

RICHARD C. du PONT (1954) **(1911-1943)**

The contributions of the du Pont family are so numerous that it cannot be imagined how our sport would have flourished as it did without their generosity. The most prominent soaring member of the family was Dick du Pont who held U.S. Silver Badge #2 earned in 1934 (#32 in the world). He served the Soaring Society of America as Treasurer (1936), Vice President (1934-1936), President (1937-1939), and Director (1933-1943) during the formative time of the Society. During World War II, he served his country as Special Civilian Assistant in charge of the Army Glider Program under the direction of General “Hap” Arnold.

To quote Peter Riedel: “Dick du Pont was the man who carried the main load for the survival of American soaring in those depression years before World War II. He not only provided material help, but he gave his time, energy, and leadership for the then small, struggling SSA.”



Dick also unconsciously provided a lesson for German pilot Riedel in American democracy: “What impressed me as a European meeting Americans for the first time in their own country was the lack of social barriers and pretenses. When I met Allaire du Pont, she was sitting in Dick's pickup truck knitting. Later, when I spent a few days in Wilmington, Delaware, as Dick's house guest, there were a number of fellows in shirt sleeves busying themselves at du Pont Airport. I couldn't distinguish from Dick's manner of introduction which ones were mechanics and which were members of the du Pont clan. It was a lesson in American democracy at its best.”

Dick du Pont's interest in flying began when he was a teenager and soon expanded to gliding. When he was a student at the University of Virginia, he founded the college soaring club.

Dick joined with Hawley Bowlus in 1933 to form the Bowlus-duPont Sailplane Company in San Fernando, CA. Dick made a record flight that year – Afton Mountain to Frederick, Maryland – 121.6 miles.

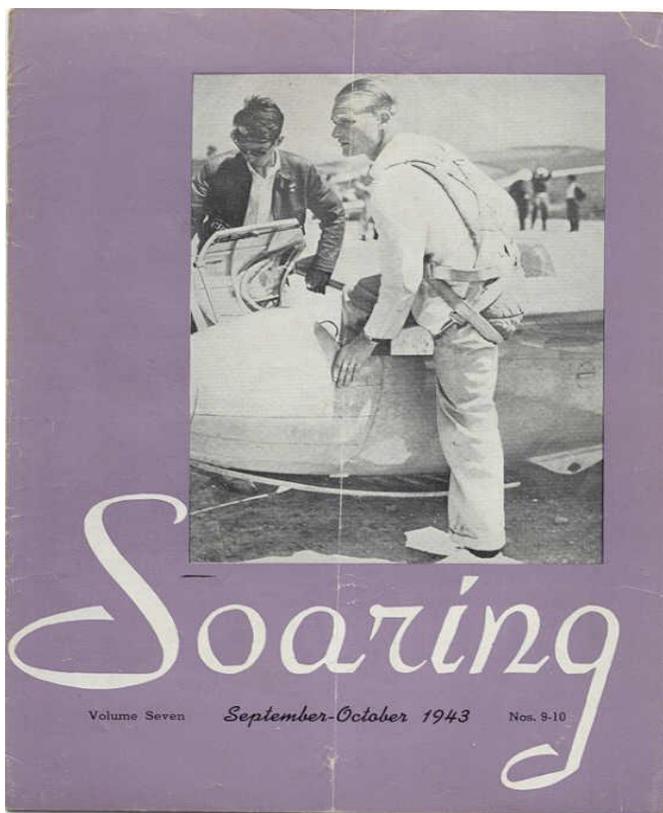
Dick was the American Soaring Champion for three years (1934, 1935, 1937) as evidenced by the Champion Evans Trophy which later became the du Pont Trophy. In the 1934 contest he flew one of the first Bowlus high performance sailplanes (Albatross) and demonstrated the possibility of making distance flights. His 158 miles

distance stood as an American record for several years. Du Pont was champion again the following year flying the Albatross although he had a point tie with Chester Decker (Champion by Contest Committee decision; however, Chet Decker won the 1936 championship by points). This time flying the Minimoa, Dick du Pont won the 1937 Championships.

1937 marked the first year of publication of *Soaring* magazine – an idea originated by Dick du Pont who also supplied the major financing.

Richard C. du Pont suffered fatal injuries when he was a passenger on the experimental SCG-16 which crashed during a demonstration flight in September 1943. He was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.

In 1957, the du Pont family provided the financing to help SSA grow to a fully financed professional organization with Lloyd Licher as the first Executive Secretary – later the Executive Director.



According to Peter Riedel, Dick was a tall, handsome blond with a strong jaw.

Adapted from research by Sharron Stemler, a volunteer at the National Soaring Museum.