

# SOARING

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION

of

THE SOARING SOCIETY OF AMERICA, INC.

Volume 6

March-April, 1942

Number 15-16

## A PRACTICAL METHOD OF *Pilot Selection*

M. N. Walsh, M.D., M.S. in Neurology and Psychiatry, Section on Neurology: The important duty of selecting candidates to be trained as airplane pilots rests with the medical profession. This is a great responsibility, since failure to select the proper persons for this most vital task might seriously impair the efficiency of the air forces, which are now recognized to be the most important element in the waging of modern warfare. It is essential that every bit of knowledge pertaining to the selection of pilots be utilized to the fullest, whether it come from friend or enemy. It is important that we be cognizant of what has been done in this field by other countries which started to prepare intensively for the present conflict during the years in which the democracies were enjoying their fancied security. It is folly to refuse to heed the lessons that have been learned by actual experience on the part of others, even though we do not agree with the philosophy which prompted their effort. Failure to learn from others may exact an enormous toll in lives and material; clear and unbiased thinking is necessary if we are to profit from their experiences and their mistakes.

### LESSONS FROM PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

It should now be apparent that we are witnessing the results of a vast experiment in the practical selection of pilots which has been carried out for many years by Germany and Russia and which has been successful. After the decisive defeat of Germany in 1918 the Treaty of Versailles forbade the use of power airplanes as a means for the training of military pilots. Consequently, motorless flight was intensively studied and experimented with, and it was soon realized that an invaluable means of training boys and young men in aviation was at hand. Germany, followed shortly by Russia and later by Japan, established government-sponsored gliding and soaring centers in all parts of the respective countries, and the principles of airplane construction, aerodynamics and meteorology were taught to boys in primary and secondary schools and in universities. At the same time, an intensive campaign to develop sports was carried out, as a means of improving the physical condition of the youths, and of building character. By these means the youths of

these nations were made air minded, and their physical condition was improved. What was more important, however, hundreds of thousands of them were taught to fly at an early age, so that reflexes important in flying were developed in them and became integral parts of their lives. Germany and Russia truly became nations of fliers. It is obvious to all fliers that flying is a special skill which, like golf, skiing and swimming, must be learned when a person is still very young if it is to be done extremely well. It is no accident that almost all champion golfers, skiers and swimmers learned their respective sports as children.

The intensive programs of gliding, soaring activities and sports carried out by the aforementioned nations served another important purpose—that of selection of pilots. These programs were carried out with the active co-operation of physicians, who examined and studied the young participants in them. German medical periodicals known as *Sportmedizin* and *Luftfahrtmedizin* may be consulted for numerous contributions dealing with various aspects of these subjects. It was realized by the physicians concerned that these gigantic programs were performing very efficiently the task of what may be called the "natural selection of pilots." Young men of poor physique and inadequate personality were soon eliminated from these activities, and neurotic or psychotic trends were readily detected. WHEN THE YOUTH REACHED A SUITABLE AGE FOR INDUCTION INTO MILITARY AVIATION, THE MEDICAL EXAMINER FOUND HIS TASK IMMEASURABLY LIGHTENED AND WAS ABLE TO REACH A DECISION REGARDING THE CANDIDATE WITH RELATIVE EASE. He reviewed the candidate's school record, sports record and gliding and soaring record. Thus, provided that marked physical or mental abnormalities were not present, the selection of a person with a ready intelligence as shown by his school record, with an aggressive personality as shown by his sports record and a flair for flying as shown by his gliding and soaring record, was bound to add a good pilot to the air forces.

THE LOGIC OF THIS TYPE OF PROGRAM FOR THE SELECTION OF PILOTS IS INCONTROVERTI-

(Continued on page 7)