

611

Volunteer Gliding Squadron

History



1944 - 2014

Compiled by

Flight Lieutenant R E Fisher RAFVR(T) (Retd)

Acknowledgment

I would like to dedicate this History of 611 Volunteer Gliding Squadron to the many Instructors and Staff Cadets who have volunteered their leisure time to this unit over the last 70 years. It is worth noting that during this period over 300 personnel have assisted the unit including the many Staff Cadets, some of whom eventually became Senior Instructors. Their enthusiasm and commitment over these many years has ensured that the Squadron has been able to carry out its remit in a safe and efficient manner and inspire the many cadets who have passed through the various courses to go on to greater things.

Special thanks should also be made to the families of all the staff for supporting their relatives so that they could fulfil their obligations to ensure the efficient running of the Squadron. Without their help and consideration the unit would not have been able to carry out its task and become one of the outstanding Squadrons in the country.



1946 Aerial View of the old Hethersett Racecourse Site
Station Lane on Left – Original A11 Bottom Right

Introduction

In January 1941 a Norwich businessman, Captain A A Rice MC, brought together several prominent local citizens to form an Area Committee to establish squadrons of the proposed Air Training Corps in Norfolk. By the 5th February 1941 seven squadrons had been formed and were operational and a further 17 units were in the process of being formed around the County. When the ATC was formed the emphasis was on the establishment of Squadrons and it was several years later before Wings were officially introduced. However with all these units being established in Norfolk, the Area Committee considered there was a requirement to organise and co-ordinate resources and training. To ensure this task could be undertaken satisfactorily they decided that all units should be brought together by the introduction of an area Wing. This decision resulted in Captain Rice resigning as Chairman of the Committee when he received an ATC commission as a Flight Lieutenant in April 1941 and was appointed to the post of Commanding Officer of the new Norwich Wing.

As the founder and President of the Norfolk and Norwich Aero Club, Flight Lieutenant Rice was keen to introduce gliding to the Norwich Wing when this became an ATC activity in 1942. As all private flying had ceased at the outbreak of WW2 it was originally left to individual squadrons to use their own resources to find the facilities required for cadets to participate in this new activity. This was certainly true in Norfolk where Flight Lieutenant Rice used his enthusiasm and expertise to get the squadrons in Norwich Wing interested and motivated to bring this activity to fruition. The first unit to take up the challenge was 221 (Great Yarmouth) Squadron and in March 1943 Flying Officer

R C Golding was given the task to organise and establish an Elementary Gliding School and eventually became its Commanding Officer.

Because of wartime restrictions it was not possible for a unit of this nature to be accommodated on any of the local RAF airfields so the first priority was to find a suitable flat site close to the town. The search eventually led to a large field which was situated approximately one mile outside Great Yarmouth on the Acle New Road (A47) at Banhams Farm. Flying Officer Golding, together with cadets from the squadron, then began what must have been a daunting task to organise the necessary equipment and facilities as well as recruiting instructors.

Six local squadrons were to be attached to the school and as the unit was the first to be formed in the Eastern Region its official title became E101 Elementary Gliding School. In June 1943 several members of the Yarmouth Aero Club had attended an RAF gliding instructors' course and after passing out they offered their services to Flying Officer Golding. The school was officially opened on the 8th August 1943 by the Commandant Eastern Command, Air Marshal Sir Patrick Playfair KBE CB CVO MC who was accompanied by the Commandant Air Training Corps, Air Commodore Adrian Chamier CB CMG DSO OBE. The first flight of the new school was taken by Air Marshal Playfair in a Falcon III piloted by Squadron Leader Hartness. There is no information as to how long this gliding school was in existence although it is known that, because of flooding on the original field, the unit was looking for a new site soon after being formed.

