THE LEADING EDGE
The Newsletter of the M.I.T. Soaring Association, Inc.
July 1997

Contents

News briefs

Mark Tuttle

New certificates: Mike Baxa has earned his instructor certificate. Mike took his flight test down at Wurstboro, New York at the end of June. Steve Moysey, our chief instructor, has renewed his instructor certificate. Steve took his flight test at Sterling, after his examiner flew down from Sugarbush in a Bonanza. Mark Tuttle has earned his commercial certificate. Mark took his flight test at Sterling, after his examiner drove up from Nutmeg in a Honda.

New badges: Steve Sovis has earned his silver badge. He flew his duration and altitude legs one weekend, and then flew his distance leg from Sterling to Turners Falls and back the next weekend.

New members: Karl Krueger joined the club last month. Karl has years of experience as an instructor at commercial glider operations, and has been rapidly moving through the club gliders and doing a lot of flying.

Worlds: Doug Jacobs (DJ) is currently flying in the World Gliding Championship in St. Auban, France. Doug won the second day in the standard class in his LS-8.

Nationals: Bob Fletcher (90) and Phil Gaisford (PG) flew in the standard class nationals in Cordele, Georgia. According to the SSA web page, Bob finished third in his ASW-24 and Phil finished eighteenth in his Discus.

Region Two: Phil and Doug also flew in the Region Two contest at the Mifflin Country airport in Pennsylvania. Again, according to the SSA web page, Phil finished seventh in the standard class in his Discus and Doug flew for a few days in the 15 meter class in his LS-6.

Region One: Errol Drew (204) finished third in the standard class and Mark Evans (3S), Bill Brine (YN), and Mark Koepper (31G) finished third, sixth, and eighth in the sports class at the Region One contest in Springfield, Vermont. Errol Drew and Mark Evans actually won the third day in their classes.

Aerobatics winner: Guenther Eichhorn won the advanced category (the next to highest category) in his Pitts in the New England Aerobatic Championships at Orange on June 16-18. He reports that, "Despite the variable weather we had a great contest. Saturday started out cloudy and very windy (30 knots across the box), but we could get some flights in. Around 14:00 it started raining, and we called it a day around 16:00 because of the weather forecast. The forecast, however, also said that Sunday was supposed to be nice. Indeed it was. The briefing at 7:00 saw clear blue skies and only moderate winds. We managed to get altogether two basic, one sportsman, two intermediate, two advanced, and two unlimited flights. We had a total of 40 pilots."

Wednesday evening flying: The Wednesday evening flying group returned for a few weeks this summer, but was suspended for lack of participants. The group flew each Wednesday evening from 5PM until sundown, with Roy Bourgeois instructing and Richard Gammon towing, but only one person showed up for instruction! Please contact Al Gold if you are interested in reviving the group: 617 926-9076 (home), 617 495-2908 (work), or gold@das.harvard.edu.

Help wanted: The club needs more DOs. The duty cycle is about one day per month. Any club member who has soloed in a glider is eligible. Please volunteer by contacting Al Gold.

Help wanted: The club needs volunteers to do routine maintenance and other small jobs. A list of tasks needing volunteers is given in the minutes from the last board meeting, published on page 2. Please volunteer by contacting any board member.

Minutes of the Board of Directors

Rob Playter

These minutes have been heavily edited for publication in the newsletter. —Editor

July 2, 1997

Directors present: Jim Emken, Phil Gaisford, Steve Glow, Carl Johnson, and Rob Playter. Others present: Ian Clark.

Clubhouse Trailer: Ian Clark and Bill Brine found a small trailer that could be used as an office. It is a camping trailer with fridge and heater in Springfield, Vermont. Carl Johnson has been looking at full-size trailers. We probably need a 10x40 foot trailer with heat. The purpose of the trailer is to serve as a gathering place, classroom, and maintenance area. Trailer availability is poor now because it is construction season. We considered a free trailer available in Bedford, but it is too small and needs too much work. We have budgeted for a trailer. Carl has a few leads, and will hear more in a couple weeks.

Budget: The estimated budget shows us just squeaking by this year but this may be too optimistic. Revenues are down due to lack of students and instructors. Currently, expenses are exceeding revenues. We are assessing our financial situation. For example, we would like tow fees to cover the tow plane operating costs.

Maintenance: Peter Connor at Yankee Aviation is doing a good job of maintaining the gliders, but maintenance is expensive.

Tow plane: Ian Clark would like tow pilots to avoid the 360 degree turn at the end of the runway before pulling onto the runway in preparation for a tow. The 360 degree turn wears out the tires and brakes. Ian has proposed some simple hand signals for communication between the ground crew and tow pilot. These signals will be discussed with the chief tow pilot, and published in the next newsletter if they are approved.

