

were quite different, and his friend did not appear to have to cover so much new ground as Ola did himself. Life in New Zealand bore many strong resemblances to life in England.

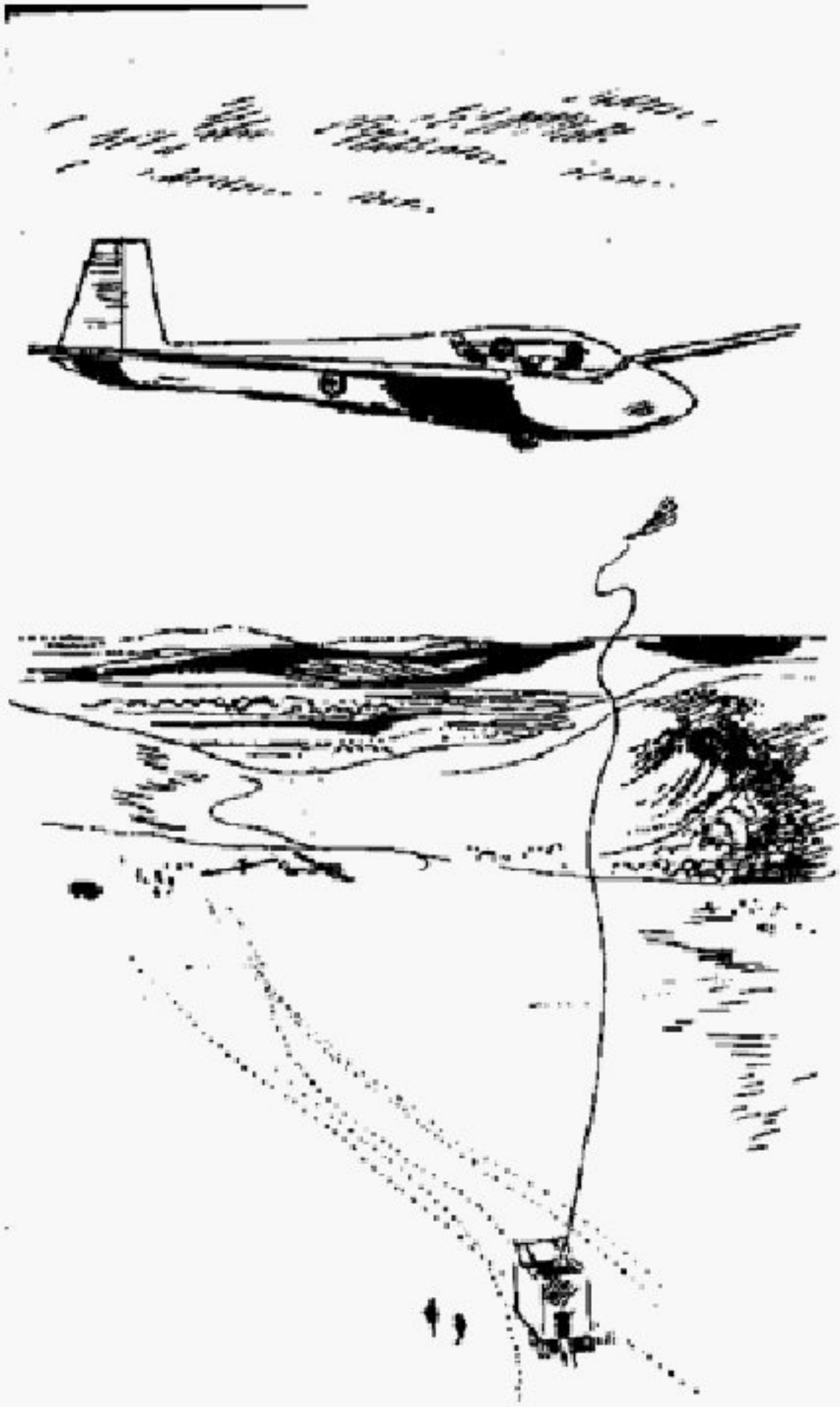
There was no formal briefing as Ola was only there to enjoy himself, but he did notice some marked differences between the glider and the plane that he was becoming used to flying. The wings were much bigger and longer to help keep the glider in the air as it had no engine. The whole airframe was almost resting on the ground on tiny wheels instead of having a proper undercarriage. Instead of sitting one behind the other, the pilot and passenger sat in a single cockpit large enough for two seats side by side. This was going to be great fun because he should be able to see all that was going on.

‘Now Ola, just go ahead and strap yourself into the right hand seat.’

‘I’ve done that, now what?’

‘Don’t worry. Remember we are going to have a winch launch. The cable in our nose cone is attached to the red and white caravan you can see in the distance. As soon as we give the signal they will wind the cable in and, when we are rushing along at a high enough speed, I shall pull the stick back and that should get us airborne.’

‘Yes, that’s fine, but surely that will leave the caravan dangling at the end of our cable when we are up there.’