E102 Elementary Gliding School

Because of its location, E101 was limited to obtaining pupils from a few local squadrons. With five squadrons in Norwich and many other units around the county, there were a large number of cadets who would not be able to participate in gliding. Eventually this led to 231 (Crooks Place) Squadron taking up the challenge and becoming the caretaker unit to organise and form a new gliding school which could cater for the largest number of cadets. The first requirement was to find a suitable site which would be easily accessible to cadets from many of the Norfolk squadrons and this resulted in the old Hethersett Racecourse being chosen. It was ideally situated in all respects as the site had, on occasions, been used for flying events before the war, it was close to the City of Norwich and there were both bus and rail services available. There was also the added advantage that a small hanger was already available on site where an instructor of 232 (Alderman Jex) Squadron kept his small private aeroplane which was being used by cadets for ground training.

Flying Officer Norman Craig of 231 Squadron, together with several enthusiastic cadets, accepted the task of organising and preparing facilities for an elementary gliding school. He also had the assistance of the Norwich Wing Co-ordinating Officer Flight Lieutenant Rice, whose pre-war connections must have been a great help in obtaining equipment and finding suitable instructors. The new unit was allocated the title of E102 Elementary Gliding School and would serve squadrons within a 20 mile radius with special weekend camps being organised to cater for the more distant squadrons.

Prior to the commencement of operations on 1st October 1944, Flying Officer Craig was promoted to Flight Lieutenant and became the first commanding officer of the unit. Flight Lieutenant Rice became the Senior Instructor and Flying Officer Arthur Rumball was the unit Adjutant. Two civilians, Norman Brett and a Mr Spruce were also recruited and prior to the commencement of cadet training all instructors had to attend an RAF gliding course which is believed to have taken place at the London Gliding Club. The instructing staff were also fortunate to have two enthusiastic cadets (Seaman and Sharman) of 231 Squadron who took on the role of ground crew carrying out the tasks of retrieving, signalling and log keeping. Cadet Brian Sharman eventually joined the RAF and during his service he became Adjutant of No.2 Air Cadet Gliding Centre and also British Glider Aerobatic Champion.

The equipment originally issued when a gliding unit was formed were suitably modified ex-Barrage Balloon winches and obsolete Beaverette Armoured Scout Cars which were to be used as retrieve vehicles. Although the Slingsby Dagling and Kirby Cadet Mk1 had been chosen as the elementary training gliders, these were not initially available in sufficient numbers and some schools were issued with gliders requisitioned from the pre-war gliding clubs. The equipment issued to E102 initially consisted of a prime mover Barrage Balloon winch and one Beaverette retrieve vehicle. The unit also acquired a small private Morris 8 dual controlled truck for use as a utility vehicle. By the time E102 became operational in 1944 more Kirby Cadet Mk1s were available and the school was established with one Slingsby Dagling and two Cadet Mk1s.



RAF Barrage Balloon Winch. These were converted for gliding operations

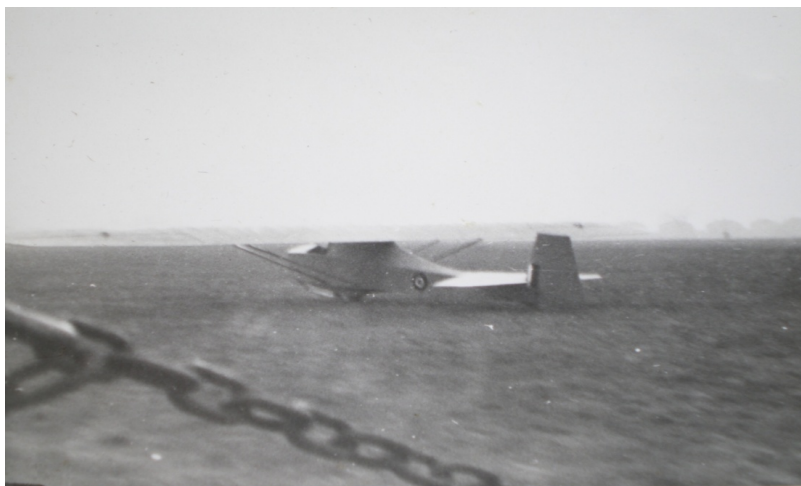
Shortly after the unit began operations at Hethersett, four Norwich boys aged 11 – 13 appeared at the local Magistrates Court in April 1945 accused of breaking into the ATC hanger. They were charged with damage to the gliders stored there which amounted to £8-17-6d (£8.75p) and were bound over for 12 months and ordered to pay £1 compensation. By today's standards £1 may seem a small amount to pay in compensation but it probably meant the boys had to forego their pocket money for several weeks. To put into context the monetary amounts involved, it should be noted that a new Scud sailplane could have been purchased four years earlier at a total cost of £98.

