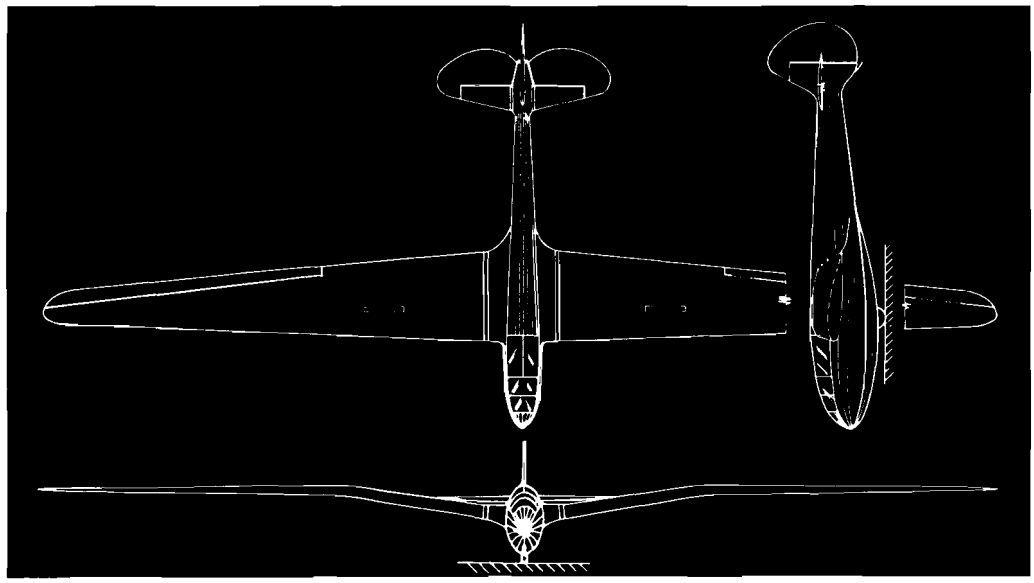

Jack Laister's last glider, the 31,000-pound behemouth shown opposite, was named the Trojan Horse. It was the largest glider ever built in the U.S. and the first airplane of any sort to carry a two-and-a-half ton truck or a 155-mm howitzer in flight. The name of the glider was derived from its intended role of putting troops within the enemy's bastion. The Yankee Doodle (plan shown to right), designed by Jack when he was at Lawrence Tech, was the forerunner of the war-time TG-4, later the LK-10.

Jack was born in Ontario, Canada, and grew up in Wyandotte, Michigan. Roosevelt High School in Wyandotte sported an active model airplane club sponsored by the manual arts teacher, Clair Jones. Jack remembers Mr. Jones as a very devoted, enthusiastic and inspirational leader. Jack and his fellow club members wanted to fly and turned their collective efforts towards gliding. Technological information and inspiration came from Popular Mechanics, Air Trails, Aero Digest and Sportsman's Pilot. Using the high school shop, Jack designed and built his first glider at 14. Now many boast an altitude Diamond at that ripe old age. The glider was never flown but Jack taught himself to fly in the two primaries that followed. During those first two adventuresome years, Jack and his gang, which included Douglas Walters, George Zuban, Edward Boetter and Emerson Melhose, used shock cord. Then the group headed for the high ground and managed to get flights with 75-foot straight glides and eventually made S turns.

* * *

By 1930 the Wyandotte Aviation Club (the former model airplane club) was using a Model A tow car and getting a heady 300 feet of altitude – enough to manage 180 and 360-degree turns. Asked how his parents felt about his gliding Jack admits, "They didn't actually go along with it but they didn't stop me!"

The Wyandotte Aviation Club was informally counseled by Ed Hill, an international champion balloonist and William B. Stout (designer of the Ford Tri-motor) who saw what the boys were doing and helped when they could. Henry and Edsel Ford invited Jack's club, as well as others, to the plant where they would hear speakers such as Commander Richard Byrd while seated under a Trimotor wing. The Ford Company also allowed the ABC Glider Club of Detroit, in which Art Schultz was active, to use the Ford Airport.

In 1932 Jack flew his glider in a contest which was a feature of an air show at the Wayne County Airport (now Detroit Metropolitan). The ship, designed by Jack, had a 36-foot span, struts and a steel-tube fuselage. It weighed about 290 pounds and was covered with the glider fabric available then. Construction cost was approximately $100. While flying this glider, which resembled a Franklin, Jack enjoyed his first soaring experience when he contacted a thermal at 1200 feet. The contest events consisted of duration, bomb drop and spot landing. Among the groups entering were the ABC Club, the Akron, Ohio, group and the Wyandotte club. Jack was the winner with a seven to eight minute duration flight.

The Aeronautics Branch of the Department of Commerce registered and numbered all the gliders that competed in the contest. The contest pilots were given motorless-pilot ratings after demonstrating glider flight. The minimum age for the rating was 16 and no written exams were involved. Jack claims motorless rating number 469.

At the Elmira Nationals in 1933 Jack competed with Stan Smith, Dick duPont, Stan Hall, Howie Burr, Hawley Bowlus, Gus Haller (Haller Hawk sailplanes), Martin Schempp, Paul Schweizer, Ernie Schweizer and the Funk brothers of Akron, Ohio. Shock-cord launches were made from the old Elmira Hill, 1000 yards from the present site. While at Elmira, Jack witnessed his first winch launch. Contestants landed in marked fields in the Chemung Valley and returned their planes to The Hill by trailer. During the contest, Jack earned C badge number 89. Stan Smith won the meet. Earl Southee was the contest manager that year, as well as many others, and Jack recalls him "gathering the kids (pilots) around for safety talks before the flights." Prizes were donated by business concerns and were either trophies or instruments. The pilots were becoming increasingly aware of thermal activity and Gus Haller, Dick duPont and Wolf Hirth were making great efforts to locate and utilize them. Hirth devised various variometers which he employed while at Elmira.

Collegiate glider clubs were a thriving vital force of gliding then. M.I.T., Purdue, the Municipal University of Akron, Tri-State College of Indiana, Lawrence Tech, Stephens Tech and the University of Michigan were training pilots and competing in contests as groups.

In pursuit of a degree in aeronautical engineering, Jack enrolled at Lawrence Institute of Technology, Highland Park, Michigan. While there he built a Universal two-place utility glider which he and Bill Put-