

# 35 hours Aloft

## An International Record Flight

By MARCELLE CHOISNET



On October 19, 1948, I had bettered the Feminine International Duration Record with a flight of 28 hours and 2 minutes, soaring over the small Alpilles mountain chain in Southern France. Conditions had not been favorable, and I was sure that in this region, with its mild climate and strong Mistral wind, chances were good for a much longer flight.

Accordingly, on November 17 at 8:56 AM, I took off again in my "Air-100." Quickly I reached 3700 feet and settled myself there, happy at having taken off at a good time with favorable weather. I had hopes this was the start of a long duration flight.

At 10 AM, as prearranged, I tried to contact the ground team by radio. This was my first disappointment: nobody replied to my calls. I called again and they replied by means of visual signal panels that they heard me, but I could not hear them. Ground contact can be a great aid in these long flights, so reluctantly I ended this promising start at 10:52 AM for repairs. I had flown for more than two hours for nothing.

The trouble was not serious: only a bad contact in the radio, but it was better to replace the part, which unfortunately was not in the airfield store.

At 1:35 PM, without being too confident, as I had lost five hours, I took off definitely. At 2 PM I was flying at 3650 feet. The Mistral was weak and I was obliged to manoeuvre often. By 4 PM I was beginning to go down and around 5:30 I was 1500 ft. above the plain (and only 500 ft. above the slope). This weakening of the wind at sunset worried me, but one hour later I was again at 3000 ft.

From now on I went from about 2500 to 3000 ft. and back again like a perpetual pendulum. I hung on as well as I could and fought the failing air currents. An active turbulence was added to these undulations, and I was sure that my flight would end long before the 28 hours of my last performance.

Finally, around 9 PM, I began to go up slowly and reached 4250 ft. around midnight. Here I was in calm air and would have been glad to stay, but half an hour later I was back at the familiar 3000 ft. level, making frequent turns in the weak wind.

At 1:45 AM on the 18th, without any apparent reason, I climbed to 5200 ft., taken up by very weak vertical currents without any change in the speed of the wind. An hour later, I was again in a violent turbulence at 2100 ft. I asked the ground crew to tell me the strength of the wind and was told the speed

High point was 5200 feet

Canada

was increasing. However, I did not benefit by any improvements and once more was going down slowly, inexorably.

By 3:30 AM I was sure I would have to land at any moment: I was flying just over the top of the mountain, between 150 and 300 ft. above its crest. For two long hours I stayed close to the ground without being able to quit the dangerous zone. A boost to 1800 ft. at 6:15 gave me a little rest, and when the sun rose I was almost up to 2500 ft.

In the plain which awoke before me the smoke of the chimneys trailed close to the ground, indicating a wind blowing from WSW; no smoke was coming towards the Alpilles and nothing came to stir the up-currents. Now I was fighting to keep every inch of altitude. I had passed the first night, I was in better condition, and if the wind, which seemed to have stopped, would consent to get going again, I could reach my goal.

The radio transmitter aground told me that the calm of the last three hours was coming to an end; the wind cone indicated a light variable North wind, although this was not yet felt at my altitude. At the beginning of this second day it was a fight between the wind and me—could I stay up long enough to give it time to strengthen?

I won—at 9:20 AM the radio told me the steady wind had started. I was now at 1800 ft. and was to spend the whole day without going over 2100. It was again a difficult flight, with a turn every 3 or 4 minutes. I continued this stubborn round until 5 PM, then I started going down. I had to stay until 5:30 to register a new performance. But the Mistral often stops with nightfall, and even now the radio indicated a weakening of the wind.

My impression was that my friends aground were astonished to see me flying at all, as the air was absolutely calm. Somehow, I managed to stay up and passed the mark of my previous record.

Around 7 PM the moon rose slowly in a sky covered with a thick veil of high altitude clouds. I had difficulty in distinguishing the ground and the mountain. The plain in the north was foggy and I could barely see the lights of St. Remi and Eygaliers. By now I had been up for 30 hours but I still wanted to go well over my previous performance.

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