



*Photo by Andrew Neilson*

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**FEBRUARY 2022 SSA CONVENTION  
CANCELLED!**

Jim Garrison, SSA Director

As you are aware, the United States is suffering a very large surge in coronavirus infections. The highly infectious Omicron variant is sweeping the country and infecting well over 500,000 people per day, far more than at any previous point in the pandemic. Current predictions suggest the level of infections will continue to be very high for the next several months.

Your Board of Directors has explored all aspects of holding the convention during this maelstrom of Covid-19 infections, and concluded that the best and safest course

of action for the health of the SSA and our members was to postpone the convention. This was a difficult decision and we apologize for the resultant disruption in everyone's plans.

We are working to reschedule the convention for early November, 2022 or early in 2023 at the Atlantis Hotel and the Reno-Sparks Convention Center in Reno, Nevada. The convention as now planned would be moved to a time when we hope the pandemic will be far better controlled. As soon as the new dates are known we will advise our members. In the meantime, parts of the convention may come to you virtually. We are exploring the possibility of having some of the

planned lectures available as SSA Webinars in the intervening months.

If you have submitted a regular registration for the convention, the SSA office will automatically take care of a refund for you in the next several days. If you are an exhibitor and would like a refund, please contact [convention@ssa.org](mailto:convention@ssa.org) to make the request.

We look forward to seeing you in Reno at the rescheduled convention.



### **I FINALLY GET MY WINGS!**

Rob Hohmann

On 2 January, I [finally] became a glider pilot. My sincere thanks and gratitude to my primary instructors, Ron Wagner and Allison Diaz, as well as the membership for their encouragement and support.

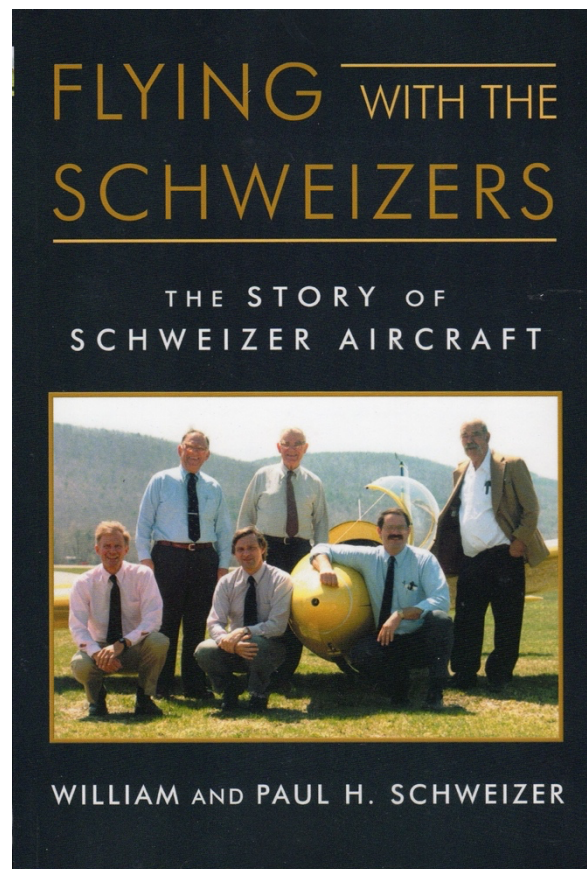


### **FLYING WITH THE SCHWEIZERS**

A Book Review by Dan Ernst

(Reprinted from the 1-26 Association Newsletter)

I am not sure if this is a book review. To have the chops to write a book review you should have written a book. On that score my cupboard is bare. But, as the saying goes, "I don't know art, but I know what like." And I like this book. So call it a recommendation. I highly recommend that you read this book!



The story of the Schweizer family and their company is presented in two parts. Part one is a slimmed down version of an earlier book by written by Bill Schweizer after his retirement titled "Soaring with the Schweizers." It covers the early family history through the establishment of the Schweizer Aircraft Company (SAC) all

the way to the retirement of the brothers Paul, Bill and Ernie in the early 1980s. The second part is written by Paul H. Schweizer, son of Bill and it covers the transition of leadership from the founding brothers to their sons Paul H., Stu, and Les and their 32 year story of how they grew the company, sold it to a large aerospace company and then had to watch as it was left to wither under the neglect of the new owner. I thought I had a pretty good knowledge of the company before, but I was constantly surprised and delighted to read about how many unique and specialized aircraft that SAC built, some of which I knew well, (but didn't know of the Schweizer connection), some aircraft of which I had a vague recollection of, and yet others that I had never heard of before.

