

THREE DAYS AT TORREY PINES

by Jerry K. Litell



The first annual meet of the Associated Glider Clubs of Southern California started on New Year's Eve and lasted for three days. The meet was held in connection with the dedication of the Torrey Pines Soaring Field, the headquarters of the Association. The Soaring Society of Southern California, the regional association in Los Angeles, was represented.

The Field, described in July, 1938 issue of SOARING, has been constantly improved by club members. A local contractor gave us the use of his equipment for elevating and grading the take-off runway and a small clubhouse had been built, largely through the Association's President, Dick Essery.

The Bishop Trophy, donated by a brother of the famous Canadian War Ace, is a gold cup which will have to be won three times to become the property of the winner. The cup was displayed in the clubhouse and created much interest, especially among the visiting pilots.

The press and radio gave us their full cooperation, bringing more than a thousand spectators to the meet. They were kept well informed and entertained by the versatile Dick Essery over a public address system, also donated for the dedication.

Since the first day was rather uneventful, with no visiting ships and no wind, the meet really did not get going until the second day, when attendance surpassed our expectations.

This day was opened by John Robinson, who, in his famous "Robin", made a beautiful loop as he released the tow rope at 500 feet. Other flights were made in quick succession by Hawley Bowlus, Frank Wolcott and Bob Heideman. No soaring flights were made, as the wind, unlike the California sunshine, failed to cooperate. After several good flights by Ray Parker in a brand new secondary, and Morrison in the Baby Albatross, which received very favorable comments, the dedication ceremonies got under way.

William Van Dusen, N.A.A. representative, traced the history of gliding in San Diego, starting with Professor Montgomery's flight in 1890, when he was dropped in his glider from balloons. He mentioned briefly the flights in 1910 by Nathan Rannels, now Postmaster of La Jolla, told of Hawley Bowlus' activities, the flights of Colonel and Mrs. Charles A. Lindbergh and, lastly, related the story of the present Associated Glider Clubs of Southern California. He introduced councilman Crandall of La Jolla, who dedicated the Torrey Pines Soaring Field to the Youth of California. John Robinson then took off and dropped the flag of California over the field. The "Robin" also carried mail for the occasion. A cache of three hundred letters, specially stamped as flown by glider, was picked up by

Postmaster Rannels and mailed. One of these was addressed to President Roosevelt, another to the National Youth Administrator.

After a few more short flights, with the wind still conspicuous by its absence, John Robinson climaxed the events of the day. Towed to six hundred feet with his climb accelerated to twenty feet per second by the pulley and "dead man" system, he released, made three turns of a spin and recovered with a loop. He then circled lazily over the field, the crowd cheering and auto horns honking. With the "Ah's" and "Oh's" and "Pul-lease pull her out" of the loud speaker, it made quite a show.

Later, at a turkey dinner and social evening for the visiting pilots, Joseph Blake of La Jolla, radio commentator on the Mutual Network, promised to aid soaring through his column, "The Magazine Man". He would like to have called to his attention any magazine article dealing with the subject so that he may impress on his listeners that beautiful word, "Soaring". So here we have a new friend, fellows—don't forget: Joseph Blake, La Jolla, California, and you'll find his column in any Newspaper as far east as Ohio.

While we had accommodations for the visitors, they preferred to spend the night in the clubhouse with their ships. This gave them a chance for several flights early next morning. At ten o'clock, however, there was a strong wind blowing parallel and slightly out over the cliffs. Different runways were used and several brave attempts were made at soaring over the canyons until Ray Parker was forced to land on the beach below. While his ship was being retrieved, the Heideman team made several short hops, giving the spectators many a thrill while their little ship was buffeted around in the rough air. A big cloud came along and the "Robin" took off, aiming for it. John caught the thermal, circled a few times but lost it over the edge of the cliff, where he was caught in a violent down draught. Diving out of it, he recovered too late to land in the field. He had stayed aloft almost seven minutes, when he, too, had to land on the calm beach below. Then the rain stopped the meet. Perhaps it was just as well, since the wind direction, like the bull Ferdinand, remained contrary.

In spite of poor weather conditions and the absence of several advertised entries, this first meet was a success. The expenses were amply covered by a small parking fee. The Club has several new members, and more than a thousand spectators are convinced that the modern sailplane is no frail craft and that Soaring is the King of Sports.

Woody Brown had expected to compete with a brand new Bowlus Baby Albatross which he has bought partially assembled for \$385.00. However, it's completion was delayed by his trip to New York over the holidays. His dismantled "Swift" has been sold to the author and Steve Kesckes.

The "Bishop" trophy will be awarded to John Robinson at the next club meeting.