



The RD 25-1, with 113 foot wingspread, sits in Earl Smith's cow pasture after its historic 62-hour polar flight. (Riverside Press Enterprise photo).

RED AIRMEN to CALIFORNIA

By MARTIN COLE

In the early morning of July 14, 1937, a Russian plane flying nonstop by way of the North Pole landed in a cowpasture near San Jacinto. The 1000 hp single-engine monoplane had lifted from Schelkovo Airport, Moscow, 62 hours and 17 minutes earlier. It had flown 6,262 airline miles for a new distance record. The following day, *Pravda* announced:

"World Capitals now lie within easy range of Soviet war planes. Let this be kept in mind by foreign enemies threatening war." (1)

Despite the sword-rattling by *Pravda*, the flight was accepted in the United States as one of good will. This was largely because of the modesty and friendliness of three blue-eyed, blond-haired crewmen. They were Pilot Mikhail Gromov, 38; Co-

pilot Andrei Yumashev, 35; and Navigator Sergei Danilin, 35.

After the epic flight, pilot Gromov donned author's hat and wrote a book. Only one copy of *Across the North Pole to America* is known to exist in the United States. (Incidentally, I took advantage of my temporary possession and photo-copied it.) The book is a translation into English, published by the Foreign Language Publishing House, Moscow, 1939.

M. Gromov, Hero of the Soviet Union, Order of Lenin, Member of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., begins his book with, "The idea of flying to America across the North Pole occurred to me long ago." Continuing he says, "Until recently, it was believed (especially abroad) that flying in the Arctic was impossible. However, the development of polar aviation has shown that to Soviet planes and Soviet

airmen the stern North is no insuperable barrier."

(2)

Makail Gromov was no stranger to long distance flying. Fourteen years previously, he had pioneered a flight from Moscow to Pekin. His plane was the R-1, the first airplane designed and produced in the Soviet Union. The flight took thirty-three days. A year later, young Gromov made a brief circuit of Europe in a Soviet all-metal plane. Again, three years later he was swinging around Europe in the tri-motor "Wings of the Soviets." His fourth long distance flight was made in 1934. Flying a closed circuit with a navigator and engineer, pilot Gromov remained aloft 75 hours to cover a distance of 7,707 miles. It was a world's record not officially accepted because the U.S.S.R. was not affiliated with the International Aeronautical Federation.

In 1935, pilot Gromov applied for permission to fulfill his earlier dream--flying to the United States by way of the North Pole.

"I was determined to continue my efforts in the sphere of long-distance flying. In this I was interrupted by protracted illness and my work on testing new airplanes, but I did not give up hope. My ambitions brought me into close contact with Yumashev, a splendid airman and international record holder, and Danilin, who in my opinion is the best navigator in the Soviet Union. We planned several long-distance flights, one of which was particularly interesting; from Moscow to Brazil, across the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, the Sahara Desert and the Atlantic Ocean. Careful preparations were made for this flight, but for a number of reasons it had to be deferred.

"What interested us most was the plan for the flight from Moscow to America across the North Pole, which had been temporarily postponed, but to which we returned again and again.

"We worked on the details of this flight for two years. This may seem a long time. But the result was that many problems which had formerly seemed insoluble now became perfectly clear to us. We had a complete picture of the details of the proposed flight. This gave us great satisfaction. We proposed to use a plane which I had been testing for nearly two years, RD No. 25-1.

"It was a monoplane of the classical type with underslung wings, and at that time was undoubtedly the most suitable craft in the world for long-distance flying.

"We did everything we could to reduce the weight of the machine. We removed the rubber chambers which enabled the plane to keep afloat on water, adapted the engine-covers to serve as sleeping bags, decided to do without brandy and firearms and reduced the food supply from a 2 months' to a 1-1/2 months' ration. We thus managed to lighten the load by nearly 400 pounds. We accordingly increased the supply of fuel, oxygen, and water for the engine by this amount.

