

THIRD ANNUAL WESTERN

by W. B. Klemperer

This Third Annual Western Championship Soaring Contest advanced Western soaring activities to a new phase, viz., that of group distance flights. Many flights ranging from 25 to 172 miles were made over difficult mountainous and desert terrain. New routes were explored. The flight strategy is governed here not only by meteorological and topographical considerations, but also by the necessity of staying close enough to the scarce communication lines, lest the pilot, after being forced down, find himself lost or unable to report his position. Many flights through the difficult Tejon pass, over the Tehachapi pass region and several north to and beyond Bakersfield give testimony of the systematic exploration of the entire San Joaquin Valley region now accomplished.

The Southern California Soaring Association wishes to gratefully acknowledge the many contributions made by many individuals and organizations from Los Angeles, Bakersfield, Arvin, and many other places, but regrets to be unable to list and thank them all publicly. They all contributed to the success of the meet. Its organization was in the hands of General Manager, N. R. Cooper; flight operations were directed by Victor M. Saudek as Contest Director and Jay Buxton as Starter and Assistant. The CAA representatives were present during the entire meet, so were representatives of the Aerial Nurse Corps. The California State Forestry mobile station with radio was of immense help in communicating with the civilized world; a Lear radio set gave special weather broadcasts from Bakersfield. A field telephone, loaned by MGM studio was very helpful in connecting the winch with the take-off line.

In spite of the great many spectators, many of them experts, who saw the deplorable accident on Sunday, the 14th, it is somewhat difficult to reconstruct the events that led to the collision of the two gliders soaring on the main ridge, although it would be most desirable for the future avoidance of similar accidents, to fully understand what had happened. There is no reason to believe that the construction of the ships had anything to do with the accident. Sanderson had been in the air for a little over 1/2 hour, Palmer for about 7 minutes. Both ships were apparently flying in the same direction and between 400 and 500 feet above the take-off field, slightly higher than the Beale Mt. pinnacle which is 2626 feet above sea level. Eyewitnesses differ according to their own position and perspective as to whether both gliders began to circle in opposite or in the same direction and thereupon collided, or whether only the one ahead turned and the rear one flew on more or less straight. Neither was it definitely ascertained if the rear one was a little to windward or to leeward.

The version given out by newspapers that a strong difference in vertical currents suddenly brought the two ships into the same level is conjectural, inasmuch as a photograph taken but seconds before the collision shows both ships at but a small altitude difference. The weather was good, the wind moderate, but there was, of course plenty of instability in the air, of which several sailplanes had taken advantage as they soared several thousand feet above the scene of the unfortunate mishap.

The ridge itself was by no means crowded. A third



E. G. Hoffman Congratulates "Woody" Brown Westphol

glider had just been launched, but was not near the two. Both pilots were experienced. It seems to be the consensus of the witnesses that repetition of an accident of this kind should normally be avoidable by observing the rules of beginning a turn always away from the ridge, of always anticipating that a ship ahead may turn away from the ridge at any time, and never to creep up on any ship ahead on the valley side of it, and for more than one glider in one thermal to circle in the same direction only. The accident as it happened was apparently unavoidable and it is possible that the pilots were unaware of their proximity.

The awards banquet, attended by 150 persons, was held at the Women's Club, North Hollywood, on May 4. At this time it was announced that Woodridge P. Brown had retained the title of Western Soaring Champion which he won last year. Thus, he keeps the Kern County Grand Award and the Wm. H. Bowlus Perpetual Trophy for another year. John Robinson was a close second.

The award for highest altitude went to Gus Briegleb for a flight to 7070 feet in the new ship of his own design. To him went the "Western Flying" Altitude Trophy.

Allan Essery was the recipient of the A.O.P.A. Trophy for outstanding achievement. This trophy was awarded to him for the design and construction of a new and successful side-by-side two-seater, combined with his exploration of the difficult Tejon-Pass and his valiant attempts to strike north beyond Bakersfield.

The banquet was honored by the presence of Mrs. Herbert Warren (the former Mrs. Warren Eaton) who interrupted her northern journey to return for the occasion.