‘Not quite, old chap,’ said Ian, grinning at the thought. ‘Before it gets to that stage, I’ll release the cable from our nose using this lever and we shall then be able to fly off, and return when we feel like it.’

‘What’s this funny instrument?’ asked Ola.

‘Oh that,’ replied Ian, ‘well, as I explained, we rely on a thermal to remain airborne, and this helps us find them by showing the vertical movement of the air.’

‘I see. And now are we going to sit here all afternoon or are we going to give the signal and go flying? I’m just dying to get up.’

Ian gave the signal and with a jerk they were pulled along the grass by the winch cable, and at the right moment he pulled the stick back and they sailed into the air with a tremendous ‘swoosh’. Normally flying gave a superb feeling of being detached from the worries of the world. Now Ola found that gliding gave him this feeling even more. The silence and the gentle circling in an area hugging a thermal was very peaceful. The monotonous flatness of Lincolnshire stretched below them towards the city of Lincoln.

Ola took over the controls once or twice when Ian thought it was safe. He found the glider heavy and more difficult than the Chipmunk but the thrill of being in control was superb.

As they came back to land, Ola was full of envy and admiration for his friend who obviously had advantages over him because of his earlier opportunities at home. Ian had handled the glider expertly and, for all

Ola knew, could easily have passed as one of the instructors. It went without saying who would land the glider back on the grass. As Ola watched Ian he looked forward all the more to the day when he would be competent enough to fly on his own.

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Going Solo

All through that term, Ola spent many hours in the air and gained both in confidence, and in handling experience. One of his flying instructors wasn't too far wrong when he told him once that he would find flying even easier than driving a motor car. The other one suggested that he should look upon flying as being in a kitchen with lots of pans on the cooker at the same time, all boiling away and needing his attention. Yes, in the air he had to keep an eye on several vital instruments giving information on things like his fuel state, height, direction, flying attitude and position.

Ola had yet another item of flying kit to master on the day he was taken for his first trip over the sea. At every stage in his flying training he had tried to relate things to what happened to him on his first and memorable flight, from Freetown to London. On this day, as his instructor briefed him before taking off, he could remember vividly how the attractive air hostess had moved backwards down the centre aisle demonstrating to all the passengers the use of the oxygen masks and life jackets in case there was an emergency.

‘Our trip today takes us over the sea, Williams. We shall cross the coast above the Wash and then fly up the east coast about ten miles out over the North Sea, before returning to base.’

‘That sounds good, sir. You know I can swim and so there should be no problems.’ ‘Maybe you can’t think of any, but we can,’ retorted the instructor. ‘Just as it is mandatory that you fly with a parachute and helmet, even though civilian flying clubs using the same type of aircraft might not bother, so it is compulsory that you use a maewest whenever you fly over the sea.’

‘A maewest? What’s that, sir?’

‘You should know by now. It’s a life jacket which will keep you afloat should you end up in the sea. You wear it over your flying suit before you strap yourself into your seat.’ He handed one to Ola. ‘Here it is Will you adjust the straps at the back so that it fits you and then do the buttons up along the front.’

‘It looks small for what it’s supposed to do, sir.’

‘It’s adequate to hold your head above water until you’re rescued.’

‘If we ever had to ditch the aircraft in the sea, sir, wouldn’t it be difficult for a rescue helicopter to see us floating in all that water?’ asked Ola.

‘If we did nothing else it would be. But first of all if we have time, we would transmit a ‘Mayday’ call over the radio, which is an emergency message to say we are in trouble. We’d give our position so that the rescue team would know roughly where to start searching for us. And in addition, when we hear an aeroplane overhead we can fire a flare to guide it to us.’

‘What is a flare?’ asked Ola.

‘It’s like a firework only it explodes into a much brighter star in the air and remains alight long enough to act as a guide. Now, if you’re ready, we’ll go out and check the aircraft.’

As they moved across the grass towards Chipmunk XZ709, Ola looked about anxiously in the hope that Adjai was on duty as ground crew that day, but he wasn’t. It was usual now for Ola to do all the external pre-take-off checks under the close supervision of his instructor without waiting to be told, so he rested his helmet on the port wing of the aircraft and proceeded with his checks. When these were complete he climbed into the back seat without the help of the ground crew airman and was fully prepared for flying when the instructor switched on the R/T from the front seat. The instructor wasted no time in switching the engine on and spoke to the tower as they taxied out towards the point that would take them along the correct runway.

‘Echo Tango ready for taxi,’ he announced curtly. The tower were always well aware of expected movements in the airfield and were waiting for them.

‘Echo Tango taxi Runway two-eight, right hand, QFE one-zero-zero-eight.’

The instructor then adjusted his switch so that only Ola could hear him as he carried on talking.

‘When we are in position, Williams, you will take over from me for take-off. What was the information from the tower again?’