

# International Position of American Motorless Flight

By CAPT. RALPH S. BARNABY USN (Retired)

This subject would have seemed easy to me before my trip to the contest at Orebro, Sweden. I'd have said, "There ain't any such animal!" Certainly our entry into this international event, the first World Championship Soaring Competition was anything but auspicious, — one bonafide entry, Paul MacCready, twice our National Champion to be true but to fly a sailplane built in Sweden and of a type he'd never flown,—and sort of "ringer", a Swiss flying a Swiss sailplane, who, due to an omission in the contest rules was permitted to join our unfilled quota. Of course, any record he made would have been Swiss. It did not look very hopeful. However, in spite of the handicap of lack of practice in his new ship, Paul flew a magnificent contest and before it was over he was acknowledged to be the best pilot in the contest—and it could only be attributed to piloting skill since his "ship" was one of 13 "Weihs" in the contest. In the two speed dashes, one of 88 miles and one of 60 miles, he beat his nearest competitors by nearly 10 mph—flying the same type ship, mind you! And then with point totals running up near 1000 he was beat out on the last day by a scant 20 points by one of the Swedes. In one way we have cause to be proud—our one entry finishing 2nd in a field of 29 representing 11 countries, and beating four of five of the Swedes on their home grounds, but in another way we have good cause to hang our heads that his was practically a one-man effort. Sure, we pat our chests and say the USA won second place. It didn't! The MacCreadys won second place,—Paul, Jr., who flew it; Paul Sr., who financed it. You, and I, and the USA in general didn't contribute a doggone thing. And what was he up against? A team of five Swedes, some of them Air Force Officers, some civilians, but all financed by their Government, using retrieving cars donated, of all things, by General Motors! As far as I could find there was only one other wholly non-government sponsored or at least non-government assisted entry, and that was a man from the Union of South Africa!

Let's look at the contest itself. It was operated by the Royal Swedish Air Force. Nine primary trainers flown by Air Force pilots did the towing. A Major General was in charge. A Colonel was "Clerk of the Course," in charge of operations. The RSAF provided the meteorological service. And let me say, all these people did a wonderful job. There was not one protest registered, not one disagreement.

All these European countries have gliding programs, not only Government sponsored civilian programs, but military programs as well. In many cases it is classed as recreation and financed accordingly.

However, to come back to my original theme, through Paul's performance it was established that the USA produces pilots as good as the best, and does not depend wholly on Elmira hills, Bishop waves, and Texas thermals to make its records!

I'm sorry we didn't have a Schweizer 1-23 in Sweden. Through some mix up when Fred Walters was originally entered as a contestant with a 1-23 and his place was taken by Rene Comte, the Swiss, the printed program came out listing Comte as flying a 1-23. You folks can't imagine how much interest that ship has caused in Europe and how many regrets were ex-

pressed that it was not there. I truly felt ashamed that our USA, which is spreading billions in all directions, couldn't arrange to get one American-designed sailplane to the contest. I think the Schweizers lost a fine opportunity by not seeing that at least one of their sailplanes got there. I realize the cost and difficulties involved but still think it was a sad mistake.

Technically, our standing in Europe was enhanced greatly by the untiring efforts of Dr. Raspet. His papers were well received in Sweden. His analysis and constructive criticisms of the competing sailplanes were eagerly sought. His assistance in cleaning up Paul's "Weihe" undoubtedly contributed to its outstanding performance. After leaving Sweden, Gus visited numerous technical universities and institutes in Germany where he presented six or more talks. I am sure the contacts he made during his trip and his appointment as Chairman of the Technical Committee of OSTIV will do much to advance the art and science of soaring.

Among the accomplishments of the FAI Gliding Committee and OSTIV meetings in Sweden were the approval of a complete Sporting Code for Motorless Flight and the drafting and adoption of a Constitution and By-Laws for OSTIV. The former, based on a draft prepared by Mr. Gehriger of Switzerland, draws together and clarifies under one cover all FAI regulations pertaining to Soaring. The latter sets OSTIV on a firm working basis. With my election as vice president of the Gliding Committee, and Gus Raspet's appointment as Chairman of the Technical Committee of OSTIV, our position in international soaring is well established.

The matter of the next World Championship Soaring Contest (1952) was the subject of much discussion. In general, there is quite a bit of sentiment against the idea of having it in Finland in connection with the Olympic Games. There is no doubt that everyone would like to see an international contest held in the U. S. A., but at the same time, feels it to be a practically impossibility without some major form of international financing. Practically no European country permits the taking of sufficient funds outside its boundaries to support a team in the USA. I can state quite definitely that no real international contest can be held in this country unless we are in a position and willing to pay all expenses of all foreign teams while they are in the U. S.

I doubt whether any community in our country would be willing to go into such a venture in the near future. The only hope, and I'm afraid a rather vain one, would be some form of government backing, and, by this time, I do not mean the military services.—they have little enough funds to carry on their immediate functions. It seems to me that it might come under UNESCO, whose job, as I understand it, is to promote educational, scientific and cultural understanding between nations. No one who attended this first World Championship contest in Orebro could fail to recognize its importance in all these fields. The ready interchange of information, the cheering of the winners, the assistance in cases where equipment was damaged, the quick and unquestioned agreement to waiver on certain rules regarding repair and

(Continued on Page 10)