

*Here you are, Old Dog fans — the further trials and tribulations of Newark Valley's favorite sailplane pilot. Is he really suffering from anoxia, or is he just light headed?*

## A Letter from the Mt. Washington Wave by RICHARD WOLTERS

**D**ear Doug:  
Three years ago when I started flying I asked our pretty little town librarian if she had any books on soaring. With glee, I watched her coordinated turns around the stacks. I hoped no one was watching me as I watched her stretch to the top of her reach for the book. Then I got embarrassed and looked away . . . some dihedral! She glided back and smilingly handed me a book called *Soaring for Diamonds*. Confused, I stammered something about wanting a book on flying . . . not jewelry. She laughed and convinced me that it was what I really wanted. I joined in on the laugh; she didn't know . . . I hoped . . . what I really wanted was to see her put the book back on that high shelf and this time . . . watch. It was good . . . I mean the book . . . I learned what Diamonds were . . . and some night when she's on duty I'm going to get

up my nerve and ask for that book again. But, the point is not to tell you how well our library is stacked, it's to tell you that after reading the book she gave me I never expected to get so far as to be searching myself . . . for Diamonds, that is.

Last spring I stumbled around 186 miles in weather so good that Octave Chanute could have made it, even in his hang glider. For that feat, plus four dollars, I wore one SSA diamond. All summer my right shoulder sagged. Fortunately, Allan MacNicol noted my plight . . . a low right wing landing at the Hiller Labor Day meet. We agreed that I couldn't face a whole winter with a list. He suggested my coming up to Mt. Washington to get the second diamond and even things up. He said something about, "Apply for membership; we want pilots with your experience" . . . Oh! Allan, the pen is mightier than the sailplane. So, off I trundled to the wave camp.

Maybe I'm a little ahead of my story; I really wasn't off that fast. I had to do some preparation, some of it physical, some financial.

The physical first . . . a wave preparation exercise. I stumbled on this one last April when I bumped into a wave at Wurtsboro, which completed my gold badge . . . it's called the George Moffat Neck Stretcher. First, I've got to be honest. I didn't bumble into the wave; a few guys got me out of the rotor by radio, and the next thing I knew I was sitting fat and sassy at 14,000 feet. Lo and behold, there was George on my right wing tip. I'd never been this high before, and when I saw something move out there I had no idea it was George . . . I thought it was Gabriel coming after me . . . I was afraid to look. Later, back down at the hangar when George . . . in his quiet way . . . was patiently cutting me to size for having my head in the cockpit, I noticed something peculiar . . . he seemed to have a crick

in his neck . . . head to the side . . . a distinct Modigliani cant to his eye. I immediately diagnosed it as window-watching-itis. Thanks to George, here is my medical contribution to the sport. This window-watching exercise can best be practiced in the office. Sit in your chair. If you're a Libelle driver open the second desk drawer . . . the third if it's a Cirrus. Lean back . . . up with the feet. Get the correct cockpit position. The desk pen will serve for the stick. Drop a dime on the floor, almost under the chair. With head erect, keep your eye on the dime. Exercise five minutes a day . . . experience has shown me to only do it longer if you're the boss.

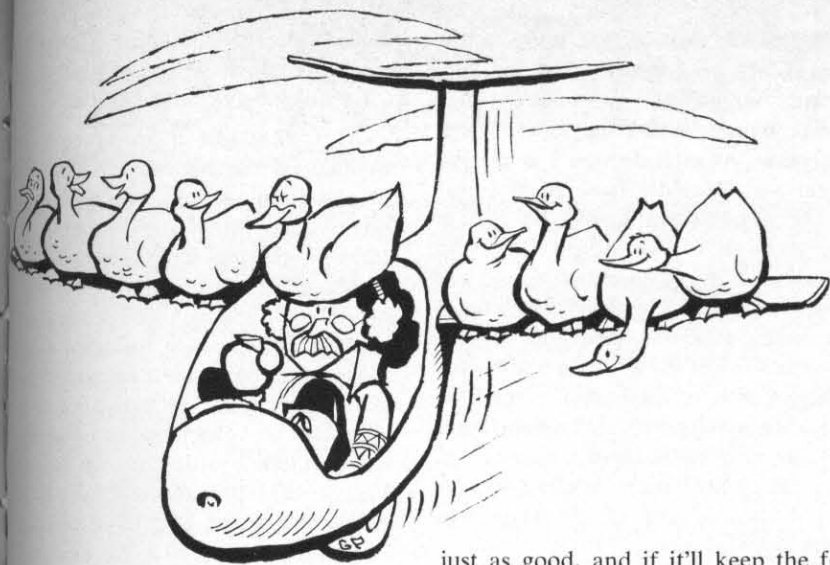
There is another office exercise for the serious wave pilot . . . no thanks to George here, it was my idea. First close the office windows. Then, don't leave your desk to go to the men's room from the time you get in until at least lunch . . . once you have mastered that, try it with the windows open.