Elementary Glider Training

The gliders available at this time were very basic, there was no windscreen or cockpit cover to protect the pupil from the air flow and instruments were non-existent. With no dual control gliders available to teach basic flying skills, all cadets attending a gliding course had to ensure they knew how an aircraft would respond to the various movements of the control column and rudder pedals. Initially, only those cadets who had been accepted for aircrew training were eligible to attend a gliding course. The training sequence was broken down into five stages to ensure the student was proficient in each stage before progressing to the next. These five stages were called Ground Slide, Airborne Slide, Low Hop, Medium Hop and High Hop.

At each stage the pupil would be briefed by an instructor on the immediate exercise to be undertaken, the cable would then be attached to the glider and the student would attempt to carry out the task given. The instructor carefully watched the pupil throughout each particular exercise to ensure that it was carried out as briefed. After the glider was retrieved, any problems would be discussed with the pupil prior to attempting the task again or progressing to the next stage.

Ground Slide. The first two stages relied heavily on the expertise of the winch driver as it was very easy to winch just that little bit too fast thereby causing the glider to become airborne or making it go much higher than it should. The Ground Slide consisted of the glider being towed along for about 200 yards, just fast enough for the pupil to maintain lateral and directional control with the ailerons and rudder, but not fast enough to become airborne. This exercise would be continued until the pupil could keep the glider heading in a straight line with the wings level along the full 200 yards. Once the instructor was satisfied that the pupil was competent he would then proceed to the Airborne Slide stage.



Kirby Cadet Mk1 carrying out a Ground Slide

Airborne Slide. As the name implies the next stage was for the pupil to maintain lateral and directional control while airborne and this was probably the most difficult exercise for the instructor to brief and the winch driver to carry out. The most important part of the instructor's briefing was to show the pupil the neutral position of the control column and emphasise the need that it was not to be moved beyond this point at any time during the flight. The exercise was achieved by slowly increasing the speed of the tow to enable the glider to become airborne and remain at approximately five feet from the ground. As the glider was attached to the cable throughout the launch it was the winch drivers' responsibility to get it into the air and retain a speed that would allow the pupil to just remain airborne.



Dagling on an Airborne Slide—cable attached

After a flight of 200 – 300 yards the winch driver would then slowly reduce power allowing the glider to sink slowly back to earth. However once the cadet was concentrating on getting the cable attached and shouting instructions to the signaller, they invariably moved the control column beyond the neutral position. Then, as the winch driver increased the speed of the tow, the glider would come off the ground at an alarming angle.

In these circumstances the winch driver was faced with a difficult situation as the glider could swiftly rise to 20 feet or more in an unsafe attitude. It was his responsibility to stop the climb, but at the same time he had to ensure that the glider did not stall and a potential accident occur. With judicious use of the winch throttle, he would continue to pull the cable in while reducing the speed allowing the glider to sink slowly back to the ground. Although it was not a gentle landing, in most cases it got the glider and student back on the ground with nothing more than a bruised back side and hopefully without damage to the glider.

Low, Medium, High Hop. Once the airborne slide stage had been completed satisfactorily the pupil then moved on to the Low Hop exercise. This consisted of the student actually initiating the take off and climbing to a height of

approximately 30 feet and for the first time releasing the cable. He then had to maintain lateral and directional control and glide to a safe landing. When the student had mastered this stage to the satisfaction of the instructor, then the release height would be gradually increased to approximately 50 – 100 feet for the Medium Hop stage and eventually up to 350 feet for the High Hop.

