THE LEADING EDGE
The Newsletter of the M.I.T. Soaring Association, Inc.
August 1996

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News briefs

Mark Tuttle

New pilots: Joe Kwasnik, Michael Welles, and Terry Wong have become MITSA's newest private pilots. Michael took his flight test on June 23, and Joe and Terry took their flight tests on July 17. Congratulations! I hope you each have your silver badge as soon as possible!

New solos: Steve Glow, Paul Overy, and Jeff Landsman have gone solo recently. Steve Glow went solo on July 5 during the Wednesday evening group. Paul Overy went solo on the weekend of July 20 in New York, as reported by Jim Emken: "This past weekend Paul Overy and I flew at Wurtsboro glider airport in upstate New York. Paul took a number of lessons in a SGS 2-33 and made two very nice solo flights. Congratulations, Paul, on your first solo." I heard a rumor that Jeff Landsman went solo with the club on July 27, but I haven't managed to contact Jeff yet. Congratulations!

New badge flights: Mark Koepper flew 300K for his gold distance and diamond goal. Actually, this is the second time he has flown 300K for his gold distance and diamond goal. In the last newsletter, he reported on completing 300K but not being able to claim the flight due to a problem with the barograph. I'm hoping that we will get a report on the second flight for the next newsletter. In the meantime, congratulations to Mark on a job well-done!

A doctor and a lawyer collide on I-95. Both shaken up, the lawyer offers the doctor a drink from a pocket flask. "Aren't you going to have one too?" asks the doctor. "Sure," replies the lawyer, "after the Highway Patrol gets here."

Labor Day weekend contest

John Wren

A group of individual members from MITSA and Nutmeg gliding club are organizing a contest/encampment for Labor Day weekend (August 30 to September 2) at Hartness State Airport in Springfield, VT. We are encouraging pilots throughout the region to attend.

There will be two classes: a *contest class* for any pilot wishing to compete in a contest environment; and a *badge class* for any pilot wishing to earn SSA or FAI badges and/or would like experience in a competition environment. Anyone who just wants to have FUN and fly with a great group of pilots is encouraged to fly in the badge class.

For accommodations, camping is available at the airport itself, or you can stay in one of the following nearby motels. If you plan to stay in one these motels, make reservations early because Labor Day is a busy weekend in Vermont.

- Cavendish Motor Inn (800-438-7908): We have 10 rooms under the name "Soaring Group" at $65.00. Nice place, 10 minutes from airport.
- Holiday Inn (802-885-4516): About 10-15 minutes from airport.
- Abby Lynn (802-886-2223): About 1 minute from airport, an "economy" motel (probably $40-$50).
- Palomar (802-885-4142): About 5 minutes from airport, an "economy" motel (probably $40-$50).

To get to the airport, take exit 7 off of I-91, and bear right. Go through Springfield. About 3 miles beyond Springfield is the Abby Lynn Motel. Take a right there. The next right is the entrance to Airport Road. All pilots flying in the competition should be registered, rigged, and ready to grid by 10:30 am each day.

If you would like more information please contact Peter Scarpelli (203-738-1154) or John Wren (508-244-0647, jwren@chelmsford.com) If you are thinking of attending please call soon.

More news briefs

Mark Tuttle

New members: Please welcome our newest club members: Allan Adams, Jim Davitt, Randall Dennis, Larry Ryan, Therese Smith, and Andrew Watson. Allan is studying at Harvard, and knew Tom MacJarrett as an instructor with the Fault Line Flyers in Austin. Jim is, of course, our airport manager. Randall is the son of Therese. Larry is a former club member and tow pilot who actually owned our towplane with Ken MacDowell for many years — and leased it to the club — before the club purchased it outright. Andrew is a talented pilot from across the pond (I think they call the place England) whose enthusiasm at the field is always a welcome sight.

Region 1 contest results: The Region 1 contest was held at Sugarbush July 15-20. Errol Drew placed ninth in the 15 Meter class, and Bill Brine and Mark Evans places second and seventh, respectively, in the Sports class.

National contest results: The Standard Class National Championship was held in Moriarty, New Mexico, the first couple weeks of July. In the end, Bob Fletcher, Doug Jacobs, and Phil Gaisford placed seventh, eleventh, and seventeenth, respectively. At intermediate points during the contest, their respective ranks were as high as fourth, first, and sixth. When I asked Phil about the contest, he said, "It rained nearly every day. The place had turned really green by the time we left."

