

PAUL F. BIKLE

by BERTHA M. RYAN

Last summer your directors elected Paul F. Bikle to serve as president of SSA for the year 1961. Paul's name is well known today in soaring throughout the United States and the entire world. Where did it all begin?

Paul started life at Wilkesburg, Pennsylvania, but his soaring career began at the age of eighteen while he was a student at the University of Detroit (Michigan). He and the other members of the glider club at the school rebuilt an Eaglerock Primary and then taught themselves to fly it by auto towing on a 300 foot rope behind a 1929 Buick. In three years time Paul accumulated 218 tows for a total of two hours and twenty minutes flying time!

The war years intervened with work at Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio, and it wasn't until 1947 that he was able to take up the sport of soaring again. About that time, Floyd Sweet encouraged Paul and other enthusiasts in the Dayton area to form a club around a TG-3A. From this group grew the Soaring Society of Dayton which was to become one of the first SSA Chapters and is now one of the most active soaring organizations in the country. Paul was president of the SSD in 1948. Late in 1947, thirteen years after his first glider flight, Paul Bikle earned his C pin with a soaring flight of seven minutes in the TG-3A. By June of 1948 he had completed his Silver C. In the next three years he logged over 300 hours in the TG-3A and made several cross-country flights, the longest of which was 101 miles.

In 1951 the lure of the California thermals beckoned and Paul moved to the Mojave Desert in Southern California where he was to become Technical Director of the Air Force Flight Test Center at Edwards Air Force Base. He soon earned his Gold C altitude in Gus Briegleb's Cinema at El Mirage. In the fall of that year he explored the Bishop wave in Jock MacDonald's Pratt-Read.

But now it was time for his own sailplane. In March, 1952, he purchased Clarence See's 1-23 and installed oxygen in preparation for more high altitude flying at Bishop. After a "checkout" with a tow behind an F-51D to 17,000 feet in

eight minutes (they quit because the F-51 pilot was cold) he took his 1-23 to Bishop where he made a flight to 21,000 feet. In April he reached 36,000 feet for Diamond altitude gain and earned the right to wear the rare Bishop wave pin depicting two lenticular clouds on a blue background.

In May of the same year he made his first cross-country attempt from El Mirage and reached his goal of Yuma, Arizona (220 miles), thereby earning Gold C distance (and completing his Gold C badge), Diamond C goal and the Barringer trophy for 1952. In June he made flights of 190, 210, 220 and 215 miles. In July, during the West Coast Contest (which he won) he accomplished distance flights of 259 and 170 miles and a 172 mile goal and return flight.



Photo: Bill Taylor

Paul F. Bikle, SSA President.

The third diamond became his goal. In July of 1952 with his wife Anne and three children he headed for Odessa, Texas, where in two weeks he made seven flights over 200 miles, the longest being 306 miles—just short of that last diamond. On his final attempt before going on to Grand Prairie for the National Contest, he made a flight to Clayton, New Mexico, for 325 miles and became the third American to complete the Diamond C (International No. 7). During the contest he made distance flights of 283, 280 and 270 miles and a goal flight of 317 miles and finished fourth in the contest. This soaring vacation had

brought him 108 hours of flying and 3300 miles of glider cross-country!

What does a soaring pilot do after earning his Diamond C badge? In 1955 Paul set a goal and return National record of 268 miles. In 1956 he established the National speed record over a 300 km. triangular course; in 1957 he earned the world speed record for the 200 km. triangular course. His first national contest was in 1937, and he competed again in 1952, 1954, and 1956, placing fourth in each. In 1957 he placed second and in 1959, fifth. He was number one seeded U.S. pilot for the 1956 International contest but was unable to attend. He competed in the International contest in Poland in 1958 and in Germany in 1960. Back in the U.S. he earned the Barringer Trophy five years in a row from 1952 to 1956.

On the local scene he won the West Coast Championship at El Mirage in 1952, 1953, 1955 and 1959 and at Elsinore in 1953 and 1959. He entered the annual Torrey Pines contest four times and won three times.

Paul first joined SSA in 1936. He has been Chairman of the Technical Committee for two years and Chairman of the Rules Subcommittee for four years. Since 1954 he has served SSA as a Director and for two years of that time as Vice President.

He has four children: Hugh (19), John (16), Patty (13), and Alan (7). He has taught the two oldest boys to fly and at the age of 16 Hugh earned Gold C #79 with a diamond. Paul himself has accumulated over 1200 hours soaring time (most of it in cross-country or contest flying) and 1000 hours power.

In 1959 Paul Bikle became Director of the NASA's Flight Research Center at Edwards Air Force Base, California. He is a member of the Southern California Soaring Association and an active pilot at El Mirage where he flies his 1-23E.

NEW LIFE MEMBERS

The Soaring Society of America has added three new Life Members to its roster since the list published on page 7 of the 1960 SSA Soaring Directory. They are Ted Nelson, Roger E. Ruch and Richard E. Schreder. This brings the total number of Life Members in the Society to 47.