

hardly a bump in the air; then into the high country south of Flagstaff. A little sink now. 2700 feet above terrain; 2400, 2200, 1900, nothing for lift. Each little cloud seemed more futile than the previous one. Ahead, just within gliding reach, was a little meadow in the timber which offered a marginal but usable place to land. 1700 feet, then lift! Clear back up to 2300 at 80 fpm, before it gave out. We had drifted with the wind and now had a magnificent big dry lake to land on. Ahead at the San Francisco Peaks, miles out of range, were glorious clouds for soaring. We looked at the big dry lake, at the tantalizing clouds ahead, and lost the six hundred feet which had been gained. Then another lift. Again less than 100 fpm. Up to 2400 feet this time. Sink, lift, sink. The next lift got us almost in range of the Flagstaff airport. We spent perhaps thirteen minutes gaining a thousand feet. The lift gave out; we headed on course and lost the thousand feet in eighty seconds. Then came a strong surge of energy under the wings; we began to circle and centered in a good 600 fpm thermal. This one carried right up to 12,000 feet, high point of the day so far. Things were looking up. We flew over downtown Flagstaff, pausing once or twice to circle in 1000 fpm lift, then got east of the San Francisco Peaks in the powerful lift which had been so far out of range a little while ago. We made one last climb which stopped at 15,000 feet. The highest point in Arizona was now below and behind us. With a feeling of triumph we headed for Winslow and put the throttle down to the floorboards - 100 miles an hour. With the tailwind helping we now moved rapidly eastward over the plateau. Rapid climbs and glides were alternated with periods of straight flying under short cloudstreets.

"Winslow Radio, Winslow Radio, this is Schweizer 91899. Could you give me the weather ahead in the direction of Zuni and Gallup?"

A line of cloud had become overdeveloped east of Winslow and if it got worse it threatened to end the flight. The weatherman had encouraging news, however. Precipitation was light and local. Things were booming ahead all the way to Albuquerque. We talked back and forth a minute and exchanged greetings because it was the same man I had visited in the Winslow tower only six days earlier. Just east of town

The clouds and Painted Desert NE of Holbrook, Arizona, as they appeared from Cirro-Q during the flight to Variadero.

Photo: Joe Lincoln



we got back up over twelve thousand feet and had little trouble making it past Holbrook; then came a long sink which grew steadily more powerful as we approached the wet cloud. Over four thousand feet was paid out, the last two thousand in only two minutes. We were flying just three thousand feet over the Painted Desert floor. Three minutes to landing? The cloud mass above and just ahead seemed to have no promise. Then suddenly came zero sink followed by strong lift. A single thermal took us back to 13,000 at more than 800 fpm. Once past this cloud mass the sky ahead to the eastward was open, dotted with fair weather cumulus. We set out again at 100 mph and flew just north of the old Painted Desert Inn.

The next period involved the fastest flying I have done. One hour netted seventy three miles and seemed more like Maxey flying the *Jenny Mae* than myself flying *Cirro-Q*. Average speed had gone up from four mph the first half hour, and only 18 mph the first hour to around forty-five. Tail wind varied but seemed to average about ten knots. The road to Gallup soon passed underneath as we headed for Zuni, doing a good bit of straight flying with no circles.

Then came another scare. Two clouds had not produced the expected lift and had been abandoned. I was in sight of the radio range station at Zuni, less than three thousand feet above the high terrain in the continental divide sector. Were we going to have to work some weak, Texas-style 500 fpm lift? After losing another five hundred feet I was ready to work anything going up, and when we hit some bumps a careful search

of the area was made, stopping finally in a moderate thermal which never got to 400 fpm. We circled and circled and finally got back up over twelve thousand as the Divide approached. My two previous flights over the continental divide had been brutally difficult. This time we sailed over at twelve thousand as if it were not there. Presently we brought up Grants, New Mexico, 265 miles out.

"Grants Radio, Grants Radio, this is Schweizer 91899, on a soaring flight out of Prescott, Arizona. Repeat, I am on a soaring flight out of Prescott. Now passing over Grants at twelve thousand five hundred feet. I have a crewman chasing me with a station wagon and a trailer. When he calls would you give him this information?"

"Roger, Schweizer 899."

"Schweizer 91899 again. Could you radio this information to Zuni too? I don't have their frequency on my set."

"Roger, 899."

For another ten minutes the flight was carefree. Then everything changed. South of Mount Taylor, right on course, lay a series of heavy cumulus cells. A trace of rain was falling from one or two of them. The tops were not overly high but had become diffuse, and over half the distance to Santa Fe was covered by cirrus overcast. Even under the black bottoms of these clouds lift was weak. Twenty miles ahead were two stunted cumulus clouds, anemic as mushrooms grown in the dark, struggling for existence under the covering cirrus. The temptation is always to go forward but the problem now was to stay aloft. Gone was the sparkling blue sky, the gay festive cumulus with 1000 fpm thermals, the