

THE NATURAL PHILOSOPHY OF SOARING

by JACK H. LAMBIE

Sometimes you wonder. You are sitting in your sailplane with a stiff back, the sweat is running into your eyes from the G's as you circle around and around in a maddeningly spotty and weak thermal. Your foot on the rudder pedal is beginning to tremble from tension and fatigue as you wipe the sweat from your hand and take another grip on the stick. What is there about that variometer reading "up" that is so fascinating to the soaring pilot?

Looking along the sweep of the wing to the ground far below we sometimes pause and ask, "What am I doing up here?"

For that matter why does the mountain climber climb, the sports-car racer race, the skin diver dive, and, to go on, why is man continually attempting to subject himself to the most dangerous and rigorous actions within imagination? What do things like soaring, going into space, or breaking any kind of record have in common? In other words, why do we do it? Yes, you can talk about the wind swishing over the wings and the bouyant kick of the thermal, but why do we get so much out of a difficult or uncomfortable flight too?

Some will say, echoing the sup-

posed mountain climber's classic statement, "Because it's there." Others will recount the possible aid to society through their activity, and some simply don't bother with the question — they just like to do what they are doing.

Meaning of Life and Awareness

In analysing the problem it seems that much of our activity is involved in the quest for immortality. Life, as I am defining it for human beings, consists in series of awarenesses or experiences. A worm or a tree is living, of course, but there is a very limited awareness of the world and very little awareness, except in an elementary way, of its own immediate environment. In the definition I will use this level of life is not "alive" in the human sense. The awareness of the world around us in all its many facets determines the extent of our aliveness. If something is happening to us and we do not know of its happening, and never will be aware of its happening, nothing is added to our lives. The real drive of the human venture lies in increasing this awareness to its utmost limits. To know everything, do everything, and have complete control of our environment is what most

people really mean by immortality.

For an example of what is meant by personal growth and awareness take the example of a person who takes an auto trip to another place some distance away. As a young person or one new to the area he may see nothing but the passing scenery flying by his window and may even be quite bored as the time drones on over the miles until the destination is reached. In contrast let us consider that the person is trained in the history and geology of the area and also happens to be driving the car himself and that further he has recently overhauled the machine in his own garage. Now the meaning of the mountains and valleys, the very noises of the car, towns and certain historic buildings, bring to his mind meanings and new satisfactions. The trip becomes intensely meaningful.

Again take the example of a meteorologist looking out of the window and seeing enough in the glance to provoke much conversation and discussion about the weather conditions while an untrained person sees "nothing."

I think all of us are aware of the growth in our own lives as we grow older. The more new things we learn the more we have with which to compare and evaluate our experiences. Therefore, the new experiences become that much more meaningful and so help us to further evaluate and recognize new experiences, and so on, ad infinitum.

It is interesting to note that this is a particularly human trait. Why? Probably for the same reason we stand up and use our hands or have color vision, among other things — evolution. Those who did not have this drive apparently were not as successful as those humans who reached out to discover better methods of hunting and fighting. The human animal has come to dominate the world through this tremendous drive and desire to know and overcome his world. This drive seems to determine most of our ideas of immortality and therefore must be considered as one of our more ultimate pursuits.

Experience Through Soaring

Personal growth supposes experiences that make us more intensely aware of present and future events. No one can be as aware of the atmosphere as the sailplane pilot who in some ways becomes and experiences being a molecule of air himself. More so, than in any other machine, is man alone matching wits

About the author, pictured below in his Fauvel AV-36 flying wing sailplane: Age, 30; married, five children; profession, teacher of gifted grade school students; B.A. from Univ. of Ill., M.S. from Univ. of So. Calif.; soloed BG-6 at age 14, was active in Illini Glider Club, now a Director of SCSA, built Bruce Carmichael's 1-26, holds U.S. Silver C #322 and has Gold C altitude leg.

Photo: William Lambie

