

1- Memories of Gery van Alsch.

Hawkes Bay Gliding Club

Roy Russel, who top dressed with a tiger moth, imported a Rhonlerch two seater training glider and a k6 13meter glider for himself. GBE and GBF. He intended to form a gliding club, and instruct himself. But was not very successful on his own. Tai Husheer who was a member of the club that flew primary gliders in the early 30's. was also keen. Roy as a boy was involved then too. I did some of the towing for Roy with an aero club tiger. We called a meeting for any one interested. About fifteen people turned up. Tai Roy myself Russell Spiller Chris Brayshaw Peter Gibb Doug MacIntyre as a fifteen year old boy, Mort Usherwood, Mike Montcagle Clarry Faulkner a railway engine driver Ken Harris Ken Francis. As most of the members were Napier based we flew from the Napier beacons dromc. Built a shed there that would contain both gliders de rigged. Started flying and soon attracted attention. At this stage we hadn't bought the Rhonlerche from Roy, but we had to raise 900 pounds which was the cost of GBE. Three of us approached various business men, Guy Baillie of Baillie motors My brother Piet, and a few others put 100 pounds each in and we soon had the required amount. Aero towing with tigers was too expensive for most of the members, so we tried car towing, using my studebaker station wagon. You couldn't change gears without causing trouble with the launch, so had to start in second gear, and get up to forty miles an hour. Tai used this method with the primary glider before the war. Napier was becoming a bit crowd and wasn't much good for thermals so we shifted to Bridge pa. And used the old hangar containing the Monospar of aerial mapping for the de-rigged gliders. Geof White and Alex Holdsworth by this time had joined us. It seemed obvious to me that we needed a winch to get airborne cheaply. And we had to have more ex war experienced pilots to help instruct. Jack Parker ex squadron leader and Peter Adds joined at this time. I knew we had to have at least 40 mph for the winch speed. I reckoned that the bron gun carrier would be suitable to turn into a winch. Piet gave us his that was still stored at bridge pa. Mort Usherwood lent his truck to take it out to my farm at Craggy Range where I converted it into the winch. Tim Higgins was then with me. The rivets were all hardened steel so couldn't chisel them off so used oxy cutting torch to cut the top and front off, leaving only the engine and differential mounted on the two rear axles of the carrier and a draw bar as a trailer. (incidentally the front half was collected by Rod Heaps who runs the Gannet beach adventures, forty five years later, and rebuilt using other parts and is now back as a carrier as new). In place of the sprocket that drove the tracks, I used a Fordson Major rear wheel and locked the diff. Put a guide on to feed the wire evenly across the whole width of the wheel. That took me six weeks and a lot of work and designing. And with few modifications was used for years. To start with we used a braded cable, but it took to long to splice the cable after a cable break, so we tried ordinary twelve and a half gage high tensile fencing wire, joined with a number eight knot. It was better than the cable and also very cheap. The first launch was at Bridge pa. Roy flying with me on the winch. We didn't brief the helpers enough, and Roy was still doing his cockpit drill, when they were signalling all out. He found himself in the air in a steep climb with the brakes still open, even so he got to about five hundred feet, but promptly walked off when he landed. That left me the only one who could fly. I put Clarry, the engine driver, on the winch and we did a few more flights with two up. Driving the winch was all part of the enjoyment of flying. And more interesting. Dragging the wire out etc made every body work together and the club was more integrated. Everybody helped each other. Bridge pa was too short and winching and club flying didn't mix. So we had to look for somewhere else to fly. If we were going to fly from away from the Bridge pa we needed a trailer to store the glider. There were not many in other clubs and I had never seen one but thought a round corrugated iron tank about five feet in diameter and twenty six feet long mounted on two axles, wide apart, would be a cheap way of making one. I had two old Willys Knight front axles and wheels as it would have to have both axles steering, the rear axle turning the opposite way to the front one. They had timkin roller bearings on the king pins. Easily steered. A working bee

