

THE FOURTEENTH ANNUAL NATIONAL SOARING CONTEST

By BOB BLAINE

Contest Manager

WHEN a couple of competing pilots get caught fervently wishing for stable air, an overcast, rain, even snow—that's something! Well, the 14th *was* something! A good hundred soaring pilots flying 65 sailplanes some 40,900 miles total cross-country in 13 days (soarable) agreed the 14th Annual National Soaring Contest was pretty close to a marathon.

This is significant, but far more so is the fact that they turned in performances that topped all America's soaring for the fifteen-odd years of its history. There were predictions and hopes; some were skeptical; but the move to the Great Southern Plains proved that we had what record-breaking took. The weather was nothing short of tailor-made to soaring's specifications. Thermals were generally everywhere, wind velocities at usable levels were pretty good on the majority of days, and there was even an obliging front with a thunderhead which came close enough for at least one of the boys to catch it as he soared over Oklahoma's fields. The terrain was wonderful—"It invited you on and on," one pilot said. "I just never thought about where I might land until I could see the tree-tops out there even with the cockpit—and Texas trees aren't tall like its stories, either," he added.

The 14th was a good show. There was suspense up to the last day with Paul MacCready, Raymon Parker, John Robinson, Don Pollard and Dick Comey running excitingly close almost to the final scoring. There were brilliant and spectacular flights—they almost became the rule. Dark horses popped up, utilities turned in performances which would grace the highest performance ships, and war-training "clunkers" with two

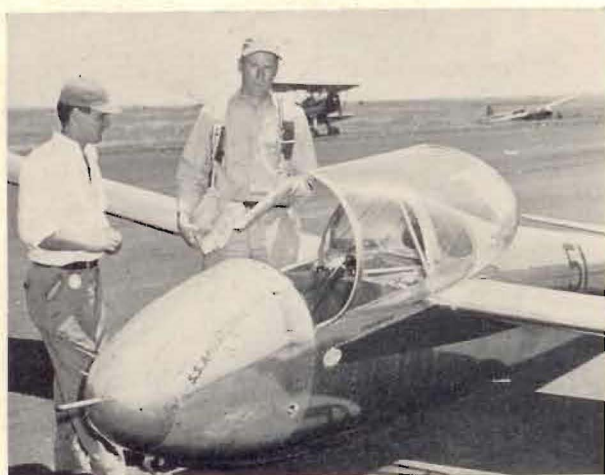
aboard pressed the single-place high performers several days. And to make the cast an all-time top for stars, EVERYONE was there! The statistics probably won't show it, but if you were to stop the next ten men who passed you, add the number of years they had been soaring, you couldn't get less than a hundred years!

A breakdown of home states of contestants gives the picture of the well-rounded out geographical representation—domestically, that is. Generally the eastern region had about 39 competing and the western region had about 35. This even split was a "first" in national contest history. Some private comparisons between the "eastern scores" and the "western scores" might prove very interesting, but of course there are none drawn in this record.

Dick Comey and the Schweizer 1-21 were brilliant. How quickly Dick, the new manager of the Soaring Society of America, and that beautiful all metal bird became one was splendid. Dick soared to the championship from the ranks of the almost unknown. He had flown the 1-21 but a mere week-and-a-half before the contest, and don't belittle his competition, it was strictly tough. Something new has been added to America's soaring picture. The 14th may have had thirteen contests preceding it, but it was in many ways the FIRST truly national, mettle-testing contest of size and import befitting America and the supreme sport of Soaring. Comparing those thirteen years with the 14th makes one think that the next decade may be called "The Soaring Fifties."

Wichita Falls did almost everything to make the contest as big as it was predicted. When Charles King and Francis Harvey, co-directors, envisioned a truly big

Photographs by Caudil



Don Quigley, Dick Comey



Ginny Bennis