

E. J. REEVES (1970)
(1905-1993)



E. J. Reeves loved everything about aviation. As a teenager, he soloed a Hiss Standard in 1922 and then, as an adult, he soloed a Schweizer TG-2 in 1945 – both without prior dual instruction. He held a commercial pilot certificate for glider, single and multi-engine land with instrument and instructor ratings.

E.J. may be most famous for his enjoyable *Soaring* magazine column – *Spiraling with E.J.* – which ran from 1954 through 1956. Many were about competitions which he loved. Having become interested in soaring history, in 1957 he replaced that column with one called *Twenty*

Years Ago which he wrote through 1959. In addition, he wrote many feature articles for *Soaring* magazine from 1946 through 1966.

E. J. was a member of SSA from 1945, holding the office of President from 1947 to 1950 and that of Treasurer from 1954 to 1957. He is a Charter Member and Founder of the Texas Soaring Association, one of the most successful clubs in the country, and is a past President and Treasurer, as well as a lifetime Honorary Director of that group.

As a Colonel and State Wing Commander in the Civil Air Patrol in the early 1940s, and buoyed by his successful insurance business, the appeal of soaring came naturally to him in the post war years. He competed with a WW II surplus Schweizer TG-2 training glider in the first post-war U.S. Nationals at Wichita Falls, Texas during the summer of 1947.

TSA sponsored the Southwestern Regional Soaring Championships at Grand Prairie, Texas during 1948 and 1949 and E. J. continued to hone his soaring skills, still flying his relatively low performance TG-2. During 1950, TSA sponsored their first Nationals (there was only one nationals per year in those days). E. J. took delivery of a new competitive Schweizer 1-23 all-metal sailplane. He impressed everyone with his flying skills that year, placing 4th overall, only 16 points out of 2nd place. He donated the TG-2 to TSA. Also in 1949 he established a National Goal Record.

The following summer took him to Elmira, New York for the Nationals. He placed well during the first two contest days, but the third was unfortunately to be his last

contest flight. Just 11 miles short of the goal flight airport, fate denied him the thermal he needed to stay airborne. The field was not large and it was surrounded by tall trees. On final approach, the wind dropped off rapidly as he descended, and he was unable to pull out from his steep approach. The crash worthiness of the Schweizer cockpit was remarkable, but back injuries placed E. J. in the hospital for several days, and ended his competition flying.

E. J. then dedicated his time to helping others fly.

By August he was back flying the Stearman tow plane at Odessa and, in addition to other tows, launched Dick Johnson on his 535 mile world record distance flight into Kansas.

E.J. was Competition Director for the 19th, 23rd and 28th National Soaring Championships and a member of the Contest Committee for the 20th, 21st, 22nd and 27th Nationals. He was an organizer of the first Odessa Records Camp in 1951 where several records were set, including Johnson's distance record mentioned above. He also organized the 1952, 1958 and 1959 Odessa Records Camps.

E. J. Reeves received SSA's highest award, the Eaton Trophy in 1959, and the second highest, the Exceptional Service Award, in 1980. He gave the Barnaby Lecture in 1977. He earned Silver #81 in 1947 and Gold #26 in 1950.

To quote Dick Johnson, *“He was a rare giant of a man who loved cloud flying in his sailplane before his unfortunate Elmira crash. Despite that incident, his love for flying never diminished, and he continued to foster soaring in any way he could, including a major role in the establishment of the National Soaring Museum in Elmira, New York.”*



At left, the 14th Nationals at Wichita Falls, Texas, 1947. Left is Capt. Ralph Barnaby and right, seated, is Rear Admiral Sprague who gave the keynote speech. Capt Barnaby had given Admiral Sprague his first glider ride the day before.

Center is E. J. Reeves, the Master of Ceremonies and new (at the time) SSA President. He earned his Silver Badge #81 during the contest.

Adapted from an article by Dick Johnson, *Soaring* magazine, December 1993, page 10.