

# THE RETRIEVE

by JOSEPH C. LINCOLN

Soaring crews can be divided into roughly two categories. Those who serve pilots like Dick Schreder have such an easy life they cannot really be called experienced. They sit in the shade at Contest Headquarters drinking Coca Cola and waiting for their pilot to smoke around the course. True, as a mental exercise they concede the possibility that he *might* go down, but since he never does, this is little more than ostentation. They help their pilot off; wait until he sets a world record or wins a race, then help him tie down after he flashes over the finish line in triumph.

At the other end of the spectrum are the crews who serve me. They get so exhausted by the appalling rigors of their duty they begin to wonder if they can possibly carry on by the time they get half way through a contest. But carry on they do; red of eye, dizzy with fatigue; they work it out until the end. There is no energy left to write down their experiences. Even if they had the energy there would be a question in their minds as to whether the pilot would take their story in just the right spirit. It would seem highly insulting, if not downright libelous.

For years, the soaring world has waited for the story of a retrieve. It has never been written by a crewman, for the reasons indicated. Since I am involved in the easier half of soaring, I can make up this lack and celebrate Ruth Petry, my crewchief.

On the last day of the 1960 Nationals at Odessa the task was a short goal and return. I got away from the field, struggled, almost went down, got up, flew a little way, almost went down, got a few miles farther, then got stuck for twenty minutes, fourteen hundred feet above the deck; finally got up, tiptoed to the goal; got lost, got low again, found myself, got up, got back on course, hit good lift, made it almost half way back to Odessa, in sight of the Ector County Airport, then tried to cross a wide hole in the clouds and went down. *Cirro-Q* was on a dry lake, perhaps twenty-five miles south of Odessa; quite some distance from a travelled road. The Awards Banquet was to start in four hours.

I climbed out of the sailplane and took a look around. We had landed

approximately in the middle of the lake and rolled over toward the edge. The sheep, which had been browsing on the grassy bottom of the lake, had been frightened by the approaching aircraft and ran away into the tall scrub growth which covered the area. I tried to drive in my tie-down stakes but the surface of the lake was too hard. Just beyond one corner of the lake there was a small windmill which filled a concrete tank for cattle. I went over to the windmill, climbed up to the top, and saw a one lane country road leading off to the west. Near the horizon there appeared a low telephone line which went on until it was out of sight. I climbed down to the ground and started walking out along the road. In twenty minutes I reached the telephone line and after another hour got to a larger road and a fence which ran straight north and south. Here the problem was to decide which way to go. On the way in, a few minutes before landing, I had seen a tank farm which I had flown over as I got low. From the air it looked as though there would be people nearby and I could get a ride out to the main highway. With this in mind I turned south and walked another hour over country which became hilly and quite rocky. At the end of this hour I could see a tank farm in the distance and headed cross-country toward it, since it appeared to be only two or three miles away. The crossing was over a dry river bottom, heavily over-

grown with thorny trees. After walking through this country for another three-quarters of an hour, I finally reached the tank farm. There was no house, no car, and no one in sight; but it was on a much better road than I had been on heretofore. I headed west again, toward the main highway. In another half hour I passed more tanks, again without any people being around. Cars on the main highway were now faintly visible in the western distance.

Late in the afternoon after most of the pilots had landed back at Odessa Airport, a group of them got together in the tie-down area and began to compare notes about the flight. One of them saw Ruth Petry waiting patiently inside my station wagon and the Easley boys playing on the trailer. This pilot had experienced no difficulty in completing the flight and he was curious as to how I had fared. "Where's Lincoln?" he asked. "Hasn't he made it back yet?"

One of the other pilots who was just tying down his sailplane answered. "No, I saw him start out and he seemed to be having quite a bit of trouble. After working one good thermal he was getting very low over Odessa, and I thought he had either returned to the field or gone down somewhere in Odessa."

At this point Bob Moore carried the information one step further. "No, we got in the same thermal over downtown Odessa and got clear up to cloudbase. Last time I saw him he was still working in the same thermal a little bit below me but I didn't see him the rest of the day."

"He must have made it some distance south of Odessa anyway, because I saw him working fairly high

The author, (standing at left behind CIRRO-Q). The rather pompous looking individual standing up in the cockpit is neither Ruth Petry or Don Roberts, but a gentleman who won soaring fame at Odessa in 1959 during the Soaring Camp. He was Ruth Petry's chief assistant there.

Photo by Bowerman