Volunteers needed: We will make a list of jobs that need job organizers and volunteers. Please pick a job, find volunteers to help, then do it. A sign will be kept in the office of the current list of jobs. Here are some jobs that need volunteers:

1. Make concrete bases for main wheels and tail wheels on Blaniks.
2. Replace tie-downs for all gliders. These are tires buried three or four feet deep with chain wrapped around tires and exposed at ground level. Talk to Jim Emken.
3. Wash and wax all gliders.
4. Buy tie-down materials (tires, chains, etc.). Talk to Jim Emken.
5. Buy Sackrete.
6. Buy real chamois for glider canopies.
7. Make weak links. Talk to Ian Clark to learn how.
8. Purchase gas for golf carts (do this every week).
9. Repair 1-34 trailer and wing mounts.
10. Repair 1-26 trailer.
11. De-rig the small Blanik, grease it up, and reassemble.
12. Replace wing tie-downs for all gliders. Talk to Jim Emken.
13. Install audio varios into both L-23's. Steve Glow has the parts.
14. Mow tie-downs, etc.

Instructor expenses: We will continue to waive the introduction fee and membership fee for instructors. Instructors need to be checked out by the chief flight instructor and they need to be doing useful instruction in order to waive these fees. We will pay tow fees for active instructors for checkrides. Other reasonable charges will be reimbursed.

Students: We would like to know how many active students there are. We suspect we have lost several students.

Maintenance: 117 has the landing gear fixed and is ready for a retrieve.

Golf carts: One of the carts is currently broken. We need to get a replacement. We should we buy a lawn tractor instead. We will search in the Want Advertiser for lawn tractors and golf carts.

Next meeting: Thursday, August 7, 1997.

Operations schedule

Al Gold

Here is the MITSA duty roster through the end of July, correct as of the end of June.

MITSA DUTY SCHEDULE
July, 1997

Date	DO	Instructor	AM Tow	PM Tow
7/4	Watson	NA	Gassett	Clark
7/5	Welles	NA	Easom	Fletcher
7/6	Evans	Rosenberg	Gammon	Friedman
7/12	Wong	Moysey	Hollister	Kazan
7/13	Gold	Rosenberg	Poduje	Proops
7/19	Johnson	NA	Ryan	Gassett
7/20	Wong	?	Dershowitz	Easom
7/26	Loraditch	Wren	Fletcher	Friedman
7/27	Sovis	?	Gamon	Hollister
8/2	Kucan	Moysey	Kazan	Proops
8/3	Welles	NA	Ryan	Clark

Roy Bourgeois will be available to instruct
from 9:00AM to 2:00PM only.
The Citabria tow pilots are
Ian Clark (617 924-7637) and John Wren (508 244-0647).

DO's should send out an email message to the membership only if the instructor status for the day has changed. DO's should mail logsheets to Albert Gold, 8B Locust Lane, Watertown, MA 02172. DO's should mail the daily summary, money, membership forms, waivers, and anything else to Steve Glow, 1 Lakeshore Drive, Sterling, MA 01564.

First off-field landing

Mark Tuttle

I was at the Region One soaring contest during the last week of June in Springfield, Vermont. I went to help run the contest, but also to fly recreationally around the edges of the contest. The big news is that I made my first official attempt at the fifty kilometer flight that would complete the requirements for my silver badge, and also qualify me to fly in the contest, but I ended up in a cornfield instead. A better title for this story would be, "A Cornhusker shows his true colors."

The organizing material for the contest noted that the organizers expected people like me to show up and try for their silver distance flight. The cover letter said that the Nutmeg club holds annual retreats at Springfield, that many Nutmeg club members fly their first cross-country flights from Springfield, and that the passing of a strong cold front and the resulting northwest wind makes the southeast flight to Jaffrey an easy downwind flight. During the initial days of the contest, I talked to a lot of pilots about flying to Jaffrey to get advice on making the flight. One pilot said it would be a piece of cake. Another pilot said to take two thermals and you would be there. They made it sound easy.

My concern was where to land if I got into trouble. I had done only local flying the last time I was in Vermont, so knew nothing about the terrain away from the airport. The hills and ridges and forests in Vermont looked pretty unlandable to me. Driving along the highway to Springfield, I didn't see a single field that was remotely landable. The only landable spots I saw on my map were the airports at Springfield, Keene, and Jaffrey lined up in a row, but the first hop between Springfield and Keene looked pretty long to me. John Wren and others assured me that there good fields along the Connecticut River that threaded south from Springfield.

So my plan was this: fly down the west side of the Connecticut River, but resist the temptation to fly above the river and fly instead above the high ridges on the west side since the high ground would be the best thermal-generator; jump across the river at Bellows Falls, where I should be able to follow a power line with my eyes and see the Keene airport; resist the temptation to fly directly to Keene, and fly instead above the high ground to the north and east of Keene to get the good thermals, and know that at all times I would have the option of gliding back to the river to good fields or gliding into Keene if I should get into trouble; and between Keene and Jaffrey was Mount Monadnock which should produce a great thermal somewhere, and know that at all times I could either glide into Keene or Jaffrey if I got into trouble.