The maximum height for all of these stages of training were rather arbitrary as the glider did not have either an Air Speed Indicator (ASI) nor an Altimeter and in the case of the High Hop the cadet had to attain sufficient height to remain airborne for a period of 30 seconds after release. Once he could demonstrate his ability to climb, release the cable, glide and maintain straight and level flight for 30 seconds and finish with a safe landing, he was awarded his Gliding Proficiency Certificate. This flight also qualified the student for the award of the British Gliding Association 'A' Gliding Certificate and his ATC gliding training was considered complete.

As there were no dual control gliders available for instruction and the existing single seat gliders had no instrumentation, this method of training gave rise to many heavy landings resulting in damage to the glider. On one occasion a cadet was briefed to carry out a ground slide but, as pre-flight checks did not exist, he failed to centralise the rudder before commencing the exercise. As he moved off he began to drift to one side but did not carry out any correcting action which resulted in the cable trying to pull the glider back on course. This made the wing drop and before the winch driver could stop, the wing hit the ground and the glider cart wheeled and finished upside down, fortunately the pupil was able to get out unscathed.



Cadet Mk1 taking off for Medium Hop



Fg Off Rumball explaining use of 'T' Horizon bar

In an attempt to reduce the numbers of gliders being damaged, a system of bat signals was introduced in 1947 whereby the pupil could be given a visual indication of how he was coping with the flight. A 'T' shaped bar was also fitted to the nose of the glider to give the pupil a visual indication of the aircraft attitude in relation to the horizon. This revised system necessitated an instructor being positioned to one side of the winch with a set of yellow bats. Using the bats, the instructor was able to indicate to the student that he should climb, release the cable, glide or level the wings. By following the bat signals the pupil was able to interpret which way he should be moving his controls in order to maintain straight and level flight. When the student was considered safe to undertake his 30 second flight the bats would not be used.

Another innovation introduced to assist the student during his forays off the ground was a metal plate attached to both sides of the control column. These plates had a series of holes through which safety pins could be placed to restrict the fore and aft movement of the control column. Depending on the exercise to be undertaken, the pins were put in the appropriate holes so that the pupil could not move the control column more than necessary. This did alleviate the problem of the glider becoming airborne when it should have remained on the ground as well as stopping a steep take off when undertaking an airborne slide. To some extent this innovation did relieve the pressure on the winch driver as he was not faced with a difficult take off situation during the early exercises. Looking back this system could easily have resulted in an accident due to the fact that there were no pre-flight checks to be undertaken prior to a launch. It would have been very easy for an instructor to undertake a circuit immediately after a cadet had completed a ground or airborne slide and the safety pins had been left in place leaving only limited movement of the control column.

To carry out all these exercises the school was originally issued with a modified standard Barrage Balloon Prime Mover unit but by 1946 this had been superseded by a trailer winch. The winch was powered by a Ford V8 engine and was slightly modified by placing the single cable drum to the side of the winch drivers' cab. The cable drum was approximately 18 inches in diameter and 16 inches wide with the cable running through a manually operated paying on tube fitted immediately in front of the drum. No weak links or parachutes were fitted to the cable as they are today and there was no cable guillotine fitted to the winch.

When a launch was in progress a cadet was stationed by the side of the winch and his job was to hold the cable tube and move it from side to side to feed the cable evenly across the drum. As the drum was not very wide, care had to be taken to ensure the cable did not pass over its edge and wind round the power spindle. This was a precarious job for a cadet as the cable could be travelling at anything up to 45 miles per hour and if it happened to break during a launch it was a case of moving out of the way very fast indeed. The cadet also had a fireman's axe close by when carrying out these duties in case he was called upon to cut the cable in the event of an emergency or a non-functioning cable release on the glider. The winch driver would stop the launch and a cadet would place the cable on the metal chassis and usually with one blow could cut the cable.



Manual Cable Paying on Gear- (Cable Drum right)



Modified Wild Balloon Winch with automatic Paying on gear and guillotine

In 1949 all the original balloon winches were gradually withdrawn and were replaced with a modified version. These replacement winches had the drum repositioned centrally in front of the drivers cab and it was also fitted with automatic paying-on gear and a guillotine which could be operated by the winch driver. These latter two items did away with the dangerous situation of having a cadet feed the cable evenly on the drum or having to cut the cable with an axe.