I would guess that most people who fly a glider in the US know the broad outline of the Schweizer story. Their father immigrated from Switzerland (Schweizer means Swiss) and had a successful career as a chef and restaurateur. The three boys grew up in New York, first on Long Island and then in Poughkeepsie They were captivated by Charles Lindberg, aviation and gliding. They began building gliders in their father's barn and teaching themselves how to fly them. They didn't kill themselves in their gliders and eventually went to college and earned engineering and science degrees. Fresh out of school at the height of the Great Depression, jobs were scarce, so they started their own business, the Schweizer Metal Airplane Company to build gliders. Sons of immigrant parents, they started a business, worked incredibly hard and were living the American dream. If the American dream was scraping by. But with the Second World War looming on the horizon, the United States needed training

gliders and the Schweizers had the SGS 2-8 (military designation TG-2) low rate production. Contracts followed that helped to win the war and establish the company.

Building gliders never really paid for SAC. To follow their passion the brothers Paul, Bill, and Ernie, had to take on a wide range of subcontract work to keep the lights on. For example, in 1956 gliders were only 7% of SAC's business. By 1967 gliders had grown to 19.1% while the Grumman Ag Cat accounted for 16.7% and subcontract work was still the majority. Much of the increase in glider sales was due to the beloved 1-26. As Bill admits, gliders weren't good business, but the brothers were passionate about them. It was what got them interested in aviation to begin with.

I was struck by what hard work it was to run a mid-sized company like that and how often they were on the brink of going under until they won the next contract. They constantly borrowed money to bridge the gaps. Moreover, they were incredibly creative in their efforts to win work to leverage the expertise of their workforce and advanced equipment. They built everything from one very large parabolic antenna for tracking satellites from a ship at sea to 16,000 machine tool guards for CNC machines and even dabbled in aluminum power boats. Anything to keep the workers and the machines busy. SAC was a major source of jobs and economic activity in New York state.

SAC had a long partnership with Grumman Aircraft and produced over 1,000 Magnetic Anomaly Detector booms for the S2F, a carrier-based, anti-submarine patroller that 1-26 Championships winner Ron Schwartz flew during his navy career. This partnership

led to SAC and Grumman collaborating on the Ag Cat, a sturdy biplane crop duster which continues to serve in numbers today. Eventually Schweizer would own the Ag Cat and continually improve it, eventually producing 2,646 of them.

An important part of the story is that the Schweizers didn't just build gliders, they were instrumental in building the organizational structure that we enjoy today in the Soaring Society of America. They were all glider pilots, but especially Paul was a contest pilot and earned Silver, Gold, Diamond and Lennie pins. Moreover, Paul served as president of the SSA and was a founder of the National Soaring Museum. All are honored in the National Soaring Hall of Fame. To read the first part of the book is to get a concise history of gliding in the US through the 1980's. That is how closely the brothers and their company were intertwined with soaring in this country.

With the transition of management from the founding brothers to the Schweizer scions came a new era of business development and expansion. In the early 1980s SAC was in poor shape. The general recession had reduced the numbers of Ag-Cats and gliders being sold. The brothers became aware that the Hughes Helicopter Company was looking for a company to manufacture its 269 series helicopter. The Schweizers went after this business and won it. They turned the helicopter line into a money maker and saved the company. This chopper was produced in numbers and in addition to numerous civilian users, it was the basic training platform for Army helicopter pilots training some 20,000. Over the years they improved the helicopter and designed new models

The company entered a rough stretch in 1990 where they competed on and lost contracts for a new training helicopter for the Army and an Enhanced Flight Screener trainer for the Air Force. Losing these programs left the company with huge debt. The story of these losses is a sobering peek into the world of procurement in the so-called military-industrial complex. If those events weren't enough, after years of trying to organize the Schweizer workforce, the United Auto Workers was finally able form a union at the plant. If the loss of the trainer contracts was enlightening in a bad way, the strike is a look at the seamy underside of labor negotiations gone bad.

After these setbacks they embarked on two very interesting collaborations with Japanese companies, one of which was Toyota Motor Company which was hoping to get into the general aviation business and handpicked Schweizer to be their partner. The second was with a large Japanese conglomerate Kawanda which was interested in autonomous helicopters. Neither of these relationships continued, but both were critically important to the future success of the company. SAC got back on its feet and continued to produce unique and innovative aircraft, however they were never far from going out of business.

in the year 2000, SAC was the oldest privately held aircraft manufacturer in the world and the last US airplane manufacturer started before the WW-II to remain privately held. Although SAC was subject to the general cycles of the overall economy and the vagaries of defense procurement, they could manage the company with an eye toward the future

rather than manage to Wall Street expectations. Not worried about a stock price, they were free to take risks. With this freedom came considerable stress from the constant hustle to win new business and finance their new efforts. Eventually they realized that joining forces with a large aerospace company was necessary. Large companies have the infrastructure, from manufacturing to political lobbyists, that help them get business and the reserves to weather down turns. But the story of SAC after being acquired by Sikorsky/United Technologies ended badly. It seems that a corporate behemoth couldn't devote enough attention to properly manage their smaller holdings.

