

"NEW RECORD SET"

SCHWEIZER SOARING SCHOOL ACTIVITY FOR 1959

by W. E. DOHERTY, JR.

The appeal of soaring flight is increasing every year. During the 1959 season of the Schweizer Soaring School, students from 27 states and 6 foreign countries came to Elmira for sailplane ratings, FAI awards and checkouts. Total registration was 224. This more than doubled last year's registration. Of this number, 129 received their F.A.A. ratings. In addition, 76 C badges and 7 Silver C legs were earned. (The soaring school is one of SSA's best salesmen. Many new SSA memberships were taken out by all of the recipients of the C awards who were not already members.) We have found that demonstration rides are perhaps the strongest single selling point. In 1959 we gave nearly 300 of these rides.

It is interesting to note that 25% of those attending the school held a commercial pilot certificate and nearly half of these were airline pilots. Interest in soaring was not limited to any particular group. Military and executive pilots, doctors, business executives, truck drivers, salesmen, farmers, and a priest were a few of the many occupations represented. We believe that the "packaged," fixed price courses are to a large extent responsible for the popularity of the school.

During the period from May 1st until the end of October when the school officially closed, nearly 3200 flights were made and 1500 hours logged. On one day alone 65 aero tows were made with one tow plane.

It is also interesting to note that the Chemung County Airport from which the school operates had 50,000 movements in 1959. Two commercial

airlines have 36 scheduled arrivals and departures daily. All school flights are made from grass alongside the active runway. The tow plane is radio equipped and all take-offs are controlled by the tower. The tow plane pilot also reports his location and altitude when the sailplane releases. Adhering to definite rules and regulations and teaching a precision pattern are responsible for our perfect safety record.

The school equipment consisted of two 2-22C's, two 1-26's and one 1-23G. A 150 H.P. PA-18 Super-Cub was used for towing. Bernie Carris was chief instructor and he was assisted by Brad Straus and several alternate instructors. The school operated seven days a week.

Last year a ground indoctrination course was added to the curriculum. Regulations and safety rules were stressed as well as airport operation procedures.

There was a definite increase in the number of families who came to Elmira, combining a soaring course with their vacation. We are fortunate in that Elmira has such excellent attractions as the Corning Glass Center, Watkins Glen and the Finger Lakes area, all within a 25 mile radius. By proper scheduling of the flight periods it was possible for groups to visit these and other nearby places of interest.

A number of husband and wife teams took courses as well as several fathers and sons. The family aspect in soaring should be encouraged even more than it is now. We believe that soaring should be encouraged as a participation sport with less emphasis on competition. The majority of

pilots attending the school are interested in the personal challenge that soaring offers as well as the sense of freedom and satisfaction it gives. Obviously anyone who is just taking up the sport is interested first in becoming proficient to the extent that he has the confidence and ability that will make participation enjoyable. The emphasis on contests, speed dashes and records can be a deterrent to popularizing soaring if overemphasized. By presenting soaring as flying in its best and purest form we can interest a greater number of people in the sport. In the same sense there are thousands of persons driving sport cars but the percentage of owners who enter sanctioned races is very small. Competition is a vital and necessary part of any sport. It furnishes additional interest, "improves the breed" and advances techniques. However, it should be presented as an added feature not as the basic purpose. Then as pilots become more experienced they may become interested in competition. First in local regatta-type meets and then later on in local regional contests. Some may go on to the Nationals and Internationals.

The number of inquiries the school receives from every part of the country indicates the growing interest in soaring. Due to the expense and time required to come to Elmira only a small proportion of the total number can fit such a trip into their budget or schedule. If there were more soaring schools available the number of pilots being introduced to soaring could be greatly increased.

Inasmuch as commercial soaring schools are able to report favorable financial results for 1959, it appears that more soaring clubs will form and commercial airplane operators can profitably add soaring to their program. This could benefit soaring while at the same time increasing their flight activities. In 1960 ten Schweizer dealers will have commercial soaring operations.

Getting ready to launch the school's 1-23G; a typical scene of activity on the Chemung County Airport.