As previously mentioned the retrieve vehicles were modified ex-Beaverette Scout cars which were fortuitously an ideal size for this particular job. The top turret portion of the vehicle had been removed and a glider towing arm was fitted to the front offside which was retained in a vertical position when not in use. To retrieve a glider, the towing arm would be lowered to the horizontal position and a tow hook would be attached to the nose hook of the glider. The tow arm was of a length which allowed the wing strut to just extend to a position level with the offside rear wheel cover. Because the rear wheel arches inside the vehicle extended to the back panel they formed a seat on which a cadet could sit with their legs dangling over the rear. The cadet sitting on the nearside would hold on to the wing strut to ensure the glider remained parallel with the vehicle, while the one sitting on the offside would hold the wing steady. Although this would probably have been against today's Health and Safety rules it did allow the glider to be retrieved at a much faster pace than would otherwise have been possible.



Beaverette Retrieve Vehicle

A few comments from my autobiography on my single-seat training to circuit standard

The Gliding Experience

During the very bad winter of 1947 my friend and I decided that we would like to try, or better still, get involved with gliding. As there were over 100 cadets in the squadron we considered our chances of being picked for glider training to be virtually non-existent, so we decided that one way to overcome this was to see if we could volunteer for 'ground crew' duties at the local gliding school. This was a term we invented and there was no way we could put this to our squadron commanding officer so we decided that we would contact the gliding school Commanding Officer (Flt. Lt. Norman Craig) direct. We were aware that he was the landlord of the Catherine Wheel public house in St Augustine Street and one Saturday evening in December 1946, we plucked up courage to ring him. Obviously he did not know us and when he questioned why we were ringing him, I did my best to explain but in the end we were told that no gliding was taking place due to the weather conditions. Because we felt that we had not been completely turned down we were more confident and we continued to telephone him each Saturday evening, but due to the very bad weather that winter, the answer was always the same.

It was not until the hard frosts and snow dispersed at the end of March 1947 that the school reopened and during one of my regular Saturday evening telephone calls, I somehow succeeded in persuading Flt Lt Craig that he should accept us as ground crew. So on the 6th April 1947 with this success behind us, my friend and I cycled to Horsham St. Faith airfield (now Norwich International Airport) and presented ourselves for work as ground crew. We were obviously the first cadets to present ourselves in this manner and we did have some explaining to do as we had bypassed all the official channels. However I think our enthusiasm for apparently wanting to do the mundane work as opposed to attending for a gliding course, must have persuaded the C.O. that perhaps we could be of use to the unit. We were thrilled when he said we could stay and help out and although the instructors were unsure as to what we were there for, by the end of the first day our enthusiasm for doing the more tedious jobs ensured that we had been accepted as ground crew.

Perhaps it should be mentioned here that the gliders which were in use when I joined the school were the very basic, single seat Kirby Cadet Mark 1. These were wooden and canvas gliders without any cockpit cover, or even a windscreen to protect the pupil pilot and instruments were non-existent, although in 1948 a self-contained housing for the altimeter and air speed indicator became available. These two units were bolted on the outside of the cockpit, one on either side, at the beginning of each day's flying and removed at the end of the day.

Commencement of Gliding Career

As I had been attending the gliding school regularly over the preceding three months and had shown my enthusiasm for doing the tedious jobs, I had by default, been accepted as a 'member' of the gliding school. My gliding training began in June 1947, but as I had not been officially placed on a gliding course, my 'flights' in the first instance were given as a reward for the work I had put in during the day. This did have its advantages as I was able to watch and absorb the mistakes made by the cadets who were officially on a gliding course, which allowed me to complete the various tasks at each stage without making too many errors. During the next few months I gradually built up my experience until in January 1948 I eventually had the thrill of climbing to around 300 feet and remaining airborne for the minimum 30 seconds after releasing the cable. I considered this a great achievement as I had now obtained the coveted BGA 'A' gliding certificate as well as my ATC Gliding Proficiency in a very elementary glider without the benefit of instruments or a windshield. Although it was literally flying by the 'seat of your pants' the flying bug had now taken hold!

