# THE LEADING EDGE
# The Newsletter of the M.I.T. Soaring Association, Inc.
# October 1995

Acting Editor: Mark Tuttle

## Contents



## Ground School Classes

**John Wren**

Soaring ground school classes, for those who wish to take their Private License written test, will be held on Saturdays throughout the month of January. For more details on times and location of classes contact Joe Kwasnik or John Wren.

## Sugarbush Encampment

**Joe Kwasnik**

A trip to Sugarbush is planned for the weekends of October 14-15 and 21-22, 1995. A Blanik will be disassembled at Sterling the morning of October 13th and trailered to Sugarbush that afternoon. We hope to reassemble the glider during the early morning of the 14th and be in the air flying the ridge that day. Steve Moysey has agreed to provide instruction (thanks, Steve). As we plan the final details, we will need some help on disassembly/reassembly of the Glider on the 13th and 22nd. In addition, if anyone has a spare radio transceiver or two that we could borrow for the trip, please contact us. To participate or get more information about the trip, please contact Steve Sovis or Joe Kwasnik. Hope to see you there!

*"I have searched all my life for the essence of flight. Flight — what happiness."*
Comments by sculptor Constantin Brancusi on his extensive series of abstract birds.

## Breaking News

**Mark Tuttle**

The latest news and gossip from the field and email:

*New members:* Please welcome the following members who have joined the club since the last newsletter: Mike Ellis, Tom Ellis, Steve Glow, James Jones, Paul Lynch, John Nordmann, Nick Patrick, and Bob Playter.

*New pilots:* Paul Lynch, a new member with significant power experience, soloed on Monday, September 4, and passed the check ride for his private/commercial glider certificate on Sunday, September 24. Jerry Engelsman, another new member who is a power instructor at Fitchburg, soloed on Saturday, August 19, and hopes to set up his private/commercial check ride soon. Joe Kwasnik soloed while at Sugarbush on vacation after some intensive training there. Mike Rudomin and Bernie Loraditch have also gone solo since the last newsletter. Congratulations to all these pilots! And while we are at it, let us thank our newly checked-out tow pilots Jerry Engelsman, Bob Fletcher, Charlie Friedman (who has also been checked out as demo pilot), and Paul Lynch.

*New private owners:* If the money and papers didn't change hands last weekend, the deed will almost certainly be done soon: Al Gold and Joe Kwasnik will become partners with Roy and Dan Bourgeois in the Bourgeois 1-26. Ask one of these four about this glider's interesting history.

*Children:* Derek Sherlock passed on a piece of email from former MITSA member Scott Hathcock: "On 9/4 Pat gave birth to a 8 lb 1 oz boy. All are healthy. His name is David. By the way, I'm building an RV6."

*Weddings:* Steve Glow joined the club just a few weeks before getting married, and jokes that, "I felt I should get my foot in the door before my wife had an official say in the membership." Congratulations, Steve! On the wedding, I mean.

*Mike and Eric Zucker:* Mike and Eric Zucker spent the summer months flying with MITSA and have now returned to Hungary, but their father John Zucker sent MITSA a postcard from Greenland proclaiming "Greetings from Thule Air Base" with the following message: "Dear MITSA: I'm sorry, I only know you collectively, but I wanted to send you my greetings from Greenland.

I also wish to thank each and every one for 'taking in' my sons Mike and Eric this summer. They are now back in school and in the air in Szombathely, Hungary. They will soon be checked out for solo/tow plane thanks to the excellent training and practice they received from all of you. We will be back again in the summer and Mike will stay on, as he will be starting school in the Worcester area next fall. If you want to exchange information, correspondence, or pictures with a gliding club in Hungary, please write. Thanks again, John Zucker, PSC1501, Box 1226, APO AE 09704 USA."

*Safety:* Peter Foley has conveyed concerns from the airport management about gliders thermaling near the power pattern. Apparently a group of gliders was seen scratching for lift on a weak day near the entry point for the power pattern. Stay clear of the power pattern when thermaling, as stated in the Practical Test Standards.

