

Soaring COMES TO THE Southeast

by R. Avery Hall



Capt. Charles with his "La Paloma"

On Wednesday, July 19th, the first thermal soaring flight ever made in this part of the country by a sail-plane was witnessed by many people of Atlanta and vicinity.

Towed aloft by airplane to an altitude of 2000 feet, Captain Shelly Charles, veteran Eastern Air Lines pilot on the Atlanta-Chicago run, soared his Baby Albatross "La Paloma" for four hours and twenty minutes before returning to his point of take-off at Candler Airport. During this flight Captain Charles reached a maximum altitude of 6800 feet above take-off, and during the afternoon flew some fifteen miles northward to Buckhead, Ga. and returned, thus setting simultaneously the State records for distance, altitude, duration, and distance with return!

In describing this, his first real taste of soaring, Charles said:

"I was towed up early in the afternoon by a Cub 'Fifty' and after fighting our way through the downdraft in the lee of a small hill, we finally managed to make a fair climb to 2,000 feet, although the tow plane pilot was totally new to this type of work. The airspeed varied between forty-five and fifty, and there appeared to be no undue strain on the ship at any time.

"Shortly after releasing I found myself rising and ascended to about 4,000 feet before losing the lift. The first hours of the flight were then spent in the vicinity of the airport, which seemed to give off a continuous stream of thermals at intervals, so that it was no trick at all to remain aloft although at times I sank as low as 800 feet. Here I had a chance to practice my turns and discovered that things went better when I tightened them by increasing the bank considerably, as then I could remain within the boundaries of a small thermal. Soon it became almost second nature, and 'La Paloma' would almost fly herself; in fact, I did so many turns that I was becoming dizzy and had to straighten up a couple of times for a rest!

"There was very little wind, and consequently I was able to wander about in any direction as there were numerous clouds all over the sky. After leaving the vicinity of the airport I headed north toward Atlanta and without bothering to circle in any thermals, arrived over the city at about 5,000 feet. It was here that I encountered the best lift of the day and rose to 6,800 feet, just under cloud base. There was lift all about, up to 15 feet per second, and not having a turn indicator I was forced to dive out as I didn't want to enter the clouds.

"About this time I began to get pretty cold, as I was using a seat pack 'chute which raised my head and shoulders out of the 'pod' too high to permit the use of the windshield and cowling; the only protection against the wind being my goggles. Therefore, I held the air-speed up around fifty-five until I had descended into warmer air again at about 5,000 feet. By this time I was north of the city over Buckhead, Ga., which is about fifteen miles from the airport. Then as it was getting late I turned and headed back. Again over Atlanta I got another good boost which enabled me to continue on to the airport without difficulty. At no time was I in danger of landing in the city; in fact most of the flight was carried out between five and seven thousand feet! The landing was made about six o'clock in the evening, as I was pretty cold and tired, but conditions were such that I could easily have remained aloft for another hour!"

This flight was of particular interest to the writer, since it tends to prove what I have long contended; that here in the Southeast we have the finest thermal conditions in the country. The day was good, but not unusually so, and the country over which the flight was made is typical of the "Piedmont Plateau" of this section; gently rolling ground at an average elevation of about 1,000 feet above sea-level. Also, it will be noted that the cloud base was high, nearly seven thousand feet. This means that the sailplane pilot can get a lot of altitude before having to resort to blind flight tactics.

Such days are common here from early in May until October, and during our mild winters slope soaring is always possible in the mountains of North Georgia. During the Spring, there occur numerous well defined "fronts" which are another potential source of distance flights. After having seen the conditions in New York, California, and Texas, I am still of the opinion that the Southeast is second to none.

We are at present handicapped however, by a dearth of good ships with which to explore these possibilities, although interest is rapidly growing among all who watch us operate. Besides Captain Charles' Baby Albatross there is a Franklin secondary here in Atlanta, belonging to the author, and in the future we hope to report new progress in this section. Meanwhile, we extend a cordial invitation to pilots from other sections of the country to bring their ships here and try out our thermals.