



THE 18th NATIONAL

By HOWARD E. BURR

On July 12 the 18th National Soaring Contest came to a close. Never before in the history of U. S. National Contests has Elmira been plagued with so much precipitation, yet it should stand with the best, as a successful competition.

July 4th greeted the contestants with a drenching rain. The pilots occupied themselves with last minute touches to their ships while contest officials completed pilot registrations. In the afternoon movies of waves experienced in Austria, Switzerland, Sweden and Iceland were shown by Karl Ovgard of Sweden. Slides of the 1950 International Soaring competitions at Orebro, Sweden were shown by Captain Ralph Barnaby, USN Retired. In the evening the pilots and crews were entertained by a square dance held in one of the hangars atop famous Harris Hill.

July 5th the rain and low ceiling continued until after 1:00 p.m., when 13 pilots finally got into the air to utilize the brisk northwest wind on the ridge, most of them for Silver "C" duration attempts. Low ceiling and poor visibility terminated most of the flights in the late afternoon, but Larry Gehrlein of Erie, Pennsylvania managed to ride it out and thus completed his five hours required for his Silver "C."

Friday, July 6 promised to be an excellent day according to the briefing given by Barney Wiggen, Chief Meteorologist. Take-offs started at 11:00 a.m. with Dick Johnson, 1950 soaring champion, being the first away. Dick released at about 200 feet above the brow of the hill, continuing his flight with the help of the ridge for some time before getting away for a new American distance record of 360 miles. Johnson's towering flight should not overshadow that of C. J. Smith who flew a 1-19 67 miles, a flight worthy of comment.

July 7 promised to be more of what was experienced the day before, but not quite the life and vitality. Action bore out the forecast as it was one o'clock before the first ship finally got away. As Dick Johnson was still not back from his sojourn into Virginia, another open day according to the rules, was in order. The outstanding flight of the day proved to be that of Fritz Compton who fell short of his goal and return flight to Scranton, Penn. by six miles.

July 8 was elected to be the first task day of the meet by the Contest Board. Norwich, New York was

selected as the goal and the task was to be the Beechcraft Speed Event. Thirteen pilots completed the goal with Dick Johnson placing first, averaging 51.5 m.p.h.; Richard Ball second at 39.2 m.p.h; and Ray Parker third at 38.3 m.p.h. This event was well timed as the 76-mile flight made it possible for the pilots to attend the Schweizer Lawn Party in the evening.

July 9 was elected an open day, but proved to be a poor day in which most pilots had difficulty remaining in the air. There were only four flights which exceeded the 25 mile minimum. They were:

Johnson	128 miles	128 points
Coverdale	99 miles	
Wiberg	76 miles	(goal)
Miller	52 miles	

According to the rules Johnson gained 128 points as this was his second open day of competition. Wiberg, Coverdale and Miller gained no points as all three had two previous open day flights which had been further. Thus, Johnson was the only pilot to contribute to his score.

July 10 was again voted as an open day by the Contest Board. Take-offs started at 11 but a large number of ships had to return to the field for a second start, as conditions did not prove to be as good as they looked.

The longest flight of the day was Coverdale's flight of 107, but the most dramatic was that of Stan Smith. Stan selected Dansville as a goal and return flight. Late in the afternoon at least an hour after thermal activity had apparently ceased and many of the field personnel were enjoying a swim in the pool, Stan appeared overhead at about 1,000 feet gliding down to complete his 104 mile goal and return flight which moved him from third to second place.

The outlook for July 11 was not too promising and lack of evidence of thermal activity delayed take-offs until the middle of the afternoon. Most pilots landed short of the 25 mile minimum required for contest points. Two pilots exceeded this minimum. Steve Bennis flew 47 miles and Dick Johnson completed a 34 mile distance and return flight.

According to the contest rules July 11 was to be the last contest day in order to allow ample time for Ben Shupack and his statistics crew to tally up the scores.