It sounded like a good plan, but I was still nervous. All of the anxiety and self-doubt that makes Mark Tuttle such a "special person" climbed into the cockpit with me. I launched and immediately ran into trouble. I pulled off tow in what felt like a thermal and found myself in sink, and was back down to 1,100 feet AGL just outside the normal landing pattern in no time flat, thinking about landing. Suddenly, I felt lift some lift, turned, saw a turkey buzzard turning with me, and started climbing. I expected at any moment to get chewed out over the radio for thermally adjacent to the landing pattern, but decided I was safe enough, and then I noticed two other gliders joining the thermal below me!

We climbed rapidly to cloud base at about 5,300 feet MSL, and for the first time I could see the Connecticut River valley from the air. I could see that there were indeed lots of good fields, some of them the size of an aircraft carrier. The wind was carrying me rapidly down the course as I thermaled, and more and more fields were coming into view. Staying above the high ground, I found good clouds and reliable lift that let me float along at cloud base down past Bellows Falls. There was the abandoned airport at Drewsville that was reported to have machinery on the former runway, but today the runway itself was clear. There was the power line leading to Keene, and there even more obviously visible was Mount Monadnock itself marking the location of Jaffrey, my destination. This *was* going to be easy after all. A third of the flight done before my first swig of water, and the remaining navigation was trivial.

I hopped across the river valley with little loss of altitude. I could see the high ground to the north and east of Keene that I'd been advised to fly over just another couple ridges away. I could see good clouds over this high ground standing in sharp, firm, crisp, sun-emblazoned relief against the dark blue sky — clouds taken right out of a landscape painting at the MFA — and I headed for them.

My memory of the next fifteen minutes of the flight is something of a blur, but somewhere in those fifteen minutes lay my downfall. Perhaps seeing Keene in front of me made me forget about the fields in the river valley behind me. Perhaps the lure of the promising clouds in front made me give in to my doubts about whether Keene was really an easy glide. I could see multiple sources of good lift in front of me, surely they would make the glide into Keene an easy one. Everyone says you just have to have faith that the lift is out there, and here I see evidence that the lift really must be there, so I went for it. And I went and I went, and I went down and I went down, all the time in heavy sink with those wonderful clouds ahead screaming the offer of salvation. Finally, at 2,000 feet, I started to feel low over a collection of fields that seemed rare this far from the river. I bumped into some zero-sink as I crossed the top of a low ridge, and decided I'd better explore it. Soon I was doing my usual one-knot-up/two-knots-down dance that I do so well. A few hundred feet over the ridge I started to feel uncomfortably low, and I decided to fly back into the valley so that I would feel higher over the valley floor than I did over the top of the ridge, a foolish decision since I knew the high ridge would be a better source of lift than the valley floor. A few puffs of lift, but nothing I could do anything with. The top of the ridge started to get higher, and perhaps I gave up too early, but I decided it was time to land.

Circling in those puffs, I had plenty of time to study the two fields in the valley between the two parallel ridges. One of them looked like a soft, freshly cultivated field with small plants. A discoloration in the surface made me think that one quadrant of the field was surrounded by a fence, but that was okay because there was a good approach to the field into the wind that would let me fly short final over that quadrant and land in the remainder of the field. My crab on crosswind made the strength and direction of the wind clear, and I flew a downwind a comfortable height above the field, although it was surprisingly close to the trees on the rising slope of the ridge adjacent to the field. I was waiting for the wind gradient, but was still surprised by a sudden ten-knot drop in airspeed. I was also surprised by how the trees were taller than I thought and hid more of the field from view during the base leg and turn to final than I had expected.

My greatest surprise, however, occurred on final approach when I realized that the quadrant of the field that I thought had been fenced in was really a flat plateau, followed by a steep drop-off to a lower flat plateau constituting the remainder of the field. I adjusted my glide path to flare shortly beyond the drop-off, and landed normally. The field turned out to be very soft, almost like sand at a beach, so either my gear struck a furrow or my gear was grabbed by the soft dirt as I touched down, but the glider must have nosed over a bit and slid on its belly for a few feet. (When I told Margaret that I nosed over in a corn field, it took me thirty minutes to realize that she had imagined a bizarre image of the glider pointing nose down like a lawn dart into a carpet of corn six feet tall!) The dirt was so soft, that when I came to a stop I felt unusually low to the ground. The last time I remembered being that low was when I landed hard last fall and collapsed my gear. Horrified at the thought of hurting the glider on my first flight in Vermont, I scrambled out and was relieved to find the wheel buried up to the axle in dirt.

