

AIRWORTHY



Newsletter of the Black Forest Soaring Society - Spring 2003

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TABLE OF CONTENTS: (clickable)

From the President	Pg. 2
From the Editor	Pg. 3
Newsworthy	Pg. 4
The Two-minute Hook-up-Drill by Raul Boerner	Pg. 6
The Schweizer1-26 Championship 2002 by Oliver Schmelzer	Pg. 7
About The 2003 SSA Convention by Hans Arnold	Pg.12
Caught in the Soup by Jim Walker	Pg.14

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings,

As many of us come out of our winter soaring hibernation and begin to dream of cloud hopping and 10 kt thermals, now may be a good time to contact your favorite BFSS instructor and schedule a spring check ride to work out the winter cobwebs. That spring time air can be fairly textured so a check out and safety review will reap big dividends in the comfort and fun factor.

Speaking of safety, your Board of Directors has been busy this winter. As I write this, our Pawnee is being fitted with a new Bendix/King KY-97A COM Transceiver and a Garmin GTX-320A Transponder with an ACK-A30 Mode C Encoder. This will give us another much needed set of eyes in the sky and allow us the ability to chase the Wave. We also have just installed a new Microair 760 Radio system in our L-23 Super-Blanik.

Now, this is a great start but the remainder of our fleet is still in need of reliable communications. Due to an unusually active winter at our club we can afford to purchase upgrades for the rest of our fleet. Both 2-33s and our 1-26 will also receive new Microair 760 Radio systems. An Icom IC-A110B-05 Commercial Base Station will be installed at the clubhouse and will be tied into an external speaker located on the deck. All radio systems have been ordered and we hope to complete the member assisted radio installations by the first week in April. The above noted additions to our fleet will provide a quantum leap in the safety of flight operations at the Black Forest Soaring Society.

These are just a few of the items your BODs are working on in the name of safety. In the name of fun and education one of our most prolific instructors, Jim Pilkington, has put together a Cross Country Soaring Seminar on March 15th and 29th from 9:00am to 12:00 noon, to be held at the BFSS clubhouse. If you have a desire to see what lies beyond them there hills, I encourage you to attend this informative and relaxed event.

So, this is what a select few volunteer BFSS members are doing to help the club out, how about you? There are several things on the horizon that could use YOUR help. Yep, if you're reading this, I'm talking to you.

We have a distinct shortage of "Glider Manager Volunteers" for the L-23 (9BA), 1-26 (Blue Jay), 2-33 (966) and our other 2-33 (840). These are not over taxing positions and don't require large amounts of time but they are extremely important to the smooth operation of our club. Please do a bit of thinking on this subject, and if you can help out please let me know.

We also are in need of “Line etc. Assist Volunteers” we generally find the same person(s) jumping in here, we need to share the wealth. What I believe would work best is to break up Saturday & Sunday into two Line Assist time slots from 8:00 to 12:30 then 12:30 to 17:00. Please consider volunteering on a regular basis, then hop on the BFSS web site at <http://www.Serkowski.com/bfss/> go to the Club Events Calendar and sign up for an available time slot. Once again this is an extremely important position that benefits all BFSS members and helps to insure the smooth operation of our club.

It's not quite time to put away the skis yet, but if you're like me you just might catch yourself looking at the clouds and daydreaming of the soaring to come.

See you at cloud base,

Rick Culbertson BFSS, President

FROM THE EDITOR

We received much positive feedback for the Winter Airworthy and several volunteers have stepped forward to help with articles for this spring issue. (Summer issue ideas anyone?)

Oliver Schmeltzer and Jim Walker, two BFSS members, competed in the 2003 National 1-26 championships hosted by the Airforce Academy at one of their auxiliary fields this summer. Oliver has written an interesting account of his experience. This was Oliver's first 1-26 competition, indeed he did not have a lot of experience in the plane, and he made us proud by coming in second place.

Jim came in 13th place, a good showing for our most senior member, for which we were also proud. Jim has agreed to share an article, published before in the 1-26 newsletter and Soaring Magazine, about a long ago flight he took out of Black Forest in a 1-26.

Hans Arnold writes of his visit to the Soaring Convention in Ohio. His article has convinced me to attend next year. I think you'll find his summary interesting.

Raul shares a short piece on how to make short time of hooking up gliders. He says it is appropriate that such an article be short.

