

1958 WORLD SOARING CHAMPIONSHIPS

"Into the Wild Blue Over Yonder"

by FREDERICK H. MATTESON

At five o'clock in the morning, a sleepy group of glider pilots assembled at the "Horn Inn" at Lancaster, California, last May 28th for breakfast prior to the first leg of the trip to Leszno, Poland. This was the start; what lay ahead was sure to be a great adventure for which those assembled were fortunate enough to be a part. There were Stan Smith with his crew of the alternate pilot Ray Parker and George Lambros; Paul Bikle with Jim Robinett; Lyle Maxey with Irv Prue; Meteorologist John Aldrich; OSTIV Speaker Gus Briegleb; Team Manager John Graves and myself. Paul Bikle had been able to secure transportation for us to the East Coast in a USAF C-54. At 6:00 A.M., last goodbyes were said to families, Gus started his movie taking, and we were off. That evening we were welcomed to our port of embarkation, McGuire Air Force Base. After a night at this New Jersey base, we were to take-off and fly to Washington for a State Department briefing. After Gus had carefully taken shots of us climbing back into our trusty C-54, and we had donned parachutes and strapped ourselves in, the pilot informed us that one engine would not operate! So, after a bus trip to Trenton, the trip to Washington was made by train.

At Washington, Fritz Compton, John Nowak and Dick Johnson joined the team, and attended the briefing with Paul Schweizer and Colonel M. Giblo, who were to meet us in Leszno. In the briefing, the State Department experts gave us facts and hints on what to expect on our trip, which proved a great help to us. Our first taste of Polish hospitality came right after the briefing at the Polish Embassy, where we all enjoyed a cocktail party in elegance. This was also our first taste of Polish vodka, a powerful drink. That evening, our previous SSA President, Floyd Sweet, had us all out to his home where Mrs. Sweet served us a broiled chicken dinner. It was a wonderful send-off.

John Graves had made careful plans for the subsequent preparations. However, the very short time he had for this difficult task did not allow for many "hitches" to develop. Unfortunately, two untimely snags did occur which caused frantic measures to be taken. The first was the failure of the French to supply the tow cars for the Breguet trailers. Stan Smith had ordered a Jaguar sedan which he had intended to bring back from the meet. He reluctantly decided to press his new car into use as a tow car. Paul Bikle had a friend in Paris, Lt. Col. R. P.



Photo: Bernard J. Koszewski

The Premier of Poland, Jozef Cyrankiewicz, shakes hands with John Nowak and greets the American team during opening ceremonies.

Klein, who found a Ford station wagon which Paul would use. The second snag was the strong advice of the State Department that we not go through East Germany as we had intended. The alternative was to go through Czechoslovakia. For this trip we must get visas in Paris. Our transportation from the U.S.A. was already settled. MATS was to take the team to Paris and Frankfurt in two flights. The first left on the 30th to Frankfurt. All were to go to Frankfurt except Bikle and Smith and their crews. So Stan Smith exchanged places with Fred Matteson and went on to London in order to bring the Jaguar to Paris. The second flight left two days later. To trace the movements from here on would only lead to confusion, but I shall note some of them. Briegleb and Graves came to Paris to ready the paperwork and to secure trailer hitches and supplies for Smith and Bikle. John Aldrich rounded up the passports of those in Germany who would drive to Poland, and took them to Paris for the Czech visas. Maxey and Prue went to Bavaria to join Walter Dittel, a German pilot from whom we had rented a Zugvogel II, and who would serve on Lyle's crew. Fritz Compton and John Nowak went to Amsterdam to take the KLM flight to Poznan. John Aldrich returned to Frankfurt where he had business with the Weather Bureau. Time was soon passed for leaving in order to be in Leszno before practice started unless we drove night and day. Our original plan had been to caravan into Poland. Paul Bikle was the first ready to go and left with the French team in a caravan. Stan Smith was ready about half a day later. John Graves and Fred Matteson went to Frankfurt

The 61 competing sailplanes lined up in eight rows for take-off behind 19 towplanes.

Photo: Bernard J. Koszewski