Now to find the owner of the field. I had to walk to a dozen houses in the area before I found someone at home. She suspected that the owner of the field was one of three brothers, brothers so tightly-knit that talking to one was almost equivalent to talking to the others, so I called them all and got answering machines each time. I kept calling, and eventually the wife of the owner answered and told me to go ahead and take the glider out of the field if I thought I could do it without any additional damage to the low corn, so I said thanks and called Springfield to ask Steve Sovis to come pick me up.

I spent an enjoyable forty minutes talking with my new acquaintance, her neighbor, and their cheerful little kids playing in the wading pool outside on the lawn. I wanted to wait by the phone in case Steve got lost and had to call for better instructions, but I really had a delightful time watching the kids, and had a difficult time figuring out how much I could play with the kids and how much I should just stand by the side without intruding on the family's afternoon any more than I already had. Eventually, another neighbor came over and started talking about how he was tired of his town duty of mowing the lawn of the town library every week, and how he wanted to change his assignment. My host indicated that she understood, and that she would like to change her assignment as well. She turned to me and said, "Welcome to small town life."

After a while, I decided to wait by the road to flag Steve down when he drove by. While I was waiting, the owner of the field drove by to see what had happened. He was a nice guy. "Why did you land here?" he asked. Because I ran out of lift. "Why didn't you fly along that ridge up there? There is always lots of lift up there, I do it myself all the time." With that he pulled a photo album out of his truck and started showing me pictures of a Piper Cub that he owned at Jaffrey, of a homebuilt that he had helped a friend build, and he talked of a glider they had hoped to build. "I soar in my Cub up on that ridge all the time," he said. Now I really felt silly. He pointed to my Grob and asked, "Is that a Schweizer?"

We talked some more, then he drove off to work, and Steve came along soon after that. As Steve and I were preparing to take the glider apart, a neighbor and his two young boys came along to watch. We helped the boys climb into the cockpit one-by-one, and showed them the controls, but they seemed a little overwhelmed and a little uncertain about how much they were supposed to be smiling. The father lent us a hand in disassembling the glider, and we soon had the glider in the trailer. The owner of the field drove by once more as we were driving off, we had a nice goodbye chat, and we drove home.

This was my first off-field landing. I was a little self-conscious about making Steve drive so far to pick me up, but he said, "Hey, you're going to have to do it for me some day." And indeed I did. Five days later, Steve had is first off-field landing, and I drove north of Springfield to pick him out of a hay field. This time the field owner had been in his kitchen, and turned around to find a glider in the hay field he had mowed just the day before. He was also a very nice guy (with a very excited dog), and he reported that in previous years two gliders and a hot air balloon had landed in the same field. And Steve was also surprised by his field: it, too, looked flat from the air, but the ground roll turned out to be a roller coaster ride over small ripples in the field.

Now I just need to find something interesting to send to all of the people who helped me after my flight…

Best of COMDEX: Our former president and friend Shaun Keller has been working at Dragon Systems on a continuous speech recognition dictation product called Naturally Speaking, which has just won Byte Magazine's Best of Show award at COMDEX. It must be a good product: I've already been spammed with email ads offering to sell me the product at a discount!

Region One contest

Mark Tuttle

The Region One contest was held at Springfield, Vermont with one practice day on June 21 and contest days June 22-28. Four MITSA pilots flew in the contest — Bill Brine (YN), Errol Drew (204), Mark Evans (3S), and Mark Koepper (31G) — and Steve Sovis and I took our glider up to fly around the edges of the contest. This contest is of special importance to MITSA because we are in Region One, but also because MITSA has traditionally done so much to help run the Region One contests. That is to say, John Wren has done so much to help run the contests, with a varying amounts of help from other MITSA members. This year, almost all of John's help came from two hard-working people who aren't even members of the club — Matt Sovis and his friend Colin Block — who helped John Wren run the start gate and develop film. The whole contest got help from these two, since every forlorn glider pilot without a crew seemed to latch onto them to get help rigging or pushing a glider.

The contest this year was organized by three groups: the Nutmeg club led by Jim Wright, MITSA led by John Wren, and Kem Aviation, the FBO run by Skip and Patti Kemmer who manage and run the Springfield airport. The primary responsibilities MITSA fulfilled were the weather briefings by Maria Pirone, the start and finish gate led by John Wren, and the film development at the end of the day led by John Wren. Soaring conditions were generally good. Monday, Friday, and Saturday were quite good, but Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday were rather hot, humid, and hazy. In fact, Wednesday was scrubbed after the first three or four pilots launched that day complained about the low visibility in the haze.