Bruce Carter hopes to begin a weather related column with the June 2003 issue. If you have weather related questions he might address in this column let him know.

Bill Howe Airworthy Editor

NEWSWORTHY

Club events

In the fall many members gathered on a Saturday to finish the paint job our club house needed. Rick brought paint and Annette brought sloppy joes. Rumor has it a spring work day is in the plans to get things spruced up for the soaring season.



Photo: Newly painted club house

Member News

Member news is based on information provided to the editor. Please excuse any errors or omissions.

New members:

Ramon Colomina
Randy Rothe
Christopher Rothe (son)
Jim Schwerin (rejoin)

Students who have soloed:

Steve Johnson - fall 2002
Rick Ranson - fall 2002
Matthew Curry - December 14, 2002
Caitlin Curry - January 4, 2003
Ramon Colomina - February 1, 2003
Sean Bradbury - February 8, 2003

Members who received their private pilot license:

Mike DeBettencourt - December 15, 2002

Ramon Colomina - March 2, 2003

Chris Rothe - March 9, 2003

Chris completed his practical exam with Quay Snyder for Certificated Flight Instructor-Gliders. In early April he will be departing for Maxwell AFB in beautiful Montgomery, Alabama, for the Air Force's Officer Training School. After that paid vacation, Chris will move to Columbus, Mississippi for Undergraduate Pilot Training.

Upcoming events

March 22, 2003:

The Colorado State Governor's Soaring Seminar and Awards Banquet Seminars 1:00 to 5:30 (no charge) . Cash bar 5:30 to 6:30. Reservation dinner plus speaker at 6:30. Any questions call Charlie Collman (303-460-8245).

March 15 and 29, 2003:

BFSS X-County Orientation

Jim Pilkington, our newest instructor, has put together two cross country lecture days at the Black Forest club house. He writes: "It started out as an effort to get new solo pilots to use the SSA practice 17sm x-country triangle and it has developed into a gift of shared x-country knowledge by some of the experienced pilots of BFSS." Sessions are from 9:00 to 12:00 in the clubhouse and include five presenters on a variety of topics such as speeds to fly, thermalling technique, course selection, landing out, terrain evaluation, instrumentation, and planning long flights.



Photo: Jim Pilkington (right), with student Terry Collins.

The Two-minute Hook-up Drill

By Raul D. Boerner

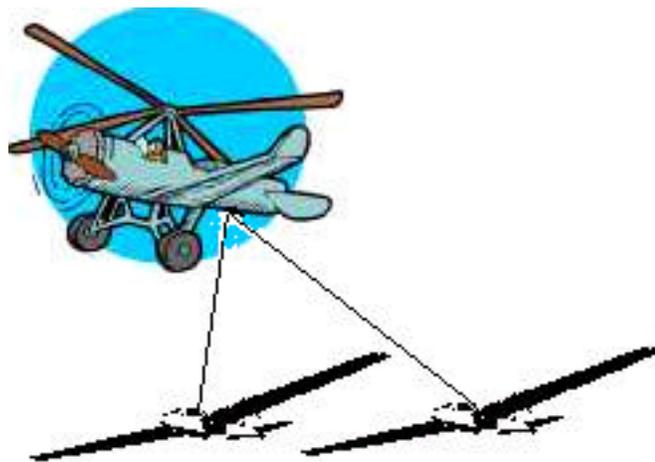
A tow pilot gets lonely, too. That's why we have been encouraging a glider pilot to be on the runway at the same time; it makes for great company. And you thought it was to do more launches in less time.

Actually, that is not a bad idea. Seems that this winter we have been completing between 20 and 27 tows per day; this is excellent on short days. From the moment the tow plane taxis onto the runway, to brake release and rolling, only takes two minutes pass when using, of course, the Two-minute Hook-up Drill.

To make the Two-minute Drill happen, the glider pilot completes his checklist prior to being pulled into position. To this end, some of us have rewritten our checklists so that most of the items can be done while waiting in the staging area. Then, we have what is called Final Items. These are those very few checklist tasks that can't be done until hooked up. They include seat belts, checking the weak link, and closing the canopy.

Imagine this: You're already strapped into your seat while waiting in the staging area, the takeoff checklist is complete down to Final Items. The tow plane taxis onto the runway and you are pulled into position. You check the weak link and lock your canopy. Then, you gently wiggle your tail (or the glider's tail), and you're off.