## SSA Dues are Due

**Mark Tuttle**

Most of you will find enclosed with this newsletter your 1996 membership renewal form for the Soaring Society of America. You are receiving this form from MITSA because the SSA's records indicate that you are an SSA member affiliated with MITSA. For what it is worth, MITSA will receive a few dollars if you happen to renew your membership before December 1.

MITSA is a chapter of the SSA, and the SSA simplifies its paperwork by assigning a common renewal date to all members affiliated with a given chapter. The renewal date for MITSA is December 31. Since you are an SSA member and the SSA knows you are affiliated with MITSA, you are receiving a renewal form with dues pro-rated so that your SSA membership will expire for the next time on December 31, 1996. This means you may be paying a little more or less than the normal $55 annual dues, but starting next year it will be $55 every year as usual.

MITSA members are strongly encouraged (in fact, expected) to be members of the SSA. If you are not a member, please contact the SSA by writing to SSA, PO Box E, Hobbs, NM, 88241-7504, by calling (505) 392-1177, or by faxing (505) 392-8154. I believe the SSA accepts applications over the phone with a major credit card.

## Wednesday Evening Group

**Steve Moysey**

As an experiment, this summer the club ran a Wednesday evening flying session. The aim of the group was to give student pilots, and other folks chasing new ratings, a chance to fly with the same instructors each week. This was intended to give a degree of continuity to the training. We encouraged people to turn up each week, regardless of the weather, so that even on nonflyable evenings we could concentrate on ground school work.

The group started at the end of June and ran through to the end of August. We managed to fly on most weeks, with poor weather impacting us less than the lack of students! Having said that, the turn out on most evenings was very encouraging. Some weeks we had to employ both Blaniks and two instructors just to get through the flying list. I remember one evening where we had only one instructor — yours truly — and still used both gliders! We would land one Blanik, get out of the cockpit and be whisked away by golf cart to the other Blanik waiting at the launch point. The ground crew would then retrieve the first Blanik, after launching the second, and place it ready for launching while the other was still in the air. Talk about a fast turn around! But it worked and enabled us to achieve a high launch rate and use the remaining daylight to the best advantage.

The flying was very enjoyable. Silky smooth conditions and spectacular sunsets made the Wednesday evening group a pleasure to instruct on. Other elements also contributed to a successful run of evenings. Good towing from Richard Gammon and Tom Avery helped turn things around quickly. Instruction from Roy Bourgeois, Pete Foley and myself was, I think, appreciated by the students and pilots who flew with us! I remember one pilot - who shall remain nameless - asking me if Peter and I went to the same school for instructor sarcasm! I guess it must be our British sense of humor.

Last, but by no means least, are the members who turned up week after week to both fly and help out with the ground operation. A big thank you goes out to Steve Sovis, John Fulghum, Joe Kwasnik, Ian Clark, Lou LeBlanc and anyone else I've forgotten to mention. Thanks for your enthusiasm and encouragement.

If there is the demand to run this group again next year, I am only too happy to organize and fly with the group again. We would plan to start at the beginning of June, to gain a few extra weeks.

If there is any interest in running an early morning group, on a weekend day, then please let me know. The idea would be to start flying at around 8 am, and hand over to the regular weekend operation at around 10:30 am. This would give the group a chance to fly, have breakfast and still be home before the wife / husband / significant other is out of bed! No need to announce, "Honey, I'm back from the field," dodging the occasional projectile because you're back two hours later than you said you'd be. They wouldn't even know you'd been flying!

The down side is getting up in the dark, heading out in the dark , inspecting gliders by car headlamps and freezing your butt off. We used to do this back at Lasham during the winter, but I guess the English winters are nothing compared to here! Anyway, if there is sufficient interest, I'm happy to organize and fly.

