

TWENTY YEARS AGO

From the November and December, 1937, Issues of SOARING

by E. J. REEVES

The late Mr. Lewin B. Barringer was Editor of this magazine twenty years ago.

After these twenty years he has lost none of his luster as an extremely able editor, soaring genius, gentleman, scholar and airman of exceptional vision.

One has but to reread these early issues of SOARING published under his direction; much of the material being the product of his own pen, to appreciate now perhaps more than ever before the brilliance of this man Barringer and the part he played in the soaring movement in America. Such a man does not come our way every day.

It occurs to us that some of his contemporaries still active in the movement and possessed of a good quill, might give thought to a tome on the life and times of this great soaring man.

Barringer was what we call a "doer." Dreamer he was, to be sure — but one not satisfied to just dream and let it go at that. Once possessed of a vision of a possibility — he would next most probably be found exploring it.

An example is his editorial in Vol. 1, No. 11, November, 1937, which he titled "Soaring Over Level Country." The following is a part of what he had to say.

"We have known for many years that thermals do grow over open, flat country but have chiefly confined our soaring to thermals found near ridges."

"Probably the strongest and most consistent thermal production will be found over our southwestern deserts in Texas (Texas prefers to refer to their's as semi-desert or arid. E.J.), New Mexico, Arizona and California. There is no question of the possibility of breaking the world's distance record (Then standing at 313.29 miles and held by Rudolph Oeltzschner of Germany) in these conditions, but such a flight might easily end with a landing in rocky, cactus-covered country many miles from food or water. Instead, we should first see what can be done over the great plains east of the Rocky Mountains. Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma and the panhandle of Texas should provide wonderful sites for high-performance

soaring from winch or auto tow." (Note: The specific areas mentioned are still relatively unexplored and a great many soaring men consider they offer perhaps the ultimate conditions for distance soaring. E.J.)

"At certain seasons of the year the warm, moist, gulf tropical air mass moves upward in a generally north-easterly direction, causing unstable conditions over great stretches of country. Lt. Commander Barnaby, working with the aerologist at Pensacola and your editor in compiling Weather Bureau statistics collected over a period of many years, are studying the possibilities of this region with the view toward organizing a small expedition next spring to test soaring conditions. If we are successful, we can definitely determine the advisability of basing operations for future regional and perhaps even national and international contests in that part of the country."

"We have the country and the conditions. It is up to us to go out to find and use them."

As is known, Barringer did indeed organize his "Level Country" expedition and the spring of 1938 found his party at Wichita Falls, Texas, set up for distance tries. Working with him on this project were — Dr. Karl Lange, famous soaring meteorologist; Ted Ballak; Pete Bonotaux; "Red" Kimbrell; Ken Fendisen; and Harland Ross, a native who had more or less staked out the site.

Here again Barringer proved up fully, if not fantastically, all his theories on "level country soaring." His 212.45 mile flight from Wichita Falls to Tulsa, Oklahoma, bested Richard C. du Pont's National distance record of 158.29 miles; This flight incidentally being made in du Pont's "Minimoa" which Barringer had the loan of.

Never again would soaring men in this country be bound down to the ridges, cliffs and mountains, but would have open to them those vast stretches of level country in America's mid-lands. And it all came sooner by reason of the vision and fortitude of this man Barringer who was SOARING's Editor twenty years ago.

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Southern Californians, twenty-five

pilots strong, were exploring a site on the Tijon ranch near Bakersfield, Calif. This was a ridge — probably more properly, a mountain site at the south end of the San Joaquin valley, 2800 feet above sea level and 900 feet above the valley floor. A three day meet over the Labor Day weekend produced no eventful flights due to poor weather. The account of the meeting was by R. A. Bailey.

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A power plane flyer, Robert T. Luepke, allowed in an interesting article that soaring possibilities probably existed over Arizona. He described at some length his "ups and downs" in flying a new Cub light plane over the area.

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Walter "Wally" Setz, an observer at the 18th Rhoen Soaring Contest in Germany, gave his first-hand account of that activity. Karch flying a MU 10 was Champion of the contest, with Beck in a MU 13 and Haase in a Minimoa as runners-up. The "Rheinland," an extreme gull-winged design with retractable landing wheel, was shown in a photo.

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An article titled "Hunting Thermals by a Sea in the Desert" by Woodridge P. "Woody" Brown, told of his and one Johnny Robinson's soaring exploits over level country.

These two soaring men, as with Barringer, were the explorer type. They too had visions of breaking away from the traditional ridge and cliff sites. The locale of the experimental flights described in this article was the shores of the Salton Sea in California's Imperial Valley.

Their results were not so conclusive as were Barringer's in Texas, because their time was very limited. They could devote only spare week-ends to the explorations. Their findings were, however, that strong thermals existed over the flat desert country and were not associated necessarily with ridges or mountains.

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Events of the 1937 British National Competitions were recounted. It was quite a good contest by the standards of those days. The reporter failed to mention the winners or runner-up. Perhaps that was not important after all. The best distance flights were mentioned as being in the seventy to eighty mile range with Mr. Wills bringing off the better performances. America's Dr. Karl Lange was one of the more eminent meteorologists observing the contest.