Total elapsed time is two minutes or less. Next, you're airborne to the sound of wind music.



The Schweizer 1-26 Championship 2002

by Oliver Schmelzer

How it all began

I believe it was in September 2001. I just became a new member of BFSS, and had the privilege to meet Jim Walker, the guru of 1-26's. I helped him with "Blue Eagle" and we started talking about the weather and many other things, when Jim mentioned that the 1-26 Association intends to have the 1-26 Championship in Colorado. He told me about the 1-26 community and all the fun he always had when he participated in the 1-26 competitions. I guess, that was the moment the idea was born to participate, since it had been a while since I competed in gliders. I asked the BFSS BOD whether I could have Blue Jay to represent BFSS at the 1-26 nationals, and there were no objections. OK, I thought, now I have to convince Annette, the treasurer of the Schmelzer family. What do I need? Radio, GPS, lots of tape (insider joke!), and the extra money to pay for SSA/1-26 membership and the competition. Should I bring her flowers? No, then she will ask me what I did wrong. I waited for a good moment (typically 351 days in a year) and came forward with my ridiculous request. To my surprise she quickly responded with a definite YES. I briefly explained what I needed. She looked at me and said: " don't we also need a cell phone in that desert-like environment, and don't we need a second GPS so I can find you when you do an out-landing?" (Big confidence builder—out-landing, yes, L/D 22:1, no clouds, lots of fields to land in; yes, she's got a point!)

Well, as you can see, the plan was made; now the realization phase started. EBAY, Hart Avionics, and many others were to be contacted to make it happen. One by one the little toys entered our front door, and I started playing with my new toys. Now I needed to find the right locations to put all these things. Annette, I need your help, can you ...! I flew a couple times with good old Blue Jay and noticed that some modifications were desperately needed before I could compete in it. Did I mention trailers yet? Let's make that short: remove the wood, replace the tires, fix the light and get the registration done (piece of cake: Annette did it!). Special thanks to Brian (electrical work and hitch) for his helping hand. Back to the modifications: those wheels on the wing tips needed to go, the aircraft needs to be polished and taped. Of course, Annette did most of it. What bothered me was the fact that Blue Jay was definitely nose heavy. I talked to Bruce, and he arranged for the weighing at Doug Curry's hangar. Bruce and Horst helped to bring it there, and despite having very limited time, Doug put it on the scale! I had my numbers, and calculated how much weight I could put in the tail. What a difference. Now Blue Jay did what I wanted in thermals: nice and slow! Blue Jay and I were ready! Let the show begin, I'm ready!

Deploying to Bullseye

End of June 2002! After months of preparation the real thing was near. Jim Walker flew non-stop from Kelly AP to Bullseye on Saturday. I planned to do the same on Sunday but the weather wasn't too favorable and therefore I asked John Good to tow me in the direction of Bullseye. Some bumps here and there but I didn't want to risk it. I landed out at USAFA only a week ago (yeah, my confidence was a bit shaken). Better safe than sorry! Thanks, John, for the nice tow, and the treasurer thanked me! I released between Elicott and Bullseye. Smooth glide towards the runway. Blue sky, some wind! Plus 300 ft/min! Annette was on her way to Bullseye, therefore I stayed in the lift and tried to contact her on the cell phone. No connection! I must have been too high. After descending to 8500 MSL, I had more luck. Annette came on the phone and was only 15 minutes away. Time to land! I rolled out when Annette rolled in. Perfect! Del Blomquist (organizer and participant of the 1-26 championship) and Jayne Reid (SSA magazine: tow pilot's corner) helped me to push Blue Jay to the tie-down location. Blue Eagle was watching us, swinging softly in the breeze.

The competition

The peacefulness of the previous day was gone. Not hectic, but definitely crowded. Some familiar faces: Bruce, who spent some of his vacation to be our weatherman and my crew, John Good, who gave time to be our tow pilot, Chris and Randy Rothe, and of course Jim Walker. The USAF Academy bunch, which I am part of, made the family reunion complete. The rest were unknown. 32 aircraft were waiting to compete above the prairie. Seasoned and experienced glider pilots. I overheard some people talking about some of them. There is Bob Hurni, last year's winner. Oh, look! Ron Schwartz and Bob von Hellens (more than one time winners of 1-26 competitions). But there were also young soaring enthusiasts; probably first time participants, as myself. I quickly made contact to most of them (yeah, Annette helped out a bit!).