## The Demo Flight of 1911

**Joseph Wood Krutch**

*When I joined MITSA, I had to show up three weekends in a row before I got my demo flight: extreme turbulence one day and smoke from a forest fire down south the next shut down the operations before I got my flight. But no story I've heard about demo flights beats the tenacity shown by Joseph Wood Krutch. The following is an excerpt from his autobiography "More Lives than One" (Wm Sloan, NY, 1962) sent to me by Morrie Tuttle, my father. —Ed.*

Knoxville's free library building had burned down before I was old enough to use it and in my time the library was housed in an old frame building. The rather forbidding spinster librarian did not look upon me or any other children with much favor, but somehow I got the privilege of the stacks. That I spent a good deal of time in the back room poring over bound volumes of the *Scientific American* is a significant indication that I then considered myself definitely scientific rather than literary in my tastes. And it was the *Scientific American* which was indirectly responsible for the only bold adventure of which I was ever the hero.

The back numbers, which I began to read about 1905, were full of accounts of the early, unsuccessful attempts to get a flying machine into the air. Lilienthal, martyr to his experiments with gliders, and Santos-Dumont, who made rather ridiculous jumps into the air aboard elaborate, kite-like contraptions, were my heroes. Then, while this interest was still at its height, came news of the Wrights' incredible feats at Kitty Hawk.

In 1910 I wrote the term paper for my third high school year on "Flight." Next year it was announced that one of Knoxville's newspapers would bring into town two intrepid birdmen who would give a demonstration at the old race track. Moreover — and this sent a chill down my back — it would launch a "popularity contest." The man and the woman who got the highest number of "votes" (i.e., who could present the largest number of coupons cut from successive issues of the paper) would each be entitled to a ride. This, be it remembered, was in 1911, just three years after the Wrights had given their first public demonstration, and when very few people had ever seen an airplane, much less flown in one. It is true that the Wrights had flown in 1903, but the flights were secret and the rumors not generally credited.

I was a shy and unaggressive adolescent who definitely avoided contact with strangers. Yet, because what modern educationists call "adequate motivation" can do wonders, I found myself to my own amazement starting out every afternoon as soon as school was dismissed to ring the doorbells of strangers of whom I begged the coupons from their papers. I don't think I really expected to win but the remote chance was not to be missed. And as it turned out the winners were myself and a young lady some years older whose name I have forgotten and of whose subsequent history I am entirely ignorant.

Not long afterwards the flyers and their machine arrived. The former made a somewhat oddly assorted pair, one being a rather rough customer named Lincoln Beachey who became a well-known stunt flyer and killed himself a few years later, the other a quiet, cultivated Canadian named McCurdy who, only a year or two ago, repeated one of the historic cross-country flights made not long after he came to Knoxville. Their machine was a Curtiss biplane, a flimsy contraption made out of bamboo, piano wire, and oiled silk.

When I presented myself to them at the race track they informed me that they had known nothing of the newspaper's contest until they arrived, that it was completely unauthorized, and that they most certainly could not take either me or the young lady for a ride. Their machine had only one seat and would, as a matter of fact, be quite incapable of getting off the ground with a passenger.

Quite uncharacteristically I became adamant and even truculent. I had entered the contest in good faith; I had devoted much time to winning it; I was now being put in a humiliating position and if I did not get the promised reward I would see to it that the newspaper found itself in as much difficulty as I, with the help of a lawyer, could contrive. McCurdy was tight-lipped, Beachey openly furious and profane. After a consultation they suggested that a hundred dollars might be adequate compensation for my disappointment. I replied that it certainly would not.

"O.K.," said Beachey at last. "We'll strap a chair seat on the wing alongside the engine and see if we can get you in the air."

After a considerable delay the chair seat was finally affixed and I climbed onto this precarious perch. I rather doubt that Beachey, who then took the controls, really tried to leave the ground, but he ran the plane as fast as it would go all the way across the bumpy center field of the race track and stopped just short of the fence. I was too excited and too disappointed to be frightened. "See," he said, "it won't go up. Are you satisfied?" "Certainly not," I replied, "I want to fly." He glared and then paid me the only compliment I ever got on physical courage. "I gotta admit," he said, "that you don't scare easy."

