

● Pop Khrone

recent rains had cooled the ground, or in flying ahead instead of waiting for thermal conditions to advance with me. I wasted a lot of time zigzagging from cloud to cloud and quite often, after losing much altitude with no thermal or a very weak one, flying back a few miles trying to find a thermal I had left earlier; or in working weak thermals where the time spent in climbing was out of proportion to the height gained. Or flying over areas where downdrafts were notorious, without having altitude enough to really get over them. Also, flying heavy cross-winds or even head winds, because I had made a pre-determined goal so fixed in my mind that I would struggle toward it, regardless of changing conditions, when that 187 mile flight might have been made easily had I avoided these pitfalls: I mention them here, hoping that my experience may be helpful to some other pilot, also struggling for his Golden C distance or better. I learned these things the hard way, and I've got a heck of a lot to learn yet. Each flight presents some new problems or I manage to pull some new, dumb stunt, like this recent flight to Hereford, Texas, which I will relate in more detail later.

This year, with the 17th National Soaring Meet being held in Grand Prairie, my hopes were high. My old L-K had been modified radically, into a mighty "slick" ship, with a really beautiful job of workmanship and design, done by George Pankau, St. Lucie Airport, Fort Pierce, Florida. George came along to help Mom crew for me. We worked to the last minute, to get my new ship, The Comet, about ready. Then, by driving day and night, arrived at Grand Prairie tired out physically and still some last minute work to be done on the ship. I didn't have time to sit in it, even, until my first contest flight was made. Each morning I set out, thinking "this may be The Day"—but my best flight came on the last day of the Meet and was only 141 miles. This was a great disappointment to me, when seven other pilots made longer flights than mine on this same day. I determined to go farther west and make another try, after the contest closed. George Pankau could not accompany us, this time, so Mom and I set out for Odessa, Texas, where we had hopes that better thermal conditions would prevail. Beaumont Cooley thought we would find good soaring weather there and that a tow ship was available. "Beau" was right, only we were a day late for the good weather—a "Front" had moved in spoiling the chance for an immediate try for distance. We set up the Comet on the West Odessa airport, and made a test flight, then waited for conditions to be right. Each morning, hopefully, we prepared for a take-off; each time we met with disappointment. As you might surmise, the morning came when we didn't bother to go to the airport early. No, we sat on the Cooley's front porch, while comparing Barographs with "Beau" Cooley, discussing soaring in general, when a fluffy Cumulus cloud popped into view. A quick survey of the sky showed rapidly developing Cumulus, and we hurried to the airport. Al Parker, the tow pilot was trying frantically to reach us by phone, to tell us things were popping, when we arrived. In a flurry of excitement we rolled the ship out and got into the air as quickly as possible, at 11:10 A.M. I released from tow four minutes later, at 1500 feet above terrain, but this was being too optimistic and

I had to work hard for another hour before getting beyond sight of the airport. Then a strong thermal was encountered, which got me up to 8000 feet and put me well on my way. Within the hour I caught thermals which carried me to 12,800 feet and I flew down wind, determined not to veer from this course as the tilwind of about 10 miles per hour was helping a lot.

I got lost temporarily, by not paying enough attention to my maps and because it was quite hazy. But sometime later Clovis, New Mexico, came into view. This place is easily recognized by the railroads and other identification points. I had been flying three hours and thirty minutes and was 170 miles beyond Odessa, nearly my Golden C distance. I had been flying for an hour or more keeping above 9000 feet. The strain was off when I sighted Clovis and I sat up there, fat, dumb and happy, knowing that I could glide the 17 miles necessary for my Golden C.

Indications at Odessa were that down wind should put me in the direction of Amarillo, but it had veered to the west and put me over Clovis. Now that my distance was assured, I felt that I had time enough as well as sufficient altitude to beat my way against cross-winds to Canyon, Texas, my designated goal, where Mom would be waiting to retrieve me. Making the goal would also let me add a diamond to the pin. As I continued on this course thermals became weaker and the the ground winds were about 25 miles per hour. Progress ahead became slower and slower as it was hard to keep the thermals centered with so much wind; my drift was so great that I had a hard time to get as far as Hereford, a few miles short of my goal, though the 210 mile flight was well above the distance needed, when I set my ship down at Clover Airport, Hereford, Texas.

Had I used good judgment and continued down wind, veering to the west where conditions remained good, I believe I could have gone at least 310 miles, which distance earns the Diamond automatically, without a named goal, and it is quite possible that I could have set a new distance record. So you see I am still making "Pilot Errors" or alibis, but I am still determined to keep trying. My big ambition was to receive my Golden C pin—and I wear it proudly; it is number 27—and I thought I would be satisfied with it. But it looks a little bare without those three diamonds, so I am going to try to add them as soon as possible. I don't have as many years ahead of me as you younger fellows, for when you are past sixty, you can't really count on having more than fifteen or twenty more years of active flying.

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