

FLIGHT TO VARIADERO

by JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

All the long plans for improving the sailplane had come to nothing and my previous flying in the year consisted of only a few hours at Torrey Pines, a few hours during the Memorial Day weekend at Prescott, and a failing try at distance on June 26th when Marcel had made it all the way to Albuquerque, Diamond distance. On Friday, July 1st, I was again in touch with my gifted young crewman, Dwayne Spain. At three o'clock that afternoon the decision was made to fly the next day. Derek Van Dyke had agreed to tow on either Saturday or Sunday and Joe Wischler had checked over *Cirro-Q*. By four o'clock we had left Sky Harbor in Phoenix and at six we were on our way to Prescott.

Next morning we were up at dawn and before seven o'clock we had arrived at Love Field with *Cirro-Q* trailing behind. It was the crisp hour of a fine summer day; the sun was well up over Mingus Mountain and the airport had awakened with flights of a student and small transient aircraft. Then we pitched into the long job of washing, rigging, connecting the navigation lights, taping up the wing roots and air leaks, and setting in batteries, barograph, radio, water, tie-downs, charts, pillow, parachute, food, and the other gear which finds its way into a sailplane getting ready for a long flight. Derek arrived before nine. I went up to the Admin-

istration Building for the final check on wind and weather. Back to *Cirro-Q* at 10:15 to climb in and get the canopy taped up. The tow rope had been laid out before we started on the ship. Derek fired up his Waco; I was trundled out on the runway with some difficulty and connected up. Release check: O.K. Hook up again. The Waco took slack out of the line. Marcel and Berta were there. They waved goodbye and good luck. Dwayne Spain held up the wingtip of *Cirro-Q*. We were ready to go. At 10:29 we started to move on tow, and presently got airborne. 10:29! The same minute that Dick Johnson had started on his great flight out of Odessa. A good omen I thought.

Five minutes got us up a thousand feet. The next five minutes netted at least three hundred more. Ten minutes on tow and only thirteen hundred feet up? Behind a Waco UPF-7 too. What's wrong? I hope he has an altimeter in the Waco or he will think I have decided to spend the day being towed around Chino Valley. Three more minutes and we are at 6900 ft. ASL, 1900 above the ground, a little upwind of the field. I released, made a dive to 1600, held it down there for thirty-five seconds, and began searching for lift. Presently came a booming 75 fpm thermal which took us clear back up to 1840 ft. before weakening. Little sink in between while looking for the next one. Better this time, almost 100 fpm.

Isn't it supposed to be unstable today? Four thermals were used to get up to 2300, then a general search of the area was made. After sinking down to 1900 feet just barely upwind of the field border, we connected with a good one which worked up to 500 fpm. The next several minutes were spent circling up to escape altitude, ten thousand feet ASL, and we kept going on to eleven. I lowered the retractable antenna.

"Prescott Radio. Prescott Radio, this is Schweizer 91899 receiving on 122 point 5 megacycles. Do you read? Over."

"Schweizer 91899, this is Prescott Radio. Reading loud and clear. Over."

"Prescott Radio, this is Schweizer 91899. If my crew calls in or if Marcel Godinat asks, I am now at eleven thousand feet, and have worked up at five hundred feet a minute. Over."

"Roger, 91899. We will relay the message. Prescott out."

I pulled in the antenna and looked down at the field a last time. We had drifted the first two miles on course. My Ford Ranch Wagon and trailer were parked close to where the flight had started, and right now Marcel was going off on tow. It was well past the half hour mark in elapsed time. Two miles in half an hour, four miles an hour? Let's go!

We set out across Chino Valley, heading for Mingus Mountain at 80 mph indicated in the first cruise of the day. Almost immediately we hit a crashing sinker. Down 4000 feet before even reaching Mingus, far below the top of the mountain. Is this one going to end before we even get to the Verde Valley? I turned ninety degrees right in order to use ridge lift from Mingus Mountain to keep the flight going. Then came a boom and once again we started circling up at 500 fpm. The lift held on until we were back at 11,000 feet. Stepping across Mingus Mountain we flew slowly for a time, trying to save altitude which is always useful in crossing the Verde Valley. One hour after take-off we passed Jerome. 18 miles an hour! I guess any similarity to Johnson's flight ended with the take-off time.

Out across the valley there was only scant lift and almost no sink. Ahead in the Mormon Lake area there was a big cumulonimbus just getting ready to drop its load. We had to detour left of the course and headed straight for Flagstaff. Clear across the valley at maximum glide and

The author, son John and *Cirro-Q* at the Prescott, Arizona airport. Granite Mtn. shows in the background.

Photo: Ken Shake

