

EVERY TWENTY-FOUR YEARS

by STAN SMITH

With but half a dozen brief flights under my belt in 1957 and a mere twenty years or so of National Contests for experience, I was just a bit uneasy as the National's Pilots' meeting opened on July 2nd, 1957. I'm always uneasy on opening day. But nerves gave way to concentration as Howie Burr opened the meeting briskly, with instructions and announcements followed by the business of selecting Contest Board members to represent the pilots. This over, Barney Wiggin came on with the weather. Soaring would be good after a chilly, early morning 45 degree temperature in the valley, with a good lapse rate reported from the Buffalo sounding. There were no wind data available as yet but it would probably be 20 to 25 knots from the northwest. A 60 degree temperature would start convection at about 11:30. The day's task would be a goal race to Norwich and return.

My nervousness came back in a rush. Norwich! I always got lost going to Norwich. Once I found myself 25 miles north and struggled in against a head wind as all the experts lounged on the green turf at the goal and watched me limp in last man. Again I was equally far off course to the south. But this was the task so let's have at it.

I review the sketchy weather information — that wind will be a real problem. Better get an early start and concentrate on making the course rather than trying to make time. We are off around noon with a fairly good start under rather solid Cu. I'm determined to stay north of the course, because of the strong drift to the south, so set a course of about 60 degrees toward Ithaca. In about an hour I'm ten miles south of Ithaca and having a bit of a struggle to stay up. A session of ridge soaring at Candor and after a while I'm back up to cruising altitude again but badly off course to the south. Looking around, I see Binghamton in the southerly distance so begin steering a new course of 50 degrees between thermals. I slowly manage to make headway up the valley between Binghamton and Norwich while I worry

about whether it is the right valley. In due time a town which should be Norwich but may be Sidney appears in the distance. I keep going and call Norwich on 122.5 mc. Back comes Clarence See's voice on Unicom. Very reassuring, but maybe I'm looking at Sidney after all because there is no indication that Clarence sees me yet. But finally I locate the grass field of Norwich Airport and in another fifteen minutes have rounded the turn, recognized the marker, had a brief chat with Tom Eaton on the radio, and am on my way back into the teeth of a seeming gale.

By now the sky is quite devoid of any cloud and I begin to doubt the possibility of getting back to Harris Hill. A routine radio check



Photo: Rose Marie Licher

Stan Smith and Don Ryon, contest scorekeeper, look on as activities get under way on Harris Hill at the 1957 Nationals.

with my crew raises a healthy response. Pete's voice assures me that they are parked right under me at Whitney Point. I'm glad to know this because I've been too busy to do any navigating since leaving Norwich. We exchange hurried bits of information and I tell them to stay on frequency while I see what can be done. Soon I can see Broome County Airport and direct the crew to head

for it as I allow the wind to carry me closer. With an airport below I can keep trying a little longer. A call to the Broome County tower on 122.5 and they clear me to land if necessary. I beat the bushes some more as I spot the 2-25 on the airport. But the wind is too strong. The few thermals are small and are all broken up. So down we go to land on the smooth runway. Bernie Carris greets me with the encouraging information that we are tied for the best flight of the day so far.

After I have gotten the ship parked and disposed of the usual post-flight chores, I emerge from the hanger to find everyone watching a tiny spot of motion in the sky off to the southeast. It slowly grows and becomes the 1-24 with Paul Schweizer aboard. Bernie and I kiss our joint first position goodbye as he slowly circles on toward the northwest. We feel sure he would have landed if we had been smart enough to get our gliders out of sight.

After more waiting, another straggler appears on the low southeast horizon. We are sure that he can't possibly make the airport, but he does! And out of his shiny new 1-26 steps that old Southern gentleman, William (Jack Daniels) Coverdale. A three way tie now for 2nd place (we hope.) We inform Bill that he is not welcome at our airport but give him a hand to get the 1-26 parked in a safe spot.

A look at the five hours plus barograph trace discloses twenty-six thermals, none of them exceptionally good and nearly half of them with a double peak at maximum altitude. This indicates two apparent facts — thermals were rough and hard to center, and the pilot is a bit rusty. Statistics—5 hours and 13 minutes, 105 miles, and an average speed of 20 miles per hour. A difficult flight, and one in which I actually lost ground in the last half hour.

A good retrieve by my efficient crew (sister Marion, son Pete, and enthusiastic Rochester Soaring Club member Allan Melendy) and we are back home in time for a good night's rest before tackling the —

Second Day — July 3rd

At pilot's meeting Barney informs us that a warm front has left us bathed in warm moist air but that a temperature of 85 degrees in the valley will produce thermals to about 6000 feet. The strong wind is still with us at 25 to 30 knots from the northwest, shifting to south of west