Training day (1). During the briefing someone asked: "Don't you have mountains here?" The wild-fires produced so much smoke and haze that we could not see Pikes Peak and his relatives from Bullseye, only 30 miles away. First turnpoint Elicott and then a point of our own choosing. Ceiling at about 18,000 ft! I left the start cylinder at 17,000 ft. I watched what others were doing, made sure all my equipment was doing fine, and tried to figure out where to go next. At Elicott I turned towards Calhan. About 10,000 ft overhead the airfield, I circled in some lift and headed towards home after I reached 13,500 ft. I didn't want to land out, and I didn't trust my GPS-coordinates yet. I was getting closer and closer but the airfield was not visible. A huge cloud cast an even bigger shadow over the whole area. When I finally spotted the runway I realized that I was way too high. I flew pretty fast (calm air) and had about 1,500 ft AGL when I flew over the finish line. I had a 60mph average, but considering the 17,000 ft at the beginning this was not

difficult to accomplish. A USAFA cadet had an average of 70 mph, well deserved!

Training day (2): different weather. I talked to Bruce, who was not only the weatherman, but also helped me during the competition (once again, thank you, Bruce!). We decided to make it a rest day, to be well rested for the days to come.

Competition day one: The heat was on. I tried to bribe the others by sponsoring some cake: my birthday cake! Only seven pilots did not take the bribe. The weather was so different from the first training day. 14,000 ft MSL ceiling, lift at about 400-500 ft/min. I released at 1,500 ft AGL to expedite the towing. Big mistake! For the next 15 minutes I was busy trying to stay up. Bruce told me later that they were watching me. I would have been the talk of the day had I landed for a relight. Well, the thermal god showed mercy, and I finished eighth with an average of 28 mph. 250 points behind the winner. Ron Schwartz had to land out. He lost 570 points and could not recover from it until the bitter end (finished third overall despite some day winnings). 32 aircraft, but only 19 aircraft made it home, including Jim Walker who finished 15th.

Day two: 66 miles to fly. Weather similar to the day before. Bruce's predictions were phenomenal. A trusted Piper Cub pulled me across the prairie, and altitude-wise we made slow progress. I had time to look into real bull eyes. Release, climb, wait for the gate to open. I was still a free man; no one was watching and following me. The advantage of the "no name". I made good progress to Calhan, and turned towards High Mesa. Ceiling at 13,000 ft MSL, lift about 500 ft/min. But it didn't look too good in the southerly direction. Only two clouds that looked promising. Choices! I hate when that happens to me. I took the one that was more on course. By the time I got there, guess what! Yeah, the cumulus lost its previous charm and started to dissolve. I called it all the names in the book and blamed myself for making the wrong decision. I turned towards my second choice cumulus and began to whine about the 15 minutes I just lost. Regaining my concentration, I found reasonable lift but the southern portion of the leg was not looking too good. I started gliding into my turnpoint and knew that after having it rounded I would have tail wind. 11 miles out and 2,000 ft above field elevation, I started my final glide milking the lift and made it home. It was a difficult day for all 1-26's! Only five pilots made it home that day. The rest went to the cows, as the French say. Fourth on this day made me second overall after two days of competition.

The days went on and the fourth day pushed me very close to the leader, Bob von Hellens. I made up 160 points that day and kept second place overall with only 20 points shy of Bob. On day five, Bob gained 15 points. So we started into the last day, knowing that this day would determine the winner.

