity of the glider. This gave Derek some difficulty in abandoning the machine for he found himself in the embarrassing position of being pinned spread-eagled, face down on the port wing with the glider in a flat spin. Derek did eventually succeed in parting company with the wing and was able to deploy his parachute only moments before hitting the trees.

When both men were clear of the glider, the machine took up an inverted attitude, then flew straight on a shallow glide path. It continued in this manner for the remainder of its flight and on reaching the ground, made a surprisingly gentle landing, still upside down.

At the time John and Derek were gyrating about the sky, Reg Wolfe, who by now as a passenger-carrying pilot, was at the controls of an old open cockpit two seater Slingsby T21, known affectionately by the Royal Air Force Gliding Association as the Sedbourgh. Beside Reg was his passenger, a boy scout. They were happily soaring in a thermal, circling to the left, when Reg, glancing over the side, was amazed to see somebody swinging about on the end of a parachute and yet another body lying on the wing of a glider spinning its way earthwards a couple of thousand feet below.

Later that day, a boy scout was heard telling his friends that he had flown with a strange man who flew while leaning over the side of the cockpit repeating,

"Vot se bloodyel! Vot se bloodyel!"

There was no doubt that in some weather conditions Tebay was a beautiful site from which to fly. But there were also times when life was rather difficult, and one of those occasions arose when the cable broke during a launch.

There was a small parachute fixed at the glider end of the cable for the purpose of both marking where the cable fell, and allowing the cable to fall back to earth under some sort of control after it had been released from the glider. During the fall it is normal for the winch driver to reel in the cable and, by keeping power on, the parachute will fill with air and so prevent a horribly coiled up mess which could take an age to unravel. This can hold up further takeoffs and frustrate everybody, except, of course, the lucky ones already airborne. If one did get a cable break, Sod's law saw to it that it occurred, as likely as not, when everything was going up, with lift all over the sky. A time when all glider pilots are anxious to leave the ground.

A light crosswind had been blowing and this was sufficient to drift the parachute over some wet ground. The man who had been driving the tractor for retrieving the cable was an enthusiastic new member. He had noted where the parachute had dropped and had eagerly set off in hot pursuit. What he did not know, however, because no one had bothered to tell him, was that the area of the drop was wet and boggy ground, well camouflaged by a reedy sort of growth.

The driving wheels of the tractor lost their grip and turned to no effect until soon they were well and truly bogged down. In fact it sank so far that the underside of the tractor came in contact with the bog.

With a spirit of, "Ah well, it's all in the game," a group of us trudged our way over with spades, followed by the spare tractor with a chain which was to be attached to the original. First though it seemed necessary to dig away at the ground until it was wedged upwards away from the wheels. Heavy work this, but eventually the slope from the wheels looked reasonable so we fastened on the chain.

The spare tractor pulled, huffed and puffed, but to no effect. More digging, followed by some more tugging but still the stricken tractor would not move. Yet more digging, but it was no use. Then someone suggested that we attach another rope and try to pull it out manually. Most of us believed that if a serviceable tractor could not pull it out then we certainly could not. However, in desperation we were persuaded to have a go.

Sixteen men lined themselves along the chain and the rope and at a command of 'pull' we together took the strain. The stricken tractor came out from its mire like a knife cutting through butter. No problem. No problem at all. We stared in disbelief. How could this be possible? I have thought since that it would be interesting to see if sixteen men could prevent a tractor from driving off!

We had been at Tebay a good many years now and from a club which had at its beginning only two pilots it had become fully fledged in all but one respect. The

members at Tebay were used to flying in rough air. The early solo pilot who flew from Tebay was no 'cissy'. His experience of making an approach for landing through 'lee' air which had rolled and tumbled down the fell had become commonplace during his two seater training. He was used to being bounced about on a strong southwest windy day at the Point, but most of all there were few pilots who were cleared for 'flying the Point' who had not had to handle the jets of air as they passed over the chimneys and gullies. One visiting pilot had been turned on his back as indeed a few years previous had our own CFI, Ron Reid. But, despite all this, the Club had not been cross-country orientated, for no one had even left the site to land elsewhere.

No one that is until Ron flew off one August Bank Holiday in the Olympia. His office as Chief Flying Instructor had been taken over by John Young and Ron was at last able to discard his responsibility and do his own 'thing', so on this day he was spreading his wings. He had been launched in the early afternoon and headed west for the Lake District proper.

The day was hot and there were big cumulus building up with high vertical development and obviously strong up currents within them. The base of these clouds was high and looked dark and heavy and there were bright silver linings towards the peaks. With the lift there were probably hail stones within them, and also strong downdraughts for a few hours. Then it was likely that the clouds would 'over develop', spread out and join together to block out the sun's rays from reaching the earth no longer able to warm the more heat absorbing areas of ground which would, in their turn, warm up the air with which they were in contact and so send off new thermals and start the cycle once more.

Over the Lakes, Ron entered cloud and climbed to seven thousand feet before coming out of the other side. Over Lake Windermere he dallied, interested in watching the many sailing boats and the general activities of the people below. Then he flew for Kendal and on reaching there he felt sorry for them as there was a traffic jam blocking the main street in the town and along the main A6 road heading north and south from the town.

He looked towards the north east in the direction of Tebay and had no difficulty in deciding not to return there, which had been his intention. In that direction the sky was full of activity in the form of a thunderstorm. Huge black clouds seemed to be sitting on the hills and lightning was striking from that part of the sky. So Ron thought it would be nice to go to Levens, his home village and only five or six miles to the South.

The sun was still shining at Levens and from his bird's eye view Ron could see that two people were sitting in his garden enjoying the warmth. One of course was his wife, the other no doubt her friend from the village. The garden adjoined a large field where Ron was going to land, but first he thought that he would entertain the ladies with a display of aerobatics.

The Olympia's nose was lowered and when the speed had increased it zoomed up then over the top to complete a loop. Several loops were followed by a number of Chandelles and the series finally finished with a couple of stall turns. The glider was then brought in for the approach and, since the wind was light in this area, Ron was able to make the landing towards his garden. By the careful use of his airbrakes he held the glider off the ground allowing it to float nearer and nearer the garden hedge until it duly came to rest a few yards from it.

Lifting off the canopy he sat there awaiting the admiration of his wife but, since she did not appear after a few moments it was becoming obvious that the display had been unobserved. The whispering wings had not whispered loud enough. It was with no little surprise that Maureen saw the face of her loved one smiling at her over the hedge.

One day I asked John Young if I could go on a cross-country flight. At first he said no, but then sensing my disappointment he told me to take some large dust sheets from the hangar and carry them well away towards the north sloping side of the site. Shortly after, John came down to lay out the sheets in two line which were to suggest the boundaries of a small field.

"OK," he said to myself and two others, "if you can land normally in between those two lines you can go."

Jack went first and succeeded gracefully, but it certainly was tight. The other chap tried but though he landed in the 'field', he ran through the far 'hedge'. Then it was my turn and I was delighted to get it right.

I pulled the yellow release knob and dropped the winch cable. Then turned to my right and flew towards the valley where I knew there was a small disused quarry which was know to give thermals. Would I arrive at the right time to pick one up? As I approached, the variometer slipped to zero, the glider gave a little quiver, I turned to complete a full circle. The stronger lift was to my right. I centred on this and the lift improved. I climbed in the first thermal of my flight.

At 3400 feet the lift faded. "Don't hang about the site," I told myself, "get going now." With a fast beating heart I turned the glider towards Penrith and kept it steady until I cleared Shap. Now the ground beneath was far less dangerous as the fields became flat and spacious. I was still descending though and the air was very smooth. I must have more lift soon, but from where? There were no cumulus clouds to signal possible lift. I had chosen my area for landing but not yet the actual field. My height was eighteen hundred feet. At fourteen hundred feet I studied a field over to my right which appeared to be large and flat with a clear approach. It looked like a perfect choice. It was true that there were about twenty cows in the next field, but I could see a well maintained fence between the two fields.

Suddenly the smooth flying was interrupted by a little turbulence which induced me to turn without delay and the reading on the variometer began to show less sink,

but the air remained broken, unorganised, preventing a true thermal from developing. Committed I made for the high point of the circuit to commence a landing procedure and at around a height of three hundred feet I turned in on the approach with all nervousness gone as we floated down to land in the beautiful field.

For a few moments after the wing rested on the grass I sat motionless. For so long I had dreamed of this first cross-country flight. I had not gone far it was true but I had landed safely in a good field and apart from Ron, I was the only one to have severed the umbilical cord of Tebay. With great exhilaration I stepped from the cockpit and simply ran in delight around the stationary glider shouting with joy. I supposed I behaved like a small boy but I felt great. Suddenly I laughed out loud for my eye caught sight of the cows from the next field. There they were, every one of them lined up with their large heads hanging over the fence, some chewing contentedly, their jaws moving from side to side, others with saliva hanging down and all of them staring at me with large sleepy brown eyes. All this in a complete silence only broken by the sound of cud chewing. They did everything in slow motion.

After the loss of the Venture it became necessary to replace it with another two seater training aircraft. It was decided that a Slingsby T21 was the answer. Like the Venture it was a side-by-side glider though slightly roomier. The wings each had a strut from the under-surface to the fuselage as had the Venture, but the most marked difference was that while the Venture had been a shoulder wing, the T21 had its wing mounted on a short pylon.

Sometimes this aircraft, towards the end of a hot day, when the heat had gone out of the sun and the thermal winds it had caused were stilled, it was possible to have a last flight of anything up to forty minutes in the gathering dusk. The rising air on which we rode was known by some as the 'evening thermal' and was silky smooth. It was capable of holding up a glider at a constant 1600 feet above the valley before the glider, with less than usual sink, slid gradually back to earth.

These evenings the thermals happened because the air at altitude near the hill tops cooled down more rapidly than did the air lower down in the valley. The heavy cooler air, known as katabatic air, then rolled slowly down the hillside before wedging itself under the warmer air along the valley floor and so starting the upward movement of the valley air. As mentioned this rising air was very silky and smooth with a complete lack of turbulence, even though the air must still keep rising as fast as the glider's sink speed of say two and a half feet per second, in order to equalise at 1600 feet. In such circumstances one could happily fly the T21 at a mere thirty-three miles per hour.

It was during one of these 'evening thermals' that our old friend Ron Reid got up to one of his tricks. On a day when most of the activity was taking place at the launch point and well away from the Clubhouse, the 'duty cook' of the day would

indicate that her creation was ready by the ringing of a large and loud handbell. So, on the evening in question, the villagers of Tebay were surprised and bewildered to hear the distant peal of a bell which seemed to be echoing from all sides as the sound bounced off the hills. None gave a thought to look in the sky above the valley where they would have seen the T21 sailing serenely by. With further scrutiny the worthy villagers might also have noticed that the pilot was leaning over the side of the glider swinging a large hand bell back and forth. A few weeks later the strains from a fine trumpet rendering of, "Oh My Papa," reached around the valley from upon high.

From time to time a few of us would manage to leave our work for a day during the week and make our way to Tebay and the fells. It was during one of these few occasions when the second and last serious accident took place whilst the Club was operational from that site. Since there were just enough members to operate we had out a single glider, the Olympia IIB. There was a light northwesterly wind and the sky was full of promise.

Les, as ever, was eager to get airborne and was sitting in the cockpit at the launch point, chaffing at the bit, as he noticed a beautiful cumulus at just the right stage of its development, slowly drifting to the right part of the sky for him to make contact after release from the launch cable. The tractor towing out his cable was crawling at about half its usual speed.

Finally the cable was attached to the glider and the 'all out' was given. The machine leapt off the ground rather too steeply. At 200 feet the cable broke and Les, who had been an excellent pupil, seemed to be slow in getting the nose down. He appeared to start a right-hand turn and things seemed to be happening at a retarded pace. The nose then fell well below the horizon and the Olympia entered a spin.

The glider was in a mess. So was Les. He had lost his front teeth and blood was dripping from his chin. He moaned and was unable to move. We learned later that, like Matthew before him, he had three cracked vertebrae. He also had a hole in the roof of his mouth. At the time we knew nothing about his back of course, but we did know that it was unwise to move him. So all we could do was to try to reassure poor Les the best we could until the ambulance finally came and made its way to the scene.

There were two ambulance men and after some preliminary preparations, they took Jack and me to one side to inform us that they required our help to lift Less onto the stretcher. They told us that we must take one leg each and when they said, 'Lift,' we were to do it without hesitation and in one clean movement. "You must not," they said, "pause due to any shout or scream which that man may make." Soon after the stretcher was safely placed within the ambulance, a lady doctor arrived to administer an injection of some kind.

A few evenings after the accident I drove to Levens, picked up Ron and together we went to the hospital at Kendal. Naturally Ron was very concerned about Les. He

had not been with us at the time of the crash and there really was absolutely nothing he could have done to prevent it had he been there. Of course it was brought about in the first instance because of the cable breaking, but the handling of cable breaks at all heights is an integral part of one's training. There was no doubt that the accident happened mostly because of pilot error.

Having found the ward we walked down the row of beds and it was only when we passed the halfway mark that we heard a sound which was more animal than human. Les was nothing if not an extrovert as the doctors and staff were to discover with the passing weeks during his steady progress towards recovery. We had walked past his bed not recognising his very swollen and discoloured face. Also to add to his other injuries his jaw had been broken and was wired up. Nevertheless he was still able to talk in a manner of speaking.

During the short conversation Ron and I had with him, (he really was not yet in a condition for a prolonged visit), he explained what a nasty experience it was when trying to lift up the right lower wing with his aileron, it just refused to come but instead started to spin. The happening seemed to be a phenomenon to him.

Les was in no condition at this time to be lectured but I decided there and then that when he was, I must 'talk' to him. It was evident that he had experienced the classic accidental spin and had not been aware of the cause. Indeed had he been he would never have allowed it to develop.

Due to not having lowered the nose of the glider immediately after the cable break, the glider had reached a near stall condition. Then by applying stick and rudder to the right the glider had yawed to the right from the rudder effect. This slowed down the right wing through the air as the yaw was taking place, thereby producing less lift on that wing. At the same time the left wing increased its speed through the air due to the yaw and received more lift. Les at this point noticed that the bank was becoming steeper than intended and so made to take off some bank with the use of stick movement to the left. The effect of this was to lower the right aileron which, in turn, increased the angle of attack at that part of the wing, thereby stalling it completely, creating one of the necessary conditions needed for a spin to develop.

As the years went by the Club, having an inflow of new members, the time came when the Committee bore little resemblance to the early days. Much of the new blood was dissatisfied with the difficult conditions the fells inevitably gave during poor and wet weather. There were deep furrows almost a mile long which had been caused by cable retrieving. At the northern launch point there was at times a near quagmire, and in such weather it was never easy dragging the gliders back to the hanger at the end of the day's flying. This was done manually in an effort to preserve the grass in that area.

It was understandable then that when the offer came from Vickers Ship Builders

for the Club to use their aerodrome on Walney Island with its beautifully paved surfaces and large hangars that the majority of the committee members were in favour of the move. Most of we older members were not so happy with the idea. Also for those members of the Club who had to travel from their homes already well east, Walney Island would be getting too far for practical purposes. Many of the recent members came from the Barrow side anyway.

Some of us were even more concerned about the inevitable lack of thermal activity on an aerodrome placed bang next to the sea and sitting under stable air. Try as we might we could not convince our opponents that we would spend most of our time just doing unending circuits. It is true they were able to claim that there were fine hills for soaring, even though aero-towing would be necessary to reach them, the nearest of facilities being at Irleth which is some six miles from the 'drome to the north east and Black combe ten miles to the north.

Since the hills were west facing we agreed that only too often the air would be so damp that the orographic clouds would be too low on the hills to allow us the height to get back to the 'drome. So we put forward a further proposition which was to leave the whole decision in abeyance until we were able to look into the possibilities of having a sound winch-track laid all the way to the winch.

Normally this would have seemed a near impossible job for us to do successfully over the fell, but very soon now the M6 Motorway would be built through the Tebay valley and we considered that it could well be possible to get one of the contractors to do the job, all the heavy equipment being on our doorstep as it were. Certainly with such a track our major problems could have been solved. In the meantime the thermals would not be going away. Our case was lost. The proposal to move to Walney was carried. This was the end of an era for the Lakes Gliding Club.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WALNEY ISLAND

Our move to Walney Island gave no problem for, as previously related, the surface was paved. The aerodrome had been an Air Gunnery School for the RAF during the war and its three black hangars had been kept in excellent condition. The club shared one of the hangars that was used by a Vickers twin engined executive aircraft so there was plenty of room for our gliders and equipment. However, there was still some hard work to be done as the ship-builders had kindly offered us that part of the control tower building they did not use. Much of the building had been sealed off with all the windows bricked in. It was offered to us as a clubhouse.

We were a little surprised at the solidity of the brick windows and walls. One might have thought that they were meant to last for centuries they were so difficult to demolish. Reg Wolfe really did come into his own during this chore. Stripped to the waist, he swung his heavy sledgehammer with such force that one would be forgiven for thinking he had served five years hard labour.

It was a messy, dusty job, for the openings were being made on the first floor which meant that the hammering had to be done from the inside of the building. The large room was very musty and also in total darkness. This floor we had decided was going to be made into our main clubroom with a bar and a kitchen. The ground floor was to be made into a bunkroom. There would also be showers and toilets in that area.

I had for some time been an Instructor, and it was because of this that during one of my summer holidays I found myself running a week's gliding course. In fact it was one of several that I ran at Walney and whilst doing this I had my first and, I am pleased to say, last incident while in a two seater. I mention this incident because the circumstances which brought it about are interesting. But it should not have happened, and if I had been a little more alert it would not have. The pupil I was flying with was by now able to do all the circuit flying with only verbal advice. This was his first flight of the day but I had already done several with other pupils. It was sunny with a cloudless sky and little or no wind. We had been launched by winch and had released the cable at 1,000 feet.

"Keep on the upwind side of the runway and use up three hundred feet of height practising turns to the left and right," I told my pupil, "Then see if you can be in the correct position to start your downwind leg and circuit at 700."

At about halfway along the downwind leg I said, "See if you can use your judgement for when to turn onto the base leg."

At the end of the downwind leg the pupil commenced a right-hand turn onto base, his judgement was OK. At this moment I was distracted by something rolling across the floor of the cockpit. A 'loose article' that should not be there. I reached forward against my straps trying to pick it up. I could no longer see it, nor could I

feel it with my fingers. I messed about for a short time before deciding we would be ready to turn from the base leg on to the approach. On looking right from the cockpit towards the runway my heart quickened a little as I saw that it was displayed at an angle much flatter than it should be. We were too far away for the height we had. The glider was at right angles to the runway, not pointing downwind from it. So it was not the fault of the pupil. The reason must be strong drift. It was. A stiff sea breeze had come in during our circuit.

There was only one possible way of getting out of this situation and if this did not bring it off, then nothing else would.

At once I said to the pupil, "I have control." I dived the glider towards the sea. "Don't worry, we may have a mishap but you will not get hurt." I reassured him. "Check your straps, see that they are tight." Down close to the surface of the sea the headwind would be retarded because of friction on the water. By diving away out of the faster moving higher wind I had increased my speed by more than double and was now able to fly into a much less headwind near the water. This made my relative ground speed higher, enabling us to travel a further distance. Now we were going on and on, but the big T21 does produce a lot of drag, so our speed was bleeding off. The high wild hedge growing on a bank which defined the boundary was not far away. We were clear of the water by now and over the mud flats. Ahead, the high hedge was now providing a complete windbreak. Could we make it? We were near to stall. The hedge was there, I eased back on the stick. The T21's nose came up. We flopped onto the hedge and then slid backwards onto the tail.

Black Combe is a mountain in Cumbria standing about a mile inland from the sea. Its height is 2000 feet, give or take a few feet. It is 10 miles to the north of the aerodrome on Walney Island. Black Combe can be soared in winds with a westerly component, and it can at times become covered with orographic cloud. Black Combe was well-named as it had taken its toll of aircraft over the years. Both Civil and Military machines and their crews had finished their days on this mountain. It is a place to be respected, if not feared. It is also magnificent.

The Club Auster aircraft would tow the gliders to the Combe leaving them there to return when their pilots had their fill before flying crosswind back to Walney. If they were not to spoil their day the gliders needed to leave the Combe at not less than 2,800 feet. Luckily there is a safety back-up in the shape of a disused airfield at Millom, three miles from the peak of the mountain where the boys could put down if need be.

One day in March 1970, one of our older pilots. who a few years earlier had started flying in middle age, was soaring Black Combe along with several others. There was cloud capping the mountain and reaching up fifteen hundred feet or so above. The cloud stretched back inland towards the east in a continuous strata form with a base coming down to around 1800 feet. Immediately upwind of the mountain

and way out to sea the air was clear.

At the time I was with runway control from where we could contact the pilots by radio. It was always useful to learn from the first to soar the Combe how the conditions were behaving; but now an anxious voice was coming over the radio saying that he was in cloud and his speed was fluctuating.

I replied, saying, "If you can, get your compass on a reading near 270 degrees, and fly around 70 knots." But there was no reply. I called again, but still there was no communication.

We knew the pilot was not a cloud flyer and even if he were the cloud came down below the tops of many hills in the Lake District. If he did not succeed in flying west he would be in real trouble. It was decided that the police should be informed and a search made. Before reaching the telephone however, a police car arrived on the scene.

The police in Barrow had received a message from a walking enthusiast who had seen an 'aeroplane' smashed up on the hillside. He told the police that he had not been up to the crash which was some way along a valley but was able to give its position which was on White Combe.

We drove as near as we could by car, and after some pretty tough walking arrived at the wreck. It was indeed a 'smash up on the hillside.' There were bits from the glider commencing at about a hundred feet below the cloud line - the top of the mountain being covered - and continued strewn about over a considerable distance down the hill. The gradient of the hill was very steep, at an angle of about 50 degrees, and formed, with the hill from the opposite side, a wedge-shaped valley. There was no sign of the pilot.

The pilot had, incredibly, walked away from it. It is sometimes said that, "Any landing you can walk away from is a good landing." Boy, they should have seen this one. The pilot's escape was really remarkable. Anyone coming across the wreckage strewn down the mountainside would surely have said, "Impossible." The pilot told us his story of how he had accidently entered cloud at Black Combe, had soon become disorientated and, after the first wild gyrations, managed to keep his glider under some sort of control but without really knowing where he was going. Finally, whilst in an unintentional dive, he broke cloud and at once hit the ground with a glancing blow. His glider, now damaged, hit the ground again and continued its way down the moutainshide, breaking into pieces around him. The shaken, but otherwise unharmed pilot, walked away from it. One can only surmise what speed the machine was doing at the time of contact, the angle of the dive being rather more than that of the hill.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LOST IN WAVE

Mike had done his early training at Walney with the Lakes Club. He had gone solo with us and completed maybe forty solo flights. I remember that Mike had been a good pupil with much aptitude for flying.

Then Vickers Ship Building, his employers, sent him to their works at Weybrige, for Mike had a bright future and was a marked man by the firm. His degrees were good and his abilities outstanding.

He had been at Weybridge for almost a year, now he had returned home for the Christmas hols. It was 1968. Naturally Mike looked in at his old club. The day was extremely cold with even the sea water frozen along the shore line. The club single seater, the Oly 11b, was available but first he asked if I wanted to give him a check flight? I in turn asked if he was still in flying practice?

He showed me his log book from which I saw he had been flying with The Lasham Society all Summer and had indeed just completed an advanced course with them. I was happy he should fly. 1 said, "You did all your basic training and passed solo here, you know the site as well as I do, so you can skip the check, Mike." Since it was already after lunch and the days were short I said,"If you get high don't forget the earlier sunset down her. Give yourself plenty of time."

This was another 'wave' day, so there was a chance of a high flight and in such cases it was necessary to bear in mind that a glider could be flying in full daylight after darkness had covered the ground. So one must allow for this and also for the time it takes to glide down from high altitudes. The day was very cold.

Len Redshaw had been in a 'wave' and had just landed in nice time, not cutting it too close to the oncoming darkness. Some of us helped him put his glider away and by the time it was bedded down in the hangar it was getting decidedly darker. Someone said, "It's time Mike was back, he is the only one still airborne." More time elapsed but still there was no Mike. We were now getting worried. The Club Oly he was flying did not have a radio so we were feeling pretty helpless. There did not seem to be much we could do but wait. When it became painfully obvious that the situation was serious we called a Vickers pilot who lived close by. The Astec was rolled out from the hangar and in near darkness he attempted to search the sea and Morcombe Bay. Perhaps a forlorn hope but one had to do something. However, poor Mike was not found that day, or the next. To be sure one would not last long in waters of that temperature, but it was possible he was inland but the wind was from the east and blowing out to sea. It had also been confirmed by Len that Mike had been flying near the coast. Len had been towards 10,000 feet and shortly before he let down he had seen the Oly which appeared to be near the crest of a deep cloud. Len said the top was at 7,000 feet.

It was a number of days after Mike's disappearance that the canopy was

discovered on a beach at St Bees Head. The canopy was undamaged apart from the clear-vision panel which had been ripped out and was missing. Several days later a piece of the starboard wing was discovered on a beach in the Isle of Man, and some days later a trawler noticed an 'aeroplane' just under the surface near the mouth of the Mersey. Incredibly this also was undamaged apart from the missing wing tip. It was also quite remarkable that the trace from the barograph which the glider had aboard was readable so that it could be 'fixed' and made permanently readable.

We were able to reach a conclusion which may well have been possible, after studying the barograph trace. It showed that the glider had been at approximately 7,000 feet, as Len Redshaw had said. From that height the trace showed a very rapid descent. It seemed likely that the glider had blundered into the cloud and that in the bitterly cold weather the pserpex had frozen over preventing the pilot from seeing out. Also freezing the lear vision panel tight to its fittings so that it would not open. This would explain why it had been forcibly ripped away. Yet again surprisingly the panel was found to be still lying on the cockpit floor when the fuselage was recovered.

The glider, it seemed, lost thousands of feet, probably out of control. When clear of cloud, the pilot would have seen lights and gaining control now that there was a reference to be seen through the panel. Mike may well have made for the lights, not realising that they were from across the bay in Morecambe. If this was the case, the glider would be flying away from the land at high speed, having recovered from a fast dive.

After the rapid descent the trace showed a normal glide down to sea level, which also indicated a 'normal' landing. It could well be that Mike realised he was flying away from the land and found too much headwind when trying to return.

Towards the tail end of an Olympia's fuselage is a lifting bar for ground handling. Wound around this bar were the cords, or shrouds, from a parachute. This at first seemed very puzzling, due to the fact that the trace showed a normal glide to sea level. The pilot had obviously been with the glider during the whole descent, but there where the shrouds plain to be seen; however, with thought we understood the probable answer. After removing the canopy we think Mike had deployed his 'chute in an attempt to use it as a sail to reach the shore on the other side of the bay. The flying overalls and the remains of Mike's body were discovered on the Welsh coast eleven months after the flight had taken place.

CHAPTER NINE

A HIGH FLIGHT

On a Sunday during March I left home early to drive to Walney while there was little traffic on the road and to make an early start at the club. From Levens Bridge the road to Barrow was rather narrow and very winding in those days, and if the spirit moved me I got much satisfaction and fun conrnering at speed in the Cortina with my lovely dog Sussie next to me. She would sit there facing square forward with her paws placed firmly on the seat and looking straight ahead at the road anticipating each corner as it came up so that she leaned into the turn. If I took the corner fast her lean could reach thirty degrees. Through an 'S' bend she would lean first this way and then that, in one flowing movement. You would not unseat Sussie; not by fair means anyway. If you cheated by giving the wheel a quick flick while on a straight stretch she would topple. In that case the dog would pick herself up and take up her former position and glance at me indignantly.

Sussie was a Border Collie with just a touch of Labrador in her. She wore a long black shiny coat with pure white vest below her chin and a little white on her nose, just to make it more interesting. She had white socks on each of her feet, though of varying length. she had long silky feathers behind each of her legs and feathers hanging down from her tail, which also had a white tip. Sussie was beautiful.

The day was cold with a clear blue sky, not a cloud of any form to be seen anywhere. The wind was slight and from the east, the Lakeland hills covered in snow.

We were taking off towards the slake bank using runway one two. The wind being so light there was none of the low down turbulence often found on this runway which originated form the slake bank placed upwind. The 300 foot man-made bank just across the water on the mainland was used by the Club for small-scale hill soaring. It has a short beat and is boring to fly. Nevertheless one ambitious pilot was so keen to get his five hour duration flight, which he required for a leg of his Silver Certificate, that he used this little slake bank in an attempt to attain it. He was in fact getting close to his fourth hour when the Vickers man, acting as Air Traffic Controller manning the tower, ordered the glider down because shortly there was a Vicker aircraft coming in which was a shame, as with just a little cooperation there need not have been any difficulty.

The gliders were being launched both by winch and aerotow but always they sank gently back to earth. The day was lovely, but quite dead it seemed. The air was crystal clear with the visibility reaching out towards infinity. I looked towards the hills along the Dutton Valley and sensed rather than saw a suspicion of inversion in the atmosphere. Was it possible there was an invisible 'wave' out there, dry and without its usual Lenticular cloud to signpost it? I talked to the tug pilot and told him where I wished to go.

A HIGH FLIGHT

The take-off was as smooth as silk, so was the climb as we made our way to the Dutton Valley. I had asked the tug pilot to go to a position on the east side of Milliom, I wanted four thousand feet of height. From the lovely Skylark 3b I could see the Auster flying as steady as a rock. He appeared to be frozen in space with no movement. The propeller seemed to be replaced by the blur of a disc, down which shone a stationary line of reflected sunlight.

The Skylark followed the tug in a gentle turn and Milliom slid by below my left wing. We levelled off and had almost reached our agreed height. I had hoped for at least a little turbulence on the latter part of the climb, which might have suggested a little rolling air from the trough of a wave as it descended onto the inversion, but there was none. Nor did the air take on a slight opaque appearance as I looked at an angle slightly below the hoizon. It seemed there was no inversion. As four thousand feet was reached I pulled on the yellow release knob and saw the towrope fall away. I executed a climbing turn to the left and at the same moment the tug fell way to the right marking our separation complete. I headed east to get closer to the lee side of Irleth, the hill forming one side of the valley and brought my speed to 40 knots. Now though, we made no headway over the ground. So there is a wind gradient up here! I increased to 60 knots. Now we were pressing forward slowly, but the glider was sinking and soon the altimeter was showing 3,600 feet. I banked to turn the Skylark a little to the left and levelled off again, but we continued to sink. At 3,400 feet the vario needle started moving up and reached zero, the airflow remained absolutely smooth and a moment later the needle moved further to indicate two knots of lift.

Now the thing was to remain in the lift so I increased my speed a few more knots until the vario needle dropped down to one knot lift. I kept my new speed constant and concentrated on the vario until the needle began to fall back further. At this moment I eased back on the stick and converted some speed into height and steadied in level flight at 50 knots. I needed to swing the Skylark a little more to the left to prevent flying forward out of the wave. I could even afford it to drift back slightly. The thing now was to find a landmark straight ahead of the nose and another for each of the wing tips.

If I kept the Skylark stationary on those markers I should remain at an oblique angle in the invisible wall of rising air.

We were going up through 10,000 feet and the vario never moved from the two knots up. One might have expected the strength of the lift to increase with the higher altitude but it had not done so. The scene below was wonderful and the glider seemed to be utterly still with not a movement or the slightest quiver along its wings. The original marker ahead had slipped much too near the nose and the wing markers had long since been drawn in and under the wings. The Skylark was now slotted into a new set of markers, much bigger and less defined than the originals.

At 12,000 feet I called up runway control giving my height and position. I

carried no oxygen but decided not to abandon the climb just yet, so I must safeguard against shortage of oxygen. I told runway control to ask me questions at very regular intervals. Questions to which I should know the answers. If I was told that I hesitated too long, or gave one reply incorrectly I would immediately abandon the climb and come down without delay.

The questions started and my answers were prompt. I continued to feel fine but nevertheless from time to time studied a distant object and then quickly brought my eyes close in to peer at the nearby instruments to be sure that the change of focus was instant and clear. I checked my fingernails for signs of blueness, but all remained normal. The questions continued as did my answers.

At 16,000 feet I could see well into Scotland. I could see Wales, the Island of Man and Ireland. The Lake District below could have been covered with a white table cloth. Everything was distant. I heard chatter on the radio, it was Peter Redshaw in the Oly 2B. He had jumped on the bandwagon and was apparently climbing steadily. At 16,500 feet the runway control asked me a simple mathematical question. This was awful because I had always been a fool where figures were concerned, so I more-or-less had to guess the answer and of course it was wrong.

I was frustrated, but without delay I opened the brakes fully and lowered the nose until my speed reached 70 knots. The vario needle dropped down amongst the sink. I was furious but I had previously made up my mind that in no way would I argue or find excuses. I had in the past been in a Royal Air Force decompression chamber with others and later seen the nonsense I had written whilst in the chamber believing myself to have been normal.

At 12,000 feet I closed the brakes and took off the speed. At least, I thought, I could enjoy a long leisurely glide down. Soon I heard Peter again, this time telling of his progress to his father who by now had his Kestrel towed out. Peter had placed himself nearer the sea, the west bank of Black combe which he reckoned had boosted the primary wave. Maybe he was right for he took his Oly up to 19,000 feet. He did carry oxygen.

"Why didn't you hang on a moment and let us ask you another question?" I was asked on landing, but I told them I had been determined to discipline myself as planned. All the same it had been a good day, I thought to myself, as Sussie and I made our way back home. It had also been my twelve thousand, one hundred and seventeenth flight in a glider.

CHAPTER TEN

MAYBE OFF THE WINCH

At times we did get some good flying from Walney Island but not very often. As regards thermal flying, the bread and butter of gliding as far as lift is concerned, the opportunity for this was even less than for wave flying. That leaves hill-soaring and there is some good hill-soaring to be had from Walney but the main trouble was often the low cloud base on or near the hills. When it was good, it was very good, but when one remembers that most of our flying is done at the weekends, then the number of good days that can actually be used is only a fraction of the total that occur throughout the whole year.

Maybe our frustration was understandable when we had a good westerly wind blowing and the clouds had their bases easily high enough for soaring the hills, but the tug aircraft was temporarily out of service as was the case this day. Of course, the winch was working hard throwing the gliders up into the air, to allow five minute circuits.

I did not feel inclined to bring the Skylark from the hangar just for a circuit around the airfield, or even to take a nibble at the slag bank. It was a long way to travel to Walney then not fly, but even so I preferred the atmosphere of the club rather than spend a whole Sunday moping around at home. Nevertheless the west wind was good and those hills did seem inviting.

I watched a winch launch taking place and I saw that the glider was getting up high for this type of launch. I looked at the hills again, then decided. If I could get 1,500 feet I was going to have a go.

We pushed the Skylark onto the runway, climbed in and completed my pre-takeoff checks. The safety device on the cable release was checked to see that it would release the cable should a back pressure be applied. Everything was OK. The Skylark ran along the runway and quickly we were airborne. I wanted to get into the climb at once. It was height I was after; but I knew I must take care at this stage of the launch. To climb too steeply too soon and before the speed had built up was courting disaster.

1,100 feet and we were still going up well. 1,200 feet and we were above the height of the average launch but then we were climbing into a strong wind and that did help. 1,300 feet and we were still going strong. At 1,400 feet the cable was trying to pull down the nose. I applied more back pressure on the stick. The altimeter needle was almost touching 1,500 feet but the nose was trying to go down more, we must be almost over the winch, I knew that the launch had been milked for all it was worth. I pulled the knob and the cable then fell away, the Skylark's nose leapt up now that it was released from the down pull of the cable enabling the lift from the wing to have all its own way as the excess speed was turned into height. The needle passed 1,500 feet.

I turned the Skylark to the right, brought the nose sufficiently into wind to ensure a proper track over the ground to reach Irleth which lay crosswind and six miles form Walney. It would be 'a close run thing'.

The airfield drifted slowly away from my left wing and even more slowly edged back, but the Skylark's sink was normal for the speed of 50 at which we were flying. Because of the headwind component, I flew a little faster that the glider's best 'still air' penetration. Soon we were leaving the north east corner of the Island and were then over the sea with the vario needle remaining on the same reading. The cellophane factory which was on the mainland slipped past the right wing with the altimeter now showing rather less than 1,300 feet, but the sink had become slightly reduced even though we remained at the same speed of 50. The track took us over only a short stretch of water so before long we were crossing the mainland coastline with the altimeter showing 1,200 feet. I gave a glance towards the TV mast which had been built up on the top of the southern end of the hill and near the point where the hill lift would begin. It still looked a long way to go from our height. The part of the hill where the mast is situated is about 9,000 feet and the angle to it from the glider was shallow, but it was rather more comforting when my gaze slanted down to the foot of the hill. We were now well clear of the sea and for a few moments the Skylark had flown through air which had been a part of a downdraught causing us to lose some height rather more quickly but now the needle began to climb back until it actually gave a reading of zero; it could not have been due to hill lift but it was very welcome. Tantalisingly though, the needle slowly dropped again and settled back on the normal sink.

We were now level with the top of the hill and still had about two miles to go and the sink remained normal but I had noticed a long narrow field just out from the foot of the hill. I knew that I could get into that if I came unstuck. The Skylark continued to sink with the hilltop now climbing above the canopy, but a moment later the sink reduced to half a knot down and the altimeter showed we were now below 500 feet with the ground below starting to climb, making it look close and I felt great relief when the needle read zero. I was more than halfway down by the time I reached the sweeping corner of the hills and I flew the Skylark with the tip of the 18 metre wing only a few feet away from the hillside which is where the lift would be found this far down the hill. The vario needle started to climb and so did the glider. We had made it.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

TRY SOMETHING ELSE

During a week in August 1964 I found myself once more running a Course at Walney. This was a holiday course and most of its members had found their way onto the course via an advertisement in a national magazine. For one member, however, a professional gentleman, the course was to be a continuation of training begun eight months earlier. Since this pupil seemed an intelligent sort of fellow only in his thirties, I had been inclined to take it for granted that he would reach the solo standard during the course.

We were using the open two seater, the Slingsby T21, which as it turned out was the same type on which this pupil had done all his flying to date. This should have been an advantage since different gliders do have different characteristics and some had tandem seats, which is to say one seat behind the other with the instructor occupying the rear seat. Anything which is unusual to the pupil can be off putting during his training. The pupil had also received all his launches from a winch. On this course we also would be using a winch. It seemed to me everything was going for him, so he should return home from his holiday a happy man having got a few solo flights under his belt.

The rest of the course were the usual mixed bag of people of various ages. Some no doubt would be very keen from the outset, while others would be uncertain of the whole thing and be wondering if perhaps it had been such a good idea after all coming on a gliding course, especially having noticed soon after their arrival the previous evening how steeply the pilots in the club seemed to climb the gliders. But as the week progressed their confidence would build so that they too would enjoy this new sport and become very enthusiastic and try hard to develop as much skill as they could during the short time available. Then off home they would go happily remembering the new friends they had made, friends who during the first evening of arrival had been very reserved with each other, quiet and uncertain. But saying their farewells as though they had been lifelong comrades who had shared much together. One of the requirements of a good gliding course is the communal effort and good team spirit of the members.

A personal problem as far as I was concerned was the fact that I knew most of the course pupils would never again step into a glider after the completion of their week. Certainly the British Gliding Association was rewarded by some holiday pupils developing such interest that on their return home they would hunt down the nearest gliding club and become enthusiastic members for years to come. Because the majority of the holiday members did not follow up the sport, inwardly I would be frustrated. This was because I was incapable of not striving to teach all I could to progress the pupil as far as possible in his flying while I knew full well no further continuation would take place. I hope I behaved as a professional should.

Many instructors, though not all, would understandably take advantage of the situation so that the holiday course was for him as much a holiday as it was for his pupils. In other words he flew the way he liked and did most of it himself, the pupil being little more than a passenger just following through the movements on the dual controls. This was terrible if it happened to the pupils who were very serious about flying.

By the third day the pupil whom I thought would most likely go solo before leaving was giving me a very bad time indeed. His ability was nil and he had learnt nothing over the eight months that he had been flying.

Before releasing the cable from the glider at the top of the launch it is normal, and also kind to the release mechanism, to lower the nose of the glider from the climbing attitude in order to remove the tautness from the cable. However on releasing the cable from his first launch, the stick had been kept hard back causing the cable to 'ping' off and the glider to leap upwards.

Well OK, we are not going to get excited about that, after all I was a new instructor for the man and maybe he was a little anxious. Still he had been in training for eight months... So I carefully pointed out his error and advised him on how to prevent it recurring. On his next flight we had a repeat performance. So I explained the techmique again but this time decided to reinforce it with a practical demonstration. From the fourth launch we pinged and leapt upwards yet again.

A moment before his fifth launch commenced I said once more, "At the top of the launch and before releasing we must lower the nose then pull the release knob twice. What is it we do?" He repeated, "At the top of the launch and before releasing we must lower the nose then pull the release knob twice."

"Right," I said, "You've got it." Half way up the launch I turned to him and asked, "What is it we must do at the top of the launch?"

"We must lower the nose before releasing the cable, then pull twice," he replied.

"That's my boy," I said. A few moments later the cable went 'ping' and the glider leapt upwards like a frightened horse. This man is nothing if not consistent I thought.

With every turn he made the glider slipped inwards. "Apply more rudder," I said. But no, the turns continued to slip badly inwards, that is to say downwards towards the lower wing after the nose had returned from an adverse yaw. "Well, then," I said. "Let's go through a turn together, you following me through on the stick and rudder. With me then. We look around carefully to see that it is clear and safe for us to turn. It is! Now apply right stick and right rudder. There, the wing is reaching the degree of bank we want. Keep the nose sweeping constantly around the horizon by gentle use of the elevator if need be. Nice isn't it?" "Yes, it is," he replied. "OK so let's come out of the turn and level off the bank by moving the stick to the left, and at the same time applying left rudder with your foot. There! Now you have a try, but remember, press the rudder as you move the stick over. OK, then?" I asked.

"Yes sure," came the answer. Then a ruddy great draught of air came in from the side and blew my hat off!

I really was baffled. Could it really be eight months he had been at it. Then I made a remarkable discovery when I suddenly noticed that both his feet were resting on the cockpit floor, they were not even placed on the rudder pedals! I asked him to try another turn, but by this time I was not altogether surprised to see that his feet remained on floor. Bewildered maybe, but not really surprised.

Most of the remaining manoeuvres required to fly a glider were treated in the same incredible manner so that by the end of the course, I felt that it was in his own best interest to accept that he would not reach the solo stage. I knew this could be a hard thing for a man to be told if he was really interested in the sport, and it seemed this man must be for him to have kept at it so long with virtually no progress being made. I tried to be as gentle as I could when saying this and pointed out that if he was happy always to be in a two seater then to go ahead and enjoy it, but if that is not enough it is only fair that I should try to save him the expense when perhaps his money could be used for developing another pastime for which had more aptitude. It is in fact rare not to be able to get a pupil to the solo stage if one sticks at it long enough, though in many cases the pupil is not likely to become a good soaring pilot. Just once in a while, however, one does come up against the impossible.

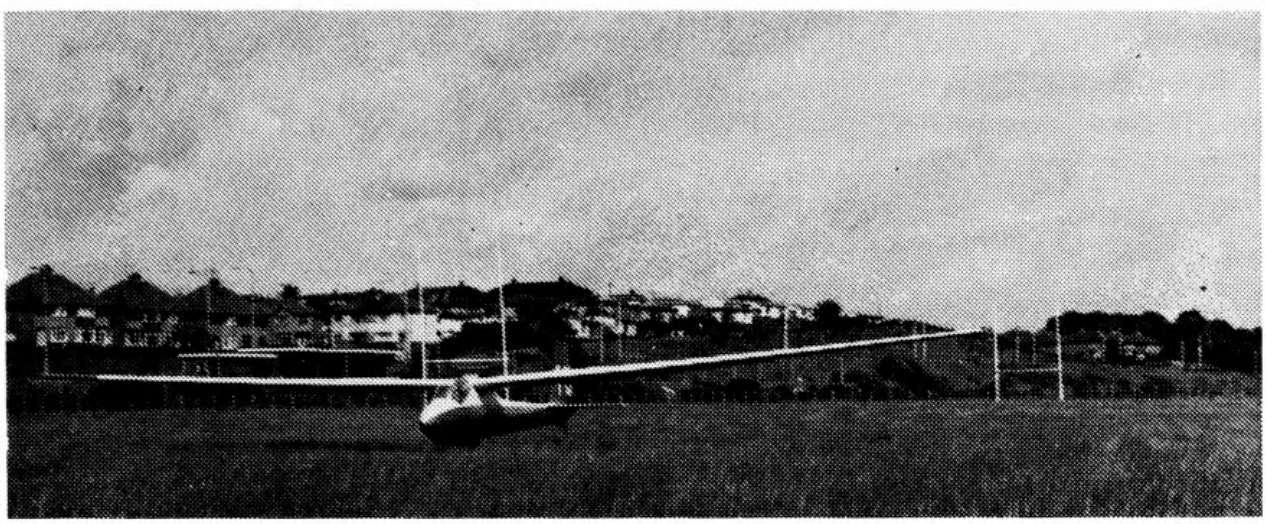
CHAPTER TWELVE

DESTINED FOR GREATER THINGS

I had a Coffee Shop in Lancaster and business was not good. In fact I could not seem to get it off the ground. Well, that's not quite true because it was already 'off the ground' up on the first floor and I think that was the trouble, together with the entrance being set rather far back from the street so that I was not catching the passing trade. My customers assured me that the Blue Mountain coffee I used was good and that the place was comfortable.

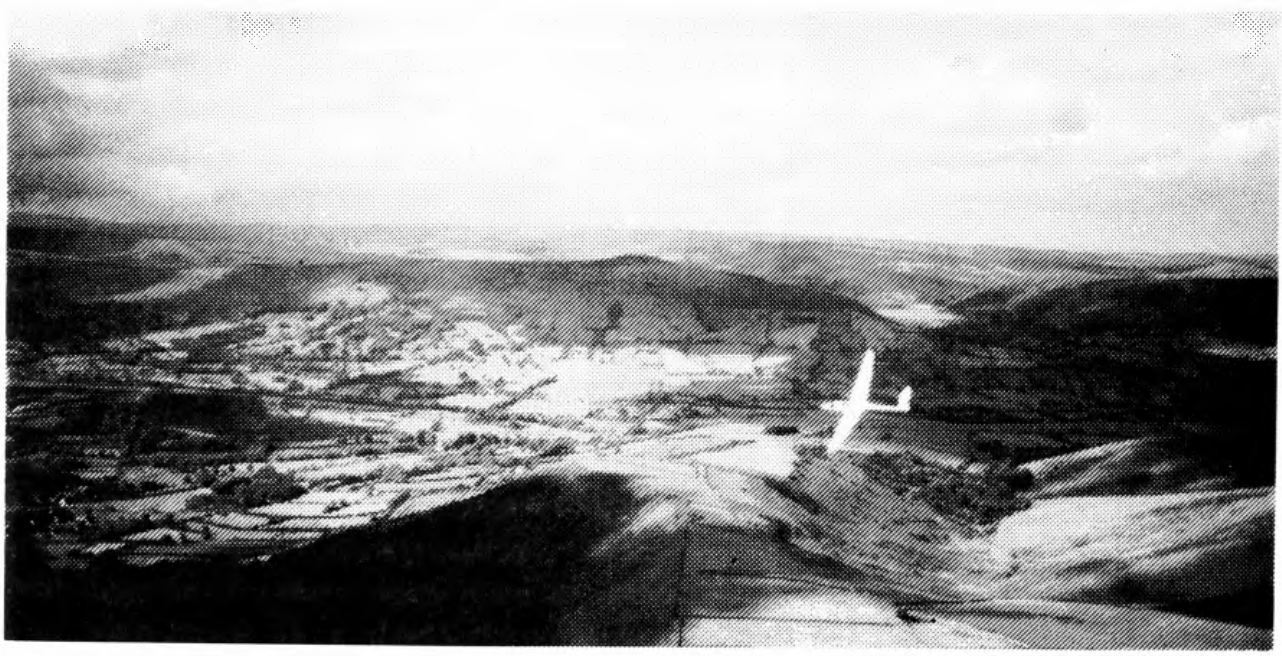
It was with my Coffee Shop in mind that I chatted with the photographer of the local paper. Together we discussed the possibilities of getting a picture and good copy for the paper whilst at the same time achieving a good 'plug' for my business. The plan we agreed was for me to fly the Skylark over from Walney and land it in a nice field by the river Lune which runs through the town. The field was next to the town's rubbish tip. I hoped there would be no significance in this! The photographer would be standing by on the big day with one of the paper's reporters. A reporter incidently who was also a member of the Lakes Gliding Club. Somewhere in his report the writer was to include a comment something to the effect that, "David Millett, the Chief Flying Instructor of the Lakes Gliding Club, whilst flying on a cross-country flight in his Skylark Glider was unable to find further lift when passing over Lancaster. However, Mr Millett, who is the Proprietor of the Harlequin Coffee Shop on New Street said, 'At first I was rather disappointed when I realised I would have to land so soon,' then he added, 'but when I've had a cup of my excellent coffee all will be well once more!'"

On a day when the thermals looked good I got through to the reporter and informed him that the flight was on. "OK, I'll find John and will see you later." John was the photographer. So the stage was set. The tug took me a few miles inland away from the sea air and I cast off at Dalton at 3,000 feet. The tug turned heading back home while I flew level in the direction of Lake Coniston until I had lost 500 feet and took my first thermal. I centred the Skylark in a nice four knot climb to cloud base at 3,500 feet, then glided out down to 2,500 feet. The cumulus were nicely spread out and well-defined so staying up was not too difficult. I kept north of Silverdale which is as far as the bay reaches inland, although the cumulus did almost reach the coast at this point. I knew that the clouds there would be rather 'wet' and not really effective as they were not part of a sea-breeze front. I skirted the glider around the north side of Levens and thought of Ron before crossing to get on to the east side of the main A6 road, which runs between Kendal and Lancaster. I was soon at Milnthorpe and I flew past with the town on my right so that I could keep closer to the hilly country, then with the town slightly behind me I got the strongest thermal of the flight which gave me just more than 5 knots of lift and the cloud base had risen to 3,800 feet.



The author's planned Skylark landing at Lancaster with a press photographer waiting.

The author posing for the press just before the arrival of the police.



Hill Soaring in Derby - Lancs Gliding Club

Author awaiting his pupil to complete the cockpit drill before take-off. Aircraft Blanik.

I could easily make Lancaster out now so I tried to pinpoint the remarkable 'structure' with its copper dome which dominated Williams Park in the high land to the east side of the town. The beautiful park and structure had been built by Lord Ashton whilst still the commoner, Mr Williamson. Surprisingly I could not at first identify the tall building which must have been merged into the scenery in some way, but as my angle changed it suddenly seemed to pop into view.

I took my final thermal for this day just short of Lancaster and had another good climb which permitted me to have the pleasure of looking down on my home town for the first time, save once many years earlier when I had been seated in the rear turret in an aircraft which boasted my town's name. Nobby and his crew were flying a night exercise and I plainly recall Nobby asking me, with some surprise, what was the tall building he could see below. It was reflecting the moon which was shining brightly. I remember how the crew laughed when I said it is the Structure. At first I didn't know why they laughed, it was always known as 'the Structure' to us Lancastrians.

High up, the building is encircled by a balcony which in its turn is edged with a rather elaborate flat-topped balustrade which has arrows embedded in it and if one was to line up the eye with an arrow it pointed directly at a landmark such as the castle on the other side of the town, or maybe at a well-known lakeland mountain. Move around rather more towards the south and an arrow will indicate Blackpool Tower, and so on.

Now I flew quietly over my town and picked out familiar places and found my own house. I continued to Glasson Dock at the mouth of the river Lune. There were a few yachts in the dock and many more in the basin past the lock. My eye followed the canal reaching away from the basin through the beautiful country until I lost it amongst the buildings of Lancaster, now several miles away. Returning back over the town I identified my previously chosen landing field lying alongside the river and I moved upwind of it on the opposite side of the water. Finally my landing circuit was started and we travelled along the downwind leg at 500 feet over the roofs of Williamson's factories, then turning onto the base leg which was to take us across the river before finally turning into the approach for the landing. From the corner of my eye I noticed a man down on one knee and a camera held to his head. The Skylark floated a little, only inches from the earth before the wheel gently kissed her.

John said he had got some good shots of the glider coming in and then had me stepping out of the cockpit a couple of times for more personal photos. I felt quite happy about the situation and looked forward to seeing my business jumping ahead by leaps and bounds, and told John he would be well advised to speculate in the stock market!

Shortly we were joined by three policemen. I was honoured by a goodly spread of rank of inspector, sergeant and a constable. My happy spirit evaporated a little as

I gleaned that these gentlemen did not seem at all happy in discovering that there seemed to be nothing amiss. Someone had rung the police to say that there was an aeroplane flying over the town when its engine stopped and they had lost it from view and thought it must have crashed somewhere near the river. The police did not seem to be very pleased in finding me and my 'aeroplane' in one piece. Of course they soon caught on that my machine was a glider so then they wanted to know what I thought I was doing landing here away from airfields?

I tried to explain to the officers that it was not uncommon for a glider to fly considerable distances on cross-country flights but they did not always reach their destination due to a lack of rising currents or too many strong downdraughts. I said that it was a shortage of these upcurrents at Lancaster which had brought me down. In such a situation, I explained, the pilot simply has no choice but to find a good field to land in and get down safely.

