

CHAMPIONSHIP SOARING CONTEST

by V. M. Saudek

Pilots and sailplanes soared every one of the nine days of the Western Soaring Meet which was held at the Arvin Sierra Glider Port, 10 miles east of Arvin, California. Cross country flights and high altitudes were attained on even the poorest days—under conditions that have hitherto been deemed impossible.

The following is a brief resume of the contest: Saturday, April 13. Pilot's Meeting, originally scheduled for 9:00 a.m., started about noon, for not until then was there any possibility of competing with the CAA licensing or the Technical Committee's checking on the sailplanes. The winch, which had been brought to the site the day before, by Jay Buxton, was readied about the time the meeting was over, and flying began with Dick Essery's pass along the ridge. As the afternoon progressed, the flights became longer, and Woody Brown in the "Super" took the honors with a flight up the slope of Bear Mountain so close that the barogram showed not only about 4000 feet above release, but could be used to draw a profile of the West slope, right on down to the last fir tree.

John Robinson suffered bad luck due to the fact that both times he was launched the soaring conditions were poor and he was forced in again immediately. Delays in launchings were due in large measure to the fact that the pilots were not yet used to the winch and invariably released with the rope in tension and with no warning to Paul Hepburn, who was driving the winch.

Jay Buxton was official starter, assisted by Mr. Bertrand Rhine, the referee for the day, and several Avions. Signal flags and Jim Campion's light gun were used to signal the winch driver. Retrieving was done with the Ford pickup truck loaned by Mr. Thorne and driven by volunteers. Twelve hours of soaring were piled up in 65 take-offs. Flying officially stopped at 6:30 P.M., though Dick Essery, with lights, and Jack Ludowitz stayed up in Briegleb's BG-7 quite late on evening thermals.

There was a campfire at Jay's tent which was attended by most of the pilots later in the evening. Here, this day's flying and the precious memories of other days' flying in other states were spun out under the stars.

Sunday, April 14. Pilot's Meeting, surprisingly enough, was held very close to 9:00 a.m., as scheduled, and a very important matter was brought up and voted upon. The matter of trading one's position in the order of takeoff cards was discontinued, though the pilot kept the privilege of putting his card at the bottom of the list at any time.

Flying started at 9:50 a.m., when Stan Hall's "Cherokee" took off. This day was one of the most successful soaring days in Southern California and at the same time, the most tragic, for Paul Sanderson and George Palmer were fatally injured after colliding in midair. Their wrecked ships fell on the knoll south of the pinnacle about 4:25 p.m. Paul and George will be remembered as swell pilots and wonderful fellows. Their untimely deaths shock us all, and our deepest sympathy is extended to their families.

When the day's flying was at its height, all but one ship had taken off, making some 26 in the air at once, scattered, literally to the four winds. Milt Stoughton was referee

for the day. There was a campfire as usual that night.

Monday, April 15. This day at pilot's meeting, the announcement was made of the deaths of Sandy and George. All had gathered down at the camp, out of the wind, and were shielded from the threatening weather by huddling against Dick Essery's trailer. It was a raw, gray, windy day, and all felt the loss of our two friends very keenly. At this meeting it was decided to limit the ridge privilege to four ships at any one time and half hour chances were given to each ridge pilot. (The original 15 minutes chance had been doubled to 30 minutes at the Pilot's meeting the first day). There was a long discussion about the advisability of altering the point award system, but this was finally voted down.

When Dr. Nixon, M.D., arrived on the field, as per CAA instructions, flying began again. The overcast broke down considerably and Gus Briegleb was first off at 11:27. About 12:30, a cold front moved in which whisked every glider up above 3500 feet in nothing flat. Storm warnings were displayed and all by Woody Brown in the Bowlus "Super," and John Robinson in "Zanonia" (Ross-Stephens) landed before things got entirely too wild. Woody and Johnny went on and on, over mountains and deserts to Twenty-nine Palms, a distance of 172 miles, getting about 10,000 feet of altitude on the way.

Back on the soaring site, flying continued after the front. At one time several sailplanes were soaring in a snow storm over Bear Mountain (6800 ft.). It was a beautiful sight to see their silhouettes above the silvered, tree covered slope.

During the rest of the week, Jay Buxton was the only ever-present official, except when Charlie McReynolds came up to bat. The rest of the time, the pilots helped out by helping themselves. Many flights to Grapevine and return were made by Woody Brown and Harland Ross. Altitudes of five and six thousand feet were common, and durations up to 7 hours and more were recorded.

Saturday, April 20, was probably the duller day of the meet. At Pilot's Meeting, a \$135.00 prize was put up for a flight from Arvin to a point within 20 miles radius of Grand Central Air Terminal in Los Angeles. This tricky flight would require the crossing of three high passes in the mountains, but money lust gleamed from every pilot's eye as he took off and headed south. The best of the day was a couple of miles south of Gorman.

Bob Buell in a Cadet made 33 loops from an airplane tow. There was a "Hangar Dance" that night at Kern County Airport, Bakersfield, which many of the pilots attended. Those who stayed on the hill cooked weinies and told tales around the campfire.

Sunday, April 21, was a swell day, and so the fellows took off without bothering to have a pilot's meeting. The soaring conditions were pretty much off and on right around the ridge, so a lot of the boys tried their best to "fly home" and get the \$135.00 L. A. prize, but three of them landed at Caswell, south of Gorman. Don Stevens did 86 loops in a Baby Albatross from airplane tow in an attempt to beat his own record of 93 made in 1937 at Elmira. Flying was continued until 81 flights were logged.

(Continued on page 10)