"Having increased the potential range of the plane by lightening its weight and increasing the supply of fuel, we turned our attention to the selection of the pro-



Major Victor Strahm, U. S. Army Air Corps, greets Soviet flyers (l to r) Danilin, Gromov, and Yumashev. (Photo - Paul Marsh)



March Field soldiers look on during dismantling operation. (Photo - Louis B. Ziegler)

pellor. This absorbed a great deal of time and energy. We made a large number of test flights to ascertain the expenditure of fuel and the ways of economizing it.

"The original range of the RD No. 25-1 was 4,350 miles. But when a geared engine was installed, the range was increased to 6,200 miles. Experiments showed that the corrugated surface should be replaced by a smooth surface, and this increased the range by roughly another 1,250 miles. Finally, after covering the anterior edge of the wing with a polished surface, we were able to fly 7,700 miles without a stop. The installation of metal propellers still further increased the range.

"We made a thorough and careful study of the craft. It had to be ascertained what height and speed should be maintained as the flying weight of the plane changed with expenditure of fuel. In the end, enough material was collected to enable us to know exactly in advance what distance could be flown in calm weather. But inasmuch as calm weather could not be expected along the whole of the long flight we were contemplating, we had to discover the laws which would tell us how to fly to achieve the maximum distance.

"In the end, we had at our disposal extensive charts showing what speed and elevation to maintain under various conditions. This clarity on all questions proved to be one of the most important factors determining the success of our non-stop flight.

"What caused us most uneasiness was the meteorological aspect of the problem. The comparatively small margin of stability of the plane in the early hours of the flight (owing to excessive load) demanded calm weather, at least during this period. After that, the only serious danger to be feared was the formation of ice on the propeller and wings. For two years we had been studying everything published at home and abroad on the reasons for this phenomenon, so as to find a means of combating it. We finally arrived at the conclusion that the

lower the temperature, the less the chances of ice forming, and that in clouds at a high altitude this danger was entirely precluded at a temperature of below -20° C.

"Thus some of the most difficult problems of the flight were settled before the actual take-off." (3)

When pilot Gromov was convinced his plane and crew were ready to pioneer a route over the North Pole to the United States, he, together with co-pilot Andrei Yumashev and navigator Sergei Danilin, were ushered by Defense Commissar Voroshilov and Premier Molotov into the Kremlin's most inner sanctum to receive the blessings of Dictator Joseph Stalin. (4)

On the eve of takeoff, Russian meteorologists told the crew to expect severe head winds and storms of cyclone velocity. The combination of agonizing storm warnings, and the thoughts of flying over a vast unknown, contributed to give pilot Gromov such an agitated state of mind, he was unable to eat. Drinking only tea, he waited while six tons of gasoline were pumped into the wing tanks, enough, they believed, for 8,000 miles of flying.

The takeoff was made at dawn, Monday (Sunday in America) July 12. Despite a mile-long runway, the overloaded plane almost failed to become airborne. Commented Gromov, "It may be said with certainty that if the plane had weighed another 200 pounds the runway would have been too short." (5)

Lumbering upward, the RD 25-1 reached clouds at 1,100 feet. Continuing on instruments, they climbed to 2,620 feet to find themselves in an open corridor between cloud layers. Two-and-a-half hours later they pierced the upper layer and, at an altitude of 3,610 feet, they flew northward above storms in a heavenly world of sun with the plane's shadow racing across the sea of clouds below.

After five hours of flight, co-pilot Yumashev took the controls and pilot Gromov, having recovered his "complete composure," found himself wolfishly hungry. Later he was to write, "I addressed myself to some refreshments." (6)

Eventually, navigator Danilin calculating the airspeed against elapsed time, concluded they were approaching Kolguyev Island. Here was a check point with a standby referee of the Central Aeronautical Club to register their flight. Grudgingly Yumashev descended into turbulent clouds. They flew into a violent, buffeting storm that subjected

the plane to stresses which greatly alarmed the crew. At a height of 650 feet, the RD 25-1 passed over the check point. Yumashev immediately climbed back to the less turbulent altitude.