The manner of the inspector and sergeant now mellowed a little and they became more friendly. The constable was, however, having none of this and plainly desired to make an issue of the affair. I politely pointed out that gliders often landed in fields, especially when large gliding championships were held. At such times, I told him, gliders could be landing all over the country but there was never any problem with the law.

But the constable was not so daft, also maybe he wanted to impress his superiors as to what a fine fellow he was, because he asked,

"If this was an emergency landing as you say, then how is it that there is a press photographer and reporter on the scene before we arrived?"

This called for a bit of quick thinking and for once I managed to do just that. I said, "Well, yes Officer, I can understand you wondering about that, but really I think we've got to give full marks to the reporter here. You see, it happens that he is also a glider pilot and a member of the same club as myself over at Walney Island. I am the Chief Flying Instructor of the Club and I have advised its pilots that, should they ever find themselves in the vicinity of Lancaster and are getting into difficulties as regards remaining airborne, there is a safe field across the river from Williamson's factories where they could make an emergency landing. The reporter had seen the glider in the sky and being an experienced pilot himself he knew I was not getting away. He also knew that if this glider he saw was from his club, as it probably would be, it would land in the recommended field. So you see he was on the ball, as far as his paper is concerned, by grabbing his photographer colleague and getting down here quick."

I could see that the constable was still very sceptical but his superiors fortunately were not, so he had to go along with them. For some time after though I double-checked the rear lights, stop lights, etc on my car. All the same I feel that constable was destined for greater things! As for me and the Coffee Shop, well...

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LEARNING THE HARD WAY

Whilst standing at the launch point on Sunday afternoon shortly after lunch I heard the sound of an aeroplane. As our tow aircraft was standing on the ground I lifted my eyes to the sky and a moment later found the source of the sound. It was a Jodel which seemed to be making a visit to Walney. Before long the Jodel was making its approach which was long and very flat. Finally the aircraft passed over the hedge flying very slow, hanging on its propeller. The pilot closed the throttle and at once the Jodel settled on the perimeter which skirted the runway. The pilot braked hard and stopped a short distance down the runway. It was accurate if somewhat showy.

A week or two later the same aircraft paid us another visit and made a similar approach and landing. Having parked his aeroplane the pilot came over for a chat. It turned out that he was the proprietor of a garage near Blackpool, he also owned the Jodel. Later he asked a friend and I if we would like to go with him for a short flight and we agreed. It was quite a windy day, blowing 15 to 18 knots and on our return journey he let down to about 1,200 feet and flew past Black Combe on the lee side which put us about 800 feet below the summit. As we were passing the Combe he said he would show us how slowly the Jodel could fly and proceeded to drop his flaps and take off speed.

At once I told the pilot that it was not a good idea to demonstrate the slow flying characteristics of his aeroplane right in the lee of the mountain. His reply came in the way of a smile which was to suggest that I need not be frightened, he knew what he was doing. As the speed came off more he was right, I was frightened, damn frightened.

"For God's sake," I shouted, "put some power on, we may hit curl-over!"

"What are you afraid of? There is nothing to worry about," he said.

Now I knew he didn't know what he was doing. It was obvious that he was not aware of the behaviour of the air in hilly places. I thought how I might get through to him, and quickly.

The pilot was really quite a nice chap but I had the distinct feeling that in his eyes I was only a glider pilot and what did glider pilots know about flying? Eventually in his own good time he put on the revs and I breathed again. There had been no disaster it is true, but I knew it was no thanks to the pilot.

The following Sunday the Jodel again appeared in the sky. It seem, I thought, that his pilot must be rather fond of Walney Island. I watched him on his approach. It was coming in as in the past with his flat angle, slow and 'hanging' on his propeller. Then his wheels touched the perimeter track and he stood on the brakes. I felt very concerned for this man as I was sure he was a potential 'statistic'.

Later that day I joined him in the clubhouse over a cup of coffee and tried to draw him in on the merits of gliding but he obviously did not want to know. It was

not that he was an unpleasant person for he was not. In fact he had a pleasing personality and was in no way rude but he did not want to know because he was of the opinion that gliding did not really have anything to offer. What I was trying to do of course was to get round to the subject of his very slow landings in windy conditions. Not that it had been windy for his approach this day, but there had been times earlier when there was a stiff breeze. I decided to be direct and asked if he knew the effect that a wind gradient had when near the ground but he changed the subject.

Pointedly I said, "You really should come in for your landing faster than you did if there is any wind about." Then I let the matter drop.

The next time Jodel paid us a call the wind was blowing quite strongly and I watched anxiously when he turned and flew towards the runway. Would he be using what now seemed to be his usual technique? I wondered. I watched him come closer and closer. Yes, we were getting a repeat performance, only this time it seemed slower because of the stronger head wind. He came over the hedge. There was a short stretch of rough grass before the perimeter track and, as the aeroplane was passing over this grass, it stopped flying and dropped heavily to the ground.

The front wheel disappeared and was pushed up through the nose. The left wing was badly damaged from its tip to several feet inboard. As fate would have it this time he had a passenger. A young lady no less and now a very shaken one. Someone took her in his car to the clubhouse for a hot sweet tea while other members moved the Jodel away from the approach some distance to one side, from where it was later moved to the hanger by Vickers.

Eventually over a cup of tea the pilot asked, "What was it you were saying about gradient the other week?"

I must admit to being surprised that he should ask as I knew it could not have been easy. His pride had been hurt, but he listened attentively to what I said and then commented, "I wish I had discussed it with you before." I said, "Never mind, I'm sure you will not be caught out that way again." Then I smiled and said, "Perhaps you should take up gliding, you would be surprised at what we learn."

This story though has a sad ending, I'm sorry to say. The poor man never got the opportunity to try gliding, even if he had wanted to, for shortly afterwards we learnt that he had died in a road crash.

My days at Walney were now numbered. I had a yen to get into gliding on a more professional basis and in order to do this I needed a full-time instructing position; of course, this could only be found at a full seven days a week club. I cast my net and kept an eye on the positions advertised in the magazine Sailplane and Gliding.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A SPELL ON THE MYND

I had on several occasions in the past helped the resident instructor of the Midland Gliding Club run his courses. Jack Minshull had for many years been with the club which is situated on the Long Mynd in Shropshire. If during one's first visit the weather is bright and clear one could not help but be impressed by the lovely setting in which the club is situated on top of the hill a few miles from Church Stretton. However, it was also quite possible to be equally disenchanted if one's arrival coincided with the clouds covering the site and with the cold wind blowing the drizzly dampness all around until it seemed to reach the very marrow of one's bones.

The thing which impressed me most during my first visit, was the incredible number of gliders which they managed to pack into the hangar. It surely was a work of art which would need to be studied for sometime before one would remember the sequence of parking, what with one tail being jacked up on a box to allow a wing to go under it, a landing wheel supported on some weird looking long-legged tripod allowing yet another glider to be slotted in,and so on and so on. In fact the whole arrangement was so complicated it could hardly be expected that a visiting instructor who had come to help run the course for a week or two would be able to pack the hangar correctly. For it not to be correct would mean the odd glider or two being left out in the cold.

To get over this problem of hangar packing therefore, some individual had gone to a great deal of trouble of making a small model of every type of glider which was housed in the hangar. Then, within a frame, all the models had been placed exactly how their big brothers were in the hangar. From this model one could see which glider's nose had to be brought up tight to the hangar wall and what part of the wall. Likewise which wing or tail was lifted in the air and what went underneath. One could refer to the model step by step. If this was done, then lo and behold one would find that the doors indeed would close - just - with all the gliders bedded down.

It was whilst helping with my second course at the Mynd that the unthinkable happened when one of the course members noticed these nice little model gliders which appeared to be parked all higgledy piggledy, in any old way. "How interesting," he must have thought, "having one of each type. No, even two or three of the same type in some cases. Hm, very interesting." He picked each one up for a closer study. Of course, he only needed to pick one up for the whole group to fall about like a line of dominos. For some time after that, the end of each day's flying became a nightmare.

The Midland Gliding Club is perhaps the only club in Britain which regularly employs the bungie method of launching. It is surely the most pleasing way of becoming airborne. The uninitiated may well imagine the process as being rather hairy. Thing they would find themselves being hurled over the edge of the mountain

like a stone from a catapult as the kinetic energy is released from the thick pre-stretched elastic rope. In reality, however, the process of the glider from standing still through into flight is the smoothest of actions.

Whenever a west wind was blowing with sufficient strength, the bungie method would be used. Apart from its pleasantness, it was also a most economical way from the point of view of the Club. With engines not in any way being involved it seemed to be more in keeping with the countryside and nature itself.

On one occasion at the start of a course and therefore before the pupils would be making any attempt at landing, Jack and I had great fun vying with each other even though not a word was spoken between us. Each of us flying a Capstan Glider.

The wind was blowing hard from the west so the day was an excellent one for bungie launching. It was not even necessary to use the normal technique of flying forward from the hillside, after the bungie rope fell away from the glider, and turning to fly along the hillside only as the variometer needle showed lift. On this day the wind was blowing up the hill so hard that one was immediately able to go into a climbing turn with 50 knots indicated and gaining height rapidly. Then at the end of each training session we instructors would bring the gliders through the curl-over for the landing.

It was super when a day like this did occur on the first day of a course because it meant that the instructors would not yet be teaching takeoffs and landings, giving the instructor the satisfaction of doing them himself.

The curl-over on a strong west wind day at the Mynd was considerable and it needed watching when making the approach. Due to the extra sink caused by the curl-over and the Capstan having the powerful air brakes it has, one was able to come in, in a steep dive as though dive-bombing with air brakes fully extended from 1,000 feet. Sinking like a stone through the curl-over before pulling out for the landing.

On the edge of the hill at a position where the bungie rope was attached to the glider there was for each of them a channel made of concrete into which the wheel was positioned. With the help of the glider's wheel brake this groove retained the glider as the pull came from the bungie. Then when the brake was released the wheel at once climbed out of the groove as the aircraft catapulted forward into the air.

Our landing run normally finished thirty or forty yards short of the grooves at the hill top. The gliders then were manually pulled up to the launching point. But as I said, Jack and I began to vie with each other so that with each successive landing we finished up closer and closer to the concrete grooves. Soon the members of the Course could see what we were doing so that each team was cheering their Instructor, but the loudest cheers went up when, each Capstan finally came to rest with the wheels firmly settled down with in the grooves.

It was, of course, inevitable from time to time for a wet non-flying day to come

along on the mountain top of the Long Mynd. This in part was taken advantage of by giving lectures to the course but naturally even the keenest members would not wish to be lectured to all day long. It was on one such occasion that Jack and I were swopping gliding stories. One which Jack told remains fresh in my memory. The reason being that his story concerned a lady doctor, the name of whom, it turned out, was the same as that which belonged to a strong and unusual character who had also been on one of my previous courses. As coincidence would have it, she also was a doctor. However, on comparing notes, the ladies were not found to be the same individual.

Anyway Jack told of how this lady showed extreme independence and only with reluctance accepted help with the adjusting of her cockpit straps. She was off hand when given a short pre-flight briefing before her first flight. But when finally settled in, with the formalities completed, she prepared for a bungie launch.

Jack said he had flown with all types but he had never until now found himself being severely admonished by a pupil on becoming airborne. In a superior voice the lady sternly said, "You are flying far too fast." Jack's rendering of 'the voice' causing much laughter.

"Well I continued to fly along the hill until we reached the end of the beat at the south end and banked the glider to the right for the return beat. Whilst in the bank I received some sharp digs in my upper arm and heard 'the voice' severely saying, 'Don't you ever dare turn like that again.'" This was too much. What with his impression of 'the voice' and now his clear indignation, Jack left us rolling about.

When 'my' lady doctor turned up, it was only after the powerful motorcycle had been parked and the heavy riding clothes removed, that the penny dropped that she was female. This lady was not dictatorial like Jack's lady but was still a very strong personality. She had arrived at Tebay for a gliding course direct from completing a parachuting course. One wondered if perhaps she had not got full confidence in her instructors for the coming course! Then, straight after completing our course she drove off to join a sailing course.

A few years later 'my' lady returned for another gliding course with us, this time at Walney Island. By now she had obtained her power licence for aeroplanes, but she still arrived at the Club on a motorcycle. Not the same cycle, oh no, this one was quite different in that it had a most unusual petrol tank of enormous dimensions. I hate to think what it did to the bike's centre of gravity. However the purpose of this monstrosity had been to facilitate her journey across Africa from coast to coast, which she had done quite alone.

Another time whilst I was working at the Mynd I had a member of the course who was already a solo pilot. He normally flew from Lasham where he was a member. He was very keen to do his five hours duration flight as one of the legs towards the silver 'C' Certificate, and so was hoping that during his week with us

there would be a suitable west wind day. His Pilot's Log Book showed that he had flown over eighty solo flights. I flew with him in the two seater as a check flight and also to let him see the site from the air. His flying and, it seemed, his airmanship were acceptable and since he was already familiar with the Swallow I cleared him to fly one. The day of his check though was not suitable for hill soaring so he flew a few circuits alone. From his point of view things looked somewhat more hopeful the following morning. We unpacked the hangar and wheeled our gliders out to the launch. Then returned to the Clubhouse for breakfast. We would be launching to the north through a crosswind. The wind was westerly but it was not strong enough for bungie launching, nor would it give any problems as far as crosswind landing was concerned as near the ground the air was relatively still.

From the first launch of the day the two seater was sustained in flight by the hill even though the lift was rather weak, holding the glider at a height around 400 feet. The hill produced this lift along the whole of its length. We returned back to earth after 15 minutes to allow the next pupil to take his turn. On landing the solo pilot asked me if he may take off. He was itching to get started what he hoped would be his five hour flight.

I said, "Well, as you can see, the hill is soarable but it is a bit on the low side."

"Yes," he said, "but the wind will probably strengthen later on and lift should improve. If we wait until later in the day the wind could slacken off before my five hours is up." I knew the wind would most likely drop in the late afternoon, assuming it was to stiffen in the first place. Later in the week a five hour may be much easier, but on the other hand today may be the only chance he would have. This was his holiday and he needed his five hours, but the thought uppermost in my mind must be for the safety of the pilot.

That it was soarable with care there was no doubt and if the pilot listened to the advice I gave he should not meet any danger. I therefore decided to let him go, but first he was to be briefed.

"OK, you can go," I told him,"but if you are not holding your height when down to 400 feet you must call it off and land. From your winch launch you will start the beats along the hill at about 1,000 feet so as you descend you will have plenty of opportunity to detect that the rate of sink is reducing as you come lower. If it continues to descend when at 400 feet - even if the sink is light you must come in. OK? If it is necessary to leave the hill you will be straight on to your base leg at 400 feet which is about the same height you would have turned onto your base leg from a full circuit at Lasham. So it is a simple matter to turn onto the approach from that leg in the manner you are used to, no difficulty there for you. If though, despite what I have said, you do find yourself low you can turn in from the end of a beat at a slight angle and make a straight-in approach and landing. It should not be necessary to have to do that though and if it is, it is because you have allowed it to happen by

not leaving at 400 feet as I have told you. Do you understand what I have been saying?"

"Yes, I do," he said.

"OK. Will you tell me now what you must do." He told me. It was clear he understood the briefing. "Now let us walk to the edge of the hill and look into the valley." We walked to the hill top accompanied by two other men who were also on the course. I had been aware that these fellows had been interested in what I had been saying to the Swallow pilot and had been listening intently.

"Now there is no real reason why you would have to land down there but nevertheless I must point out the field which would be used." I indicated the field making sure he knew the right one. "Anyone going into that field would simply plan their circuit in the normal way. The field is a nice size and will allow a degree of error from a spot land."

Now the briefing was complete and everything was quite straight-forward. The pointing out of the field in the valley was academic because the probability of it being required from such a flight was virtually nil. So off went our Swallow pilot in high hopes for his duration flight and with my best wishes for his success, together with a warning for him not to fly slowly in order to change weak sink into lift.

We watched him cast off the cable at the top of a good launch then turn to the hill only a few hundred yards away to commence the flying back and forth over it. With each beat the Swallow made, some height was lost as was to be expected. The Swallow would need to descend at least 500 feet before there would be any hope at all for the air rising sufficiently to sustained a steady level.

By the time the next pupil and I had climbed into the two seater, strapped up and completed the cockpit checks the Swallow was down to about the hill soaring height. So we held the two seater back so that we could see how his next beat along the hill would fare, but the glider continued to descend. The man who was holding the wing of our glider up ready for takeoff was asked to lower it onto the ground, which would indicate to the pilot of the Swallow that we did not intend to move, for at the end of his present beat he would surely leave the hill for his landing. It was a pity but he would not be getting his five hours this day.

Instead of continuing his outward turn from the hill for 270 degrees to enable him to commence his base leg, he levelled out again after 180 degrees and so started another beat. "I told him to leave the hill at 400 feet," I muttered, "He is below that height now." I could see that he was flying fast, there was no hope he would stay up and he was now finishing beat number two after he should have turned in to land. It was obvious that the pilot intended to leave the hill at a slight angle to make a straight-in approach. Or at least that's what I had thought. He had already ignored the briefing as regards leaving the hill safely at 400 feet, but what on earth was he doing now? For far from angling in he was continuing along the hill with yet another beat.

I climbed out of the two seater and with the rest of the course members ran to the edge of the hill to see the Swallow flying by at hill top level. Now there was no way he could land on top and a landing in the valley had become inevitable. It seemed beyond belief that he had allowed this to come about. The pilot must be crazy, and yet on his check flight and those which followed he had seemed to be a perfectly sensible fellow.

Now there was only one thing for it, he would have to land in the field below. Was I thankful that I had included in the briefing the landing field in the valley. Of course activities would now be held up because of the job of getting the Swallow back to the Club. The trailer for the glider would need to be hitched up and driven on the snaking road down the hillside. On the bright side though it would show the members another side of the sport as they would see how the wings and tail plane were removed from the fuselage and placed into the glider trailer with its fittings. I did not think they would find it as interesting as getting on with their flying however.

As the Swallow returned from his last beat, we looked down on him. Any moment now he would turn away from the hill and out into the valley to place himself on his circuit for the field. The Swallow did turn away but, to my complete astonishment, the pilot put the aircraft into a steep dive pointing straight at a field just at the foot of the hill. The speed built up to God knows what before pulling out of the dive to 'hit' this field and then he went right through the hedge.

We rushed down the hill and finally reached the scene to find the Swallow, having gone through the hedge, had come to rest across the road, which was running parallel to the field. Of course the glider was badly damaged but there was no sign of the pilot. The canopy had been removed and was resting on the grass verge with the perspex broken. A worrying sight was the strand of wire with its apex at the Swallow and leading back to the hedge at each side of the glider. This wire was taut and had evidently cut through the canopy and had made a groove of some depth near the wing roots behind the pilot's head. It was difficult to see how the wire could have missed the pilot, but missed him it had, for on hearing a call from the road we saw a cottage with a lady at the door. "The man is here," she said. And indeed, there sat the pilot, white and shaken but otherwise unharmed.

Of course everyone was most pleased that no real harm had come to the pilot. Naturally though I felt very concerned that I had been in charge and had given him permission to fly. I would have to write a report for the Committee of the Midland Gliding Club. Then I recalled the interest of the two course members who had heard the whole of my briefing to the pilot. In the presence of a member of the Club I requested that each of the two course members should independently write an account of my briefing as accurately as they were able. This turned out to be very fortunate for myself as their accounts related very closely to my own which resulted in my being completely vindicated by the Club.

A SPELL ON THE MYND

The day's instructing had drawn to a close and for once I was still feeling reasonably fresh. It had been a long time since I had flown on my own and I felt the need to do my own thing. It had been a lovely day which was turning into an even lovelier evening. The hill was working with the west wind and the sky was clear, save for some high cirrus. so I took a launch in the Club's Oly 463.

After a short time flying on the hill I was able to move forward up-wind where, over the valley, I made contact with wave and had a nice climb up to 7,000 above the hills. The air was as usual very smooth with this kind of flying and I sat up there drinking in the beauty of our country whilst slowly roaming along the wave. I liked this Oly as it was quiet and responsive on the controls. Life was good and for once I felt relaxed. I was often told by my pupils that I was so very relaxed, and certainly I was forever telling them to relax themselves. The truth was though that inwardly I was never relaxed and therefore my energy drained away and I had to drive myself a great deal.

Tonight though was somehow different and as I sat up there life seemed good and I was at peace with my surroundings and felt as one with the glider. But now the sun was getting low it was time to return to earth before it became too dark. What better way to round off the flight than with a series of aerobatics? It was time I kept my hand in anyway. I worked my way down through the air looping, stalling, enjoying the stall turns when for a moment one is enveloped in complete silence as the glider hangs motionless in the air, as though imprinted on the sky. The magnificent feeling as the nose drops and the silence becomes a whisper before the ever-increasing rush of air turns the volume right up with the glider pointing straight at Mother Earth. Chandelles and lazy eights trailed in the sky. It was good. It had been satisfying, and now to fmish off with a nice long spin whilst over the valley.

The Oly 463 spun well, she fell easily into it with her nose well down. Round and round we went, or was it the earth going round? The Oly kept going. There was no tendency for her nose to come up to flatten the spin, so all was well. Round and round we go. The ground is coming up now and it is time to recover so give it full opposite rudder to the turn. Christ! Air suddenly tears at my face and temporarily closes my eyes as the canopy is whipped away. The thought of my tail unit flashes into my mind but the glider recovers at once form the spin and I pull out from the ensuing dive.

The canopy had flown past the tail without clobbering it. The yaw in the glider had caused the rushing canopy to pass by the side, so all was well. Looking down at the field I noticed someone walking towards the hangar from the direction of the winch. I would land next to him.

As I approached I could make out the person to be the winch driver. Good, he was a Club member, not one of the course. The Oly came to a standstill near him so at once I lifted up both hands and said, "I have not touched a thing." I felt that I had

done nothing wrong and wished for it to be verified. The winch driver bent forward to look into the cockpit. A moment after he straightened himself up and said,

"Well, the canopy bolts are in the unlocked position aren't they?" I glanced in their direction and saw that they were.

"Good God!" I said, and gave a sheepish smile... I had muffed my cockpit drill. How often had I stressed it's importance to my pupils?

From time to time as one journeys through life things happened for which there seems to be no explanation. Of course there must always be a reason for everything but it is not always possible for one person to know why. How did my dog Sussie for example, know when the glider I was flying was in the circuit? That this was so there is no question for time and time again over the years people have told me that when my glider joined the circuit Sussie, who was usually stationed near the launching area, would stop what she was doing. She may have been just generally sniffing in the grass or even taking a quiet snooze, but when the glider which I was flying appeared her attention was directed towards it as she watched its flight around the circuit. Certainly as we rolled down the runway it would be my glider only that Sussie came running alongside. There was always a welcome.

How the dog knew I cannot imagine for her action was the same regardless of whether I just flew for a few minutes over the site of if I had been far away for an hour or more. Yes, Sussie was some dog!

Then again why did I choose that moment, I wondered, one night in 1944 while seated in the cramped rear turret of a Lancaster, to press my back very hard against the doors in order to compress the bulky 'Tailor Suit' which I was wearing? - A large and heavy yellow garment filled with buoyancy material because there was not enough room in the turret to wear a 'Mae West'. - I pressed back hard and turned my head to one side whilst trying to reach back with that also. I was attempting to stretch a little to ease my stiffness, for I had been seated in the same confined position for hour after hour. Now I relaxed again, returning the few inches to my former position.

But things had been happening in those few seconds, for now in line with my head and on either side was a sizeable hole in the perspex. A piece of shrapnel had passed through. This gunner still had his head, though.

Returning to the Midland Gliding Club. My pupil and I were soaring their lovely hill and it was working quite well as even with the pupil's rather erratic flying the ridge was enabling him to hold 700 feet. We flew up and down for twenty minutes or so before returning to change pupils. This pupil was making good progress and so by now he was making his own approach and landings. Quite understandably the glider came to rest some distance from the launch area.

Several of the course came running towards our glider with what I thought to be much eagerness to get the machine back for the next flight and to keep things moving. As they drew near I saw their smiling faces seemed to have a sense of

excitement.

"Gee, that was damn close," said one.

"You must have dirtied your pants," said another.

"I could hardly believe my eyes," said a third.

I was puzzled. "What are you talking about?" I asked. They laughed almost nervously.

"It doesn't seem to have bothered you anyway. Either of you."

"Do you know what they're talking about?" I asked, turning to my pupil.

"I've not the slightest idea," he answered.

It took a little time convincing those around that we really did not know what they were going on about. When they told us we thought at first that it was now they who were pulling our legs. But the fact was that while we were soaring the ridge at 700 feet, the Red Arrows had appeared, from nowhere it seemed, and few directly beneath us. One at least apparently had suddenly shot off to one side, but those on the ground did not believe we had been seen by the other Arrows.

Now what remains a mystery in my mind from that day to this is why neither my pupil nor I had heard a sound. The observers on the ground said the roar from the jets was terrific, yet neither of us had heard a whisper. Many times when flying I have heard a jet in the vicinity, none of which had been anywhere near such close proximity. No, this was one of the happenings I cannot understand. My several stays at Long Mynd had proved interesting one way and another, but it was to be many years before I was to return to that club.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

DI THE FLY

My wish to enter into fulltime instructing took a big step forward when I responded to an advertisement by the South West Wales Gliding Association. I was invited to attend an interview with the CFI, Gil Phillips. On the Saturday I met Gil at Withybush which was a disused aerodrome a few miles from Haverforewest to do some flying with him before returning with him to his home at Tenby where he kindly invited me to stay the night. The following day I returned to Lancaster with joy in my heart for Gil had given me the job of running their courses during the coming season from April to October inclusive.

The Club had an Auster for aero-tows but this was not for the use of my courses. Instead we used the auto-towing method of launching and for this purpose there were two high-powered Jaguar cars which had been written off by the insurance companies and one old Humber Super Snipe diesel engined car. The Club was a happy-go-lucky sort of place and run in a haphazard manner. The ground equipment was very temperamental, but we usually managed to keep at least one tow vehicle running. To achieve a good week with plenty of flying it was often necessary for one or two members of the course to be more than a little mechanically minded. It never ceased to surprise me how willingly the course members accepted the situation, bearing in mind that they had paid a considerable sum to get on the holiday course in the first place. I felt that the advertising for the course should have stated that a requisite for membership should include a working mechanical knowledge, or even an engineering degree!

The pluses for Withybush, however, were the good-humoured friendliness of the Club members and the magnificent coast line and beaches only five miles west as the crow flies. Also I should mention the high standard of food, at least until my latter years with the Club. What with the sea breeze, the area was assured of blue skies far more frequently than most inland parts which if this was not good from a soaring point of view, it did at least allow for many happy evenings swimming parties. Really from a Course Instructor's point of view, West Wales presented quite a challenge. There seemed to be no limit as regards the number of members on a course, fifteen or sixteen being a commonplace number, but figures on occasions have been known to reach eighteen. All these pupils with only one Instructor. The ideal number from the Instructor's point of view is four, though to be fair to the Club, they could not be expected to make any profit from only four without pricing themselves out of the market - but up to eighteen - well really! Nevertheless regardless of these large courses, I still tried hard to teach each pupil as much as possible and not turn the whole affair into joyriding which would have certainly made my time much more enjoyable.

One of the more frustrating aspects of course Instructing is the fact that one is not

often able to follow the training of a pupil through. Instead one finds that the pupil is just getting the general idea of things and then he has to say goodbye. The Instructor then starts with a new course to repeat the performance all over again, only to leave everything once again in the air, so to speak.

Another challenge for the Instructor at Withybush was his being completely on his own. There was not a tug pilot, nor a winch driver, nor a tow car driver. Only course members, who usually had not even seen a glider previously, let alone helped in the operations of launching etc. I quickly learnt therefore, that one of the first things I should do was to observe which of the members drove his car with a confidence born from experience and general ability. Having found two such men, I then took them to the runway in the Jag and demonstrated how I required the car to be driven and the need for signals from first the batsman on the ground and then the glider in the air. Having explained the meaning of the signals I then showed the man in the front passenger seat how to start the car in motion at an oblique angle to the runway so as not to jerk the tow cable, then how to build up the necessary speed and to respond to make-believe signals verbally relayed from the man in the back. On approaching the end of the runway he was shown how the car must slow down fairly rapidly before turning onto the perimeter track. It was stressed to him that at this point he must not stop but keep driving down the track while his companion observed the fall of the parachute of the glider end of the cable. The car was not to stop until the parachute reached the ground. In this way the cable, which was in fact piano wire, was laid upon the ground and not knotted up in a pile of coils as it would be is the car stopped too soon.

I would demonstrate this technique a couple of times and then put the chap into the driver's seat to let him have a go. Since I had been careful in my selection of drivers he usually caught on quickly. Then came the real thing. The first launch of the course. By lunchtime on the first day the two chosen men had usually become proficient so I would then get them to train at least two more of the course as one could not expect the same chaps to do it for the full week. Normally by Tuesday morning, with a completely new course, the ground work was running smoothly. When one considers that this means ground handling of the glider maybe in windy conditions, signalling, car towing, timekeeping, hangar-packing etc, I do not think it was a mean achievement on the part of the course.

Shortly after commencing my first season at Withybush I strolled down to the launch point during my day off one Sunday to watch general Club activities, and to pass my time away in the sunshine. The CFI was there and he asked me if I would like to take the Swallow for a flight with the compliments of the Club. I thought this was very kind and I jumped at the chance of a solo flight. I was soon hooked behind the Auster and off we went down the runway.

I had been expecting the Auster to take me up to 2,000 feet somewhere near the

aerodrome. After take off however the tug flew North and kept on going instead of turning to gain height near the field. At first this did not worry me too much, I simply thought that it was not very good airmanship to keep flying on a continuous straight line away from the 'drome. If the rope were to break I most likely would not have the height to get the Swallow back with its poor performance, plus the fact that once again there was hardly any movement of air which meant that I could not expect the help of a tail wind. Of course it was very seldom that a rope broke and it did not do so this time. In due course we reached 2,000 feet and during the climb we never did deviate from our course, now however the tug had stopped climbing but continued to fly north. I simply could not figure out what was on the tug pilot's mind. I could not rule out the possibility of him taking me to 'wave' which might have provided me with very much more height than I would need for the return flight, but there was not a sign of 'wave' anywhere. On and on he went further away from the aerodrome now not even with increasing height for we remained at 2,000 feet. The sky was blue from a gentle sea breeze which excluded any hope of my soaring my way home with the use of thermals.

Finally I released the glider from tow quite bewildered. I turned for home but the chances of reaching there were out of the question. When the Swallow was down to 1,500 feet I was studying the countryside with not a little interest and I did not like what I saw. The fields were small and few seemed to be flat. When I was at 1,000 feet I felt, not to put too fine a point on it, concern. There was not a halfway decent field to be seen. That I was going to have to land, however, there was no question. The best of a bad lot seemed to me to be a sort of triangular shaped field with its base at the bottom of the slope. It also happened that a narrow lane ran along the base and there was a wooden gate giving access to the field. From base to apex was not far but the slope was considerable so that with a 'spot' landing I should roll only a short distance after touchdown. I knew that the approach would have to be very carefully watched as regards altitude and speed. The lane itself ran across the hill with the land falling away on one side and climbing up on the other. My horizon would be quite false and high up the canopy which, with the land rising ahead of me, would give the impression that the glider was approaching in a diving attitude. It would be easy therefore to be fooled and be coming in too flat and too slow, even though it would still appear to be a steep glide-angle relative to the hill. I must make one or two quick glances at the air speed indicator but must also be fully aware of the sound of the airflow. Because there was no wind I knew I need not consider curl-over or for that matter 'dead' air on the lee near the ground.

I turned the Swallow in for the approach and listened. As we went over the hedge it seemed as though I was pulling out of a dive to get the body of the glider parallel to the climbing ground, but she touched down nicely and we stopped rolling within moments. I knew the Swallow would start to run back down the hill so I kept the

stick hard back to keep the elevators in the fully up position. Fortunately the port wing, tip which was now resting on the ground, caused the Swallow to be dragged round somewhat before the tail skid dug itself into the turf bringing the plane to a standstill. I stepped out thankful that no damage had been done.

The lane by the side of the field was obviously a little used thoroughfare so I considered myself lucky when I was able to wave down a car after only a short wait. The driver took me to a phone box several miles away, from where I rang the Club giving them my position and the voice at the other end of the line said a trailer would come out for me immediately. The owner of the car then very kindly drove me back to where the Swallow was waiting. Since this man had put himself out considerably on my behalf I suggested that maybe I could show him my appreciation if he would care to visit Withybush some Sunday where I would arrange for him to have a flight. He thought it was a nice idea and said he might just do that and, with a cheery wave, off he went on his way.

I was left on my own for only a short time before another car appeared along this lonely lane. The car had a driver and passenger and one had noticed the glider resting on the hillside. The car came to a halt and two men stepped out. They were interested in the Swallow for after all it is not every day one sees a glider parked in the middle of a field. Naturally they wondered how it came to be there and were fascinated to learn how it would be removed. I explained how it would be towed away in a trailer especially designed for the job, but first of course, the machine would need to be dismantled. Perhaps they would like to help me to take off the wing and tail plane so that it would be ready to load when the trailer arrived? My two helpers proved to be most useful and after the derigging of the glider they stayed chatting away asking many questions about gliding and did in fact remain until the trailer showed up some time later and helped with the loading of the Swallow. So, as with the previous car owner, I suggested that they should look in to Withybush some Sunday so that I could repay them for their kindness.

A few weeks after my 'landing out' I returned to the Club from the lovely beach at Broad Haven where I had enjoyed a Sunday morning swim. During the afternoon I wandered down to the launch point to watch proceedings and noticed that they had brought out the T21. I guessed that a particular Club Instructor might well be on duty as he was known to be very fond of the old barge. Watching the T21 coming in on the approach confirmed to me that this man indeed was at the controls. He was bringing the glider in with his usual, if unwise, technique of flying almost on the stall with the wheel of the glider all but touching the fence as it passed over it. I do not know what the pupils were allowed to do in the air higher up but it seemed that they were certainly only passengers for the approach and landing at least.

It was fairly obvious that eventually the day would arrive when this 'Instructor' would come unstuck. I was soon to discover that the day was upon us. I parked my

little Mini at the end of a line of cars which were on the perimeter track by the side of the launch point. With Sussie at my heel I strolled over to chat with some of the boys and soon I was again watching the slow flat approach of the T21 as it passed, just missing the fence in its usual way. God what's keeping it up, I thought. This had no sooner gone through my mind when the left wing dropped, the wing came down with a bang onto the roof of a parked car. The stud on the under surface at the wing tip which served to protect the wing when resting on the ground hit hard into the roof. This had the effect of swinging the old T21 round through ninety degrees causing the nose of the glider to crash hard into the side of a second car ahead of the first staving in the doors. Pupil and 'Instructor' were shaken but fortunately not hurt.

So here we had, apart from a badly damaged glider in and around the cockpit area, two heavily dented cars and Murphy's law had reared its head in this series of events. The unhappy owners of the cars were none other than the two gentlemen who had been so generous with their assistance during my out-landing a few weeks previously. Each independently had chosen this day to accept my offer for a flight. Neither knowing the other had nevertheless parked their cars close to each other. Such was their reward for the kindness they had extended.

When Gil Philip, the Chief Flying Instructor, gave me the job as Course Instructor for the first season in 1965, he made one point quite clear to me. He said that I was to be wholly in charge of the courses. It would have been difficult not to be since I was the only person on the 'drome most of the time apart from the course members, but, said Gil, I was to have no authority at all over normal Club members. I thought this was rather an unusual state of affairs since I was an Instructor but in fact though strange as it was, I was not in the least way concerned about this. As I got to know Gil better I realised that it was just his way of doing things and I am sure that he thought that his Club Instructors would react more favourably if an 'outsider' was not to steal any of their thunder. I should emphasise that I was always treated with much friendliness by Instructors and members alike and was never in any way made to feel an 'outsider'. Indeed, almost every Saturday and Sunday evening was an event to be remembered in their Clubhouse. The main Club Room and Bar were very well-appointed with an excellent bar and many very comfortable chairs. There was a high quality radiogram with a fine selection of records for dancing. This main room also boasted a sizeable dance floor with an excellent surface.

Pembrokeshire, as the County was named before the boundary changes, was one of the Welsh Counties which was 'dry'. The Welsh having this peculiar regulation whereby each country decided whether or not alcoholic drinks could be sold on Sundays. I think it was most likely due to the influence of the Methodist Church in Wales which brought about this state of affairs. Certainly the Methodist faith has a large following in Wales. Anyway, Pembrokshire was 'dry' and it was on account of this that the West Wales Gliding Association had the most active associate

membership of any gliding club I knew. The flying members were keen on their flying but they were vastly outnumbered by the jolly, fun-loving, hard drinking social members, which I knew to my cost when lying in bed trying to get a decent night's sleep for the Monday morning start of the weekly activities. My room was directly below the dance floor and it was not at all unusual for the music above to be booming around the place, together with the thuds and scraping of dancing feet until three or four in the morning.

There is a rather nice tale with regard to the dry counties of Wales. The story has it that there is one particular pub which is placed across the border line of two counties, one of these counties being 'dry' while the other was 'wet'. The front of the pub was in the dry county, but each Sunday night the place was bursting at the seams mostly with occupants from the dry county who had simply walked in through the back door while the front was firmly locked. Maybe the tale was true, maybe not. I never bothered going up there to find out.

The clubhouse at Withybush, like the Lakes Gliding Club at Walney Island, had been fashioned from the old wartime control tower, but the Withybush clubhouse was a rather more luxurious affair. While the main clubhouse and bar were upstairs, the kitchen and some of the sleeping accommodation was on the ground floor, as was the dining room. In this room we ate our meals off one long dining table capable of seating around twenty diners. There were French windows which led out of the side wall.

One morning the course and I were having breakfast. We had already opened the hangar doors and brought out the Capstan. Her daily inspection completed, she now rested wing down on the grass ready to be wheeled over to the launch point. This was a keen course who were enjoying their holiday very much. It was normal for course members to knit together into one happy whole but this particular group was an exceptionally happy group. In the group there was a man aged about thirty who was tall and very handsome with fair curly hair which was well cut. He was clean shaven and had a strong physique. He was to me something of a strange mixture for this man wore a black velvet band around his head above his eyes. A silver chain about his neck with a long link of beads draped over his chest. On his right wrist he wore a gold bracelet. He reminded me in some ways of being a 'flower person' but he was not really their type. The man was obviously well educated and, despite his trinkets, he was a very stable and hard working course member. He was also full of fun.

This morning was a truly beautiful start of a summer's day which seemed to hold promise. The sun was slanting through the windows and already had early morning warmth. The sky was a lovely blue and very clear, and the air was still and peaceful for the sea breeze had still to arrive. Then quite suddenly, our 'flower person' laid down his knife and fork, pushed back his chair and walked through the French

windows. He stood for a moment quiet still and silent. Then, turning to face us he said, "Come out here everyone. Come out here now."

"Why, what for?" asked one.

"Never mind. Please just do as I say and come out here now." He beckoned us forwards with his hand. Fifteen or sixteen of us stood there in the sun then the 'flower person' slowly turned his arms outstretched, surveyed the surrounding country. He paused, then gently clapped his hands and said, "Just a small ripple for God."

It was usual on the Sunday evening to gather all the course together to introduce them to each other and myself to them. Then I would give them a short talk to give some idea what the plan was for the morning in particular, and for the coming week in general. I would tell them something about the aircraft handling, signalling, the need for timekeeping as far as the flying was concerned and introduce them to the small amount, but necessary paperwork they would encounter. Of course they were also formally introduced to my dog, Sussie. They were warned that the only one thing that could turn me from my normal cheerful, friendly, happy, considerate and generally loveable self, into a snarling, mean and vicious person, and that was to be caught feeding my dog surreptitiously at table. I told them that in one way dogs were like glider pilots, inasmuch as if a bad habit was allowed to develop, it could be one hell of a job to break him of it.

As a point of interest I would ask if any of the course had previous gliding or power flying experience. From time to time there would be a pupil who was already receiving instruction, having joined his local club. On occasions there would be a pilot who had already flown solo and hoped that he would be the only solo pilot on the course and thereby be able to have one of the Club's solo gliders to himself for the week. His own Club most likely flew only at weekends, so this was a way for him to get a full week's flying, weather permitting. After successfully completing his check flight with me he could, on a good week, get a few hours flying each day all for the same cost as the beginners.

While gathering this information concerning people who may have had previous experience, I was surprised when one member said,

"Yes, power but not gliding."

"What do you fly?" I asked.

"At the moment, DC8's," he replied.

The other members made suitable noises of surprise and admiration.

Someone asked, "Who do you fly for?"

"SAS," he answered, smiling modestly.

Talking with John later, he told me that he was looking forward to getting the DC9's which SAS would be having soon. Although John was an Englishman, he said in order to comply with the law he had to become naturalised to enable him to keep his job with SAS. He was in fact their senior pilot.

Naturally I was keen to get John off on his own in the Club's Oly 463, but first, of course, he would need to catch on to a few gliding techniques. So when we released from the cable I handed the glider over to his control and said, "Just for starters, John, fly straight and level and trim onto 50 knots, and finally return to 40 knots." Of course , he did this without any problems. "Now I want you to turn to the left, but first I must advise you that you will need the use of rudder when entering into a turn much more than you do on your jets." He banked and, as I expected, he slipped in the turn.

"Don't worry, we will soon sort that out," I assured him "I want you to pick a point straight ahead. Anything will do, say a field or a road. Have you got it?"

"Yep, I've got that farm building," he replied.

"Right, now I want you to rock your wings continually from one side to the other and reach about 30 degrees left and right. By coordination with the use of a lot of rudder see if you can prevent the ailerons from swinging or yawing the nose, so that the farm building remains on the same point on the canopy and does not slide about."

"Right, whoops, the nose is swinging a bit. My, it does need the rudder, doesn't it? Oh, that's better! How's that? The building is pretty steady now."

"Yes, that's OK John. Now if you go into and come out of the turn with that coordination the glider will be balanced. Actually for a glider the Capstan is slightly under rudder. If you were to roll quickly to 45 degrees the rudder would not quite prevent all of the adverse yaw, but with many gliders you can rock the wings happily to 45 degrees. Now you need to get the hang of a circuit without power, John, so I am going to talk you round while you continue to do the flying, right?"

"Right, mate?"

"OK then. We will start off by arriving upwind for the commencement of the downwind leg at 600 feet and seeing the runway at an angle of 30 degrees. So you see we are much closer in than you are when flying a power circuit, but you are also lower which means that the angle to the runway is good. Got it?

"Yep, I've got it."

"Now fly at 45 knots and trim a little nose heavy. Right! Now put your hand on the air brake and leave it there. Good. You will notice that as we fly the downwind leg the glider will normally be losing height and ideally we would like to be at 500 feet when half way along the leg, and to be turning base at about 400 feet, but with the landing area still at 30 degrees. So, by watching your angle you will know when to turn. Well, here we are, that's about it John. Turn onto base now. Can you read the angle?"

"Yes, I've got the idea," he answered.

"Fine. OK. Fly at 50 knots and stay with that speed until roundout. Use your own judgement for turning onto the approach, or, as you would say, finals. Super, that's spot on. Can you sense that at this 50 knot attitude it looks like we are going to over

shoot the intersection?"

"Yes, we are, we will be well down the runway."

"Right, then. Now keep on 50 knots but open your airbrakes fully. That's it. Now, what do you see happening?" I asked.

"The intersection is sliding up the canopy and we are going to undershoot," he replied.

"That's true, John, now almost close your brakes but not quite fully. Good, now we are reaching forward. So there you have it, just use the brake lever in the same sense as the throttle on power and when practical, land with about half-brake, not altering the brake setting during the final fifty feet so as not to mess up your roundout."

It was not long before John could look after himself satisfactorily on the circuit and he quickly had launch and cable brake procedures buttoned up. When he was given the Oly 463 to fly, he was like a little boy with a new toy. It gave me much satisfaction to see a 'pro' discovering what fun there was in gliding. John was on one of the early April courses and at that time of year, even at Withybush, we could have thermals with the cloud base at a height of 5,000 feet, whereas a little later on into the season, thermals were rare, being strangled at birth by the effect of the sea breeze on the lapse rate. In April, though, the land generally had not warmed up much so that the sea remained relatively warmer and prevented a sea breeze from developing. The air over the land, being undisturbed by sea breeze, was often conducive for thermal development. By the time that his course week came to an end, John was so interested in the sport that he asked if he could stay on another week. He did not have to be back for duty, so as far as he was concerned there was nothing to prevent him.

"Anyway," he said, "I really must 'crack' at least one thermal."

It was true that his flights had been competent so that I had very little worries about him, but try as he might he could not gain height, even though April, Withybush's soaring month, was behaving well. I contacted the Course Secretary on John's behalf informing him that as far as I was concerned, John would not be interfering with the coming week's course providing there were no solo pilots on it. It was not usual to have solo pilots on a course, or for that matter many with any experience at all. In the event there were none this time, so it was OK for John to remain. When I told him the news, his face showed his delight.

During the early part of the week John continued to search up wind for the elusive thermals, but always his glider was coming down until he had to break off the search in order to join the circuit. Thursday came and went and still he had no success. That night over a beer I went into the technique of using thermals with him. I used the blackboard and then a model glider. I flew the glider holding it in my hand, then slightly as level flight continued, I would lower my hand with glider as

we flew out of the lift into sinking air.

Several lamps with their shades were hanging from the ceiling. With our imagination we changed the shades into cumulus clouds which were capping the 'thermals', so that now we had a 'sky' which was dotted with cumulus. Then, instead of flying straight when reaching lift, I made the model circle in the thermal and the glider rose slowly, but after a couple of circles I would make the model glider gain height only at one side of the circle and to sink a little on the opposite side. In this manner I taught him the centring technique; by levelling off just before the best lift indicated, then back into the turn with the same angle of bank.

Having climbed up to 'cloud base' we would do straight glides then when lower I would show John how the glider may fly by the edge of rising air with just one wing travelling into the lift. I showed him how, if he allowed it, the wing would be lifted and cause the glider to bank away from the lift. He saw then that it was necessary not to allow the wing to lift but rather to 'push' the wing down into the rising air and so turn into the thermal.

The following day, John's last day with us, the sky again presented us with the 'April' thermals and we were climbing up to cloud base at 4,000 feet plus. Three club members came and got out their gliders. They were all successful in making contact with lift and were spending a happy afternoon over and around Haverfordwest. John landed having had two flights both of which had ended in his usual sedate descent to earth after casting off the tow cable. He stepped from the cockpit and looked up to the three gliders near cloud base.

"What the hell, Dave. How do they do it for God's sake? I've got over eighteen thousand hours and I bet they haven't got three hundred between them!"

"Maybe not, but when they had as little gliding as you they were still on the two seater. Don't worry," I said, "once you have a little success with lift you will quickly develop your thermalling skill."

Later that Friday afternoon John cast off at around 1,000 feet. He was coming down as usual, but at 800 feet he circled and slowly began to rise. I watched him from the ground willing him to do it right. He continued to climb, at bit slowly as he was not centring properly, but he WAS winning. At 1,600 feet he lost the thermal completely and sank back to earth. He nevertheless doubled his height and the duration of this flight was also 16 minutes. He was so thrilled that one may have thought he had won a gold cup. That night at the bar he just would not 'close the hangar doors.' Still living his flight into the early hours.

John returned to his DC8 a very happy man.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE MAN FROM THE MOUNTAINS AND THE INTERNATIONAL

On one course at Withybush there were two members who were as far apart as the poles.

One was short and slim with very little hair remaining on this head. The poor chap's face was plagued with unhealthy looking skin. It was red in patches and appeared as though he still had the residue from an over-spotty youth. His complexion, whilst being blotchy, also looked as if he had finished treating it with a hard bristled scrubbing brush. Whatever else one could say it was scrupulously clean. He had a nose which was far too large in profile for it was a bony and narrow nose pitifully short of flesh. The skin pulled tight shone with a ruddy glow, but not the glow of a large bulbous nose of the longtime heavy drinker with its pitted and matted surface. Mounting the nose was a pair of small beady eyes places uncannily close together. They were very dark eyes. Had the man still had a full head of hair it would have shown up his short forehead which now seemed to flatten off sharply, causing a flat and almost domeless shape. This man was birdlike in his movements, not at all as one would imagine from a man who came from the Welsh mountains. He was in his early forties. He was also a Boy Scout Leader.

The other member in question was quite a different sort of fellow, for he was tall, I should think about six feet two inches. He had shoulders which sloped away from a strong-looking neck and were very broad. His powerful arms and hands looked as though they would not be unfamiliar with the handling of weight lifting bars. One could not say that this man had not seen his feet for years because of a large protruding tummy getting in line of sight. No, it would be more like not having seen his tummy because of his chest getting in the way. Since the weather was good and hot it was only natural for him to be wearing shorts so that one was able to see his muscular legs complimenting the rest of his fine physique. The man had luxurious brown curly hair and hazel-coloured eyes set in a strong handsome face. He was in his mid twenties. He was also an international rugby player for Wales.

Looking at the two men I could hardly be blamed for feeling that some people had all the luck while others had none. I learnt with interest that our man from the mountains had paid for two courses to run consecutively. As he explained, "I have come for two weeks because when I go back to my Scouts I intend to teach them to fly." I should think that my eyes widened with incredulity. After I had pulled myself together I informed him as gently as possible that his intentions were not likely to materialise and that it was also against the rules of the British Gliding Association. I tried to indicate some idea of the time which would be required for a pupil to reach instructional status. The man was as surprised by my statement as I had been by his. He could not believe that what I had said was really necessary and was sure that he would be able to act independently and not bother with the BGA. All this and the

man had not even had his feet off the ground yet. Though I suppose it was debatable that they were planted firmly on the ground in the first place!

His progress was interesting if somewhat bewildering. When we were together in the glider he seemed not to listen to any instructions. It was not that he was a cocky man, but rather that he was on a plane all of his own, far away. Because of the pressure I had in trying to get a reasonable number of instructional flights for each member and because the course was too large in the first place, it was my style with some pupils not to give them an air experience flight but instead make it an instructional one. If one had fourteen or sixteen people on one course it meant that the time required for that number of flights was used up before instruction even began, and it worried me knowing that each member would get few enough flights as it was. Consequently I used my judgement. If a pupil seemed nervous or strung up, then I would ease him into the game with an air experience flight. With our man from the mountains I decided that instruction must start with his second flight. Not that, in all honesty I could say he seemed to be either nervous or strung up, but there was certainly something which suggested an air experience flight would not go amiss. I told him to relax and off we went. At the top of the launch the cable fell away and we were in free flight. As was my custom on an air experience flight I began by having the passenger look into the far distance as this way they get little sensation of height. Then I pointed out objects which are progressively nearer until finally I point out the clubhouse or hangar below. But when I indicated the coastline and sea five miles away to our left the man from the mountains continued to look straight ahead in a fixed stare. I talked to him hoping he would look or glance at me but he seemed immobile. I tried pointing out instruments on my side of the cockpit but still he stared ahead as though transfixed, and this was the man who was going to instruct the Scouts!

On his first instructional flight he was of course to learn the effects of controls. We had talked about it on the ground and I asked him to rest his feet gently on the rudder pedals and to lightly take hold of the stick. I noticed that again he stared ahead apparently transfixed, but he did find the controls and taking hold of the stick his knuckles immediately came up white. "OK then, leave go of the stick completely." I said and I was almost surprised to find that he did. "Now let's start again. Find the stick again but this time just see if you can 'feel' it gently with only your thumb and fingers keeping the palm of your hand away from it." With his head and shoulders still immobile he felt for the stick again, found it and the knuckles went white.

I tried moving the rudder pedals but they were solid. I asked him to relax the pressure from this feet, but of course he did no such thing. I asked him to remove his feet from the rudder pedals completely then went through the same procedure as I had with his hand. I got the same negative result.

I thought seriously now about this man from the mountains with his head, neck and body remaining as though they were a statue. Would he, I wondered, freeze on the controls? He had moved both hand and feet when asked, however. A fact which I found reassuring. Nevertheless, we had after all only been flying a sedate straight and level path and I felt I wanted to know more while we still had the height. Of course, even if he turned out to be a pupil of average ability, he would not be handling the controls while very close to the ground for his first few flights.

So I told him to take his feet and hand off completely, which he did. Then I executed a steepish turn producing a small amount of G. I watched him but the statue did not move or change expression. I levelled off and put the glider in a slight dive to bring up the air noise, then asked him to lightly return his hand and feet to the controls, which he did and at once the white knuckles returned and the feet 'locked on'. I then asked him again to leave go of the controls which again he did. It was now time to land.

Despite this strange behaviour in the air, the man from the mountains never showed any hesitation to climb into the cockpit for following flights. Even so by the end of his first week with us his progress had been virtually nil. I can recall clearly a flight we had together towards the latter part of his second week. During the whole of his stay at Withybush we had marvellous weather with almost continuous sunshine and the course members of both weeks had become very brown. Not our man, however, as his face was badly sunburnt. On this flight in question I glanced across at him as he sat there in the Capstan. The sight I saw almost made me shudder as it seemed I might be flying with the devil. He had his seat set on the forward stops so that he was almost upright and in spite of the hot weather he was wearing a dark brown flying helmet such as was used by the 1914-18 war pilots. It fitted his head tightly and came across the forehead, just above the small beady eyes, which were still staring forward like fixed marbles. The burnt skin of his cheeks were red and sore while the oversized nose was in an awful state of putrefaction. While he remained quite motionless as previously he had now taken up a position with his head thrust forward. All along I had pity for the man, but now I felt terribly sorry for him. Nature could be so unkind.