A typical day for a contest pilot began about 9:00 with rigging the glider. Most contest pilots have a crew to help (usually a spouse or offspring), but most pilots seemed to be keenly aware of how few brownie points they had left with their over-worked family crews and helped each other rig. A pilots meeting was held in the hangar each day at 9:30. The meeting typically consisted of a discussion of logistical or safety issues from the previous day, stories from the winners of the previous day, a preliminary weather briefing, a preliminary idea of the tasks that would be assigned, and a few daily words of wisdom from experienced pilots selected by the contest director on safety issues particular to contest flying.

After the meeting, the pilots returned to preparing their gliders for the day, and eventually moved their gliders out to the edge of the runway for gridding. At 11:00, the pilots pushed their gliders from the edge of the runway out onto their numbered positions on the grid. The grid positions are painted on the runway so that the gliders alternate left and right sides of the centerline, with the tail of one glider about a foot ahead of the wing of the next glider. At 11:10, the pilots met at the head of the grid for the final pilots meeting where the final weather briefing, the task assignments, and the launch time were be given.

Launch generally began with a pair of sniffers, two experienced pilots sent up to sniff out the thermals and report the general conditions to the contest director. When the director was satisfied that the day was starting to cook, he started the launch. The launch was an impressive display of towing capacity. Three L-19s launched 25 gliders in less than an hour. The tow planes would roll out onto the runway, hook up, go, and return to land on the grass adjacent to the grid for the next glider. Each hook-up-and-go cycle took each tow plane about two minutes. Once launched, the gliders flew locally to get a feel for the day. Eventually, after getting advice on conditions from designated task advisors in the air, the contest director would announce the final task selections and the opening of the start gate.

The start gate is a planar region in the air through which pilots must fly when they start their task. On the ground, the vertical plane is defined by two strings suspended one above the other in the air. The start gate manager (in this case, John Wren) reclines on his back and aligns the two strings so that he is sighting directly up the plane. When a glider passes over the pair of strings, the glider has crossed the plane. There is limit to how high the glider can cross the plane, however, and this was checked by another man referred to as the "window" in a building a mile away with another set of strings calibrated so that by sighting along the strings he could tell whether the glider had crossed the plane below this limit.

The start gate can be a frantic place as pilots cross the gate one-by-one. A pilot calls out his contest numbers over the radio when he flies over a designated point, and everyone at the start gate grabs a pair of binoculars and searches the sky for the glider until someone shouts out that he or she can positively read the pilot's contest number on the glider. This requires good eyes. We were fortunate to have Matt Sovis and Colin Block with two pairs of young eagle eyes. John would call "mark" the moment the glider crossed the start gate. The record keeper would mark down the time. Matt or Colin would call out the contest number "XY" of the glider that had just flown through the gate. Assuming no complaints about the starting altitude from the window, John would call out "XY, good start," and the pilot would fly off on task. This sounds easy, and it is fairly easy when the gliders cross the gate with large intervals of time between them. The start gate earns its dinner when six or seven gliders try to fly through the gate at the same time!

Four or five hours later, the day ends for most people as the pilots start to return. The location of the finish gate is the same as the start gate, and running the finish gate can be just as frantic, but the high-speed finishes followed by the dramatic pull-ups to land can be a dramatic reward.

During those four of five hours, however, time can drag. Fortunately, our old friend Rick Sheppe came to the rescue with his potato cannon. Imagine a three feet of two-inch PVC pipe for a barrel, attached to a foot of four-inch PVC pipe for a chamber, with a charcoal grill ignition button on the side of the chamber for the spark. You fire the cannon by ramming a potato down the barrel, spraying a short burst of ether into the chamber and sealing it up, then aiming and pushing the ignition button. Sound silly? The results are impressive: a controlled thump in the chamber sent a potato hurling three hundred yards into the woods! Rick talked about the ballistic properties of other fruits and vegetables. This was the ultimate salad shooter!

Tuesday was a marginal day, and seven pilots landed at Claremont just a few miles from Springfield on the other side of a ridge. Steve Sovis also landed there, and since Tuesday was the night of the banquet, he suggested that the contest just send a grill and a keg of John Wren's beer over to Claremont when he called in to ask for an aero-retrieve.

Three club members rented pop-up trailers and camped on the airport with their families. The rest of us stayed in hotel rooms, but Mark and Cathy Koepper rented a home for the week and even threw a party for the contest in their home on Friday night.

Rick Sheppe is proposing to organize the contest for next year, and if all goes according to his proposal, the contest next year will be in Stowe, Vermont. This was my second contest, and it has been an educational experience for me both times. There are more pilots of high caliber at a contest than you can find at any given club, and watching how they fly and when then fly is both instructive and inspirational. The majority of contest pilots are very approachable, and are very happy to talk about their flying, your flying, and flying in general, and regional contests are very social events. If you have never worked at a contest, I highly recommend that you volunteer next year.