In *Across the North Pole to America*, author Gromov devotes eight pages from take-off to North Pole. There is a flavor about his writings that gives the reader an easy grasp-and-feel that escapes in the re-telling. Therefore, we continue with Gromov's vivid recollections:

"Down below, the blue waters of the Barents Sea were visible. We were heading for Novaya Zemlya. We first spied it at a distance of 60 miles. As we approached within 30 miles of it, a picture of unusual beauty and mystery opened before us. From afar, Novaya Zemlya looked like the sunlit shore of a southern sea, with long sandy banks of vivid hue, reminiscent of sunshine and warmth.

"A layer of strato-cumulus cloud approached from the left and concealed the sea. Over Novaya Zemlya we twice descended to a level of 1,000-1,300 feet to have our flight registered. We then slightly altered our course to hit the 120th meridian at the spot where it led straight through Rudolph Island to the North Pole and then on to California. Here again, we rose above the clouds.

"A White veil appeared on the horizon and covered the sky. This was an approaching cyclone. Several hours passed. Yumashev informed me that he had detected some dark spots below which must be Franz Josef Land. Soon we spotted the snowy summits of the archipelago. We could feel the breath of an approaching cyclone. Strata of black cloud and humpy cumuli again floated by. The scene was again overcast.

"The only way we could avoid cyclones was to rise above them. We firmly stuck to our determination not to depart from our schedule unless absolutely necessary, and not to diverge from our course under any circumstances. Only forward, and only along a straight line, was our motto.

"We had already reached an altitude of over 13,000 feet; the temperature had fallen to minus 16 degrees. Clouds barred our way. Nothing was to be seen. We kept our course by the radio signals from Rudolph Island, which now lay behind us. We flooded the propeller with liquid to prevent ice coating.

"We continued to ascend. I noticed that the windows of the cockpit were covered with a crust of ice. Only at a height of 14,700 feet where the temperature was minus 21° C., did they become transparent again. We nosed our way through high cumulus clouds. Then again flew blindly.

"It suddenly grew lighter and the plane emerged from the clouds. Below us lay a white sea of feathery cloud. The sun shone brightly. We breathed freely.

"Fighting our way through two cyclones, we approached the North Pole. We had already been in the air twenty-four hours. During this time all we had seen of the earth was the stretch between Schelkovo and Zagorsk--two towns lying close to Moscow--a patch of Kolguyev Island, the peaks of Novaya Zemlya and about 125 miles of sea. All the rest of the route had been covered by clouds. We had flown either above them or through them.

"At 3:14 a.m., we passed over the North Pole. We were then at an altitude of 8,850 feet and were making a speed of 100 mph. The temperature was minus 8 degrees C. The crew were in excellent spirits." (7)

There was a sense of accomplishment, now that they were on the 'down' side of the North Pole. With co-pilot Yumashev at the controls, Gromov caught his first nap. He slept soundly for an hour, then awoke with a second gnawing hunger. But there was no time for satisfying the inner man. They were flying directly into a bank of ominous clouds. In anticipation of severe buffeting, Gromov assisted Yumashev at the controls. However, the storm proved feeble than some of its predecessors, and in half an hour they were again in a bright polar sun. Through breaks in lower clouds they saw the polar cap, an endless, icy wilderness traversed with characteristic fissures. The scene was grand but monotonous.



Mrs. Rosecoe Taylor of San Jacinto smiles as she poses with Co-Pilot Andrei Yumashev.

(Photo - Marsh)



Navigator Sergei Danilin contemplates his history-making flight, as he enjoys cigarette. (Photo-Marsh)

Eventually they perceived unmistakable darker areas on the cloud-scattered horizon. Approaching, they discovered with satisfying relief, that they were directly on course; the growing areas were the cliffs of Patrick Island.

When land again appeared, they mentally shook hands. They had reached North America! As the RD-25-1 droned over the northern wasteland, the character of the terrain gradually changed. Canadian tundra stretched before them from horizon to horizon. They saw its million lakes of varying sizes and shapes. They also saw treacherous bogs, rivers--perhaps some without names, and a scrub growth that finally emerged into an endless forest. It was in this setting, 3,725 miles from Moscow, that they made their last radio contact with Russia. In the meantime, they had established radio contact with Anchorage, Seattle and San Francisco. At noon, they gave their position as 400 miles north of Vancouver. During the afternoon, they radioed:

"Regularly send every hour weather conditions of airdromes San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco." (8)

Tuesday, the 13th, was a day of mounting interest on the West Coast. Where the Soviet airmen would land was a speculation kept alive by the newspapers and radio broadcasters. Some weeks previously, Amelia Earhart had been lost while attempting to fly the Pacific Ocean and her disappearance made for daily headlines. Now, these headlines were being replaced with stories of the approach of three Russians on the first transcontinental flight over the North Pole. But where were the Red airmen?