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was organised and that didn't take long. I remember there were lots of members there, and Peter Burney was on the top of the tank riveting the sheets together, and I was drilling holes for the fittings inside, when I pulled the drill out there was cloth on the end of the drill, but no screams from outside. While still at Bridge pa we flew from An exspitfire pilot, Mr A Robsons farm at Poukawa, just east of the Poukawa lake. We had a recruitment drive there, and flew forty three flights winch launched in the one day. The only wire break that day was the last one, but the passenger got a flight back to bridge pa. We aero towed the glider down from Bridge pa and back each night. Albyn and Joyce Manley joined us then. Poukawa had a range of hills with ridges at right angles within reach of winch launches, but it was too low and dangerous. There was a bit of lift on the ridges but no height. It was good experience for us instructors but useless for training. We next tried Craggy Range in a north westerly. We had to launch with the wire running through a gate. I got on to the hill solo, but it was so rough that the rear seat kept banging up and down, and it was only because I knew every bit of the paddocks that we didn't end up bending the glider. Next was Haupouri paddocks in behind the sand hills north of Ocean beach. That was quite good, in the sea breezes lift was good right along to Cape Kidnappers. Geof was caught out there when flying with Albyn Manley. Mist started forming underneath him, and he had to fly out to sea to come in underneath it. Albyn kept reminding him he could not swim. I can remember thrashing rye grass at home seeing the glider cruising up and down from the mill. That was the first time we bent the glider. Someone landed short of the strip and hit a fence post with the nose of the glider, the week end before Christmas but didn't damage anything else. Temple Martin had it back flying before the Christmas break. Flying was cheap at 2/6 a launch and six pence a minute for the glider, but we were not making any money, and using members cars to retrieve the wire. I didn't want to be CFI as well as president and thought we needed a lawyer as president and an accountant as secretary. With a few other members we jacked up the next AGM to bring in Ian Heath to take over the presidency. When I told him about it, He said you cant do that, but he agreed to come along, and ended up accepting the job. Ken Harris who had been secretary since the club formed in November 1957, wanted to be relieved of that job. Ian then introduced us to Brian Johnsson. He was an accountant in Waipukarau. It was then that we discovered the more permanent home at John Jolls farm under Te Mata peak. The sea breeze really worked there. Geof was the first to be launched there, and flew straight up over the peak from a six hundred foot launch. The strip was small, only about five hundred yards long if that, and take off and landing were nearly always cross wind. But the lift was marvellous. Pupils could make as many mistakes as they like and the instructor could always put them back into the lift to carry on. The landings had to be spot on, which made for good judgement. We never had any worry with any of the pupils flying at strange strips, they could land on a spot. Not so when other pilots used to a big aerodromes came to fly with us and land on our postage stamp size field. The only trouble was in a westerly, the curl over from the hill had our windsock on the strip showing an easterly. I didn't take long to experience that when I could only get a couple of hundred feet off one launch and just got enough height to make a landing across the strip, finishing up starting to climb the hill. To rectify that I made a wind sock out of a petrol tank, counter balanced by bits of the bren carrier, and mounted up on the ridge above the strip. Painted red on one side green on the other if the wind was strong enough to hold it level as it often was. Green East red West (after we left there the hang glider boys shifted it along so they could see it from the top of the peak). A hangar became necessary so we didn't have to