Saturday morning arrived and the course broke up to return home. An Austin car drew up at the clubhouse door and the driver that stepped out was a thin bird-like creature. As far as her appearance at least was concerned, nature once again had been unkind. The man from the mountains introduced me to his wife, then the bags went into the boot, the lady into the passenger seat and our man took his position behind the wheel. He drove off turning left and hit the sizeable rockery stones which served as a kind of kerb. As I watched the car disappear onto the main road I thought that maybe nature was not all that unkind after all, because she had seemed to achieve union of a pair who may see beauty in each other. Maybe the likelihood of a divorce

there could never arise.

The extremes of the two course members did not stop with their physical appearance, it also extended into the air and their abilities in that medium. The man from the mountains was without doubt quite the most inept pupil I had ever known, so much so that he made even the 'professional' man who had been on a course at Walney seem able in comparison and that man, you may recall, was advised to take up another sport. However, our rugby player was, to put it mildly, outstanding.

His enthusiasm knew no bounds. He would be first at the hangar in the mornings, eager to get the glider and tow car out and generally I found him to be of great help in getting things moving. One sometimes hears of a 'natural pilot'. Well I am not sure that there is such an animal as that, I think one would have to be born with feathers and fly solo on one's first flight to qualify. Nevertheless, this man's capabilities were almost beyond belief when it came to handling a glider. It seemed he required to have an exercise demonstrated to him once and within minutes he seemed to have mastered it himself. By the end of the week he had only fourteen circuits but he could have soloed without a doubt. I could not let him go on principle and I wished I could have had him for another week.

Regardless of the rugby player's large frame he was remarkably agile. It was pure poetry in motion to see him enter the driving seat of the Jag. This he achieved with one bound to take him through the sunshine roof after only a brief touch on the roof with a foot, and there he was behind the wheel ready to bomb off down the runway.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SADLY, I WAS LACKING IN AUTHORITY

During my first season with the West Wales Gliding Association in 1965 I recall a perfect soaring day early in the season. We were at that time using the T21 open side by side two seater and, flight after flight, we were climbing steadily up to the cloud base at 5,000 feet. This fact had not gone unobserved by some club members who, as glider pilots will, looked longingly through their office windows at the inviting white cumulus drifting lazily by in a high blue sky. First one then another noticed the old T21 up at cloud base or on its way up there. Any glider pilot knows that it is more than a man can stand not to get in on the act if it is at all possible. This being so, three pilots arrived at the Club, each of the three needed his gain of height for the Silver 'C'. That is to say, a gain of not less than one thousand metres above his lowest point in free flight. The clouds with their base of 5,000 feet were nicely in excess of this requirement when one considered that a launch by autotow was rarely much above 1,000 feet at Withybush. Then, as likely as not, some height would be used up before contact was made with a thermal to start the climb. The trio brought out the Slingby Sky. I was informed that this was the same glider with which Philip Wills had won the world championship for Britain when it was held in Spain in 1952.

The T21 continued its magnificent flights making contact off practically every launch with a suitable thermal. About one minutes flying time after releasing the cable we were able to place ourselves over a ploughed field which was kicking off thermals at regular intervals and off we would go back up to the cloud base at 5,000 feet.

During one of our ascents, whilst looking down at the aerodrome, I watched the Sky climbing on tow and I followed its progress with interest to see if the glider was going to get away, but in a few minutes the Sky was on the approach: he had been unsuccessful this time. I felt sorry for the pilot because the soaring period at Withybush was generally so short. However before we had landed the T21 I was pleased to see the Sky, having taken off again, was climbing well.

In due course a jubilant pilot stepped out of the cockpit. He had taken the Sky up to the clouds and he had his Silver gain of height in the bag with a good barograph trace to prove his claim. Before long the second club pilot was climbing successfully away. Then off went the T21 again with the pupil looking forward enthusiastically for what he hoped would be his first high thermal climb. It was true that for the initial part of the climb he would be no more than a passenger as I would need to reach a reasonable height before handing over to him. In this manner we would be more sure of finding the thermal again after the pupil had lost it, which he almost certainly would, probably a number of times, before we reached the clouds. We had reached only 200 feet on the launch when the airspeed became critically slow

and I was surprised because the normal climb speed had fallen off very rapidly, in fact almost instantly. The speed did not fall off that quickly even if the cable broke whilst the glider was in full launch climbing attitude. I at once lowered the nose a little below the horizon and then rocked my wings to indicate to the observer in the tow car that we wanted more speed, but none came. I looked over the side of the cockpit down at the Jag and was surprised again to see that it was racing very fast along the runway and the tow cable was still attached.

Suddenly I realised what was happening and I decided to remain on the cable until the Jag reached the end of his run for we were maintaining our 200 feet with enough flying speed to be safe. Then as the car slowed I released the cable and turned 180 degrees to land back on a reciprocal. The course members came up to the glider, some looking puzzled. "I am sorry," I said, "but we must finish flying, we are putting the glider back to bed." Naturally they were very disappointed and wondered why we were going to stop flying when it was such a lovely day and so many of them had not yet known what a thermal flight was like.

I tried to explain the situation and said, "I'm afraid there is a reverse gradient at 200 feet and it would be highly dangerous for us to continue to launch with the power we have available. Look, I'll try to explain then you will understand and perhaps not feel so bad about having to stop. When there is a wind blowing it travels mostly parallel to the ground. Its flow does of course get interfered with when thermal causes a bubble of air, or by trees, hedges, buildings etc., will break the smooth flow and make the air turbulent for some distance immediately downwind of the obstruction. In the main though the air does flow parallel to the ground. The speed of the wind very close to the ground is slower than the wind a little higher up. In gliding terms we refer to this as a 'wind gradient'. As you can see the wind today is not strong, otherwise I would not have landed on a reciprocal had there been a stiff tailwind. Where the problem lies right now is at about two hundred up because we have got something unusual up there. We have got a reverse gradient. That means that although we are taking off into wind with the wind blowing into our face as it were, at about two hundred feet the wind suddenly becomes a tail wind. We find then that from flying into wind we are suddenly flying with the wind and this quick change reduces our flying speed, i.e. airspeed, just as quickly making the danger of a stall developing without warning."

"What causes the reverse gradient?" someone asked.

"I'm afraid it is a phenomenon to me. I don't know the answer, but it does not happen very often." I replied.

In the meantime the Sky had been back up to cloud base with its second pilot. With two gains of height in the bag the third member was eager to get his and as we rolled the T21 off the runway the Sky was being rolled on from the perimeter track, its pilot already strapped in.

I walked over to the Sky and said to the occupant, "I'm sorry but there is a reverse gradient, it is not wise to take off."

He answered, "OK Dave, thanks very much, it will be alright."

Now this incident happened during my first year with the West Wales Gliding Association and one will recall that a condition of my employment was that I had no authority over Club members. Of course the pilot in the Sky was quite aware of this.

"Well honestly I don't think it is alright," I continued, "and I strongly advise you not to take off."

"Don't worry David, I'll be alright, I know what I'm doing," he smiled.

The pilot was not being unpleasant and he was not cocky or offensive in his manner.

"Well I am stopping the course flying and we are going to put our glider in the hangar," I said, "but let me put it this way, if I had the authority to stop you I would do so."

"It'll be OK - not to worry."

That was all I could do. I had tried. We trundled the T21 towards the hangar and when we were some way along the perimeter track I turned to see the Sky rolling down the runway taking off. I watched with some apprehension as he left the ground and climbed, and at about 200 feet the left wing dropped, the glider entered a spin and hit the grass at the side of the runway. I called to one of my boys, ordering him to run to the telephone in the Clubhouse and get an ambulance at once. "Don't mess about with numbers," I said, "call 999." I then ran quickly over to the crash.

The scene which befell my eyes was awful, with the front of the aircraft just a twisted mess and incredibly the whole of the wings from wing tip to wing tip were in one piece but lying parallel with the fuselage. As for the pilot, well his legs were crumpled and mangled. He was, of course, unconscious, but still alive. His head had fallen back as there was no longer a headrest or even a bulkhead to give support, there were unpleasant gurgling sounds coming from his throat. I had no medical experience. I knew however that he should not be moved, but even so I felt sure that his head at least should be brought up and supported because I thought he might choke on his own blood, so I gently placed my hand behind his head and very slowly lifted it and then packed my jacket behind it. We were all relieved to see that the ambulance had wasted no time in reaching us.

For the next few days, one or the other of us rang the hospital for information on his condition and it was on the fifth day after the accident we were finally told he would pull through. I wrote a report giving my opinion as to how the accident had come about, and the CFI finding that it almost exactly tallied with the findings of the official accident investigators, now gave me authority over all flying members, including his instructors other than himself. Yes, we did seem to have extremes one way and another at Withybush.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

TWO WITHIN TWENTY MINUTES

Jimmy. Now Jimmy was a Welshman through and through. He was short and stocky, a really solid sort of man who may have reached five feet six in his stockinged feet; feet which were small but quick in movement when required, and feet which were as light as a feather on the dance floor. Jimmy had a self-assurance which approached almost cockiness as seems to be characteristic amongst most of the Welsh. Just a slight scratch though and one finds below the surface a warm, helpful and friendly person. Jimmy was one such person, a truly lovely man.

Jimmy had a wife and this wife bore her husband seven children, her name was Sylvia. She also was small but, unlike Jimmy, she was petite and quite one of the prettiest ladies one would see in a day's march. When I first learned that Sylvia had seven children I would not believe it, but it was indeed true. It was almost inconceivable to think that she was the mother of seven, and I am sure that any young man worth his salt would consider that Sylvia would be the finest twenty-first birthday present he could ever wish for. Crazy as it may seem, Sylvia did not look as though many years had elapsed since she herself had come of age. There was one thing for sure, though, Sylvia would be no one's present, for to witness her with her husband on the dance floor or just sitting talking together it was blatantly obvious that they had eyes for no one else. They were still as young lovers. A wonderful marriage. A wonderful family.

It had come to my ears that Jimmy had been in the Royal Air Force during the War. He had been a pilot, a night fighter pilot. I was told that he had shot down a goodly number of enemy aircraft, two of which he had despatched in quick succession. I got talking to him one evening over a drink, having dragged his attention away from Sylvia. From our conversation I learned that he had shot down the two within twenty minutes of each other.

As we talked together about the war I had to hide a smile from time to time for Jimmy was obviously proud of his achievement, and rightly so, but he tried to emit an air of modesty which he could not quite achieve. Try as he might he could not prevent his self-pride and self-esteem coming through to the surface no matter how hard he worked on the 'oh it was nothing' touch. Now it would not be fair on the man to say that he was displaying a false modesty because there was nothing false at all about Jimmy. It was that his true character with the built-in slightly cocky attitude could not be kept at bay. A cocky person is usually not the most pleasant person with whom to socialise for more than the shortest period of time, but this was not so with our Jimmy. For integrated with his character was to be found a warmth and consideration for others that assured his welcome in anyone's company. It certainly did with mine. When Jimmy smiled the whole of his face lit up, and Jimmy smiled very often.

Jimmy and his brothers were the licensees of a pub in Haverfordwest and it was one of my pleasures to pop in from time to time with a member from the gliding club. I would order a drink from Jimmy and introduce my colleague to him and there was always a big welcome smile and he asked how the course was going and if he was enjoying it. Then after some general conversation I would say, "Jimmy was a night fighter in the war and he shot down two aircraft within twenty minutes of each other, didn't you, Jim?"

I used to say this quite deliberately because I loved to see Jimmy's reaction which was always the same. For he would answer, "Yes that's right," while a veil of attempted modesty was switched on, but under the surface you could see him thinking, "Hell that was nothing I could have shot down six of the bastards if they had been around."

A good friend of mine whom I had met in the gliding movement came down to Withybush to visit me. We had been instructors together at the Worcestershire Gliding Club where I had been the Chief Flying Instructor for some time, while taking a year or two off from Withybush. Mike had a week to spare so I though he would enjoy the time spent in Wales where he could swim from the lovely sandy beaches in our area and also give me a helping hand with the course which, as he knew, would be much appreciated by myself.

I took Mike along to Jimmy's pub one evening and introduced the two flying types to each other. Mike received the usual friendly welcome from Jim. Mike had no difficulty looking over the bar at Jim for he was around six foot two or three inches tall. One might say a case of the long and the short of it. Anyway as usual the time came while both men were present when I told Mike about Jim's aerial victories. I went about it in the same way as usual but with the exception of the time factor. This time I said, "... and you shot them both down within forty minutes of each other didn't you, Jim?"

I had barely completed the sentence before Jimmy snapped, "Twenty minutes!" All efforts of modesty had faded in a flash. I doubled up laughing and so did Mike, for I had already told him about Jimmy and his exploits. But Jimmy was not at all sure why we were so amused.

I had never been much of a drinker. A couple of pints once or twice a week would be my lot, and certainly a midday drink would not normally be entertained, but of course there is always an exception to the rule. Such an exception occurred one Saturday lunchtime. I had been doing a bit of shopping in Haverfordwest and did not feel like returning to my room alone. I felt in need of company so decided to pop into Jim's for a drink and a chat.

Jimmy was behind the bar as usual and so was his brother. Dougy was a year or two younger than Jim and of a rather quieter nature, or so it seemed. The two men were of similar build. The two brothers were hard at it on the pumps on this busy

TWO WITHIN TWENTY MINUTES

Saturday lunchtime when a giant of a man walked in none too steadily from the street. He was not exactly rolling about the place but it was evident that this drink would not be the first of the day. The big man ordered a whisky, his accent was broad Scots.

It was Dougy who answered. "I'm sorry mate you have had enough."

"Give me a bloody whisky!" the man bellowed.

"I'm sorry but I am not serving you with anything," replied Dougy firmly.

"You will give me a bloody whisky or I'll be over the bar and take the bloody bottle!" the man shouted, glaring down at Dougy.

Suddenly there was a sort of a blur around the bar caused by movement at lightening speed. There was a space where Dougy had been standing. The blur materialised back into the form of Dougy, now at the other side of the bar and he was taking a grip of the big Scot. It seemed to take only a fraction of a second for the man to be hustled across the floor to the entrance before the door crashed open as both men fell through onto the pavement. A moment later the door re-opened as Dougy re-emerged and went to take his place behind the bar once more. I saw Jimmy's shoulders momentarily hunch up with satisfaction as his smile showed approval of his brother. Dougy gave a tight lipped smile back and a quick wink. As for me, well I was seated on the bar stool and I was truly amazed at the burst of explosive energy which had exuded from the little man.

One bright and sunny Sunday morning the Auster was taxied around the perimeter track towards the runway in use. I saw that it was Jimmy at the controls. After a momentary pause on reaching the runway the aircraft took off, climbed and then headed in a southeasterly direction and was soon gone from view.

Had I been a passenger in the Auster I would have witnessed what took place at some time during the thirty minutes duration of the flight. However, had I been playing golf on the course at Haverfordwest I would have been able to appreciate Jimmy's performance, or at least I would have if the story as told by one of its members there is to be believed.

The sound of an aircraft flying overhead reached the ears of the gentlemen who were playing golf. Few however permitted this to disturb their concentration on the game, for after all there was nothing unusual about aeroplane being around any more. Dougy watched the little aeroplance with interest because as likely as not it would be Jim.

He watched the Auster and after flying over the golf course he saw it turn back again. Dougy noticed the nose being lowered putting the plane into a dive and he heard the pitch of the engine rise a little. Now the plane had reached the far side of the course and was by this time only a hundred feet or so high and was diving. As it was over to one side of him Dougy could see that the Auster appeared to be heading straight at a small group of players and the next moment the plane flew over

their heads clearing them by only a few feet.

The small group of players had been taken by surprise because the little plane was almost upon them before it was noticed, certainly by one of the players anyway. For it seems that, if we are to believe the tale, one man, suddenly seeing the Auster flashing by only feet away flung up his arms in shock. His right arm was extended by an iron which the frightened man was still clutching tightly. The iron, now travelling through the air at an enormous rate of knots, made contact fair and square with the ball. The ball then soared off down the fairway to disappear onto the green. It was discovered to have been a hole in one.

Well it seems a good story for the nineteenth.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

SILENT FLIGHT AMONGST THE JETS

During the 1968 season I received an informal phone call from the Commander Flying Brawdy. Brawdy was in those days a Royal Naval Air Station and it seemed they were to put on an international air display. Would I care to take over a glider to do acrobatics? Would I also invite Mr Wolfe to take along his Faunier in which to do his act? I told the Commander that he could count on me, I would confirm later regarding Mr Wolfe.

Peter Wolfe - another Wolfe in the British Gliding Association - had been a Focke-Wuff 190 pilot in the Luftwaffe and had been taken prisoner during the war and like his namesake in the north of the country he had the good sense to remain here. He had married and was farming successfully in Pembrokeshire. He was also an active member of the Gliding Club at Withybush and was part-owner of the Faunier Motor Glider. For good measure he also piloted a twin engined Dornier which belonged to a millionaire businessman and was based at Withybush. On the whole our Peter was not doing at all badly for himself.

The most suitable glider for my purpose was the Pirat as it was fully aerobatic and had a relatively high maximum permitted speed of 140 knots. This was the first Pirat in the country. The glider is of Polish origin and was at that time given a VNE of 140 knots. Later however the British Gliding Association reduced the VNE to 117 knots. Phil Phillips, the CFI, gave me carte-blanche with the machine and free aero-tows to enable me to practise and work out a routine. One of the most enjoyable aspects was that I could freely indulge in the normally forbidden 'beat ups' which I found so exhilarating. I would finish off each practice with a VNE dive to pull away from below head height in a vertical climb and execute a stall turn at the top. As flying speed was regained the airbrakes were fully extended for the landing.

It was agreed that John Jenins should be my tug pilot on the day. John had very much the Flying Officer Kite image with his flashing eyes and long black moustache which he frequently smoothed and encouraged to turn up at the ends by sliding it through his index and third fingers. He was quite tall and slim and had a fine head of dark hair and was something of a ladies' man. We were to give the display from 4,000 feet and it was important that the display was timed accurately. So, having worked out the routine I then measured the time taken from casting off from the tug to landing on the ground. During the period in which John was towing me up to 4,000 feet Peter would be doing his display in the motor glider. He was timed to land as tug and Pirat parted company.

Nevertheless, as each event was strictly timed, the organisers thought it wise that the gliders should open the show because in some cases the aircraft would be arriving overhead from different part of Britain and the Continent. It was interesting that we were the only non-military people in the show.

On the big day all the aircrews taking part that were on the spot had to report for a general briefing well in advance of the starting time of the display. We therefore took off from Withybush early to fly the short distance across to Brawdy. As we approached I could see even now that the traffic on the roads to the aerodrome was getting snarled up with cars bumper-to-bumper and moving only slowly. The display was obviously going to be well patronised.

In the briefing room we gathered together with airmen from many parts of the Continent. John, Peter and myself found ourselves seated in a row which was immediately behind six airmen from Germany. This got John quite excited as he used to make-believe he did not have much time for Germans. I think this was really put on for Peter's benefit as it would please John to get him going. Because I was seated between my two colleagues John had to reach over me to speak to Peter in a supposed whisper, a whisper which was meant to be heard over a considerable area.

"Good God man, what the hell is all this? The place seems to be overrun with bloody Krauts!" he said.

Peter squirmed in his seat with embarrassment, where upon John asked if he was feeling alright. One of the Germans turned in his chair to glare at John but John glared back and ran his fingers along his moustache. The German turned his back to us again. I also found this to be rather embarrassing as, unlike the Germans sitting in front of us, I knew that it was only John's somewhat twisted sense of humour.

After the briefing was over Peter became very concerned about the fact that there was to be a party in the Mess that evening and admission was tickets only. The party was for the benefit of all those who had organised and participated in the air show. We did not have tickets and this troubled Peter very much as he loved to be amongst the military men.

I did my best to reassure Peter that there would be no problem by telling him that the tickets would have gone out to all concerned through the normal military channels, but in the case of ourselves, because of having been invited informally over the telephone to participate in the show we were outside the "usual channels". However Peter could not or would not accept this, it being I suppose outside the correctness of the German mind. He therefore pestered me to obtain the tickets. As the place was a hive of activity I certainly had no intention of making a nuisance of myself over tickets which I was convinced were not necessary in our case anyway. But Peter remained unhappy and kept on at me until I told him that if he was so concerned he should do something about it himself. He backed off at this, and in the event there was no problem and Peter, like the rest of us, had a wonderful evening.

Both the motor glider and the tug/glider combination were timed to take off on the hour. While John and I were climbing up to 4,000 feet Peter would be doing his 'thing' at low level due to the tight manoeuvres possible on his type of machine. At quarter to the hour we each went over to our respective aircraft. Peter settled himself

in his cockpit and I fitted on my parachute. A Navy man went over to swing the propeller of John's Auster. The tow rope was laid between the glider and the tug. Everything seemed to be in order. I climbed in and tightened my cockpit straps. I could just hear the Sailor's voice calling 'contact' but I did not hear John's reply from within his cockpit. The Sailor swung the prop but the engine did not fire. Not to worry, it was not unusual for the Auster not to burst into life at the first try.

Again I heard the Sailor call "Contact!" and he heaved on the prop again and it turned half a revolution only to be sprung back a little by the compression. The Sailor called and pulled at the prop several more times but the engine showed no signs of life. I looked at my watch and saw that it was now eleven minutes to the hour.

Peter came running over from his plane. He had been concerned about the evening's party tickets, but now he was getting excited. John said to the Sailor, "Blow her out twelve times." The Sailor pulled the propeller backwards twelve times. Then, "Contact." The switches were flicked up. The prop turned in response to the Sailor's pull then remained inert. Several more efforts were made but without result.

I noticed that Peter's face was becoming highly-coloured and his voice was rising as was his excitement. This was a side of Peter which I had not seen before, for he was a good and calm airman but now things were going wrong and in a military environment to boot. This, I think, caused him much embarrassment.

John on the other hand was as casual as if he had just wheeled the Auster from the hangar at Withybush and was experiencing a slight annoyance before a Sunday afternoon's pleasure flight. I heard him say to Peter, "You really must not get so excited old boy, it will make you old before your time. We shall give it one more try and if it doesn't go we will try another blow out."

It did not go. "Blow out twelve times," ordered John. My watch showed that we had three minutes left. The blow out was completed and the Sailor manoeuvred the propeller until one tip of a blade was a little past top dead centre. He then reached up and called "Contact." After a slight pause the Sailor pulled, the propeller turned and suddenly became a blurred disc as the engine fired.

In minutes we were airborne and soon Brawdy was slipping away behind us as the combination made its climb up to 4,000 feet. Looking across towards the sea I noticed the white horses on the water, we had a 20 knot wind which I knew would make my display routine slightly awkward, as to perform mostly cross-wind would allow the glider to drift, but to perform mostly into and down wind would mean that the curves of some of the aerobatic manoeuvres would appear to be elongated as we travelled down wind and shortened when moving into wind. This as viewed from the ground would spoil the symmetry of the manoeuvres.

I looked back towards the airfield and was able to make out Herr Wolfe doing his stuff. His plane now looked like a small model turning and twisting about. From

where we were he seemed to be putting on a good show. Because his aerobatics were being carried out with engine on I knew that he would to some extent be able to counter the effects of the wind, and anyway he could handle his motor glider beautifully.

The combination was now almost at 4,000 feet and John placed me in a position which would not allow the sun to directly catch the eyes of the spectators as they followed the path of my glider. I reached out for the yellow knob and gave it a pull and I saw the tow rope release itself from the glider before starting my turn-off separation, climbing away to my left. I watched the starboard wing of the Auster roll downwards and the roll did not stop until the little plane was almost on its back and then John plummeted away down in a steep dive leaving me alone.

The noise of the airflow had reduced as the ASI needle settled down on 40 knots and I reached with my right hand to give an extra tug on each of the shoulder straps to check that they were good and tight. Then I added another ten knots to the speed before making a steep clearing turn, first to the left and then to the right. It was quite clear below and the Auster was now a speck in the distance. The Pirat and I had the sky to ourselves.

I had made up my mind that much of my display should be along the line of the wind. With care I would to some extent prevent the visual effects, as seen from the ground, which the wind would have on the line that the glider would take. Starting a loop into wind for example I could ease the stick back rather more slowly than usual and so extend the time in the climb. But to do this and to ensure one force of gravity when going over the top, I would need more than the usual entry speed of two and a half times the stall speed. The maple-leaf manoeuvre I could not influence however, as we would be in each quarter of the wind in turn. Chandelles I felt should be executed cross-wind and the glider, when being flown about the reciprocal turn at the top of the manoeuvre, should be directed to pass through a headwind.

For a moment I thought the effect of the wind acting on the larger surface area of the glider which is behind the centre of gravity would help carry the tail along with it at the time when near the stall and so encourage the nose to topple sideways into wind. Then I realised my foolishness as I remembered that we would be moving with the air mass anyway and it would not make any difference.

I eased the stick forward, I was ready and eager to go. Now the green earth filled my canopy and instead of 90 knots I allowed the needle of the air speed indicator to reach 115 knots before easing out of the dive. This would, I judged, give me the planned 120 knots before the speed began to fall and I would then be able to extend this into the wind part of the loop. The horizon came down the canopy and quickly the green earth was replaced by blue sky. During this stage it was important to check the 'G' meter as I did not wish the pointer to pass 3G, even though the Pirat could accept twice this value.

Moments later I brought the stick back into my tummy and reached my head back to look over my shoulders for the downwind horizon to appear. Then there it was, sliding up the canopy at right angles. I moved my left hand over the airbrake and left it there just in case the brake was required. But that would only be if things went wrong.

Once more the green earth is filling the canopy and I am making entry for my second loop. Number two of the ten continuous loops to open my display. Loops are easy if you apply the differing forward and backward pressure on the stick correctly and back them up with the monitoring of the ASI and 'G' meter during the entries.

Now I am coming over the top of the tenth loop and am about to make the entry for the start of the maple leaves. This will call for co-ordination of the three control surfaces, the elevators, ailerons and rudder. The latter being hardly necessary for the loop. Now I shall forget about trying to counter the drift, the wind will in turn be coming from four different angles of 90 degrees during the complete manoeuvre. So now I reach the normal 90 knots. In each of the four successive dives we make a quarter-roll to the left and after the fourth quarter-roll the maple leaf was completed.

Now here I go for the entry into the Chandelle; the lovely Chandelle. A manoeuvre much abused by many pilots. I must keep on positive G all the time. Bring the wings at 90 degrees to the horizon each time. Go up and down perfectly parallel each time. A beautiful manoeuvre calling for much co-ordination of all the flying controls. So, I Chandelle first to the right, then to the left, to the right, to the left, to the right, to the left and still more.

Now it is time to leave the Chandelles to make the entry for the stall turn. I keep the dive going until the ASI again shows 120 knots. The higher speed is not to try and counter the appearance of drift as I did with the loops, but this time it is to enable me to build up enough energy to keep the glider travelling vertically upwards for a short time. Again I must be aware of the 'G' meter as I feel myself pressed heavily into the seat while pulling out of the dive, and once again the vision of the green earth which had filled the canopy is replaced by blue sky. I glance along the left wing and see that it is now at right angles to the horizon and I know I am going straight up.

The sound of the airflow, which had been most noticeable during the dive, is fading away rapidly. I must get the nose of the glider to incline a little to the left which is the side I intend the nose to drop after the stall. I look out to see that I have got the left wing tip just a little below the horizon, while the right tip is a little above. The speed is bleeding away very quickly now but it will be no good referring to the ASI because a time-lag prevents its needle from keeping pace with the rapidly diminishing airspeed. Therefore a false reading will be indicated and can even give a value when there is no airspeed at all. It must be my senses now that are aware of the airflow and, while there is still some movement, full rudder will be applied to

weakly achieve a small yaw to the left while there is still time.

The glider becomes absolutely stationary and inclined a little to the left. If I were to move the controls there would be no response whatever. I am for a moment utterly still and without sound. If a bird outside were to give a twitter I would surely hear it. To mistime the application of rudder by putting it on too soon would have spoilt the effect of the glider being poised in space, but to apply it too late could result in a potentially dangerous tail slide with the glider falling backwards towards the earth and setting up a reverse airflow which would damage the control surfaces or even rip them off.

But the nose is inclined to one side and the centre of gravity is closer to the nose than the tail so, over I go and the blue sky, slowly at first, is pushed out of the canopy by the horizon moving across from the left to right before it is replaced entirely by green earth.

After a few more stall turns I try to make the aerobatics flow by doing each one consecutively several times, before putting the Pirat into its final dive for the beat-up.

As the glider rolls to a stop and the right wing tip is allowed to rest on the ground six Army helicopters spring into air. I did not do a stall turn after climbing away from the beat-up. A beat-up at VNE with a tailwind of 20 knots gave the glider a ground speed of 160 miles per hour as I swept past a line of spectators about two wing spans away. A quick glance from the corner of my eye showed their faces as a white blur. Instead of the planned stall turn with which I had intended to close my display, I thought it wiser to keep on positive G by doing a Chandelle, because of the wind strength. But even with this manoeuvre one needed to allow for a rapidly falling airspeed as one climbed with an increasing tailwind through the gradient.

During my first season with the Southwest Wales Gliding Association I heard strange tales about a man from the mountains, but not my man from the mountains who was the subject of a previous chapter. This was a person who I never did meet but listening to the almost whispered stories, I gathered that he was a very strange individual indeed. It seemed that he almost lived the life of a hermit and had been doing so since shortly after the war ended. The man was a German. I learnt that this fellow had made several visits to Withybush and had, I believe, become a member of the club at one stage. However, a time came when he was asked to leave, though I do not know what the circumstances were to induce the club to make such a decision. Despite his way of life in the hills, I understand that in his isolation he somehow or other managed to get himself airborne. What his flying machine was or how he acquired it I do not have the slightest idea. I can only assume that he had once done some gliding in Germany before the war, or perhaps had done some sort of flying in the German armed forces. Be that as it may there was one thing for sure. The man was not welcomed by the South Wales Gliding Association.

During one of my days off, the problem of this man showed itself again, this

time reaching previously unknown dimensions. I had left the club during the morning to do some shopping in Haverfordwest. Then, as it was a beautiful summer's day I decided to drive in my Mini to Broad Haven and enjoy the warm sun while at the same time bathing in the clear blue sea. The sands there are smooth and shine a lovely golden yellow in the sun. Jutting out from the sand are quite high rock formations, some with small caves worn out by the sea, while others are joined together by narrow overhangs forming a misshapen arch. The beaches here are seldom overcrowded and so are ideal. I had a pleasant afternoon and by the time I returned to the club my skin must have been a shade or two darker.

However, while I had been away, fun and games had been going on at the 'drome. A lone Swallow had taken off after an unknown member of the public had, on the pilot's instructions, managed to attach the launch cable to the glider and then held the wing tip for the projected launch. There had been no activity for some time and the tow cable had been left in place on the runway. The tow car driver had entered the runway from the upwind end and had driven downwind to the cable and attached the same. Under these circumstances there was no way he could have known who it was that occupied the cockpit of the Swallow. It was, in fact, the expelled member from the mountains.

The launch took place, as did the flight. Then came the approach and landing. The entire airfield was devoid of all obstruction save for one caravan, one disused control tower, our club house, one hangar and wait for it... one solitary aeroplance in the shape of the Auster. This Auster was sitting on a hard standing not far from the hangar and miles from the runway in use. Sat in the Auster was a pilot and the propeller was revolving at low revs. The ex-member brought the Swallow in on its glide approach and in so doing flew the port wing tip right through the prop. Which went some way towards explaining why, on my return from the beach, I found myself driving past a rather sick-looking glider.

The ex-member responsible for this accident completely ignored instructions to keep away from the club. That is, he did until his fellow countryman, Herr Wolfe, happened on the scene. As I have said, I was not around at the same time as this man but I must admit that I would rather have liked to have been there when the confrontation of the two Germans took place for I would have once again been able to witness the German character as compared to our own. Those that did witness it said the affair was quite remarkable. As we know Peter had been an Officer and the ex-member knew this also. Peter called the man over to him, and then in the German language and with a loud commanding voice ordered the man to stand to attention. Apparently the man did so at once, like a ramrod. He then received a thorough dressing down and was finally ordered to get off the site at once and never to return. I was told that he cleared off at the double. He was never seen again.

CHAPTER TWENTY

CFI - PPL

Although I worked for several seasons at Withybush they were not all consecutive and so it came to pass during 1969-1970 I did a year at Bickmarch which was at that time the home of the Worcestershire Gliding Club, and while there I decided it was time for me obtain the Private Pilot's Licence. I was after all the CFI of Bickmarsh and a fair amount of aerotowing went on there as well as winch launching.

One Saturday morning therefore I presented myself to an instructor of Staverton Flying School which is situated near Cheltenham in Gloustershire. I had not flown as a pilot in power aeroplanes before, but my gliding qualifications, in theory at least, made it possible for me to take a general flying test for the PPL after five hours' flying. My first excursion into power flying was taken up by one hour's circuit bashing, getting used to throttle and the approach and landing with different stages of flaps, and likewise with take offs.

I turned up at Staverton the following day and enjoyed an hour's solo flying on the circuit. After three hours I was once again joined by the instructor for an hour in order to carry out spins and stalls. Then, with one more hour solo, I presented myself to the CFI and requested the general flying test.

"Your face is not familiar to me. How many hours have you done?" asked Mr Wood, or 'Woody' by which he was generally known.

"Five hours," I replied.

"Five! and you ask for a GFT. Don't waste my time," said the CFI, understandably showing some annoyance.

"You see I am a glider pilot," I tried to explain, "and with the gliding qualifications I've got I am entitled to try for the GFT after five hours' power flying. Of course I do not necessarily have to pass," I said with a weak smile.

"Yes, I know that gliding time can contribute towards a PPL Course but not to have only five hours. Twenty hours maybe, but five! No, Sir, not on your life."

"I just happen to have the evidence here," and reaching into my pocket I produced the appropriate literature. On reading the 'offending' paragraph Woody's eyebrows arched with surprise. "Well, this is news to me," he said, "come on if you must. Let's get it over with."

The CFI certainly was not being objectionable but one did not need to be too perceptive to sense that he felt it was going to be a waste of time. He was not a glider pilot nor was he familiar with the sport and therefore I think he felt, like many of the power fraternity, that gliding was not really flying and we were not real pilots. I struggled laboriously through the pre-flight checks using the printed check list extensively while my Examiner sat beside me waiting and non-committal. Eventually I found myself on the runway numbers ready to take off. The wheels of the Cessna parted company with the ground and we got ourselves established in the climb. Then

without warning the CFI's left hand flashed forward and cut off the power. Instantly I placed the control column forward, which lowered the nose dramatically and almost at once I rounded out to land smoothly.

The CFI looked at me saying, "That was a violent change to nose down attitude."

"Well, yes it was," I said. "During my time gliding I have had probably hundreds of cable-breaks both real and simulated and at all different heights during the launch. A glider will stall rapidly from a break during the full climb. It is automatic for me to react promptly."

"It would seem so," he said, "without the straps I think I'd have been through the roof. Anyway, the touchdown was good."

At 4,000 feet the air was crystal clear and the visibility seemed to be unlimited. We were flying above an inversion and the air was silky smooth. Flying was easy. After some time the examiner asked me to select a suitable field into which I would land if there was an engine failure now. I was surprised at the question and felt very uneasy about it.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that."

"What do you mean you can't tell me that?"

"Well I can't. Not from 4,000 feet above the ground. One cannot detect a slope or all obstacles on the approach, nor can we tell what the surface is like. What I would do from this height is to glide towards the best-looking general area within reach and pick out an individual field from a much lower height."

There was no comment from the man on my right. Surely he must know that. Was he just testing me I wondered? Somehow I felt that things may not be going right. What with the violent change of attitude following the 'failed' engine after take off and now I had as good as told him he was wrong about field selection. But no, I told myself, he is an experienced airman and must know as well as I do that one cannot select a field from this height. Surely he was trying it on! If so I did not need to worry on that score for I knew I was right.

A short time later I was asked to demonstrate a steep turn to the left. I looked out for other aircraft. There were none. As I rolled to the left I applied full power and the nose pivoted on the horizon and then swept around it as it indicated a steep slant through the canopy. Back pressure on the column prevented the nose from lowering and in the silky smooth air the sweep was clean. Soon came turbulence and I knew the aircraft had flown over its own wake on completing 360 degrees of turn. I think the test allowed up to 150 feet loss of height. I had got it bang on.

I next heard the examiner's voice say, "Now steep turn to the right," I knew that he would expect me to level out and settle down in straight flight before going into the next turn. My mind flashed back to the incident concerning field selection. What if it had not been a test question and he did not agree with me even though I knew I was right? I must convince him I knew what I was doing. So, I did not remain level

after rolling out from the steep left bank, but instead carried on rolling into the steep right bank.

This is a manoeuvre which calls for more coordination than is required if the two turns had a time interval of level flying between them. So, I left on the full power which had been put on to cancel out the extra weight created by the 'G' force of a steep or tight turn. It therefore follows that as the aircraft rolls nearer to the horizontal the 'G' becomes less but the lift from the non-reduced power remains, bringing the nose of the aircraft well above the horizon. To prevent this occurring and to keep the nose pivoting on a point on the horizon during the changeover form a steep bank from left to right it is necessary not only to coordinate with the rudder but also to release the backward pressure from the control column and progressively change it to a forward pressure which reaches the most powerful 'push' as the wings pass level with the horizon. As the aeroplane passes the level position and continues into the right-hand bank the push or forward pressure on the control column, diminished until it reverts once again to a back pressure. If these different pressures are applied correctly along with the use of ailerons and rudder the nose will remain on the same point on the horizon as the aircraft changes from a steep bank from one side to the other. I felt a slight tingle of satisfaction as the wake turbulence returned on the completion of this second turn.

As expected during the test the examiner suddenly 'chopped' the engine down to tick over to simulate an engine failure. "Now get it down," he said.

I had from time to time mentally checked the best general area for future field selection and had just noted in the distance what appeared to be an airfield with a single runway. This in fact turned out to be Shobdon in Hertfordshire. After we had been gliding down a short time I felt that the airfield was within gliding distance and so headed for it but at the same time tried to make it appear that I was still searching for a suitable field. We had almost reached 1,000 feet mark for the base leg when Woody rumbled my true intention. "Here, what are you doing? I said this was an emergency landing!" he exclaimed.

As humbly as I was able I said, "Could you suggest a safer place to land for an emergency?"

We touched down on the runway and rolled to a stop. Then back tracked and took off.

Woody made no further comment about this emergency landing and I felt I had been lucky in not having pushed my luck too far. I suppose he could, of course, have made me do another one well away from the aerodrome but he did not do so. Finally when we got back to the circuit of our home base he asked for a short landing and to turn off at the first intersection. This I did with the use of full flap and by 'hanging on the prop.'

After closing down and leaving the aeroplane parked we walked together towards

the flight office? Woody said, "What do you want your PPL for?"

"So that I can be more useful at the Gliding Club and do some aero-towing from time to time," I answered.

"What aircraft would you be using?" he asked.

"An Auster," I said.

He smiled, then later in his office he signed up for my licence as I had already completed the written section of the exam. In truth however, it was not only to be more useful that I wished to obtain the power licence but because I had noticed for some time past that when advertisements were inserted in 'Sailplane and Gliding' Magazine for a Professional Gliding Instructor, more and more of them were stating that it would be an advantage to also hold a PPL.

The next day I asked Mike who was the tug master to check me out on the Auster. As we were concluding the first circuit Mike took over from me just before touchdown. I knew it would not be because Mike had got the twitch for I knew him as a good gliding instructor and an excellent light aeroplane pilot.

"I made a mess of it then, Mike?"

"Yes, you would have done if I hadn't taken over. You were not holding off right for an Auster."

"OK. Let's have another go then." We taxied back to get ready for another try. As we were lined up for takeoff I noted where the horizon cut across the engine cowling which was raised up a little ahead of me. The area straight ahead of the airfield was flat which meant that the horizon was true and not high due to hills or high ground. Well this is the answer I thought, All I've got to do is bring the nose up to the position it is now by placing the horizon to cut across the nose in the same place, it will then be in the three-point-landing position. All I need to do then is wait until it stalls on the ground. If I can see to it that we are only two or three feet off the ground as the Auster is allowed to stall, then that should be it. If I couldn't judge a few feet off the ground, well then I'd better give up.

It worked, the second circuit got it right. I did three more which totalled five circuits before Mike got out and told me to push off on my own. So I completed another three solos and then asked Mike to sit in while I pulled a glider. It was a two seater glider with a pupil and as it turned out the instructor had not been aware that I was going to do the tugging which was a good thing as far as I was concerned, because as the pupil was on an early aero-tow he did not keep good station behind the tug. He also allowed the tow rope to go slack and then tighten with a jerk. This gave me the opportunity to find out what it was like to feel pulls and surges which pass through the tug and I discovered it was not difficult to 'ride' them. On landing, Mike said I was OK as far as he was concerned so I started tugging without delay, mostly at weekends when I was free from courses. I later noted that by the time I had completed 100 tows I had a total of 35 hours flying power.

Birkmarsh is a flat site with one strip running along the bottom of a large field. The Club owns a small hangar and the two seater section of its small fleet consisted of two Slingsby T21s. The main building which contained a fine and modern Club House was constructed from attractive pine. It boasted a modern kitchen with a roomy dining area. A small hall to which was attached the office, a store room, toilets and showers for each gender. While from one end of the hall near the main entrance a long passage led off with doors down its length which gave way to individual bedrooms. From the other end of the hall one would enter the lounge/bar with its large picture windows giving onto the gliding scene without. Generally speaking this was a high-quality building for a Gliding Club. The Club had provided for me a good-sized modern caravan which allowed me my privacy during my off duty hours should I desire it.

One of the club members had recently bought himself a single seater Slingsby Tutor Glider. By the year 1970 this had become a glider by name only to most of the younger pilots of the gliding movement few of whom had ever actually seen one. I had however flown my early solo flights with this machine.

Shortly after taking up my post of CFI with the Worcestershire Gliding Club and while I was still something of an unknown quantity to its members, the owner of this old relic kindly invited me to try it out in the air. Since I had nothing to fly and it was a Sunday and my day off I gladly accepted his offer. Together we wheeled the small machine from the corner of the hangar up to that part of the field from which they were taking off.

Even though I am a slim sort of fellow and not unduly tall at 5'10", one still climbed into the small and horribly-designed cockpit with a certain lack of agility. Once in, one is seated on a hard board with a back-rest vertical and at ninety degrees to the seat. The instrument panel, such as it is, missed the knees by an inch or so and then only when sitting bolt upright. It would be quite impossible to wear a parachute whilst sitting in the Tutor.

The cockpit, of course, like the T21, is open to the elements with just a small transparent windscreen which was meant to deflect the airflow from one's face. This it achieved only partially. The sides of the cockpit were well down below one's shoulders and each wing was held on the fuselage by two metal struts with cross-wires.

The gliders were being launched by the winch and none had successfully soared this day and so had only enjoyed a circuit of a few minutes thus far. The time was shortly after two o'clock.

As the cable was being attached to the release hook placed under the belly of the Tutor one member asked, with a grin on his face, "How long do you reckon you will be away for... three minutes?"

I made my expression dead pan and performed an act of studiously studying the

sky, then with mock confidence said, "No, about three hours."

At the top of the launch I reached for the round yellow release knob to give it two firm pulls and the cable fell away from the glider. I banked the little glider over to the left and then straightened up to fly downwind a short way on the reciprocal of the launch heading. I knew that sometimes the winch itself would start a thermal of air rising from the heat generated from its engine. This 'winch thermal' would, of course, rise and also drift downwind away from its source. For this to develop successfully the wind must be light as well as other certain climatic requirements. Had I simply flown slightly upwind and then joined the circuit I would most likely have failed. When I was about a quarter of the way back down the field I felt a disturbance in the air which induced me to commence circling. The red ball of the old fashioned Cosmin variometer which had been indicating the glider's sink rate was falling. Then the ball rested on zero at the bottom of its glass tube and the green ball in the second tube climbed up to the one and a half feet per second mark. the glider was now climbing away from the ground. The trick was now to keep the glider within this small mass of rising air, to keep the red ball at the bottom of its glass tube and the green ball as high as possible up its tube. The first full 360 turn was completed during which the green ball had not remained constantly at the one and a half foot mark but had at one time sunk back to its bed, and a moment later the red ball fluttered just a little as though trying to rouse itself from sleep. A moment later it was stilled and the green ball climbed again.

I would attempt to complete the second full circle along the same air track as the first and verify at which part of the circumference the green ball rode to its highest peak. This came as my line of sight over the nose swept past a ploughed field, the ball nudging the two feet per second mark, but as the turn continued the ball once more sank down it's tube.

Now we started the third turn but this time I was going to try and 'centre' in the stronger lift. The green ball had moved up to three feet per second at one point, and during the whole of this turn , though varying a little, kept clear of the bottom of the tube. The red ball stayed quite inert.

We had got it right, but, after a few more turns the centring procedure was repeated due to some twist of the thermal, or perhaps some inaccurate flying by slight, if unintended, changes to the angle of bank brought about by the roughish air of the thermal. Before long, though, we had doubled our launch height as the little plane passed through 2,200 feet.

Around 3,000 feet the variometer was indicating 10 feet per second and the air about my face was degrees cooler. Suddenly the Tutor bucked and kicked and the green and red balls in their sluggish manner were doing wild things. I glanced at the cumulus cloud above but this was still some distance away, so it seemed that I must have been careless and had allowed the glider to reach the turbulent edge of the

thermal. Once more I re-centred and all was well with the green ball more or less steady at a respectable distance up the tube.

The climb continued with the occasional re-centring checks and at 4,000 feet the lift was constant and fairly smooth. Then a strange thing happened, for while turning I looked along the lower wing. I noted the two struts and their cross-wires reaching from the bottom of the fuselage to fastenings on the lower surface of the wing. Suddenly I felt very exposed with almost half of my body perched out of the tiny cockpit and the air rushing past my ears. The wood and canvas glider seemed so very frail all at once and the earth looked a long, long way below. The sensation was uncanny and was not normal when flying. It should not at all be the same as looking down from a ladder, but now it was and I tensed up and the Tutor did not seem adequate for the job.

With some surprise I realised that my condition must be a matter of nerves. I levelled the wings and gave myself a good talking to. "Release the tight grip, you fool. Take the pressure from the feet - let them rest gently upon the rudder pedals and lower your shoulders. You are bunched up like a ball. Relax. Relax."

I began to feel better - what the hell had been wrong with me? Things were still not quite right. "To hell!" I thought, "I can't have this. I will make myself do some aerobatics. But the Tutor is not cleared for aerobatics. A few mild chandelles will do no harm though. Just mild ones with only a little more 'G' than normal. Not more than one would get from the rough air of some thermals. Or at least in the vicinity of some thermals." We had flown well away from the lift now and were in smooth air again.

Once more I concentrated on relaxing. Then I eased the nose below the horizon. The top speed of the Tutor is only about 60 and the old drag bag of a glider had a ridiculously steep dive to reach this speed. I gently brought the nose up into a climb, the noisy air now quietening rapidly. Once in the climb, the airspeed fell off so quickly that I found myself putting on right stick and rudder almost at once as I added a little more back pressure on the stick. The nose pulled round and soon I was levelling the wings at the start of the dive to keep the glider to the line on which it had climbed. The manoeuvre was performed several times before levelling off into normal flight.

All traces of tension had gone. The manoeuvre, which to some extent I had to will myself to do, had done the trick. But during this time I had lost a little height. So, with the airspeed needle now settled at a sensible reading, I made a survey of the thermal produced cumulus clouds and hoped to find one nearby with a firm flat base. I made my choice and soon the gallant vintage glider bucked into life as its wings passed from the sinking air which had preceded the lift I was now entering. The red ball, which had for some time past been high up in its tube, gave way to a reawakened green ball which now climbed higher up the tube than at any time during

the flight. Soon we were just over 5,000 feet and at cloud base.

Shivering in the cold damp air, I flew towards the sunny edge and then away from the cloud into the drier air. The bright sun was now able to reach my glider, but alas not my legs or feet which were hidden away within the Tutor's nose! I stooged around, gliding straight and level until 1,000 or 1,500 feet were lost and then back into lift for another climb to cloud base. Finally I wanted to go down and get warmed up. I had for the most part enjoyed the flight and my reintroduction to the old Tutor, but now I had had enough. I looked at my watch which told me that it had been one hour, 55 minutes since I had taken off.

I commenced to fly away towards the blue to a 'flat' area which should be devoid of rising air. I tried to settle easier in my seat within the small cockpit for the long glide down. Then I heard myself saying, "No about three hours." Suddenly even the thought of a lovely cup of hot coffee could not change my decision to remain airborne. The sky to the north showed good, promising cumulus dotted about the blue, so why not keep up my interest by trying a short out and return? The Tutor, with its between-lift sink rate, represented something like a brick: twenty miles should be enough. I turned and headed for Redditch.

The going was good, but a northwesterly wind, though light, was quite enough for the Tutor with its appalling penetration to battle against. I tried not to allow the glider, from the top of each climb, to continue down below three thousand feet before thermalling back up again. It was during the last thermal we had taken before turning back to base that I noticed a glider coming in below. The little Tutor was once again getting close to cloud base as the new arrival went into termalling turns. He was several thousand feet below and the sunlit wings showed up well against the backcloth of the earth. On closer study I became fairly sure that the glider was a Skylark. The Skylark with its 18 metre wings and an L/D around 33 to one. He would not be troubled today with that sort of penetration. But now the surrounding air of the Tutor had become damp and the light dull. It was time to set course for Bickmarsh and leave the chilly atmosphere behind to enjoy yet again the bright rays of the sun. My watch told me that it had been three and a quarter hours since the Tutor had become airborne. I decided that would do, so I joined the circuit for landing.

Later that evening I was standing at the bar enjoying a drink with David Wales who was proving to be most friendly and had helped me settle into my new club. There was a slightly boisterous group at a table nearby and I could not help but overhear this conversation.

Someone said, "Where was it you flew from?" A man said, "I came from Dunstable. That's my club. I had a most pleasant flight here but I had one hell of a surprise when I was taking a climb shortly before arriving. I had allowed myself to get rather low when I found my glider flying in zero sink, so I straightened out trying

to find positive lift and gave a glance at the cloud overhead. Then I saw this dreadful-looking flying machine turning around and around in tiny little circles at what seemed to be close to cloud base. I was amazed how the thing had even got there."

At that, one of the number said, with a touch of pride in his voice, "That... was our CFI."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

A BIT OF A LINE-SHOOT

One evening at the end of a good day's flying and with the two T21 training gliders bedded down in the hangar for the night, the holiday course members having been well fed and watered, we were happily chattering away in the bar.

The subject was inevitably about Flying. Someone asked me what different certificates were obtainable in gliding and their requirements. When I came, during my explanation, to that part of the Silver 'C' certificate which requires a five hour duration flight, there were some surprised expressions.

"It seems a long time to be sat in the small cockpit of a glider. You must get bloody stiff," one remarked.

"Well," I said, a lot depends on how well you prepare for the flight. It is important to make oneself as comfortable as possible before you take off. Check that you are not on too hard a seat. Make sure that there is no space between the back of the seat and the lumbar regions of your back and that your legs behind the knee are padded so that the blood is not restricted in anyway. You should also take some drinking water with you, but be sure to have a pee in the first place."

"How about you Dave, where did you do your five hours?" questioned another.

"I did that in the north of England with the Lakes Gliding Club who were at that time flying at a place called Tebay. Tebay was a hill site with the Club operating from the top. The whole flight was of the hill soaring kind as on that particular occasion there was no thermal activity. I was flying in the club's Olympia IIB and the area of lift was at a place known as the Point which gave a short beat along which to fly. It was in fact a corner in the hill not a sharp corner, but well rounded. I recall that on that day the clouds were low, just nicely clear of the hill tops by five or six hundred feet. It was dull and pretty miserable and the time seemed to drag terribly.

"Then, during the final half hour the cloud had started to drop until fifteen minutes short of the five hours it was virtually capping the hill. In the valley which ran back alongside the club there was no place to land safely. Down there ran a river and the main railway line to Scotland. Now of course it has been blasted somewhat and the M6 Motor way runs through the valley before climbing to Shap.

"Anyway, the cloud came down and there I was only fifteen minutes form achieving the five hours. It was impossible, or at least extremely stupid to remain at the Point so I turned and flew along the valley towards the club which was about two miles away. The hill however fell away from the Point so that as we flew along the valley the hill line receded and became just and so clear of cloud. I had a tail wind as I flew and after a short distance I came to a knob which protruded out from the hillside and which now had the wind blowing against it.

"In desperation I decided to try soaring this knob and found that by doing

extremely short beats which were little more than 'S' turns I could keep in the lift. I had 13 minutes to go to achieving my goal as I hung on like grim death. With 3 minutes to go the cloud had now hovered below this hill top and I hovered with it. I reckoned it would take about 2 minutes to landing as I would be entering directly onto the downwind leg with a 'U' turn onto the approach. But this, I knew, was cutting the time factor very fine. What if the time keeper's watch and my own did not tally? Or if I had noted the take off time on the wrong minute on my watch? It was just possible that the time keeper had been distracted at the time of my take off for a minute of two and had as a result put the wrong time by that amount.

"One minute more, I decided, I would hold on for just one more minute before turning away from the hovering cloud to run downwind for the fell.

