

A Flying Summer Camp

by Frank X. Mercurio

The sun's soft pink glow reflecting in the heavy morning dew lit the pasture airport better than any approach light system you've ever seen.

As I circled the field that morning preparatory to landing, the thoughts and experiences of my prior four days and of a man who had become a good friend flooded my mind.

The country grass strip was Frith Airport. The friend was Bob Frith, the airport's owner and the innovator of the most unique kid-oriented experience going—a five-day aviation summer camp.

Yes, I know, a summer camp is a summer camp. Well, I thought that too, as Bob began to outline his plan to me over the phone in mid-June just before the close of school. Bob is principal of an elementary school in Cincinnati, and I teach science in the same district.

"Come on Bob," I said, "I've never ever been to a summer camp, how can I be of help?"

Well, that left the door open just enough for this master salesman's foot. As he explained his ideas I became more and more fascinated by the proposal. Hooked, you might say. The idea was new. The camp was going to be different from any other summer camp around. It wasn't food orient-

the pertinent information, had to be distributed to as many airports and other public places as possible. The local newspapers were given copy and photos for publication. Time was short. We had hoped to attract enough students to hold a one- or two-week experience. As it turned out, we enrolled twelve of the nicest kids you could ask for. Twelve campers staying overnight for five days. Not the largest turn out, but adequate. Monday, July 15th, was D-Day. the kids' ages actually ranged, as we had hoped, from nine through fourteen. This provided a good age spread for our initial trial. The future operation of the camp depended on the success of these twelve kids.

Banking on the cross-wind leg, my 172, 7985G, leapt on the morning air. Did it anticipate this first encounter as much as I did? Or was it my inadvertent muscle contraction playing havoc on the controls? "Relax! You have taught students for twelve years!" I reminded myself, trying to calm my eager adrenalin source.

Diverting my mind, I let my eyes scan the land below. "Beautiful!" I said aloud. Frith Airport (Cincinnati Sectional Chart) is located five miles from Morrow, Ohio, on Osceola Road. It consists of 180 acres, some 30 of which are wooded.



ed or even camping oriented. It was flying oriented.

The basic idea was to provide a complete flying experience for boys and girls ages nine through fourteen. It would consist of ground school and one hour actual flying time. The first half of the flight time dealt with the basics of aircraft control. The last half, and the culmination of the training program, was a cross-country flight prepared and executed by the students. All phases of the program would be well supervised by qualified personnel. Bob Frith, an ex-Navy pilot, presently holds SMEL, Instrument, Commercial Pilot, and Flight Instructor ratings.

The idea, without precedence as far as we know, would function on an experimental basis. The ingredients were all there, but none the less, neither of us had ever undertaken such an endeavor before. Enter the unknown, stage left.

"Should be fun," I mused, after the phone call. "One thing for sure, I'll learn something!"

Bob was busy in the ensuing days. A flier, containing all

The majority of the land is kept meticulously cut and rolled for the grass airstrip. Bob has two runways. The east-west runway is 3000 feet long and a north-south runway is 1850 feet. At their crossing, a bright orange wind sock catches your eye and suggests the best way to land. No communications here. It's strictly do-it-yourself.

Bob Frith's farm boasts two small air-conditioned houses in good repair and a large trailer. These facilities make boarding pleasant for the camper. The land is largely flat but esthetically pleasant. Three stocked farm ponds grace the property. Hiking trails are kept cut through the woods with a bush hog to facilitate nature walks. On our first day's hike, a white-tailed deer, startled from its mid-morning nap, bounded into a thicket.

Camp Activities

The schedule during the five days varied, though we were able to adhere rather well to our original concept. After rising at 6:30, we all assembled in the dew-laden grass for some wake-up callisthenics and our "famous" six thousand foot run/walk from the Piper House down the length of the east-

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