Day six: the final day! By now, I had some leeches following me. Some turns in sink got rid of them in a heart beat; not nice but effective.. Bruce had predicted some high clouds to move in fast, therefore I knew that I wanted to fly the minimum distance of the free task with the first point given. Bob von Hellens and I left at almost the same time, but neither one tried to follow the other one. Going into the first turnpoint, I noticed Ron Schwartz and we flew a while together (1-26 term for staying together for 5 miles!) until tactics put us apart. I flew to the south and made great progress. Only a few 1-26 around; the rest were behind us. Tactics! If I fly the route almost the same way backwards, then I will encounter many 1-26's that indicate lift. Lift means speed, and speed means good ranking. The tactic did not materialize. I glided into my turnpoint and no one to see. The weather was getting bad. High clouds, only shadow, some wisps of cumulus. I couldn't believe it. 85,00 ft MSL (about 1,500 AGL), a bit of lift. Time was running but I had to take it. 100 ft/min! Not even round but the altimeter didn't show any lower and made slow progress in the good direction. After gaining 500 ft, I lost the lift, or should I say the lift decided to give up. I rounded my last turnpoint, and now I had a bit of tail wind. I climbed one more time 500ft, and then I knew that I had to head home. 11 miles 1,800 ft AGL, no clue what kind of surprises were awaiting me. A land out would be fatal to the overall ranking (remember Ron Schwartz?). I followed the GPS when I saw the airfield low on the horizon and three miles left where the needle pointed. What? I was still seven miles away and still slightly under glide path. What is wrong with my GPS? Then I saw the real airfield. A clump of trees looked like the two towers of Bullseye. The sink was minimal, what a relief! I had 150 feet AGL over the fence, accelerated to 60 mph and flew over the finish line in one to two feet. I was exhausted and relieved at the same time. Bruce and Annette had a big smile on their faces. Bruce said: "You made it home! That is what counts!" 16 aircraft made it home that last day. Bob von Hellens gained another 60 points on me and deserves to be the 1-26 champion. Jim Walker finished that day as Thea and was Thea overall. What an accomplishment with age 80!

The aftermath

What can we learn from all this? Everything in life begins with a dream, and it is on us to make it come true. Had it not been for Jim Walker, I probably wouldn't have participated. You cannot succeed without friends. I received help in many ways. Without the support from all of you, this wonderful competition would not have taken place for me. I'd like to address special thanks to Bruce Carter, who spent his time to support the competition and me, as well to John Good for his towing and friendly smiles. And of course Annette, who contributed in so many ways, as you can imagine.

Who says you cannot fly cross-country in the flat lands? It was definitely challenging,. It proves that we could fly far more cross-countries than we really

do. Even small tasks will help you to become a successful glider pilot. And what about navigation? Well, thanks to GPS, navigation was not an issue. The prairie looked pretty much the same for many miles. Of course you can find Calhan without GPS, but some turn points were really tough to find.

Is water important? I've never drunk so much water in my life. Before I mounted the cockpit I was fully hydrated and kept that way by carrying two liters (half a gallon for you non-metric guys!) of water in a camel-back. Yes, recycling of water is essential too! It's like potty-training in your early days. The first trials are mishaps, then you'll see the improvement. No water is no solution, it is dangerous!

1-26 competitions are designed to accommodate all ages of pilots; from teenager to eight decades old ones. The 1-26 championship is made for everyone, whether he or she is a new comer or an old head. If you are looking forward to have fun, participate in the 1-26 championship! It's worth the efforts and very rewarding.

Have fun flying Blue Jay and other ships around Kelly Air Park! Every flight is a good flight!

Oliver Schmelzer (alias Schweizer)—they gave me that nick name after someone misspelled my name!



About the 2003 SSA Convention

by Hans Arnold

I attended the recent “2003 SSA Convention and Air Sports Expo”, as it was properly called.

It was fun, entertaining, educational, and a welcome event shortening the long wait for the first spring thermals. The location, Dayton, Ohio, was obviously chosen to honor the Wright Brothers and celebrate the 100th anniversary of their historical powered flight.

I spent two and one half days at the convention. The Dayton weather was sunny and miserably cold, -6° F on the first morning. So I preferred to stay as much as possible inside the convention center and tried to concentrate my attention on two issues: safety of soaring operations and cross country flying.

I attended the instructor breakfast. Bob Wander, author of the Beginner’s Corner in the SSA magazine, pointed out various safety issues, some of which I will list below, even at the risk that they may be obvious:

- Prior to solo flight, all student pilots should obtain a pre-flight briefing on any particular issues pertaining to the flight and should be supervised for each flight.
- Post flight inspections should be implemented and exercised before a pilot returns a glider.
- Flight instructors should prepare a written student pilot guide for all student pilots.
- SAA conducted recertification clinics for flight instructors are locally available at a cost and upon request.

I like to suggest that the BFSS flight instructors convene and work on post flight inspection procedures and a written student pilot guide.

I asked Bob Wander if the SSA would be willing to develop and provide a recertification course for flight instructors available on the Internet at a cost. “Not anytime soon” was the answer. Bob justified this answer with the availability of locally available recertification clinics. It was my experience with a recertification course commercially available on the Internet, which I took last summer, that soaring issues were insufficiently addressed. The course was almost entirely aimed at power pilots, but accepted by the FAA for recertification of CFGs.