"I landed and the port wing tip of the Oly IIB gently lowered to rest stationary on the grass as I again checked my watch. According to that it had been five hours four minutes since take off. Then the club members were reaching my aircraft; many were smiling and calling out their congratulations. 'We were watching that last 10 or 15 minutes and thought the cloud was going to get you, but it didn't. You have just got it.'

"As eager hands lifted off the Oly's canopy I smiled and said, 'It was a damned close run thing.'

"The man sat at the corner of the table put down his beer glass, 'You mean to say you didn't feel cramped after that lot?'

"'Oh, yes,' I admitted, 'there was a touch of stiffness when climbing out of the cockpit but if you really want to hear about a case of crampness and discomfort I'll tell you of an occasion during the war.'

"I recalled the winter of 1944 and a particular raid, not so much because of the actions of the enemy but rather the sheer discomfort of the flight.

'During the war,' I explained, 'I was a rear gunner on Lancasters.'

'On Lancasters? My father was on Lancasters. He was a pilot,' interrupted a young course member. 'What Squadron were you in?'

'Forty Nine Squadron, Five Group. What Squadron was your father in?'

'Er, I don't know, but I've heard him say he was in number one group.'

"Well, yes, they flew Lancasters but he was in quite a different Squadron. Anyway in the rear turret we did not wear a parachute as there just was not enough room to do so. We did have a parachute harness which was ready for the parachute to be clipped on and it could be done very rapidly. The snag, though, was that the parachute was stored a long was from the rear turret, close to the main door. The door being about three quarters of the way down the fuselage but still a considerable way from the tail.

"If you had to 'bale out' therefore,one had first to centralise and lock the turret so that the turret doors, against which the gunner rested his back, were in line with

the Lancaster's fuselage and the four Browning guns pointed directly backwards. The turret you see, revolved from beam to beam to give you a large field of fire! Having lined up and locked the turret, you then had to open the door. The two doors were rounded and ran along runners and the catch was in the middle of one's back. The clothing we wore was heavy and thick which made it almost impossible to reach back for the catch. So, to enable the door to be opened from the inside of the turret there was a wire one side of which was attached to the door catch and other end fastened on the right hand side of the turret. When the door was shut this was taut, so all one had to do to open the door was to bring ones elbow down on the wire which both opened the catch and pulled the door along it's rollers. It was a simple matter then to twist round your trunk and hit the left hand door with your right elbow to knock it flying open.

"Having got the door open one leant back to reach up for two hand grips inside the fuselage to enable you to extract yourself from the turret. At this point the inside of the fuselage was very narrow, making it necessary to crouch down while you made your way to a draught excluding door a few yards ahead. Once through this door you could get out on top of the Elsan (toilet) the fuselage at this point became less restrictive. The main door was now just a couple of steps forward and to the right, besides which was your parachute.

"If the bomber was going down in a glide or a slight diving turn it would be no real problem to reach the main door. On the other hand should the aeroplance be completely out of control in a tight diving turn or in a spin, then the 'G' force could make it near impossible to reach the main door.

"So having this problem in mind I developed a method which I think would have enabled me to reach the door in all but the worst case. This was achieved by bending the right leg under me as I pulled myself out of the turret, so that I came down on the ball of my right foot in a squat position. Now it was easy to pivot myself round to face up the fuselage, then I would leap forward as if I had been a coiled spring to land face down, but that one leap could get me up the fuselage much faster than trying to walk in a crouched position while wearing the thick heavy clothing which rear gunners wore. I could in fact reach in one such leap the draught excluding door. This door in any case was always held open in our aircraft, the boys up front being prepared to accept any resultant draught in order to making it easier for me to escape.

"You may imagine then the joy of the rear gunners when it was decided that some of the seat and the armour plate beneath it were to be removed to enable the gunner to wear the pilot type chute, i.e. the type one sat on. Over night the rear gunner's position had changed from being the most difficult place from which to escape to the easiest. All he needed to do now was to turn the turret to the beam, roll the doors open and drop out backwards. He would be immediately clear of the plane in every sense because of parting company with it from the extreme end."

"'What has this got to do with being stiff and cramped etc, you may ask?'

"Well this change of policy concerning the rear gunner and his parachute came about during the winter of 1944. I for one decided that no time would be wasted in making the change over, so without delay I changed my chute from the clip on to the pilot type. That same day the crews were briefed for a night attack on the 'U' boat base at North Norway. When the RAF crew lorry had driven us to the dispersal point where our Lancaster 'D' Dog was standing, I learnt that the modification of the turret seat had not yet taken place.

"Unlike the rest of the crew, the rear gunner did not wear a 'Mae West'. A Mae West, should you not know was a life saving jacket, worn in case you came down in the sea. Instead the very thick 'Taylor Suit', worn only by the rear gunners, was padded with a buoyant material. The one effect of this great suit, put on over the rest of our clothing was to make one look rather like the advertisement for Michelin tyres, or a bit like a moon walker except out Taylor suits were of a bright yellow to show up the better in the sea.

"Anyway, after I had struggles to get myself into the turret, I discovered I was not able to slide the doors along their runners because the chute and the remaining armour plating and seat took up too much room. Finally the doors were closed but only after Ken, the wireless operator, had come to my aid by laying on his back and pushing me with his feet against my back. No part of my body could move apart from my head and my arms. My legs up the knees were squeezed tight between the control column and the castings up which travelled the ammunition for the four Browning machine guns.

"The flight towards the Arctic Circle was a bad one for poor Nobby, my skipper, as we were most of the time flying only a few hundred feet from the water in complete darkness as the cloud base was very low and thick. When the bombers eventually reached the target they all had to wait around while the Path Finders did their best to mark the target for us. While this was going on bombers kept clear of the light flak, the tracers of which could be seen coming from hundreds of guns emplacements stepped up and around the mountains. Viewing from the side lines, and therefore looking through it as if along a plan view, it was hard to see how one could fly through and survive. However we did not bomb because the target marker was unable to identify the aiming point.

"This being friendly Norway we drooped the bomb load into the sea. Then started the long, long flight back home. To me in the back, unable to move, the hours seemed unending, and for Nobby up-front there, still battling against the blackness while almost down on the surface of the sea. After eleven hours we landed. This was, and remained, the longest flight of our tour. That's where the stiffness comes in mate, after eleven hours in that turret and in that condition. That's where the stiffness comes in."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

ROMANCE OUT OF THE BLUE

The people who came on holiday gliding courses were often a mixed bunch from all parts of the country. Although for the most part the course members were male we did nevertheless get a fair sprinkling of females. They arrived at the club during the Sunday and the evening meal was the official start of their programme.

Some members may have had a little previous flying in the way of a course attended during former years These 'regulars' thoroughly enjoyed their gliding and looked forward to it all year. In between, however, they attended no gliding club or participated in the sport in any way. This was and still is a mystery to me. In some cases they actually reached the solo stage and then went home to await another year. Due to the lack of consolidating their piloting experience they would spend the first few days back in the two seater with the instructor. When and if they did re-solo they were confined to local flying and in none but very favourable weather conditions, such was the height of their gliding achievement. However, if that is what gave them joy, then who was I to criticise?

Some members, after their first course, would be so enthraled by the gliding scene, that they wasted not time at all in finding a club near to their home. So courses in this sense were a source of rejuvenation for the British Gliding Association.

After the Sunday evening meal the members were gathered together to receive a short talk on what to expect on the morrow. They normally were taken to the hangar where they were shown a glider and told briefly how it's controls operated. They were shown how we would move the gliding from one place to another while on the ground; where they could push it and where they must not. They were taught how the direction of the wind relative to the glider dictated which wing tip to hold so as to balance it on the single main wheel as it was wheeled along the ground. They were shown that to have one man holding each wing tip, which was a natural thing for them to do with everyone eager to help, only made things more difficult as they pulled and tugged against each other. They were shown the all important way of parking it, so that it would be safe to leave it in a strong wind without it coming to grief. The method of using the signalling bats, or the signalling light to indicate to the man who was driving the winch what the launch point required. They were shown the time-keeping table which must be filled in for each flight.

All this pre-flight briefing saved a lot of time on the following morning to allow us to get started on the 'real' thing as quickly as possible.

When an instructor was training pupils week after week most days would pass in much the same day as the previous one. It is said though, that there is always something new in gliding, and when one takes in the countless possibilities for the different movements and moods of the air passing over different terrains and surfaces

and it's behaviour and reactions to changing degrees of heat and humidity, this is certainly true.

But even while carrying out the humble circuit, which makes up so much of the early training of the pupil pilot, one can still get a few surprises from time to time. I recall once when flying the old T21, with it's open cockpit with pupil and instructor sitting side by side, a most peculiar thing occurred. It was a very calm day and the glider was flying straight and level in smooth air. The airflow was whispering past our ears and the old tub's nose was a s steady as a rock on the horizon. Yet there was a definite shaking sythmically passing through the aircraft.

Of course I made no comment to the pupil but casually peered along first one wing then the other. There seemed to be nothing amiss. I leant to the left a little and looked over my shoulder back along the fuselage at the tailplane. It was utterly stationary as the gentle airflow passed over and under its surfaces. I took hold of the stick, for the pupil was flying, but I felt no shake at all there. But the shaking persisted.

What was the cause? I could not imagine. Then my glance dropped to the floor of the cockpit and I discovered the cause. The pupil's right leg was shaking uncontrollably and through the ball of his foot, which should have been resting upon the rudder pedal, was transmitting the shake through the aircraft. Had we been flying in anything other than smooth air it probably would not have been noticeable.

On one of the holiday courses of 1970 two of the members where man and wife. The lady was aged about 33 and was around 5'6" in height. She had dark brown hair and was quite slim. Although the lady had a very nice face and a pleasing figure, it could not have been said that she exuded a great amount of sex appeal. There was something just that little school ma'amish about her.

The course started the week in the usual manner, which is to say with the usual amount of stiffness between a group of strangers who varied quite a lot in their age range. But on the completion of the first day's flying and an evening in the bar the typical British reserve began to fall away so that before long the group was well on it's way to becoming one large happy family. All, but for our lady who, while not unfriendly, kept her reserve. She remained very proper in her manner and in her quiet way of speaking.

The third day of the group's course was a beautiful gliding day. The thermals were working well and the cumulus cloud had a lovely high base which meant that the two T21s were going up and down life yoyos. Such days as these are very pleasant for the instructors as well as the pupils. The pupils have the advantage of not only learning the take off and launch followed by a circuit of a few minutes

duration, but he also gets the practice of turning and gliding down from several thousand feet. While the instructor on the other hand has the opportunity of getting in a bit of real flying and the joy of climbing the glider up high to cloud base by using the thermals before he again hands over the controls to his pupil. Under these circumstances the instructor can have a completely clear conscious in flying the machine, because there is no way that a pupil in his early stage of training could have developed the skill necessary to enable him to use a thermal successfully.

It was for the last flight before lunch that the lady climbed into the cockpit. There was the usual twisting and wiggling to find a comfortable position as the straps were tightened up followed by the cockpit drill and a short pre-flight briefing before we found ourselves climbing on the launch. Before take off it was agreed that the remainder of the course would go back to the club house for their lunch if we were successful in finding thermals.

We were successful; the thermals came from a ploughed field as we started to fly the down wind leg. Before long we were looking down at the ever decreasing airfield and we were able to see the little dots which were the course members moving slowly towards the club house. The lady by my side was strangely quiet which could have been as a result of nervousness, but this had not been evident during her previous flights. At cloud base we levelled out and I offered the controls of the glider to my pupil as we flew towards the brighter air.

"No, please keep it if you don't mind. I'll take over later," she said.

Shortly after, I noticed that the lady was loosening her shoulder straps. Had they been pulled uncomfortably tight I wondered? Well, I did not concern myself as the air was fairly smooth and even the thermal was not too lively but I had in no way anticipated what was to come next, for our quite and reserved lady, by twisting her body round in her seat, was suddenly able to reach out her arms to wrap them around my neck making it possible for her to kiss me passionately upon my mouth. Her persistence and ardour was such that the glider was gradually growing a will of it's own as it gyrated about the sky. While no doubt there was 'lift' in the immediate vicinity there was none that would raise a glider however.

Having landed, we parked the old T21 on a now empty field, and after the glider was safely parked I found myself entertained by a dance of the seven veils in the hidden shelter beneath the lee wing. Quite a lady!

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

FRAMED

It was Saturday. By breakfast time there was a thin layer of cloud at about 3,000 feet. The visibility was good, the day held promise for the gliding fraternity.

It was preferable that the sun should not be shining in a clear blue sky during the early part of the day in Summer. For, if it did so, it inevitably meant that the sun would start off rather weak thermals too early which would become capped by cumulus clouds. Also, should the cumulus appear too early in the day they usually showed a marked reluctance to dissipate, but instead remained in suspension waiting for more and more of their brothers to be formed until they were able to nudge and join each other to finally evolve into a stratus sheet-like cloud, albeit rather lumpy.

Once the blue gaps were filled by this development the warm rays of the sun could no longer give an uninterrupted flow to the ground to enable the development of hot spots for thermal production. This unwanted cloud simply floated up there neither wanting to die nor to give off the latent heat which would cause a cloud to suck up a glider from beneath. It was on such days that many a pilot has known at first joyful anticipation on seeing the first early small and fluffy white clouds which seemed to hold so much promise, only to become disappointed and frustrated to see the whole sky cloud laden by lunch time.

But this Saturday morning did not have such a beginning. Instead there was that much desired thin cover of cloud which had been as a blanket during the night to prevent too much of the earth's warmth, collected the previous day, from radiating out into space. At breakfast time the sun was still quite unable to flood onto the land. By around ten thirty or eleven o'clock we knew the sun, which was now making the top surfaces of the cloud snow white, would start to burn holes in the cloud as it began the process of evaporation. Before the sky was completely cleared the thermals would begin. The cumulus now would grow into healthy cauliflower-like clouds. In their beginning they would be seen as ghostly milky patches before developing into the healthy body of a cumulus and beneath which would be the glorious up current much beloved by all the gliding fraternity. This gem would have a merry but short life. Soon to dissipate and unselfishly make room for the next generation after a life span of perhaps only thirty minutes. And it's creator, the sun, always able to find a clear area through which to reach the earth enabling it to keep the process evolving for six hours or more.

Geoff, my assistant instructor, had said the night before that given half a reasonable day he was going to treat himself to a cross country flight. Well, he had got his day alright, so during the morning I helped him rig a Skylark which he had borrowed from the Royal Air Force Gliding Association, with whom he had recently worked as a civil instructor. Shortly after midday I wished him joy and off he went into the wide blue yonder. I was still around to watch his approach at the time of his

return.

"How did it go Geoff, a good flight?" I asked.

"Yes, smashing. A lovely high cloud base and lots of good thermals. It was great, but I got a hell of a surprise when I was about one and a half hours into the flight."

"Why, what happened?" I wanted to know.

"Well, I had my head down in the cockpit studying the map trying to check my position, and after I replaced the map into the side pocket, I looked about me to take a general stock. Then I noticed straight ahead and at the same level, a red line running in one side of my canopy and out at the other. I followed the red line with my eyes and saw that it formed a circle all the way round the Skylark. I was bang in the middle of it."

"Go on, you are kidding," I said.

"No, I'm not, Dave. There I was bang in the middle of this red ring and I hadn't heard a thing, honestly. It had obviously been put around me by a Red Arrow having himself some fun at my expense. I reckoned he must have throttled back, maybe after a dive, then put on bank and turned on the smoke and on completing the circle he'd stopped the smoke and dived off. Anyhow, whatever he did I never heard. There I was framed in this ring for all the world to see.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE FARMER AND THE LADY

It seemed that for some years the Worcestershire Gliding Club had enjoyed a 'Task Week' with the members of the Cotswold Club. During this week there was no course held so I was able to enjoy the event with everyone else. Indeed, as the Chief Flying Instructor, I was expected to partake and that was certainly no hardship as far as I was concerned. I learnt that on previous years the contests, when averaged out over the week, had been won by the Cotswold pilots. This year it was hoped to put an end to their run and I did my best to generate enthusiasm and competitive spirit amongst our pilots in order to achieve this object.

The last few days of May 1970 saw the arrival in dribs and drabs of the Cotswold contingent. We noticed one driver with his trailer mess up each turn for the entrance of the airfield, and the manoeuvres which followed gave one a distinct feeling that he was trying to tie a reef knot in his machinery. "There you are," I said to a couple of our chaps standing close by, "and you reckon you are going to let baboons like that beat you." The two walked away smiling and muttering, "This year we win."

Our visitors enjoyed a few practice flights after being welcomed by acquaintances from previous years. In the bar that evening there was much banter about how they would show the Worcestershire club the way around the tasks as in previous years. Not least of these noisy predictions came forth from the lips of their confident CFI, Roger Bunker.

The first day's task was an out and return to the Bristol and Gloucestershire Gliding Club at Nympsfield. The turning point photograph was to be their long white hangar. This hangar was designed by one of their members and it is a very good method of housing gliders. In the usual type of hangar it is often troublesome to remove any one glider from within. Due to their long wingspan gliders, when packed in a hangar, they are often interlocked with the wing of one machine under the wing of another. Because a glider has only one main wheel it follows that when the aircraft is at rest it has one of its wing tips resting on the ground while the other tip is high in the air. The only economical way of using the floor space, therefore , is to have the down wing of one glider resting on the floor beneath the lifted wing of another. The high wing of a third or subsequent glider could be raked at some oblique angle over the top of a tail plane. So, with a full hangar of fifteen or twenty machines all one sees is what appears to be a mixed-up jumble.

Since there is usually no way of changing all this confusion if all the gliders are

to be hangered, it follows that there is not a little frustration when the glider you wish to fly is parked well back. In order to get it out it is necessary to first bring out most, if not all the gliders between it and the hangar doors. Then repack those which have been removed. The risk of damage to a glider is perhaps at its highest during the packing and unpacking of the hangar.

However, the packing and wheeling out of a single machine from Nympsfield's long white hangar is a different proposition altogether. The very long side walls of this hangar are made up of many doors all of which are held in place by simple bolts. Remove the bolts and the doors fall outwards and lay flat on the grass. It is possible to drop every door on each side, and so leave the building with only its roof and two end walls. The gliders are stored by pushing them in backwards from either side of the hangar. One simply wheels the glider back along a concrete strip until the nose is far enough in to allow the doors to be lifted and rebolted into place.

This hangar then was to be our turning photograph, the picture which would prove that the turning point had in fact been turned.

I had the Skylark IIIb for two weeks. My friend and syndicate member Sid Wearing had brought the glider down from the Lakes Club and I was looking forward to its stay, hoping to put the bird to good use before its return north. With the heavy centre section in place we quickly added the other pieces. The glider was rolled out to the launch point and soon I was strapped in and had the familiar pre-take off checks completed. The Skylark was ready to go.

Since this was the first day of the task week and with a promise of no more than moderate soaring condition, the modest out and return task to Nympsfield had been a wise choice. I had my first climb shortly after release from the launch which gave me one and a half knots lift at best to only just over 3,000 feet. The disused airfield of Honey Bourne soon showed up on my left-hand side while over to the right I could make out Evesham. The visibility was not good.

At Broadway I picked up the Stratford-Cheltenham railway line and stayed with it for eight miles or so before it looped off around the hills for Cheltenham. With the rather low cloud base I had considered going along the valley to the west of the hills but decided instead for the more direct route. With some difficulty I remained airborne but not without a few anxious moments before the hills gave way to the steep narrow valley in which lies the town of Stroud. A few minutes later I saw a two seater glider coming off aerotow and banking up to the left as the tugplane, made almost a half roll before falling down like a stone off to the right. My eyes followed the line of the tug as it made straight for the Bristol and Gloucestershire

Club, and bingo, I had the field in view.

The long white hangar showed up well even though it was on the south side of the field where it began to fall away towards a valley. I noticed what seemed to be an attractively laid out caravan site amongst the trees nearby. The clubhouse itself was over on the north side of the field at the top of the northwest facing ridge. As we flew away from Bristol and Gloucestershire little did I think that in the not-too-distant future I would be starting the first of several happy years spent with the club. A club where we were to run excellent courses, and for me the extra pleasure of finding amongst its members Dave Wales and Mike Munday with whom at this very time I was forging a solid friendship at Bickmarsh.

On this day it had been with difficulty that I had achieved the outward leg of the task, but it was not long after turning Nympsfield that it became very obvious that I would be lucky to complete the return journey and finally I had a field selected for landing. It was a good field with no serious obstructions on the approach and on the upwind side there was a gate with a lane running alongside which made the field accessible for the Skylark's trailer which would be coming to retrieve me. Shortly before landing I had already called out my call sign over the radio, "Coffeepot, this is Birdseed," stating I was landing and gave an approximate position, but Coffeepot did not reply and I flet my message had not been received.

On the side of the field to the left of my approach there was a large Dutch barn with an almost white roof and I also noticed that during the last few feet of height before touchdown, the field was not truly flat but had a slight crown in the centre with the grass falling away a little towards each boundary. The effect was not unlike an oversize bowling green of the type we have in the north of England as against the flat grass of the south. The Skylark finished its landing roll a few yards from the centre of the crown. I lifted the tail to swivel the glider round so that the wing tip, which was resting on the ground, was turned until it almost faced into wind, but in such a position that the wind blew from just behind the lower tip and obliquely climbed up the raised tip. The glider being parked in this manner prevented the wind from creating 'lift' which would have been the case if the wind had been permitted to flow over the leading edge towards the trailing edge of the wing. Having now parked the Skylark correctly I placed the parachute, weighing twenty pounds, on the wing tip.

The glider was safe to leave so I went off in search of the farmer.

After ten minutes I entered the gates of the farm and walked across the yard towards the house. As I passed, a man of enormous proportions came out from the

shipmen.

Smiling, I said, "Good afternoon. Are you..."

I got no further as my sentence was cut short by a deep and aggressive voice. "Who are you? What do you want?"

The man must have been easily six feet four inches tall. He had a cap pulled low over his eyes, and he held his head well back so that in turn his powerful jaw was thrust well forward as he looked down at me from beneath the peak of his cap. He stood with his heavily booted feet astride. From head to toe this man was a picture of fierce aggression. But what caught my eye most of all were his hands. Those paws were the biggest and thickest hands I had ever seen on a man. My mind momentarily flashed back to a visit of a safari park I had once made and of all the animals I saw there, the one which had left the most lasting impression upon me was the lion at rest. Or rather it was the lion's paws, as I had never imagined they could have been so huge and round.

The animal was at rest, lying on its right side so that the under pads of its paws were exposed and easy to view. I stared incredulously at those thick solid plates of such a diameter. I saw in my mind's eye the fantastic speed at which the ordinary household cat could jab its paws in defence if it was cornered; and I wondered what devastation would be wrought should the lion's paws react in a similar manner.

I made another quick and rather fugitive glance at the man's hands, and I felt that any blow made by them could almost match that of the lion.

"Does the field which has a silver-roofed Dutch barn alongside one edge belong to you?" I asked.

"What if it does, what business is it of yours?" Snapped the giant.

"There is a glider parked in that field," I said, "Well, er, I landed there and...." I got no further before the air around my ears started to crackle as though full of static, and his thunderous voice seemed to boom and bound from building to building about the farm yard.

"Eh, what? Landed a what in my field? In MY field! If there is any sort of damage done to my field I'll set fire to your bloody machine." He took an aggressive step forward, and with heart beating fast I thought my time had come.

As we walked towards the field I tried to calm this unstable person by explaining the necessity of the landing. "I would like to explain why it is that I had to land in your field."

"You've got no bloody right to be there," he cut in. But I sensed that he was calming down a little.

"Yes, I must agree that you are right about that. I do not have a right to be in your field," I said diplomatically - or was I doing a bit of crawling? "But there are times when a man flying a glider finds that it is really impossible to remain up in the sky for more than the next few minutes and with the best will in the world he has no choice but to land. He does have a choice about one thing, though, and that is which of the surrounding fields he can choose.

Before I could continue the man was at me again.

"And you chose my field, didn't you? Why my field I want to know, why my bloody field then?"

"Well, yes I am trying to explain and I am sure you will understand if you will just hear me out. As I said, a pilot can choose his field and the one he chooses must be one where the landing will cause no damage. Now your field with the Dutch barn has no crops growing. It would be, to say the least, unreasonable for a pilot to land in a growing crop and I for one would back a farmer in his complaint if harm or financial loss resulted. It would be a very unthinking glider pilot who would do such a thoughtless thing as that, if it had been at all possible to land in a field less likely to be damaged. Another consideration we must bear in mind is the removing of the glider after we have landed. Its no good landing in a suitable field where no damage will be done to the farmer's property only to find that the other fields will be damaged when dragging the glider through them in order to reach the road to which the retrieve vehicle has been driven. Now in the case of the field I landed in, which happens to be yours, there is a road running alongside with a suitable exit gate. There will be no marks or damage of any kind, which is the way we both want it, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, so you expect to drive in a vehicle with a bloody great trailer behind it, do you?" he asked.

"Good God, nothing like that," I said, "We will pull the glider over to the gate then take it to pieces and carry them through the gate to the trailer on the road. This is one of the reason that this field was chosen."

His answer came in the from of a quiet grunt. Of course it would have been much easier to drive the trailer into the field, which would have caused no damage whatever anyway, but on this occasion discretion would be the greater part of valour.

Together we entered through the gate from the road and walked towards the crown of the field. On reaching the glider I was able to show the farmer the very faint track of the landing run reaching some short distance back from the glider, and progressively becoming fainter until it reached the point where the wheel first lightly

kissed the earth with most of the glider's weight still suspended from the flow of air passing over its wings.

The Skylark was just a few yards short of the summit of the crown so that the machine had to be pulled a little distance up the short gradient before finally topping the crown to commence a gently downhill pull towards the road gate. Now I have no illusion about my own strength so it was virtually a foregone conclusion that I would not succeed in pulling the heavy glider up the incline.

Nevertheless, bearing in mind the character of this man, I felt it prudent to request that he should hold the wing tip off the ground while I took hold of a safety strap in the cockpit and pulled with all my force. The result was that the Skylark moved only a few feet and even this was achieved in a series of jerky inches at a time.

With embarrassment I sheepishly admitted that I was not strong enough to pull the glider up the hill and wondered if perhaps he could manage it?

Without a word spoken the giant caught hold of the strap with his right hand, then bent well forward and with his head inclined towards the ground, the glider moved up the hill like a hot knife cutting through butter.

With an assumed and credulous admiration, I said, "My God, but you are a powerful man!"

The man's head inclined a shade towards me and with a sort of snarl that came to his lips he answered, "Ay."

After he had topped the crown, I had offered to take over the cockpit strap but the farmer was having none of it and he continued to pull the glider all the way to the gate so now with the machine again safely parked I rummaged in the cockpit and produced the camera.

Taking my courage in both hands, I asked my new 'friend' if he would care to have his photo taken standing beside the glider.

I had been ready to duck, but what followed told me that I still had a lot to learn about human nature and the idiosyncrasies of man, for this dangerous and unpredictable giant suddenly came over all coy. He shyly lowered his eyes to the ground and then started to readjust his cap, but when he had done so it was exactly how it had been all along. His weight shifted first from one foot to another and then back again.

"Where should I stand?" he asked.

"Well, come over here and stand by the cockpit. It should look good there," I suggested.

The man strolled over to the nose of the machine and turned facing me where I had taken up my position forward and to one side. Then with another supposed readjustment of the cap he began a continuous back and forth rolling movement from the balls of his feet to the heel and back again. Every few seconds his knees would fill the baggy trousers as his legs bent before straightening. The movement put one in mind of the comic policeman of the old films... "Now, now then, what's all this here?" But the murmur from the farmer was not, "Now, now then, what's all this here?" but rather a series of "Ay, Ay, Ays," which obviously denoted his approval of this new role he had been asked to play.

I played up to him. First looking through the camera's view finder from this angle and then that to find which would be the most advantageous position to put him in to get the best light.

"That's it," I said, "that's wonderful. Hold it right there." Click went the camera. I was sure even at that instance I detected a swelling of his chest. Pride was written all over the man. This creature who only recently had been an object of ferocious terror had changed to a benign and almost gently human. I had found his vanity and played on it to the full, he was happy and I was grateful.

The farmer vaulted over the wooden gate with an agility I would not have credited such a huge man to have, and leaving me standing beside the parked Skylark he strode up the road with hands plunged deep into his trouser pockets and whistled as if to challenge any birds of the countryside. I wondered if this man, who on his shoulders had the weightiest of chips had ever before been so happy. He had, of course, left with my promise that he would receive a photograph through the post within a day or two.

It had been almost four hours since the farmer was lost to sight as he rounded the bend a few hundred yards up the road, and I was still kicking my heels standing by the glider. My patience was wearing thin, I wondered what the hell had happened to Mike Munday with the glider's trailer. He should have been here ages ago, for I had long since found a phone which had enabled me to give my message to the club.

About half a mile away, the road which ran alongside the field joined onto a more major road in the form of a T junction and it was from this other road that Mike would come. So, to help pass the time and to some degree to pacify my impatience I decided to step out towards the junction. During the time I had been waiting I had hardly seen a soul, so I considered myself lucky that the farm had not been too difficult to find without instructions on its whereabouts. But now, having left the landing field some distance behind I was surprised, when glancing back over

my shoulder, to see that a car had drawn up at the gate of the field and to discover two young children climbing over the gate.

They were just about in shouting distance and by now a man was leaving the driving seat. Cupping my hands to my mouth I shouted to the man saying, "Will you please see that the children do not touch the glider."

"What's that?" came a deep-throated reply.

"I was saying, will you please keep the children off the glider!"

At that the man stepped back into the car and was soon roaring down the narrow lane towards me. It became necessary for me to press myself well into the hedge to avoid the car from hitting me, and then the side of the car almost swept against my body.

The driver thrust his head and shoulders through the fully open driving window. The man was massive. "God!" I thought to myself, "I seem to be in the land of giants."

"What was that you were saying?" he bellowed. The man was, to put it mildly, most truculent.

"Er, I was just asking that the children should not touch the glider. You know what children are, they can damage a thing like that without really meaning to."

"To hell with the bloody glider. What about the field?" he roared.

"Hell!" I thought, "Not only a land of giants but also a land of mad men."

"Oh, that's all right," I said, "I have already seen the farmer and he kindly helped me pull the glider to the gate from the middle of the field."

"Oh, you have seen the farmer, have you? And he helped you with it, did he?" The man's voice was calmer now, "Well, he is my brother."

"God, that fits," I thought. "That certainly fits." Then the man started to drive off and taking my courage in both hands I called, "You will keep the kids off the machine, won't you?"

He glared at me with his eyes opening wide for a moment, but did not reply. Then he was gone.

When finally I got back to Bickmarsh it was to learn that no-one had managed to complete the out-and-out task, and since I had achieved the greatest distance this made me the winner of the day. Winner maybe, I thought, but I bet no one else had come as near to getting beaten up as I had. It was by far the worst reception I had ever experienced. In fact it was the only time I had come up against any sort of trouble from an outlanding.

The following day brought a 300 kilometre task which was to have its turning

points at Bath race course and Lasham. Since neither club had a glass ship between them this was an ambitious task. The top performing glider was the wooden K6E. The Met forecast as I recall was quite good, especially to the south and east. The sky at Birkmarsh, though, did not seem to hold much promise. After being launched we were all struggling to remain airborne. Several gliders floated back to earth to try again with another tow.

Gradually I began to work my way along the first leg working hard in the feeble lift. About twenty miles along this leg conditions got worse and the struggle was intensified. Finally I found myself down to about 600 feet and had started a circuit of the only decent field in the area. The field was a good one, the only trouble being that it was already well populated with gliders.

At less than 300 feet in the vicinity of the end of my base leg and the commencement of the approach I felt a slight movement in the otherwise smooth air. There was virtually no wind and therefore no drift. I knew I would be able to safely complete a 360 degree turn even at this low height, and I was not teaching a pupil now. I made the turn with great care keeping the bank and speed constant. The variometer read zero. I was neither gaining nor losing height. I checked just to be sure that there was no drift and that the field remained in reach. After one complete turn I continued to make the second and for one quarter of the circumference the vario needle just moved from zero and showed a touch of positive and then settled on zero again. It had been so slight that I had not felt any movement.

As I started my third turn I saw several people rushing towards two of the gliders which had landed, and then on reaching them vigorously push them apart so that the gap between them opened to give me more room to land. There was no need to do that as I could have got in, but they must have thought I was nervous to complete the approach. Again and in the same quarter the needle lifted to zero.... just.

Normally if one part of a circle shows lift one will straighten out for a couple of seconds to fly into this area of rising air and then go carefully back into the turn. This way you hope that you have moved your circle to a more promising area, albeit the shift of the circle has been slight. In this case however, I did not move. If I had been higher and if the promise of lift had been stronger, I should have done so. However, experience had taught me that a move, to centre the circle as it is called, when the promise was so vague could be doomed to failure as at this height there would be no second chance should the vario needle drop below zero.

So, I continued exactly as I had been doing. Flying as accurately as I knew how,

not allowing the slightest change in speed, and therefore pitch. Not allowing the slightest alteration of bank and keeping it absolutely balanced with the Skylark's rudder. I knew there was just a chance that the air I was in could become more buoyant. It had happened before. Even now to hold the Skylark on zero the air had to be rising to counter the glider's normal sink rate of nearly two feet per second. It just could increase.

How many times I went round and round like that I do not know, but my height remained vertically static. A periodic glance at the landing field showed the interest of the pilots now grouped together watching. It would not be the first time I had got away from this height, and it was a long time since an elderly glider pilot informed me that I was known as 'The Scratcher'. Well, we would see! I know the secret was not to move, not to be tempted to look for better things but to stay exactly where I was; providing I was not actually losing height.

Then, after what seemed an eternity, the vario needle just lifted from zero. The gap between the mark on the dial and the needle was little more than a hair's breath, but it was there, and there it remained for another couple of completed turns. My heart beat a little faster and I told myself again, "Don't move over, just stay as you are. The needle is above zero all the time now. Forget that part of the arch where the lift is bigger. Leave it alone. Don't move over. You can't have gained more than fifty yet. Remember you own rule for these heights - if you are not sinking, 'Don't Move'."

Now I thought I was able to 'see' that the ground was not quite so close and the altimeter needle actually jumped up the scale a little after I had gently tapped the instrument panel with my forefinger. It had not moved due to the smoothness of the air and the lack of vibration which would have been provided from an engine in a powered aircraft. A warm glow was replacing the tenseness that had been in me for we were now reaching 600 feet and I knew that, providing I did not make any blunder or get careless, I had won. It was still not easy and it would be the simplest thing in the world to throw the whole thing away with just one false move.

At no point of the turning circle was I now getting less than half a knot lift, but one small section constantly showed rather more and I decided that now I could move over to the stronger part. I had marked well where the better part of the lift lay. I would level out from the bank on the Country House which had passed across the Skylark's canopy once with each full turn. I had noticed that a few seconds had elapsed each time after the house had slipped from the side of the canopy before the variometer showed the small increase in lift. By using the house as a marker I felt

that I would be allowing for the timelag of the instrument in registering the increased rising air which we had already passed through. To have turned on the indication of the instrument would almost certainly have spelt disaster in this most feeble of thermals.

The Country House was held in the centre of my canopy with the glider's wings level for no more than a count of three, and not such a slow count at that! I had slid my circle across the sky but only to a small extent. The short piece of string, the lower end of which was fastened to the outer surface of the canopy in front of my eyes, was lying straight up the perspex. It was the airflow which placed it there, the airflow which was flowing straight from the nose and along the fuselage. So the turn was perfectly balanced. Had it not been the tell tale string would be leaning over to one side. This cheapest of instruments was far more sensitive than any slip ball, or needle indicator. Had the turn not been absolutely balanced unnecessary drag would have been present which could have cancelled out the weak lift I had been getting.

The fact that the string did not slide about just a little was enough to indicate that the thermal was utterly gentle, for, had the thermal been strong and with plenty of body, it would have been most unlikely that the string would have remained quite so steady. For even while flying with the glider balanced the turbulent air of the strong thermal would be sliding about. In such circumstances the pilot settles for a mean average with the string. But even then the ball, or slip needle would remain central and would not register the thermal effects if the glider was flown well.

The Skylark continued to rise but the air remained smooth and the rate of climb gentle. With only one to one and a half knots of lift at most is seemed an age before the grounded gliders below took on the appearance of model airplanes. Finally though, the thermal having given its best, I set a compass course of about 200 degrees towards Bath and the first turning point. I had squeezed a little more than 3,000 feet out of the climb and as I progressed in straight flight the surrounding air remained smooth. If this state of affairs should continue I would find myself on the ground long before I was anywhere near Bath.

At the time of launching there had been a faint sign of cumulus clouds forming in the sky around Bickmarsh but this had been a false promise, as many were to find to their cost. The sky had cleared and gone quite blue again and this had not been foreseen by any of us. I had wondered if the thermals were after all going to become 'blue.' This can occur if the air is unstable enough to produce thermals but hold only a low content of water vapour. Under these circumstances the bubble of warm air will break away and rise up through the ever-decreasing temperature of the

surrounding air. But only to be stopped dead in its tracks by the 'lid' of an inversion, before the rising thermal with its low water vapour has had time to cool down to its 'dew point', which would have caused it to have condensed and form a cloud.

An inversion is a situation in which warm air is sitting on the cooler air beneath it. When a rising thermal reaches up to this inversion the thermal can no longer continue to rise because to do so it must be surrounded by air cooler than itself.

Blue thermals are of course quite invisible to the glider pilot so one can only hope to blunder into them. Strangely enough on a 'blue' day the thermals are quite often plentiful.

One technique of finding the blue thermals is to fly straight on the assumption that you will fly into one, in the same manner as you would bump into a tree if you were to walk in a straight line within a forest. Of course the type of terrain beneath the glider also has a bearing on the density of the 'trees'.

It was with a feeling of relief therefore that shortly after we had passed Broadway I noticed a milky haze a little over to my right. This hazy patch above gave real promise of the lift beneath it. It was, in fact, the result of a thermal commencing to condense and form cloud.

I gave a little stick and rudder for a right turn, then levelled off and, since there was virtually no drift, I flew straight under the haze. I was now down to 1,500 feet, but as I flew under the still opaque cloud the air around the Skylark roused itself from its slumber. The glider shook a little as if it also was being awakened out of dreamy flight. The right wing tilted as the rising air pushed it up from the horizon. I reacted with right stick and rudder to push the wing down again into the lift. I completed two full turns of investigation before centring the best lift and before long the happy Skylark was climbing at an almost-steady three knots.

I glanced at the cloud above and saw that it was becoming more substantial and we continued to climb well. Finally, at 3,400 feet the forward vision became milky and the variometer's needle had gradually fallen back to zero. I had got all there was from this climb, as this cumulus would not be developing any more. Evidently the cloud base was lifting as I had got almost 300 feet more than I had from the previous thermal. So the Met report had been correct: it was going to be a good day, even if it had started a little later than we first thought.

Soon Cheltenham was fading away behind me and to the right-hand side. It should not be long before Stroud would peep up from its valley floors, then Nympsfield soon after to tell me I was on track. But suddenly my heart almost missed a beat. "God!" I thought, "Keep flying. For heaven's sake keep airborne at all

cost." I had realised that somewhere not a hundred miles from here was giant country, and the thoughts of yesterday brought a clammy feeling to my hands and my eyes didn't seem to want to focus properly.

Eventually I was able to make out to my right the larger horseshoe-shaped bends in the River Severn and my map told me that the bend should be approximately west of Stroud. Where was Stroud then, for I was east of the bend and just over the hills away from the flat land? Then a mile or so ahead a glint in the sky caught my attention. I stared hard but for a few minutes saw nothing but blue sky, then, as sometimes happens, it seemed that from nowhere a glider suddenly materialised silhouetted against the blue sky with one wing high above the other as it turned. The next moment there came another glint as the sun was again reflected by the glider before it momentarily disappeared once more from my view. I knew that for this second or two the soaring sailplane was presenting a knife-edge attitude towards me.

Was this one of the boys from Bickmarsh, I wondered? Or had the glider climbed up from Nympsfield? The vario needle on my instrument panel moved up and a moment later we took the thermal. I glanced down the Skylark's wing during the turn and there I saw Stroud almost directly below.

After setting course again we were soon flying over Nailsworth which kept the Bristol and Gloucestershire Gliding Club to our right. I had now identified the soaring glider as a Slingsby T49 two seater training machine or, the Capstan, as the trainer was more usually known. I became sorely tempted to fly over and play with them in the sky, but we had a task to do.

Looking back with hindsight, it seemed that there was some sort of attraction at Nympsfield as far as I was concerned. But in the meantime we continued our progress towards the first turning point and it was not long before we had Chipping Sodbury way over to the right, and in the distance ahead I could just make out tiny specks which seemed to be crawling along in straight lines: they were in fact vehicles rushing along the M4.

The thermals had become easier to work. They had broadened out and were going at about 4 knots most of the time; also the cloud base had lifted to nearer 5,000 feet. The cumulus remained flat with little vertical development, and because of this I felt the inversion would finish up at about 6,000 feet before the day was out. Visibility was fairly good, though not quite so sharp as it had been on the previous day.

The worsening visibility which could be expected later would be due to the thermals not being capable of penetrating the lowering inversion layer. Since

thermals carry up dust particles with them, these particles remain suspended in the air for a long time after each thermal has become inactive. It follows therefore, that, the nearer the inversion comes to the ground, the shallower the air between the two becomes. In this way the dust particles become more concentrated and so impare visibility. This poor visibility is most pronounced if one is flying towards the sun during late afternoon or early evening.

At last Bath came into view and as we flew nearer to the town I tried to find the race course which was the turning point but I was unable to identify it. After a short search I looked at the map and discovered I had been looking too far into and beyond the town, so that when I turned my attention to the country a little to the northwest I quickly picked out the race course. I had got myself to the South of the race course so I carefully flew the Skylark to the southwest side of the turning point before taking several photos. To have photographs of the course from elsewhere would not have been accepted as having actually turned the point.

All the country I had flown over since leaving Nympsfield had been new to me but navigation had not proved to be difficult. I was pleased with the time taken to reach this far once I had left the tortuously slow climb shortly after the start, and now, with the thermals still improving, I felt there was a chance of achieving the 300 kilometre triangle even in my wooden glider. Before the advent of glass fibre gliders the 300km triangle had been considered a really worthwhile achievement. This was especially so in the United Kingdom where the weather can be so changeable over relatively short distances and the thermals not so strong as in other countries. But the faster, higher performance of the 'glass ships' brought the 300km into much closer range.

I put the small instamatic camera away in the pocket below the canopy, and set course on 120 degrees for Lasham. In gliding terms 'set course' must inevitably be termed loosely. If one was to hold to a consistent course it would not be long before the pilot and machine found themselves on the ground. Thermals do not often place themselves in a continuous straight line let alone a straight line which just happens to down your track. Since the more effective hot spots on the ground are scattered more or less willy-nilly, so are the thermals which they produce. The glider pilot therefore must make frequent decisions to find his next thermal.

If the flight is progressing successfully so that the pilot does not get low before taking another climb, then the cumulus are used extensively as signposts indicating the lift beneath them. However the cumulus cloud is not fed continuously by its thermal and so the cloud does have a life cycle. It takes a glider pilot considerable

time to develop the skill which enables him to successfully read the stage of the cycle that the cloud has reached. Some pilots never excel at this skill. As a cloud decays the air about it will often sink, and so, if you fly into the air related with such a cloud you find your normal sink rate increasing instead of the lift you had hoped for.

Having misread one cloud you may still have enough height left to try for another but should this be misread also you have got problems. It is at this part of any cross-country flight that the pilot should have selected a suitable field in which to land should the flight terminate. And, providing the pilot keeps his selected field within range for landing it is now that the skilled glider pilot will turn his attention away from the 'sign post' cumulus clouds and try instead to identify a 'hot spot' on the ground.

These 'hot spots' can be most varied: for instance, if the ground below is bathed in sunshine and not covered by cloud shadow then a large ploughed field amongst meadows will take in more of the sun's heat than its surroundings. The air in contact with this 'hot' spot will become warm and so expand. In doing so the air will also become lighter and must rise through its environment. Should the glider pilot fly into this air at the right time... Bingo! With careful circling and canter-in the pilot and his glider are reprieved and, as they climb together, it will not be long before the selected landing field is forgotten. The thermal has been caught at its 'birth' and together the thermal and the flight are reborn.

Or, the 'hot spot' could be the farm with its stone buildings, slate roofs and concrete yards. A producer of good thermals even if at times rather smelly. Another chance to get away maybe by finding a 'Wind Shadow' thermal. Should your selected landing field be near to a hill, and if the sun shining on that side of the hill where the air is still then a hot spot can occur. If the hill has rocky outcrops then the chances increase. These then and many more are the hot spots, the thermal producers and sometimes lifelines to the soaring pilot.

120 degrees it was then, or thereabouts. I had had a good climb over Bath and before long I made out Trowbridge on my right. Good progress was made to what I believed to be Devizes. On my map I saw white horses which had been worked out of the chalky ground. These white horses, I had been told, showed up magnificently. Time passed but the white horses did not come into view. The lift remained good though the visibility was not quite as clear as it had been. Before long I was yearning for a land mark but I could identify none. Eventually, after what seemed an age, I saw a motorway below. I tried to identify Andover, but there was no

aerodrome or for that matter no nearby town, so it could not be the by-pass at Basingstoke either. My fears deepened as I was over completely new country and I had been lost for a considerable time. Could the motorway down there be in the LTMA? Had I flown too far for Lasham? The thought worried me so much that I felt there was only one thing to do before getting myself or the British Gliding Association into trouble. I must land.

I opened the airbrakes and duly selected a nice big field. How different this was to the north of the country. No postage stamp fields here. There was an abundance of suitable landing places, but as the Skylark rolled to a stop and its long wing, now lifeless, rested on the ground a great disappointment enveloped me. My watch told me that the time was twenty minutes to four and from this I calculated that we had been airborne five hours twenty minutes.

It did not improve matters when the farmer's wife told me that Lasham was about ten miles away. From the map I was now able to see that I had landed south of the turning point. Had I been a little more to the north I might well have picked up Basingstoke. A little more to the south and who knows I might have identified Winchester. But then again, I may not.

When I considered the amount of messing about I had done because of the uncertainties during the latter part of the flight, and then recalled the slow struggle at the start, I could not help but feel that if my navigation had been up to standard I might well have achieved the course. My map told me that 104 kilometres would have got me back to Bickmarsh. The day was still good and it seemed there would be plenty of it left for some time yet.

The lady of the farm was a most pleasant and quite charming person. I was invited into her home where she prepared a cup of coffee and produced a large slice of farmhouse cake which was indeed delicious. I used her phone to inform Bickmarsh where I was to be found, but try as I might the lady would not accept payment for the call.

Soon a small boy of perhaps five or six years of age entered the farm kitchen. It seemed he had been playing with a rocking horse in the playroom. A rocking horse, I thought to myself, I don't suppose there are many of those about today. My mind went back to my childhood days in Lancaster and the rocking horse I had known in my home. Ah, the fun a little boy can have on one of those! I recall that I had been a cowboy, and sometimes, but not often, an Indian. But even then I was the Indian Chief with, as I imagined, lines of feathers running down my back from my head.

"This gentleman has landed a glider in our field, dear. He is a pilot." 'This gentleman,' the lady had said. 'God,' I thought, 'recognised at last for what I am!'

The small boy said, "Wow! A real glider in our field?"

I smiled and assured him that it really was true.

"Oh, Mummy, Mummy, can I see the glider? Please, Mummy?"

The lady looked at me and raised her eyebrows. I smiled at the boy and said, "Of course you must see the glider. Come on, let's all go together then."

The small boy ran and leapt ahead of us, giving whoops of delight. His eyes opened wide as we topped the small mound and he saw the red and white Skylark before him. "Oh, Mummy, can I sit in it, can I please, Mummy?"

"Oh, no, you cannot do that," answered the lady.

But quickly I assured her that it would be OK and that I didn't mind in the least.

"But I should feel awful if he should break anything," she said.

"He won't. Not with his mother watching," I smiled. Then I lifted the little chap into the cockpit. "Now then, we will fasten the canopy down and then you will be a real pilot." His face was just one huge expression of delight. I lifted the wing tip off the ground to bring them level. "Now," I called, "you are flying." The boy made zooming noises as he would if running around his room with a model aeroplane in his hand. He was completely happy.

I got out my camera and asked the lady if she and the small boy would like to have a photo, and she thought it was a grand idea. I lifted the canopy again so as to prevent the reflection of light from it. The little chap beamed over at me while his mother crouched down by the side of the cockpit. Click went my camera, and I knew I had a good one of the two of them.

After making the Skylark secure again, the three of us walked back to the house. Then the lady asked, "How long had you been flying?"

"Rather more than five hours," I said.

"Goodness, you must be tired out." She then led me into a nice garden at the front of the house. There, at the edge of the lawn was a hammock which was long enough to lie on. The seat was suspended and could be made to swing under its canopy. "Lie down on there, you must be quite tired. Place one of the cushions under your head and have a sleep. You will stay for dinner won't you? It will not be too long before my husband is home and one extra is no trouble to me. Anyway he will be pleased to meet you, I know."

Such hospitality was almost embarrassing, but any protests I made were quickly swept aside.

THE FARMER AND THE LADY

I lay on the hammock which swung gently. The sound of the birds singing began to fade in my ears as my drowsiness was turning into sleep. Then, with a slight start I heard a young voice ask, "How high in the sky do you fly?" Before I had gathered my senses to reply, mother had run over and led the boy away by the hand saying, "The gentleman is tired and you must not disturb him, dear." Just before drifting off into sleep I momentarily saw a cap pulled low over the eyes of a face with a thrusting jaw. Hanging down from the shoulders were long arms which terminated in huge lion paws which were gently swinging back and forth. One paw lifted and reached out towards me, but only when it was inches from my face did I see that it held out a delicious slice of farmhouse cake. A nightmare had been averted and the peaceful sleep was not again disturbed.

On the day of the 300 kilometre triangle I had third place, but unfortunately no one successfully completed the task. On the third day we had a triangle, Bickmarsh - Worcester - Cheltenham - Bickmarsh. The fourth was a distance along a line through Paulton, and finally for the fifth day we had a race to Shobdon via Kidderminster. It had been a good and enjoyable week which I won and, of course, that pleased me. My greatest satisfaction though was that for the first time the Worcestershire Gliding Club had beaten the Cotswold Club.

The end of the tasks week was celebrated with a shindig in the bar which turned out to be a happy, if rather lively, evening. Cotswold CFI, Roger Bunker, organised a few 'sports' and he was particularly eager to have myself participating in one game in particular. Roger brought out a metal tray measuring two and a half feet by about one foot. The tray was perhaps one inch deep. This was placed on the floor and then it was three quarters filled with water. Two white lines had been painted at each end of the tray to represent goal posts. Two people were to play this game of which I was one. A matchstick was placed in the centre of the tray where it floated on the shallow water. Roger told my opponent and myself to kneel on the floor, one at each end of the tray, and to lean forward so that our mouths were almost level with the tray. The object, he explained, was of course to blow the floating 'ball' to the opposite goals.

"Right, OK then. Have you got it clear?" asked Roger.

"Yes, we have," we both agreed.

"Right, get down," ordered Roger, as he also crouched down by the side of the tray. "Get ready. Get set...." At that moment, Roger brought his flat hand down hard onto the surface of the water which resulted in a displacement that caused the water to rush up over the sides and into our faces. It had been magnificently done as we

were thoroughly doused which added greatly to the amusement of all present.

I personally feel very sad concerning one outcome in relation to the task week which had otherwise provided a wonderful time for all involved. During the week I had undoubtedly experienced the worst and very best receptions I had ever received as a result of landing out and this, strangely, was on two consecutive days. On both occasions I had made a promise to send copies of the photographs I had taken. In one case I had taken the photo for a diplomatic reason, but in the case of the wonderfully kind lady and her little boy I had taken the photos so as to in some way show my sincere appreciation of their kindness.

As things turned out 'justice' was not done. It is true that both sets of photos turned out very well, but in the case of the kind lady her name and address were nowhere to be found. I had lost the piece of paper and no end of searching uncovered it. I felt really sick about this and could only imagine what an ungrateful person she must have thought me to be. I asked Mike Munday, who had retrieved me, if he could recall her name but he could not. Of course we both knew the general area but neither could recall the name of the farm.

As far as the mad giant was concerned he naturally got his photos, and good ones they were too. I couldn't have cared less if he had never seen any photos, providing my promise to send them had been broken in an inadvertent manner such as the case with the kind lady.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THINGS THAT GO BANG, AND THE TEARFUL LADY

We were halfway through a week's course and the morning's training had gone well. Climbing out of the T21 I called for course members to park the glider safely before heading to the clubhouse for lunch.

Having enjoyed a short rest; and short they always were as my fight to get in as much training as possible for each pupil during their short week never seemed to ease, I walked back to the launch point. Tiredness was already building in me which seemed to start earlier each day now that the season is well advanced. I told the boys to run ahead, line up the glider and strap in the next pupil. "You have only been here a few days, having the pleasure of sitting about on the grass much of the time but I can never let up." At that I kept my walking pace rather near a stroll.

I had almost reached the old glider with its high wing and broad cord, the pupil sat nearby, the T21 facing into a slight wind. My straps were hanging loose in my seat, waiting. When I was still a few yards from the glider I saw one of the pupils crouch down under the glider's belly and start to attach the cable.

