



Seventeen-year-old Dick Johnson goes aloft in his "Baby Albatross" during the West Coast Contest held at the Arvin Soaring Site back in 1939. Winch tow—the parachute is used to let the rope down easy.

Youth on the Wing

By GENE BARDWELL

FIFTEEN-year-old Dave Sahler was getting a bit dizzy as he spiralled tightly in a robust thermal 6000 feet above the Chemung County Airport at Elmira. One of four boys in their early teens who learned to soar at the Glider Capital last summer, Dave had experienced the thrill that every glider pilot enjoys when he saw the green pellet rising rapidly in the 2-22's variometer.

Remembering his instructor's words, Dave tightened his turn to get the ship into the strongest part of the lift. This was the real thing! He was earning his "C". In 17 previous solo flights Dave had not been fortunate enough to catch a thermal although he had soared on several occasions in dual flights with his instructor.

Just before Dave reached his ceiling, he had the pleasure of soaring close to the 1-23. It had climbed past him in the same thermal, widening its spiral to by-pass his utility, and it gave him a great thrill to be up there with the sailplane. The day was one of those dear to the hearts of all soaring pilots when the sky was filled with "green" air. It was a time when the eager ambition which had tugged at the young neophyte through 10 hours and 50 flights of training reached fruition. He had climbed more than a mile into the sky; his spirits had soared even higher!

The quartet of "kids" who completed glider training in 1948 marked the largest group of 'teen-agers ever to take up soaring at one time at Elmira, but they were not the first boys in that age bracket to embark upon the fascinating sport. Back in 1931 Bob Carey earned his "C" at the age of 14. Bob was a "bantam-weight" and the Franklin glider he flew had to be weighted with bricks to maintain proper balance. Carey went on to become an excellent airline pilot, as well as an enthusiastic participant in soaring activities. Dick Johnson is another airline pilot who

began flying in gliders in his early teens. He earned his "C" and Silver "C" at the 10th National Soaring Contest when he was 17 years old. Dick continues to spend many hours each year flying sailplanes and presently holds the National Two-Place Soaring Record for Distance (310 miles).

Youth flight training in gliders is carried on under Government sponsorship in many overseas countries to the great benefit of aviation and the nations concerned. There the growth of gliding and its present strong position can be attributed to this support. In the United States we do not have Government subsidies for gliding. Interest in this phase of aviation recently has been shown by the Civil Air Patrol. Perhaps this trend may open the way for some much-needed Government help to get American youth into the air. Until the time "if and when" such help is available the law of self-preservation—or perpetuation—decrees that those now active in the movement shall devote the time, energy and funds necessary to carrying on a positive program of recruiting new glider pilots from 'teen-age ranks.

At a recent National Soaring Contest, the average age of competing pilots was 34. While this is evidence of the tremendous hold that gliding has on its participants—a grip which keeps them in it and at it over a considerable number of years—it also sounds an alarming note. There is a dearth of recruits from the 'teen-age bracket.

While many men take up gliding and soaring after they reach their thirties, one of the most practical methods of building up the ranks of active glider pilots in this country is to bring into the game the thousands of boys who are eager to join the sport and who are to be found in every section of the country.

Every glider club and every individual soaring pilot should be alive to the need which presents a challeng-