Les Schweizer was the last of the family to work with the company, now owned by Sikorsky. As leverage for him to stay with the company, he negotiated the return of all of the glider type certificates to the family. So the Schweizer legacy continues with Les and his son Kyle who are the owners of K&L Soaring.

Although the name Schweizer is synonymous with gliders, the Schweizers built many types of aircraft, aircraft parts, and many other things as well. They were buffeted in turn by organizational politics, labor strife and even nature in the form of floods from the Chemung River. Through it all both generations blended technical prowess and creativity with business acumen. There is something for everyone in this book: soaring history, first person accounts of running a manufacturing business, how business gets done in the modern world of Washington politics, and downside of large corporate bureaucracies. The story of the Schweizers, their gliders and their company is a satisfying read.

It is available in the SSA store: <https://www.ssa.org/product/flying-with-the-schweizers/> You can get it at Amazon, too, but really, don't they already have enough money?



### **TIMES HAVE CHANGED**

Jim Perlmutter



### **GET YOUR RATING ASAP . . HOW AND WHY?**

Erik van Weezendonk

Starting with the Why...the single answer - QQ, the mighty Duo Discuss:



Yep, I'm writing this article tremendously out of turn, but I do have the owner's permission (Thanks Piet Barber). If you've been around, you've heard of Piet and probably seen QQ. If you're new, or are returning to the club after a hiatus, you'll see him, and QQ. This gorgeous 20 meter-wingspan, two-seat glider is a phenomenal example of aerodynamic performance and avionics wizardry. I was fortunate enough to fly with Piet during a contest at MASA (near Gettysburg PA) in October.

We landed out (my first... the subject of another article)



but it was the flight that was pure magic, in a contest setting, that makes me tell you.....get your rating, ASAP! Why...because Piet cannot take an unrated passenger (aka, not a student pilot and not your best friend that simply wants a ride) during a contest. So, to be eligible to fly in QQ during a contest, which I equate to Disneyland for an adult + aviation experience, you've got to take that checkride (private, commercial or add-on if you already have a pilot rating, like ASEL).

Easy-peasy says the Weezy....but hold on. How? I'll give you some unsolicited advice:

If you're doing an add-on rating (already have that ASEL) then go to Bermuda High, SC or to Lake Seminole, FL which is about an hour from Orlando. I can speak to Lake Seminole; that's where I went. I was getting frustrated with my inability to show up to KFRR more than 1-2 times per month which resulted in a slow progress. Dedicating four days of intense training, at an airport meant for teaching glider pilots (commercial operation) with on-site accommodations and two full-time examiners right there made it easy. Plus, it's Florida, so weather was fantastic for learning and the off-time (we flew mornings). Granted, you'll need to take time off to be there and it will cost some money, but finally, the rating was earned...and it allowed me to fly in QQ a few weeks later (different flight, just as memorable). If you want more details, please reach out to me and I'll happily chat your ear off!

Maybe you can't pull that off right now, so you're sticking with doing all instruction at SSC. Awesome, I applaud your grit and determination. Here's my little tidbits of advice, from back in the day of flight instruction (powered planes). First of all, dedicate a little bit of time EVERYDAY to studying. One parcel of weather, one CFR (aka FAR) section, and something about your glider (the ASK-21). At the end of the week, review that stuff. Every day, learn a little bit. If all you do is fly, you might perfect the stick and rudder skills, but you'll still have the academics to conquer. Eat that rules/regs/academics/bookwork elephant in little bites and ideally you can take your written exam just as you're

getting ready to solo. After that, the checkride will be right around the corner.

Flying...you have to do it. My best students in San Diego were flying 3+ times per week. Know that you'll have little plateaus, but constant flying minimizes the flat parts, and your progression is MUCH better than if you can only fly 1-2 per month. You must fly often, and when instruction is done for the day, stick around. Plenty of learning can still occur while on the ground.

That's it. You want to fly in the coolest glider, make some awesome memories, "high in the sunlit silence" and get above the cloud layer, climb in wave, be a part of a contest....then go get that rating!



Erik, Piet, and a newly recruited ground crew member!



**Skyline Soaring Club, Inc.**

is a private, 501(c7) non-profit organization, dedicated to the enjoyment and promotion of the sport of soaring. SSC is based at the Front Royal-Warren County, Va. Airport and is an affiliate club of the Soaring Society of America.

For information about the club go to

[www.skylinesoaring.org](http://www.skylinesoaring.org)

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