

# THE SMITHSONIAN PLAQUES

by E. J. REEVES

A day late in October of this year, probably the 23rd or 24th will see an historical milestone for SSA. This auspicious occasion will come during the annual national meeting in Washington, D. C., of the National Aeronautic Association, our National Aero Club and parent organization, and the U.S. representative of the Federation Aeronautique Internationale.

The SSA project for the creation of the Diamond and Gold Soaring Badge Plaques has been in progress for two years. It is a unique and original idea of a distinguished SSA member from Florida, Capt. Charles F. Abel, a renowned soaring man and holder of the Gold Soaring Badge, U.S. No. 50. The outline of this conception was presented in *Soaring* magazine by Capt. Abel in his article, "Soaring Pilots Hall of Fame" in the October, 1960, issue.

Dr. Harner Selvidge, the then President of SSA, immediately recognized the magnificence of this opportunity and set up a competition for the design of the plaques. Subsequently, Mr. Paul Bikle, on taking office as President, appointed a committee with Dr. Selvidge as chairman, assisted by Capt. Abel, Lt. Col. Floyd Sweet and this reporter to carry through with the project.

Through a most fortunate circumstance, an anonymous donor came forward with a generous contribution sufficient to underwrite the total cost incident to the execution of the plaques. It would seem indeed that good fortune has smiled upon this entire effort.

The great Smithsonian Institution in our National Capital is, of course, well known to everyone. Its National Air Museum, when completed (its construction has been authorized by the Congress), will undoubtedly be the one greatest such in the entire world.

These plaques of pleasing and artistic design, approximately 24 x 30 inches, carry the international soaring symbol with, of course, the U.S. "N" designation. Individual plates on the plaques will show the name and U.S. number of all current Gold and Diamond Badge holders. Provisions have been made for the perpetuation of the list as the badges are attained.

It is considered that the placement of these plaques, and their future

maintenance in the Smithsonian Institution, National Air Museum, marks a great milestone in the history and for the honor of SSA.

It is indeed a singular honor and at the same time an exceptional opportunity for our Society.

Our soaring badges should take on additional luster and meaning, now that the holders of these international indices of soaring attainment are to become identified with this world renowned museum.

Greater emphasis will be given now to motorless flights which will qualify soaring pilots for these badges.

This is the first direct identification and recognition of SSA in and with this internationally famous museum. It is a recognition of SSA and the soaring movement in America which is unquestionably of inestimable value. All of which can truly be said to be in keeping with the noble ideals of Smithsonian and fulfilling its founders aim, "FOR THE INCREASE AND DIFFUSION OF KNOWLEDGE AMONG MEN."

The eloquent words of a prominent soaring man in giving his idea of the meaning of these soaring badges were:

"These awards are won by men flying alone on quiet wings in the ever changing battlefield of the sky. They have known the terrors of rotor cloud, the crash of hail on metal, the growing of ice on leading edges and canopy, the near flash of lightning under a black overcast; and the agony of staying aloft in zero-sink, a few hundred feet over brutal terrain while the sweat runs and nerves pull taut. They have known the disappointments, the flights which almost came off, the near misses, the times when only one little factor made the weather wrong. They have also

known the exaltation of the heights when, shivering from cold, with a heavy pull of oxygen through their mask, they have seen range after range of mountains growing fainter blue with distance, and over them blazing cumulus clouds towering toward heaven; they have circled with the hawk and have glided down at the end of a long day of soaring with knowledge that when the keel of their sailplane touched the earth again, it would touch beyond a magic circle on their chart, indicating a flight of 300 or 500 kilometers, and the glow of triumph overcame deadening fatigue.

"These pilots have celebrated the wedding feast of man's beating heart, the slender wing, and the sky."

The committee fully anticipates the attendance of several hundred soaring people, including all of the living holders of the Diamond and Gold Soaring Badges, on this October date in Washington, D. C., for these dedicatory ceremonies. Dr. Selvidge is handling arrangements for SSA's part on the program.

Formal invitations will go forward from the Institution. The Honorable Philip S. Hopkins, Director of Smithsonian Institution, National Air Museum, will preside.

Mr. Paul Bikle, SSA President, and Mr. Ralph V. Whitener, Executive Director of the National Aeronautic Association, will, of course, be important functionaries.

One of SSA's distinguished "Elder Statesmen" will most likely deliver the principal address.

The invitations will indicate, among other things, the exact date, hour and place in the museum where the ceremonies are to take place.

This will be a solemn, but at the same time, gala occasion. The invitees should indeed cherish the opportunity to participate in this historical event.

October, in our National's Capital, is a beautiful season. This will be a great and unforgettable occasion.

Two famous aircraft hanging in the Smithsonian Institution, the Wright "Flyer" and, behind it, the "Spirit of St. Louis."