"Good God," I called out, "here we are, halfway through your course and you haven't learnt yet that attaching the winch cable is the LAST thing we do on the cockpit check. If the winch driver all that way away at the other end of the runway misread that signal bat which Johnny is foolishly swinging while he is dreamily walking circles, the glider would leap off the ground while Geoffery has an empty seat next to him. On thing for sure, it would cure Geoffery's toilet problems for the next fortnight. Look! I'll tell you again. When walking with the signal bat, keep it edge on to the winch. Then it cannot be misread."

The man by the cable had dropped the cable and looked embarrassed. I smiled and said, "Come on now, it's not the end of the world. Well, not this time anyhow." And I received a sheepish grin from him.

This pupil had done some gliding before coming to Bickmarsh and while he was not ready to fly solo he was nevertheless not far from reaching that stage. We were reaching close to the top of the launch and as sometimes occurs, the smoothness of the climb is disturbed by a jolt. This happens because of a rough section in the cable where it has been previously replaced, passing through the feeding-on gear of the winch and interrupts the smooth winding of the cable. Or sometimes the repaired section when laying around the turning drum causes subsequent layers to lay proud on top of it, and after a few turns this proud cable can slip down from the repaired strands below and in so doing cause a temporary slack in the cable which is then taken up with a sudden jerk before the smooth run continues once more. The jerk is transmitted up the cable to the climbing glider and the momentary disturbance of the launch can be quite noticeable.

As time goes on one becomes quite blase at the odd rough launch now and then,

but this one was different and caused me some alarm, for immediately following the jerk in the cable there was quite a loud and unfamiliar bang which resonated through the hollow fuselage of the glider. The T21 though continued it's launch in a normal way. I made no comment to my pupil but surreptitiously glanced out at the undersurface of each wing and at their struts. Finding nothing which was obviously wrong there. I looked over my shoulder down the portside of the fuselage. The pylon on which the wing was mounted prevented me from seeing down the starboard side. However, on looking back I saw what had caused the bang.

To my considerable surprise I saw lying on the upper surface of the port tail plane a large tyre. We were nearing the final part of the launch and would soon cast off.

"I have control," I said to the pupil.

I did not, as was normal, lower the nose of the glider immediately before releasing. John, the winch driver, knew his job well so that if the glider had not released by the time he considered every bit of height had been got from the launch, then he simply would cut the power off. By doing this John knew that the small parachute, which was attached to the cable about twenty feet from the glider, would be over taken by the glider. This would cause the drag from the chute to automatically operate the back release safety mechanism on the cable release. Armed with this knowledge I was able to gently round off into level flight and wait for the cable to release itself.

Now the old T21 stalls at a mere twenty eight MPH and one would normally fly the glider at thirty three or four knots. However, from the launch speed I did not permit the speed to drop below forty five knots.

I then said to the pupil, "When I give you control you must fly at forty five knots. If you drop below this speed at any time I shall take control and you will be a mere passenger for the rest of the flight, OK?"

"Yes, but why forty five knots? That's fast, isn't it?"

"Just do as I say," I answered.

The pupil completed the circuit, making a normal approach and landing. As the glider rolled almost to a stop the left wing came to rest on the ground. I glanced back to see the tyre was still resting there, on the tail plane just forward of the elevator fittings.

When the pupil had unfastened his straps I said, "Lean over me and look down my side of the fuselage." His eyes widened in surprise.

"Hell, how did that get there?" he queried. But why did you insist on making me fly at forty five knots, Dave?"

"Well, the weight of the tyre could hardly have been placed much further behind the centre of gravity than it is. With such a long moment arm as that the c of g must have moved back quite a lot. Remind me to give you a lecture tonight on the dangers

of stalling, followed by inadvertently spinning with a cockpit load less than it's minimal permitted weight.

"Mind you, if we were not bothered about dropping heavy objects all over the place we could have got rid of it you know. We simply had to make a turn to the left and apply so much rudder that the aircraft would have skidded outwards and the tail plane would have probably slid from under the tyre."

We climbed out of the cockpit and helping hands were all around to push the glider nearer to the launch point.

"Well what a shower we all are aren't we? And I am not excluding myself as being a rain drop. None of us noticed the tyre on the tail plane. Well, of course we wouldn't would we? I mean it's quite normal to store tyres on glider's tail planes isn't it? Now who was the bloody genius who thought that one up?"

"Um, it was me," admitted one of the most pleasant members of the course. He was the only other member who had previously done some flying. In fact if his next couple of flights were OK I was going to send him solo.

"Well, why on earth did you do a thing like that?" I asked.

"I'm sorry, but at my club it is normal practice to put a tyre on the tail when we are leaving the glider parked," he replied.

"Well at this club, as with most others, we leave the tyre hard up against the tail wheel on the leeside to help prevent the glider weathercocking. So, while you are here do it our way please, there's a good chap."

The same pupil found himself 'in the chair' that evening as he bought drinks all round. He was celebrating his first three solo flights which he had done during the afternoon.

It was during the time I was the chief flying instructor of the Worcestershire Gliding Club that I had one of the hardest decisions I ever had to make. One of the members of that club was a tall beautifully built brunette. Her hair fell with a lustre over her shoulders. She had large and beautiful dark brown eyes. Her face was quite lovely and full of expression, and her personality was exciting.

This young lady; she was twenty years of age; had been an outstanding pupil, well above average. At the risk of being called a male chauvinist pig I can say with conviction that in the normal way of things the standard of female pupils is not up to that of their average male counterparts. In my earlier days of instructing I had often been mislead into thinking that many females were better than the men. During their flights in their very early training they seemed to carry out their lessons better than the men. However as the training progressed their ability generally fell behind that of the male pupil. For sometime I was at a loss to understand why this should be so, and slowly the penny began to drop.

I realised that the ladies would operate the controls exactly as I asked them. They would carry out almost to the letter my verbal instructions in which I indicated every

movement of the controls to be made. The men on the other hand would try to carry out my instructions but when things didn't go quite right, and they rarely did at the beginning, they would automatically use their own subconscious initiative to try to improve the situation. But as they had not as yet built up any experience, they had nothing to draw from to back up that initiative. It became necessary for the instructor to kindly but firmly 'overrule' them to ensure that they copied your demonstration of the control movements and your verbal advice. It was not that the men thought that they knew better, but simply it was a natural reaction to try to improve a badly or incorrectly executed manoeuvre without really 'hearing' the instructor's remedy. This state of affairs however would in due course be overcome by the personality of the instructor and the male would then feed in the instructions given to him.

Women on the other hand would have their minds in neutral and try to do exactly as they were told without 'seeing' what theoretically was happening. As a result the first couple of lessons or so seem to suggest that they were better pupils. The trouble came through later on when the pupil could to some degree fly with much less prompting. Things could be going along very well until some small emergency, such as sudden turbulent air, upset things rather. It was at this stage a man would try to do something about it even though it may not be the correct thing, while on the other hand many ladies would simply leave go of everything putting their hands to their mouth as they exclaimed some sound such as 'ooh!'

Once experience had taught me these different traits I began to understand much more about the sexes. That is to say as regards teaching them to fly of course.

However the lady in question did not display these eccentricities. She had been a model pupil and her progress had remained steady from her very first instructional flight. She had coped with all the situations that one would expect to arise during the different sections of her training. The girl had shown consistent progress, the ability to make decisions and was quite unflappable. I was suitably impressed, she had been a pleasure to teach.

One afternoon after she had completed several of her exemplary circuits I stepped out of the glider, and without comment placed in the necessary balance weight to enable the glider to be flown solo. The lady had unfastened her safety straps and was about to climb out of the cockpit, "No, no," I said, "stay where you are; the moment you have been waiting for has come, my dear."

She could not have looked more surprised if she had been seriously asked to walk on water. A moment of horror and disbelief showed on her face and then her lovely complexion vanished as the blood beneath the skin drained leaving it whiter than I could have believed was possible with such a brown skin. The next moment she was pleading, "No, no, I can't," and tears flowed down her cheeks. I had been taken completely by surprise, this was the last thing I expected from her of all people.

Gently I spoke to her saying reassuringly. "Now come on dear. What's this all about? Why are you so upset? You can do it easily and I would not dream of letting you fly solo if you couldn't."

But the tears continued to fall and her lower lip quivered as she involuntarily breathed in several gasps at short intervals. This might have been a crisis moment for her, but there was one thing to be sure; it was for me also. As I said, it was one of the most difficult decisions I had ever been called upon to make. I knew with the utmost confidence that she would solo successfully if only she would control these emotions. I felt that she must surely do so once the glider started moving, but what if I was wrong? I knew almost without any doubt that if the girl did not go up now, then she never would as the cause of this surprising behaviour would take root forever as far as soloing was concerned. I quickly concluded as far as I was concerned she should go but of course it had to be voluntary on her part.

So, still with a show of understanding and concern but with rather more firmness I said, "Now, come on love, wipe away your tears and stop this nonsense. Get on with your cockpit drill, then go and fly just like you have been doing with me sat there. Of course if you really don't want to then you must get out, but you must know that I would never let you go alone if I did not really know you would be alright." The lady made some show of wiping away her tears before tucking her handkerchief under a strap and taking a final glance at me. I smiled and said again, "Go on, get on with your cockpit drill."

When she finally called for the "all out," and I reminded her to think of cable breaks during the whole launch, the tears were still falling as the glider started it's roll forward.

I had given her virtually no briefing other than reminding her at the last minute about the possibilities of a cable break. This is the way I always send pupils on their first solo. I am absolutely against going into a long pre-solo briefing with the pupil sitting there building up tension the whole time. I recall eavesdropping on one instructor; whose briefing went on for twenty-two minutes. Needless to say, the pupil was a bag of nerves by the finish and utterly confused. He terminated his flight by missing the club field altogether and finished up by going through a hedge in an adjacent field. I was not the CFI at that club. Had I been so I would have made it clear to my instructors that this was not my way.

I simply would say to the pupil, "OK, off you go on your own now. I am not going to tell you what to do because you have just been doing it. So do the same again please." That is the full extent of my first solo briefing to the pupil except for the reminder about cable breaks. Then again immediately before the glider started to move forward I'd call, "Remember, think about cable breaks all the way up the launch."

In this way, should a break occur the pilot would not be taken by surprise, as

was often the case. Instead he would know what action he was going to take, no matter where the glider was on the launch, rather than having first to get over the shock and secondly decide what action to take. All of which uses up valuable time during a situation when there is no time to spare. Of the scores of pupils I have soloed none of them have had a mishap or near incident. None, that is, but one. There always seems to be the exception to the rule somewhere about the place. The pupil in question completed the later part of the approach in a semi crabwise manner and as a result the glider came in contact with the ground partially sideways on. A trained pilot will understand it was as though the aircraft was allowing for drift but failed to be kicked straight by rudder just before touch down. Anyway the result of this landing was to place a considerable side load on the landing wheel and to transmit a shock throughout the aircraft.

As I watched the progress of the T21 around the circuit I could see it was being flown accurately, so it was with a feeling of no small relief that I knew our weeping aviator was once again her capable self. The base leg and approach were exemplary and the touch down was made by the wheel just kissing the ground. The landing run was dead straight with wings held perfectly level until all lift had died.

I started to walk forward to the aircraft to offer my congratulations but before I had gone more than a few paces the lovely creature climbed out of the cockpit and came running up to me. She threw her long arms around my neck and then cried like a baby with her face next to mine and her warm tears running down my cheek.

"There, there," I said as I patted her lovely head and enjoyed every minute of it. "There, there now what's all this about?" You were perfect. I have never seen a better first solo flight."

She stood back and momentarily stared at me like a statue, her face wet but the tears had stopped. Then her expression came alive and with a most endearing smile she simply said, "Really?"

"Yes, really. But there is just one thing you should not have done, isn't there?"

"Oh, Lord, what have I done?!" she exclaimed.

"You got out of the glider and left it unattended. We mustn't do that, must we?"

"No," she said, "no we mustn't," and smiled knowingly.

"Right, my dear, off you go and get back in and give me two more just like the one you have done."

She never looked back after that and there was no repeats of her emotional displays. Her early solo flights progressed as smoothly as her two seater training. Several months later her job necessitated a move to London and I hoped very much this would not interfere with her gliding. Alas, I feel that this must have been the case though, because I have never heard through the grapevine anything more about her. To me it seems such a waste as I am sure she could have gone places in the flying world.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

SHOCK

I had made many friends, some of them very close friends, at the Worchestershire Gliding Club. It was then with much sorrow that I was not able to see eye to eye with the man who was chairman of the club. I gathered from the club history he had come on the scene a few years before taking up the Chairmanship. He had shown up one day asking if he would be allowed to use the landing strip and in return he would have a hook put on his aircraft and provide them with aerotows. Since at that time the Worcester Club was an all winch outfit they were naturally very pleased to accept his offer.

At a later date he built a very nice and modern clubhouse with a fine kitchen and about a dozen bedrooms. Bickmarsh at the time I joined was a pleasant place. I was made most welcome by the chairman and the members in general. However, I had not been there long before I detected an undercurrent and dissatisfaction of the chairman by many of the members. I quickly recognised this as club politics so I decided that providing it did not encroach onto flying matters I would keep well clear. But my understanding of their disillusionment grew when I noticed decisions passed at committee meetings held no water whatever since the chairman would simply ignore them and do exactly as he wished. This he was able to do because he had entrenched himself into what would appear to be an unassailable position. He did after all own not only the tug but also the club house and one of the club's two seater gliders. If he decided to pull out his assets the club would have been in an embarrassing position. We ran very successful holiday courses at Birkmarsh. There were usually two full courses run each week. I could be wrong in thinking that these were for the benefit of the chairman but I don't think I am.

After one full year, and shortly before my second season's courses were due to start the chairman started his antics with me and tried standing heavily on my toes regarding strictly flying and instructional matters. He also had the effrontery to inform me that he was taking over the chair of the flying committee. I pointed out that he was not on the flying committee and in any case a committee is chaired by the CFI and that was me.

Now he tried to use his despicable methods on me, hinting that the holiday course season was all but upon us and that the clubs would have engaged their instructors - there certainly would be no vacancies! The inference being that I should toe the line.

My nature is not that of a 'yes man.' Certainly anyone who has the responsibilities of Chief Flying Instructor should not be one. So I looked hard at the man, then said,

"Your courses are filled and about to start but you now have no fully rated instructor to run them, and unfortunately the club is also without a CFI.... if you will

excuse me I am off to pack my bags."

I don't think the man really believed me to be serious until thirty minutes later when he came to my caravan and found I was ready to leave.

"Alright then David, you can chair the flying committee," he said, then added, "you won't get a job now, you know."

I shook my head in contempt and told him he was pathetic. I walked back to the club house and wrote on the blackboard in the hall. I informed the members that the club no longer had a CFI and it was with much sorrow that I was leaving such a fine lot of members and good friends.

I drove out through the gate and turned in the direction of David Wales' home. On arriving there I told him what had happened and how sorry I was about the whole affair but felt I had no alternative.

"Well, David, you are not alone. Your two predecessors had trouble with that man and they couldn't accept it either. Anyhow, what are you going to do now? You can stay here for a few days if you wish."

This was typical of Dave's hospitality. The whole time I had been at Bickmarsh he had been a wonderful friend to me and an excellent instructor. He had never bothered getting his full instructor's rating though it would have been no problem for him to have done so. He told me to help myself to his phone and to start ringing round the clubs. The first call I made was to John Jeffries, the CFI of the London Gliding Club.

I got through without difficulty. "Hello, John. This is David Millett, how are things at Dunstable?" Dunstable is the home of the London Gliding Club.

"Alright, thanks Dave. How's yourself?"

"Well, I'm OK, but I want a job. Have you got one for me?"

"Gee, Dave, if only you had asked a little earlier. I wanted a full time deputy CFI. I interviewed half a dozen blokes and made my decision last week and he is joining us in a couple of weeks' time. The job could have been yours."

I felt pretty sick about this, I knew it probably was not going to be easy getting a job at this time, but that had been a close call. With little hope of finding a vacancy 1 decided never the less to give Clayton Thomas of the South West Wales Gliding Association a call. I was well known there but of course if the job was already filled that could not make any difference.

"Clayton, David Millet here. I need a job."

"Hello, David. What a surprise how are you? I was just opening the front door when the phone rang. You will not guess where I was going so I'll tell you. I was on my way to post a letter to an instructor of the London Gliding Club accepting his offer to do our summer courses. I'll put it in the fire and write another one. We are starting the second week in April, that's in two weeks time, so get yourself down here."

I could hardly believe my luck, another minute and I'd have been too late. "Gosh, thanks Clayton, you have saved my life. Gee what luck. Thanks again Clayton."

"Now then you know that 'Dave the fly' is always welcome down here, but I thought you were with the Bickmarsh lot!"

"Well, yes I was but I'll tell you about that when I see you, eh? In the mean time, take care, mate."

While at Withybush I learnt that at Bickmarsh several weeks' courses had been cancelled. I also learnt that after I left eighty four of the club members also left. This gave me a feeling of sorrow for the members but also humility to think that I should have been supported in such a way. I think in the end it may have turned out for the best because from those members came the embryo of the Club at Enstone and also the Stratford Upon Avon Club at Long Marston.

Later during the season news came through that the entire club house at Bickmarsh had burnt down. This happened during the night, but thank the Lord, the occupants of the bedrooms were able to flee. The bedrooms were fully taken up by course members, and one cannot help but shudder at what might have happened to them. As it was they had to leave the building as they stood, apparently not being able to rescue their belongings.

While no one can be happy at such an event of a club losing it's club house there were nonetheless celebrations against the man who had owned it. So much was he despised by many people. A certain group of ex-members of the club were gathered together in jovial company enjoying a few drinks at a local hostelry. During the evening they learnt of the clubhouse burning. After the incredulous penny dropped, a great cheer went up. One man leapt onto the beams and proceeded to hang upside down by his feet. "Give me a beer," he called and on receiving the drink he said, "what has happened? Go on tell me again."

"The man's club house has been burnt down," came the reply.

"What did you say? Go on, tell me just once more."

"The man's club house has been burnt down." He was told yet again. It was only then with much satisfaction he contrived to defy gravity by downing, or should I say 'upping' his pint. Then, his foot slipped, and he fell in a heap on the floor. His left shoulder bothered him for months after that event.

The club at Withybush now had a motor glider amongst it's small fleet and during the season of seventy two I used it extensively for instruction. This made a nice change to be free from cable breaks of which there had been no shortage at Withybush. This was a training tool which was almost hassle free. No more long push backs from the deep landings down the runway which the pupils almost inevitably make during the early days. One did not even have to pull the glider from and to the hangar at the start and finish of the day. Of course there were plenty of real breaks, but Murphy's Law generally saw to it that the cable broke while I had

a pupil who was not yet ready for this part of his training. So it just resulted in wasted time and a lot of hard work.

With the motor glider one was able to simulate a cable break by simply 'chopping' the engine, and of course every 'cable break' was intentional as far as the instructor was concerned. Also one could do so much with the pupil during his first few flights since I was able to make it last for as long as I thought fit. This was so different to the four or five minute flights we so often experienced previously.

With the exception of the 'launch' all glider pilot training was done with the engine off. The M/G was wonderful for speeding up circuit planning. Providing the pupil did not go too far along the runway, I would take over from him immediately on touch down, start the engine and be airborne again in a few yards.

It was also excellent for introducing solo pupils to cross country flying. Of course I did not do this with the course members because usually they were not ready for it, and even if they had been it would have denied the machine to other members for too long. Where the glider pilots were concerned it was always an adventure when a pilot first flew away from his site. Due to the demand on the two seaters, very few pilots had previously done a cross country before going off on their own. They had to do the best they could from the advice they received and the books they had read. Of course before any pilot could clear off on a cross country by himself he had to have accumulated quite a lot of experience while flying locally and also to have passed an exam paper which to some extent covered this sort of flying.

Once the pilot had burnt his boots by leaving his home site behind he could not be sure where and when he would return to earth. As a result he almost always had to select a field in which to land, and this certainly would be the most stressful part of his flight. The field would be nothing like the size of his home 'drome and he simply had to get it right at the first try because in a glider there is no second chance.

When a pupil who had his pre-solo training in the Motor Falke was close to solo, we together moved onto the two seater pure glider. Until now of course the pupil had no experience of a glider launch which, unless it is towed off by a tug plane, is very much steeper from a winch or autotow. Only after the training in 'wire' launches and simulated cable breaks were completed did he solo; and when he did so it was in a pure glider.

The day had been dull with a low stratus layer over the surrounding countryside at only 300 - 400 feet. As a result of the weather the Falke had sat behind the closed hangar doors all day. I had lectured to the course during the morning, but now in the afternoon most of the members had wandered off into Haversfordwest which I considered to be fortunate as this gave me the opportunity to have a rest. It was quite evident that there would be no chance of flying taking place before the following morning.

It was around five o'clock when I stood chatting in the club house kitchen with

a couple of chaps who had returned from the town. We were waiting for the kettle to boil before brewing up the tea, and just then a young lady walked in. She asked for the instructor so I introduced myself to her.

She said, "I want to fly out to the coast of Dale and then fly along the coastline up past Talbenny and on towards Newgale. Can you take me please?"

"I'm afraid it would not be of much interest for you with such low cloud and weather as miserable as this. Why on earth do you wish to do such a thing?" I asked.

"I want to take some photographs. It doesn't matter about the low cloud and it being so dull because what I want to do is infrared photograph."

"How do you mean, infrared photography? What do you want to take?" I asked.

"Well it's for the University of Wales. What they want are pictures of ancient foot paths running along the cliffs. They are invisible to the naked eye since they have long since been covered, but infrared photography will show them up. It won't matter if we have to fly rather low. I'd only need one or two runs up and down the coast, and I won't take long, so how about it? I have come a long way," she pleaded.

I glanced out through the window at the cloud. It was low alright, couldn't have been over 300 feet but then it had been like this all day. It had not changed. While it certainly would have been a nonsense for any instructing to take place perhaps we could have a quick trip to the coast of Dale which was no more than ten miles away and it was all flat country with no real towns in that direction. Likewise when we left the coast to return we would be flying only over open country, so why not? I could see no real problem.

"Alright," I said, "we will do it."

"Oh, thanks," she said. Her expression showed obvious relief.

We got strapped in, taxied to the runway and took off. Almost immediately we left the runway I banked to get onto a course for Dale. I levelled out with the altimeter needle failing to touch the 300 mark as the Falke skimmed beneath the stratus cloud. On reaching the coast at Dale it was necessary for us to fly on the seaward side of the cliffs. This would enable her to take her photos from her side since she was in the right hand seat. As we followed the coast round flying close in I observed that on my seaward side there was no horizon demarkation of sea and sky. It was just a grey mass. For the few minutes we had been flying since leaving Dale I had been concentrating on looking forward and to the right at where the cliffs were, but now because of what I had seen, or more to the point because of what I had not seen when looking forward, I lifted my gaze inland. I was shocked to note the cloud was all but on the ground.

"We are going back," I said, and turned to cross over the cliff, but even though we had been no more than two hundred yards out to sea the cliff itself became enveloped before we reached it. I banked again, this time away from the cliff to fly once more parallel to it but I lowered the nose of the Falke to keep away from the

cloud which was now below the height of the clifftop. We could see the sea a few feet below us as I tucked the starboard wing close to the cliff to keep it in sight. I became very frightened because I knew that should we lose sight of those cliffs I would have no idea where I was flying. I probably would be able to keep the water in view but without a compass it would be anyone's guess as to what paths we may fly. If we got back from this maybe at last I would get the compass I had more than once requested to be fitted in the Falke.

The coastline here is anything but straight; so I was grateful for the slow speed at which the Falke can be flown and thereby it's ability to turn quickly round 'corners'. We flew on, hugging the cliff like this for I know not how long. It would not have been many minutes but I was losing sense of time due to being completely boxed in. I could see nothing but a small area of water. To delay in following the cliffs round a bend would be to lose them altogether and such an event must be followed by disaster. But as we flew around a bend in the cliff line I developed an almost claustrophobic feeling that we were flying into a cul-de-sac, or that the cliff would turn sharply back on us not giving enough room to swerve back the other way.

There was no beach due to the tide being in, otherwise I would have landed on the sands. As it was I decided the best thing to do would be to land on the sea at the foot of the cliffs as the water was quite calm. I could only hope that the cliff would not turn in front of us a few moments before we splashed down. I reckoned it would have been the height of folly to turn our backs on the cliffs even though we would touch down only a few hundred yards out to sea, but then with the land hidden which way would we swim? It seemed that we were in a trap which had only one escape; to land at the foot of the cliffs.

I was about to tell my passenger of my intentions and to assure her that all would be well, when at that moment there was a low clearing on my right and I saw clear air between the land and cloud. Without hesitation I banked the Falke over to the right and flew through the gap. It had been an automatic movement as with a moment's delay the opportunity would have been lost. It now only remained to be seen if the action had been a wise one or not. A second later we flew over a car park which was almost deserted but a car flashed by only a few feet below us. I recognised the shape of the park and knew it to be at Broadhaven. I mentally thanked the Lord for such luck that the gap in the clouds had been just here, for I knew that the road leading inland from that park led towards Harverfordwest.

A very short distance from Haverfordwest and on the seaward side there was a large field, one of the hedges of which ran alongside the Haverfordwest Broadhaven road. From a landing point of view it was the best field for miles around and certainly the only one I had any hope at all of flying directly towards. During one of my previous seasons at Withybush I had almost landed the Capstan in that field but fortunately had picked up a low thermal and got away again.

We followed this road almost at ground level since we had the same problem in keeping the road in view as we had with the cliffs. By keeping a little distance from the road and on the right hand side we were able to keep clear of the telegraph poles. I knew the field was on the same side and by flying slowly I was sure I would recognise it in time to put the Falke down. Then, quite incredibly, as we reached the field the cloud lifted on my left hand side and ahead. Although the cloud even now could not have been much above 100 feet I made an instant decision to go for the 'drome. I knew where it lay from here and as I turned I shoved the throttle fully open and prayed that the higher cloud base would hold for just a few minutes.

The 'drome came in sight almost without warning and the trees on one side were reaching almost into the cloud. Having landed we taxied up the runway then turned onto the perimeter track; I glanced back down the airfield to see the cloud was now down on the ground at the far end of the runway. On occasions during the war I felt that God had been on my side, but never more so than just now.

A little way down the lane from Withybush was a boarding house which also put on evening meals for non-residents. The landlady was a pleasant person and her food was very good indeed. I suggested to my photographer lady that we would have a meal there before she returned to her college. She seemed happy to accept.

The dining room was fairly busy and it was during the dinner that I studied a few of the diners to see if they were bothered by the apparent high temperature in the room. It seemed to me that we were sat in an oven and I felt distinctly uncomfortable. The lady with me appeared cool enough but I still asked, "Don't you feel that it is awfully hot in here?"

"No, I don't find it hot, it seems quite pleasant to me," she replied.

A few moments later I again complained of the heat, saying, "Are you sure you are not finding it hot?"

"No, I am not hot, I find it just fine," she assured me.

"Well, I can't understand it as it feels at least a hundred degrees to me," I said, fingering my shirt collar.

At table I had been saying that we had a pretty close call during the flight and that I had not been the wisest of pilots by taking off in the first place. I had reasoned that the low cloud had more or less been the same all day and that a low flight for the photographs would not be much of a problem. Had I thought a little deeper I should have foreseen the possibility of even more condensation occurring as things got cooler. It had been a pretty poor show on my part. Through my carelessness I had endangered the lady's life. I felt pretty ashamed of myself and made a mental note to learn from such an error.

My companion said, "Even I could tell that it was dicey but you did not appear to be over concerned. I think that if I had known or understood just how bad the position had been I would have died from shock. In fact, David, come to think of it,

I'm sure that's why you are feeling it so hot. You are in mild shock."

I came to the conclusion that the lady was right. When we paid the bill she suggested that she come back to the caravan with me for a coffee because she felt that in my condition I needed some comforting. I said, "I am sure you are right, my dear," and off we drove. I much preferred living in the caravan rather than the club house which had been my home during previous seasons at Withybust.

How successful the low infrared shots she had been able to take were, I never discovered, but if they turned out to be only half as good as the effects of her body massage then I think she must have considered the trip had been well worthwhile.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

JOB SATISFACTION

On the first day of one of the summer courses one of the pupils who had not yet flown climbed into the Capstan and settled down next to me. I could tell from the familiar way in which he fastened up his safety straps that this was not the first time he had sat in a glider cockpit.

"Have you done any flying before?" I asked.

"Yes, I have," he answered.

"What flying have you done?"

"Well, I've had 98 launches," he replied.

"How may of those were solo flights?"

"None," he answered.

"Where have you been doing your flying?"

"Lasham," he said.

"All of them?" I asked.

"Yes, all of them," was his reply.

The pupil was middle aged, and it is true that as one gets older it takes a little longer to learn to fly; all other things being equal. Nevertheless, even when taking his age into account he should have soloed by now for he was not all that old. No, he either had no aptitude for flying or else there was something sadly wrong somewhere. On the other hand, maybe his training had been spread over a long period of time, which, if it had , would certainly delay matters. So I asked him, "Did you have continuity during your 98 flights or were they spread out over a long period?"

"No, I have been very keen. I have hardly missed a week unless it was due to the weather," he assured me.

"OK, then. Go through your cockpit drill and fly me around the sky a bit," I told him.

His drill was done efficiently, without hesitation. We took off and the early part of the launch was rather slow. The tow car driver had changed and the man who had just taken over was delaying in building up speed but the man sat next to me was handling it quite correctly, keeping the glider in a shallow climb. There would be no danger here if his cable should break. At the top he cast off cleanly and the cable fell away. I did not talk to the pupil but let him get on with it. Before long he had picked up a weak thermal and made a good attempt to work it. At the right height and position he joined the circuit prior to landing. The circuit was good, the angles and speed were good, his turn in off the base leg was accurate, neither undershooting nor overshooting for the line up on the approach. His approach speed was quite acceptable and so was the use of his air brakes. From the start of his cockpit drill until the present time I had neither spoken nor given him any advice. I was

wondering to myself, "Why had the man not soloed?"

As we passed over the intersection of the runway we were at about fifteen feet from the ground and the pilot rounded out so that we were flying quite parallel to the ground. I waited to see if he would make an adjustment while there was still a little speed to spare, but the pilot continued to 'hold off' just as though he were a foot or so from the ground. The air brakes were still half open with the speed bleeding off. Just before the stall I said, I have control," the only words spoken until now. I quickly eased the brakes shut and at the same time lowered the nose. Then, with a new round out at the correct height, I eased the brakes open again to settle on the ground.

I looked at my pupil and with a smile said, "Well there was nothing wrong with that flight at all apart from the landing. Why on earth did you round out and hold off way up there?" I glanced up to the heavens as I spoke.

"That's the trouble. I always do that," he said, "that is why I have never gone solo."

"Come on then let's have another go and see if you can do better. There is nothing wrong at all with your flying apart from the landing," I said reassuringly, "but let's face it, the landing is a bit important, isn't it?"

The round out and hold off was a repeat of his first effort. He seemed to have the wrong height measured to a tee.

That evening after spending some time with the course I returned to my caravan sometime before I intended to turn in. I sat on the bed and thought about the man who had now completed one hundred launches. What was it that was causing an otherwise competent pilot, relative to his limited experience, to mess up his landing by such gross misjudgment? I considered other problems concerning landings that I had come across and how they had been rectified. This man was holding off too high. Pupils did this sometimes, but I had never come across one who held off quite as high as this. Then there were those pupils who, if they had been allowed, would not round out at all but instead fly the machine right into the ground. This fault was the rather more concerning of the two.

Generally speaking the cause of the too high hold off was because the pupil was looking too far ahead at the moment of round out, so that the line of his gaze from his eyes to where it reached the ground only made a shallow angle with the runway and thus made it difficult to read his height above the ground immediately beneath him. Looking too far ahead like that was inclined to cause a high 'hold off.'

On the other hand the pupil who continued his approach right into the ground without any hold off at all would have been looking at that part of the runway where he judged the glider would hit. As that part of the runway became even closer his eyes would remain fixed on it until he was simply looking over the nose of his aircraft at the time of impact. Once the instructor managed to make the pupil look about a hundred yards ahead during the final part of his approach, he then was able

to note the angle of his descent to the runway and he would make the round out and hold off automatically.

So in the one case the pupil was encouraged to look further ahead and in the other to bring his eyes closer in. But now I had a man who did not really fall into either of these categories because his hold offs were not only too high, but were extremely so. The following day I decided that I would watch where his eyes were looking during that final part of his approach. This I would be able to do because the Capstan was a side by side trainer.

Up to this time I had not discussed the matter with my pupil because I did not want to give him any preconceived ideas. I felt it was important for him to behave in his 'normal' manner during the next flight to enable me to gauge his problem.

During his flying at 'height' I saw that he concentrated meticulously on looking at the horizon ahead. Fortunately he did not neglect a good lookout before entering a turn, but this was neglect during a prolonged turn when he again looked steadfastly ahead at the horizon. Of course he had been taught to fly by the horizon and rightly so. Later on I would stress the importance of a good lookout during the turn also, but on this flight I would not disturb him. Before long we were down at circuit height so as he flew on the down wind leg I again made a few more surreptitious glances to note what he had his eyes on. They were still firmly on the horizon. Well, nothing wrong with that so long as the lookout was not neglected. We turned base leg and then onto finals. The approach, as before, was good but another quick glance told me that his eyes were still on the horizon. We were now in the latter part of the approach and still he was concentrating on the horizon and not at the runway in general. Now came the roundout and there we were at the height of bedroom windows again with his gaze still firmly fixed on the horizon miles ahead beyond the end of the runway. As the speed once again bled off I took over control. Obviously the angle from us to the horizon was so infinitesimal that it was quite impossible to read with the naked eye, but now I knew what his landing trouble was. The question was how to set about putting it right.

Since the pupil was extreme in the distance he was looking ahead, and with the height he was holding off, I thought that if I took him to the extreme the other way I may get results. I reasoned that if I tried to make him fly 'into the ground' before rounding out he had enough flying experience to be able to see that he would be about to hit the ground and would be able to prevent himself from doing so. So, before we again took off, I impressed quite forcibly upon him that during his approach he must aim at the intersection of the runway and keep his eyes fixed on the intersection right to the touch down.

As we turned onto the finals I said, "Look at the intersection," and glanced at his eyes to check that he did so. In fact from out of the corner of my eyes I remained staring at his. A moment later his eyes had shot back to the horizon. "Look at the

intersection," I said firmly, and his eyes lowered again. A second time his eyes looked at the far horizon. "Look at the intersection," I ordered. I knew old habits die hard and I had been expecting this, so every few seconds I said, "Keep your eyes on the intersection. Keep looking at it. Keep looking at it right down to the ground." This of course is normally absolutely the wrong thing to do and as I have said this is why some pupils in their earlystages of training would fail to round out. I was banking that with the general experience this man had he would see that he was going to 'crash' and would act accordingly.

We were now at the height of bedroom windows and I was still keeping him looking at the 'arriving point' so that he was looking over the nose now. A moment later I heard the pupil quietly utter, "Bloody hell," and at that he rounded out and held off a treat. The landing was perfect. "How about that then?" I asked. The answer was on his face which simply beamed his pleasure and satisfaction.

We had nine more flights together and each one was followed by a perfect landing. The first four or five I kept nagging at the approach if his eyes moved up at all. The last four or five I did not say a word. The tenth, eleventh and twelfth flights he did on his own. The man had gone solo.

I never did tell him he should look about one hundred yards ahead, it may have triggered him to the distance again and he was alright doing what came naturally. Just before the season closed a parcel arrived for me one morning. On opening it I discovered a very fine Bulova watch together with a letter of appreciation from the pilot who had learnt how to land whilst at Withybush.

His letter informed me that he had never looked back and had recently completed his Bronze Certificate which of course meant he was now permitted to do cross country flying. Sometimes my work really did bring job satisfaction.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

MY DOG SUSSIE

I have said a little about my wonderful dog Sussie who was a Boarder Collie. She was highly intelligent and a wonderful friend to me. I had owned her since she was nine weeks old and obtained her from a ladies' hairdresser's of all places. She had grown into a fine powerful dog so that it was hard to imagine her first day home she had crawled under the gas cooker in the kitchen and I had difficulty extracting the fat little bundle of fluffy hair. Sussie had grown into an outstanding beautiful specimen, strong and fast and yet powerfully built for her breed. Her shining coat predominantly black but much character was added by the snow white which covered her chest and by the white fleck on her head. There was also a white sock on each paw, the front legs boasting long feathers at the rear, her tail also displayed a white tip. A gloriously luscious tail with its long feathers hanging down several inches. Sussie was beautiful.

The dog was always a favourite of the course members but from time to time there would be the odd person who obviously did not like dogs, or at best did not have any feeling towards them. The behaviour of these people when in the presence of Sussie was remarkably similar. They reacted as if the dog was not even there, rather like giving her the cold shoulder. But Sussie knew how to behave; how to win friends and influence people for by the end of a course I never knew of a single case where she had not succeeded in winning the 'non-dog' people over. After saying their farewells to me the dog would receive an affectionate pat and a kindly word. They would often confide in me that they had never cared for or seen anything of merit in dogs before getting to know Sussie but now they saw them in a different light.

Usually the course members would be sitting round on the grass at the end of the runway if the weather was warm and sunny while I was airborne with one of their colleagues and of course it was normal for Sussie to be there too. When my glider landed and was running along the runway as often as not Sussie would be running alongside before we had actually stopped the rolling run. There was nothing particularly surprising about this as one may expect any dog to do the same sort of thing, simply running to greet its master. The welcome was always affectionate and one might have thought I had been away for a few days.

No, there was nothing remarkable about my dog's welcoming behaviour when the aircraft I was in was the only one in use at the time. What was remarkable however, was to have people tell me, as many did down the years, that Sussie knew which aircraft I was in when there were several other gliders in the area. They told me that the dog would be quietly resting on the ground or else slowly wandering around the place sniffing here and there, but as soon as my glider came onto the circuit they said she would follow it round with her eyes and then come charging down the runway to be level with aircraft by the time the wingtip had dropped to the ground. This she

did regardless of the number of gliders operating. How the dog knew which was my glider remained a mystery to everyone, but knew she did, even when I had been a few miles away from the gliding site for some time.

A little way down the lane from the entrance of the aerodrome, maybe half a mile or so was a place where a pack of four dogs used to gather. The four definitely had a leader and it was quite obvious to see which one was the cock of the midden. It was a tall and rather slim animal with a piebald kind of coat and the beast seemed aggressive and unfriendly. This creature obviously objected to Sussie's presence at the time we walked down the road and passed nearby. Since he, the leader, didn't like her, neither did the others. Lately the 'pack' had taken to leaving their territory and showing up about thirty yards from the clubhouse door where Sussie often sat. There they would bark and snarl and make a general fuss. Sussie simply remained seated and was in no way excited. She treated them with the contempt they deserved, for never in her life had she been involved in a dog fight. Nevertheless I did not feel myself quite as contemptuous as my dog towards the 'visitors' for once or twice the piebald had made short threatening rushes towards Sussie but always stopped short and returned to the others.

The day came, however, when the leader did not stop short but came straight in at full charge, while being supported by the others. At once the fight was fast and furious and if the snarling and howling was anything to go by then all hell had been let loose. I felt helpless having no weapon to fend them off but I still could not leave my dog without support. I managed to grab one dog and throw it aside before it was able to sink its teeth into me - the fact was that this dog was so intent on getting at Sussie it simply ignored me and rushed back into the fray. I was not quite as lucky with the next dog I grabbed, as before I could fling it aside it had succeeded in getting its teeth into my arm. Then it also forgot about me and returned to the others. The next moment poor Sussie was on her back with four dogs over her and the sounds which came forth were indeed savage.

My heart pounded in despair as it seemed to me that my dog was in great danger. I simply had to do something, and quick, I rushed into the kitchen and picked up the only weapon I could see which was the sweeping brush. A poor weapon I knew but at least it was something. I almost went headlong as the ground beneath my feet shot away while turning hard on leaving the entrance. It had taken me only seconds to get the brush but thank God, Sussie was no longer on her back. I was surprised and greatly relieved to see her running flat out after the pack as they went like hell for the gate, at least one of them was howling as it went. I yelled at her to come back and in a moment she returned - victorious. I saw blood around her head and along one side and I felt much concern for her wounds. I spoke gently to her while I investigated the damage. There was none! The blood had not come from Sussie.

We never saw the dogs at the aerodrome again.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

UP TO LAMPETER

One of the club members at Withybush travelled all the way from mid-Wales for his flying. He was a very keen member and was always thinking up ideas to raise money for the benefit of the club. His home was at a small place named Lampeter. At the surrounding farms he preached the Gospel according to Pontius Pilot, who as every flying man knows, was the first person to hold a flying licence. Though some old aviators will at times tell you they have been flying since before Pontius was a pilot. Anyway, the efforts of our enthusiastic member had brought results in the way of arranging for a group of farmers to partake in passenger flights. These where to take place out of a field belonging to one of them and it was agreed that I should take the Falke there at the end of the day with my course. The time allowed for flying the farmers would be reasonable as there would be sufficient light up to eleven o'clock for the return to Withybush. For my first visit to mid-Wales the enthusiastic member flew with me to help identify the rendezvous, leaving his car at the Club. He said he would return with me and drive home the following day after bunking down on the bar floor for the night; all the beds being used for the course.

On arriving we did a low pass of the chosen field, it was the only one large enough for a takeoff but it had one thing in common with the small ones all around, in that it was not flat. Certainly it was not a good field for the purpose we wanted but it was the best of a bad lot. Fortunately the wind blowing from the West was not strong which was just as well since the slope of the field was towards the West and into wind, but the slope was such as to make a landing down it out of the question. It would have to be a downwind landing but up the slope so there was no problem. The ground speed at 'hold off' would be fast and I told the enthusiastic member not to be surprised at this.

I was introduced to the farmers. I had expected maybe five or six and was somewhat taken aback to find twenty-five or thirty men of the land waiting to greet me. Although I had worked for a number of seasons in Wales I had hardly ever heard the Welsh language spoken. Of course Pembrokeshire, as the county was at the time called, was known as Little England beyond Wales, but here at Lampeter, English was a foreign language and many of the farmers I was meeting could not speak it much at all. Nevertheless we got on famously. I pointed out at the start that there was no hope of everyone getting a flight in the same evening. I said I would return another time so as not to disappoint them, so those who were not going to fly this time need not hang about if they did not want to. I suggested if they didn't want to go home maybe they would like to go to their local. It seemed that this was more of an event than I had appreciated however, because not a man left until we had completed the last flight for the night.

Each time the Falke started rolling we became airborne quickly as not only were

we taking off into wind, but also downhill. I could not but help wondering how we would get on another evening should the wind be blowing down the hill instead of up it. In that case I would be landing into wind and up the hill which would be great, but the take off would need watching as we would still need to takeoff down hill, but now with a tail wind, I would need to be quite sure that the tail wind would not be too strong. For not only must we be airborne before running out of field, but one had to consider the sharp drop into a valley immediately over the boundary fence. There, if the wind was above a certain minimum speed, one would find curl-over as the air fell turbulently away down the lee side of the field. Just to reach flying speed at the limit of the field, the turbulent curl-over would be enough to remove a few knots of airspeed from near the stall with calamitous consequences.

I made three more evening visits to Lampeter to clear the back log. On the last visit I had to stay overnight due to sea mist and enjoyed the hospitality of the enthusiastic member. The next morning we were up early to be back at Withybush in time for my day's work with the course. It was an interesting flight back as the cloud had not fully lifted so I flew West to the coast, then followed it to Broadhaven before heading directly for the 'drome five miles away. This may not have been necessary but I did not intend taking a chance of getting lost.

It had been an entertaining time flying the farmers, though the truth is a full day's instructing with the course is more than enough work without adding a full evening. Still, so long as it was not to be a regular thing I felt it was worthwhile, since the money it brought to the club was very useful.

CHAPTER THIRTY

A HIDDEN HAZARD AND A SECOND FRONT

One of my courses' was attended by a pilot with some 300 hours on powered aeroplanes, but none on gliders. We were using a motor glider at the time as indeed we did for the whole of this particular course. Since the man was a powered pilot on a gliding course I would have much preferred that he had been able to spend his week on a pure glider but unfortunately this was not to be.

I decided that after Peter had familiarised himself with the Falke he would get the best value for money if he was to learn about glider field landings during his week with us at Withybush. With this in view therefore, I gave him a pre-flight lecture on the subject. So, on the Wednesday afternoon we flew some way from Withybush and climbed up to 6,000 feet before stopping the engine and turning the Falke into a glider. I suggested that Peter fly the 'glider' anywhere he wanted but that it should be towards ground which at least appeared to be general where an outlanding could be possible. At 2,000 feet he knew that he had to select two fields into which it looked a landing could be successfully executed. Also at 2,000 feet he was to restart the engine and leave it only ticking over. He knew that if his field selection and his approach for landing were successful he was to open up the throttle immediately the wheel touched the ground, so as to revert back to a power aircraft in order to lift off and climb away.

It was important that the two fields eventually selected should be in close proximity with each other so that if one should be found to be unsuitable for any reason by the time we were down to 1,500 feet Peter must be able to reach the other before he was less than 1,000 feet. This meant that the two fields could be separated by anything up to 2 miles. I advised him that if there seemed little to choose between the two fields then it was best to go for the field which was upwind of the other. This way he would be able to leave his first choice if it were necessary and easily reach the second field since he would be flying with a tail wind component.

At around 2,000 feet Peter was able to identify to me the two fields he had decided upon and I agreed with his decision. By 1,500 feet he had chosen his field. There was a line of pylons carrying high tension wires running across the approach but I accepted his observation that they were well enough back from the boundary of the landing field and presented no real danger.

Bearing in mind his experience in power together with the briefing I had given him I decided on this attempt I would make no further comment. If he was successful then all well and good, but should he mess it up so that it became necessary to take over then I knew he would learn more from a mistake which I had allowed to become obvious. So, after finally reminding him to ignore his altimeter once he had started the circuit, as the instrument need not give his true height above this unknown ground level, but instead to keep his correct position to the field by judging with his

eyes his angle to it, I said no more.

When Peter turned onto his base leg prior to the approach it was quite obvious that he was too high. He had turned onto base too soon. I sat back to see when it would register on him. It was only as we passed over the downwind boundary of the field at a height which was far in excess of what it should have been did he say, "We are not going to get in."

"No, I don't think we are. Two fields ahead maybe but not this one. Let's open up the throttles and climb away, eh?"

At 2,000 feet we put the engine on tick over again and I took over control. I said, "This time I shall do it to demonstrate for you. I shall fly and mention the salient points as we go through the exercise. Then we will climb up again so that you can have another go."

On this particular Falke the throttle was something of a nuisance inasmuch as when it was put into the idling position it would creep forward and would not be held closed by the friction nut. In order, therefore, to enable the pilot to have his hand free so that he could use his spoilers to help him make an accurate approach and landing, it was necessary for the pupil, or passenger, to hold the throttle closed. This I had done during Peter's attempt, and now he was doing the same for me.

The circuit had been normal and the approach was good. We were going to touch down about a third of the way into the field and now we were passing over the downwind boundary, when suddenly, right above our canopy we saw a high tension cable. With a reflex action I pulled back on the stick and the Falke seemed to slide over the cable, it was so close. Then almost in one continuous movement I pushed the stick forward again. For, although I had yelled for power at the same moment, and indeed Peter had got the power on almost before my asking, I knew that with such a high attitude the machine would quickly have stalled. The speed with which Peter had reacted would only have come from one who appreciated the danger, so I was not a little thankful that it was an airman who had been with me. Had I elected to dive under the cable instead of going over it the fin and rudder would most certainly have lifted into it. I do not believe that during the fraction of a second it took me to pull back on the stick that I reasoned this out. I am sure that it was simply fortuitous that I pulled rather than pushed on the stick in the first place.

When we were safely away from the field I became puzzled as to why I had not known the cable was there. When finally selecting the field we certainly had done the normal checks of searching for lines of poles or posts along their line, but we had seen none. I had to know why, so we returned to the field with power on and flew low and parallel to the offending cable, and by so doing the mystery was solved. In the left-hand, downwind corner of the field as seen when making the approach was a house and in the right-hand corner was a small copse. There were no posts it is true, but nevertheless the high tension cable was strung form the house across to the

copse, no doubt anchored to a stout tree.

I made a mental note of this. I had learnt something that had not been in the books but came from experience alone. The chance that the house and the copse should be so placed and on that particular chosen field must have been one in ten thousand. Nevertheless if ever again I came across a house and a copse opposite each other on either side of the approach, or for that matter two houses or two copses then I would be very much on my guard.

Soon we left the treacherous field behind and made for the second choice where we carried out the exercise until Peter got it right.

One of the interesting aspects at Withybush was the effect of the sea breeze. Interesting, but nonetheless infuriating to the glider pilot because the effect of the sea breeze is to largely prevent the development of thermal activity. As explained earlier, in order for useful thermals to develop, the air should have an unstable lapse rate where the air cools off with height at three degrees Centigrade or more per thousand feet. If the falling off of temperature is much less than this then the air is stable and any warm air trying to rise from its hot spot or thermal source on the ground will be unable to progress and is likely to succeed in only making the air near the ground rather turbulent.

During a clear night in summer the heat, which the land had absorbed the previous day is radiated out into space so that by morning time the temperature of the land is less than that of the sea, the sea's temperature remaining almost constant during the 24 hour cycle. However, during the day the sun quickly re-heats the land until it again becomes warmer than the sea and this of course, warms up the air in contact with it so that it becomes lighter and therefore rises. This rising warmed land air is replaced by the heavier and stable cooler air form the sea as the 'sea breeze' blows inshore, so that any thermal activity which may have started is quickly killed off. From this it will be seen that it is not a good idea to place a gliding site near the sea, because the gliders having been launched into the air simply float back down to earth again.

As the sea breeze front moves in around about mid-morning it is possible to soar this point for a short time as it passes overhead. The front is normally marked by a line of cumulus-type clouds moving inland with the front. This cloud has occurred because of the cold heavy sea breeze air chiselling its way under the warmer land air and so pushing it up until condensation takes place. The distance which this sea breeze front reaches inland depends largely on how warm the land air is amongst other things. It can vary from three to four miles to as much as fifty miles. The cloud producing front can be soared as it passes overhead or indeed the glider can ride inland with the front. The rub though, from the glider pilot's point of view, is that the cool air left behind the front is now stable and therefore mostly unsoarable.

Many's the time that we have been frustrated at Withybush to see excellent

soaring conditions miles inland for the rest of the day after the passing of the sea breeze front but which is far out of our reach. Sometimes when there was a strongish wind blowing from the north we could soar quite successfully. What would happen here was that the sea breeze would try to come in from the west, but the wind from the north would try to resist it. This meant that near the coast the resultant wind would be approximately north west or westnorthwest. Now Withybush is five miles from the sea in a line from the centre of a horseshoe-shaped coastline framed by a bay with St Anne's Head on the south side and St David's Head on the north side. It is St David's Head which juts out into the sea the most. With this northerly wind, watery cumulus clouds would form off St David's Head, and with the help of the sea breeze would slant south east and 'Street', in the general direction of the gliders at Withybush. The clouds became firmer and the base rose higher as the Street reached further inland. If the line of this Street was just right then the gliders could catch it off a motor-tow launch and run up and down its sucking base. This could be done so long as the Street remained which sometimes was most of the day. It was indeed a blessing for such a poor thermal site as Withybush.

To be honest it was not all bad thermalwise at Withybush. Certainly in the high summer the thermals wold not be seen for weeks, but it was rather a different story during April and sometimes early May. At this time of year there were thermals and quite often they reached up to the cloud base of 5,000 feet. At first I was puzzled about the existence of this lift which was not strong, usually about two knots or 200 feet per minute, but which remained fairly constant all the way to cloud base. Then one day the penny dropped with me, or at least it is my explanation for the phenomenon anyway. We all know that around Great Britain the sea in winter is warmer than the land and, as we have already stated, the land during the daytime in summer is warmer than the sea. Well, I reckon that there comes a time around spring when the sun is strong enough to produce hot spots for thermal production but the land in general is not yet heating up enough to become warmer than the sea and so trigger off a sea breeze front. These early thermals then are able to rise steadily in their undisturbed environment. Certainly at Withybush it has only been for those few weeks in spring when thermals are around with any kind of reliability.

One other interesting phenomenon worth mentioning is the map in the sky to be seen on a strong sea breeze day. The clouds of the front would take up the shape of the coast line. After the front had reached its way inland one could look up and see St Anne's Head to the south and St David's Head to the north with the line of cloud running from each Head imprinting the shape of the coast high up there in the sky, so, for those who could recognise it, it was an exact map of St Bride's Bay.

One day though I saw something which may have been truly remarkable in meteorological terms, for during this particular day I witnessed the formation of this map in the sky not only once but twice. Sometime after the sea breeze front passed

overhead with its well-defined cloud map of St Bride's Bay, the air actually became unstable allowing thermals and their cumulus to form so that several good climbs were achieved by the gliders. This was unusual to say the least, but the really remarkable thing was the development of a second sea breeze front later on in the day leaving once again the usual stable air behind it. I have only ever witnessed such an occurrence once in my flying career.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

MY BROTHER TOM

Once when the laden sky and continuous rain kept the hangar doors shut for the whole day and I had a full course on my hands with little to do after a morning of lectures but lounge around on the easy chairs of the club, I asked for any of the pupils who had an interesting job or had an unusual experience to give us a talk about it. While it was true that everyone thought this is a good idea no one volunteered to step forward. Instead I was asked the question I had often been asked, which was, "When did you start flying?"