Their last radioed position was 400 miles north of Vancouver. Much of California, from San Francisco to the southernmost tip, was blanketed in fog. Despite the ignoring of repeated requests for their position, the flyers did occasionally radio a growing concern.

"Inform us the time according to Greenwich when fog disappears from Los Angeles and San Diego airdromes. Will it be clear in morning?" (9)

The first definite knowledge that the Soviets were over the United States came at 10:25 p.m., when a United Airlines pilot saw the big red monoplane near Roseburg, Oregon. Thereafter:

11:15 p.m. "Estimated hour-and-half from Oakland."

12:15 a.m. "Ask Aeronautical Association representatives to register our position when the plane over Oakland." (10)

Before the hour of midnight, a crowd began assembling at the Oakland Airport. The airport was open with an 800 foot ceiling. With fog extending southward, it seemed unlikely the Soviets would continue. Noone was more anxious to welcome them than Tamara Yumasheff, sister of the co-pilot. In 1910, the family had separated in Russia; she had come to America with her parents, and by the strange vicissitudes of fate she now awaited eagerly, after seventeen years, for this reunion. When the plane was heard to pass over at 1:00 a.m.--but not seen because of the 800 foot ceiling, and when it did not circle and land--Tamara Yumasheff told newsmen, "I hope they fly as far as they can and set a record which will stand for a long time. It will only mean a delay of a few hours, which won't count against the seventeen years I've waited already." (11)

Author Gromov offered few details of his flight down the coast. Briefly, he said:

"We reached the shores of the Pacific in the vicinity of Seattle . . . The first real night of the flight began. This was between Seattle and San Francisco. We espied the shore through breaks in the clouds. Below us gleamed the beacons of flying fields, and the lights of cities and villages. We flew beneath a clear sky. To the right lay the Pacific, veiled by clouds; down below lay the land. From our height of about ten thousand feet we could distinguish a chain of lighthouses. A headwind blew; it seemed as if we would never reach San Francisco.

"We felt the effects of fatigue. The gas indicator was very encouraging. As we approached San Francisco, we saw that we could fly farther . . . so, we radioed, 'Are continuing our flight'." (12)

Now began an unexplainable radio silence from RD 25-1. The Soviets answered no calls. As the hours lengthened into the foggy night, apprehension grew in the Southland. Had the flyers crashed? The *Los Angeles Times* was put to bed with awesome headlines, "POLE FLYERS MISSING; HUNT BEGINS."

The *Times* story told of Russian Consul Grigori Gokhman, fearing his countrymen might be lost, had chartered a plane and was searching first in the vicinity of the Bay cities, then southward. Another chartered airplane with newsmen and cameramen had taken off from Union Air Terminal in Burbank and was searching the southland above the fog. (13)



(left to right) Yumashev, Gromov and Danilin, after a bath, shave and three-hour sleep. (Author photo)

Walter Harvey heard the night newscasters tell of the searches underway, while driving from San Jacinto to Riverside to pick up a morning delivery of *The Los Angeles Times*. He saw the inescapable headlines and read the *Times*' story. On the return trip, and while delivering papers in the Hemet-San Jacinto community, he made idle speculations. Supposing the Russians came to Hemet Valley? Walter considered the possibility. The fog was clearing in Hemet Valley. Not so elsewhere, according to the newscasters. "I finished delivering my papers at five o'clock. I didn't go to bed. I stayed up thinking the Russians might come." (14)

Walter Harvey not only presumed the Russians' arrival --they appeared at six o'clock--but, during the twenty minutes the big red plane circled Hemet Valley, he accurately guessed the flyers would land in Earl Smith's 740 acre pasture. At 6:30 Walter got to the cowpasture just as the RD 25-1 touched down and began long grasshopper bounces across the rough terrain.