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Rig the glider. Several members were interested to own their glider, so the hangar had to be big, I designed a half circle corrugated iron building, making the frame of six by two timber, two pieces side by side, nailed together to form a shallow x, one long leg the other short, so that a half length at each end makes the complete truss. Leaving room at the apex of each x to fit the longitudinal rafters. I took the design to John Scott Architect, for his approval. He said OK but why not use six by ones, they would be strong enough. He must have been right as the building is still there having gone through the Wahine storm and another 45 years of weather. When I came to build my own hay barn several years later I didn't get a building permit. The building inspector was an aero Club Member. He soon found it. When he came to see it, he said he couldn't give me a permit as they didn't have stress figures for round buildings, only vertical walled ones. I told him about the gliding club one with only six by one timber, had gone through the Waihine storm with no trouble. I never heard from him any more. John Joll told me that some people from Cambridge had come to see it and that resulted in them making all the round hay barns you see about the country now, using steel instead of our timber. When we were building it and had several pieces of curved iron not nailed down on the roof, we heard a front coming through from the south, and several members climbed up to hold them down. I was worried the frames wouldn't hold the weight. The launches into the south usually gave us 600 feet, and we were able to get onto the hill and strike the lift and over the top of the peak at 1300 feet in the one sweep. If not above the bottom of the big rock come into land from the south end. Several members clubbed together and bought an Eon Baby, and because the lift was there for long flights we needed another two seater. We got a T31 from Palmerston North. Open cockpit. GAW. Temple had to recover it as there were several places in the wings where the bracing in the ribs had become unstuck. Even with its low performance it was ok on the hill from a winch launch. That's when we started the pig in a barrel raffles, And it wasn't long before we offered to start paying back the original loans. Very few accepted, and wrote off our debt to them. It wasn't long before Geof imported his k6 GCG. And we replaced the T31 with a new K7 GDA. We made a trolley to pull each glider side ways in to the hangar. We mounted the winch on an old 1926 Chev truck to make it more self contained. It only had to drive to either end of the strip, but I took it to Geofs farm in Takapau. He cut out the middle of a shelter belt between two paddocks giving quite a long distance for the winch wire. This was underneath the rotor formed in the wave in a westerly, and we hoped to get into it from a winch launch. I never did, don't know about the others. When the hill was working there were quite a few gliders on it at one time, and we had to be strict with flying rules. Never over take a glider on the out side in case he turns towards you. Launches, always be ready in case of a wire break to land straight ahead, do a 180 and land down wind or complete a full circuit. I don't think we ever damaged a glider from a wire break, but we had plenty of practise. I remember taking my future sister-in-law for a flight. We didn't get above 15 feet three times because of wire breaks. She stuck it out and the forth one got us into the lift. In 1964 Bill Williams and I imported a Sagitta from Holland GDO. Still flying in 2003. This was one of the last wooden gliders designed. My wife Prue learnt to fly with Herb Maxwell at the aero club. I found it hard to teach her without upsetting her. So she learnt on the last of the clubs tiger moths. Eventually flying the Pa18 and the three seater Witney Straight. As well as joining us flying the Sagitta. She also flew a Skylark 3 at Masterton. I put on a display flying the K7 at the opening of the beacons control tower at Napier, doing loops and as

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Stall turns. Whenever we did that the Sagitta was out of hours or some other problem, as it was good for barrel rolls as well. Temple was doing a lot of repair work on crashed gliders from around the country, and asked me to test fly them. Some with completely broken wings. Which he rebuilt by putting a piece in the middle joining the spars with two tapered, one in ten, joints, glued together with araldite, in each spar. I had to load them up pulling at least two or three G. They wouldn't come apart, and were just as good as a new wing. We had perfect faith in the work that Temple did. As did the other clubs to which the gliders belonged. One glider, a slingsby Dart, which I tested, dropped the port wing badly in a stall, brakes open or shut. It took full rudder as well as stick forward to recover. I remember Geof calling me on the radio as she stalled, and I had to tell him to hang on as I was in a spin. Temple took a bit of incidence off the port wing, which made it a lot better, and didn't enter a spin when stalled. The radio, that Piet gave me from a disused one for aerial mapping, was modified by Phill Howell in Christchurch as a base station for me Charley Uniform Two, which the club took over when Bill hit a plantation while landing near Dannevirke with the Sagitta while on a cross country trying for his gold C distance. Bill and Jan were killed on the Eribus flight. I took my daughter Charlotte up on the Peak once when I thought the lift was gone, but surprised that it was still there, I had to do a demonstration at Napier in the next few days, and asked Charlotte if she minded if I did a few loops to practise. She said she would be ok. Years later she told me she shut her eyes, after the first one, and later opened them again when we were at the top of a loop. Promptly closed them. We were not able to get away from the peak in sea breeze lift, thermals were not often present in those conditions, and the performance of the gliders were not good enough to reach them. The owner of the strip didn't want too many cars down on the strip so we eventually had to go back to Bridge pa. I do remember one unusual day. Robin Lowry and I took the first flight on a day in the Rhonlerche, with no sea breeze. We were down level with the top of the road and turned out over the strip to land and struck a thermal that took us to 5000 feet. We were supposed to be at a party at eleven, but turned up late. By 1975 my hearing was deteriorating so badly that I couldn't instruct. But I was still flying and doing my share of towing. Which wasn't improving my hearing. The only way I could stop that was to let my flying licence lapse. So after 32 years of flying and about 36 different types, from VW powered Druinc Turbulent to the 68,000 lb 6600 HP Halifax four engined bomber I gave up. Not having bent any of them but pretty close sometimes. I went sailing.