Becoming a Staff Cadet

After completing that special flight I was told by the adjutant (Flying Officer Arthur Rumball), that I had now gained my ATC gliding proficiency and my time at the gliding school was at an end. As I wanted to continue flying and I had been with the school for over six months, I ignored his advice and proceeded to turn up the following Sunday trying hard to keep a low profile. I then had a bit of luck as I was standing close to one of the retrieve vehicles when the C.O. (Flight Lieutenant Alfred Warminger), wanted a driver to tow out a glider and he asked who could drive. Straight away I said I could and got into the driving seat and for the first time in my life I had charge of a motor vehicle and was now expected to tow a glider. Fortunately all the driving I had done during the lunch breaks out of sight of the instructors, now paid off and for the rest of the day I continued to retrieve and tow the gliders. By the end of the day even the adjutant had accepted that I was doing a good job and he never mentioned that I should not have been there and so began my long association with the Gliding School.

After that first day, by default, I had become a staff cadet and never looked back and so began a learning curve of all the duties needed for the efficient running of the unit. First thing every Sunday the Staff Cadets would carry out the daily inspection of the retrieve vehicles and winches and then load a Beaverette with four or five empty jerry cans for collection of the day's fuel. The winch also had to be refuelled and this was attached to the Beaverette in a very 'Heath Robinson' manner as there was no proper tow hook on the vehicle. The tow bar of the winch would be placed on top of a small 'D' ring on the rear of the vehicle and a long starting handle placed through both of them. A cadet would then sit at the back of the vehicle holding the handle while another stood on the steps on the side of the winch with one foot resting on the handbrake lever ready to push to the "on" position in an emergency.

The result of being a staff cadet was that after a hard day's work I would be rewarded with possibly one or two 'flights' and because I already had my 'A' certificate, the C.O. decided that I should train for my 'B' certificate. To attain this certificate it was necessary to fly both a left hand and right hand circuit of the airfield. This meant that my flights gradually became more demanding and instead of undertaking straight glides I was now being instructed in the art of turning the glider to the left and right so that I could eventually undertake a full circuit of the airfield. As we still had no dual control gliders, I would be briefed by an instructor on how to co-ordinate stick and rudder in a turn and then I would take off and endeavour to complete the flight to his satisfaction. The height attained on these exercises was between 300 and 400 feet and after release I was expected to undertake a 90° turn then a 180° turn followed by a 90° back into wind and finish with a normal landing. By the 13th June 1948 I had completed around a dozen of these flights and it was considered that I could safely turn a glider and was competent enough to undertake my first full circuit of the airfield.



Top of the launch – no Airfield in sight

Prior to this flight the 'climb' had been terminated approximately halfway along the total launch run to ensure that there was sufficient airfield ahead in which to land after completing a couple of 90 degree turns. To carry out a circuit, the launch had to be continued until almost over the winch and at a height of 700 – 800 feet the cable was released. For the first time ever, there was no airfield in front of me and all I could see were fields stretching into the distance towards Drayton plus the ground was suddenly an additional 400 feet further away. It was at this point that realisation dawned that it was now up to me to get myself and the glider safely back on the ground. After completing the first turn it was exhilarating to see the airfield laid out below and then the adrenalin began to flow, remember the briefing; attitude (speed), height (guess), position, turns, approach and finally landing.

Having never had the benefit of any dual instruction, much of that first circuit consisted of guesswork, self preservation and the intelligent interpretation of the instructors briefing in order to complete the four 90 degree turns and land more or less where the launch began. With hindsight this was an exceptional achievement for a 17 year old especially as the glider did not have even the basic instruments of airspeed and altimeter or spoilers. However I did become the first ATC cadet in Norfolk to be awarded the British Gliding Association 'B' Certificate (competent in take off, turns, circuit and landing) and so began my flying career.

Because dual control gliders had not yet been introduced, I was now as competent as the instructors and although I was still only a cadet, I was allowed to instruct the course cadets in the basics of gliding. When my squadron Commanding Officer heard of my achievements, I was promoted to Corporal so that I had more authority over cadets attending the gliding school on their proficiency gliding course. During the next couple of months I carried out another 16 circuits and on 28th August 1948 I was considered competent to fly the Kirby Cadet Mk2 which, at the time, was only flown by the instructors.