Tow plane

Ian Clark

Ian is in charge of tow plane maintenance, and has also been looking after the golf carts at the field. Ian sent an email message to the club last month making the following points. —Editor

Tow pilots, please consider whether it is necessary to do 360 degree turns at the end of the runway to look for traffic. This may not be necessary when there is a glider on the runway and a crew member on the runway signaling "all clear." This maneuver is causing considerable wear on the tow plane. If you must continue to do this, turn both left and right to equalize wear on brakes, tires, etc. Please report any squawks to me at 617 924-7637.

Ground crews, please do not waggle the rudder on tow planes after connecting rope. This is unnecessary and is putting the rudder trim out of alignment. I will shout at the next person who does this while I am towing!

Also, the golf carts have no "idle" feature. Please do not leave your foot on the gas when the cart is stationary.

RAS League

Guenther Eichhorn

The rec.aviation.soaring league is up and running. This league is a world-wide competition among soaring pilots that started in the rec.aviation.soaring newsgroup. The initiative came from Stephen Crabb, and I have programmed the web software to enter and view flights in the league. The league can be accessed at http://acro.harvard.edu/LEAGUE.

So far there are over 50 flights by 20 pilots in the database. I hope we get many more soon, and it would be great if some of our club members would submit flights. Any soaring pilot can sign up as many flights as he or she wants. For the standings, the four best flights of each pilot are used.

There are three parts of the league:

- The open league: all flights are entered automatically in this league.
- The weekend league: only flights flown on weekends and national holidays are entered in the scoring for this league.
- The beginners league: only flights from pilots who have not yet had a 500K flight are allowed in this league.

The league is based on a honor system. We will only require flight verification for the first three finishers at the end of the season when awards are given. The league rules are available on the league website.

Where are they now?

Sheila Conway

Sheila Conway (sheila_conway@om.cv.hp.com) was a member of MITSA in the Mansfield days, then graduated and moved to Washington where she set a number of state records. —Editor

My husband (whom I met through a soaring club in Seattle) and I live in Oregon. Shortly after we were married, he quit his job as an architect to become a professional pilot. I'm still in engineering, but work part-time as a flight instructor. Our honeymoon was a week-long trip up Vancouver Island, British Columbia, in a Stinson 108. If anyone gets the opportunity to get out this way, Tofino, on the Island's west coast is highly recommended. Last summer, our vacation was a flight in a 1949 Cessna 170 from North Carolina to Oregon via the Smoky Mountain National Park, Taos, New Mexico, the Grand Canyon, Arches, Yellowstone, etc.

We fly quite a bit, though lately we haven't been able to fly gliders as much as we'd like to. Last summer, every time we went to the glider field we got chucked in the tow plane (which is fun too). We're hoping to get down to Minden this weekend.

Where are they now?

Alfonso Gonzalez

Alfonso Gonzalez (alfgonza@sarenet.es) joined MITSA about the same time I did. In those days, we were MIT students without cars, but the aero/astro department used to lend a van to the club to get to the field. A group of us would meet on Mass Ave early in the morning, drive down to Mansfield, fly, and drive back. Alfonso moved home to Spain after graduation. —Editor

I'm now the owner of one-third of an ASW19B. I did my first 300K last year with it. Due to my work, I have not yet had the opportunity to go to the Spanish championships, but next year, maybe, I will.

I am also a member of the board of directors of my club, that has also put some limitations on the time I have available for flying. Our club is somewhat problematic: too many gliders, too many members that want to fly, and just a few that want to work.

During my first years on the board of directors we had awful problems with our tow planes. Too old, bad maintenance, bad handling, too heavy, and very rough runways. So, on the second year I managed to sell one of our tow planes for twice the price the club had to pay for it and got the demonstration tow plane of the Aviat Inc. dealer in Europe: our brand new tow plane, the Aviat HUSKY A-1 D-EXYZ, also known as Puff the Magic Dragon. I humbly recognize that I had an unusual amount of luck in pulling off that deal.

Nevertheless, we were able to organize the 1995 Spanish championship. I made the program that computed the day-by-day and final results. I participated with the club Twin Astir with one of our instructors. In that flight, we got 4,000 meters height over the airfield using thermals, and since our airfield is at 1,100 meters above sea level, that is 5,000 meters total height (I swear it is true). We were not using oxygen so we were a little scared, and at that height, even in the middle of the month of July, we got ice formation on the leading edge of the glider. On our return to the airfield, we were cruising at 120 kph at 3,000 meters when we reached our last turning point. It was covered with rain, so we entered the rain to take the photo, and in less than three minutes we were at 300 meters attempting my first outlanding. Never get into the rain, especially when there is cumulonimbus in the dissipation phase above it.