There was another consultation. Finally McCurdy said he would take the airplane up and look about to see if he could locate any field which looked as though it might be long enough to get two people into the air. Later he reported that there did seem to be such a field on an island in the Tennessee River about five miles above Knoxville. He would flying the airplane there and if the young lady and I would come up next day he might be able to take us up.

The climax of the adventure can best be told in the words of two front-page stories in the sponsoring newspaper which were dug out for me a few months ago in the same library where I had pored over the *Scientific American*. The issue for Friday, April 14, 1911, reads:

> A practical demonstration was given Thurs-

day afternoon by Aviator Beachey of the inadequacy of Johnson's Race Track for airplane passenger flights, by his efforts to make an ascent inside the restricted space of the enclosure, carrying a passenger, this attempt resulting in failure.

The aviators expect to make good on the passenger carrying agreement, however, and Aviator McCurdy and a Journal and Tribune representative spent yesterday morning driving over the country looking for a suitable place and after looking over several fields, one was found which Aviator McCurdy said would do. He first located it on his highest flight of Wednesday afternoon.

Next day the story read in part:

Knoxville has been placed indelibly on the aviation map, for under the auspices of the Journal and Tribune, the first passenger carrying airplane flights ever made in Tennessee were made Saturday afternoon from Vance's Island a short distance from the city.

To Miss Mellie Cole, of Lustrell Street, belongs the distinction of being the first person carried in an airplane flight in this state, while the other passengers, flying in the order named, were Joseph W. Krutch and Wilson Coile, young Knoxvillians. Miss Cole and Mr. Krutch were the winners of the popularity contest conducted through the Journal and Tribune, and Mr. Coile captured the balloon which carried a ticket entitling the holder to a ride in an airship …

A variety of means of transportation was tried by the three passengers Saturday afternoon, ranging from the most primitive, a rude hack drawn by mules, to the most modern, an airplane driven by powerful motors. Miss Cole and the young men came to the office of the Journal and Tribune by streetcars. Automobiles carried them to within a short distance of the Holston River, when the roads became too rough for the "buzz wagons." There the passengers were transferred to a rough hack, with mules for motors and plain boards for seats, and taken from the banks of the river to the island where a small ferry boat was waiting to receive them. They were "poled" across the river to the island in a boat, which was by no means of the most modern construction, as it was forced across the stream by a man with a strong hickory pole. Across the river the young folks did the pedestrian stunt to the place where where the Curtiss biplane was awaiting them. Aviator McCurdy having flown to the island Friday afternoon from the race track …

After a preliminary flight in which he rose to a height of about 500 feet and circled the island two or three times, McCurdy brought the machine to the ground and announced that he was ready for the first passenger carrying flight.

I don't suppose the flight lasted more than five or ten minutes or that we were ever more than two or three hundred feet above the ground, but after all most flights in 1911 were hardly more ambitious. Nowadays when anyone boasts of his exploits in the air I can always say, "I flew first in 1911," and I have never yet met anyone who could top that. It was nearly fifteen years later that I was again in an airplane when I flew one of the early German commercial lines in Europe. Since then I have flown, always as a mere passenger, in pretty much everything from a Piper Cub to a Jet, but never with the sense of adventure or achievement such as I felt when I climbed down off that Curtiss biplane. No, I have no desire to be invited onto a space ship. We pioneers cannot be expected to pioneer more than once. A flying saucer just isn't my dish.

Mr. McCurdy — now the Honorable John Alexander Douglas McCurdy — was only twenty-five when he conferred upon me my passive position in the history of aviation and he went on to a distinguished career. During the same year when he was my unwilling host he made the longest overwater flight which had yet been made — the 90 miles from Key West to Havana — and in the same year broke the record for duration in the air. During the First World War he became Canada's Director of Aircraft Production, later entered politics, was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia (1947 to 1952) and, so I am informed, now lives in Halifax. I say "so I am informed" because I received no reply to the letter I wrote him a few months ago asking if he remembered the Knoxville affair. He was pretty mad in 1911 and I am afraid he still is.