

ST. YAN AFTERMATH

by W. S. IVANS, JR.

Member of the U. S. Team, 1956 World Glider Competition

The excellent accounts of the 1956 World Competition by Team Captain Barney Wiggin and by our World Champion Paul MacCready, which have appeared in the previous issues of *Soaring*, leave little to the imagination in recreating what was for all of us an exciting and rewarding three weeks of practice flying and competition at St. Yan. The following narrative deals with the accident which befell me on the final day of competition, with the months of hospitalization which followed, and with the many warm-hearted people whose friendship and sympathy made this period so much easier to bear.

The task, a race to St. Auban, appeared to be a good choice. We would have to depend upon thermal soaring for the first 100 miles or so, and upon reaching the Dauphine Alps we might expect to find the same strong ridge and standing wave updrafts that several of us had found on a previous flight over the same mountains to Cuers. The same strong northerly wind, the Mistral, was reported. A field of cumulus extended as far as the eye could see from the ground at St. Yan. The goal, however, was reported to be clear, and remained so all day.

I settled comfortably into G-ALNF, checking turn gyro and artificial horizon while Sterling and Jim smoothed tape over the gaps at the rear of the canopy. The satisfying sound of accelerating gyro wheels followed, and I turned both switches off. Next the radio, a tunable receiver Skycrafters which fitted snugly below the instrument panel. This checked out too, as always. Jim was now busy running along the fifty-six foot span of Olympia IV's plywood-covered laminar-flow wings, removing the last traces of dust. The Stampe towplane taxied into position, dragging its towline. A release check, and all was ready. Wings level. The starter waved his flag, and soon the graceful ship was sliding reluctantly forward. More and more speed, then a small bump let us break ground,

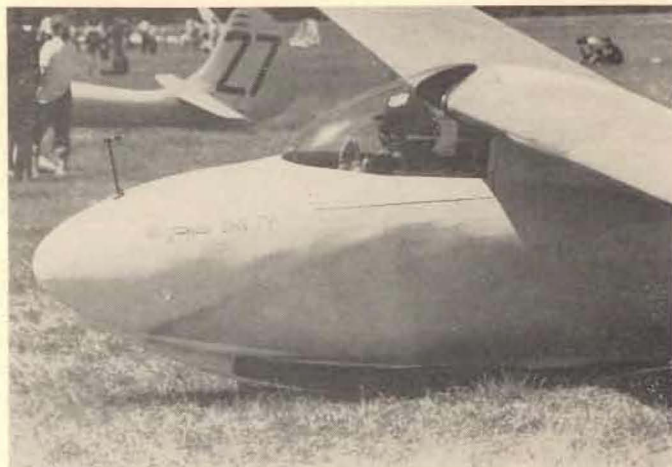
and the awkwardness of being dragged along the ground was superseded by the quiet, taut responsiveness of flight.

I had been flying the Olympia IV almost daily for nearly a month and had become very fond of it. Besides a nice flat polar with maximum glide ratio of 36 to 1, it had excellent visibility, very smooth handling qualities, and no tricks of any kind. The speed and lightness of roll control I had found particularly impressive, and the dive brakes were phenom-

the Engineering Department of Convair in San Diego, and is an experienced glider pilot and president of our glider club, the AGCSC. Jim is chief inspector at Elliotts of Newbury, England, where the Olympia is produced. Mr. Horace Buckingham, Managing Director of Elliotts, had generously offered me not only the loan of the ship but the services of Jim as crewman. I felt really fortunate in having these two as crewmen. To me, the really significant team at a glider competition is not the team of

Bill Ivans in the Olympia IV, ready for take-off at St. Yan.

Photo: Wolf Hirth



ally effective. Due in large measure to the superior qualities of this ship, we were now in fifth place out of a strong field of forty-five single place entries from twenty-six countries. We were fortunate enough to hold this place in the final standings.

After a slow start in which we all had to struggle to remain upwind of the airport while trying to climb to the maximum starting altitude of 1,000 meters, ships began to dive through the starting line. I soon followed suit, pointed the nose of Olympia IV SSE, and radioed this news to crewmen Sterling Starr and Jim Cramp, who were already some miles south of St. Yan with the car (a Ford Ranch Wagon, which Nick Goodhart had loaned to me for the duration of the contest) and trailer.

Sterling is an associate of mine in

pilots from a particular region but rather, the team of one pilot and his crewmen. We were a team in the fullest sense.

Thermal strength proved to be quite variable and individual thermals were hard to center, probably due to a strong wind gradient. Nevertheless, there were no really tight situations until I reached the Rhone Valley somewhat south of Lyon. I had done some cloud flying before reaching the Rhone, and was able to get a good start across the valley by flying blind for several miles in a cloud street that led directly into the valley. This was at an altitude of about 6,000 feet asl. From here on the going was difficult. I lost several thousand feet of precious altitude by flying crosswind to look for lift under the edge of an irregular cumulus deck