I considered this to be a great honour as it was a little more sophisticated than the Cadet Mk1 in that it had tapered wings, a better aerofoil section and streamlined wing struts, but it was still a single seat glider without a windshield, basic instruments or spoilers. So that it could be flown in thermals, one of the officers' had a local carpenter build an instrument pod fitted with an airspeed indicator, altimeter and variometer. This contraption was bolted on to the top of the existing nose cone but because it was difficult to see over the top, pilots had to sit on a rather thick cushion, however it was the first time I was able to fly a glider complete with a few instruments.

I also had the privilege of flying this glider in the Battle of Britain display at Horsham St Faith in September 1948. Because of the crowds behind my take off point, I allowed extra height on the approach to clear them and this caused me to overshoot (no spoilers) by a couple of hundred yards necessitating a long retrieve. At the time we had two German prisoners of war from the local camp helping us and they said I should have 'side slipped' to lose height allowing me to land nearer my take off point. As I did not know how to carry out this manoeuvre, Werner Vogel (a JU88 pilot), did the next launch and carried out a side slip on the approach to show me how it was done.

On my next flight, although I was not sure what I was doing, I tried out this new exercise which must have looked rather dangerous to the people on the ground as I was slipping towards the Control Tower which at that time was situated in front of the Hangers. However I did not hold the side slip too long as I still had to fly over all the people in front of me, but it did help me to land a little closer to the take off point. Once again this was a flight profile which

had not been demonstrated in a dual control aircraft and the pitfalls had not been explained, but I suppose that youthful naivety, over confidence and self preservation resulted in a safe landing.

On another occasion I was told late one afternoon that I could carry out a couple of circuits. Unfortunately I was flying the glider after the previous occupant had been undertaking the airborne slide exercise. In those days we did not have to carry out a cockpit check prior to a launch and I did not notice that the safety pins for the previous exercise were still in place on the control column. After strapping myself in, I proceeded to have the cable attached and called out the appropriate instructions for take-off. I had just left the ground and began moving the control column aft only to discover that the safety pins were in position for an airborne slide and I was being pulled at circuit speed but could not climb. What I should have done was to abort the flight at that stage, but as it was late in the day I thought I would lose my chance to fly, so I immediately started to remove the rear safety pin. This I did quite quickly and was able to get the control column back and continue the launch, but while in the climb, I endeavoured to remove the front safety pin to allow me to attain the correct gliding angle after release.

Unfortunately, the clip on the safety pin fitted to the device was much more difficult on the front and I was unable to remove it before I reached the top of the launch. At this point I could only move the control column forward to the position suitable for an airborne slide and not to the position required for a normal cable release. However the front pin allowed a little nose down attitude and I suppose I was lucky that the conditions were calm and although I was 700 or so feet above ground, I was just about able to maintain flying speed. For the rest of the circuit I struggled with the safety pin but I could not remove it, so I gave up. By this time I was on a cross wind leg and with my limited experience, I considered it prudent to concentrate on my approach and especially my landing as I had no margin for error. Much to my relief I completed a successful landing and immediately retrieved the pin and safety device which I had dropped on the cockpit floor, before removing the front pin and embarking on my second flight. With hindsight I realise that what I did could have led to a dangerous situation developing, but I suppose that the phrase "*there are old pilots and bold pilots but no old bold pilots*" had not yet entered my youthful vocabulary.

For the next three months of 1948 I continued to assist with the operation of the school and notched up a few more circuits until I received my call up for National Service with the RAF. I eventually had my first dual flight in January 1950 when Alfie Warminger gave me three check flights in the T21 Sedberg the school had just received. I was considered to be competent to fly the T21 solo and I was sent off with a car tyre in the 2nd seat as ballast. Unfortunately the all up weight was not sufficient and I spent the circuit trying to stop the glider from continuous stalling, but, hey ho, I was at last flying with instruments and spoilers.