

SSA PLAQUES NOW IN NATIONAL AIR MUSEUM

by FLOYD J. SWEET

On October 24, 1962, the Regents of the Smithsonian Institution accepted from The Soaring Society of America, Inc., two plaques to be displayed in the National Air Museum. These plaques have inscribed thereon the names of those United States soaring pilots who have achieved the requirements for the Gold and Diamond soaring badges as established by the Federation Aeronautique Internationale. These are the highest soaring awards attainable and are recognized worldwide. Once each year the names of the newly qualified pilots will be inscribed on the plaques.

About 200 representatives of soaring from coast to coast were welcomed by Mr. Philip S. Hopkins, Director of the National Air Museum. Mr. Hopkins introduced and highlighted the achievements of SSA President, Paul F. Bikle, and the honored guests: Ralph S. Barnaby, Mrs. Helen Barringer Shober, Earl R. Southee, Miss Jacqueline Cochran, E. J. Reeves, John Robinson, Joseph Walker, Paul A. Schweizer, John D. Ryan, Charles F. Abel and Floyd J. Sweet.

The presentation was made by Dr. Wolfgang B. Klemperer, Honorary Vice President of SSA, eminent scientist with the Missile and Space Systems Division of Douglas Aircraft Company and esteemed dean of soaring exponents throughout the world.

Dr. Klemperer spoke as follows:

"Mr. Hopkins, Honored Guests, Ladies, and Gentlemen:

"For those of us who have been associated with the development of soaring flight from its early beginnings, this is a most gratifying occasion. Enduring national recognition is now being given to motorless soaring flight, a sector of aeronautics which has enjoyed greater popularity in many other countries. Nevertheless many of its historic events took place right here and many Americans have made important contributions to its development. As a matter of fact, 30% of all internationally recognized world records of soaring flight are presently held by Americans, for instance,

the distance of 535 miles (Dick Johnson), and the altitude of more than 46,000 feet (Paul Bikle) and nearly 40,000 for ladies (Betsy Woodward); and, in the hotly fought world soaring championship contests which have been regularly conducted every other year since 1950, Dr. Paul MacCready, also an American, was victor in 1956.



The SSA plaque for honoring all Diamond Badge pilots which has been presented to the National Air Museum of the Smithsonian Institution. The plaque for Gold Badge pilots is similar, omitting the three "diamonds" and providing for more names.

"The regattas and contests which are regularly organized on international, national, and regional levels are, however, only one facet of the sporting activities of sailplane pilots. Another and broader stimulus to achievement is the recognition of the attainment of certain milestones, which are expressed by the various grades of performance certificates, the three-seagull badges, those with silver or gold wreaths, and with one, two, and ultimately, three diamonds. These awards are issued by the national aeronautical sporting bodies of all countries, in the United States by the Soaring Society of America, and registered by the International Aeronautical Federation. The requirements are uniform; they are spelled out in detail in the FAI Sporting Code, and quoted on the invitation to this gathering. The

tasks of soaring in a motorless sailplane to altitudes higher than our highest mountains, to cover more than 300 miles over unforgiving terrain, and to struggle for 5 long hours to stay airborne on no other power than the thermal updrafts of the winds and clouds, are not easily accomplished. They require careful preparation, technically refined high-performance equipment, dauntless courage, and great perseverance. Some pilots, without thought of fame or of tangible reward, but for the sheer joy of accomplishment, work for years through many frustrating trials until they succeed at last.

"Soaring flight is one of the few sports in which such a system of attainment awards has gradually evolved and become internationally honored. Soaring is indeed a wonderfully exhilarating and rewarding experience. It fills one with an unequalled sense of exaltation and of kinship to the eagle as he wends his way silently among cloud streets or towering cumuli, or circles leisurely high above the multicolored fabric of the surface of the Earth whose structures and inhabitants seem to shrink to insignificance when viewed from so lofty a realm. For who can scale the height of heaven and think no thoughts of God? But the air can also be brutally violent with gusts, lightning, rain, hail, ice, and the darkness inside clouds. The flier who may inadvertently become confronted with such perils or dares to explore them must learn how to brave and survive them.

"The sporting side of the conquest of the air is by no means the only aspect which deserves commemoration. Just as important are the educational values and the advancement of science and technology to which the venerable halls of this museum are particularly dedicated. In these respects soaring flight has contributed much. Its pursuit requires conscientious study of its physical, engineering and meteorological foundations; it demands teamwork, training, and stamina. It fosters the exercise of good judgment and responsibility, qualities which indeed deserve emphasis sadly lacking in some of the hobbies and pastimes with which many of our young people become preoccupied.

"The contributions of motorless flight to the sciences of aviation and meteorology, and to aeronautical