

Rose Mateuse Trumps Wind

by Hu Filleul

In last month's issue, Willis Cline wrote an article about a crosswind landing at Resolute Bay. After the severe winds here on Saturday, February 11, Bill Rodney got a 30 second close-up interview on Chek TV discussing the wind on Gonzoles hill. He and I came to the conclusion that there must be many windy stories out there flying in the wind. I will start what I hope will turn out to be a good series.

Turbulence at Lajes

After the Suez Crisis in 1956, the United Nations intervention included an RCAF detachment of C-119 aircraft flying between Naples, Italy and El Arish in the Gaza Strip. At the time I was a Radio Officer instructor with 4(T)OTU at Trenton, Ontario. We were put on alert to fly in support of the C-119 mission with both Northstar and C-119 aircraft. Crews were put together and assigned to various serials. I was on a crew assigned to Northstar 17508 which was lying in pieces on the hangar floor undergoing a major overhaul. We were supposed to be the last serial to leave but, as usual, things took much longer to fall in place than planned. It turned out that by the time we were told to go, our aircraft was ready with zero time to overhaul so on November 22 we were the first OTU serial to depart.

The route was from Trenton to Downsview (Toronto) to pick up some cargo, then to Greenwood, Nova Scotia to pick up more load and from there to Lajes, a USAF airbase in the Azores. We were to take a crew rest at Lajes before proceeding to Gibraltar and Naples. Everything was going well until we got close to Lajes. The tower all of a sudden told us that the field was closed due to severe turbulence on the runway. The weather itself was clear and sunny so we decided to make an approach anyway—we didn't want to go to Santa Maria, our alternate. The Captain, F/L Ron Kyle advised the tower that as an RCAF transport crew we could set our own limits and we would attempt a landing. The tower repeated that the field was officially closed and that the crash equipment would be standing by.

The approach was bumpy but going well as Kyle was a fine pilot. Just as we touched, a fierce gust hit us and tipped the Northstar until the port wing tip just missed the ground. Ron Kyle who was 6'4" tall jammed on full starboard aileron and rudder (I think) as we went whizzing along. Eventually the nose wheel and the starboard wheels banged down and there was a huge sigh

of relief all around as we were in danger of running off the runway as well as losing a wing tip. The fire trucks and ambulance were having a great time chasing us.

There was a 426 Sqn. Northstar about an hour and a half behind us. They wanted to know what the conditions were. I was in contact with them on HF and F/L Kyle said to tell them absolutely not attempt a landing and suggested they go back to Gander which they did.

After we got parked and settled down we went to the Met Section to find out what caused such turbulence. You can see from the poor photograph of Lajes airfield that there are steep cliffs along the shore but there were also rocky islands around the other (approach) end of the



runway. Naturally, I couldn't find a photograph of them. These obstructions broke up the wind and caused the heavy turbulence so it was not unusual for the field to be closed for that reason. The USAF Operations Officer opined that we were lucky as well as being good pilots. He diplomatically didn't say we were a bunch of damn fools.

Later in the Officers Club over dinner and several bottles of Portuguese *Rose Mateus* at 75 cents each we wondered what would have happened if the copilot, F/L Jack (Black Jack) Hall who was about 5'9" tall had been in the left hand seat. Would he have been long enough and strong enough to do the job?

The rest of the seven day round trip went as scheduled and we even managed a day visit to the ruins of Pompei, south of Naples. The volcano sure finished the people there but the crosswind turbulence in Lajes let us survive to fly another day. Good luck or skill and ability, who knows?

If you have a line shoot about flying in the wind please write it up and forward it to me either typed in hardcopy or by email (See Newsletter box on Page 8.)