"Well, if you mean when did I start gliding I suppose it was around 1954, but I was actually flying when I was a member of a bomber crew during the war," I answered.

"Oh," said one, "now we have something to talk about, or at least you have. You must have some interesting experiences to recall."

"We're all ears," said another.

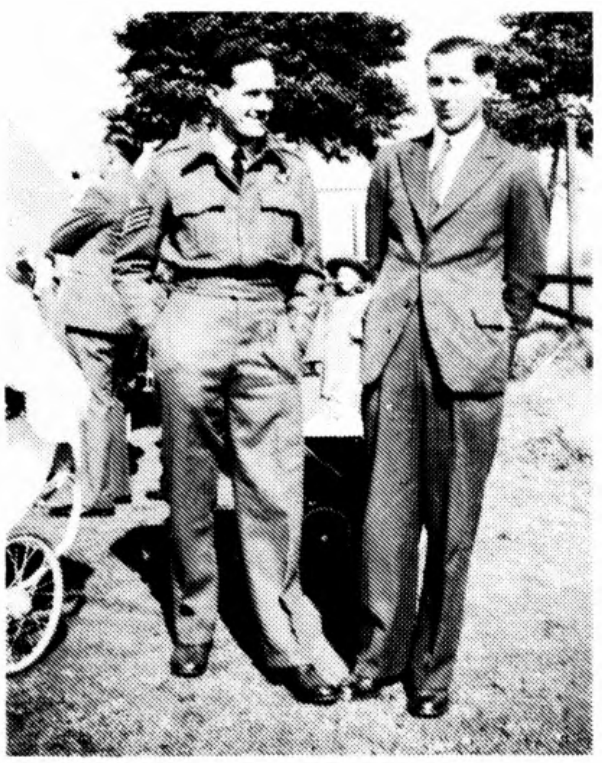
"Certainly things happened during the war, but I'm not at all sure I have anything of real interest to relate," I said.

"Oh, come on Dave, you must have. Were you ever shot down, for example?"

"No, we were never shot down, although we were shot UP several times. Once over Hamburg our Lancaster was caught by a blue searchlight which suddenly flicked on. There had been hundreds of white ones with their probing fingers sweeping all over the sky, each trying at random to pick out an aircraft but an experienced crew could often handle the white lights. If a beam was sweeping towards your particular bomber from say left to right, then the pilot turned left so the aircraft cut into and across the beam which was going the other way. This way you shot through the beam and back into the darkness before the searchlight crew could change direction to hold you. One thing you never did was to run away from an approaching sweep.

"The blue search light was a different kettle of fish altogether. This blue, or the master, searchlight was not even lit most of the time or at least if it were then it simply stayed stationary pointing up into the sky. You see it was a radar affair and if the blue light came on, or if it moved from where it had been stationary, some target aircraft would suddenly find itself dazzlingly illuminated or very nearly so. Then it took seconds only for a group of their lights which had been searching at random to come on the master. To be caught like that was like being caught walking through Picadilly Circus with nothing on.

"Anyhow, there we were and for a long time no amount of twisting and turning would break us free. In the meantime the big guns were having a whale of a time banging away at us. Finally we were out of range of both lights and guns and our sweating skipper still had the Lancaster under control. Mind you it was a mess and at that moment the navigator, though he did not know it, was busy winning the

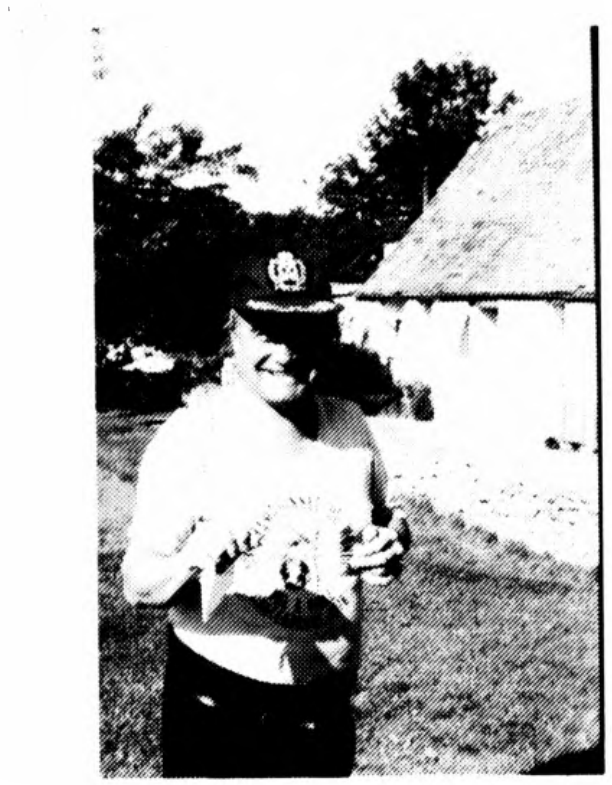


Brothers Tom (in uniform) and Leighton on leave in Lancaster in 1944. Tom back home after being shot down by a night-fighter. Missing for nine months, thought to be dead but spent much of that time with the French maquis before making a home run with the SAS.

Author with his Olympia 463 in 'wave' at 10,000 ft over Perth, Scotland having taken off from portmoak -SGU.

A glance at the weather before a training flight with a pupil at Nymsfield B & GGC 1976.

Northern Regional Competitions 1976.



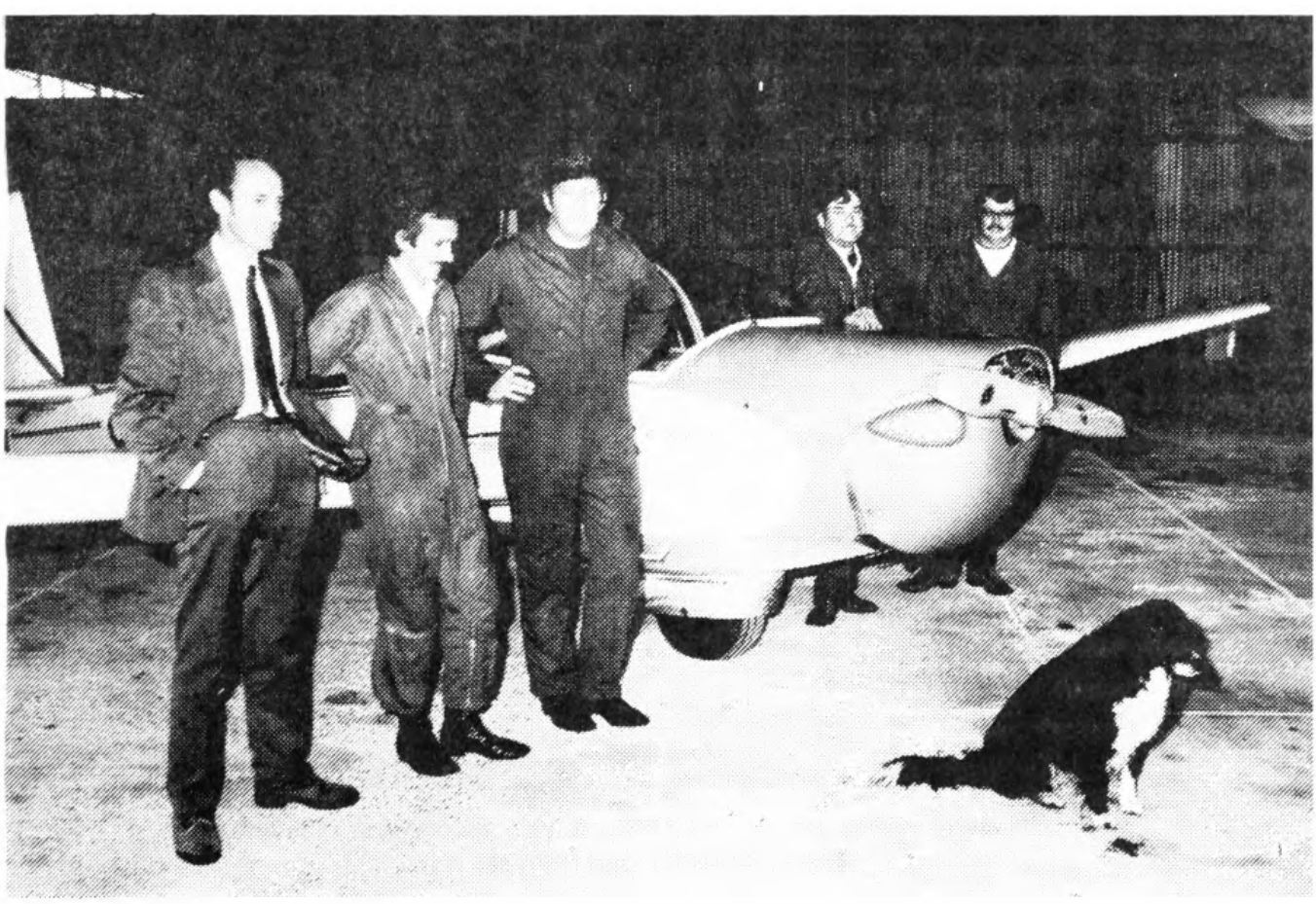
Tim Bradley, Nymsfield. A Bristol and Gloucester gliding instructor, 1978.
A change from captaining a RAF Vulcan bomber.

B & GCC Nymsfield, instructor Jim Webster 'encouraging' his pupil after a training flight. Jim had remarkably survived a spin into the ground whilst a navigator on a RAF Wellington bomber. Sadly, from a second spinning accident in his glider he did not survive.

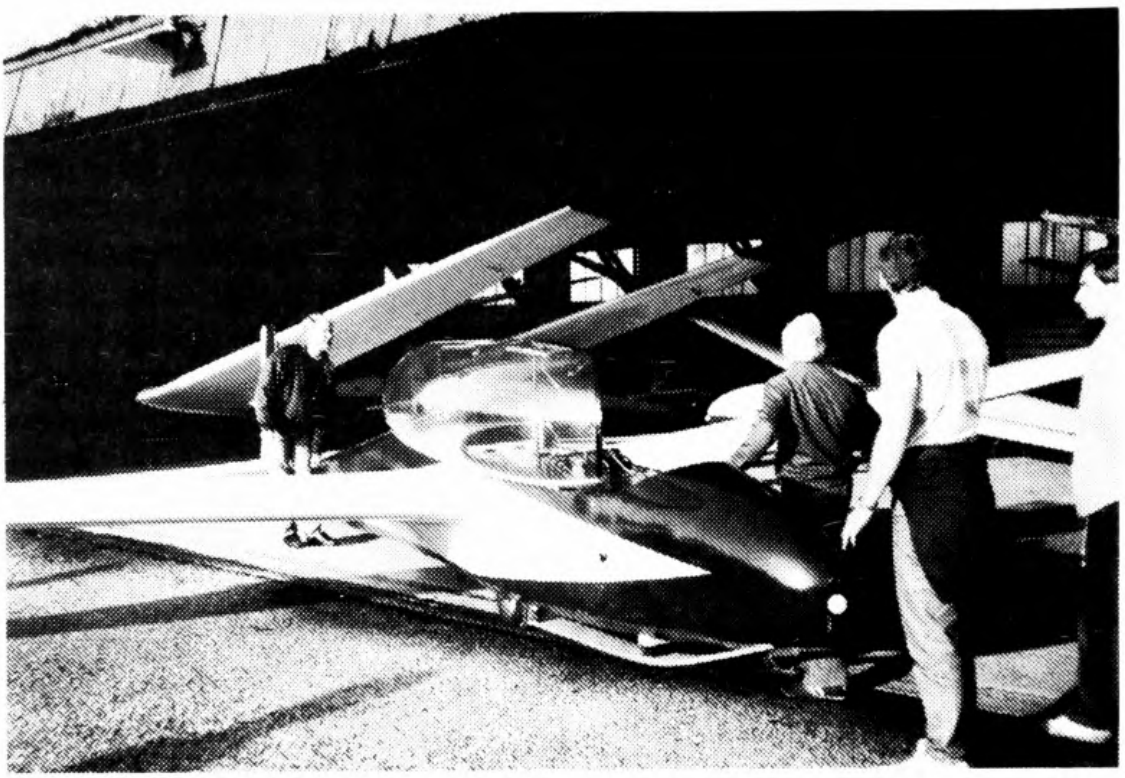
The 'very nice lady' with her small son standing next to my Skylark III after having landed at her farm near Winchester. I received the kindest of receptions only to lose her name and address which prevented me from forwarding the photograph as promised. I hope you see this one day kind lady!

Susie wintering at home, dreaming of the coming glider season and the wide open spaces of the gliding field.

Jim Webster - Always ready to help out.



Members of the West Wales Gliding Association with the author extreme left and Susie onguard. The occasion: the arrival of their new motor glider.



Packing them in after a day's flying at Camphill D & LGC - 1981.

Holiday course at Camphill 1988. Author second from the left.
Winch driver second from the right.

Distinguished Flying Cross as he fought the fire which was raging in his compartment. Then after getting it under control and finally out with the help of the others up front, he successfully directed the battered Lancaster back to base without maps, radar or wireless. After landing, the aircraft was declared beyond repair and the skipper also got a DFC. Mortally wounded though the bomber was, not one man of her crew had so much as a scratch. There had been other occasions also where we had been shot up but we were never shot down.

"This was not the case for my brother Tom," I continued, "for he was a navigator on the Lancasters and he WAS shot down, and what happened to him was far more interesting than anything which happened to myself. But first let me tell you about the time when I had a couple of days' leave so I climbed onto my motor bike and rode off to visit Tom at his Squadron in Number One Group.

"For a few years before, my brother had been an officer in the Merchant Navy and had indeed served at sea during the first two years of the war. He had been on the North Atlantic convoy runs and had seen ships torpedoed and sunk around him but had been lucky himself."

"Tom's schooling as a boy before going to sea had taken place on the Conway. The Conway was a sort of floating public school whose teachings leant towards the sea. It was one of the two ships of the line which still remained and was the only one still afloat, anchored at Rock Reney up Liverpool's River Mersey. The other ship being Nelson's famous Victory which, as is well known, is set in concrete, though the Victory was built earlier than the Conway. Discipline on the Conway was very strict and great respect was developed for one's superiors, whether they be senior boys or officers. Punishment was by flogging with a rope. Because of the danger from bombing, the Conway was towed away from the river Mersey and taken to its name place in Wales. Then when the war was over, and after having survived so long, the one and only floating ship of the line broke its tow during what was to have been its return to 'station' and came to grief. The Conway is no more."

"Anyway, Tom decided to leave the sea and join aircrew in the RAF. As a matter of fact one could only leave the Merchant Navy in war time to join aircrew otherwise you remained there until the end of the war, or you drowned. It was the same with the Police Force. You could not leave them for the services unless you volunteered for aircrew duties.

"On arrival at RAF Kirmington I found Tom in the mess and after the pleasantries of our meeting he asked if I could give him a lift on my bike to his Lancaster sitting on its dispersal point at the far end of the aerodrome. He had left something or other in the bomber, I have forgotten what it was now, but anyway he wanted it. We rode along the perimeter track passing numerous Lancasters at dispersal, when, on reaching one, he asked me to turn off to ride round the far side of the bomber. "Its not our Lancaster," he explained, "but there is something I would like you to see."

On rounding the aeroplane we stopped and Tom said, "Look at the pilot's cockpit." There were the usual pictures of bombs each one representing a raid, but under the line of bombs was a perfectly-drawn pair of pink cami-knickers with the words, 'We are the boys who dropped them.'

"During the evening we went along to the local village pub, the 'Marrow and Cleaver', which was crowded with members of 166 Squadron as that night there was 'no war on'. I was stood by the bar with Tom jostling for a pint as were a couple of middle-aged locals next to me. Then I heard one say to his companion, "It didn't half shake our place, I can tell you. The windows came crashing in and the old ornaments standing on the Welsh dresser fell over and smashed on the floor. What a bloody bang though, Harry. My God." Of course I had not the slightest idea what he was talking about and with all the other chatter going on around me I didn't much care.

"Then a Flight Sergeant bomb aimer who was standing close by said, "Well if you want someone to blame you need look no further, there's your man." At that he pointed his forefinger at Tom.

"What's all this about?" I asked, but my brother did not answer me but instead concentrated on getting some beer. Finally after extracting ourselves from the crush I again asked, "What was the Flight Sergeant on about, when he said those blokes should blame you for the bang?"

"Finally it came out, Tom told me what had happened. A few nights previously the Squadron were on ops., and after a number of Lancasters had roared off down the runway it was the turn of my brother's aircraft to take off. After the engineer had pushed the throttle of the four engines through the gate into full power and with the Lancaster travelling at speed, shortly before it was ready to lift off, the port undercarriage gave way and partially collapsed causing the heavy bomber to swerve to one side. It was too late for any hope of aborting the take off as with full tanks and bomb load there was no way the pilot could stop before running out of runway. So the only hope was to get airborne which the Lancaster almost was anyhow. Leaving the power on, therefore, the pilot tried to correct the lurch and hoped desperately that the undercart would hold for just a few more seconds."

"Then it happened. The legs folded up. The Lancaster with its loaded tanks careered along the tarmac on its belly with sparks flying off in all directions and finally slithered to a halt. After all the commotion and din there was just a moment of utter silence before someone shouted 'Fire - get out quick!' The crew tumbled out into the darkness and ran like hell away from the potential time-bomb. As they ran the fire quickly spread. In the darkness Tom could see the shadowy forms of the crew ahead of him and then realised he could only see five men and knew that he was the last of the bunch. Tom turned to run back to the burning bomber, 'There must still be someone in there,' he thought and as he turned he heard a voice which came from nearby. 'Where the hell do you think you are going?' It came from none other than

the Station Commander who had been on the airfield away from the control tower, the better to see his Lancasters take off. At the moment that the stricken Lancaster had been roaring down the runway, the Station Commander had been driving from a dispersal point after talking to one of the crew. Now he had stopped his car and run towards the bomber before coming up on its fleeing crew.

"Who are you?" asked Tom, at first wondering if he could be the missing man. Then he was able to make out the form and saw the man was not wearing any flying gear.

"I am the Station Commander," came the reply.

"There is a man short, Sir. I think he is still in the bomber." Without another word both men ran back to the aircraft. They made a rapid search but found no one and again they ran madly away from the danger having suffered no more than a little scorched hair. After several hundred yards had been put between the bomber and themselves and Tom's lungs were fit to burst due to trying to run flat out while wearing the cumbersome flying gear, the bomber went up. The two men threw themselves onto the ground, or were they blown there? For the enormous explosion had come from the 4,000 pound blockbuster they had been carrying together with hundreds of incendiary bombs. The whole aerodrome had for a short time been illuminated as bright as day, then remained for a long time in a sort of twilight as wreckage, spread over a large area, continued to burn and a large pool of light came from the hundreds of gallons of high octane fuel reaching out like a lake. The Lancasters which had not yet taken off did not do so on that night. The massive crater on the runway saw to that."

"Where was the missing crewman? The fact is he had not been missing at all but had been so far ahead of his companions he had simply merged into the darkness. All is well that ends well of course, but I cannot help but think it would have been a double tragedy if my brother had been blown up while trying to save a man who was not even there.

"It seems to me that you were a lucky family," remarked a member of the course."

"Oh, you don't know the half of it," I said, "I have two other brothers who served all through the war. One was on tanks while the other had a mobile dental unit which was almost continuously with the forward troops. The unit was required for carrying out emergency treatment on severe facial and head wounds prior to the patients being sent back to a base hospital. With this unit John was at the battle of Caen and the Falaise Gap, which was one of the bloodiest battles of the war, if not the bloodiest. During this battle No 5 Group carried out a daylight raid in support of the Army. It was one of the few occasions when the British heavy bombers bombed tactically as against their usual strategic roll. Although it was an extremely bloody affair on the ground, it was from the bombers' point of view an easy raid. To start with it was

daylight and secondly we were over enemy territory for a very short time. Straight in and straight out so to speak. Not for a considerable time after that particular operation did I learn that John had been down there. I think it would have been nice to know that I was helping to support him. Anyhow enough of that, it is supposed to be my brother Tom, we are talking about.

"Shortly after my visit to RAF Kermington I managed to get myself another 36 hour pass. There was to be NO WAR ON for at least 48 hours, so I had a word with the fighter pilot who was at our Station on 'rest'. His job with us was to do fighter's affiliation exercises with Lancasters when we gunners used camera guns as did also the fighter pilot with his Spitfire. After the 'flight' we would each see our films in the projection room for analysis. He was to go up the morning in question with one of the bombers so I button holed him to ask if he could do the exercise with the Martinette which had two seats and I knew to be in one of the hangars. If he would I would ask the Lancaster pilot to fly over to Squires Gate at Blackpool during the manoeuvres where the Marinette could make a quick landing to let me out, since my home at Lancaster was only 25 miles away. The Fighter Pilot said it would not be much of an exercise with the slow Martinette but if it was OK with the bomber crew it was OK with him.

"Agreement was reached and I was dropped off at Blackpool with the promise that he would pick me up the next day if he could fit it in with another fighter affiliation exercise. It was good to see my Mum and sister again; they were all that were left of the family still living at home. I had another sister but she was serving in the Fire Service in Liverpool, while the sister at home, though not in the services, was a dental nurse and my Mother was doing her bit with the Women's Voluntary Service. The Milletts I think were doing their share in the war effort.

"Of course I could not spend many hours at home on this occasion as I had to leave about noon the following day to make for Squires Gate. Shortly before my sister, Joyce, was to leave for work that morning there was a knock on the front door and it was Joyce who answered. She was confronted by a man from the GPO and was handed a yellow telegram. During the war years any telegrams were received with much apprehension as they all too often brought bad news and this one was no exception.

"Joyce opened the envelope and the blood drained from her face as she read the contents and without a word she handed the paper to Mother. They were both standing in the hall at the time and after reading the message my mother walked into the dining room, sat on a chair and wept very silently with her hands covering her face. I picked up the telegram and it read, 'Your son is missing, presumed killed.' The son was Tom.

"A little further along the road from where we lived was a middle-aged couple who were the very proud parents of two sons who were in the RAF. One was a

navigator while the other was a pilot. A few weeks earlier the couple had received a telegram informing them that their son, the pilot, had been killed. Thirteen days after that there was a second telegram. The navigator had gone the same way as his brother. The family was no more.

"After a few minutes of quiet weeping my mother got up from her chair, found a duster and polish, went into the hall, knelt on the floor and began to polish the already shiny wood. Two hours later not having uttered a word she was still polishing that floor.

"At around midday my mother kissed me goodbye on the doorstep and on reaching the garden gate I turned to give her a wave. I saw on her face a gentle smile that was both pathetic and loving. I had to walk 200 yards down the road before turning the corner which would conceal me from view and it was the longest 200 yards I had ever known. From time to time I turned to wave as I almost felt my dear mother's gaze on my back and it was obvious what must have been in her mind as she saw me walking off wearing the same uniform as my brother Tom had worn.

"No more news of any sort was received of Tom until one day in answer to the ringing of the telephone my mother heard a voice saying, 'Hello, Mother, this is Tom.'

"Much later on I got the story of what had happened on and after that fatal July night in 1944. The bombers of No. One Group were after some target near Paris but on arrival there, the bomb aimers were not able to identify the aiming point as they were flying over eight eighths cloud, or, as it was termed in those days, ten tenths. The cloud was deep, down almost to the ground so that there was no opportunity for about a couple of hundred heavy night bombers going in from below. There was only one thing they could do and that was to return home with their bombs as one did not bomb blind over France as one might over Germany rather than take the bombs back. Of course not even the fabulous Lancaster could land safely with a full bomb load aboard, so the big and rather volatile block busters at least would be jettisoned near the Wash. But almost before the return journey commenced my brother's Lancaster came under attack from a night fighter. The enemy most likely came in at the bomber from behind and below for before the bomber crew knew what was happening they had cannon shell ripping into the fuselage and into the both inboard engines. The starboard and port inboard engines quickly became alight and the flames reached back along the sides of the fuselage. The roar of the engines which was so loud inside the uninsulated tin shell, which was the body of the machine was now less audible as the burning engines fell silent leaving only the two remaining outboard engines turning.

"In a situation like this the bomber was ready to blow up if the intense heat of the fire did not burn the strength out of the main spar first, causing a wing to fail and fall away. I had myself seen this happen to a Lancaster during one of the few

daylight raids I had been on and had witnessed numerous 'blow ups' at night, seeing a great burst of flames and light where only darkness had been. However my brother's Lancaster did not blow up nor did it lose a wing. That is not until it hit the ground. In fact the worthy Lancaster remained under the control of the pilot's hands. It was true that the two remaining engines could not maintain height while the aircraft was in this state and still carrying a 16,000 pound cargo of bombs, but it was nevertheless in a controlled descent."

"Immediately after the attack the bomber aimer set about jettisoning the bomb load but with this he was not successful. The hydraulics required to operate the opening of the bomb doors was powered form the port inboard engine but this was now useless causing the doors to remain firmly closed. So now in his desperation to get rid of the weight he released the load hoping the doors would be forced open by it, but they were not, the bombs remained aboard.

"With the bomber all the time losing height even though it was otherwise under control, and with the inherent danger from the fires the only thing left to do was to get out quick.

"Now perhaps I should just explain here that there are two drills for abandoning a Lancaster, or to be nearer the truth, one is a drill while the other is more of a controlled panic, if there is such a thing. So first I'll explain the latter. Should the aircraft become completely out of control immediately after being hit, it is essential to get out at once before G forces pin you down from say a spin or a spiral dive. During the daylight raid I mentioned when the bomber lost its wing, it was only minutes after the Lancaster which was loosely formating on our starboard side received a hit from a heavy flak shell. I actually saw the port side wheel fall away from its housing and then the bomber fell into a spiral dive. From my rear turret I was able to watch it go down all the way to the ground but not one parachute opened from that stricken aeroplane.

"So, if a Lancaster is, or is about to become completely out of control the pilot shouts rapidly over the intercom, 'Jump, jump, jump, jump, jump!' At the same time he presses a button to activate a flashing light in each crew member's compartment so that if the intercom has been damaged there is a chance the flashing light has not. Anyhow on receiving one or both warnings, all know that it is every man for himself and that includes the skipper. He is not expected to wait for the aircraft to be cleared of crew before he leaves.

"On the other hand if the bomber is under some sort of control but is nevertheless going to crash sooner or later, the skipper will order his crew to bale out and on receiving these instructions the crew quickly acknowledge, starting from the rear gunner and working forward. But, when Tom was shot down no reply was heard from the rear gunner. After just a moment's pause the mid-upper gunner acknowledged and went to his jumping position at the main door between his turret

and the tail of the aircraft. The wireless operator should have been the next to acknowledge but did not do so. But since his position was very close to the navigator, Tom was able to quickly inform the skipper that he was dead. Then, instead of going to the bomber aimer's panel from where the navigator would normally abandon the aircraft he informed the skipper that he was going back to the rear turret to see if he could do anything for the gunner in there. Sadly though, on opening the turret door my brother was confronted by the terrible sight of his crew member having been hit in the head and was now quite dead. I can well imagine that he must have looked pretty grim after being hit by 20mm shells.

"In the meantime all the remaining crew, apart from the pilot, had got clear of the burning Lancaster. The nearest exit now for Tom was the main door and without further delay both the remaining men jumped. Immediately he began to fall he pulled the rip cord of the parachute for he knew the bomber must have been close to the ground, but just how close he discovered seconds later. The parachute slapped open and almost at the same moment Tom hit trees. When he was over the initial shock, he found he had a problem due to being suspended in the harness, and the darkness prevented him from knowing what was below him. He therefore dare not release himself from the harness but he did find that he was able to swing back and forth a little until he hit something solid. It was the trunk of a tree, and finally he got a good grip on it which gave him the confidence to hit the quick release mechanism and the harness swung away. Timidly he lowered himself down the trunk and at once his feet were on the ground.

"Tom knew that the parachute with its shrouds would be hopelessly entangled in the tree's foliage, making it impossible in the darkness to retrieve it in order to bring in the 'chute. In any case he could see the brightness in the distance where the Lancaster had exploded on hitting the ground. If there were not seven human remains in that wreckage then the enemy would soon deduce that men were on the run. There was a point which kept nagging at Tom's mind, for while he realised that those members of the crew who had baled out while the bomber was at a reasonable height would be spread miles away form his present position, he could not but be concerned for the pilot's safety. For his skipper had remained with the burning Lancaster while Tom investigated the fate of the rear gunner and he knew that he must have left the aircraft about the same time as himself. Tom hit the trees almost immediately his parachute had deployed. Death had been a second away. What of the pilot then?"

"Now all we bomber crews knew that when a shot down bomber hit the ground the Germans threw an imaginary cordon of a certain radius around it and had the area within it entirely searched as soon as possible and in most cases they would find the survivors. If the whole crew were not accounted for then the radius would widen but of course the more it did the less concentrated a search became. Tom wanted to go south to make for Switzerland but the small compass which all aircrew had with their

escape kit showed that the bomber had crashed almost due south of his present position. He therefore at once struck off east to cover as much ground as possible before daylight. He could of course widen his distance from the bomber even further had he gone north but two considerations decided him against doing this. One was that after the Germans had entirely searched the first circle it would be logical for them to pay rather more attention to the bomber's previous track, which had been from the north. The other consideration was that it was physiologically bad to walk away in the completely opposite direction to which you wish to go, when you had nothing but what you stood up in.

"As soon as Tom started to walk east he discovered that he had landed on top of a conical shaped hill, and some time after the war he learnt that the pilot had missed the hill and gone down into the valley. This fact almost certainly saved his life as it gave him that fraction of time longer for his parachute to open.

"At 6 o'clock that morning Tom found a place in which he could hide for the rest of the day. It was a wood, for he decided that if he was somehow able to obtain food he would travel by night only. At this stage he could only guess how far he had walked but he felt that he had put a good distance between himself and the stranded parachute which he hoped would not be found quickly, and more important from the wrecked bomber. The shoes he had on his feet had not hindered him on the trek even though these same shoes had been flying boots when he had put them on in the locker room back at base. Due to some sensible fellow in the Air Force, the boots had been designed in such a way as to enable the heavy sheepskin lined leggings to be cut away from the shoes which at once made them easier for walking and less conspicuous to the onlooker.

"Shortly after Tom had settled down to wait for his first long day he became alarmed at a sound coming from the middle distance and he decided that he would carefully investigate in order to put his mind at ease. These investigations disclosed that the noise came from charcoal burners working in the forest. At first he considered the idea of confronting the men in order to obtain help but decided against such a move, as he knew that if the men were aware of his presence he would present a danger to them if they were to keep this knowledge to themselves. Some of the workers may have been prepared to keep quiet and help the best they could, but some may not, so Tom did not break cover.

"With the help of sign posts and the silk printed map, which was part of his escape kit, he was able to walk in the right direction, though he avoided towns and skirted the villages. Food soon became an urgent matter so during his second night he walked to the edge of a village and into the back garden of a cottage to find that his luck still held for there was a well-kept kitchen garden, some of the products of which gave him the much-needed nourishment he required. From the light of a part moon he made out the form of a shed and on investigation found that the door was

not locked and, groping in the darkness, he came across a pushbike. Here was the means of easing his journey as well as speeding it up very considerably, so as quietly as he could he extracted this valuable form of transport and with a rising spirit rode off on the machine. He hoped that the loss would not be too great for the owner, but he did feel that his need must be greater than theirs. Would its loss be reported to the police and if so would they inform the military? If the French police kept it to themselves and it was treated only as a normal sort of theft he would be OK, but should the Germans be informed then they may pick up his scent. Much depended on just how anti-German the French were in this area.

"During the remaining darkness of this night, bicycle and rider made satisfactory progress, but the following night, shortly after setting off, the chain of the bike broke and it was not repairable without a new section, so the priceless transport had to be abandoned. Tom left it in the bottom of a hedge on the field side and concealed it as best he could. After the previous night the progress now seemed very slow but he kept dragging on until daylight once again made him seek cover. To his dismay, however, suitable cover did not seem to be available as everywhere was far too open. He found himself near a river and nearby was an area where was stored a surprisingly large quantity of timber. It seemed to Tom that even if men later came to work there he still would be able to conceal himself, so abundant was the layout. Within this area there was a single house with one or two out-houses and he wondered what these may contain so that when darkness fell he determined he would try to make entry.

"Although Tom's circumstances were not to be envied, for he was very hungry and at times he felt very lonely, but an incident occurred as he watched the house which almost caused him to laugh out loud. For a heavily-built middle aged woman came from within the house and to his almost disbelief he saw her lift her skirts, lower her knickers and squat down to have a pee. Thus relived, she returned back in to the house. The activity amongst the timber during the day was minimal with only one man messing about doing nothing in particular, and when the light finally faded Tom carefully investigated the buildings which, to his extreme pleasure, held another bicycle ready to be ridden off. Better still, this machine boasted a three speed gear and was generally in much better condition than the one he had left in the bottom of the hedge. His journey south was making good progress now and even though he was travelling without any kind of artificial light he was lucky in that the moon during this period was in evidence which prevented absolute darkness, and in due course he reached Dijon, but he was very careful to give the town a generous berth.

"After continuing for not very many miles beyond Dijon, Tom reached some cross roads and situated close by was a cafe and a farm house; he may not have noticed the cafe had it not been for the door opening as he was riding quietly by. The open door allowed a dim light from within to shine out for a moment before being

extinguished as the door closed. This really activated Tom's curiosity for the time was around 2.30 a.m. and of course the enemy had laid down a strict curfew. Had the door been opened to admit somebody or was it perhaps as simple as putting the cat out? But it certainly was a late hour for country folk to be out of their beds.

"Laying down his bike in the ditch the escaper decided that the cafe deserved closer inspection and the hunger which he was now experiencing made his resolve all the more firm. He knew he had done well up to now in his success in evading capture, and so kept well to the fore of his mind not to allow the pressing hunger to induce him to become careless, so he simply laid low for a time to see if anything developed. After some twenty minutes had passed by he heard someone walk nearby and at once Tom lowered himself silently to the ground and lay dead still. The person he had heard now tapped on the door which opened almost immediately and again permitting the dim light to shine out and in doing so it silhouetted the shadowy figure stepping through. Tom was sure he had seen a gun slung over the man's shoulder.

"His mind was now made up. He was going to make his move as these people were obviously clandestine, so without further hesitation he got to his feet, walked up to the door and quietly knocked on it. Before he had seen the door open almost immediately after the man had knocked but now he was waiting for what seemed a long time, but was probably not more than half a minute, though the door had not opened. He knocked again, quietly, his heart beating in anticipation and then the door slowly opened, but only partially.

'Qui est la?' it was a man's voice.

'Je suis Anglais. RAF.'

"There was a pause then, 'Venez par ici.'

Although the lighting inside was dim it at first seemed quite bright to his eyes after the hours of darkness. The door had opened directly onto a large room which was occupied by four men, three of whom were standing behind a long wooden table and Tom saw that each man had a British sten gun in his hands. It seemed to him that they were very much on their guard against the unexpected caller. Tom's French was the limited school boy stuff and the French men he now confronted had no English. He could sense their suspicion and knew that they were watching him closely. He asked for food and was grateful when handed a chunk of bread with some butter.

"Tom understood the suspicion of these men, for it was not unheard of for the Germans to pose as shot down RAF men on the run in order to try to break into an illicit escape organisation. One of the four men tried asking questions of Tom but the difficulty of language overcame them. Before the dawn broke one man left the house and Tom was able to glean enough to understand that he would be returning later on that day. And so the hours passed, but at no time was he left alone. Then, shortly

before 11 o'clock the departed man returned and with him was an elderly lady whose English was perfect if somewhat upper class. Soon the lady was giving him a thorough interrogation and it was obvious to Tom that it was not the first time she had done such work. Finally she seemed to be satisfied and then he was led away a few miles through the woods until he came to a makeshift shelter made of branches and remained there for the day. Later he learnt that one of the four men, who was the local leader of the 'underground', was a Gendarme Chief at the small town of Grancey-le-Chaterax which was only a little more than a mile from the cafe.

"After the two days stay in these woods Tom was taken by two men to a lane which was not far from the shelter they had been using and he was then taken to a larger Maquis camp 12 kilometres north of Dijon. The main centre of this camp was a farmhouse but in nearby woods the Maquis had erected numerous 'huts' made up of parachutes which had been used for dropping supplies from England. Now they were camouflaged with foliage. This camp contained 16 underground men but the outbuildings of the farm contained much of the equipment used by the men. Their bread supply largely came from the farm too though food was also dropped by air.

"The dropping zone was a large cornfield, and if the men heard their own code word come over the BBC broadcast from London they would be ready at the dropping zone to light up their torches which were formed in a triangle for the supply aircraft to identify. The RAF dropped the materials which had been previously requested by the Maquis such as arms, food or clothes etc. The aircraft used were usually Halifax bombers which were capable of carrying a considerable load.

"Soon after his arrival at the camp Tom had occasion to enter one of the farm outbuildings and he saw, amongst other arms and explosives, hand grenades hanging by their pins on nails which had been driven into the walls. He was not a little alarmed at this method of storage and began to wonder how much expertise the men he was now associated with had in handling of firearms. In fact it turned out they could handle them very well but they did have a distinct lack of safety training.

"Apart from the bread made at the farm and the food dropped by the RAF it was sometimes necessary for other sources to be found to supplement these supplies. So it was during Tom's stay with the Maquis that information came from a higher source in the underground movement that a food train would be passing through their area and that they were to de-rail it in order to replenish stocks. The train would pass by during the hours of darkness so during daylight Tom went with a small group of men to survey the lines to enable them to decide the best spot to place the plastic explosives. Having so decided, they faded away only to return in greater numbers during the night, but this time the explosive was placed. The men, armed to the teeth, then waited some way from the track for the train to arrive. Three quarters of an hour after the appointed time the train still had not shown up and the men were becoming restless even though it was known that the actions of the Allied Air Forces made a

mockery of timetables. Arrive the train did though, and it was very efficiently derailed. Two men at once ran to the engine which was hissing steam in all directions and held the crew at gun point, but it quickly became obvious that they wished for no trouble.

"The information that there was food on the train was correct as a section was indeed transporting food but the food was in the form of thousands of sardine tins, enough to last the Maquis for months ahead. The men might have wished for a better menu.

"One morning a small group of SAS men turned up at camp for a short rest before continuing their way back to the Allied lines. How long they had been under cover and what work had been done by them they were reluctant to say. However, they did tell Tom that one of their main jobs during that particular expedition was to assassinate Field Marshal Rommel. The Field Marshal used a large caravan as his mobile HQ and the SAS had got as far as staking it out. They had done a dummy run by way of concealing themselves amidst thousands of German troops and observed Rommel's early morning practice of stepping out onto the balcony of the caravan to breathe in the early morning air. The SAS planned exactly how to get Rommel and the time was set to do this. However, the gallant SAS were robbed of their pray.

"For while Rommel was in his staff car travelling along a road, an RAF fighter blew the vehicle up. Rommel got away with his life but was badly wounded.

"Another job they were to do on this same expedition was to drive their vehicle, which had been dropped to them by parachute and was armed with a mortar and a Vickers twin machine gun, into a small French town where there was a factory doing war work for the Germans. The object was to mortar bomb the place which they did very successfully and then roared out of the town to make their getaway. On clearing the town and after turning a corner they came slap bang into an Army convoy heading in the opposite direction. There was no hope of returning the way they had come as they were already abreast of the enemy trucks which of course were being driven with very dim lights in fear of air attack. So taking advantage of surprise, the SAS driver put his foot down while his colleague fired the Vickers into the enemy's cabs as they sped by. Luck was with them because no truck pulled across the road to block their way. Soon the men had dispersed into the darkness leaving behind them total confusion.

"Later Tom learnt that these SAS men had also sabotaged a wood alcohol plant producing petrol for the German forces.

"After the short lay-up with the Maquis the SAS prepared to leave having received word to join up with the main force of a hundred SAS who in turn had been ordered to fall out and make for Orleans which was now in American hands. Tom asked if he may join them and at first they refused his request. But Tom said, 'Oh, come off it. I am British just as much as you are, damn it.' So the soldiers agreed.

"At home in Lancaster the telephone rang. My mother placed the instrument to her ear, saying, 'Hello.'

"The reply came back, 'Hello, Mother, this is Tom.' He was phoning from Middle Wallop where he had landed."

One man in the club room said, "He sure did have nine lives what with the crash on takeoff, followed by the fire incident, then being shot down with the man next to him killed and as if that wasn't enough his parachute opening only in the nick of time, and his adventures behind enemy lines to say nothing of what he went through at sea before joining the RAF."

I smiled saying, "That was by no means the end of my brother's adventures. After the war he returned to sea and in due course got command of his own ship. During 1970 he had a communist inspired mutiny aboard during which time he was forcibly held on deck in front of a giant sized poster of Chairman Mao Tse Tung. Then later when in China he was with in a hair's breadth of being flung into a Chinese prison in Shanghai because he refused to erase the incident from the ship's log. But that is another story altogether, one which in itself could fill a book."

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

A SWALLOW OVER THE MOUNTAINS

During my first season at Withybush, on the 24th July 1965, I decided I was going to have a go for the Gold Distance Certificate using the Slingsby Swallow to try it in. The Swallow was the only glider available to me at the time and in any case I reckoned it would be a real achievement if I pulled a Gold in a machine of such adverse performance. The Swallow has a high sink rate and a poor glide angle and which at any rate is only achieved at a slow speed. Should one push its speed up by more than ten mph above its best glide angle speed, then the glide angle became dismal. So, while I knew the chances of success were not high I still felt a touch of excitement in the hope of an accomplishment in such a machine.

I found the map to explore the territory over which I hoped to fly. If I was lucky enough to fly clear of Wales I did not after that have any hard- and-set plan, I would simply hope to keep flying in a general easterly direction deviating a little as required to follow the best part of the sky. However the plan while flying over Wales was to make for Camarthen which is twenty-five miles from Haverfordwest, then on another twenty odd miles to Llandovery. From there I would follow the railway as close as possible up the Builth Wells yet a further twenty miles and then, still keeping to the railway, continue to Knighton which was also a twenty mile step and this would bring me to the English border and almost clear of the mountains.

The route was not the most direct one to reach the English border because for much of the time it meant having to fly on a N.W. heading, but it was going through the valleys which would give me the best chance of finding a suitable landing area should I be forced down.

So, having sorted out my map, I set about smoking the drum of the barograph so that a stylus would mark the slowly revolving drum during the flight to provide evidence that the glider had remained airborne and had travelled as far as the pilot claimed. I also placed in the Swallow an apple, a bag of boiled sweets and some sandwiches to eat in the event of coming down in some isolated spot. There was no question of being able to make contact with my first thermal from an auto tow launch because the sky was blue over Withybush as usual. However a bit to the north there were a few cumulus, even if they were rather feeble looking, but over to the east the clouds looked much stronger. I therefore asked Jimmy, who was flying the tug, to give me two thousand feet to the north, from where I hoped to stay with the weak lift near cloud base while I gradually made my way further east to get with the stronger lift.

On release from the tug I found the cloud base was only 1800 feet and the lift was so sparse that the flight was twice almost terminated during the first ten minutes after the separation of glider and tug aircraft. Although the poor old Swallow does have an abysmal performance there is, nonetheless, one thing to said in its favour

which is, due to its short wing span and slow flying speed, the old bird is very capable of turning in tight circles and therefore keeping within narrow cones of lift. On the other hand due to its high sink rate she is not very clever in handling weak lift. Anyway together we slowly made our way east towards the better formed cumulus and on reaching them the air became alive so that the Swallow danced and frolicked about the sky like a week old lamb in the meadow.

Together we flew, both of us thoroughly enjoying the strong surges of the upward rushing air. The aileron controls of the glider were superb, responding at once to every movement of the stick as we happily soared upwards until time and time again the canopy nudged the grey world of the clouds, but we did not venture into their vitals, for the Swallow did not carry instruments for such ventures. So we would leave the cloud behind and push on towards its next good looking companion. The boiling action was undetectable until very close to, and even then much of the outer surfaces appeared to be surprisingly still until the bucking Swallow called its bluff. During the glide out between the clouds the sun shone bright and hot through the canopy which only tended to exaggerate all the more the dullness as we flew below the innocent looking heaps of power. Sometimes the next cloud seemed too far away for the gallant Swallow while she sank lower and lower as if weary of the effort to reach her goal. Then, with the promise of rest so close by below, she would almost with her final breath take sustenance from the changing air and reach once again towards the grey cloud above, first climbing so slowly as though she was using her last reserves before the stronger lift fed life into her and had her bouncing skywards once again.

We picked up Carmarthen on the flat ground a little to the south and soon I saw the railway line running east to Llandeilo so I flew slightly north to get amongst the better looking cumulus nearer the hills. The sky remained good and the earth below behaved generously with its production of thermals and the lift had become really easy to work. The visibility was excellent which gave me the pleasure of witnessing the beautiful country of Wales at its best. The countryside to the north and to the east of Lancaster is also beautiful and I now felt an affinity with the people of this lush land below. But soon my preoccupation with the beauty which was all around me was interrupted by the need to concentrate on the job in hand. Gliding is not, as so many non-flyers think, simply a matter of sitting up there silently floating along on the wind. It is true that the sky has much to offer to those who are awake to the opportunities and have the skills to handle them, but it is a fickle place up there as the offers are not held out for long. A short loss of concentration or a slip into a dreamy state of ecstasy, and one awakes to find that the friendly air which has been lifting you up aloft is replaced by the clutching hand of descending air rushing the glider earthwards once more. Nor is all so silent in this environment that one can always hear the whisper of the air flowing past the canopy, which is not unpleasant

in itself, but the volume of this sound can be much affected by the turbulent edge of strong thermals as the glider pilot schemes to place his machine in the somewhat smoother rising stream which is the core.

A railway line is very easy to lose sight of when high up, especially if one is off to one side as I was. The rail tracks will sometimes have trees on each side or will make their way through a cutting or even go right through the hillside and all of these things cause them to disappear. A river is a much simpler feature to keep in view. There was a river alongside the railway running from Carmarthen to Llandeilo and indeed all the way to Llandovery.

After a nice flight from Carmarthen we crossed the railway heading north west to Llanwrtyd and on to Builth Wells. In fact it would work its way right up to Knighton and the Welsh-English border where I planned to leave the hills for the flatter land further east. I had been satisfied with our journey so far and as we continued to make good progress towards Builth Wells, but shortly after reaching Llanwrtyd Wells the sky ahead had over-developed so that the clouds were covering the whole sky which prevented the sun from shining onto the ground, automatically stopping the production of thermals. Worse, the base of these heavy clouds were lowering and were becoming dangerously close to the mountain tops. It was quite obvious that to continue on to the north west and Knighton was now not on.

By studying the sky to the east, however, I could see a rather better situation and felt I could get through that way. The terrain however was anything but inviting, but after further study of the sky, I decided I must go. Nothing ventured nothing gained!

For a short time all was well but then the lift seemed to have faded away and we were still descending when well below what I had considered to be a safe minimum. The ground below was frightening with steep sided valleys and no flat fields to be seen anywhere. The glider was getting lower and lower while my blood pressure was climbing higher and higher until the Swallow's instruments indicated we were in zero sink; neither losing nor gaining height. I at once started to circle very carefully. We were just at one side of the peak of a mountain which was about 300 feet below. Although I was flying as accurately as I knew how, some of my concentration was diverted to assessing the possibility of making a safe landing somewhere in the valley which ran at either side, but there was nowhere. Still going round and round neither losing or gaining, I noticed that there was a definite flat area just a few hundred feet down on the mountainside and I finally decided that, if it came to it, I could put the Swallow onto it without killing myself. I also knew that if I were to do so then the South West Wales Gliding Association could say goodbye to their glider because it would not be possible to retrieve it.

This small flat area lay at about four o'clock to where I was circling in the zero air and by now the hairs on the back of my neck were standing on end. I told myself to keep calm, after all that bit of flat ground did offer me a way out through the back

door so to speak. Up to now I had no indication of how to move in order to find definite lift and to do so could cause me to so easily lose the little bit of insurance I had. Then, while completing a circle, I noticed a gulley, or a chimney, worn into the mountainside. My mind flashed back to my early gliding days at Teybay and of the many times, while making our way to the Point, we had flown over such a gully and while doing so the glider had kicked and bucked for a few seconds until we had flown clear.

I circled round a few more times with the glider still remaining at the same height, but what now concerned me was the fact that we almost had no drift and, that being so, then how could I expect the gully to work? I was puzzled about this lack of drift because I had been enjoying a reasonable tail wind during my flight until now. Could it be, I wondered, that the heavy and low clouds further north had generated so much latent heat that they were sucking in air from their surroundings to such a degree that I now found myself on the periphery of the movement? Or was I experiencing a lee effect even though I was a little higher than the mountain top? I just did not know, but one thing I did know was that I had to make a decision soon. Although time does seem to drag when one is anxious, I was never-the-less pretty sure that I must have been circling in this no-man's land for at least ten minutes.

The gully lay at seven o'clock to me and was about the same distance as the 'flat' at four o'clock on the other side of the hill. The flat, the gully and the glider formed a triangle which was roughly equilateral. I reckoned that if I left my present position and flew over to the gully I could still make the flat area should we find no lift. I would not, though, be able to fly back to my present position in the hope of still finding the zero sink, and failing, still have enough height to reach the flat area. To leave my present position then was going to be a make-or-break situation and I hoped vehemently that the latter would not turn out to be literally so. Not that it would make much difference to the gliding club whether it was in one piece or in pieces.

I hung on just a little longer desperately hoping that the lift would develop but it did not, so, taking the bit between my teeth, I levelled out and made straight for the gully. At once, were hit from beneath by a rush of air that caused the variometer to go off the clock and, as I threw the left wing down into a steep bank, the Swallow rocketed upwards. "Thank you, Tebay," I said aloud, and the climb continued like magic until we were back up at cloud base 2,500 feet about the top of the mountain.

Together we flew on east with no further difficulty but shortly after leaving Wales and the mountains behind, the sky became completely blue. It seemed that the sea air had reached this far from the Bristol Channel so that everything had gone dead with stability. We simply extended our glide until the wheel kissed the lush grass a mile or two short of Hereford and a lot of miles short of a Gold.

It is strange the things that can happen when landing out. This time it was not a bad tempered farmer - of which there are few - nor was it the very kind lady. No;

it was Boy Scouts. I had landed very close to a Scout's camp and after ringing up Withybush to inform them of my present position I found myself giving a talk to the boys, on the insistence of the Scout Master.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

OLD FRIENDS AND NEW

The season of '74 was the last I was to spend at Withybush. I had been at Withybush since 1965 with only minor breaks apart from my time with the Worchestershire Club at Bickmarsh during the year 1970/1. I had good memories of the place despite the frustration of too much circuit flying due to the sea breeze fronts. We had some excellent courses with many interesting people attending them, and in the early days the club spirit, certainly from the social side, had been memorable. In the latter years, though, the place had declined greatly with fewer members, a poor spirit, and what had been the club room and bar had now been taken over by an entirely different organisation which was, putting it mildly, way down-market, approaching the undesirable. Word must have spread afield as even the bookings for the courses were falling off. In fact the last few weeks of '74 were almost without any bookings at all.

It was just at this time my old friend from Bickmarsh days, Mike Munday paid me a call, dropping into Withybush in the Bristol and Gloustershire Gliding Club Auster. Mike was now employed at Nympsfield and he had come with the news that their course instructor had had a nervous breakdown, as there were several weeks of the season left, was I able to help out? Their remaining courses were fully booked.

So, the following Sunday I found myself over Nympsfield in the Bocain with Mike in the back seat giving me a site familiarisation ride.

Nympsfield is an interesting club and one for which I grew an attachment. It had its fair share of characters, not the least of which were Mike and Dave Wales who had gone to Nympsfield after the Bickmarsh fiasco, and now I was to meet yet another in the shape of Jim Webster. Jim was one of the club's non-professional instructors and when he was around the place things seemed to be brighter. I'm sure Jim would leave his mark wherever he went as he was not a man one would easily forget. Like most such men, Jim was liked by many and objected to by a few. This minority, mostly disliked his 'not give a damn' attitude as to what he said or who he said it to, and he was, in some strange charming way, quite disgusting. But make a friend of Jim and one found help was never far away if needed.

Nympsfield is a very pleasant site situated as it is, on the edge of the Cotswolds and looking from the hill across the valley through which the river Severn makes its way down to the Bristol Channel, and beyond the river one could see the hill of Wales on a clear day. Since this was a hilltop site I was looking forward to the prospect of teaching the pupils a little hill soaring on non-thermic days when the wind was right. This was going to make a nice change from the flat, sea breeze affected airfield of West Wales.

The club house was an interesting building also, with its lovely old beams and cosy bar room. As for the old bunkhouse which was part of the same building beyond the kitchen, well that was something else! Nevertheless in this crummy old

place with its iron beds and low solid beams I was to know a lot of laughs. One of the first things I noticed as I lay in my bed on the first night was the network of string, like some giant pattern gone wrong. It seemed that this was Fred Carno's system of putting out the lights from no matter which bed you occupied. The system worked every time. It was perhaps while laying in bed before going to sleep that I really got to know Jim Webster through our late evening chats and listening to his tales about himself and others. At times his sense of humour would crease me, and during the long spells he was not there I missed those chats. Jim lived with his wife, Barbara, in the Channel Isles but his visits to Nympsfield were four of five times a year and each visit lasted several weeks. I don't think I had ever came across anyone who liked to be in the air for such long periods as Jim. He was a very experienced pilot and as such one would expect him to be satisfied with an hour or so of flying when the conditions gave only hill soaring, for the hill at Nympsfield was not very exciting since one simply flew up and down the 'beat' a few hundred feet above it and that was all it amounted to if there was no thermal activity at all. One would see Jim, however, even on such a day, get airborne around 9.30 in the morning and he would still be 'beating' the hill at 7 o'clock in the evening. Such boring flying would have driven most experienced pilots out of their silly little minds.