I attended eight presentations, all of which were well prepared, interesting, entertaining, and sometimes funny. The best one was clearly Dr. Jack Glendening’s presentation on “BLIPMAPS Soaring Forecast”. His thermal forecast seems to be the

product of his pioneering work of developing analytical forecast models utilizing locally available weather information. For more information, please refer to <http://www.drjack.net/BLIPMAP> .

Another very interesting session was Mark Maughmer's "Aerodynamics for Dummies". No, he did not make you feel like a dummy. But if you thought you knew it all, he showed you otherwise. He gave understandable explanations of the quite complex airflow patterns on the upper wing surface supported by wind tunnel pictures. Most interesting to me was the picture showing the effect of a bug on the leading edge of a wing. There was a clear morale: glider pilots wash your wings off after a flight.

"Understanding the Physiologic Hazards in Soaring" was a presentation by Dr. Walt Cannon. Dr. Cannon emphasized the requirement for drinking and disposing of sufficient water during soaring flights. He also pointed out the need to protect against the sun. He showed very nasty pictures of some malignant skin cancers, which I do not care to see again.

The last session, I would like to mention here, is Curt Lewis' "Letting Go Of the Windsock (Training for Cross-Country Soaring)". He described the fear and its reasons of some glider pilots to fly cross-country tasks. The presentation was aimed at overcoming such fears. He sold the presentation on a CD in MS PowerPoint format. I bought it and am willing to make it available upon request.

I could have done without the boring presentation of a representative of the Department of Homeland Security during the SSA Plenary Session, but more good things were to come: clearly, the best part of the convention was the evening visit of the US Air Force Museum at the Wright Patterson Air Force Base. If you have never been there, I'd like to recommend that you plan a visit soon. The whole history of aviation is addressed in this museum. In three large heated hangars, military airplanes from many countries are displayed. Of course, I had to look at the German WWII planes and found to my surprise a Messerschmitt 262, the first WWII jet. Even an engine was placed next to it, partially cut open to see the design of the turbine. I love such things!

I did not meet many familiar faces, but found myself suddenly and to my surprise opposite Dave Leonard looking at the same glider in the exhibition hall. When I looked up, there he was. It is good to see a BFSS member at national soaring events.

In the exhibition hall, many of the latest gliders were on display, a few of them motor gliders. My impression: bigger, heavier, and more expensive seems to be a trend. I do not like it. The affordability and availability of soaring for the younger generation with limited financial means must be an objective for the soaring community and the SSA.

Caught In The Soup (written in the mid 70s)

by Jim Walker

One Sunday last spring, Jim Walker, a realtor and insurance man from Colorado Springs, had been puttering about 22 Whiskey, his 1-26, when he got this wild idea.

“The forecast was poor, just like the preceding day. I was fixing stuff and moving casually until Chuck McKinnie told me a cold front was moving in along a line from Nebraska to New Mexico. There would be strong southwest winds, and the dew point line was slated to reach from Dalhart, Texas, to Sidney, Nebraska. ‘Gee,’ I thought to myself, ‘maybe a guy could ride the front.’”

No one else showed any interest. But two students who had been flying over the forest in the midmorning reported lift. Jim decided to get a crewman. He called his friend Sam Alexander.

“Sam and I have a thing going - we always have ‘unusual’ retrieves. He showed up around 11:00 a.m. with an expectant look.”

If Sam had any doubts about the advisability of his crewing alone for someone riding a storm front, he kept it to himself, and within the half hour 22 Whiskey was launched. However, Jim was unable to break away from the gliderport.

“By that time I had the front in sight. It lay as predicted - along a southwest to northeast line. Nice frontal cu’s reached to the east.”

Evidently the leading edge of the front was going to be irregular rather than a straight linear wall. After following the clouds east by northeast for forty miles, he noted their shadows ending at Limon twenty miles farther. He decided to swing north of northeast to take advantage of the southeasterly wind. At first he thought he had erred because he was low by the time he reached Deer Trail fifty miles east of Denver. But when he picked up the lift associated with the front, he called his crewman who had been holding at Limon and told him to move north. “That was the last contact I was to have with Sam,” Jim said.

For the next fifty miles he sped north at a high rate of speed. He crossed the South Platte River and flew over Fort Morgan 106 miles and two hours out from Black Forest.