Good flights: Walter Sakowicz must have visited Moriarty just before the rain, because he described a great flight in email to me dated July 2: "Soaring great in Moriaty, NM, home of the current National Contest. Cloud bases at 18,000 feet. Managed getting to 17,200 feet first time using oxygen. No problem with XC, can see 100 miles in all directions." Steve Sovis also reported flying at or near 18,000 feet in Minden in the last month.

"Fit to Fly" Seminar: Margaret Rappaport is scheduled to give her "Fit to Fly" seminar at Hanscom on August 14. Unfortunately, this newsletter is too late to be of any use in advertising her seminar, but the latest Aviation Safety Program flyer from the Boston FSDO contained a nice paragraph about her: "Dr. Margaret Rappaport will speak on traditional pilot proficiency with some new and interesting twists. Pilot psychology and pilot health will be discussed and a personal checklist will be provided to help you determine when you are "fit to fly." Dr. Rappaport is a psychologist with 20 years of clinical and administrative experience in her health services practice. Dr. Rappaport is an active pilot in power planes, both land and sea, as well as gliders. Dr. Rappaport provides this seminar to airline pilots as part of their training. We are very pleased to be receiving this caliber of training."

Wednesday evening group: The Wednesday evening group run by Steve Moysey (with a lot of help from people like Roy Bourgeois, Richard Gammon, and Bruce Easom) sounds very successful. In one message Steve sent out to the club via email, he wrote: "The 1996 Wednesday evening group got off to a fine start last night. After a slightly late start — I was stuck in traffic and the tow plane was in transit from Fitchburg — flying started on what turned out to be a perfect evening. We achieved 11 launches, with both L23's on the go together with the L33 and 1-34. Congratulations go out to Steve Glow, who went solo and received the customary water bath from Roy Bourgeois. Well done, Steve! Shame everyone missed the flypast Rob Platter and I did, in 118BB, in salute of Steve's achievement!"

Safety: With the sudden increase in the number of visitors and new members at the field, there have been some reports of incidents that raise safety concerns in my mind. Things like people wandering slowly or aimlessly across the grass trip without checking for traffic in the glider and power patterns, and children driving the golf carts at high speeds. Please do what you can to make certain that everyone at the field has received a safety briefing. In particular, when you bring friends to the field, please take responsibility yourself for making certain your friends know how to behave safely at an airfield.

Close encounters

Robert Rossier

The current issue of "Flight Training" has an article by Robert Rossier on near-misses in which gliders are portrayed as unpleasant road bumps in the sky. The opening paragraphs describe a near miss with a glider within sight of Boston. There aren't very many glider sites within sight of Boston:

"I was a flying light show — strobes streaking into the gray summer dusk, beacon pulsing like a steady heartbeat, and position lights clearly marking my orientation in the sky. The sun was setting behind a layer of broken cumulus that stretched to the horizon, and shafts of sunlight illuminated the Boston skyline in sharp contrast to an otherwise flat sky. Cruising southeast at 5,500 feet and a comfortable 130 knots, I had no inkling of impending danger.

"Out of the corner of my eye, high and to the left, flashed the unmistakable silhouette of a glider diving at me. Instinctively, I rolled right and pitched the nose toward Mother Earth. Power back and wings level, I slowly leveled off just as the airspeed needle brushed the top of the yellow arc. My body still shook with excess adrenaline 30 minutes later. It was a close call that I shall not soon forget.

"The incident reminded me of the primary responsibility of all pilots to see and avoid other aircraft, because near misses can happen anywhere, anytime."

Later the article says:

"Even when pilots know traffic is in the area, airplanes can be difficult to spot. Such was the case for a pilot of a low-wing aircraft who was warned of glider traffic before entering the pattern. According to the ASRS report, the pilot switched to CTAF, reported crossing overhead, and began his descent on the crosswind leg. 'As I started to turn downwind, I felt a bump, as if the wheels struck an object. My wheel struck the glider's canopy and my right wing grazed the glider's right wing. Both aircraft landed with minor damage. Both glider pilots were looking for me. I could not see the glider beneath me turning to downwind. I was not aware the glider was in the pattern."'

Coincidentally, a letter this week from the SSA to its chapters states that "the SSA (along with other associations) was directly challenged by FAA Administrator Hinson to 'Find a way to achieve a goal of *no midairs*.' Later in the meeting Hinson stated, 'If you (general aviation societies and associations) don't find a way to do this, we will find it for you.' In 1996 that is a fact, not a threat." So please keep your heads up.