Now for the financial preparations. You might be smarter than I and already know this one. I'll pass it along for what it is worth, for you to work out the best way you can. It cost me \$134 to get outfitted with cold weather gear . . . but the check I had to write was for double that amount, \$268.

I bought ski-doo boots with goose down booties. My wife liked them so much that I bought her a pair. I bought a goose down vest. My wife liked it, too, so I bought her one. Goose down warm-up pants . . . my wife liked . . . so I made it two. I bought a goose down ski jacket. My wife . . . so I bought. Hell, I just ordered two pair of goose down mits. They only cost \$28 . . . no use being a cheapskate for a lousy 14 bucks. But, an even more serious problem developed . . . try to get into a Libelle cockpit with \$134 of goose on. Feathers? Man, it must have taken a whole flock to outfit me. Finally, Neil Hyslep preened me into the cockpit. I felt



Illustrations by Gil Parcell



like a chicken about to be hatched, and that first tow was rough . . . with my vario chirping and cackling, I thought my yoke would bust. If you think that was a sight, you should have seen Bud Briggs.

Of course, you have to realize in Bud's defense that dressing for the wave isn't exactly like going to a formal dinner party. It's advised by those who have suffered the cold of 25,000 feet to wear silk socks next to the skin, under the wool. I stumbled onto the information that nylon will do when I inadvertently walked into Bud's camper . . . he was sneaking and grinding into a pair of his wife's panty hose. Embarrassed, his comment was, "I don't have silk. Nylon's



just as good, and if it'll keep the feet warm it ought to work for all parts."

I had another shattering experience but no camera. I missed a great picture while I was at 8,000 feet and as warm as toast in all my feathery splendor. A gaggle of geese—twenty of them—fell in line with me. It was thrilling, a magnificent sight as they moved into formation off my wing . . . could they have smelled me? . . . or one of their family? As they took off, I thought . . . thank goodness I wasn't down in those mountains wearing a bear coat . . . Tut, tut, Bud Briggs in panty hose! Another picture missed.

Now something about Mt. Washington and the people. The area can best be described as miles and miles of vertically rolling farm land. The crop these farmers grow isn't exactly for food, it's for building houses. Strange these New Hampshire farmers, they also grow rocks . . . miles high. I saw all this on the mandatory orientation flight that Allan MacNicol gave me. When we got back to the airport, by following a blazed trail in the woods . . . I was undecided whether to cry or go home . . . or both.

Mt. Washington is the tenth location I've flown in the east in my three years. I've enjoyed every place, but this one is different. The Schussverein is that difference. It's a ski club lodge, but it looks like an old farm house to me. Jane and Roger Merrill are the hosts. Once the day's flying is over and the planes are bedded down for the night, everyone goes back into the mountains to the Schuss. This is tradition; the first night I walked in on fifty pilots, crews, wives and people drinking "milkshakes" and telling

"honest" stories of the day's exploits. I'd heard about the camaraderie of the Schuss . . . it does exist. When Karl Kretschmer, keeper of the wave horn, blew its cow-like bellow, all took their places more or less like gentlemen at the long dining tables. No matter what the yearly income, all



feasted on the \$2.50 nightly special. The quality was great and the quantity was enough to ruin any L/D. It was all very democratic . . . wives served and the men ate first.

Allan MacNicol runs a tight ship. His recording secretary, chief cook and bottle washer, is faithful Marcia Prest. She announced the night of October 18th that 38 diamond climbs were recorded that day. Marcia claimed it as a record, and my research, after a long investigation, shows that it is a U. S. record. It's interesting that the record is held east of the Mississippi. How did I research it? I asked Lloyd Licher if it was a record and he answered that



The author

he didn't know. That was enough for me . . . it's claimed for Allan Mac-Nicol at Mt. Washington . . . If anyone wishes to do battle over it, write to *Soaring*. Doug, you answer the mail and take the monkey off my back . . . I so declare the record.

The tow to the wave, about eight miles to the secondary, behind Grayson Brown in a Super Cub might not be considered formation flying by the Blue Angels, but we managed to stay within the same county. The only thing that kept me from throwing up my Schussverein cookies was the thought of pollution and stuff. Besides, what would I say to my dry cleaner?