“I was getting fantastic lift in straight-line-flight, the kind you read about. At 70 mph the vario was pegged. I was at 17,000 feet in no time!”

The weather ahead made him uneasy. To his left he could see the front kicking up dust, while to the right a band of haze angled in as if to converge at an unseen point in the distance.

“Before takeoff I had joked that with my luck I would probably get boxed in where the dewline and the storm met at Sidney. Now it was coming true. The only clear air and clouds left were in a narrowing band that led toward Sidney.”

Jim pushed on until there was no choice but to fly into the haze. Things began

to happen fast.

“The haze got darker and seemed to extend in all areas, even closing beneath me. I turned east. Whammo! I was blocked. I did a one-eighty and found it had closed behind me. It seemed like a dust bowl was rising in all directions and engulfing me.”

Walker was still able to see a patch or two of ground directly below. He opened the spoilers and began a steep spiral down. At 12,000 feet he was able to see the outlines of a town.

“I thought it was Sidney. I’d been there before. The airport was in the right spot and there was a white cottage that could be the Flight Service Station. I called Sidney radio. They told me the wind was blowing at 47 knots from 300 degrees. ‘Okay,’ I told them, ‘I’ll land on runway 33.’ They seemed puzzled. ‘Runway 33? We don’t have any runway 33!’”

Jim decided he must be over Sterling, a town 35 miles south of Sidney. No matter. Any old port in a storm.

“About that time I was thrown violently every which way in a frontal shear that was as rough as any rotor I had ever experienced. Even worse, the dust blotted out the airport in the space of a few seconds.”

He was down to 4,000 feet and approaching the first stages of desperation when the dust thinned enough to reveal a patch of ground to the south.

“I gave the news to Sidney that I was in trouble, a little lost, and was going to take any field that showed up. When I got to the area, I could see rivers of sand blowing along the ground. Suddenly I hit a violent updraft that lifted me 2,000 feet with the spoilers full out. Wow! I knew I had to get down while I could still see.”

He spotted a car and truck parked on a road near some power lines next to a usable field. A farmhouse was a half mile west.

“I figured they would surely see me, and I began essing to position myself for a straight-in landing. But I had to fly 100 mph to get forward motion, and just as I eased in over the car and truck, they took off to the south!”

Though Jim got 22 Whiskey on the ground without incident, he felt as if he were still flying.

“I held the stick full forward with the spoilers full out, but the ship kept jumping up and down like it was on a trampoline. The canopy was getting plastered with sand, tumbleweeds, and cornstalks. Once I saw a quart oil can go by in level flight. The wind must have been 60 to 70 mph at least.”

There was no choice but to sit it out and wait for the wind to abate.

“I thought the worst of the front would be through in thirty minutes or so. But after an hour I was still there and it was still howling. I couldn’t see 50 feet.”

He was able to discern that he had come to rest on the forward slope of a knoll that would prevent anyone passing by on the road behind from seeing his plight. By holding the stick forward with his knee, he managed to eat a little candy and have a drink of water.

“After two hours, things seemed to be getting worse. There was still some daylight and I kept telling myself to stay cool. I tried to raise anybody on 122.6 and 122.8. No answers. When three hours had passed, it seemed serious enough to try emergency on 121.5. Again nothing.”

By 7:00 p.m., with darkness approaching, the temperature dropping to 35 degrees, and with no letup of wind and sand, Jim felt the time had come for making some overt move. Was there any way to save the plane?

“I decided that if I could hold down the cockpit area and right wing root and try opening the canopy at an angle so that it would push the left wing down, maybe I could use the wind to help me ease the glider backward over the knoll and down toward the road.”

Walker somehow managed to extricate himself from the cockpit and put his plan into action. He nudged the plane and then ran a few steps—perhaps ten feet—while pulling down “for dear life”. Unbelievably, the desperate pilot repeated this process over and over until he succeeded in moving the 1-26 a quarter mile over the hill and down the other side to the road!

A driving rain started falling.

“The chill factor began getting to me, and I was about at the end of my string when lights appeared out of the dark and stopped by a blown-over pole on the east side of the road.”

It proved to be a utility truck. Jim began to feel his efforts might not be in vain after all. He shouted, hoping the wind would carry his cry to the repair man. At last the headlights turned his way and the truck pulled up and stopped. The driver was incredulous.

“What the hell are you doing out there with that thing?” he shouted.

