

A Brief Taste of Soaring Abroad

by Lewin Barringer

ON my return trip from Iran recently, I had the unusual opportunity and great good fortune to spend a few days as the guest of Wolf Hirth at his house, near Stuttgart. He had terminated his long confinement in the hospital only a week before, and I believe was as glad to sit and discuss soaring with me as I was to listen to him. After several long talks and visiting with him the great school on the Hornberg, which he founded, I realized that his has become the greatest name in soaring, not only because of his many outstanding performances, his engineering achievements, and his writings, but also, to a large degree, because of his remarkable personality and his simple and kindly outlook toward his fellow man.

When we were driven up to the Hornberg by Mrs. Hirth, this being Wolf's first visit to his school in nine months, we were met by the instructors and a few remaining students who were touchingly glad to see their old master and comrade once again in their midst. Great was the laughter and joshing on the subject of Wolf's black beard which he had cultivated in the hospital.

It was a bitter cold day with low hanging clouds, a strong east wind, and snow on the ground. I was first taken on a tour of inspection by Martin Schempp and the school manager. To say that I was impressed by the large inn, dormitories, classrooms, garage, and hangars filled with training gliders and sailplanes is to put it mildly. After seeing this equipment and walking over the site and viewing its unusual soaring possibilities, I was not too surprised when Wolf told me they had put in over 2000 hours of motorless flight here during the last year. That stands as a world record, and it was set up without fatality or serious injury.

My interest was focused on what I found in the end hangar. Wolf's famed Moazagotl, gleaming in its black, white, and red fuselage and varnished wings, was suspended from the roof beams. Nearby sat a trim, sleek Rhönsperber in a coat of grey. Nearer the door sat the apple of my eye, the new mid-wing Minimoa, or "Little Moazagotl" which I had had in mind for two years, and come five thousand miles to see. I was not disappointed. I think most of you will agree with me, when you see this ship at Elmira next summer, that it is one of the most beautiful aircraft ever built, judging from a purely aesthetic point of view. That it is also one of the most efficient is really more to the point, but I can't help raving over its graceful lines.

As I was anxious to fly the Minimoa, it was trundled out while Willy Spielman warmed up the Klemm tow plane. He first made a reconitering flight and came back to say there was a ceiling of 300 meters, or a little over 1000 ft. The wind was in the wrong direction for soaring, but it was at least possible to make a short tow or two. The first flight was made by Erwin Kraft, a young fellow who holds Silver C No. 67, the second after mine, as well as the world's record for a goal-flight made last year from the Hornberg to Cologne, a distance

of over 200 miles. He seemed so much at home in the ship that he wallowed it this way and that right from the take off in airplane tow, and after releasing dived it until it fairly whistled through the air and then pulled it up in mild wing overs. Martin told me that the government inspector who recently put the Minimoa through its paces for a license, dived it to an airspeed of nearly 200 mph. That was going rather to an extreme, but I was assured that it is absolutely safe up to 150 mph., which is really an enormous factor of safety, as its normal cruising range is from 45 to 75 miles an hour.

After Kraft landed, I took his place in the Minimoa's cockpit and took off for two flights. I haven't the space to go into my impressions of the ship's flying characteristics at this time, but I will say that I never felt so secure or at home in a motorless ship despite the fact that I hadn't flown one for nearly two years, and had the rather stage fright-inspiring audience of Wolf, Martin, Erwin Kraft, and the Hornberg instructors watching my performance.

That evening we had a round table evening at Wolf's house—an occasion so full of that good fellowship which is one of the great by-products of the soaring movement—that none of us who were there will ever forget it.

Just two days later I was lunching at the Aero Club de France in Paris with Eric Nessler, chief pilot of Avia, the French Soaring Society. You will remember that Erwin Kraft's Silver C was No. 67, and mine 65. They say that good things come in three's or that numerical combinations have special meanings. Be that as it may, Nessler's Silver C, the first in France, turned out to be No. 66. There we were—three nationalities, three consecutive numbers, meeting within three days; America, France, Germany; 65, 66, 67—figure it out any way you please; it gave me a real kick.

On Sunday, December 13th, Eric Nessler and his wife drove me out in the country to the club and soaring site of the C. A. U. (Club Aeronautique Universitaire) near Beignes—Thinerval, less than 20 miles from Paris. Here I found a mile-long soaring ridge, a grass covered training and take-off field and a metal hangar filled with gliders and sailplanes. All the French motorless ships are built from their national soaring society's designs, hence their designations of Avia 11a, open primary; 15a, nacelled primary; 32E, secondary; 40P, sailplane with 48' span; and 41P, high performance sailplane with 62' span. The three latter ships are the designs of M. Jarlaud, President of Avia. The 41P is the joint design of Jarlaud and Nessler.

A student made a flight in the Avia 11a while I was there and later we drove over to the Aero Club de France's field at St. Cloud where Eric Nessler flew the big Avia 41P in airplane tow. The pilot of the wartime Caudron tow plane with rotary engine was Georges Abrial, also prominent in French soaring. The 41P seemed to have a very fine performance, with unusually

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