

# WINTER SOARING IN MINNESOTA

by CHARLES H. WHITMORE

The farthest thing from a warm, thin-blooded soaring pilot's mind is soaring in Minnesota in the winter. True, we have a reputation to uphold; lots of snow, blowing winds and below zero climate. We see plenty of all this in Minnesota; however, the sun does shine on our winter ice-box.

Modern fabric technology has made it possible for the glider pilot to soar all winter. Thermal long-johns, nylon quilt-lined parkas with pile-lined hoods, Redwing boots, dacron insulated mittens, and absorbent thermal knit boot socks make the worst weather quite enjoyable (I'm stretching a point). Some pilots have even tried battery-heated socks and mittens, or a John-ee hand warmer in each pocket. These pilots are in the minority and probably aren't from pure Viking stock.

Yes, we glide and occasionally soar all winter in Minnesota. The limiting factor is the amount of snow on the ground. Many winters, as is true this year, our snowfall is less than New York State, Kansas or Kentucky all put together? Other winters, we tunnel. Thermal activity in Minnesota is at its lowest during the month of December. I believe this has been arranged by our wives so we can go Christmas shopping. January starts to show some thermal activity, and February can be a boomer. The soaring hours at this time of the year are short since there isn't a good mid-night sun. We have seen zero weather, 20-mph winds, 4 to 5 meter-per-minute lift, and two frost-bitten toes all at the same time in February.

Probably the most unique and beautiful soaring we have experienced in Minnesota is "ridge soaring" on Lake Pepin. Lake Pepin is formed by the Mississippi River. It is over 20 miles long and is three to four miles wide. The Mississippi valley is carved through sheer rock in some cases, and heavily wooded hills in other areas. The 400 to 600-foot rock cliffs and wooded hills extend right down to the water's edge. Pepin is no exception to this with sheer cliffs and steep, wooded hills completely enclosing this unusually beautiful lake.

The lake is the home for all Min-



A Schweizer 1-26 sailplane soaring low on the ridge adjacent to frozen Lake Pepin. Note small snow drifts on the clear ice.

nesota winter sports. Skating, skiing, ice-boating, sail-skating, ice-fishing, and now soaring. Ice fishing is the most popular, at least by numbers. The good fishing areas may have 50 fish houses clustered close together, with as many cars added. This lake provides a 100 square mile airfield with two feet of ice for our ridge soaring activities in the winter. Many of us need this large area on occasion when we start exploring the ridges.

Minnesota has two soaring clubs, totaling 60 members. The Minnesota Soaring Club is located at Stanton, some 30 miles south of Minneapolis-St. Paul, and 20 miles west of Lake Pepin. The Redwing Club is located at the head of Lake Pepin, which puts it 40 miles southeast of the Twin Cities. Our combined efforts can turn out four sailplanes, two tow planes, a couple dozen watchers, and many gallons of hot coffee.

Two new sailplanes have been ordered. A two-place Ka-7 will replace the beautiful TG-2 that the Minnesota Soaring Club has for sale (plug). The other new ship on order is a Ka-6 for a group of fellows from the Minnesota Club that call themselves "Sky Sailors". Next winter we will fill the sky over Lake Pepin with sailplanes.

The only pictures available of our winter operations were made possible by the lack of blowing snow. They were taken on the fifth of January, one of our better days. Temperature was 20°F., wind 5 to 10 mph from California (southwest). The air was stable, the sky was blue, and the sun was shining. In spite of the cool appearance our weather may give, our doors are always open to a warm fireplace for any soaring pilot that may wander our way.

## Nationals Notes

Maj. Edward H. Butts, Jr., USAF, of Twin Falls, Idaho, has been appointed as SSA Competition Director for the 1964 U.S. National Soaring Championships, to be held from June 30th through July 9th at McCook, Nebraska. In this position he will direct the technical aspects of the competition. Maj. Butts was Competition Director for the Northwest Regional Championships held at Sun Valley, Idaho, last year and has participated in numerous past Nationals as pilot and crew.

The Nebraska Soaring Association, sponsor of the 1964 Nationals, has written to give further information on facilities, accommodations, points of interest and diversions for families of those participating in the contest. Evidently the townspeople are planning to treat the Nationals as the major event of the year. There'll be a get-acquainted banquet, a continental breakfast, swimming party and turkey shoot, and a card party to keep the fair sex and families occupied. Baby sitters are being lined up for each motel to free parents for the business and activities at hand.

Pilots planning to compete should write to NSA, Box 491, McCook, Neb. 69001, informing them of your intent so preregistration materials can be mailed.

The large, paved apron and adjacent sod areas at the contest site are being prepared as tie-down areas. Rings imbedded in the concrete apron should accommodate twice as many aircraft as are expected to compete.

ABC-TV has indicated that they plan to give the contest four days of coverage with a full crew for "Wide World of Sports." NBC-TV is expected, also, so pilots and crews should practice their smiles and on-camera manners.