The place where we fly has very good conditions. If you have a chance to look at a map of the area, you will see there is a ridge very close with peaks about 1,000 meters above the airfield. The ridge has an usable length of about 30 kilometers long. Even in winter, if the wind blows from the north or west, we can stay as long as we wish on the air. Two years ago, one of the club members got into the wave up to 8,000 meters. In spring and summer we get good thermals, height gains of 2,000 meters are quite usual, 3,000 meters not unusual and 4,000 meters although exceptional do exist. There is also a special effect called the convergence. The mountain ridge that is close to the airfield divides the central plateau of Spain in two, and sometimes the wind blows from the south in the southern plateau and from the north in the northern plateau. Both winds meet over the mountains producing a line of lift all along the mountain ridge. You can fly without having to circle on the thermals, at high speed for hundreds of kilometers.

If you don't believe me, come to see it yourself! Or get the German Magazine Aerokurier and you will find there some of the accounts of the German pilots that fly at Fuentemilanos.

By the way, if any of the MITSA members comes to Madrid and want to have a fly, he has only to give me a phone call.

Where are they now?

Chris Kurz

Chris Kurz (ckurz@ucsd.edu) left MITSA to become a professor of physics at UCSD, and now he is returning home to Austria for a dramatic career change. —Editor

Eva and I are preparing our move to Austria, which will take us through Boston for a few days and get us to Vienna on August 5. The reason for the move is a job offer "that I couldn't refuse." It comes as a surprise even to me, but I will be leaving science behind for the next few years. The job I am taking is a managing position with a power company. State and federal monopolies are falling fast in Europe, while at the same time trade with the former East is increasing. Located only about 5 miles from the Hungarian border, my job will be to position this power company strategically for the impending increase in trading energy with the East. Why they chose me is anybody's guess. I can't deal with real numbers, and measure electric currents in microamps and power in milliwatts.

America has become our second home, and particularly San Diego's picture-perfect weather, beaches, and easy-going lifestyle leave us wondering how difficult it will be to re-adapt to Austria. You have to realize that year-round temperatures between 65 and 75 degrees turn even the most hardy macho into a wimp.

Flying has been mostly (99%) power, although I did go up several times in a Grob at Warner Springs. Following in Guenther's and Derek's footsteps, I ventured into some aerobatic flying with a Decathlon. Great fun! Other than that, renting is cheap here and the weather and countryside is inviting to long cross countries. If you haven't been to Santa Catalina Island in the spring yet, you should make it a top priority!

I should probably not say this, since I don't know if I'll be able to pull it off, but I am planning to get out to Sterling when I am visiting in Boston. How many people will I still recognize?

Where are they now?

Ed Foley

Ed Foley (foley.ed@tcs.teradyne.com) is the brother of Peter Foley. We took our flight tests on same day, and he was a most enthusiastic pilot. —Editor

I have been thinking a lot about my time and friends at MITSA. As part of the paper I have just submitted for my MBA at the University of Chicago, I write about a memorable flight in the club 1-26. I use it to draw parallels with business and life decisions. I enclose the part that refers to the flight. I know that it is a little out of date, as Pete told me that the 1-26 has a tidy new paint job. The Foley brothers will be flying together in a few weeks when I will visit him out in Sacramento.

I joined SKY Soaring while out here, and did get my five-hour flight in eventually. They are a good bunch of people, with some airline-type stars from American and United Airlines and a corporate pilot and fleet manager for FMC on the membership list.

This year, although a fully paid-up member, I have not flown… in fact I now sign my email messages "groundED." An executive MBA is just too demanding on my time. When I get done with school, I am going to buy a glass ship with all the new found wealth and start living again.

I miss MITSA and I think back to my three seasons at Sterling with profound joy.

"In the Flow"

It is the mid-morning of a beautiful summers day in New England. I drive onto the airfield a little later than is respectable for the flying club. After the ceremonial greetings, apologies for tardiness, and exchanges of information on the soaring conditions, I know that all the club's performance gliders are airborne. The occupants of these gliders are enjoying the delights of riding streams of rising hot air known as thermals. Puffy, white clouds mark the location of these thermals and I squint upwards to pick out the small circling forms and wish that I could have come earlier and secured my place among them.

As I express my envy, I am told that the 1-26 is still tied down and available. Well, it would be better than nothing. The 1-26 is a stumpy looking flying machine, with stubby wings and all metal construction it looks worlds apart from the sleek, modern day glider. Our 1-26 sits, there in the grassy tie-down, forlorn and unloved, its paintwork flaking and wings dented.

Half an hour later at 3,000 feet, I let loose from the tow plane to join the fun. In the 1-26, because of it's lack of soaring performance, it is important to find a source of lift quickly or else a quick return to the earth is certain. I locate the other gliders, 3,000 feet above me, and fly without delay into the invisible lifting source that suspends them. You can tell when the glider enters the thermal as there is a satisfying push in the seat of the pants and a sharp flick upwards of the needle of the variometer, an instrument for indicating upward or downward movement of the glider.

