

TWENTY YEARS AGO

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The 9th National at Elmira, June 25th to July 10th, 1938.

New types of American sailplanes —The Ross 'Ibis,' The Stanley, The Bowlus 'Baby Albatross' and the Schweizer all-metal two-seater show brilliantly in Contest.

Emil Lehecka of New York, flying the famed German designed and built 'Rhonsperber' sailplane, out-pointed all American entries to win the U.S. Championship.

Peter Riedel of Germany returned to the U.S. Nationals for the second time to top all pilots in scoring. In this 9th National, he flew the big 'Kranich' two-seater, whereas in the 1937 event he had flown the 'Sperber Senior.' In the contest of both '37 and '38 he had quite handily out-scored all others.

duPont and Decker flying 'Mini-moas' came in 2nd and 3rd. O'Meara in a 'Baby Albatross' was 4th, Merboth in the Bowlus-duPont 'Albatross' was 5th, Bayer in a 'Kranich' was 6th and Sweet in a 'Rhonbuzard' was 7th.

Inspired by the accomplishment of the 'Level' Country' expedition earlier in the year of '38, American soaring pilots had come at last to the knowledge that thermals were where you found them. No longer would they ever keep an eye cocked for a good ridge to run to on X-C tries. Freedom was theirs at last as they struck out with great abandon in this 9th National.

The rules makers for the 9th National had intelligently foreseen that American pilot skill and machine refinement had advanced to a point where more rigid contest disciplines were in order. The Editor commented on the subject in the July '38 issue.

"When the rules and regulations for the 9th Annual National Contest were first published — we immediately heard a hue and cry from certain members of the soaring fraternity. When they heard that the requirements, to count, had been raised for distance from seven to thirty-five miles, for altitude from one thousand to thirty-five hundred feet, and for duration from one to five hours, they saw that there was little chance to meet these requirements with their low performance craft. They did not

realize that this was one of the very reasons why these rules were drawn up."

Interestingly enough, the arguments as to contest rules go on now twenty years later, as hotly as ever. While scoring for altitude and duration has long since become passé, the weighting factors for speed and distance is a tune played on many a chin as the boys take their ease 'neath the wing of a ship - between flights.

Flights in the 9th National ran off about like this -

June 25, 26 & 27 were days of poor weather and no contest flying. The Schweizer brothers had arrived on the 27th with their sensational all-metal two-seater sailplane (now known as the TG-2).

June 28 — Saw first flights in excess of the contest minimums. Riedel had best distance in the 'Kranich' of 103 miles, altitude 5,000 feet and duration 5 hours 34 minutes. Merboth was second in the Bowlus duPont 'Albatross' for 41 miles in 2 hours 15 minutes. Lehecka in the 'Rhonsperber' made goal for 34 miles in 2 hours.

June 29— This was the big day of the contest. A big day even by today's standards.

duPont's National Distance Record of 158 miles had stood for four years and only recently had been breached by Barringer's great level country flight of 212 miles. On this day, four contestants went beyond this old 158 mile mark. Failing Barringer's 212, they came all the same dangerously close.

The best flight was Stan Corcoran in his self-designed and built 'Cinema,' a ship of intermediate performance. He attained 183 miles in 5 hours 53 minutes and with best altitude of 5090 feet. Riedel was 2nd hitting a 178 mile goal at Wilmington, Delaware. Decker was 3rd at 171 miles to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. duPont was 4th with 155 miles. Robert Stanley took his new ship on her maiden voyage for 144 miles. Lehecka had 130 miles, O'Meara 88 miles, Bayer 64 miles.

Cross-country soaring was indeed

on its way in America. These performances would compare favorably with flights of a contest now twenty years later.

June 30— Conditions diminished, yet seven flights exceeded the contest minimums. Merboth was first with 94 miles, Lehecka holding on strong made it 89 miles. Sweet carried 84 miles to be stopped at Lake Ontario, O'Meara 73 to Syracuse, Bayer 59 and Stanley 38.

July 1st— Was a no contest day due to poor weather.

July 2nd— Saw improved conditions with six flights exceeding the contest minimums. Riedel was again first with a goal flight 130 miles to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Interestingly enough, his best altitude on this flight was a mere 3,700 feet. How long since any of you modern day pilots covered 130 miles with a maximum altitude of 3,700 feet— and in a big, clumsy two-seater?

Robert Stanley was second with a 122 mile flight to the Delaware Water Gap. His best altitude was 4,000 feet. The aftermath of this flight created a situation of macabre proportion, one to end all 'hard luck' stories in the annals of contest soaring.

Before going to telephone his landing at a nearby farmhouse, Bob had carefully removed his flippers and stowed them in the cockpit of his ship. During his absence some gentle soul, evidently souvenir bent, took these said elevator surfaces away for his very own. To this day, hide nor hair of this sailplane accessory has not been seen nor heard of. Saved from a pack-up and return all the way to California, Bob was given, sportingly enough, leave to finish the contest with the new Ross 'Ibis.' However, his scoring in this ship, property of SSA, would not count officially.

July 3rd— Another big day, Riedel, the German national, substantially exceeded the U.S. Distance record, also surpassed the World's Goal Record— 225 miles to Washington, D.C., in 7 hours 19 minutes with a maximum altitude of 4,160 feet.

Corcoran was second when he carried 146 miles to Shippensburg, Pennsylvania. Both Sweet and O'Meara made a goal of 133 miles to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Merboth covered 98 miles, duPont the same distance. Lehecka reached 4,250 feet in 6 hours 10 minutes on a short distance flight but scored well in altitude and duration points. Dana Darling washed out his Haller Hawk.

July 4th— Bob Stanley, back in