The directions of take off at Bristol and Gloucestshire Club were appropriately west and east. Shortly beyond the western boundary high tension cables were strung between their pylons running at right angles to the take off before they dropped away down the hillside to cross the flat valley below. When one had a strong south wind the take off on aerotow to the west could be rough. On such days it was not wise for early solo pilots to venture out. However, it was truly interesting, but more about that later. Finding myself back with Mike and seeing Dave Wales most weekends gave me a good feeling and I enjoyed the last few weeks of the '74 season with them. I was overjoyed, therefore, when the club asked if I would like to run their 1975 courses for them, but I did mention that I would hope for personal off duty privacy as I was sure they could hardly expect me to live permanently in the bunkhouse. I received an assurance that when I returned a suitable caravan would be at my disposal.

Come the season of '75, I found myself comfortably housed in a caravan which was situated amongst the trees together with numerous others carefully parked in this attractive site. Quickly Sussie had settled in and from that time on she took on her duty of guard with as good an effect as any sentry. She was a most friendly dog but no one must come into our territory uninvited, she was quite firm about that. However, once the visitor had made official entry then the welcome mat was put out, even though the same visitor would meet with a similar procedure on future calls.

The pupils who attended holiday courses stayed at the King's Head in King's Stanley but the midday lunch was provided at the club. I had breakfast also at the

club but joined the course at the King's Head for my evening dinner where the meals provided by Alice and George were excellent and there was always more on offer than one could eat. Alice and George were wonderful proprietors and were as popular with the local people as they became with the members of each course as the weeks went by. Poor George was not a well man but no complaint was ever heard to come from him. Alice was just a tower of strength.

Sussie was very fond of her evening beer and she became restless around 7.30 if the drink was not at paw. Mind you Sussie was moderate in all things, and although I would not get any rest until she had had her beer there was no way anyone could induce her to more than her usual half pint. From time to time there was a pupil who thought it would be interesting to get the dog drunk but it was a waste of time, Sussie was nobody's fool.

Now Alice of course, like everyone else, knew Sussie enjoyed her beer, limited though her consumption was, so it was quite normal for Alice to ask if the dog had had her drink and if the answer was in the negative then kind Alice would pass the drip tray to give to the dog. This was often a tricky moment for me because Sussie had a sense of taste not unlike a connoisseur where her beer was concerned, and so she would do no more than take a proprietary lap before turning away with contempt. Somehow I had to get the real stuff to her and dispose of the contents of the tray without being discovered by Alice, for there was no way I wished to offend that lovely person.

So Alice, I do not know if you will ever read this but I only wanted not to hurt your feelings. Come to think of it though Alice, you were not easily offended were you? Though you could have been if any of the plants wilted in the cocktail bar and you knew the reason why. You see it was not always easy to get out of the door unseen with the tray in my hand making my way to the toilet. Oh well, no offence meant Alice!

Now Jim Webster was the sole owner of a K6E single seat glider. He had had it for several years and had done a lot of successful flying in it. A new member had joined the club, who had been on a holiday course on a previous year and he took the bait at this introduction to gliding and became quite an exceptional pilot. Now he was spending the season flying the Auster tugging for me and Mike; David Hodsman was his name, and he persuaded Jim to sell him half a share in the K6E. The deal had gone through and David had owned his half share for not much more than a week when having landed from towing a glider, he stepped out of the cockpit looking rather pale. Quietly, very quietly for David was a quiet man, he was heard muttering and swearing as he walked off to the club house with his head slumped forward. On learning what it was that upset him it became quite understandable why he felt this way.

Jim had gone off on a cross-country flight several hours earlier in the day. He

was attempting an out and return but had failed to get back to Nympsfield and so had landed his glider in a field one mile short. He had not contacted us on radio so no one knew he was there until David had noticed him while returning from a tow. He saw that the K6E was almost halfway into the field and had seen Jim waving to him as he flew by. He had also seen the tailplane of the glider laying across the hedge over which, or THROUGH which Jim had passed. It seemed obvious to David that his glider was going to be under repair for quite some time.

The trailer for the K6E was taken to bring the glider back. David could not go himself, of course, because he was working with me and the course, but he naturally showed great interest when the trailer returned and the glider was again removed from it. To his bewilderment he could find no damage and was puzzled for Jim looked very crestfallen also. But Jim then burst into laughter and slapped David on the shoulder saying,

"That fooled you, didn't it? I just detached the tail and placed it on the hedge to give you a bit of a fright."

"You are a bloody fool," said David, but the look of relief on his face was plain for all to see.

Each year, the Western Regional Competition was held at Nympsfield, an event which lasted for ten days and as a result of this, the club was unable to run a holiday course during this period, which meant in turn that I had a most welcome break. I often felt that I would like to take part in the competition myself but it was not easy to lay one's hands on a glider with a suitably high performance. I had sometime since sold my share in the Skylark and anyway the machine was way down on performance for flying against the modern fibreglass ships which are now used. In any case the rest was always needed as continual course instructing is exhausting in the extreme. I was reaching the stage where my social life was non-existent because of not being able to keep out of my bed once dinner was over, and there were times when I was too tired to eat a dinner even though I was hungry and on those occasions I had settled into my bed for the night before the others were even at the table. Yes, due to the pressure of my work over the years the fun had been taken out of my flying.

For the benefit of those readers who are not involved in gliding I think it as well to mention briefly just a few details concerned with competition flying. Obviously for anyone to be eligible to enter a competition a certain minimum standard of flying ability must be present. Regional competitions are held in various parts of the country and Nympsfield is the venue for the Western Regional while Sutton Bank near Thirsk hosts the Northern, and so on. A pilot competitor does not necessarily have to be domiciled in any particular area in order to qualify. Indeed any one pilot may enter any one, or all of the Regional Competitions. Then a stage higher up the ladder one finds the National Competition and for a pilot to be eligible to enter this depends on how he fared in the Regional. Finally, at the top of the ladder are the World

Championships, and normally each country is represented by four of its top competition pilots. The Regional and the Nationals are held each year, while the World Championships are bi-annual.

Each morning of a competition day, a briefing is given to the pilots informing them of such things as time of takeoff, what the 'task' is with its start and finish lines, and turning points etc. The task is almost always a race and is usually, but not always, a race around two turning points which form a triangle with the start-finish line, or a straight out and return. Proof that the pilots have turned the turning points is provided by photographic evidence taken by himself. The distance of the race is decided by the Competition Organisers together with help from the Met-man. Depending on the weather conditions a race can be anything from 600 kilometres down to a mere 100 kilometres.

In the briefing room there is always an air of excitement whilst waiting for the wall maps to be uncovered so as to expose the markers upon them showing the day's task. It was always interesting for the spectator to witness the rapid fire take offs and to hear the pilots radio down to inform the officials that they were shortly to cross the starting line. Thus observed, the official radioed back to assure the competitor that he had been observed with a 'good start' and from that moment the clock was ticking for that individual pilot. No competitor was permitted to cross the start line above 3,000 feet. So to get full advantage the pilots usually climbed a little higher, conditions permitting, before diving down to 3,000 feet for the crossing. They would plan to be at the bottom of the shallow dive as the gliders were flying at the fastest permitted speed.

Many of the modern gliders, or hot ships, have provisions for carrying water ballast in their wings in order to make the all-up weight heavier. This proved to be an advantage, providing the lift in the thermals was not weak, as a glider which is heavy is able to achieve its best glide angle for its lift over drag performance at a faster speed than it can when the glider is light. In other words, for a glider to fly as far as is possible it must fly at an exact given speed. To fly slower or faster than that speed, the glider would not travel as far. However, the given speed is faster if the glider takes on ballast but the glide angle remains the same. Also if the pilot was to fly at say 20 mph faster than his best glide angle speed, he would of course achieve a lesser angle but if his glider is heavy then that angle will still be flatter than if it were light.

Once the last glider has crossed the start line everything seems rather quiet at the venue after all the previous activity, apart from the radio chatter from the competitors. There maybe the occasional report of someone landing out and this is followed by that glider's trailer being towed quietly from the field to make its rescue. Of course if the organisers had got it badly wrong when setting the task then gliders may be coming down to earth all over the place, but this sort of thing did not happen

very often. To the casual eavesdropper, much of the radio chatter meant very little as it often concerned information from the pilot to his ground crew indicating his progress and as he does not necessarily want his opposition to be informed, the information is in code.

However, things begin to wake up at the airfield as individual gliders radio the field that they are on their final glide for home. The length of such glides vary according to the relationship between the distance he is from the field and the height at which he called off the climb in the last thermal. To cross the finishing line with an excess of height or at a high speed is clear evidence that the pilot had wasted time by staying too long in his last thermal, but to call off his climb too soon would mean landing short of the finishing line with a very high loss of points for not completing the task. If one pilot was the fastest round the course but landed only one field short of the finishing line after flying a task of say 400 kilometres, his point loss would be so great that even the slowest competitor would have higher points providing he finished the course.

Sometimes pilots during their task may decide that the soaring conditions have deteriorated to such an extent that it would be to their advantage to dump the water so as to lighten their gliders, but usually they bring the water back with them. Having brought it back, however, it is not wise to land the glider with all that extra weight aboard, so shortly before the landing they would get rid of the ballast. Sometimes one would see a glider streaking in at the end of his final glide and immediately before landing pulling up to climb away, the pilot would then pull the plug and thereby change, for a short while, a lovely sunny day into a rainy one as gallons of water trail jet-like from the machine before turning into rain drops to fall on the spectators below.

On one occasion at Nympsfield when the final day of the competition had been completed and the competitors, their crews, the organisers and everyone in general had gathered on the lawn in front of the club house to witness the prize giving, a touch of extra entertainment came their way and one which was not in the programme.

Ralph Jones was a pilot who this day had landed out. This in itself was rather unusual for Ralph, for he was a pilot of outstanding ability and did, as often as not, show the rest of the field the way home. He is an ex-British champion and has won every regional competition at some time or other. In fact during one season he actually won the national and every Regional held that year in a truly grand show, and is, to the best of my knowledge, the only man to have done so. Well that's as maybe but on this final day he had not got back and so was obliged to land out.

It had been a good day. We now had a beautiful evening, as the happy and relaxed competitors and crews drank their beers or whatever, as they stood around waiting for the proceedings to begin. Then overhead an aeroplane was heard and

looking up we saw it was one of the tugs and on the end of the rope behind it was Ralph's Nimbus. A small ripple and an ironic cheer came forth from the gathering, but soon eyes were diverted and everyone continued with their idle chatter.

The combination had flown off and was forgotten by most before someone pointed to the tug as he dropped down from over the trees to fly low over the ground and looked set to do a 'beat up'. Then there was a call of, "Look, the Nimbus!" and sure enough the glider came over the trees following close behind the tug as if still on tow, except that it was about one wingspan offset to one side. The pair continued their fast flight low over the field, coming ever closer to the gathering outside the clubhouse, which is situated roughly two thirds of the way down the strip.

Then it happened. Just as the pair were about to fly past the clubhouse, the glider actually overtook the tug aircraft and flew off, leaving him far behind. A beautiful piece of showmanship, which evoked a cheer from all present. The tug, having passed the boundary, turned and came in for landing. The Nimbus though, with the kinetic energy it had stored, together with its fabulous performance, simply flew on and disappeared before returning minutes later to settle down on the grass opposite the babbling crowd. Maybe it had not been Ralph's day, but he had stolen the show.

During the Western Regional competitions of another year I decided to take advantage of my week off duty and to get away from the gliding scene completely. Sussie and I went off only to return on the ninth day. The tenth day being the final day of the comps. My good friend, David Wales, was a participant with the SHK this year and I was naturally interested to see how he was faring.

"How are you making out, Dave?" I asked on finding him.

"Bloody awful," he replied, but not unhappily.

"What's your position then?"

"Last. Bottom of the list."

"Last! Come off it Dave, pull the other one. Now, what is your position?"

"I've told you. Bloody last," I saw that he was serious.

"Hell, Dave, what's gone wrong? You may not be the World Champion but I know you can do better than that. A lot better."

"Well, let's say its just not been my week. Here, what are you going to drink?"

"Last," I said, "I can't really believe this. You will do a lot better tomorrow."

"No, I will not."

"Of course you will, and you know you can do well."

"I tell you, I will not," replied my friend.

"Hell, that's not the attitude to take, you know damn well you can improve on that. There is only one way you can go anyhow and that's up," I insisted.

"I will not do any better, Dave, and I'll tell you why, because I'm not flying tomorrow - you are!"

"Are you serious?" I asked.

"Yes, perfectly serious."

I felt a tingle of excitement run through me. I felt rested after my week away and I would love to compete, and while the SHK was nothing like as good as many of the glass ships, it was probably the highest performing wooden glider ever made and certainly way ahead of anything I had flown. I only wished I had had time to have got really familiar with the machine so as to get the very best out of it.

As was usual on the last day of the competition the task was kept fairly short so as to allow people to make for their homes during the evening should they so wish to. The task was therefore an out and return of rather less than 200 kilometres with a turning point of a large industrial pond. As may be imagined I was very keen to have a go at this day, but I knew from bitter experience that my weakest point lay in navigation, or to be more precise where gliders are concerned, map reading. If one was going to do any good at all in a race then one simply could not afford spending time trying to find oneself. Before takeoff I studied the map diligently within a large arc from the turning point.

As always there was a rapid fire take off, with each of the five tugs climbing with their charge to the dropping zone at 2,000 feet before diving back to base to have another glider quickly attached to the tow rope. Soon the area around the zone was packed with gliders like bees around a honey pot and for a time no pilots seemed eager to leave. The conditions were pretty good so that soon we were able to look down on the last of the gliders to be launched from the height to which we had climbed as they were released from the tugs.

At last, after what had seemed to be almost a reluctance to go, first one and then another of the flock dived for the start line and the radios came alive as the observer below confirmed starts. I decided to hang on a bit longer however, thinking it may be a good idea to let the 'field' string itself out on track a little so that they may be used as markers should my map reading let me down. Now the time had come, I decided, and lowered the nose of the SHK and as we passed a certain spot over the ground, I called, "Gate!" to inform the observer that we were on our way to the line. As the speed increased so did the sound of the airflow but the canopy of the glider fitted so snugly that the volume rose only slightly and even as we shot over the start line at VNE the glider was still remarkably quiet compared to the row at VNE which came from most of the gliders I had flown.

For the short time I had been flying in the dropping zone I had tried to get the feel of this glider, I was aware that I was not likely to get the best out of it until we had spend a good many hours together. However, I was feeling pleased with our progress and I knew we were making good time. We were one hour into the task and best of all I knew exactly where we were. "Please, God, let it remain thus!" Eventually to my great joy I saw the turning point ahead and hardly had to deviate at all in order to get round it.

At maybe 15 kilometres into the return journey I saw a stubble fire ahead and my word what a fire it was! Stubble fires can be wonderful thermal producers. Usually there would have been five or six fires each burning parallel to each other on the lines that had been made when the field was ploughed. The fires eat slowly along these lines until they peter out on reaching the other end of the field, whereupon another group would be lit by the farmer. In this manner the farmer had things under control.

To fly into and circle the hot air created by a stubble fire usually meant strong but turbulent lift. One could climb thousands of feet at 600, 700, and even 1,000 and more feet per minute. But treachery could lay therein as the line of a fire in the distance could induce a glider pilot to glide down to a lower height than he normally would, confident in his belief that good lift was at hand, but on arrival the air could be as a damp squib having none of the usual bits of straw being taken aloft for thousands of feet. Instead of good lift, the air would simply become turbulent with no definite core of lift. Then the pilot would find himself too low to search for more lift and would have to look smart about making a landing.

Sometimes a stubble fire would suddenly grow so rapidly that the whole thing would become out of control and the farmer would literally have to run for his life. Ahead of me, just such an event had occurred. Masses of heavy smoke was climbing to a height I could not estimate with any sort of accuracy. Half of the large field was still ablaze. As it would not be long before I would be wanting some lift I decided to fly straight into the dense column of smoke. Knowing it would be lively in there I pulled my straps tighter but when I had got quite close I found the air about me still very smooth. In fact I was in the smoothest air of the flight to date. Now the wall of smoke was really close and I glanced upwards to see it reaching vertical for thousands of feet with practically no wind-shear or drift present. It was like one great column reaching from earth to the heavens.

We were all but in now and still the air was smooth, then quite suddenly visibility was lost and replaced by a brownie grey mass and with it the strong smell of smoke. I was able to notice a bit of burning field shoot up past the nose of the SHK before all hell was let loose. The glider simply was not under control as I was pressed down hard in my seat followed a moment later with the straps trying to cut into my thinly clad shoulders. The apple which had been placed between my legs smashed hard against the canopy. My camera flew from its fitting, then like magic, the sky was clear. The air became smooth as I flew on for a moment.

I shook myself, turned and looked at the monster. "You can't do that to me," I thought, "You are not going to beat me." I flew back towards the brute, determined this time to stay with it. We were all but there, about to plunge in once more, but I banked steeply away. I had chickened out... so far as I recall it was the only time I had ever chickened out of anything. I flew off feeling ashamed and tried hard to

convince myself that my move was simply good airmanship.

The navigation remained on the ball and my progress continued to be good. I was becoming fond of the SHK. During the flight I had seen two gliders down so they at least had been eliminated from the forty-odd opposition. Maybe there were more down which I had not seen. It is really quite amazing how few gliders one sees once the start line is left behind. It is at the turning points they are most likely to be in evidence as obviously all that remain airborne must sooner or later fly in that sector, but even there you may only see two or three or even none. Anyway, we were nearly home with Cheltenham over to my right but hardly seen down there in the valley. The ground directly below me was about 800 feet and I was about 1,000 feet above that. We had enjoyed a long glide after a good climb but I should have taken more lift before now, however the stuff seemed to be getting elusive. Then we were saved by the SHK going low over Andoversford as we picked up a thermal which worked well once it was centred.

The map showed me that Nympsfield was 15 miles away and the ground level there was more or less the same as that which I was over now. I had no tail wind component but the wind was very light anyway. Looking along my wings I could see the small flies swatted on the leading edge with which they had come into contact while sharing the same thermal. The difference was that I had been climbing the thermals under control whereas the flies had not. They had not even chosen to be in them in the first place. When calculating for a final glide such things as dead flies on the glider's wings should be taken into consideration because of the spoilage they cause to the laminar airflow, resulting in a small increase of the drag factor. However, such consideration as that could be left to the competition fanatics, that sort of stuff is far too complicated for the likes of me.

At 2,800 feet above ground level we were climbing well but I decided we could make it back from there. The temperature was strong to remain in the good lift and to take out insurance with more height, but time was of the essence. We rolled out of the bank and pointed towards Nympsfield. We seemed to be gliding out for an age and still nothing was ahead which I could definitely identify. On the right was the valley of Gloucester and the disused aerodrome of Brockworth somewhere down there, but straight ahead there seemed to be no definite pin-point. Of course Stroud was out of view nestling at the bottom where the hill dropped down ahead of me. But then beyond that valley straight ahead the ground soon climbed back up again to where just beyond should be Nympsfield, but still I could not make the place out. We seemed to be getting very low so that I badly wanted to get the field in view and see where it was placed in my canopy; for once I got it placed there I would know if we were going to make it or not off this glide, providing that is, I kept the glider's speed steady and therefore its altitude constant. If, while flying in such a manner Nympsfield, now the aiming point on the canopy, would do one of three things. It

might start to slide down the canopy as we drew closer to it which would tell me that we were going to reach the airfield with height to spare, in which case we would trade off height for more speed. Or, on the other hand, the aiming point might creep up the canopy indicating that we would be flying into the ground before reaching Nympsfield, though we might be able to overcome this by reducing speed if the 'miss' margin was short. But if when flying at the best glide angle the aiming point continued to climb up the canopy, then that was the bitter pill, we would have failed. But what we wanted was ideally the option where the aiming point simply remained stationary.

Now I was getting really anxious for I simply could not make out the area I needed so badly to identify, but then suddenly, as though it had just been before my eyes, I had got it. I was amazed at the flatness of the angle it presented and I felt sure there was no way we were going to reach the field, but I steeled myself for just a few more moments not to slow down and was rewarded by the most unbelievable stationary picture ahead. A fixed aiming point with a constant speed.

Some time ago I had called up on the radio stating, "Coffee Pot, this is Birdseed. Final glide." 'Coffee Pot' was the code name I had chosen for my ground crew in remembrance of my coffee bar days. Naturally with a name like Millett my air station had to be birdseed.

Now the radio spoke again, "Birdseed, this is Coffee Pot. How are you doing?"

"Just fine, Coffee Pot, just fine. It will be a straight in approach. Out."

I saw the fencing coming up and I had already reduced speed. This was not going to be a fast pull up and round again before the landing for I had achieved an optimum with nothing in hand to spare. Then, just as I crossed the fence an urgent radio noise filled the cockpit. "Wheel, Birdseed, wheel!" My hand flashed across the wheel-lever and I heard the distinctive clunk as the wheel locked down. The next second we were rolling over the grass.

So much for the pre-landing checks! Thousands of times I had made my pupils carry them out... now this.

Finally, when all time results were completed, I discovered that I had been placed fourth for the day, and was overjoyed. Ralph Jones took first place and it had been his warning I had heard about the wheel so I sought him out to offer my thanks. It turned out that my wild adventure with the stubble fire had not gone by unnoticed. For Ralph had also entered the column of smoke.

"My God, Dave, what turbulence! I went into the thing and almost at once I had no real control and was shot upwards. I can tell you that I have never known its equal, not even in the worst cumulo-nimbus thunderclouds. We somehow found ourselves in clear air again, and then on looking down I saw the SHK making for it. I laughed to myself thinking, 'Oh boy, is he in for a shock!' then I saw you enter. I remember thinking at the time that my workmanship would be put to the test. Did

you know that the SHK once had a crash and we repaired it? Anyway, since I was at an angle to the cloud, I was able to see you come out again. Then I could hardly believe it when I saw the SHK turn and fly back for it. I stopped laughing at that and thought, 'Hell, he's a brave bugger - or a fool!'"

"I chickened out," I cut in.

"So I noticed," he said.

Then came the disappointing news that the day was to be declared void. It seemed that some of the competitors had photographed the wrong 'lake' for the turning point. Had only one or two pilots made this mistake then they would simply have been disqualified, but it turned out that the proportion of the field photographing the wrong point was so great as to show an ambiguity in the choosing of such a turning point by the competition officials. I was, of course, disappointed, but in one way I did not mind, since the distance of the true and false turning points were identical, so I did at least feel I had earned my fourth position. The edition of the magazine, 'Sailplane and Gliding', which followed the competition gave the final overall results of the ten day competition and there in bottom place for all to see was Wales/Millett. I had not expected to see my name mentioned, but now my pride was badly hurt. I know that pride is not one of the better qualities of man, but nature being what it is I did rather feel there was no justice.

As it turned out I was to fly the SHK again at a later date. Dave, as generous as ever, on seeing me moping about during my day off said, "Why don't you take the SHK and push off somewhere?" He knew that my job kept all my flying local and that at times I longed to fly off on my own.

"Oh, I would like that a lot Dave, but the conditions are none too hot. What if I had to land out somewhere?"

"Not to worry. Mike and I will come and pick you up. So go on Dave climb in it, its already rigged."

I took a tow, released and pushed off. It had been a struggle from releasing from the tug to landing a couple of hours later. I had been in radio contact with 'Coffee Pot', so that the trailer was already well away from Nympsfield in anticipation for a landing out. It was making its way in fact to a more or less central position of the triangle I was trying to fly. This favourable central position would allow the retrieve crew to travel straight to the landing field should the glider be forced down. Sure enough in due course 'Birdseed' had to call 'Coffee Pot' to give the position of an inevitable landing.

After placing the parachute on the wing tip to help secure it I sat down and waited. It seemed to me that it was taking them a long time to reach me when one considered the fairly short distance they had to travel. but eventually turn up they did.

"What kept you?" I asked, but only received a rather silly smile from each of them.

The car and trailer were left on the road by the gate and the three of us dragged the SHK over to it. On reaching the gate Mike said, "Let's have a beer before we de-rig the damn thing."

"There is not a pub for miles around," I said.

"Who needs a pub," said Mike lifting the boot of Dave's car. Now the car had a big boot, and it needed to be to accept the contents which befell my eyes. I saw crates of bottled beer there, but better still a keg lay there in the middle.

"Where on earth have you got this from?" I asked. Then I got the story.

Now first I should explain that I had never in my life come across two people who enjoyed their beer more than Dave and Mike. They had their favourite brewery and both of them considered that there was no beer anywhere to compare with the produce of that brewery. It is easy to understand therefore their delight when they came across that same brewery when making their retrieve for me. Dave's foot had gone down on the brake and both had stared in homage at the building until finally Mike had said, "Why not go in and have a sniff around the place?" Dave's reply was to leap from the driver's seat and stride out purposefully towards the entrance.

Since both men had been at the gliding club it was natural that they were dressed in the usual tatty gliding clothes, and on finding the manager they received a disdainful look of disapproval when they stated that they would like to be shown the process of production. Begrudgingly though, the manager agreed. My friends had found their heaven.

After the tour of the factory with the offhanded manner of the manager, Dave asked if they could buy a crate or two to take away with them, and perhaps even a keg!

"Your boot won't be big enough," commented the manager.

"I think it will," replied Dave. "We will find a way."

"Let's see your money," he said with a superior air.

"Let's get it in the car then I'll write you a cheque."

"It will be cash or nothing," said the manager sharply.

"OK have it your way," said Dave.

When they went out to the car the manager's attitude suddenly became effusive, for what he beheld was a Bentley. With the beer aboard Dave made to pay the man but holding up his hand, he said, "No, no Sir. Just pay it anytime at one of our houses. It will be quite alright."

We all took a poor view of that individual.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

INCIDENTS

My pupil and I parked the two seater and together with the rest of the course walked over to the club house for the tea break we had for fifteen minutes each afternoon at four o'clock. The course had been launching by aerotows, but there were a few club members who were using the winch for their tows. Amongst the members were Jim Webster and his wife, Barbara. For some reason I glanced over my shoulder at the launch point just in time to see the single seater K6E leap off the ground in a very high nose up attitude. This is a most dangerous manoeuvre as the winch has not yet had time to give the glider a safe flying speed. Should the cable break at that point, the glider could be too close to the stall and with its nose up high, the pilot would have no chance to fly the machine 'over the top' before the stall took over. The results could be disastrous.

I left my colleagues to walk back to the launch point in order to ascertain who was the pilot of the K6E. I knew it could hardly be Jim, but whoever it was would be put back on the two seater for a spell. As I walked I naturally continued to watch the launching glider and noted the climb to be on the steep side during the whole launch; even at the top, a position where the climb tends to flatten out shortly before the release of the cable. Then I realised the pilot had 'hung up.' The cable was not parting company with the glider. I was not the only one to notice this for the winch driver wasted little time in guillotining the cable free from the winch. Now the K6E at over 1,000 feet was trailing all the cable down to the ground. Then the cable a moment later fouled a single high tension wire running along side the road. The glider entered a spin. At first it appeared it would continue spinning until hitting the ground, but the spin stopped just in time to allow the pilot to land on the pullout straight ahead.

I raced over to where it had landed and found Barbara, Jim's wife sitting in the cockpit. She was surprisingly calm, and soon Jim was on the scene, breathless after racing over despite his callipered leg, a legacy from another 'spin in' while serving as a navigator in a Wellington during the war.

Yes, Barbara did go back onto the two seater, but only to check that her confidence had not been shaken. For she had come out of the incident with flying colours. The cause of the hang up had been due to the glider having been jerked forward at the start of the takeoff run which had resulted in the glider over-running the cable which then tousled itself around the wheel of the K6E. The pilot had been powerless to release the cable either during takeoff or at anytime during the launch. The cable catching itself on the high tension wire after it had been cut free from the winch had caused a spin to start and it was only when much of the weight of the launch cable was resting on the ground as the glider spun lower that Barbara was able to achieve recovery action, and just in time at that.

Barbara's check flight had been no problem to her and she continued to fly happily on. That was until a few years later before tragedy struck, and it was for real this time. The event took place after I had left Nympsfield and had returned to my home town of Lancaster. I was greatly saddened when I heard of Jim's demise over the grapevine. Poor Jim had spun in again but this time it was more than a leg he lost, it was his life. It happened during one of the Western Regional competitions. An eye witness said he had seen a glider flying round and round very low down near a village. He described how the bank had gone steeper and then the nose dropped and it dived into the ground.

I was incredulous when I heard this for I knew Jim to be very experienced and a sound pilot. That he was a press on type there was no question and he was also renowned for his ability to scratch. But to think that Jim of all people was capable of spinning off a turn seemed almost unbelievable.

Many had been the times when Jim Webster had lent me a hand instructing as he knew how fatiguing the job was and how long I had been at it. In recent years I had been getting very tired indeed. Yes, Jim had always been a good friend and I recall an occasion when this very friendship caused a greater embarrassment. You see, one weekend I saw a pilot takeoff behind the tug aircraft in his glass ship with his airbrakes still open. The man had been sloppy with his pre-takeoff cockpit drill, the final part of which is to check that the brakes are closed and locked. I watched the combination flying down the field heading for the far boundary expecting the pilot to realise his error and to get the brakes closed. He did not. Since the combination was taking off into a stiff breeze, the two machines cleared the boundary safely despite the increased drag of the open brakes. However the bad airmanship of the glider pilot had been compounded, so some action had to follow. I therefore wrote in the offending pilot's logbook that he had to complete twelve flights in a two seater before returning to his glass ship. I pointed out that this was for disciplinary purposes only, not further training, as he had just been dangerously careless. I told him I did not mind how quickly he completed the twelve flights and if he was able to use the privately owned two seater so as to avoid the long waiting time for the club's busy trainers that was OK by me. After such a dint to his pride it was most unlikely that he would make a similar error again, and that would be to the relief of any tug pilot.

It was only one week after the brakes open event that I noticed the DG 100 taking off with its air brakes open. Jim had replaced his K6E with the DG 100 and he was at the controls. "I don't believe it," I said to myself and watched as the tug and glider proceeded down the field but shortly after becoming airborne Jim was onto it and the air brakes closed suddenly and the rate of climb visibly increased.

After this flight Jim came over to me with a sheepish grin and muttered something that sounded like, "Oh, bloody hell!"

"Let's have your log book Jim. I can't do otherwise, can I? We must not have one law for one and another law for another," I said sharply.

"Quite right Dave, quite right," and off he went for his book.

"Twelve in a two seater Jim, but listen, why don't you get together with the other guy and do them together? If you can use the private Bocian you will kill two birds with one stone. Is that a bad choice of words, do you think?" I asked. Poor Jim, I have happy memories of him.

Some pupils get very frustrated when they are trying hard to make the glider respond to their hands and feet on the controls, only to become aware that there is a pressure feed through other than their own. This is caused by the instructor not being able to leave the controls alone and let his pupil get on with the job. It is one thing for an instructor to make a demonstration from time to time, in fact it is necessary and it should be made quite plain to the pupil that such a demonstration is about to take place. However it is quite another matter when the instructor continually fiddles about with the controls when the pupil is supposed to be doing the flying himself. The pupil is usually quite aware of this and , as I have said, he finds it most disturbing and off-putting.

It came therefore as something of a surprise to me when I was asked, first by one pupil and then shortly after by another one, if I had my feet on the rudder pedals. In both cases they were turning to the left at the time and I had pointed out to the pupils that the turn was badly out of balance and that they should press down with their left foot to rectify the fault. After a moment, and there being no response in the badly executed turn, I said, "Go on press down with your left foot but first remove your right foot from the other pedal so that you will get no resistance from that." For it was a common fault for a pupil to be pressing down on both feet without him being aware of the fact. This is due to nervous tension, rather than keeping his feet relaxed. But even after I had been assured that the pupil's right foot was off the pedal the left pedal still did not depress because of the resistance the pupil still felt and it was then that they asked if my feet were on the pedals.

The glider which we were flying was a Bocian, a type I had not flown before coming to Nympsfield. It occurred to me that maybe the counterbalance of the rudder could be somewhat inadequate. So I took control from the pupil and put the glider into a side slip so that the airflow was now striking the fin and rudder from one side and then after a moment I applied the rudder from its extreme deflection to bring it back into a balanced position for the turn. I discovered from this that it was necessary to push much harder than with other machines I had flown as the resistance form the side flow of air was strong. Both the pupils in this case, rather than having tension pressure on both feet, had in fact been resting their feet gently on the pedals during level flight, and rightly so. However when they went into their turns, moving the stick to the left, they had delayed a moment before applying the rudder. Then as the

glider began to slip into the turn the airflow had whipped the rudder over to the right, and the amount of pressure on the foot now required to bring the rudder back over again was quite sufficient to lead the pupil into believing my feet were resisting his own.

Now the rear cockpit of the Bocian, which is where the instructor sits, is very spacious for a glider, so it was not difficult for me to bring my knees towards my chest and then lift my feet up and rest them on a support at either side and slightly behind the pupil's head. After this I received no more suggestions that my feet were riding the rudders and if the rudder 'flipped' the pupil pushed harder.

One week during my time at Nympsfield I was sick and unable to fly. I left the club and for those days I was feeling so rotten that I needed the comfort of my home in Lancaster. Fortunately I soon recovered and was back with the club on the following Sunday ready to begin work again the next day. That evening I went down to the King's Head for my dinner and to meet my course members for the coming week. After dinner I popped into the bar to say hello to Alice and of course to let Sussie have her usual half of bitter.

While in the bar a member of the club who had spent a few days on the airfield during my absence came over and said, "Have you heard yet about how Tim nearly bought it last week?"

"What do you mean, 'Nearly bought it?'" I asked. Tim was the instructor who had taken over for me while I had been in Lancaster.

"Well, he was being launched by winch and was using the Blanik Glider. On one flight it took off too quickly, and at once the machine went into a very steep climb. I was standing watching and I naturally expected to see the nose lower to a safe attitude. After all the glider had only just left the ground but instead of the nose lowering it actually got steeper. In no time it was almost pointing straight up to the sky with the pupil frozen on the controls. I shut my eyes waiting for the cable to break. I mean it just had to and the winch driver knew jolly well that if he took off power just then, the glider would be stalled, so he just prayed that the cable wouldn't break. But it did of course and the glider could not have been more than 100 feet or so up. I just waited for the crash, and then before my very eyes the Blanik did a beautiful stall turn and literally touched down from the pull out, down wind. God, I've never seen anything like it! It was a close one I can tell you."

"What did Tim have to say about it?" I asked.

"Oh, he just climbed out and said in that voice of his - you know what I mean! - 'I really MUST have a cup of coffee.' And at that he strode over to the club house without saying another word.

"Was the cable on the hook OK?" I asked.

"Oh yes, it was nothing like that. It seemed that when Tim told him to lower the nose the pupil did the opposite. So Tim pushed forward on the stick himself and at

the same time repeated, 'Lower the nose,' that time with a louder tone, and you know how loud his voice is normally. Anyway Tim pushed forward on the stick but nothing happened because the pupil was pulling back even harder. I'll tell you Dave, old Tim was really on the ball with that stall turn."

Then he said, "Now I have some more news for you."

"Yes, what's that?"

"That same pupil is still here, he is staying on for a second week. Have fun," he said.

"Charming," I said. "Point him out to me when he comes into the bar."

"Oh, you will have no difficulty identifying him, just listen for his accent. He is an American."

When the American's turn came to fly with me I did not let on that I knew he had already spent one week with us. I simply asked, "Have you done any flying before now?

"Yes," he responded. "I was here on last week's course."

"That's fine," I said. "Well I will takeoff and do the launch and then I will hand the aeroplane over to you after we release from the tug, and see what you have learnt. In the meantime just keep your feet and hands off the controls. If you don't know what to do with your hands, just hold your shoulder straps, it will make you feel secure."

OK, let's go," was his reply. He didn't sound nervous to me.

Having cast off from the tug, I told the man, "Take hold of the stick lightly with your right hand as you have been taught and rest your feet gently on the rudder pedals and we shall see what you have learnt, eh? For starters' just fly straight and level by keeping the horizon steady across your canopy." After a minute or so of this I said, "That's fine. Now give me a turn to the right, but first, what must you do?"

"Check that the sky is clear of other gliders in the directions of the turn."

"Full marks. Now carry on."

I had him doing a few turns this way and that. Then I asked him to increase his speed by twenty knots in level flight and keep to it. This he did, more or less. His flying naturally had a long way to go but he was reasonable for what he had done up to date and there certainly did not appear to be any undue tension. I let him try the circuit prior to landing which he managed with some verbal prompting but he needed quite a lot of help on the approach and landing.

"That was great," I said, as the glider's wing tip settled on the ground. "You learnt something last week all right." As he walked away from the aircraft I puzzled about his incident with Tim. There seemed to be nothing untoward with this man. I wished I had been able to have had a chat with Tim, but I had been unable to contact him. The next day the American asked if it would be OK to take his camera up with him. I said yes he could do so if he wished, but to make sure that it was secure with

a strap around his neck.

After he had cast off from the tow he asked if I would take control and put the glider into a spin over the airfield as he would like to take his pictures then. His camera was quite small and I knew he could hold it with one hand only, and although this man had as yet given no indication whatsoever that he may freeze, I did of course still have in mind his hairy incident with Tim.

"Did you do any last week?" I enquired.

"No, I haven't done any spinning yet but I would like to see what its effects are on a photo if you don't mind," he drawled.

"I don't mind in the least but since your camera is for still photography the spin will have no effect on the picture you take. Still, if that's what you want, well OK, we will do a spin." Nevertheless I thought I'd like to see where he had his hands while doing it, so I said, "You will find that the camera will seem to feel heavier when we spin, so I want you to place it in position to your eye now before we start and to leave it there until we have completed spinning. I must be able to see that you are holding the camera with both your hands. Should I see you remove the camera or even lower only one hand, then I shall stop the spin at once. Have you got that, Bud?"

"Got it."

"OK then, we will just do a clearing turn first and then off we'll go."

I spun the Bocian to the left and at the same time watched the guy in front for any reaction but his hands stayed with his camera as he clicked away. "Gee, this is great," he said. I recovered from the spin saying, "Did you get what you wanted?"

"Yep, I sure did. Say that was great. Hell of a feeling isn't it, man? Now how about one the other way?"

"Yes, we will do that if you wish but first let's find a thermal to regain some more height."

We spun to the right and he was equally delighted. To the right this particular Bocian had a more radial spin and it entered with more vigour than it did to its left. This was due to the glider having a slight, but unintentional built-in twist in one of its wings so that when she went she really let rip. Anyway, the outcome of all this satisfied me completely that there was nothing wrong with this pupil, and I now felt sure that there had to be some other explanation for the pupil's supposed behaviour the previous week. Although I did not bring up the subject with either Tim or the pupil, I think I know what had probably happened. Some instructors talk of applying forward or backward pressure on the stick when they require the pupil to ease it forward or backward. So, I think it is quite probable that when Tim noticed the Blanik' nose was becoming too high immediately after takeoff he would have said to the pupil something like, "Remove the back pressure." The pupil may well have only heard the word, 'backpressure', and as a result applied more. Of course with such

a dangerous nose high attitude and at such a low height Tim will have reacted at once and at the same time repeating, with a raised voice to match the urgency, "Remove the Backpressure." The situation thus culminating in Tim pushing forward on his stick and the pupil pulling back hard on his stick. If that is what happened, the pupil won! Anyway Tim's smart application of the rudder when the cable broke saved the day... just, it seems.

During a Saturday afternoon the phone rang and it was for me.

"Hello," I said. The caller on the other end of the line turned out to be one of the Enstone crowd. He had called to invite Mike and myself over to their place for the night as they were laying on a party. He suggested that we took with us sleeping bags or something and returned to Nympsfield on Sunday. I said we would be along.

Mike and I felt it would be much more pleasant if we were able to do the journey by air rather than taking extra time by road, so we asked the Chairman if we may take the Auster, and he agreed. The party, of course, was nothing exceptional. It was just the jolly companionship of a nice bunch of people with good fellowship all round. Rather less conventional was the role Sussie played. I felt that I had to take her along with us as most everyone who would be at the party knew Sussie well as she had been a great favourite during the Bickmarsh days and most of the people at Enstone this evening were at Bickmarsh during my twelve months at that club. The thing was, however, that Susssie had not flown before. The fact that she had not done was certainly no fault of her own as in the past she had shown much interest in gliders and had obviously wanted to climb in with me. She had long since learnt however that I did not approve and had to be content with simply running up to greet me when I landed.

With Sussie walking at heel Mike and I made our way up the field to where the Auster had been left parked. I had a bag in my hand which contained dog biscuits and tinned meat as I intended to see that my friend would have her dinner at her usual time which would be after the flight. Mike opened the door of the aeroplane and I told Sussie to get in. You could almost see amazement register on the animal's face as she stood there looking in disbelief. "Get in," I repeated. Her tail suddenly wagged back and forth and she leapt up at the open door but not making it she slipped down again. The undercarriage leg of the Auster partly blocked her path making the high leap difficult so I got hold of her, lifted and pushed her in. The rear seats had been removed so there was plenty of room for her on the floor where she now stood with tail still wagging and was obviously delighted with the prospect of becoming airborne.

I said to Mike, "You fly, I'll watch the dog." The Auster is a noisy aeroplane, there being no sound insulation to speak of so I wondered how the dog would react to the din. Mike started the machine and did the engine checks. Sussie just stood there with tail still wagging. There was no adverse reaction at all. Mike released the

brakes and the Auster bumped and rocked its way over the grass field with frequent changes in engine note as Mike gunned the throttle and still the dog was happy.

We took off, climbed, and as we were leaving Nympsfield Mike banked the Auster to get onto course for Enstone. At that Sussie fell arse over tit. Whilst seated in the front seat of a car Sussie would not be unseated, no matter how sharp a corner might be. She simply leant into the bend as though she was a motorcyclist and remained firmly seated. She countered the centrifugal force which tried to throw her to the side of the car. Consequently when the aircraft turned she behaved as though she was still in a car and leant into the turn and as a result got a surprise. I could not explain to her that the small amount of 'G' passed straight down through the floor and at right angles to it and therefore she must not lean one way or the other. The incident was none the less quite amusing so that when the dog regained he posture and the Auster was again flying straight and I level I unsportingly asked Mike to give the dog another bank. This he did and we had a repeat performance. Sussie showed no sign of distress but it did seem as though she was somewhat puzzled. However, after Mike had completed a few more banks the dog got it sorted out and after that a gentle or steep turn was all the same to her. She really was very bright.

The flight to Enstone seemed to be a very interesting event for Sussie. Each time I turned to check that she was getting on all right, I found her taking an interest in the outside world as she spent her time gazing through the window where she seemed to be taking in the fields of the countryside with fascination from her new found position aloft. The flight from start to finish appeared to have been a great satisfaction for her.

It was good to be back amongst some of the friends from the Bickmarsh days, and not only was I happy to spend a few hours in their company but it was also very obvious that my dog remembered those people from a previous place and the welcome she extended to many was rather touching. The night passed pleasantly enough and, after a few hours snatched sleep in the clubhouse, we rounded off our visit with a fry up of egg, bacon and beans. With Mike once more at the controls, the Auster roared off down the runway before sweeping around the aerodrome and lining up for a beat-up on the one-time control tower which now served as the club' clubhouse.

With engine roaring hard, Mike pulled hard up over the building, seemingly climbing the walls in a flash as we reached skywards. At that moment I turned with difficulty in my seat against the 'G' to see good old Sussie sat square on with rigid front legs and making a valiant effort to prevent her head sinking down into her chest and with eyes still wide open. We set course at 2,000 feet and Sussie again looked down at the fields below but after a moment she lay on the floor in her slightly curled position and giving me a final glance as if to say, "Oh, I've seen it all before," she dropped off to sleep for the rest of the flight back to Nympsfield.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

NYMPSFIELD'S NORTHERLIES

The takeoff run and initial climb out in the heavy Bocian was always a little on the hairy side should the wind be very light and the tug aircraft be the Auster. There was much less of a problem if the heavy glider was being pulled by the Super Cub or of course if we were taking off into a stiff breeze. I have known times, particularly if there was a cross-wind, when the Auster has only just cleared the trees on the west boundary and on the very odd occasion I have put the Bocian into a slight dive so as to take all the tension off the tow rope in order to prevent the Auster's wheels from sweeping through the tree tops. The timing of this was a bit important because to have removed the pull on the rope just a little too soon could mean it would have tightened up again and not have helped matters at all. With proper timing I could use my momentum to climb those few feet over the tree tops as the tug had reached the other side. By the time the slack had been removed from the rope I had the Bocian nose slightly down again preventing any sudden jerk on the tug.

Although I had completed thousands of aerotows I had never had a rope break on me. Not even though some pupils caused a lot of jerking during their aerotow training. Sooner or later however, the time had to arrive when the tow did break and sure enough Murphy's Law saw to it that it should take place not at the best of times. It happened after the westerly takeoff at Nympsfield and just as we passed low over the trees. There was therefore no alternative but to glide down into the valley as the day was not producing hill lift and there was no question of turning back for the airfield. I quickly found the field I would land in which was not by any standards large. We were far too low to be able to range over a large area, and the better fields which were reachable had cables strewn across them. This part of the valley was ripe with pylons and their cables shooting off in all directions.

There was no question of planning a normal circuit of the chosen field and in fact the way for me to get into it was to turn and fly towards the hill which had turned off to the left. This meant that I had to almost turn my back on the chosen field before I could make a U turn for the approach. Since we were now well below the top of the hill but flying almost directly at it I sensed the pupil's apprehension and I assured him he need not be worried. Shortly before we reached the hillside I turned away from it to make a low flat approach for the field. In order not to overshoot into the far hedge it would be essential to pass over the approaching boundary hedge with only inches of clearance and for the speed not to be high. A side slip of about three seconds duration immediately prior to crossing the hedge made things just about right, since we stopped rolling twenty feet from the far boundary.

That was only the second time in my career that I had landed out unintentionally unless I had left for a cross-country flight. It had been on Monday that the rope had

broken. On the Wednesday of the same week we were taking off towards the east with a strong southerly wind blowing. The pupil in the front seat had already done a fair amount of his training at his home club but had not yet soloed, though he was getting close to doing so. The regular tug-pilot working with me on the course training had just handed over the tug to another pilot for a spell. This new pilot now flying the tug was not also a glider pilot which is never a good thing since non glider pilots rarely have the same ability of reading the air and are in a habit of aiming at the 2,000 feet mark, when the glider must release, in an area of sky which has sinking air. Albeit unintentionally.

Very shortly after becoming airborne the tug turned to the left which took the combination over the lee of the north facing hill so that we flew through the strongly descending air, or curl-over. A thing a glider/power tug-pilot would never have done at such an altitude. Although the crosswind takeoff was rough I instructed that the pupil had to handle the launch himself. As we flew away form the lee side of the hill I told the pupil not to feel too concerned that we were sinking instead of climbing regardless of the tug using full power. "As we get further into the valley we will pass through and ahead of the curl-over," I said, "and then we will climb normally."

However, even when well away from the hill we still did not climb and it was at this point that the pupil got much too low behind the tug so that I said, "I have control," to enable me to make a rapid climb which I had then intended to stop smartly in line behind the tug again. I was surprised, therefore, to find that the glider seemed to continue to climb quite quickly above the tug. Since by this time we were only 200 feet above the valley floor I immediately released the cable as I lost sight of the tug below. For the moment I was puzzled why the glider had continued to climb for I knew that my actions should have steadied it behind the tug in the correct position. Anyhow any further consideration of the phenomenon was pushed aside because of the serious business of getting the glider safely down on the ground. We were already way below hilltop height and in any case to fly back towards the hill would have ended in disaster because instead of finding hill lift we would find the vicious curl-over. Here also the valley was littered with obstacles and from 200 feet we needed almost a straight approach. There was nothing suitable immediately ahead so I turned to the left and as I did so I felt a slight movement in the Bocian. I flicked my eyes to the variometer and saw the needle read nearly zero. "Millett the scratcher," I had been called. Now we would see! I continued to turn while glancing at the short yaw string, one end of which had been stuck onto the outer of the canopy. The string flowed straight back with the slipstream. The turn was correctly balanced then. Another quick glance, again at the variometer. The instrument was reading zero.

It was going to be the little piece of string, the vario and the sound of the air in

my ears as it whispered by the surface of the glider which would be receiving my concentration. For if I was going to climb out of this hole then the turning would have to be perfect. The horizon by which pilots normally fly when in clear air was no use to me down here, because it was no longer constant. Part of the horizon, during a full 360 degree turn, was meeting the sky from the flattish ground and part from a common which was slanting up from the valley floor. And then, further in the turn, the sky was met by the top of the hill running along the skyline four hundred feet above the Bocian's present position.

I uttered a few words of encouragement to my pupil in the front. Asked him to stay aware of the position of the most promising field and not to talk, I needed to concentrate fully.

Down here in the lee of the hill and several hundred feet below its top the air was almost still. We were in a 'wind shadow.' Exactly what was the source of this weak thermal I did not know. Nor did I care at the moment. I was just grateful to be placed in it. The lift was improving too as we were now turning in one full knot of lift for most of the circle. The string remained down the middle, for this was a very polite thermal, not being the least bit turbulent. The sound was steady - almost eerie.

Before long the altimeter was showing 350 feet and it continued climbing slowly to 400 feet. Yes, it was a weak thermal but it did seem to be developing. I allowed myself a wry smile as I thought of Keith and the others back at the club. They would be thinking I was down the valley, but they were in for a surprise when they saw us pop up and make it back to the club.

Then suddenly, just as the needle of the altimeter nudged 600 feet and the glider was barely level with the top of the hill, the wind blew the top off the thermal as the glider ascended from the windshadow. There was no way back to the airfield from this height.

I looked out at Slesley Common over which the road to Stroud passed and which was considerably lower than the airfield. Could I make it there, I wondered. I was higher than the common but to go directly for it would put me in its curl-over and we certainly did not have the height to get through that. Would we be able to keep clear of the curl-over by flying past it on the valley side just beyond its effects and then turn in for a crosswind landing parallel to the road and with Stroud to my back? I knew it would be touch and go. I decided to try to pull it off. The result was we made it but there had been a few anxious moments.

There was a good sprinkling of cows on the common, so after parking the Bocian I instructed the pupil to stay with it to chase off any that came nosing around. I then went off to inform the club a couple of miles up the road.

Soon I learned the reason why I had lifted rapidly above the tug. It had suddenly lost all its power. As a result both the tug pilot and myself had released the rope together so that it fell free into the field below. Although a search party went after

the rope they did not find it. However, immediately after releasing the rope, the engine of the tug fired up again enabling the pilot to fly it home. Another unusual thing concerning this particular 'landing out' was the cows. They did the unheard of thing of completely ignoring the glider. As we know, the curiosity of cows is considerable and in their slow but persistent manner will always want to investigate anything 'new' on their patch. They are very fond of wooden gliders, probably because they like the dope and as a result they are capable of causing extensive damage.I think the reason that these cows ignored us was because they were used to cars parking all over the common and they had long since lost their curiosity.

When we finally returned back to the airfield with the car and glider trailer I was asked by Keith, our chairman, if it was my intention to try for my hat trick during the remainder of the week?

For sometime now I had been very very tired. By about eleven each morning I felt exhausted and had to force myself to continue until six in the evening. Somehow when in the air I was able to let the pupil handle the controls to the limit of his ability, as I was unable to bring myself to fly the thing unless it became absolutely necessary, and the effect of this was wearing me into the ground. Even though at the end of the day I was hungry I sometimes literally had not sufficient energy to eat. By 7 o'clock I was in bed.

Then one Friday evening when we had completed the last flight of the course and the pupil had carried out the whole of the flight without help from me other than a little verbal advice, I dragged myself into the club house and collapsed down on a line of easy chairs in the bar. After a short time, someone came over to me and asked, "Do you know where the Bronze 'C' forms are, Dave?"

I did not reply. I couldn't.

I lay there for something like one and a half hours, as I was not able to pick myself up. But finally I got to my feet, reached the bunk house to flop on the bed. There was no question of getting undressed.

The next morning one of the club members drove me over to the Medical Centre at RAF Kemble, where I was given a thorough examination: cardiograph, chest X-Ray, the lot. And the findings? Nervous exhaustion. I was grounded for a spell.

The clubhouse kitchen was being decorated by a member who had taken a day or two off his business in order to do the job. I had gone in to brew a cup of tea. "You look tired," commentated the decorator.

"I am," I replied.

I had been with the Bristol and Gloucestershire Club for several years now and the man said, "I don't know how you keep going at your job. Did you know that your last three predecessors all had nervous breakdowns?"

"Well I knew the last one did, but I did not know about the other two."

"Oh, yes, the last chap did it for three years, and the others did two years each. How many have you been at it now, Dave?"

"Fifteen years," I replied.

