

Snow Bird Meet 1946

One of the Best

By DICK COMEY

Thursday, November 28, saw the first sailplanes take to the air for the start of this year's informal soaring meet. When Winthrop Block arrived at Harris Hill the wind was blowing right on the ridge but by the time other enthusiasts arrived and got gliders out of the hangar and ready for takeoff the wind had died down considerably. I was trying to get in my five-hour leg to complete my Silver C so Howard Burr, Paul Schweizer, and Winnie agreed to launch me first. At about eleven o'clock Paul towed me up to 350 ft. by pulley and car. I was able to hang on ten minutes but that was all, and in I came down wind. Several more pulley flights of short duration were made and then we switched over to airplane tows which netted a few mild thermals. Maximum altitude above release 300 ft. Total time in the air for the three TG-3s, three LKs, and one 2-22 participating was two hours and eleven minutes.

Friday was a great fall gliding day. The wind didn't shift to NW until nine A.M. so it caught us a little off guard and it wasn't until eleven-thirty that Lee Wood towed me off to try for my "five hours." I worked the ridge twice, picked up a few thermals and was up 1500 ft. about the ridge. Operations were really under way. Winnie Block, John Robinson, Youston Sekella, Bob Taylor, Paul Schweizer, Frank Hurtt, and Rossi all took to the air and had good flights. Everybody got up a couple of thousand feet or more and stayed up two or three hours. The thermals were really popping. I was amazed to get in one that carried me up between 500 and 700 ft. per minute to over 3000 ft. above the hill and many of the other pilots had similar experiences. After two hours the wind started to slacken up a little, but during the third hour the thermals continued good. The fourth hour wasn't too bad but the thermals were definitely dying down and the ridge wind was weak. The start of the fifth hour found me about 400 ft. above the ridge without much prospect of getting any higher. John Robinson hung on with me right over the brow of the hill to give a little moral support. Paul took off in the 2-22 to explore the SW end of the ridge. He seemed to be holding his own down there and John and I were losing out where we were in front of the field. With 200 ft. of precious altitude left and forty-five minutes still to go, I headed down that way fully expecting to end up in the valley. I was able to hold my own for a while but as the wind continued to die I started to lose again. It was quite a unique equilibrium setup. Each time as I soared along the ridge I'd just hold my own and when I had to veer away from the ridge slightly to turn around, I'd lose twenty feet. This process kept up until there wasn't much altitude left. Johnny, having no desire to take his ship apart, decided discretion was the better part of valor and landed. Paul, realizing he had only a slim chance of ever regaining enough altitude to land on Harris Hill, headed off for the Chemung County Airport. If he

had had 50 ft. more height he could have made it. As it was, he landed in a field adjacent to the airport and was able to tow the 2-22 up a plank and over a fence onto the airport without taking it apart.

To end the story happily, the wind freshened a little just when it appeared that I was going to be landing soon, too. Very slowly I was able to climb a couple of hundred feet. With ten minutes to go I was up high enough to soar the length of the ridge from its southwest tip to in front of the field. Then it started to die out once more and I returned to the southwest end. Watching the minute hand of my watch very closely, I headed back for the field. I lost altitude on the way but arrived with seventy feet to spare. When the glider touched the ground, the anemometer was standing still and the wind sock was hanging limp. By the time we had the ships put away a half-hour later, it was pitch dark. Total time flown by seven pilots in seven gliders that day was eighteen hours.

Saturday saw some new arrivals. The wind was very definitely from the south so we went in for airplane tows. Winnie Block, Lewis Hull, Dick McGrath, Paul Schweizer, and myself all made flights.

The following is an excerpt from a report Paul Schweizer made to Barney Wiggins on the day's activities: "There was a high overcast—no sunshine at two p.m. with a south southwest wind of approximately ten miles per hour. Dick McGrath, Winnie Block, Dick Comey and I talked the possibilities over and thought that we would take some airplane tows and try soaring on the little used ridge along the river overlooking the western part of the city of Elmira. Dick McGrath made the first tow in his L-K and came down after a short flight. I tried next, going solo in a TG-3 and in view of Dick's poor luck, I told the pilot to tow to 3000 ft. The take-off was made to the southwest, and towing along the ridge on the river it was very rough, indicating apparent ridge lift or, more likely, thermal activity, since it was small and localized. The first 1500 ft. of the tow was also very rough and then it began to smooth out. At 2000 ft. to 3000 ft., it became as smooth as glass and I released approximately over the Rhodes farm house and proceeded to glide south over the ridge in question. I got "down" about two feet per second and, in making a few beats of the ridge, lost 700 ft. I then proceeded to get very light but steady lift of about one foot per second approximately over the ridge at 2300 ft. From then on it was an easy matter to gain altitude, for the lift extended over large areas to the front and rear of the ridge. By this time, Dick Comey came up and he released at 2000 ft. above Harris Hill and had no trouble climbing to 3000 ft. with me. We stayed in this altitude range for approximately an hour and a half in the smoothest soaring that I have ever experienced. There seemed to be a definite break in haze at 3000 ft., as if an inversion ended there. Looking

(Continued on Page 10)