

1940 American OPEN

by Robert F. Blaine

"Old man weather's smile had gone from a broad grin into uproarious laughter resulting in thermals, the like of which few soaring enthusiasts had ever seen." Such was a resume of the previous month's soaring weather at Lockport, Illinois, on the eve of the 1940 American Open Soaring Contest.

In one of the trailers that came that night in to Lewis School of Aeronautics, six miles north of Joliet, somebody must have brought a Hindu curse, for the smiles turned to tears and a sickening series of utterly useless days to soaring followed in awful regularity.

Saturday, August 24, saw nearly twenty ships but most of them, alas, remained on their trailers for the day. A miserable dripping overcast got things off to a horrible start.

Sunday, August 25, same miserable dripping overcast.

Monday, Ditto.

Tuesday, Same.

Wednesday, likewise.

We might pause to say that the rugged outdoor type of manhood and womanhood which characterized those who entered the contest both as pilots and crew showed, on most of these days as ships, braving the rain and mud, made spot landing tries for prizes set up at the rate of \$25.00 a day for all ten days. A couple of these days were so hopeless that not even spot landings were tried.

Along about Thursday noon somebody shouted "Don't look now, but the sun is shining." Sure enough a little thermal activity asserted itself about one o'clock and Johnnie Robinson in airplane tow got away on a couple of "zero-sinks" and carried Bob Blaine as a passenger in the Schweizer 2-place for a little over fifty miles to Crisman, Indiana. Johnnie watched Randy Chapman follow him for about ten of those fifty miles but Randy, being at lower altitude never got enough "umph" out of these weak ones to make a go of it. Randy landed the L. I. T. sailplane about ten miles from Lockport. A little farther on, roughly about seventeen miles from home, Robinson and Blaine saw Bill Putnam on the ground standing beside the Midwest in which he had left about an hour and a half earlier. No stretch could call this day a good soaring day but Stan Corcoran, in the Cinema I, after making the latest start of all, flew to Michigan City, Indiana, his announced goal, for the day's top distance of sixty-two miles. Stan landed on the announced beach in a qualified flight for the \$50.00 Goal Prize offered by that city.

Friday, along about noon, timid eyes turned upward, saw a little bit of sunlight breaking through the cursed clouds. Stan Corcoran, realizing that the \$50.00 prize posted at Michigan City would go to the pilot who made the trip in the shortest elapsed time, thought he would better his Thursday's time, so off he went for Michigan City again and landed on the exact spot in three minutes shorter time than the day before. His time was, approximately, three hours and forty minutes.

Helen Montgomery showed her skill in handling the Midwest sailplanes which were entered by the Detroit gang, and on this day set a new women's distance record

of, roughly twenty-one miles, landing east of Cicero in a somewhat difficult terrain just south of the Chicago city limits.

Saturday's dawn was more like it. The sun actually came out before noon and things started to happen. Lots of short flights not of contest performance marked the day, and John Robinson got the day's honors by making a most remarkable altitude flight. On a flight that took him to La Porte, Indiana, he contacted a rather mangled cold-front. Everybody else tried to catch it but to no avail. Johnnie went immediately on to instruments and for over two hours never saw the ground. During this time his altimeter showed him a good 14,000 feet above the airport and the barograph credited him for 12,700 feet.

Sunday saw some distance flying. Shelly Charles flew one hundred and thirty miles with Chet Decker's Minamo and landed at Lebanon, Indiana. John Robinson, without a passenger flew one hundred and forty miles to Clinton, Indiana, and Stan Corcoran made the Meet's greatest distance at one hundred and eighty-six miles to Dolan, Indiana. If they had started sooner, they would have been able to turn in record-breaking flights.

Monday, Labor Day, at the pilots' meeting in the Lewis Gymnasium, it was decided that no time limit should be put on the day's flights, since there had been only one or two cross-country days as far as the weather was concerned. John Wilson, Superintendent of the Lewis School of Aeronautics, promised that he would fly his big Stinson out to pick up pilots and barographs just as soon as they had all reported in after the day's flying. Ted Bellak, flying his "Minnie" back to the airport, saw he wouldn't have to be retrieved. Art Schultz in his ABC



J. Shelly Charles, American Open Champion

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