

Soaring IN POLAND

by CHARLES M. WOOD
Photographs by the Author

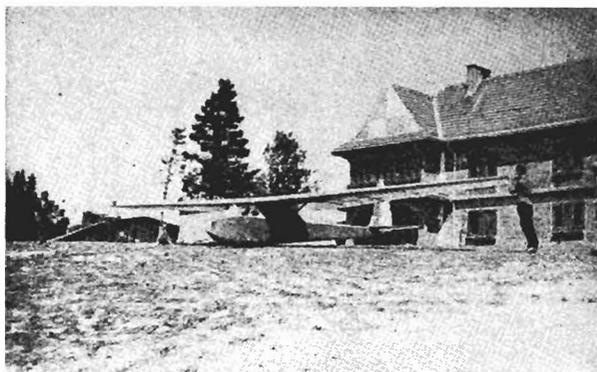
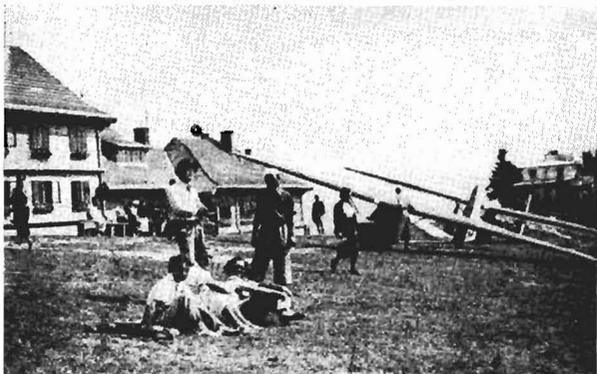


EDITOR'S NOTE: *With this article we introduce to our readers the newest (18th) American Silver C Pilot, the only one to win this coveted rating abroad. He has only recently returned from Poland to his home in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.*

My first connection with gliding was in 1932 when I helped my brother, Franklin, construct a Mead primary. Although I had only ten or fifteen short flights in it, I never lost interest or enthusiasm. In those days, before I had a chance to do much, I was always envious of Frank, who was a member of the University of Michigan Glider Club and a member of their team at the National Soaring Contest at Elmira.

My first real gliding started last year. While in Paris for the International Exposition, I happened on some very interesting information about gliding and soaring in Poland, which made me decide to go there for my training. On my way to Poland, I visited the Wasserkuppe and the German International School in Den Riezenbergen at Grunau. However, I did not change my plans and started the 18th of September in one of the Polish primary schools near Katowice. Because of the good equipment, management, and luck with the weather, I passed my "A", "B", and "C" license tests in two weeks. I am very much indebted to the patience and good fellowship of my classmates and instructors, especially Kierownik Koziel. Not having any knowledge of the Polish language, we spoke by means of sign language and pictures, although it was not long before I had learned starting commands and a few other useful words.

Typical scene at Bezmiechowa. Seated in center is Mynarski, leading Polish soaring pilot.



A "Komar" about to take off on the south slope.



Making my "C" automatically graduated me from this first school, after which I went to Bezmiechowa, one of Poland's most outstanding schools for advanced flying. This school is located about 100 miles southwest of Lwow (Lemberg) on a long ridge in the foot-hills of the Carpathian Mountains. At Lesko, the nearest train stop to the school, my only choice was to ride the rest of the way in a droskie (horse and wagon). After nearly two hours of jogging and bumping over one of the world's worst roads, the drage (driver) stopped at the bottom of a large hill and pointed up into the cloud and said, "Bezmiechowa," and indicated by holding up three fingers that I owed him three "zloties".

After climbing the hill into the mist, I came to the administration building. Its architecture was much in contrast with buildings of the surrounding country. There I introduced myself and became acquainted with the people with whom I was to spend the next six weeks. Fortunately, there were two or three fellows among the pilots who could speak a bit of English, so everything went smoothly. The next day, we had better weather, which gave me a chance to look over the terrain and make my first flights.

With favorable north or south winds, one can soar along the ridge for about five or six miles. Most of this is thickly wooded, except the slopes down either side of the school, where large pastures start at the top and extend down to the valleys six or seven hundred feet below. Because of the sun and prevailing winds, the most successful flying is done on the south slope. New pilots, regardless of previous experience, are generally checked out by starting first in primary gliders from half way up the hill and landing on the flat fields below. After a flight from the top and proving they know their "A's" and "B's", they start with soaring and advanced training with the higher performance equipment. Unfortunately, it was October 8th before I started, too late for good flying conditions, but on November 10th, I left in a snow storm with more than 30 hours flying time in my log book, including an endurance flight of