

AUSTRALIAN ACE REPORTS FROM SPAIN

22nd July, 1952
Horsham, England
c/o W. Platt.

HI, EUGART:

You probably know the tale of the Spanish Contests by now. My own part was cut off in its prime by a broken wing which caused me to miss one of the five contests, so that I finished well down the list—26th.

However, in the four contests in which I did take part, I was ahead of Lorne Welch, who finally finished 9th, and am quite content with my results, obtained with a very slow Kranich 2-seater, flown solo without ballast, with performance about equal to a Bowlus Baby.

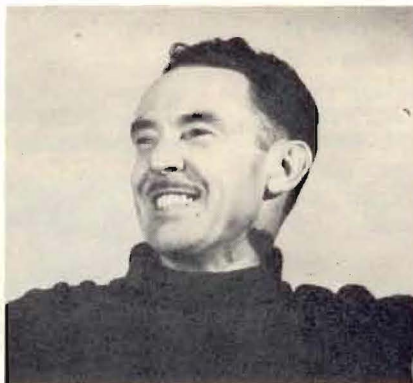
There were 20 sailplanes wrecked in the contests, due to very small, very rocky landing fields, and other causes. One, in which the German pilot broke his back, was caused by a violent wind roll from an approaching storm, striking the glider straight down from 200 feet while it was turning in to land.

My own accident was caused by the jettisonable wheels failing to "jet." After a 3 P.M. start (due to retrieve difficulties from the first day's distance flight) in which I was launched without time to test anything, and after hastily declaring a goal after studying the map in the last few seconds, I pulled the release but the wheels stuck on. As there is no way of knowing this, no indication except increased aerodynamic drag, which I did not detect, being unfamiliar with the Kranich, I then flew to my goal and found the airfield already occupied by 19 other gliders, many cars and trailers. I landed in what appeared to be a space of ample size, for a skid landing, but was rocked to find that the wheels (which are mounted ahead of the C.G.) were still on, and I rolled more than 100 yards further than I had intended, quite unable to get the nose down to use the skid. So at the finish my right wingtip clipped a trailer, bursting the ply on the leading edge at the point where the drag span joins the main spar, and breaking various small pieces in the trailing edge and drag spar.

The Kranich then swung and the nose put a neat dent in the rear door of an Opel car attached to the trailer.

Luckily, third party insurance paid for the car damage, and I paid for repairs to the Kranich, which took only 12 hours) but which had to wait for 2 days first, as the workshop was fully occupied with the two Argentine Flying Wings, both of which were previously damaged. So I was unable to fly next day and missed the 3rd contest, the first speed flight.

Most of the 20 wrecks were rebuilt



FRED HOINVILLE

with amazing speed. I can personally vouch for the good work and great speed of the Spanish workmen, who spared no effort to help all of us.

Eight gliders were written off—mostly Spanish-owned Weihses and Kranichs. One of the Flying Wings is always a write-off, but may be rebuilt later. The "Wings" were good in the air, but hopelessly unsuitable for Spanish landing conditions. With their high, short, nosewheel undercarriage, they overturned very easily, and were safe only on airfields. In my opinion, the design has little to commend it, since it appears to have the same aerodynamic drag as a conventional type, with very great wash-out in addition, plus the very poor landing qualities.

You may have heard that Dick Johnson stated that the RJ5 was unsuited to Spanish conditions. I hope nobody doubted his sportsmanship, because Dick was absolutely right, and I support his attitude in full. In the air the RJ5 was everything we expected of it, but the flush skid and high landing speed made structural damage a certainty. The fields in Spain are the most rock-infested imaginable, besides being microscopic in size.

The meteorological information was very unreliable, due to the strange structure and surroundings of Spain, which is divided into many broad valleys and surrounded by seas like an island. I don't think any meteorologist in the world could give a good forecast there, and the Spanish met. men had an unenviable task and are not to be blamed. The job was impossible.

Every valley in Spain has its own weather system and its own winds and cloud formations. During any flight, nothing remained constant for more than 30 or 40 miles. Then a new valley was reached and everything was different. Strong thermals in Madrid with a S.W. wind—then weak thermals and a N.W. wind, then medium lift, clouds, and a N.

wind, then a cold front from an unexpected direction. This explains why Paul MacCready did not do as well as expected. He was badly misled by the met. data supplied, as were most other pilots.

The only pilots who did well were those who deliberately ignored the met. forecast and just chose a general direction and hoped for the best. Only the British pilots learned this lesson before the contest started, and it was worth much to them. They also alone knew the extraordinary inaccuracy of the maps, which sent many of us in search of wrong roads. The rest of us found out these things too late, during the contest.

It may be thought that the Spanish pilots had the advantage, but this was not so. They were just as handicapped as the majority. Although the Spanish team have thousands of hours of soaring, it includes almost no cross-country experience, as they are all instructors and under air force orders to stay at their home fields except on very rare occasions. I want to make it clear that the British team had no advantage outside the rules. It was the only team which combined skilled and experienced piloting with unlimited resources and practical foresight and preparation.

All teams were free to do the same but for various reasons did not do so.

Within certain limits, the part played by chance was unusually large in Spain, due to the completely unpredictable soaring conditions. Efficient retrieving was of paramount importance, and was difficult to achieve.

It was probably chance which decided the final order of the first 6 or 7 pilots, but it must be obvious to all that Phillip Wills flew with the greatest consistency and richly deserved his popular win. It is a matter for deep regret that a faulty barograph robbed him of a height diamond and a British National record, on the last day.

My own observation was that the type of sailplane flown made very little difference, and that the final results were quite inconclusive in comparing different types. On many occasions I found that conditions actually favoured my Spanish-owned Kranich, or at least completely negated the advantages of faster machines. A splendid feature of the Kranich was its very low landing speed and excellent climb in thermals, which largely offset its very high rate of sink in excess of 50 miles per hour.

During the last event, a speed run of 78 miles from Cuatro Vientos (4 Winds) airport at Madrid to Torresavinan airfield, which was won by Dick Johnson in 67 minutes, I had a

(Continued on Page 18)