After a few weeks rest I returned back to my job feeling fine and as I thought, fully recovered. In fact I was to discover that I was always to be fighting fatigue. As previously stated, Nympsfield is a hill site and the club operates from the hill top as does Derby and Lancastershire, and Sutton Bank in Yorkshire. If the wind is blowing straight up and down the takeoff run, there are no real problems at Nympsfield but if it should be blowing strongly from the south then it can be pretty rough. However, should the wind be blowing hard from the north... then be warned! To a visiting pilot it can seem to be innocuous for when the north wind is blowing the air at ground level over the airfield is virtually stationary but there are hidden dangers. One warning of these dangers, known by the local members, is the unpleasant sewer-like smell which drifts up the north facing hill side near the club house. It is on the approach where you really get hit, but on a north wind day even this approach can vary. Should the day be also thermic and a vigorously sucking cumulus cloud be drifting over at the time of the approach, and should the air which has been stagnant in the region of the gully on the leeward south side of the approach decide to break free due to heating then all hell is let loose. During my enforced rest a visiting instructor lost control of the Blanik on such a day resulting in both himself and the pupil ending up in hospital very much the worse for wear.

On sunny days I wore a cotton sun hat to protect my head from the rays striking through the canopy. Directly over my head from where I sat in the back seat was a vertical U shaped metal bar which is part of the structure of the Blanik's canopy. I was wearing this sun hat and it was during an approach for landing on a northerly unstable day that the skin of my scalp was cut open as it made contact with the metal bar, and, that was in spite of the fact that I had checked my shoulder straps for tightenss during the downwind leg. It is true that the offending bar lies only a few inches above the height of my head, but nevertheless...

One Monday morning we left the club house to be greeted by a beautiful sunny day. The air about us was still and all seemed set for a good day's flying. Amongst our company was a pilot who had brought his single seater K6E glider from Lasham, the largest gliding centre in Britain if not in Europe. He had arrived by road the day before, and since he was a solo pilot of some experience one of the club instructors had given him a site check flight in a two seater shortly after his arrival. He had come to spend a week with us.

As we walked onto the airfield leaving the clubhouse behind us the K6E pilot said to me that he would get his glider up to the launch point.

I said, "No, I think you had better leave it where it is for today. We must hope that the conditions will change for tomorrow, or if you are lucky later on this

evening."

The pilot laughed, believing me to be pulling his leg and said, "Can you let someone give me a hand to get it out?"

"No, not now, maybe towards evening."

The man looked hard at me and said, "You can't actually be serious about that, can you?"

"Yes, I am quite serious," I replied. I had caught the smell of the sewer shortly after leaving the clubhouse and the top of the line of the trees edging the road running along the north facing hill were quite disturbed... the dangerous northerly was about. Suddenly the pilot from Lasham realised that he was not going to fly yet and probably not for the entire day. He was furious, and I certainly understood the man's attitude towards me for there he was standing in lovely sunshine with hardly a breath of air moving.

"What the hell are you trying to do, ruin my holiday?" he asked angrily.

"No, I'm not. Believe me I am trying to save it, and your glider."

"Oh, hell, I am not putting up with this," he raged, "I'm going to complain to your chairman. This is just stupid. Its not on."

"It will do you no good," I said calmly.

"Then I will get through to the bloody BGA and see what they have to say about it. It seems to me that you are just some sort of an idiot." At that he stamped off.

I called him back and he came reluctantly, "Now, please calm down," I said, "I can assure you that I know what I am doing and you will fly just as soon as it is safe of you to do so, but first I will make a small trespass into the course time and you and I will have a flight together in the two seater. In fact we will take the first flight."

"What's the use it will make no difference how I fly as your mind is made up, and anyhow you know I had a site check yesterday."

"Yes, I do know that but nevertheless you are going to have a flight with me now." I did understand this poor man's disgust as it would have seemed that I was being difficult to anyone who did not know Nympsfield in a northerly. We took off by using the winch as there was no point in putting the tug at risk. The launch was not a high one, but then I had not expected it to be. The initial part of the climb being made in still air before we reached the cross wind a little higher. In fact we did not require a lot of height as we simply had to bank right after releasing the cable to cut across the narrow airfield to reach the rising air coming off the north face. I asked the pilot in front to fly a few beats back and forth along the hill which presented no problems as the lift was good and smooth enough as it usually was on this ridge.

"OK, we will go back now. Just check your shoulder straps are tight," I

instructed.

"They are tight," came the disgruntled reply.

"Nevertheless check them and make them tighter still."

I felt I could read his mind as it seemed to be that he was thinking, 'Now I am convinced the man is an idiot.' As we turned base leg, I said, "Thank you. I have control, your flying has finished for this flight."

"Thanks a lot." The sarcasm was cutting.

We turned in onto the approach and after all this I must admit that, perhaps a little unfairly, I hoped the 'works' would be thrown at us. They were!

With the wing now settled on the ground the K6E pilot, having released his straps turned and said, "I just wouldn't have believed it. I wouldn't bloody fly if you offered me £100. I'm sorry.

"That's OK. Just let's keep our fingers crossed for better things tomorrow, eh!

Question: When is an Auster not an Auster?

Answer: When it is a Christmas tree.

And when is it a Christmas tree?

After it has made its approach during a northerly and flown through the trees.

I saw this happen one day as the aeroplane smashed its way through the trees which were line across its path on the westerly approach, hit the ground a glancing blow before bouncing over the low wire fence to come to rest on our patch. From wing tip to wing tip tree branches were sticking out, mostly from the leading edge. The nose beneath the propeller boss had been heavily dented but the engine continued to run. The pilot was very experienced having flown at Nympsfield for years. For a short time after the Auster had been hangered it became almost a tourist attraction in its present state of adornment.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

FUN FLYING WITH KEITH

Sometimes when the thermals have been good and strong during the summer one will see the cumulus clouds are no longer roundish heaps in shape but have become long continuous lines lying up and down the direction of the wind for maybe a mile or two, but often they reach for many miles. The height of the base of such clouds is normally uniform but there vertical development can vary. Sometimes the tops of the cloud-street, for this is what we glider people name such cumulus lines, are almost constant but not so smooth-looking as their base. At times though, here and there along the length of the street, cells of clouds will billow up well above the average top level and burst through the inversion which has been keeping the vertical development in check.

A number of different spots on the terrain can be the cause for triggering off their cloud-street, but whatever the spot it is necessary for the resultant warm rising air to be continuous instead of the usual warm bubble of air breaking free from its source, the hot spot. This continuous flow can come from, say, a factory chimney or air being constantly blown up a gully and no doubt many other places which I do not know about. At the start of its journey any section of the streaming air behaves in the same way as a normal single thermal. The environment into which it rises must be unstable and in due course because of expansion and cooling the section will condense into cloud, but since the whole stream is condensing as it reaches the appropriate level we get a line of cloud blown downwind instead of individual cumulus heaps well separated.

Varying with circumstances the active life of a cumulus cloud is quite short, but a cloud-street can work for many hours. By 'work' I mean produce lift within its base and to have rising air beneath it. The reason for this long life is because of latent heat being released within the cloud itself so that the cloud thickens upwards from its base until it reaches the inversion level where the environmental air now becomes warm and so puts a 'lid' on vertical development. The height of the base and tops of a street can be different from day to day but from our point of view a base of around 4,000 feet with tops at say 5,000 feet, is a dream.

On a day when cloud-streets are formed one will often find that there are a number of streets running parallel to each other, separated by a mile or two. It was on one such day that a power aeroplane pilot sat in the front of my Blanik who had joined the course to try his hand at gliding. On this occasion the streets were wonderful and I am sure he did not realise how lucky he was that such a day should present itself during his week with us. Their bases were above 4,000 feet and they ran for miles.

On releasing from the tug I climbed the Blanik up to cloud base before handing the aircraft over to him. While on the ground I had explained briefly what we could

expect. Having reached the street it was necessary to ascertain where the best lift lay as sometimes it would be right down the middle or at other times towards one edge or the other. Having found it we set off down wind at a rate of knots as the lift was strong, and when the lift is strong one pushed the nose of the glider down to increase its speed until the variometer's needle comes down to zero position. The higher the needle in the first place, then the faster you can fly before it drops down to zero. The old Blanik was hopping along at near 80 knots without losing height, which is not at all bad for an aircraft of its performance.

The man in the front seat was astounded at this free power which was handed to him from the elements and admitted that he had no idea how very interesting gliding could be. He was now in fact beginning to have thoughts about concentrating on this fine sport at the expense of his power-flying. I assured him that, apart from the odd frustration here and there, he would never regret it.

As we whistled along the cloud-street we met Keith, the club's chairman, enjoying the fun in the Bocian. We were flying on the reciprocal and rocked our wings in greeting as we passed by. He was helping out with the course flying, though 'helping' is perhaps the wrong description as my workload remainded constant. But Keith's participation did mean that the course members as a whole would get rather more flying and also gave the club a good image. Keith had done great things during the war in the Middle East on Kittyhawks and Spitfires and amongst his many achievements he had played no small part in finally bringing down the three German aircraft which had been specially prepared to fly higher than previous aeroplanes in order to take photographs of British preparations unmolested from our fighters and guns. Now Keith was and had remained for many years, a complete convert to gliding. So much so that he did not even want to know power, unless of course it was in the form of a tug to pull him free from Mother Earth to enable his glider to become encompassed within its own environment.

The Blanik flew on until we reached Wotton-under-Edge, a run of about 7 miles before turning to fly back into wind under the same cloud-street. We were still able to maintain the same high airspeed without any loss of height, but of course our ground speed was much reduced. When we were back in the Nympsfield area I saw the Bocian had moved over to another street further west over the valley towards the river. I asked my pilot to fly over towards it. I had in mind formating on the Bocain providing Keith got the 'message' as we were not in radio contact, having none aboard. As I had expected we lost height as we flew between the two streets but regained it again under the second street. We had come in some distance behind Keith when we joined his street so that now, even after matching his height, we could only reach him by speeding up and so lost height by doing so. When we finally caught up with the Bocain we were well below it.

Keith of course was flying his machine at a speed which gave him a zero

variometer reading as he went along beneath the cloud base, so in order for me to reach up to his height while flying straight and level it was necessary for me to get my pilot to fly slower so as not to have the lift converted into speed. Of course this put us behind the Bocain once more when we matched his height.

Again we dived a little to increase our speed and again finished up below Keith but not quite so far down as before. We had also placed our glider to the right of the Bocian. Slanting my gaze upwards I saw Keith looking down at us and as we were not very far apart I indicated with my hands as I moved them in union as if they were in close formation, and behold, good old Keith got the message. He opened his air brakes which caused him to sink down. I took control from my pilot up front and together Keith and I manoeuvred into close formation with half a wingspan away to my left and 20 feet higher.

I told my bloke in front to take control a moment, then I slid my left hand sideways over my right hand and returned it. Keith copied the gesture with one hand, with the other he would be controlling the aircraft because this was not the time for a learner to take control. In response to his movement I signalled thumbs up and then pointed to him. I would remain in steady flight and take over the controls again. I found the air brake lever with my left hand, ready to 'kill' any unwanted lift. The Bocian's right wing tip lowered slightly and the glider slid over the top looking huge as it filled the canopy and I felt I could have reached up and touched its wheel which was sliding past at only 20 feet above. Soon the Bocaina was stationed to my right and Keith and I grinned at each other.

I indicated that it was my turn and he nodded, then diving ever so slightly and just cracking his brake enough to prevent his racing ahead he sank down below me and so reversed the positions. I then sliced over him and then with stick and brakes, reversed the positions again. This we did numerous times and I could not help thinking that if seen from the ground it must have looked pretty impressive even though we would appear to be rather like model planes. I for one was enjoying this bit of nonsense and I was fairly sure Keith was as well. So, while flying side by side I indicated a loop with my hands. Again the nod came from the man in the back seat of the Bocian, so I pointed my finger at him and then held up one finger. He nodded again understanding that he was to lead, I would formate.

Down went the nose of the Bocian, and a fraction of a second later so did the Blanik's. Together we rushed down as the sound of the airflow rose in volume. I did not even glance at the air speed indicator but kept my eyes fixed on the Bocian's right wing as there was no question that Keith would not have the speeds correct. The Bocian's nose gently began to lift from the dive and I followed him and soon I knew we were both pointing upwards but still my eyes remained focused on the glider at my side. We went over the top but I did not even look over the horizon which would be coming up behind us, I knew Keith would have the Bocian's wings

level with it, so then also must be mine. Now, after the relative quietness over the top, the airflow was singing its song again and I knew that if I should look I would see only the green earth in the canopy. Then after the pullout followed by a shallow climb we were back in sedate level flight once more.

Keith and I laughed. I was not quite in the exact same position as when we had started but I was not far out, so I held up one finger again and then this time pointed to myself. Off we went once more to repeat the performance with myself now taking the lead. We needed a speed of two and a half times the stalling speed in order to properly complete a loop with 1G at the top but I decided to have another 10 knots at the pullout so as to have a safety margin since we were in formation. Fortunately the performance of the two gliders was similar. Since Keith was now formating on me I now had the joy of watching the ground, the sky and then the ground again fill my canopy. As we began the initial dive I watched the horizon climb up the canopy only later to slide down again as the nose pulled up until one could see only sky ahead. Then, yet again the horizon appeared now almost behind my head, and it slid towards the nose and beyond as we curved down from the top of the loop. The green fields again came back into full view but passing partially away as we finally levelled into straight and level flight.

Flying side by side, Keith and I signalled that we should try a chandelle. On the climb he would turn left while I would turn right. This however, did not work out too well for we parted from each other during the climbing turn and I saw that during the dive Keith was ahead of me and we were not quite parallel in the dive. It seemed that this manoeuvre would require some practice. We had both had great fun and enjoyed the games very much, but we never tried it again.

Later that summer I saw Keith flying east with his pupil towards a stubble fire. At the time I was over our airfield at about 2,000 feet and the fire was several miles away when I told my pupil to head towards the smoke. By the time we were down to around 1,400 feet Keith seemed low but now very close to the fire so that at any moment I expected to see his glider banking round and climbing in the hot air. It did bank and Keith completed only three turns before he levelled off and flew away from the smoke, pointing in the direction of home. It must have been one of those 'fools gold' sort of stubble fires which sometimes occur. They look full of promise but on reaching them one discovers they offer nothing and now it was obvious there was not a chance of Keith avoiding a landing out. I told my fellow up front to turn smartly back for the site, and on landing, since there were no club members about that day, I got the next pupil strapped into the Blanik and asked the tug pilot to organise Keith's retrieve with the help of course members, after he had towed me off.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

BE ALWAYS VIGILANT

No matter how long one has been flying, one still receives from time to time a reminder that one must never get complacent about the air and its behaviour. The time was around three-thirty and the weather had been sort of nondescript. All day course flying had been taking place with the glider being towed up to 2,000 feet, only to glide gently back to earth again, there being no lift in the uninteresting windless and stable air. I had known many such days and tried hard not to let the pupil sense my boredom, as always, I tried to exude enthusiasm.

We had cast off from the tug north of the site over the valley towards the River Severn. There was a layer of stratus at 3,000 feet covering all the sky and visibility was moderate to good.

"Head for the upwind end of the site," I instructed my pupil and as he turned we had the river behind us. Then something caught my eye which seemed odd to me. What I saw was a long pencil-shaped streak of cloud several hundred feet below over to one side laying on a north east/southwest axis. Its length was perhaps one mile. My interest was nominal but I was slightly puzzled as to why it had formed.

The pupil, as instructed, had flown out of the valley over our north facing hill. We were now at 1,400 feet up wind and a little to the south east of the airfield, still with our backs to the river.

"OK, practice a 360 degree turn," I said. The pupil turned left and the glider's nose started its sweep around the horizon, then came the big surprise. As we continued to sweep round, the horizon was replaced by a wall of cloud reaching down from what had been a stratus right down to the valley floor. It was as though our airfield was placed snugly at the base of a wall running east to west. Looking along this wall and also away to the south the air was clear.

Had the glider been at 600 feet above the site we would have been in the normal position to commence our downwind leg for the landing circuit, but since we were considerably higher, I asked my pupil to start the downwind leg anyway and we would go further back than normal so as to make a long final approach. That decision was a bad mistake and I should have known better. If I had had only half my wits about me we would have opened the brakes and dived for the field while the going was good. If half the land could be covered by cloud where there was none moments before, then anything could happen.

Now we were well downwind (the term 'downwind' is position indication only as there was virtually no wind on this day) and I now told the pupil to turn left on to the base leg, then, a few moments later, left again for the long approach. As the final turn was made it seemed as though the right-hand wing tip touched the wall of cloud and in doing so, burst it so that it erupted all around us. At once I called, "I have control," and put the Blanik into a shallow dive turn hoping to come out of the

bottom of the cloud. After perhaps one full turn, for we were not on cloud flying instruments, and at 70 knots I reduced speed as there were valleys all around us so if we were to hit a hill then the slower we were flying the better. Then at that moment I got just a glimpse of water and at once dived down for it.

What I had seen was a deep, long and very narrow lake set deep down between the hills which laid almost east/west so that the lake pointed straight at the airfield. On seeing the glint of water I had at once decided to land on it as it was the only spot I could see, and it did offer some sort of safe arrival, with luck. But behold! The dive had barely commenced before we found ourselves again in clear air. A quick glance at the airfield suggested the glider might make it back; and it did. The machine rolled to a standstill with one slightly shaken instructor sitting in the back feeling that he should have handled the event in a better manner than he had.

Never before nor since have I witnessed such a phenomenon. Half the land had been covered by cloud reaching up to who knows how high where there had been none moments before. The dividing line between the remaining clear air and the cloud had been as sharp as a knife, as if a wall of glass had kept the air at one side above its due point before, quite suddenly, the glass broke.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

A TOUCH OF GOLD - A FLASH OF DIAMONDS

I like to think that I am able to mix amiably with most people, certainly during my gliding career I have made a number of good friends and countless delightful acquaintances. But, as in all walks of life, now and then one comes up against the odd individual who grates. There was such an individual in the Bristol and Gloucestershire Gliding Club. I had met this man soon after my arrival, and almost at once I felt his antagonism towards me. After a week or so with the club I asked Mike Munday what he thought of the man and his reply came in the form of advice, which was, "Have nothing to do with him, Dave, the man's a berk." I took Mike's advice but always tried to be civil to him if he was present. I never the less avoided his company if possible.

One Saturday evening in July 1976, I was taking a drink with a small group of chaps who had gathered in the corner of the bar. The company was jovial, in a light-hearted frame of mind, when along came the berk and edged into the group. He had been with us only a few minutes before he started throwing unpleasant remarks in my direction and eventually brought up the subject of Gold 'C'.

For the benefit of those who are not familiar with our sport the 'Gold' is a certificate which the glider pilot gains if he completes a flight of 300 kilometres or more. This can be achieved by one of several means. For example, if the pilot flies to a point which, when measured along the map in a straight line is at least 300 kilometres from his starting point, after allowing for the height from which he releases his glider from the tow, and allowing also for any difference in the elevation of the ground at the landing place, then the pilot has got his Gold Certificate. This straight distance method is the easiest way of achieving the Gold as one would normally travel with the wind which in effect makes the distance the glider has travelled THROUGH the air, very much less than if he had been flying against the wind. Also it does not matter where the glider lands so long as the distance has been achieved, so now the pilot has no worries about navigation and therefore is able to always go with the 'best' part of the sky.

Before the days of the very high performance fibreglass gliders a Gold, even achieved flying downwind, was no mean thing. But today with the 'hot' ships a very moderate glider pilot should pull it off. Rather different however is the Gold achievement when flown out to a point on the map and then return to the starting point, or by returning to the start after completing a triangle. With either of these methods one cannot roam the sky quite so freely for the best lift since the 'turning' points must be reached and to diverge too much can add greatly to the distance flown and time taken. These two methods also do not, on the average of the successful flight allow any advantage of the wind. To pull off a Gold C triangle or out and return with the older wooden gliders was an achievement worth having, and before

the advent of the glass ships the Golds, thus gained in this country were finely sprinkled.

"How long is it you've been flying now?" asked the berk.

"Some little time," I replied.

"Uh, I see that you haven't a Gold C yet, have you?"

"That's right, I have not."

"Strange. I would have thought you would have had it when one considers how long you have been at this game," he remarked.

One of our members, feeling I think a little embarrassed, remarked that the vast majority of pilots never get a Gold and anyway they have only become more numerous with the arrival of the glass ships.

I had intended to treat the berk with contempt but he was always so objectionable that I felt I must get in a dig ." I said, "Oh, yes, it is well-known that you recently got your Gold flying your expensive piece of glass. A Diamond Goal was it? Oh, now I remember, it was a downwind all the way effort, I believe. Still you managed to cover the required distance didn't you? Just!"

The berk flushed and, looking extremely annoyed, childishly walked off.

Again for the benefit of the uninitiated I will further explain the relationship of the Gold and the Diamond Goal. If a Gold flight is made by an out and return or by a triangle where the pilot can provide proof that he has turned the turning points as stated by him before the flight, then the pilot has attained the Diamond Goal as well as the Gold Distance. In other words that pilot has to land where he said he would after completing the Gold Distance by rounding the points previously stated. However, if he simply achieves the 300 km distances, then he can claim Gold Distance but not the Diamond Goal.

It is true that I had been gliding for many years but most of my flying had been spent sitting in the instructor's seat. Only twice had I deliberately set out to try and get the Gold, once flying the Swallow from Withybush when the chances were known to be pretty slim in such a machine, and once when I deliberately landed at the farm of the very kind lady after making good progress before becoming lost. I am not a man to make snap decisions but that night in the bar I did so, and stated that tomorrow I would attempt a Gold with Diamond Goal triangle.

"Providing the weather is right," said one of my companions.

"If I wait for the perfect day to coincide with my odd day off it may be a mighty long wait. Tomorrow I go," I said.

The next day was Sunday and after breakfast I walked together with a colleague down to the long hanger where the Club's Skylark was housed.

"It doesn't look much of a day," my companion commented. Reluctantly I agreed. The sky was overcast with stratus cloud which, from its shading appearance appeared to be rather thick.

To start the day with stratus cover is good providing it is a thin layer to give the sun a chance to burn it off by raising the temperature sufficiently for it to dissipate. After this has occurred the cumulus are usually formed to live through their short life cycle as fresh ones are born. This way one keeps a nice percentage of clear sky which allows the sun to do its job until evening time. Today though, we had our stratus cover but it looked as if it might be too thick for the sun to burn off. Nevertheless I was determined to go and I hoped for improvement though I confessed that I would most likely be down before I had gone very far.

I had already decided that it would be a triangle and that the first turning point would be the club house at Lasham airfield. This would be a leg of 105 kilometres when measured in a straight line. The second leg would be the long one, measuring 150 kilometres from Lasham to Hereford. The turning point there to be photographed was the grandstand of the race course. Finally the third leg which was by far the shortest, would measure 50 kilometres back to Nympsfield. A total of 305 kilometres which I reckoned was quite far enough for an old wooden glider. Another glance at the stratus above made me think it was all wishful thinking anyway.

The task was written up on the blackboard stating the details together with the pilot's name and date. This was then photographed as evidence with the same camera and film with which the turning points were to be photographed. Another photo of the same board but this time with an official observer beside it. Then the sealed barograph was switched on and stored in the Skylark as was the map, bottle of water and something to nibble.

Once in the aircraft I wriggled my bottom while trying to get comfortable which I had always found to be difficult when wearing a parachute, because if I did not pay particular attention I would finish up with fresh air about my lumbar region instead of some solid support and, after an hour or two in the air, I would develop an increasing backache about which I could do absolutely nothing until I landed. Finally the towrope was attached and we were ready to go. I had received a few wry smiles as my intentions became known. Looking up at the sky again I could hardly be surprised. I cast off from the tug at 2,000 feet which was also the exact height of the cloud base above the site.

When about halfway to Aston Down I found myself down to 1,800 feet and still sinking so without hesitation I turned back. Then at 1,700 feet and before reaching the site I flew into zero sink and at once I commenced to circle. Weak lift developed and I climbed the 300 feet back to cloud base and then headed off again for Aston Down.

Leaving Aston Down, where I had seen the Cotswold Club's gliders wing down on the ground, I now knew that the attempt had started properly. There would be no turning back if I should drop more than the 200 feet mark. Nevertheless while the conditions stayed as they were I would still try not to allow the Skylark to sink

down below the 1,800 mark, and should the sun fail to burn off the cloud I surely would not get very far and of course any distance which was being travelled was painfully slow as the glide-outs between each climb last a few moments only.

After what seemed an age and still barely more than thirty miles from Nympsfield I found myself over the disused airfield of Memsbury. The sky was still completely covered and now my altimeter told me I was down to 700 feet, but since this airfield's elevation was 200 feet less than Nympsfield I knew my height above the ground was 900 feet. I found myself circling in zero sink as I went round and round, not daring to move away as I knew that there was always a possibility of zero turning into positive lift. I saw passing below me a tractor pulling a trailer, and it was not the first time I had noticed him go by. Already I had seemed to be turning on this same spot for ever and still I had zero. I had no drift. From time to time I glanced up at the sky right above me but always the cover was there. How I was still airborne I hardly knew but airborne I surely was in spite of everything.

I glanced up once more and what I saw lifted my spirits for there above me was a distinctly paler patch. Was the sun, I wondered going to be victorious in its battle to disperse the cloud after all? I grew just a little excited and knew at all cost I must not allow the sink to claim me now. Then the zero which had been uncannily reliable turned into a weak lift. I had been over the same spot for an almost unbelievable forty minutes with our height constant but now at last the air was turning 'green'. The rising air was giving one knot but it was not difficult to fly. The altimeter passed through 2,000 feet but I had not reached cloud level, and the pale patch was now showing traces of the blue above. There at almost 2,500 feet I was once more at cloud base. Glory be, the sky was at last awakening from its slumber.

After the improvement the cloud continued to rise rapidly and the patches of sun lighting up the earth informed me that the burning off was continuing at a pace. Soon I was accompanied by two other gliders, receiving a friendly wave from the rear of them and I identified the Inkpen club below. The strain of the time since leaving Nympsfield fell away from me as I revelled in the now strong and easy lift, and although much time had been used up in reaching this far I still felt I was maybe in with a chance to pull off the Diamond Goal.

Progress continued to be good with no more scratching and scraping to spoil my day. But, then, slowly at first, the realisation dawned. I was bloody well lost. God I had done it again!

After desperately trying to identify something or other to give me a clue, but with no success at all, I had to come to terms with the fact that I was hopelessly lost. I had not made radio contact with base as I had not wanted my struggle to remain airborne to be in anyway interrupted. But, when things had become easier, I had turned it on, and now I could hear Mike's rich voice in my cockpit.

"Birdseed. This is Coffee Pot. Over."

"Coffee Pot. This is Birdseed. I am receiving you fives. Are you airborne then?"

"Affirmative, Birdseed. Where are you? Over."

"Sahara at 4700. Out." I answered.

This was our code. Mike now knew that I was lost, but I also knew that he would now be throwing back his head in a great guffaw. The bastard! Still there was not need to advertise the fact that I was lost to the whole country. I spent more time trying to pick up some pinpoint which would give me a clue to my position but with not much success. Then suddenly to my amazement I saw the sea. No, I was not over it but there it was a little to my south and soon I was able to identify that we were in between Southampton and Portsmouth. I had now been in the air a long time relative to the useful distance flown. It had taken an age to reach the airfield at Memsbury in my struggle just to stay up, and even after reaching there the struggle continued. Then as the soaring conditions quickly improved to become good I must have drifted off into some sort of Utopia to get myself into my present position of some twenty-five miles off track.

Well, that's it. Any chance of completing the triangle has gone out of the window I thought. Anyway I should be able to fly back to Nympsfield and avoid the hassle of an out landing. Then I picked up a road running at 30 degrees and the map suggested that it led into Alton a mile or two southeast of Lasham. No, damn it I thought. I'm not going to give up. After all the long second leg from Lasham to Hereford passed close by Nympsfield and that would be the obvious time to decide if I was in with a chance or not.

The road did lead to Alton and soon my camera was clicking away as I photographed the Lasham Gliding Society's Club house. Then off I went to pass Basingstoke before heading for Greenham Common and Newbury. It felt good to be established again and by God I didn't intend to get lost again. I was getting four knots lift with the occasional six for short bursts. After Newbury I would push on for Swindon and the progress remained good. The old Skylark was at times achieving glide outs at seventy knots and was making up time, but still I could hardly believe I had enough of the day left for what still lay ahead.

Swindon town was easily identified, what with the M4 on its south side and the aerodrome of South Marston on its north side. I saw a number of the Swindon's Gliding Club both on the ground and in the air. The day which had offered little promise earlier had come up trumps. It was only around twenty-five miles to Nympsfield from here but still fifty to the racecourse at Hereford. Soon I saw Kemble, the home of the Red Arrows then shortly after Aston Down was in view. When I passed that aerodrome hours before hugging clouds for dear life I doubt if the members down there had reckoned on the good flying to come. But now I looked ahead I saw that the sky was becoming blue. The cumulus were much less plentiful and were smaller and far apart. The sea air which had come up the River Severn

from the Bristol Channel was having a disastrous effect on thermal production. Just down at a steep angle to my left was Nympsfield. Down there was food and drink and above all rest, for now I was tired as the concentration that the early part of the flight had demanded had taken its toll.

I looked again at the sky ahead which was almost completely blue at the other side of the river and I felt it was almost certain that I would float down to earth soon after it was crossed. Even behind me to the east the day was fading rapidly now. I glanced again at my home base, just down there. It was so near. Indeed I would be required to burn off height, to throw it away, if I were to let down. But I thought back to the start of the task and how I had struggled so long just to stay up. Would it, I wondered, be possible to finish as I had begun? Certainly the deploy would be different now. There would be no more trying to keep at cloud base hoping for this to improve. On the contrary it could only become worse, and as for the clouds, well there were hardly any. Still there may be blue thermals but if there were I expect at best they would only be feeble in the more stable air ahead.

What, I considered, if the track of my triangle had not passed so close to home. What would I be doing then? I would of course be pressing on, not having the psychological pull of home tugging at my tired mind. I would be pressing on; so be it.

Now I had crossed the river and if I had come down at once the retrieve would still have to loop through Gloucester to come and get me. But I did not come down even though to cross the Severn from where I had left the Nympsfield area was a flight of around ten miles and so far it had been straight glide during which lift was not encountered, nor did the now blue sky indicate where it might be and I was already down to 1,500 feet. With a further loss of more height the smoothness which had been present since before crossing the river was replaced by mild turbulence which enabled me to find bits of lift here and there, but there was nothing to really get one's teeth into. Nevertheless it was enough to stay up, but without the feeling of confidence. Still I pressed ever forward towards the second turning point and I could see the River Wye bending and twisting its way towards Hereford.

Somehow the Skylark continued its flight and I finally reached Hereford. I was surprised to have reached it but the thought of the thirty or so miles back to base seemed an impossible task and now here I was over the east edge of the town and down to 900 feet. Each time I pointed the nose of the Skylark towards the racetrack on the other side of the town I sank. I had no height to play with but I did seem to be able to remain airborne on the east side but for how much longer I did not know, surely not much longer. Over there I could easily see the turning point and yet there seemed to be a spiteful barrier of sinking air between us. Surely it could not be long now before the flight would be terminated. I decided I would point the glider's nose for the final time towards the racetrack as it was a good place to land anyway.

At 500 feet with only a little way to go the air about my plane bucked slightly and without hesitation I put the machine into a turn. It climbed, only at half a knot, but it climbed and I had milked the lift dry by the time I was at 1,200 feet. Soon I was beside the course but I was sinking down again as I tried to fly beyond the grandstand to be in the required quarter for taking the photograph. It was so near but, each time I tried to place the glider into that small area of air, down I would go. It was as if one final trap had been set to ensure my failure and I was sweating with frustration now because in the back of my mind I would not really admit to defeat until the wheel was running along the ground, weary as I was. This second photograph was going to be taken, that was for sure. I knew I could do it and still glide back for a straight in landing on the race course.

I clicked the camera twice which I supposed seemed to be a pointless exercise. I had operated the camera in the turn and now very low I levelled off for the run in and I levelled straight into lift. I turned again, in fact the manoeuvre had been not unlike center-ing a thermal. Anyway I was getting a new lease of life from somewhere and yet again I eventually found myself up around the 1,200 mark where the lift became unworkable. For the following ten or twelve miles the glider continued its struggle to remain in the air and never once at a height where its pilot could begin to relax. It put me in mind of a time when I had been flying ahead of a squall line up in Yorkshire, or rather after I had left the squall line, for while I had been with it the lift was alive with strength. But after I had left it I had travelled a considerable distance in very turbulent air with the old Skylark bouncing up and down. Yes, it had also been a Skylark on that flight. Anyway I had bounced about in a height band from 700 to 1,200 feet. 1,200 feet seems to be very significant to me for some reason. I needed to find a suitable landing place and quickly, or so it seemed, but somehow I continued to bounce along.

The land, so near beneath my wings, was covered with strong crops everywhere I looked, for the land all around was very flat. There seemed to be no meadows or cut crops anywhere, and I thought a landing with both damage to plane and crops was to be inevitable. Than I saw a rather narrow but long field and at one end the crop appeared to be cut, and that part which was cut made the width of the field its longest side, since it had been cut only a little way down the length of the field. However a quick study of this area made me decide I could get in but to do so meant that I would have to fly over the hedge under the telephone wires running down the side of the field. To go over the wire would mean going through the far hedge.

The field had been some way over to my right which meant I had to make a straight approach if I were to reach it form the height I was at. With careful use of the Skylark's air brakes, I made sure that I had them closed by the time I clipped the hedge and with a speed of around ten knots above the stall, the top of the rudder was well below the wires. The instance I was over the hedge, I progressively, but quickly

opened the brakes and I settled down with only a short ground run before the nose of the gallant old bird was sniffing the far hedge. It was then that the explanation of the peculiar cutting became evident. The crop had not in fact been cut but had been laid flat by a whirl of wind which had attacked only this minute area and even the far hedge where we now sat had been damaged. The rest of field was quite untouched as was the surrounding land.

My mind flashed back to the Yorkshire flight because of the struggle I was having, but the air of that flight for those twenty minutes before the landing had been quite different to this and had been caused by a strange mixing. I had never before nor since flown through such air. The air which had recently been around me on this flight was of a much less volatile nature with only a mild turbulence lapping at the Skylark's wings, but even this was fading to become a sea of silk and it seemed certain that the Skylark was sliding down its final glide, as if she had become exhausted with the long struggle and now wanted only to whisper her way down to rest. But, I fed a little gentle stick and rudder into her tired flying surfaces so that the bird banked gradually to her right and flew low towards the nearby wood.

My new hope was a long shot but I knew that when the air was still like this and it had lost much of the heat of the day things could begin to happen down in the woods. During the day the temperature within the woods never reached that of the outside air, due to the sun not being able to penetrate them sufficiently. But later the woods tried to hold on to the temperature which had been reached, while all around the woods the heat dissipated until eventually it fell below the air temperature within the woods. So now I could have a situation where a huge thermal, regulated by the size of the area covered by the woods, was trapped down there and was growing even stronger as the air surrounding the woods continued to cool. Finally the thermal would break away from the strong trees and their foliage to find its freedom, reaching up into the sky above.

It was a matter of timing as to whether or not I would find rising air and if I was fortunate enough to have it right, then it would be largely due to luck. So my hope was that the phenomenon would have started as I flew over the wood which was situated close to Ross-on-Wye. If the lift was there, then I knew that it should be smooth and gentle, but as to how high it may go I knew not. In any case my own height was such that I would not be able to venture far over the trees before having to turn for a landing in a field close by.

A moment went by before the green fields below gave way to a carpet of leaves which reached up towards me as I whispered by, with my ears trying to convince me that there was a slight change in the tone of the airflow. The 400 yards which I had soon penetrated over the trees was far enough. I must return to obey the enforced termination of my long flight and land in the waiting field. So I applied the controls for a sweep round to the left and as I did so the needle of the vario climbed past zero

into the positive. The needle had moved quite slowly but not so my hopes which, when my eyes caught sight of the moving needle, had leaped up together with my increasing heartbeat. It had been like the turning point at Hereford. For there also the Skylark, in my making what I had thought to be its final turn, had seemed in some strange way to have sprung free a little green air.

I did not complete the turn which would have brought the glider to be pointing towards the edge of the wood, but instead I levelled off almost at once and now I was flying only obliquely into the woods, ready with each moment in the green and my faithful bird continued to slowly climb until at 600 feet above the trees the air around her bubbled unexpectantly. With something close to a reflex action I threw the machine over into a firm bank and completed one and a half turns before moving to centre the lift. The value of the vario needle doubled and I was back in business.

The weariness seemed to fall away from the Skylark as she eagerly accepted her new lease of life and she gently bucked and played with this friendly air about her. As for the pilot! Well he was most grateful for this column of air which had somehow aspired to leave behind the slower rising carpet from the trees. How the column had come about he did not know, or for that matter much care at that moment as he saw the landscape opening out before his eyes once more.

I passed through 2,000 feet and on through two-five and still I was climbing, but everywhere I looked the sky was quite blue. Down below and slightly to one side lay the town of Ross-on-Wye, which was stranded by the M50 motorway on its north western side. I felt for my pencil, down the length of which I had cut rings equivalent to ten miles on my map. But then I quickly checked myself and thought I must do nothing but concentrate on squeezing every foot of height out of this God-given climb. Then, after setting course for base, should I check to see how far there was to go.

Now the lift was weakening until finally the vario was reading zero. I tapped the glass of the altimeter with my finger and the needle jumped upwards about fifty feet. It read 3,800 feet. The distance was exactly twenty miles. I knew the Skylark was reputed to have a lift over drag ration of thirty-to-one which was something like five miles flown for the loss of each thousand feet. I did not know if it was five miles exactly or a little more or a little less, and I certainly could not work it out in my head. Of one thing I was sure however, and that was that I had just had the very last climb of the day.

I settled the needle of the air speed indicator on the best L/D speed and pointed the nose of the glider directly at the horseshoe loop in the River Severn visible in the distance, when I had lain my pencil across the map it had cut through that point so now I knew I was flying straight towards base. I did not have any tail wind to extend the glide, but on the other hand neither did I have a head wind to shorten it. So the L over D was going to be put to test it seemed!

During the day I had used the radio very little. Just a few times I had transmitted that Birdseed was still airborne but gave no further information. I had not received acknowledgement nor did I really expect it as I had called to Coffee Pot knowing that Mike was probably not on hand but it had been a long time since making my last call. I unclipped the little microphone from where it had been secured to my shoulder strap, and bringing it to my mouth depressed the transmitter button and called. "Nympsfield base. This is Birdseed. Over."

The radio was in the club house in the room adjoining the bar. By now the bar would be well-attended and if the radio was still switched on I knew I would be received. I waited for the reply and was soon rewarded.

"Hello, Birdseed, where are you? Over."

"Nympsfield base, this is Birdseed. Final glide from Ross-on-Wye. Out," I replied to Mike, smiling to myself. "That will shake 'em," I thought.

The faithful Skylark whispered on the dead calm air as nothing seemed to move other than the alitmetre needle, which continued to slowly unwind. The loop in the river had slid down and finally off the canopy and was lost to view. I could make out the hill now on the top of which lay Nympsfield but I could not yet identify it. Presently I was directly over the northwest side of the loop which was exactly the halfway mark. Another gentle tap at the altimeter and it was reading 1,900 feet. I had used half of the maximum height to cover half the distance. I had not reset the altimeter for QNH so it was still reading the actual height above the club's airfield, assuming there had been no barometric change outside, which I doubted.

Soon after I had crossed the river I had that part of the hill top on which is situated the club plainly visible in my canopy where it remained stationary. The airspeed needle had not moved since leaving Ross, nor had the attitude of the glider and, as she whispered on, all seemed to remain still. I drew closer and the hill top which was the aiming point. It must not slide up the canopy by one inch if we were to have a hope of getting back. If only it would slide down a little, but there was little chance of that happening in this stagnant air. Closer and closer I came to the hill and still the scene did not move, other than enlarging around a central point so that I was able to make out the trees or the hill in much more detail now. This was to become a spine-chilling affair for if I were to turn away to land down below it would have to be a last-minute decision because I could read that the path of my glider was going to lead into the top of the trees or just clear them by a few feet. Flying as we had been all the time at the best L/D speed meant that there was little reserve for a pullup, to do so could result in a stall. The die had been cast at the start of the glide way back at Ross-on-Wye and only now could I see just how very tight the difference between achievement and failure was going to be.

Now the trees were not more than a hundred yards away, it seemed I would brush them. The temptation to pull back on the stick was becoming stronger but I

must resist and at that moment the final decision was made not to turn and land in the broad valley. The Skylark cleared the trees by only inches before we banked and turned through ninety degrees to the left to come to rest in front of the club house. The wing tip hardly settling on the ground before good old Sussie was alongside the cockpit.

Eventually it dawned on some of the members that we had returned, for the glider had not been in view before crossing over the tree tops and few people were still out on the field. I was surprised and flattered when several of the ladies came from the club house to welcome me, two of them leaning forward to kiss me as a tribute of congratulations. I lay back in the now open cockpit drinking it all in. I had been in the air not far short of eight hours, not once had a wave or hill lift been available. While certainly no speed record had been broken, I did nevertheless feel I had squeezed everything out of the day.

One of the ladies who had been with the welcoming committee commented the following weekend how surprised she had been with me remaining in the cockpit for at least ten minutes before finally climbing out. It seemed that she could hardly credit I had not rushed to the gents to partake of a desperate pee. I laughed, but I think I was surprised myself after it had been pointed out to me.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

ENOUGH'S ENOUGH

The Gold and Diamond flight took place two years before I left Nympsfield. Although it was time to stop full-time course instructing I weakened when invited to run the courses for the Derby and Lancashire club who have their site situated at Camp Hill in Derbyshire. It lies on the top of the hill above the small village of Great Hucklow which in turn is situated about 12 miles northeast of Buxton. I enjoyed the season's flying there, especially when a strong west wind was blowing which made the hill work very well and in that wind we sometimes latched onto wave which made a pleasant change. However, when a strong westerly is blowing Camp Hill is notorious for its vicious curl over through which the gliders must fly during their approach for landing. The field is long and fairly narrow being not unlike Nympsfield in this respect. Running along the east side of the field is a wall and when the west wind is blowing it is vital that one does not go beyond that wall when doing a base leg. To a stranger, and particularly one from a flat site, this base leg seems ridiculously close to the landing area so as to make one believe that the approach would over fly the landing area, and take the glider back into the hill lift off the west facing edge. Those pilots who have put their doubts into practice, have often come to grief by either landing short on the moor at the wrong side of the wall or even been brought down onto the wall itself. Such was the might of the curl over at Camp Hill.

One day, during my season there, I had the pleasure of Mike Munday's company when he popped in to visit me for a couple of days. He was lucky in his timing for a good west wind was blowing hard during his stay which offered some good soaring, and when flying started, he asked, "What can I fly, Dave?"

"Oh, just get in the front seat, Mike, and have a flight with me in the K13," I said.

"Hey, come off it, Dave. Let's have a single seater then," Mike complained.

I smiled, but said firmly. "Sorry, Mike, get in the front seat, there's a good chap."

Mike climbed in and fastened his straps feeling, I think, a little offended, but he was never one to hold a grudge. We took off for the short west wind launch and dropped off over the hill. Mike did a few full beats of the hill and actually contacted some wave, but this was very broken and it was lost after a small gain of height. After 20 minutes I said, "OK, go back now, Mike. I have a job to do."

"Right," he said.

"Now, Mike, I'm in the back seat and that makes me in charge of this flight, doesn't it?"

"Naturally, mate."

"Right then, you will continue to fly the thing but please do exactly as I ask."

"Sure, what do you want me to do?"

While still soaring the hill I pointed out the back wall. "When you turn downwind for a right-hand circuit you will reach that wall in seconds which means that the downwind leg will be very short. You will then turn base leg so that you will fly along the top of the wall and at no time you will go behind it. Got that, Mike?"

"Yes, but its going to mean a very low turn off base if we are going to get into the field," he commented.

"Leave the height of the circuit to me. I will tell you when to turn."

We left the hill for a short down wind leg before turning onto base, and when we were ready to turn in for the approach, we were still at 400 feet, so I asked Mike if he thought we would get into the field all right.

"Not a chance, not even in this wind," he asserted.

"Go in steep and use plenty of brake for starters, but just before the round-out have them almost closed as there is a strong wind gradient."

"But we are too high, Dave."

"I'm Pl, Mike, just do as I say, please."

We were in fact higher on base leg than was necessary and I knew it. In fact, I had deliberately brought it about so as to drive the demonstration well and truly home, for there would still be no problem in getting into the field from such a short approach even from this height. Mike lowered the nose and being a pilot of his experience, Mike realised that things were falling nicely into place. As the glider settled on the ground, still being a good distance from the hill edge, Mike turned to me and said, "Point taken,"

"Now you may fly whatever is available, my friend. Its quite some curl over, eh?"

"It sure is mate," he said with a grin.

My season at Camp Hill was very pleasant, so I enjoyed my time there. The club members were keen and friendly and the site was situated in attractive country and my only complaint was that the cloud base was rather low too often. There were a good many days where only circuit basing could be carried out but when the west wind blew all was forgotten. The day which I think stands out during my season there was the occasion when the trees near the club house where bowing and thrashing with the wind which was blowing hard from the west. I walked over the field during the morning, and as I neared the edge of the west ridge, I had to bend well forward to progress to the rim of the hill. I carried with me a handheld anemonetor for reading the wind's strength. I held it facing into the wind and it gave a reading of 50 miles per hour with virtually no gusting so that while the wind was very strong it was nevertheless smooth. I was confident that, once the glide was off the ground, there would be nothing but fun in the air.

From where the winch is placed at the edge of the west-facing hill top to the glider launch point the field falls away from the hill's edge and climbs up again to

reach the back wall from where the gliders are launched. The effect is to give the field a considerable dip in the middle. It is this dip which accentuated the wind gradient on such a day. If, however, the west wind had just a little south in it then we had an added consideration for the landing at this site. For, if one was to come in on the approach for landing about 200 yards further to the left from our usual line, then all hell could be let loose during the round out and hold off due to the air rolling over the ground at this spot so as to give the glider first a headwind and then a tailwind. In fact, I have held a scarf in my hand and watched the wind blow it out to point to the windsock, which is placed on the west edge, while the wind sock would blow to point directly at the scarf. Food for thought, methinks! However, this day the wind did not have a southerly component, so the condition described did not occur.

So, with two of the course members strapped in the glider to increase its weight and seven of us hovering around it as we dragged it up to the launch point we arrived there safely. Actually, that part of the operation was not so hazardous as it sounds due to the wind gradient of the 'dipped' field. Once up near the wall at the launch point, however, we were fairly well out of the protective gradient, so great care had to be taken.

A super day was enjoyed by all the course and certainly it was enjoyed by myself for there was no way I was going to teach takeoff and landings, so I had the pleasure of doing them all myself with a clear conscience. I'm sure there are few places where one can launch into a 50 mile per hour wind - in fact the anemometer showed gusts up to 55 miles per hour - but I dare say the Long Mynd is one of them with the use of their bungie, or catapult bungie, as I have certainly flown in strong winds there.

The last day of the season arrived, and with it also, I had decided, the last day of my gliding career. I had had enough of full-time instructing: I no longer had the stamina to keep going. In fact, I had been punishing myself for too long now so I was getting out. My last flight that season was terminated with a glorious beat where I dived down fast to pull up over the small tree whose growth seemed to have been stunted, probably by the harsh winters. The tree had done its best to flourish in the extreme north east corner of the field, but not with a lot of success. I swept the belly of the glider up the tree and then completed a chandelle as the speed was falling away. The short dive which followed gave me plenty of speed to allow the two seater to glide on along the field to the hangar beside which we came to rest. The glider was put away and I packed my bags for home. Sussie, now an old lady, was still able to jump into the car, but it was an effort for her, as she had little bounce left.

My log book shows that I returned to Nympsfield to do one week's instructing for them in mid September 1980. This mystifies me as I cannot recall anything of it. It is a complete blank. Also I returned to Camp Hill in August 1982 for two weeks.

ENOUGH'S ENOUGH

This I do remember. We had east winds the whole time which gave the instructor a hard time as it usually means that flights are three-minute circuits. On both of these weeks Camp Hill was running a double course with one of their club non-professional instructors handling one of them. It was normal for the first two days of a course for the instructor to take over completely from the pupil for the approach and landing, and because of this the glider could make a spot landing so as to avoid the hassle of pushing the glider back to its launch position. After the first two days, however, the glider landed anywhere but the launch point as the pupil was learning to bring in the glider, and as a result of this there were always 'push backs' to get the glider back to the takeoff point. At Camp Hill this was particularly hard work because, due to the field falling away from each edge, it was always an uphill push back. I had noticed during both of those weeks the other glider had always made a spot landing. There was no way the pupil could have been trying any of the approaches and landings. This made me most indignant and it was all I could do not to vent my contempt on the other instructor who was obviously there for the ride and not the job. An instructor should never forget that the pupil has paid good money for his tuition.

Before I had started those two weeks in 1982 I thought they would present no problem but I found it was all I could do to complete them as my fatigue was so great. Since then I have contented myself with a little casual instruction now and then but never for more than half a day. When I do this, which is not very often, it is done with Blackpool and Fylde Gliding Club at its home site near Chipping which is nowhere near the sea anyhow, and where I have the honour of being an honourary member. It has a fine safe hill, but as with all hill sites, one must have respect for the terrain. Also, in the winter I will take an odd aerotow from the Lakes Club at Walney Island, to fly in wave with my Oly 463 which I now own. Returning to Walney is almost full-circle but I'm sorry to say that the Lake's Club has dwindled down to a small membership. Also a few times a year I take my old Oly 463 up to Portmork in Scotland where I try and catch their lovely 'Wave'. It is very nice to stay with my good friends there. As for Sussie; my lovely Sussie. Well, that wonderful friend is no longer with me as she has lived her life out. I think it was a happy one. I believe it was.

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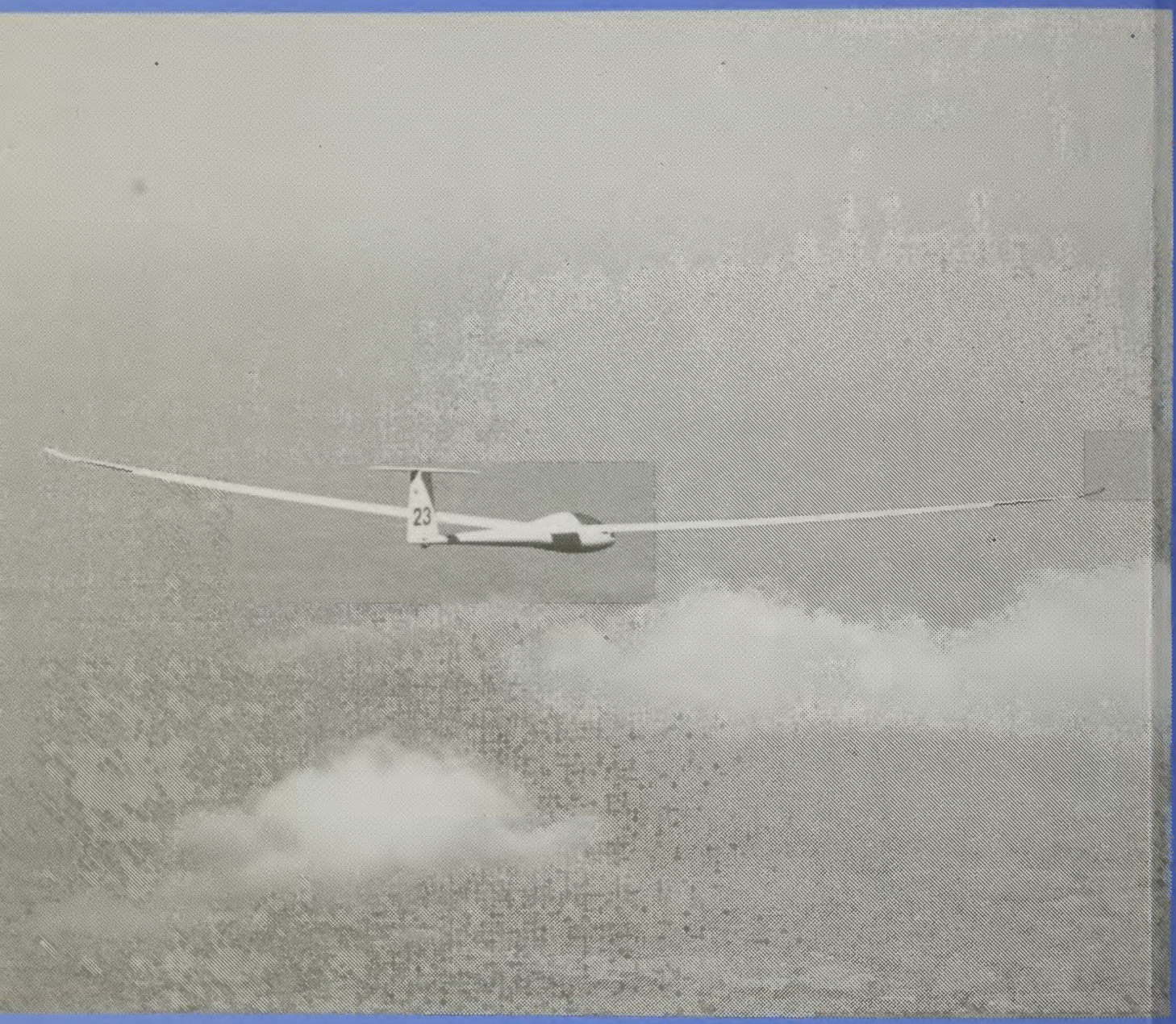

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