

# 26th ANNUAL U. S. NATIONAL SOARING COMPETITION

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The 26th Nationals were held at Harris Hill, Elmira, N.Y., from July 1-10, 1959. The Elmira Area Soaring Corporation sponsored the competition and it was sanctioned by The Soaring Society of America, Inc. EASC was responsible for operations and the business affairs and, for the first time, SSA officials conducted the technical aspects of the competition. This was the 20th year the Nationals had been held at Elmira.

Winner of the competition and new U. S. National Soaring Champion is Richard H. Johnson of Arlington, Texas, who came from behind on the last day to finish with a 547 point lead. His final score was 4243 out of a possible 5000. Dick was flying a Weihe (pronounced Vie-ah) sailplane, a German design of the late 1930's. He had also won the Championship in the years 1950, 1951, 1952 and 1954, and is the only person ever to have won more than three times. As the 1959 winner, he is automatically first pilot on the U. S. Soaring team that will compete in the 1960 World Soaring Championships to be held in West Germany.

The weather leading up to the contest was uncomfortably windy, hot and humid. On Monday, June 29th, a 57 mile goal and return practice task was set with Dundee, 28.5 miles due north, as the turning point. Not many pilots tried it and none finished. Paul Bikle landed at Dundee and later described weak conditions with a strong NW wind. No practice task was set for Tuesday, June 30th, although most pilots made local flights and a few who had met the full Silver C entrance requirement were busily striving for what they

needed to complete their badge requirements. The SSA Directors held a Board meeting at the Schweizer plant during the morning which was resumed in the evening at the home of Paul Schweizer.

Dick Schreder spent the day having the leading edge of the wing center section of his HP-8 sailplane repaired at Schweizer's. A car had run into it on the trailer upon arrival in Elmira.

## Wednesday, July 1st No Contest Day

When registrations were completed on this first day, there were 34 competing sailplanes, of which three were two-pilot team entries and five were in the Standard Class (the 1-23H and the four Ka-6's). The pilots, representing 2 Diamond C's, 14 Gold C's and 21 Silver C's, gathered for their first meeting, at which Contest Manager Hugh Whitney presided. After a review of operations rules, Competition Director John Graves announced the task for the day as a 52 mile goal and return race with the race track at Bath, N.Y., 26 miles WNW, as the turning point. Timing would be from release at 2000 feet over the Hill to crossing a finish line across the runway.

Barney Wiggin, celebrating his 20th year of forecasting for Harris Hill contests, gave the weather briefing. It was not encouraging; a SW wind, marginal lift and later an overcast scheduled to arrive with possible waves and thunderstorms.

Don Ryon, chief statistician, supervised drawing lots for order of selecting take-off times on the first day. That over, the meeting adjourned and, shortly after, official opening ceremonies took place outside the main hangar. Short welcoming

speeches were made by Luther Wolfe, acting Mayor of Elmira, Anson Saunders, Chairman of the Chemung County Board of Supervisors, Janice Hagens, the 1959 Soaring Queen, Dr. Harner Selvidge, SSA President, and Hugh Whitney, Contest Manager.

The pilots then selected take-off times, which began at 1228 at four minute intervals. The lift was weak and after the first few flights did not fare too well, most remaining early pilots selected new take-off times at the end of the list. Most everyone finally got away but it was not long before numerous landing reports began coming in. With the five flights of at least 50 miles requirement for a contest day, it became doubtful that five could do it. Finally, Kit Drew appeared overhead in his Ka-6B as the first one back. Forty minutes later, Bikle, Carris and Schweizer all came in together, although Carris just barely made the Hill and did not roll across the finish line. However, it didn't matter because no one else made 50 miles so it was a no contest day. Bikle had the fastest time, 15.6 mph., one hour to Bath, 2½ hours coming back.

## Thursday, July 2nd First Contest Day

Task of the day: a goal race to Skyhaven Airport at Tunkhannock, Pa., 64 miles to the SE.

The weather was more promising. A cold front had gone through during the night with much rain, lightning and thunder. The air was cooler and winds were 20 to 25 knots from 315°. The fresh ridge wind was used to advantage by Bob Pfeiff who made a five hour duration flight to complete his Silver C and qualify as the 35th competitor in the contest. He then got on the tail end of the

The pilots and officials of the 1959 Nationals.



A. J. Smith in his LO-150, leader after every day but the last.

