

ELMIRA to LEWISBURG

by Richard Johnson

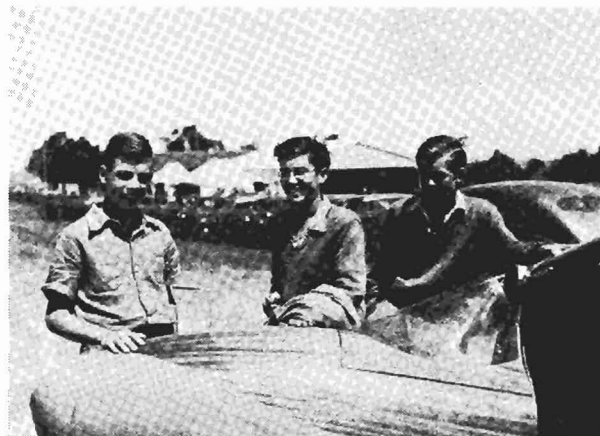
July 13, of the National Contest looked like a good soaring day. The cumuli were building up nicely. My ground crew and I rolled the "Baby Albatross" out of the hangar to the starting line and we installed the barograph as we waited our turn. As the ship ahead of me took off, I put on my parachute and climbed in. Just before the take-off, the barograph was turned on and the crew put the hood on. It was only about 10:30 A. M., but I wanted to get off early so that I could get my 5 hours duration for a Silver "C" license.

There was no slope wind, but there was a good cloud about a mile and a half to the northwest of the take-off field. I got a good tow to about 500 feet and then headed for this cumulus. The air began to get rough and the variometer showed a 10-foot per second rise, but I lost this without gaining altitude. I was then about 400 feet above the valley and I found only down currents under the cloud so I landed in the emergency landing field. My crew was down in 15 minutes with the trailer and we quickly disassembled the "Baby" and returned to the hill. In the meantime several ships got away.

As I took off the second time, there was a slight breeze. At 150 feet on this tow, the winch was pulling me 65 MPH which was 10 MPH faster than I had ever flown the ship and the air was rough so I quickly released and glided to the edge of the hill. With the light wind I was able to hold my own. About 5 minutes later a Schweizer 2-place took off and made a turn over the ridge then landed. I was beginning to lose altitude and when I got below the top of the hill, the air became violent. The Walters variometer went from 10 foot per second up to 10 foot per second down. There was not much chance of getting back to the top of the hill so I followed the ridge east in the direction of the airport in the valley.

About a half mile down the ridge I was able to rise to about 200 feet above the hill on the slope wind, which was smooth and pleasant to fly in. I hit a 10 foot per second lift once, but I thought it was only the slope wind until I saw a "Wolf" circling above me. I quickly found the lift again and circled it to 2700 feet where it weakened. In the meantime, the "Wolf" went north in the direction of the ridge. I had told my brother who was my crew chief that I would go south if possible, so I headed for the best cloud in that direction. I found that there were down currents between the thermals for the rest of the flight which made me stay with the thermals until they were dead.

I kept on going like this and while I was trying to get lift over some mountains about 10 miles north of Williamsport, I saw a "Minimoa" come from the direction of Elmira. I tried to follow it, but he soon was out of sight. By this time I was at 1800 feet and I needed altitude badly. I soon found a weak thermal and circled it for half an hour before I reached the cloud base at 5200



Richard Johnson (right) with crew at Elmira

feet. I then headed for Williamsport and flew in some light lift for another half hour over the city at 4500 feet. It was the nicest part of the flight. As I cruised around, I could see sailboats on the river far below.

I then headed for some clouds to the south and found the lift weak. I wanted to be sure of staying up my five hours and the sky beyond was clear so I stayed with these clouds for the next hour and a half without getting to their base. All the cumuli during this flight were nearly flat and the lift was never strong.

After I passed the five hour mark, I flew south to get as much distance as possible. When I got down to 2000 feet, I did not find the regular down currents between the thermals as I had on the previous part of the flight. Instead, I flew at zero sink for long periods at a time. At 500 feet I picked out a clear field. I was very careful to approach it right. I went over the fence at five feet and at the same time the left wing tip touched the outer leaves of a tree beside the fence, but no damage was done.

Within a few minutes, the owner of the field was out and drove me to his house to telephone Harris Hill of my location. My crew started out shortly after I had taken off and they went south, calling back to Harris Hill by telephone every hour. When they made their last call, they were within five miles of my landing place, Lewisburg, Pa.

(Ed. Note—The flight described above won for Richard Johnson his Silver "C" soaring certificate. He arrived at the Eleventh Annual National Soaring Contest with a glider, plenty of enthusiasm, but no licenses. He successfully passed his CAA private glider pilot's test, won his "C" early in the meet, and he finished third in the contest.)