

WOLF HIRTH

by TERRY WHITE

Wolf Hirth was born February 28, 1900. He was one of the pioneers of soaring, beginning as a pilot of Harth-Messerschmitt soaring planes in 1921. Together with Robert Kronfeld he shared Silver C International No. 1. Through his soaring school in Grunau, Silesia, his knowledge of soaring was handed on to many others, among them Hanna Reitsch. He was the first to discover wave soaring above the Riesengebirge mountains near Grunau. The name "Moazagotl" of one of his designs was the nickname people in that region had used for the wave cloud formation.

He designed the "Wolf," "Musterle," "Moazagotl," "Minimoo" and the "Goevier" types, of which the Minimoo was the most successful, with 115 built between 1936 and 1939. Approximately a dozen of these beautiful planes are still flying in various parts of the world.

Wolf Hirth visited many countries, demonstrating or teaching soaring: Argentina, Brazil, Japan, South Africa and the United States. In 1931 he made the first thermal flight in Elmira, and also flew above New York City. He liked this country so well that he would have immigrated here if he had not been prohibited from doing so because of an artificial leg.

In 1934 Wolf flew a world distance record of 220 miles from the Wasserkuppe to Goerlitz in Silesia and won the Rhoen contest again.

Ill health did not prevent Wolf from being the first president of the post-war German Aero Club. In May of this year he was awarded the Otto Lilienthal Medal for his contributions to world soaring, at the annual FAI congress in Moscow.

Wolf Hirth is gone, but his name will stand with all the others who during their life made unselfish contributions towards promoting world soaring: Günther Groenhoff, Dick DuPont, Robert Kronfeld, Lewin Barringer and Warren Eaton. (Condensed from an eulogy piece written by Terry White).

MEMORIES OF WOLF HIRTH

by PETER RIEDEL

(Silver C International No. 7)

One afternoon in August of 1920 a very unusual thing happened: A motorcycle was approaching the

small glider camp on the top of the Wasserkuppe. The rider balanced the slow-moving machine by touching the ground with his feet, half walking and half riding. There was no road leading up in those days, only deep ruts along the grassy slopes, formed by farmer's ox carts. This feat was one of the many firsts achieved by Wolf Hirth, then twenty years old. He had come from his home town Stuttgart to have a look at the first Gliding and Soaring Contest on the Wasserkuppe in the Rhoen mountains.



Photo: Karl Baur

Wolf Hirth

When I heard his name I looked at him with a certain awe, not because of him but because of his brother. Helmut Hirth, Wolf's older brother, had been one of the heroes of my childhood. His name had become famous all over Germany during the years before World War I, especially because of the first non-stop flight from Berlin to Munich which he made with a Rumpler Taube. During this flight he had passed directly over our village.

Wolf Hirth went from tent to tent, meeting the few contestants and studying the design of their ships. My little home-made and self-designed biplane was one of them and so Wolf and I met. For a boy of fourteen a young man of twenty is much more than six years older. The more pleased I was by the genuine interest which Wolf showed for my plane, which was just a few days short of being ready to be flown. "Are you going to fly it yourself?"

he asked smiling. "Of course," was my determined answer.

Wolf was so impressed by what he had seen in the glider camp that he decided to return home immediately, get the hang-glider of the Stuttgart Flying Club finished and bring it up to the Wasserkuppe. His boundless energy made it possible. Since I had to return to school on August 25th, I was not a witness to it, but Oskar Ursinus' magazine "Flugsport" reported that the Stuttgart club had appeared with its hang-glider just before Wolfgang Klemperer's world record flight marked the end of the contest. It was added that the club flight instructor Paul Brenner had made several flights with this plane, on a non-competitive basis.

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May of 1923 brought me again in close contact with Wolf. The rampant inflation of the German currency had impoverished many, and I could no longer think of building another glider of my own design. But the longing to see the beloved Wasserkuppe again was as strong as ever. So during a short spring vacation I rode my bicycle there, trusting somehow to find a place in the camp where I could spread my sleeping bag.

It turned out that Wolf Hirth was the manager and chief flight instructor of the new Messerschmitt soaring school. He readily offered me a bunk in the school's dormitory and a place at their table. Some Swedish flying students were paying their tuition in Swedish Crowns, and this kept the whole school going, since foreign currency exchange rates were astronomical.

Friedrich Harth, a real old timer already then had started the fad of the so-called "wing-steered" soaring planes. Willy Messerschmitt had worked with Harth for a while, then continued on his own, but was still influenced by Harth's ideas. The principle of the "wing steering" was simple enough, but rather dangerous from the point of view of stability: There was no elevator at the tail, only a fixed horizontal stabilizer. The pilot's stick moved the whole wing using some push rods and bell cranks as connecting members. Pulling the stick meant increasing the angle of attack, and pushing it forward meant the opposite. All planes in Wolf's soaring school were built following this principle.

One beautiful day Wolf wanted to make a trial flight with the brand