What happened next, as told by Walter Harvey, differs somewhat from the version related by author Gromov. In 1963 I interviewed Walter in Hemet. Looking back twenty-five years, he recalled this moment of history. As he talked, I made notes. Later at home, I arranged the notes into story form. I returned to Hemet for a reading and possible corrections. Mr. Harvey approved the story as written. A portion is given herewith:

"When the crew shucked their heavy flying suits and climbed down from the cramped cockpits, there was a touch of wariness in their eyes, yet they flashed expressions of relief and vast satisfaction. Andrei Yumashev came close to me

and talking above the apparent loud ringing in his ears, uttered the first words. In a strange accent he said, 'March Field.' The tone suggested a confirmation. The gesture supported it, when he pointed in the direction of March Field Army Air Base, some twenty miles away.

"'March Field,' I nodded affirmatively, and then my attentions were directed to a map Mikhail Gromov was shoving in my hand. The commander's finger jabbed at the map, and I thought I understood. I quickly found San Jacinto and indicated the location with my finger. There was nodded agreement among the flyers and an exchange of Russian talk. And then someone, Sergei Danilin perhaps, was shoving a fountain pen in my hand.

"'Sign name,' urged Yumashev.

"I put the map against the side of the plane and wrote, 'Walter Harvey'.

"I glanced at my wrist watch. 6:30. The plane had been on American soil for five minutes. I wrote '6:25'.

"The Russians pressed their hands into mine, giving vigorous handshakes of friendship. By now the first blur of excitement had passed, and impressions began to stand out in sharp focus. The flyers were blue-eyed and blond-haired. They wore baggy pants belted without beltloops. Their shirts were white and

they were without hats and coats. A three-day growth of beard did not hide all lines of tiredness, although overtiredness was not greatly apparent.

"I circled the plane with the Russians in hasty inspection. There were exclamations when a gasoline leak was discovered in a wing tank. The flyers gestured and eyed the roughness of the cow pasture. It had been a bumpy landing. There followed an exchange of Russian comments and I caught the strange pronunciation of 'March Field' several times.

"Andrei Yumashev turned to me. 'Notify March Field.' His manner implied a request, not a demand. I nodded agreement.

"It was only a two-minute drive to San Jacinto, and there Mrs. Anna Kirkendall, a telephone operator, put through a call to March Field." (15)

Historians investigating the past from several sources, are not greatly perturbed when confronted with considerable variations. They accept differences as normal research findings. Consider then what author Gromov says:

"We selected the only large, although rather uneven field, in this semi-wilderness, and 62 hours 17 minutes after the take-off in Moscow we made a successful landing some three miles from San Jacinto, California.

"Reckoned in a straight line, we had flown 6,302 miles. Our plane was severely shaken and jolted on landing because of the hard, rough ground, but neither it nor the equipment suffered the slightest damage.

"Danilin was the first to alight. There was not a soul to be seen, but a minute later we noticed an old and dilapidated automobile bounding over the hummocks towards us. A young man jumped out and addressed Danilin in English. We had provided for such an emergency in Moscow and had had the following note written for us in English: 'We are Soviet airmen flying to America from Moscow across the North Pole. Please inform the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, the local authorities, and the nearest flying field that we have safely landed.'

"The young man leaped into his car and dashed to the telegraph office. A moment later, the field was invaded by people and automobiles." (16)

There is another version of the landing that will likely prove an exception to the aforementioned research rule. It is a story that will undoubtedly disturb the future historian. It is the sort of journalism that provokes arguments against freedom of the press. It is a newspaper story Walter Harvey disclaims, despite his name appearing in the

byline. (It should be explained that Walter was a part-time worker in the cemetery. Today he is Superintendent of San Jacinto Valley Cemetery District.)

"Witness Relates Plane's Landing; Cemetery Caretaker is First Man to Greet Russ Aviators." By Walter E. Harvey,

"There I stood right in the middle of a vast cow pasture, anxious to tell them where to land.