I bank sharply, now to stay within this narrow current that is probably only 300 feet wide, and climb steadily to 6,000 feet, the apparent limit of the altitude gain possible in today's conditions.

After half an hour, or so, of sharing this particular thermal, I detect a vague wisp of vapor much higher and further out from the landing field. I take a gamble and fly towards it and as I reach it, already a small cloud has formed. I feel an exhilarating tummy flip as my flying machine is sucked upwards at over 1,000 feet per minute. Reaching 9,300 feet, I feel a cool relief from the glaring sunshine, provided by the shadow of the form above me. I am now flying in the turbulent and vapor-filled air of the underbelly of a huge cumulus cloud. For two hours, I climb and fall, bank and spin without any sense of using the primitive controls attached to my hands and feet. I feel completely at one with the metal and fabric that forms the total creature that I have become. There are no thoughts of the world outside me. I am complete, nothing to fear, nothing to achieve. I am complete in my freedom and joy, as near to my god as I can be. I am happy in the moment, a being oscillating at a higher state of grace.

A gradual return to earth in slow stages of descent and then the familiar increase in perception of speed, the prescribed pattern of approach and tightening of the senses, to set the aircraft down gently.

I join my fellow aviators and I see happiness in their smiles but, more than that, in their eyes I see the common experience that we shared up there on this beautiful soaring day.

As I tie down the 1-26, I reflect that together we had flown, higher than anybody that day, and look with affection on those stubby, dented wings. I know what it is to be in "the flow."

Where are they now?

Ray Beausoleil

Ray (beausoleil@mail.dec.com) served on the board of directors, and flew the wings off the L-33. —Editor

I haven't done any flying since the last time I was in Sterling over two years ago. I took a sort of leave of absence when I had two kids in college. I miss the soaring and the camaraderie, but I've substituted flying with fly fishing. Less expensive and I can walk from my house to a catch and release fly fishing stream. My son, Kevin, graduated from Penn State last year with a degree in International Finance and Business and is now working for GM in Pontiac, Michigan. Becky is attending the University of Maryland where she's majoring in linguistics and English. She fondly remembers her few flying lessons with great instructors at MITSA! I still work for DEC, oops Digital, and if I make it a few more months it'll be 25 years here.

Commercial check ride

Mark Tuttle

I passed the flight test for my commercial glider certificate in June. John Boyce has stopped administering flight tests, and the new examiner is Wally Moran. Both John and Wally fly with the Nutmeg club.

I love to read stories about the flight tests people take, and I wish I could write a long, detailed report on what happened, but Wally was such a pleasant man and talking and flying with him was so much fun that I simply had a wonderful afternoon. We took one launch and demonstrated a few maneuvers while being towed up into the air, but I released in strong sinking air by mistake, and we ended up back on the ground before the tow plane. We took another launch and hung on to the tow plane until we were under a promising looking cloud, and thermaled up a few thousand feet to the base of the cloud. We ran through the usual sequence of maneuvers, but a few thousand feet above the ground Wally said he'd seen enough and handed me a round post-it note and asked me to cover up the altimeter and land.

The idea is that when you are flying cross-country and have to land in a farmer's field, you really don't know how high you are above the field because you don't really know much about the elevation of the field, and this exercise was intended to simulate such a landing. Surprisingly, the hardest part is simply judging when you are at the right height to begin the landing procedure. For the landing we were doing — on 34 — the landing is supposed to begin at 1,700 feet, so my job was to mess around until we'd lost enough altitude that I judged we were at 1,700 feet. I was surprised when the examiner said after landing that I had started the landing at 2,000 feet, which I thought was surprisingly close to the right altitude.

The only piece of excitement to report was the demonstration of a simulated emergency on tow. We practice all the time what to do if the tow rope were to break at some unexpected point on tow. There are about five places that instructors love to pull the release and shout, "Whoops, the rope just broke!" with evil grins on their faces. I knew that most exams have three flights, and I knew that a simulated rope break was a required part of the test, so I knew that my third flight was going to be the rope break, and I was ready. So much for unexpected. If the rope broke in this place, I would do this; if the rope broke in this place, I would do this; and I continued this line of thought as the takeoff roll began and we climbed through twenty feet... Bang! Wally pulled the release and simulated a rope break at the one place I hadn't expected. The funny thing is that recovering from a rope break in this position is the easiest possible recovery — just land straight ahead — but I was so shocked that it took a couple seconds for my brain to start working.

After the test, I took charge of securing the glider, and Wally walked over to John Wren to described my performance to him in front of a number of club members. I don't know if he was aware of the effect his public report would have, but I was grateful to him, because the result was a number of my friends coming over to me and making a big deal about my passing. Friends are pretty nice to have.

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For more information about MITSA, you can contact the club by email, visit our web page, or contact Joe Kwasnik, our director of membership listed above.

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