

A HALF CENTURY OF GLIDING

In August, 1959, Ralph Barnaby, four-time president of SSA and holder of the first FAI C badge issued in the United States, celebrates fifty years of gliding. Back in the summer of 1909, on a farm near Roxbury Falls, Connecticut, Ralph made a number of flights up to 300 feet in length by coasting down hill in a "Hang" glider of his own design and construction. Aviation has been a major part of his life ever since. His first powered flight was made

S. Navy, achieved international notice by being launched in a glider from the rigid Naval airship U.S.S. Los Angeles, 300 feet above the Naval Air Station at Lakehurst. He landed 13 minutes later after a very cold but otherwise uneventful flight in an open-cockpit German "Prufling" secondary. In November of the same year, his book "Gliders and Gliding," the first comprehensive book on the subject in this country, was published.



Ralph Barnaby with his 1909 glider. Span was 24 feet. It attained altitudes of 10 feet during "slides."

at Nassau Boulevard, New York, in a Wright Model "B" with George W. Beatty, from whom he took instruction starting in 1912. With the fixed intention of going into aeronautical work, he took the mechanical engineering course at Columbia University, graduating in 1915. When World War I came along, Ralph was assistant Chief Engineer of the Standard Aero Corporation, Plainfield, New Jersey, and was in charge of the engineering department in which the production Standard J-1 training plane was developed.

In the fall of 1917, Ralph enlisted in the U.S. Navy for aviation duty. This service lasted until January, 1947, and took him through all the Naval Officer ranks from Ensign to Captain. In spite of all his military flying activities, Ralph never lost sight of his first aviation love - gliding and soaring. In 1929, 20 years to the month after his first flights in his home-made glider, he made the soaring flight at Corn Hill, Cape Cod, that resulted in U.S. C No. 1, to which his FAI card signed by Orville Wright attests. Six months later, on January 30, 1930, Lt. Ralph S. Barnaby, Construction Corps, U.

Ralph flew in the first four National contests at Elmira from 1930 through 1933, and was one of the group called together in the Spring of 1932 by Warren S. Eaton to become the founder-directors of the Soaring Society of America. After Eaton's death in 1934, Ralph was elected as the Soaring Society's second president. Around this same time, the Navy conducted, under Ralph's guidance, a two-year glider training program at the Pensacola Naval Air Station. During World War II, first as Chief Engineer of the Naval Aircraft Factory, Philadelphia, and later as Commanding Officer of the Naval Air Modification Unit, Johnsville, Pennsylvania, Ralph was in charge of development and test work in connection with the Naval wartime glider program. Under his guidance, the Navy's 12-place amphibious troop gliders were developed, as was an automatic pilot for heavy gliders on tow. On one occasion, Captain Barnaby and crew were towed 1,100 miles non-stop in a Waco CG-4A Army troop glider under automatic tow. He also developed a means of taking aircraft on tow while in flight and demon-

strated it in a glider by switching towplanes in flight and in an airplane by hooking onto and releasing from a towplane while in flight.

Ralph was awarded the Legion of Merit medal for his work as Commanding Officer of the Naval Air Modification Unit and the Air Medal for his developmental flight test work. Since his retirement from the Navy in 1947, Ralph has been associated with the Franklin Institute Laboratories for Research and Development in Philadelphia - for ten years as Chief of the Aeronautics Section and the last few as Principal Aeronautical Engineer.

Through all these years he has continued his active interest in the Soaring Society of America and in gliding and soaring in general. He was a director of the Society from 1932, when it was founded, until his election to an Honorary Vice Presidency several years ago. Aside from his four terms as president, he has served several terms as vice president and has been chairman of the Awards Committee for several years, in which capacity he produced the SSA Trophies and Awards Handbook. He was captain of the U.S. Soaring team at the First World Championship Soaring Competition at Orebro, Sweden, in 1950, and was an observer at the Second World Championships at Madrid, Spain, in 1952. He has been a vice president of the FAI gliding committee since 1950, and attended the committee meeting in March of this year in Paris.

In 1954, Ralph was awarded an FAI Paul Tissandier Diploma and in 1955 he was added to the Helms Soaring Hall of Fame for his activities in behalf of the sport and science of soaring flight.

Among Ralph's several collateral hobbies is sculpture. Bronze casts of his busts of Admirals W.S. Sims and William A. Moffett can be seen in Memorial Hall at the U.S. Naval Academy. The Mariner's Museum has replicas of the Sims bust and his bust of the late Secretary of Defense James Forrestal. Another copy of the Sims bust is in Sims Hall at the Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island. Ralph did the cloud and sailplane mobile in the administration building on Harris Hill, Elmira, and is designing an enlarged version to go in the glider and soaring exhibit in the new Strathmont Museum in Elmira.

All hands salute the Captain! May we have many more like him!