

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

by MOE

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THE EXECUTION of the Army Glider Program was what we could have expected if we had not been momentarily blinded with exuberance over the adoption (tho belated) of a glider program by our armed forces. In retrospect, if we analyze the military approach to gliding over the years, we will understand why the program was beset with pitfalls. For years before the outbreak of the present war, glider enthusiasts had brought their case before the military and civil leaders of our country time and again. Our main contention for the adoption of a national glider program was that it would create a reservoir of air-minded personnel through the broad participation of our youth. Surprisingly enough, even we ourselves did not place much stress on the direct tactical use of gliders, as we were somewhat subdued in our claims by repeated rebuffs on the part of those to whom we appealed for recognition. To be turned down was a doubly disheartening experience because our ideas were rejected by the very men who themselves knew how difficult it was to project a new idea into the realm of military knowledge. It was disappointing to realize that men high in aviation would adopt a typical die-hard attitude towards something new and different.

When the Nazis conquered Crete using gliders to help in that accomplishment, the tactical value of gliders was dramatically projected into public and military view. When the press appraised this new weapon and wondered editorially why our military leaders had been caught napping in the application of this new weapon of our air arm, the army quickly announced the formation of a Glider Corps, and established basic glider pilot training schools.

Needless to say, when the first basic schools were opened we had neither adequate gliders, tow-planes, nor instructors. The results of years of neglect of gliding were now manifest. A hastily formed program based upon a poor foundation and backed by a qualified belief in it augured ill for a successful enterprise. All the faults which I enumerate in the following pages are directly traceable to this lack of preparation and willfull neglect. The type of glider used in training was determined not by design but by production expediency. It is true that none of the existing glider manu-

facturers were in a position to immediately produce large numbers of gliders. This hardly justified taking less acceptable ships for the sole reason that they were available. From a policy of do-nothing the Army rushed into one of hammer and tongs. There was no logical reason for this haste in running students through basic training, as the years of neglect had also resulted in the absence of ships and personnel for advanced and tactical training. This policy did not achieve a Glider Corps any sooner, but it did result in poor basic training.

Further proof as to the disinterested attitude towards the Glider Program was the complete laxity regarding the quality of the student product. It is common knowledge that the rate of wash-outs in Army flying schools is high, that the Army demands a high standard of flying proficiency. With this objective I wholeheartedly agree. However, this policy was not applied to the basic glider schools. It was practically impossible to wash-out a student for flying deficiency. It seems that they were just going through the gestures of a flying training program. The officer who was supposed to supervise the training the students received had never seen a glider before coming to our school, and he was at constant variance with what the instructors thought was the proper glider technique.

Coupled with this indifference about the quality of students was the adoption of a shortened course of instruction shortly after the program was under way. The only excuse for this shortened course was to graduate classes on schedule. A more shortsighted policy can hardly be imagined. Many of the students who graduated from this short course (17 hours) could hardly be trusted by themselves in a ship. The students were rushed through this course and then sent to an advanced school where there was nothing for them to fly.

We now come to the controversy of high L/D gliders vs. low L/D gliders. I do not raise this argument from the viewpoint of a long standing soaring devotee, but rather from a cold statistical one devoid of sentimentality. The training schedule called for a thirty-hour course in which three phases were to be emphasized; namely, tow technique, air maneuvers, and approach and landing judgment. The use of low L/D gliders allowed too

(Continued on page 8)