"But I couldn't--I can't talk Russian and they couldn't speak English.

"I was in the San Jacinto Cemetery taking care of some graves when I first sighted the giant red-winged plane. It seemed to be gliding smoothly down the airplanes headed for San Diego. I knew immediately it was the Russian plane I had been reading about.

"In about five minutes, the plane wheeled and came back and circled directly over me. It seemed to me they wanted some help. Maybe they wanted to know which way the wind was blowing, I thought.

"So I threw dust in the air at least a half-dozen times, thinking they could see which way the wind blew the dust.

"But they didn't pay much attention to me. Then I thought, maybe they wanted to know where they could land. So I ran into an adjoining barley field and waved to them that it was good and smooth. They didn't answer but kept circling around me.

"Then I raced over to the cow pasture, tore a part of a fence down and flopped down on the ground in an attempt to let them know the pasture was smooth.

"They swooped down low and I fell over backwards so they could see the ground was smooth.

"Finally, after circling around me a couple more times, they landed the big plane. It bounced a couple of times, raced along the ground fully 250 feet and then came to a halt.

"Mikhail Gromoff, the pilot, leaped out of the cockpit first. He shook my hand warmly and handed me his passport and also a couple of letters written in English and Russian, asking that proper authorities be notified.

"There I stood, my heart leaping in my throat, trying my level best to think of some way to help them. I couldn't.

"Finally, Gromoff rubbed his stomach as though he was mighty hungry and said 'sixty-two' which I interpreted to mean

he had been sixty-two hours without food.

"Then he handed me a dictionary which had questions and answers written in Russian and English. I pointed out sentences in Russian for him to read. Through this medium we struck up quite a conversation. I told him where I was.

"Then we helped Andrei Yumosheff, co-pilot, and Sergei Danilin, navigator, from the plane.

"Yumosheff, apparently thinking I didn't know who they were, drew on a piece of paper a picture of the pole. One each side he made a dot, labeling one Moscow and the other Los Angeles.

"I asked them why they didn't stop at Los Angeles and Yumosheff put his hands over his eyes, indicating poor visibility at the airport.

"I notified proper authorities, you can bet. I wanted to drive them in my car to Riverside, but they refused to leave the plane until proper authorities had arrived." (17)

Dairy ranchers are early risers, especially when thirty cows are waiting to be milked on schedule. Helping Earl Smith with the milking were the Barker boys--one of them, Billie, twelve years old. On this morning, they had neglected to turn on the

radio. They had not seen the *Los Angeles Times* delivered by Walter Harvey. Thus, they were unaware of the Russian plane lost over the Southland.

When they saw the red monoplane circle and land, they continued milking, presuming it to be from March Field. Not until cars began racing by on the little-used country road did Billie go to investigate. In a few minutes, he was hurrying breathlessly back to get his camera and tell the news. In the days ahead, as thousands of visitors arrived from Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego and elsewhere in California, it is understandable that Earl Smith had problems. The March Field army guard, established to protect the plane, assumed no authority to protect Earl Smith's property. Fences were torn down; cattle strayed away--some were not found until a year later. To recover his losses, Mr. Smith began charging twenty-five cents a car. A considerable segment of the public ignored the toll gate and climbed fences. Today, Mr. Smith takes a dim view of the greatly exaggerated newspaper stories printed then of a fabulous harvest he was reaping: two hundred dollars an hour, according to one account. (18)

Major Victor Strahm, World War I ace, piloting a March Field Army plane, set down on the rough cowpasture without mishap. Less fortunate were two Navy planes arriving later. Both were damaged. Major Strahm found the Russians eating oranges--oranges from Russia! He invited the Red airmen to March Field--communicating through Mr. Henry Sandy of Hemet, who managed enough German with Yumashev to be understood. Mr. Russell McCoy, Hemet lumberman, volunteered to drive Major Strahm and the visitors in his Plymouth sedan.



