

THE SSA AND THE FAA

In aviation magazines these days it seems to be very much the fashion to write editorials about the FAA and its activities which are of such vital importance to the SSA that it is fitting that we have our say also. These words are being written in Washington where we have just represented SSA at a meeting of the General Aviation Council, and after a visit with personnel at FAA headquarters.

The General Aviation Council is an organization of representatives of general aviation who have combined to speak with a strong voice on matters affecting general aviation. It has had the encouragement of Pete Quesada, head of FAA, and is gradually evolving a working arrangement with his staff. Despite this activity, all members of GAC retain the right to speak separately on any matters which affect their particular groups. SSA is glad to be a member of the GAC, and has actively participated in its deliberations.

In addition to the GAC, there are two other areas of contact between the FAA and SSA. Our officers, Directors and committee members work directly and regularly with appropriate FAA staff members in Washington, and all our members are in occasional contact with the FAA field offices. My talks with FAA personnel in Washington were most cordial, and I feel we have every reason to expect that any reasonable requests which we may make of them will be carefully considered. They admit that they have a lot to learn about our activities, and seem to have a genuine interest in obtaining our assistance in helping them do a better job of administering the regulations which affect us.

As of now, we have no proposals pending before them. The action taken by the SSA Board of Directors at their last meeting regarding instructors' ratings has raised numerous protests from SSA members who feel that this will work an undue hardship on their operation. We will not act precipitously on this, and everyone who wishes will have a chance to be heard. True, it is a nuisance and a lot of red tape to get an instructors' rating, but most of the Directors felt that this should not be beneath the dignity of anyone who was really interested in seeing the stature of the soaring instructor increased. We believe that it is possible without undue hardship for every soaring club to have at least one rated instructor, and that every group should work toward that minimum goal.

Just like SSA members, the individuals of the FAA field staff come in a wide variety,

with all shades of interest, knowledge and competence. On the whole, we have gotten along pretty well with them. Probably the most general complaint is that the field people frequently have no interest in, or knowledge of, soaring, and consider it a nuisance at best. This situation is something that we as a group are going to have to try to overcome, primarily by education. This is going to take time, but we must keep continually plugging at it, at both the national and local levels. SSA will do its part in Washington. It is up to the local clubs, Directors and State Governors to work on it in the field.

We frequently hear complaints from SSA members about difficulties with FAA field people who apparently don't know the regulations. This may shock some, but remember that these men are frequently overloaded with routine work, and find it difficult to keep up with every one of the changing regulations contained in a stack of books a couple of feet high. In cases like this, if you can not persuade the local agent to look up the regulations, or read your copy, write a courteous letter describing the situation to his boss, the Chief of Operations Branch, in the FAA Regional Office nearest you. It will receive prompt action.

The other common complaint is that the FAA agent in one part of the country interprets the regulations one way, and somewhere else the same situation is given an entirely different treatment. This is something that cannot be handled too well at the local level. In cases where the rules are deliberately broad, or accidentally vague or ambiguous, the agent is expected to use his best judgment. This is necessary. If every question had to be decided in Washington we would never get any flying done. If you don't like the local agent's interpretation of any regulation, and persuasion fails, write SSA giving full particulars. FAA headquarters in Washington assures us that they are anxious to have the regulations interpreted uniformly all over the country and will do everything they can to insure this if we will just furnish them with the facts.

Probably our thorniest problems with the FAA are going to be those pertaining to airspace. Here, soaring is a real minority, but we will resist with all possible vigor, any unwarranted inroads on our freedom of flight. Other segments of general aviation have the same problem, and by cooperative efforts we hope we can achieve a reasonable success in defending our rights. H.S.