By the fourth flight it all paid off . . . in Diamonds. But, oh my goodness, Doug, if I told you about the first three tries you'd never go wave soaring again. You'll simply have to use your imagination to know what I went through. I was so sick on one landing that I used oxygen, full blast, so I'd be sure to be alert. One flight I don't even remember, and after the third I was ready to pack the whole thing in . . . needle, ball, airspeed and all.

The fourth flight was stylish and classic. I flew magnificently. No use giving the technical details, you've read them a hundred times in *Soaring*. At 9000 feet the view was sensational . . . but better writers than I have described it, so I won't dare. At 10,000 I was pegged at 1000 up. As confident and cocky as Bogart in Casa Blanca, I reached for the oxygen regulator. I turned it . . . it wouldn't turn . . . I pressed it . . . not a budge

. . . I didn't panic . . . I think. I just ripped off both gloves and yanked, pulled, hammered . . . stuck. A few choice words helped me, but not the regulator. At zero degrees I started to sweat . . . Would I have to descend? At 11,000 I swore again . . . gave it one more try . . . nothing . . . Finally I loosened my straps and scrunched down . . . picking my best three choicest words, I kicked the regulator with my knee . . . With the ease and *savoir faire* of Jimmy Stewart I turned on the juice with thumb and index finger . . . as easy as holding a cup of tea . . . pinky held high. Smiling to myself, I took a drag of the oxygen to settle my adrenalin.

Doug, did you ever try to put a mask on over two pairs of glasses, flying yellows and the reading variety that sit on the end of your nose? That's not too difficult for a baldy, but my first attempt with my hair brought it all down over my eyes. At 14,000 I thought I was flying among the trees. When I finally reorganized all parts, I remembered to check the oxygen, my reflexes and feelings. I flexed my toes . . . they flexed. I blinked my eyes . . . they blinked . . . I wagged my wings . . . they wagged . . . I added two plus two . . . multiplied two plus two and got six . . . and then knew I was in normal, fine shape . . . on top of the world in all its meaning. I settled back to enjoy the flight.

That's when something happened. I can't describe it because I don't know what it was. It seemed to be some sort of an uneasiness. I tried to forget it by looking down through the window at the ski lodge below. It looked just as I had expected . . . like a dime under my chair. I was thousands of feet above the lenticulars . . . free and clear . . . no problems . . . all systems go. But I couldn't shake the malaise. The view was stunning, the feeling strange. I checked the instruments carefully . . . the oxygen . . . the airspeed . . . 45 mph. Was it the slow speed that seemed unreal? The height? A new perspective of the world? The silence? . . . Silence! . . . that was my clue. I tried laughing off the feeling. It didn't work, instead it seemed to spread up my legs and into my gut. Damn, I hadn't read anything like this. Finally, I realized that

I had to solve this one . . . fast. My brain searched. Then it came to me . . . I was lonely! Simple as that.

At 15,000 feet there were no cars to race on the highway . . . no kids in a swimming hole . . . no farmers down there waving up to me . . . no trees to stick my wing into, to scratch and search for a breath of lift. I didn't need any lift. I had all I wanted, and that's a strange new feeling. Landing areas were the furthest from my mind. No calculations of distance were called for . . . charts weren't necessary while standing still . . . no Newark Valley. Was this soaring? Not as I'd known it for the past three years. At 16,000 feet I didn't have any problems. I've always had problems . . . always had something to solve. I wasn't people lonely . . . I was problem lonely.

How does a soaring pilot get used to looking down on cloudbase? Once I figured this all out, and was ready to relax . . . I got my wish . . . a real problem. I thought I had heard myself laugh . . . Then I caught myself in an honest-to-god giggle . . . Tut, tut, Briggs in Joan's panty hose . . . my brain raced . . . hypoxia . . . my eyes darted to the oxygen regulator . . . I set it up to twenty . . . line valve showed flow . . . the bag was filling rhythmically with the sustenance of life. Then I had to make a serious decision. Was the vision of Bud Briggs wriggling into Joan's undies really funny or was I feeling the first signs of oxygen starvation! Make up your mind! Make sure of your decision . . . all systems go . . . At 18,000 feet I made my decision . . . Yes . . . Bud, wriggling, squirming, and trying to hide, all at one time as I walked into the camper was a legitimate funny. I enjoyed it all the way to Diamond, and beyond to 23,100 feet.

Now comes the sad part, and I'm stupid enough to put it into writing. I was still so elated when I got down that I phoned my wife and told her I made the Diamond . . . and I told her if I make the third Diamond in the spring . . . and this is the stupid part . . . if I made that Diamond, I'd buy her a diamond ring. Doug, can I still claim hypoxia?

Old Dog

