



THE AUTHOR

One of the requirements for the Silver C Soaring award is a duration flight of five hours. This task is what I refer to as "The Big Sit," and this is the story of mine and the events leading to it.

Every one of the one hundred and sixty-seven individuals in these United States who is entitled to wear the Silver C has made the Big Sit. The requirements for the above-mentioned award are a gain in altitude of 3280 feet, distance flight of thirty-two miles and a duration flight of five hours of uninterrupted free flight, all substantiated by a trace from a sealed Barograph and witnessed by official observers.

A "Big Sit" can be either easy or difficult depending upon the weather condition, the locality and the type sailplane that is available. Memphis, Tennessee, where this flight was made, has no mountain higher than fifty feet on which to ridge soar. Thermals are good in the summer but top at about four thousand on a good day and six thousand on a day that I consider the best rip-roaring.

This was not my first attempt but the last of many. Most of the other flights could be classified as "Little Sits." I was penalized on all of them because I had to stay within gliding distance of the field. There was no trailer for my Pratt-Read at the time and I couldn't go X-country for fear of landing in a field too small out of which to aero tow. This necessitated flying back into the wind after drifting with each thermal. If the wind was fairly strong, I would lose everything I had gained in one thermal in the process of getting back to the next. On one "Little Sit" I stayed aloft past the halfway mark (2:35) but each thermal carried me down-

# THE BIG SIT

by BILL HARRIS

wind so rapidly that I would have to leave it in order to get back. This procedure was repeated over and over. Sometimes I would arrive over the field at traffic pattern altitude but would always "luck" into one at the last minute and struggle back up. After two hours and thirty minutes I had eaten my chocolate bars, drunk my iced tea and was quite certain that I was immune to an unscheduled landing. The fact that my sitter was losing its feeling gave me an additional feeling of buoyancy and reminded me that I had been in the wild blue for quite a spell.

Just as I was getting my second wind and steeling myself for the next two and a half hours, it happened. I glided right in between every thermal in the area and arrived over the field with eight hundred feet and no thermal. Panic struck me. This couldn't be happening to me, I thought, not in the middle of the day and with me over half way! I hunted frantically trying the roof of the hangar and several other pet spots but all in vain. Several minutes later I was on the ground. I could hardly believe it and was disappointed to the point of despair. However, one of my buddies was on hand to make me feel better. He went up and stayed two hours, reporting that the wind had laid considerably and that staying up was no problem.

The day before my "Big Sit" was an excellent soaring day. It was on Saturday, May 15th, 1954. Dr. Joe (Painless) Battle was loaded into my slicked-up Pratt-Read, which was affectionately named "Bo-Diddy" after my good friend and former partner John Karlovich. Cumulus clouds were forming overhead as "Bo-Diddy" lumbered down the strip. It looked like a good day, but Battle was trying to spoil it by mumbling something sarcastic about my little jewel reminding him of a flying beer barrel. I released at 1700 feet in what I thought was a thermal, but which as usual turned out not to be. We searched for a thermal on the way down with Joe teasing me about how much better Yerian's L.K. would stay up than my beer barrel.

At six hundred feet, while starting

my approach, I hit a thermal that tried to tear off the wings. We started a turn and soon found that it was in a real hurry to get upstairs but seemed to be too small in diameter to work. I bent ol' Bo-Diddy around so tight she must have looked like a dog chasing its tail. Joe was given the job of looking around for airplanes and I went on the gauges. At first I couldn't turn tight enough to center the thermal but could stay in it enough to slowly gain altitude. We were drifting towards the up-wind side of the field and I knew that if I didn't start doing better soon, we would have to leave it and start an approach. As we drifted across the field I was trying to get everything I could out of the old girl. I was talking to her, even pleading with her, while trying to keep the ball in the center and the Memphis rate of climb showing up all the way around. As we climbed higher, the thermal got larger in diameter and finally, when I got it cored, we started going up like a home-sick angel.

I was hot and wet with perspiration when we got high enough so that I could relax. We made lazy spirals to the cloud base at 5400 feet. It was cool, shady and peaceful under the clouds. It reminded me of sitting under a big maple tree on a lazy summer day. The fun we had up there that day laughing, talking and staying up without half trying will long be remembered by me. The flights I get the biggest charge out of are the ones where you have to work like hang in order to get up and then it's easy, so you can relax.

We took turns flying and I got even with Joe by heckling him about the little red pellet of the Robinson being UP instead of the green one, whereupon he renamed himself "Red Ball" Battle.

Joe would pump the little football pump that ran our Turn and Bank instrument, and I would try to enter the clouds but there wasn't enough lift. The cumulus were flat and the best we could do was to get one wing tip in the base. We finally got tired and did lazy eights and loops to kill off our altitude, landing after two hours and fourteen minutes.