

NO MORE FLIGHTS ABOVE 18,000 FEET?

by DONALD A. MOSHER, *Chairman*

Your SSA Airspace Committee has the responsibility of sifting and sorting FAA airspace rulings, as well as being consulted by SSA members and the FAA on individual airspace problems. The Committee is made up of volunteer SSA members, mostly professional pilots or lawyers.

Many of our airspace problems are local in nature, but there are several immediate matters of national importance that require attention by all SSA members.

One proposal of the FAA (Docket Number 63-WA-74) "Revision of Airway and Route Structure" points out that the present three-level (low, intermediate, and high altitude) airway structure has proven cumbersome to pilots and FAA, so a two-level system (low altitude up to 18,000 feet, and high altitude from 18,000 feet to 45,000 feet) is proposed. At the same time, airway width is to be changed from the present width of 5 statute miles each side of the centerline to a new standard of 4 nautical miles each side of the centerline. Because of technicalities resulting from VOR system accuracy, a $4\frac{1}{2}^\circ$ fan would widen the airway at distances more than 51 nautical miles from the navigation radio facility. The same formula would apply to the high altitude jet routes, while the old low frequency radio airways (aren't many left now) would all become 4 nautical miles each

side of the centerline. This proposal would also eliminate the present "Positive Control Route Segments" (these are the turboprop safety tunnels between 17,000 and 22,000 feet where no VFR is presently allowed). This elimination of all this Positive Control airspace may sound good to the sailplane pilot, except that "what the left hand gives, the right hand takes away". This 63-WA-74 proposal is coupled with another that will effectively lower the Positive Control to 18,000 feet.

The biggest news ever to hit us concerning our soaring airspace is titled "Alteration of Positive Control Area" (Docket Number 64-WA-9). This concerns lowering the base of the Positive Control Area over a large part of the United States from the present 24,000 feet to a proposed 18,000 feet. The map shows the borders of this area, which coincide with borders of certain FAA traffic control centers.

At the present time anyone flying above 24,000 feet must file IFR and have a working transponder and full communications radio on all channels. This is required in all weather, so there is no VFR there. This effectively eliminates sailplanes, because we cannot carry full radio navigation and communication equipment and transponder due to weight and electrical power considerations, to say nothing of the economics in-

involved. And even in a clear air wave, the pilot must be instrument rated.

In three places (Tehachapi, Colorado Springs and Washington State) soaring school operators and clubs have worked out a special "wave flight area" for sailplanes, where, by prior arrangement with the FAA traffic people, the operators can send one or more sailplanes up into the Positive Control airspace without all the IFR capability and transponders, as long as the pilot stays VFR and within a certain area. This can be done in these wave areas because other traffic will want to avoid the turbulence. Your Committee has always felt that these "Wave Waivers", as good as they are, were only a local and temporary measure, and that stronger, long-range programs for soaring should be worked out with the FAA. Cumulus flying is the only way to get altitude in many parts of our country, and we have been working on a system to do this, using only two-way communications radio, or no radio if off airways.

Soaring people have been somewhat handicapped by the present 24,000-foot limit, but lowering it to 18,000 feet will really put the bite on us. Gold badge altitude (9,824 feet above low point) would be more difficult in the higher elevations in the West, and Diamond altitude (16,404 feet) would be eliminated. With the growth of soaring in the last few years, we have found our membership to become composed of more and more experienced power pilots, many of them professionals, who are getting into soaring to recapture the satisfaction that prompted them to start flying years ago. These people have the money to buy and equip good sailplanes, the time to fly them, and the skill to do it right. More and more of our people are climbing into the higher altitudes above 20,000 feet.

In the past, we have heard comments from members that "SSA isn't doing anything about it". YOU are SSA. Send your comments to the FAA. *Today. Now.* Deadline for comments is May 13th, but we have asked for an extension, as have our friends at NPA and AOPA. Write anyway; a late letter is better than none.

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