

TENNESSEE *and* TEXAS

First Report of the Texas Expedition by Lewin B. Barringer

The advance party of our level country soaring expedition rolled into Nashville, Tennessee, on the afternoon of Saturday, April 2nd. To Ted Bellak fell the hardest job of the journey, as he drove the duPont winch truck towing the Minimoa trailer, alone the entire 865 miles through much bad weather. The piloting of my Ford was done in alternate shifts by Pete Bonotaux, Ken Findiesen, and myself. To our great regret, Chet Decker dropped out at the last minute, due to pressure of business at home.

We were most cordially welcomed at the Nashville Airport by Major Walter Williams, State Director of Aviation, who was our host during our tow and one-half day stay. It was most gratifying that the weather improved sufficiently for us to do the first soaring in the state and so demonstrate to some eight thousand enthusiastic spectators the wonder of soaring flight, which the Major had been publicizing.

Our first take-off was made around noon with 4500 feet of rope stretched along the NE-SW runway. As the winch wound up, it pulled the Minimoa off into a fresh breeze, and I climbed it to 900 feet before dropping the rope. Swinging back over the administration building and hangars, I caught a weak thermal and managed to climb a few hundred feet on it. It was a big moment in my life, as it was the first time I had ever caught a thermal from winch tow on a level airport. I made several flights during the afternoon, and, when on one, I caught a stronger thermal, climbed it to 1800 feet, and stayed up 29 minutes, the crowd went wild with enthusiasm.

A check with the weather station at the airport showed promising conditions for better thermal production the next day, which turned out to be the case.

The distance of eighty miles to the Monteagle site was covered by airplane tow, behind a very interesting new Kinner-powered, parasol monoplane with unique slotted wing.

The Kollsman altimeter in the Minimoa's cockpit registered just 5,000 feet as I cut loose and headed over the thousand foot slope far below. Playing around in the vicinity of the slope, I stayed above 4,000 feet for the first hour. I soon found that I could always catch a strong thermal of from 5-13 feet per second over one part of the mountain. As I suspected, and later definitely determined when I dropped lower, this originated over a pocket or cut-back in the ridge. The thermal started over the open fields in the valley below and grew mightily as it was carried up this slope.

The second hour I flew out over the valley and up and down the ridge, exploring the currents. At one point I dropped 700 feet below the ridge to within three hundred feet of the ground, and climbed back on a slope thermal to 6300 feet. It was this altitude that resulted in the press claiming a new unofficial altitude



All set to go

Clarence Lee Dale

record. There were no clouds resulting from the thermals on which I flew that day, and only a few small ones in the distance, so here was a definite indication that wonderful altitude possibilities could be found at this site in better soaring weather.

From this altitude I was able to get a fine view of the surrounding country and see that distance possibilities were also very good. To the eastward I looked across a series of long parallel Allegheny ridges, with broad valleys and good fields between them. A flight of 40 miles to Chattanooga should be a comparatively easy affair with a high performance ship, and a pilot could go very far downwind on thermals backed up by good slopes with the Atlantic Ocean approximately 450 miles distant. Also from this height I saw, two miles to the south, a spur of the mountain that seemed to have possibilities better than the place I was soaring.

About one-thirty, I looked down and saw the Ford with the big silver trailer in tow, winding up the road to Monteagle, following Major Williams' coupe. Soon afterwards, I dropped down to do some slope soaring, as the thermals died down a bit, and found the air quite turbulent near the top of the SW face. Gliding out over the valley, I picked up thermals over the open fields and, as I climbed on up again, saw Ted drive the trailer down and park it next to the highway. I had already planned to land in a larger field farther south. However, as my clock recorded three hours after releasing from the tow plane, I came on in and, with the help of the spoiler, put her down in a small field and rolled right up to the road.

The next morning, Tuesday, April 5th, Major Williams and I each took an airplane and flew back to Monteagle to have a look at that projecting spur of the mountain to the south, as well as other sites up and down the mountain range. As soon as I flew over and saw the other side, that I hadn't been able to reach the day before, I became very enthusiastic. Dragging my wheels over the treetops of the plateau on top, and again over the fences of the fields below, I determined the height of the mountain at very close to one thousand feet. Even solidly wooded slopes of around 40 degrees all around led down to many fields large enough for airplane landings, making slope soaring possible in winds from SW clockwise around to NE with perfect safety. Major Williams circled over and made some aerial photographs, and then we flew back to Nashville in formation. I could hardly wait to get back and tell him that I felt sure that we had discovered a potential soaring site, superior even to the famed Hornberg in Germany. We have officially recommended this site for the state to develop.