“I need help, pal,” him pleaded.

“I can’t stay long,” the truck driver protested. “We have real problems tonight with the power outages.”

Jim knew he was in danger of losing his last chance to save his ship. A tractor stood a short distance away in the open field.

“Okay, okay. Can you just help me pull it over and tie it down to that tractor and then run me down to the ranch house?”

The truck driver agreed.

They decided to tow 22 Whiskey by its tail, tying it to the front bumper of the truck which would then back towards the nearby tractor. The truck pulled up until its lights were shining on the glider’s tail. Jim reached in the cockpit for a length of tiedown rope. He let go of the cockpit and ducked under the wing, expecting to secure the tail to the car. He recalls what happened next:

“Bingo! No plane. I look up and back. There, in the rain and light, is my 1-26 starting a beautiful chandelle 50 feet above me and moving east. You can imagine what was going through my head after five hours of ground flying and the struggle of wrestling the ship over the hill to the road.”

22 Whiskey hit the ground tail first with a sickening crunch, twisted around, and came to a quivering rest nose downwind. Jim instinctively raced to his fallen bird and lunged to hold down a wingtip.

“I thought, ‘What’s the use? It’s got to be totaled.’”

Nevertheless the two men managed to drag the glider to the tractor where they secured it as best they could and put a large plank on top of the wing.

It was a miserable glider pilot who climbed into the cab of the truck.

“My hair was matted with water and sand. My glasses were so fogged and dirty I couldn't see. Phooey!”

The driver tried to be nice.

“Sorry,” he said.

“My fault entirely,” Jim answered.

They drove through the storm in silence. When they approached the farmhouse, the driver spoke.

“The owner of the field lives there,” he said. Then he nodded toward a house on the other side of the road. “But a pilot lives in that one. Wouldn’t you rather go there?”

“Yes,” Jim said. “He’ll understand.”

And he did. When Tom Pomeroy opened his door and saw the cold, shaking, beaten figure before him, it took only a few words of explanation for him to grasp the situation. In moments the Pomeroy family had thrown shawls around Jim Walker and were pouring hot coffee into him.

It was 9:00 p.m. Jim’s first concern was for his wife, Jan, who had always had some reservations about her husband’s soaring hobby. Tom broke into his eight-party line, explaining he had an emergency and handed the phone to Jim who then got his call through to Jan.

“Where the hell have you been?” she said.

Jim was not upset. He had hoped for a little more concern, but “I realized she would put a match to 22 Whiskey if the chance arose”. And he learned, too, that two Flight Service Stations had called her around 4:00 p.m. to tell her that they were having a slight problem locating him and that a search-and-rescue mission was being sent out. And when, some time later, Sam Alexander, the crewman, called from Last Chance, Colorado, to say he was in a snowstorm and was wondering if by any chance she had had any word from his pilot, because he hadn’t heard from him since morning, she was sure “this was it”.

After Jan relayed the FSS report to Sam, he turned around and started back to Sidney, the last place Jim had been heard from. It took him five hours to cover the 70 mile distance. By that time Jim had called the FSS crew to tell them where he was and get the search-and -rescue operation called off. Sam was relieved. He was also not eager to go out in the night again to fight the elements for another 40 miles. He called the Pomeroy's and was told to stay in Sidney and come down in the morning.

Jim's host treated him with hospitality and understanding. He listened while Jim unwound by recounting the flight. Then Jim learned that Tom Pomeroy is an ex-navy pilot who flies a 285 mile pipeline each week looking for leaks and then spends the rest of his time farming his acreage and surveying herds from the air for his neighbors. A hot shower before bed drained the last remnants of Jim's tension. The last thing he remembered as he fell asleep was the sound of the wind still blowing outside.

The wind continued throughout the next day, but by evening it had let up enough that Sam and Jim, with the help of Tom and several of his neighbors, managed to get 22 Whiskey disassembled and on the trailer to begin the 150 mile haul back to the gliderport. The following week after an inspection by the gliderport's A&I mechanic, he was delighted, and relieved, to learn that the sturdy 1-26 needed only to have its elevator and stabilizer replaced to pass its annual.

Now that it's all over, what does Jim Walker think of the whole business?

"It was traumatic, a real happening...For me it was a powerful experience, an emotional milestone...It's certainly ridiculous to do such things, and I've learned my lesson...but...uh...could anyone crew for me next week?"