Twenty-five years after the landing, author Martin Cole finds evidence of historic event at the site. (Author Photo)

Today, Mr. McCoy is not certain if Yumashev communicated with them in difficult English. Yet, he believes, during the drive to March Field Yumashev possibly conveyed information they circled in the vicinity of San Diego. (19)

Gromov's book makes no mention of circling in the vicinity of San Diego. He is very brief about their arrival there, but concludes with:

"We were out of luck. The Mexican border was too near to permit us continuing our flight to the south and thus increasing our distance record.

"The flying fields in the southernmost part of California and the whole strip, thirty miles wide, between coast and mountains were covered with morning mist. We were, therefore, obliged to turn back. We circled around for half an hour in search of a suitable landing place. When I decided to land there was enough fuel in the tanks for another six hours of flying."

(20)

At the March Field Officers Club, the Russian flyers first wanted a bath. Thereafter, they ate a ham-and-egg breakfast, drank milk, and turned in for a three-hour sleep. The fog lifted; Russian consul Grigori Gokhman flew in to take charge. Afterwards began a hero's welcome that took the Red airmen to Los Angeles and San Francisco for receptions, thence to Washington, D. C. where they were received by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Prudently overlooked at this time was a story in American newspapers taken from *Pravda*, July 14, the day the flyers arrived.

"Moscow--July 14 (UP) The number of persons executed by the government in recent weeks on charges of being spies reached more than 370 tonight with disclosure that sixty-one Russians were put to death today at Svobodny." (21)

Major E. G. Mouton examined the RD 25-1. He found it a "strange mixture of contrasts," with excellent welding, construction and design, but with poor covering of the wings and fuselage. Nine days after landing, the plane was dismantled and trucked to Wilmington for shipment to Russia. Two Russian technicians, assisted by March Field soldiers, accomplished the work with attractive Miss Ludmella Pridvorova interpreting. According to the army boys "she knew her aviation onions." (22)

Go to San Jacinto or Hemet today and you will find the postwar newcomers mostly unaware of this significant milestone in aviation's history. This is not surprising, considering those who lived in the valley twenty-five years ago have only a negative interest. For example, there is no roadside marker to commemorate the event. The 740 acre cow-pasture is now owned by dairyman Clayton Record. When I talked with Mr. Record, he mentioned seeing iron stakes lying in the grass. They were used for the rope barricade around the RD 25-1. Although it had been fifteen years since Mr. Record had seen the stakes, he believed he could take me to them.

I found the ground to be a pattern of rolling mounds some two or three feet high, with long flat washes for runoff water. We searched unsuccessfully for an hour, then enlisted the help of neighbor

Bailey Mitchell who also recalled seeing them years ago. After a second search of forty minutes, we located the scattered iron stakes and, also, discolored milk bottles.

In this age, young Russians have circled the globe as space men. The same old *Pravda* never fails to issue earth-shaking threats after each more venturesome space flight. And the American man on the street asks "Why aren't we meeting the Russian accomplishments?" The answer lies partly in looking back to 1937 when the United States, with technical know-how and adequate planes, missed its opportunity to create a significant long-distance flying record and pioneer the North Pole route.

- (1) *Riverside Press-Enterprise*, July 15, 1937.
- (2) M. Gromov, *Across the North Pole to America*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1939.
- (3) *Ibid.*
- (4) *Time*, July 26, 1937.
- (5) M. Gromov, *op. cit.*
- (6) *Ibid.* (7) *Ibid.*
- (8) *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1937.
- (9) *Ibid.* (10) *Ibid.* (11) *Ibid.*
- (12) M. Gromov, *op. cit.*
- (13) *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1937.
- (14) Notes of author's interview with Mr. Walter Harvey. (15) *Ibid.*
- (16) M. Gromov, *op. cit.*
- (17) *Los Angeles Examiner*, July 15, 1937.
- (18) Notes of author's interview with Mr. and Mrs. Earl Smith.
- (19) Notes of author's interview with Mr. Russell McCoy.
- (20) M. Gromov, *op. cit.*
- (21) *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1937
- (22) *Hemet News*, October 4, 1940.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This is Martin Cole's second appearance in the *JOURNAL*. Once again, he makes a unique contribution to aviation literature. A flyer since the 1920's, his retirement from the State of California becomes effective in June. Look for more articles from this fine aviation historian. (Editor)

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