Diamonds are forever!

Dick Glover

Dick Glover (hjzebra@aol.com) is a friend of Phil Alden (alden@sover.net) who is the father of my friend Ken Alden (alden@crl.dec.com) at work. Ken knew of my interest in soaring and showed me a printed copy of an email message from Dick to Phil one day, and Dick has agreed to let us republish his tale of diamond altitude at Minden. —Editor

The time flying sailplanes out of Minden, NV, was exceptionally satisfying this year. I achieved the diamond badge altitude leg just a couple of days before we left for the east. That's been an aspiration for at least 35 years. I got my silver badge back in the sixties and haven't done anything in that regard since — until last week in Nevada. Gold altitude gain is 3,000 meters, and diamond altitude gain is more that 5,000 meters (16,404 feet), all under ones' own steam after release from the tow plane which gets one into the air initially. All badge leg attempts must be made with a sealed barograph on board and certified to by an SSA member.

My fun flight was the second of the day (I couldn't keep it up the first time) during a pre-frontal low pressure area approaching from the west over the Sierra Nevada mountains and Lake Tahoe. Surface winds were gusty to 25 knots or so with substantial cumulus cloud development over the airport. The tow was bumpy and I got off at 2,200 feet above the ground. Flying a single-place German Grob 102 glider with a glide ratio of about forty to one, I thermaled to cloud base at about 10,000 feet in the course of the first hour. Then, hearing local radio chatter suggesting the WAVE was aborning over the mountains, we (the glider and me) put the nose down and headed west toward the high Sierra at near red-line airspeed. Hardly had we popped out from under the cloud street when, Eureka, we were in the wave climbing 1,000 feet per minute in absolutely calm air — so ripple-free I could have balanced a nickel on edge on the top of the instrument panel!

Having had the forethought to being an oxygen mask — although only about a hour's supply of oxygen — and a sealed barograph, I radioed the ground passing through 15,000 feet and asked for a window above 18,000 feet to be opened for me by the Feds (Air Traffic Control) to which request they acquiesced as I rapidly approached the 18,000 foot base of controlled airspace nationwide. Semi-supine in the glider, I fumbled away at donning the oxygen mask. The outside temperature had fallen to 30 below zero and my fingers were rapidly numbing at the tips. At about 20,000 feet I fell out of the wave on the back side because, unbeknownst to me at the time, I had entered the lower portion of the jet stream and the high-speed headwinds had exceed my 70 knot airspeed. Lake Tahoe was below and slightly west of my position and rapidly decreasing in size to that of a frog pond. The cloud cover below was broken, but solid a few miles to the west over the mountains. Once again we lowered the nose and headed west, this time at an indicated 90 knots and penetrated back into the lovely, blissful, calm, and oh-so-cold wave. Headed for the heavens again!

Passing through 22,000 feet the bright idea occurred that it might be fun to have some video of this happening. It was right after I found the camera under my right leg and got it cranked up in my right hand that it happened. A point of poor seal between the oxygen mask and my face just under the right nostril caused a portion of each exhaled breath to frost up my right lens of my sunglasses. Wish you could have seen it! The videocam in my right hand, pushing the oxygen mask with my left, vision in only one eye (and by now the canopy about 50 percent frosted over), with the two blocks of ice, otherwise known as my feet, doing the flying of the aircraft. Got some great video, though, of the small terrain undulations below called the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and the altimeter registering, and then going beyond, 24,000 feet.

Well, ATC refused to open the wave window beyond 25,000 feet, so I cheated a little and quit (still in wave and climbing!) at 25,300 feet of altitude by the altimeter in the ship. That was an altitude gain of 18,400 feet clinching the gold and diamond altitude legs, and earning me a Lennie plaque and pin for flying the glider above 25,000 feet. It took me half an hour to come down through broken clouds, and it took Meredith about three hours of rubbing my feet to get the feeling back into them. Literally, I couldn't walk after landing. Two days later we left for home quite ready for the trek. And, just yesterday I heard from the SSA Awards Administrator (by email, of course), that my barograph trace and application had been approved and forwarded to the FAI for posting. Nice ending to a great winter!

The Leading Edge is the newsletter of the MIT Soaring Association, Inc. For more information about MITSA, contact Joe Kwasnik at (508) 366-0474 or kwansi@neesnet.com. For more information about the newsletter, contact Mark Tuttle at (617) 692-7635 or tuttle@crl.dec.com.