

# MY FIRST WAVE FLIGHT

by CHARLES NEARING

I have had so much fun reading about other reports of soaring flights that I want to tell you about my first wave flight. Little did I think when flying from Harris Hill, or chasing puffy cumulus clouds with Toledo Glider Club members that one day I would be sitting in a Schweizer 1-26 more than 17,000 feet MSL over Reno, Nevada with my variometer showing three meters per second up!

It really began when three of us in the Ames Soaring Club at Hummingbird Haven, Calif. requested permission to take one of the club's 1-26 sailplanes (the Eye-Sore, or is it the I-Soar?) to Glider Valley on a dry lake north of Reno for two weeks.

Sunday, at the end of the first week, I had the 1-26 all to myself. I cleaned the canopy, checked the oxygen tank which showed 1,600 psi, installed the barograph, properly sealed, inspected the sailplane, then enviously watched and helped Bruce Beebe in his Ka-6, Bob Gomes in his (and Klemmenson's) Skylark, and John Baird in his 1-23 get airborne for cross-country flights. The wind was from the southwest and quite strong, perhaps 20 mph on the ground, stronger at altitude and from a westerly direction. There were lenticular clouds visible in the distance both north and south of Glider Valley but they were too far away for a 1-26 to think about, especially with only auto tow available.

My auto tow raised me to 6,500 feet MSL which was 1,500 feet above the dry lake bed. I took off at 1:45 P.M. and by 2:10 P.M. was at 12,000 feet MSL. I had been fortunate in getting a good thermal almost at once and following it to the top. I cruised around in that area for some time, picking up other thermals I could see popping off the dry lake and drifting towards me. None of them lifted me higher than 12,500 feet MSL. I used a little oxygen for a short time, although I noticed no indications of needing it. With only 70 total hours glider flight time, and 99 percent of that under 8,000 feet MSL, I was a little apprehensive about the proper use of oxygen.

Finally I decided that thermals were not going to get me a Gold C altitude gain (I needed about 16,000 feet MSL) so I flew over towards a long ridge northwest of Glider Valley where I had flown some exciting ridge lift earlier in the week. Nothing better there, except a yellow 1-26 which was getting about the same results as I. I then cruised along the west side of the dry lake and even over around Peavine mountain south of the dry lake with no interesting results. In fact I was down to only 6,500 feet MSL again so I headed back to the dry lake for some more thermals which I could see.

Again I found good lift and went right back to 12,500 feet MSL without much difficulty. There was an intermittent layer of thin stratus clouds some distance above me with a small cumulus cloud appearing, then dissipating once in a while below it. The wind must have been at least 30 mph because when I headed into it at 42 mph I seemed to be making only 5 to 10 mph over the ground. I was soaring about one-half mile east of dry lake over a small ridge between it and Stead AFB in clear air when I blundered into the wave!

To my amazement it felt just like the reports state. It was incredibly smooth, smooth as glass, but the variometer showed two mps up, then three and finally almost five! The altimeter needle was going up fast enough to see. I flew in a south-easterly direction approximately at right angles to the wind but headed south west to crab into it. The wave must have been wide and strong because I flew this way for several minutes. In a short time I was at 15,000 feet MSL. I put on the oxygen mask again. Soon the lift decreased and I turned first upwind, then downwind without finding greater lift. Finally I flew into sink, so I reversed my course and flew north-westerly. Luckily I found it again, and flew in this direction for three or four miles in lift all the way before turning south-east again. With this procedure I was soon above 17,000 feet. With my Gold C altitude gain now well in hand I be-



Author Charles Nearing with Toledo Glider Club's 1-26 at Adrian, Michigan.

gan to look around a bit.

The view was exhilarating. I could look north and west over ridge after ridge of mountains, even to Mt. Shasta with its glaciers in the west. I could look south down the tremendous, hazy, great Sierra Valley towards Bishop. No wonder those who have flown the Sierra wave are challenged to try it again and again. I was so interested in looking around that I forgot to observe my highest altimeter reading, but it was probably somewhere between 17,000 and 18,000 feet MSL.

South of me beyond Reno and east of Mt. Rose was a spectacular build up of lenticular clouds. There was a regular bank of them, layer upon layer, going up to great height. The lowest one was above my altitude but not much. So, instead of getting the most out of my cloudless wave, I headed towards Mt. Rose, thinking about the fabulous flights my friends must be having, and wishing I had a sailplane with more penetration than my 1-26.

Soon I hit sink of 500 then 1,000 feet per minute. I turned back, got more altitude, and headed south again. By the time I was down to 12,000 feet MSL, I was still several miles from the clouds but was fearful to go any farther as then I might have to land at Reno airport. I turned off the oxygen; the tank had 900 psi left and reluctantly turned back towards Glider Valley. I cleared Peavine mountain by 1,000 feet, played around a little with my excess altitude, and landed about 4:30 P.M.

If you have not yet made a wave flight, I recommend that you do so; it is really quite exciting the first time.