

# MY GOLDEN "C" DISTANCE FLIGHT

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*This story which was submitted to SOARING before Paul Tuntland's death illustrates possibly better than the direct testimonials on the following pages why those testimonials were given.*

The story of this flight starts on Tuesday, June 6, 1950. That afternoon, Paul Tuntland came by and offered to drive my car and trailer if I would make an attempt at a 187 miles cross-country trip. This was all I needed to complete the requirements for my Golden "C." There had been no Golden "C's" earned in this country in over two years, and I was anxious to be the first one to start the ball rolling again.

During the winter I had "flat-topped" my L-K, recovered the fuselage, and modified the control surfaces by removing all the lead balances and taking off the air balances from the rudder and elevators.

I am greatly indebted to Dr. August Raspet and Dick Johnson for the suggestions concerning the modifications and also for blowing the plexiglass bubble canopy.

Wednesday morning, a check of the weather showed ground winds of 30 to 40 miles per hour and thermal activity very unlikely. Thursday the winds aloft were from the Northeast, and there was an inversion which was not expected to break before noon. A flight to the Southwest from Denver would be foolhardy except under very unusual conditions on account of the high mountains and rugged terrain. Early in May, I had made a flight to the Southeast with Northeast winds aloft; but after five hours in the air I came down just 100 miles away. After that flight, I was determined to wait for a day when I could go downwind. I called Paul and we decided to go out to the field and assemble my ship so that it would be ready for the following day. After we got the ship all together, Paul insisted that I fly it, saying that the practice would do me good.

I got off at about half past one and managed to stay up about two hours. At first, conditions were weak, and I got some very good practice in a small thermal I encountered at about 600 ft. while I was approaching the field for a landing. I had flown the "flat-top" only six hours, and that was almost a month before, so the two-hour flight did help me sharpen up my technique. On the way home Paul suggested that we get an early start the next morning and try every half hour until I could get away. My idea was to wait until a good day came along with thermals bubbling up everywhere and good tail winds aloft. If it hadn't been for Paul I still would be waiting. He said he didn't care if I went only 10 miles as long as I kept trying, so I couldn't do anything but agree to start out the next morning.

Friday morning it was clear except for the haze and smoke below the inversion. I checked with the airline meteorologists and things didn't look too bad. The air wasn't particularly unstable, but the lapse rate was near 3.6 degrees per thousand feet, and the winds aloft were out of the Southwest 10 to 15 miles per hour on the three a.m. observation. They expected the inversion to break at about 10:30 and a high temperature for the day of near 85 degrees. A check of the map showed an airport to the Northeast at Ogallala, Nebraska which was just comfortably over 187 miles. Paul came by and we picked up my DC-6 flight en-

gineer, Arthur Putz, and headout to Rustin Field. We were a little later than we had intended! but once we got out in the country, we could see that there was a pretty heavy haze in the air. It looked like the inversion wasn't going to break very early. The wind was almost calm. I was all for taking it easy, but nothing would suit Paul but rush, rush. We stowed the tiedown kit in the L-K, turned on the oxygen bottle, and towed the ship out to the end of the runway behind the car at a half trot. Paul insisted that I go after the tow plane and pilot while he laid out the rope. I thought to myself, "Can't he see this inversion; why should I pay \$2.50 for a tow until things look better!" When I got back to the L-K, Botler Smith from Estes Park had just driven up. I barely had time to hear him say he was on his way to see if his TG 2 was relicensed before I found myself in the cockpit naming my goal Ogallala, 191 miles away by land, and looking like 500 by air to me in my mind. I managed to drop (and break) my pint thermos bottle of water. (I take a quart when things look good.) I stowed my two chocolate bars, fastened my shoulder harness and safety belt while I was being taped in, and before I knew it I was starting to roll as Paul was asking if my barograph was on. The field elevation is 5,500 ft. above sea level, but the Wasp-powered Stearman climbs easily and quickly. We hit a thermal at 6,500 ft., then it was fairly smooth until I cut loose at 7,800 ft. I had intended to cut off at 7,500 ft., but hung on a little while longer hoping to find another thermal. The time was 11:05.

I glided slowly down to 7,500 ft., where I began to get some lift, and soon I was struggling with a small sharp thermal that kept lifting my down wing up and turning me out. I kept turning back in and in a couple of minutes had a nice climb of 200 to 300 ft. per minute. At 9,000 ft. it flattened out, and I headed off to the Northeast with misgivings. Away off to the East two small clouds appeared, and my hopes came up a little. At 11:30 I was back down to 7,800 ft. and beginning to climb in my second thermal. This one averaged less than 200 ft. per minute, but it took me to 10,500 ft. There were a lot of green wheat fields in this area, but up ahead I could see two large bare areas, so I started off for them. I had made up my mind to ignore small thermals, but I did try one 360 degree turn each time I ran into any lift at all. Just an hour out I was back down to 7,700 ft., when I ran into a nice thermal over one of the bare areas I had seen. This one took me to 13,000 ft., my best altitude of the day. At one time my rate of climb read 1,200 ft. per minute. (I was quite surprised when I checked my barograph trace the next day to find that my average climb was only 460 ft. per minute.) Now I began to think that I might have a chance to make my goal. It was becoming apparent too that there wouldn't be any clouds; but I was running into fair thermals regularly, and so far hadn't even remotely picked possible landing sites. After a straight away glide to 9,000 ft., my fourth thermal took me to

(Continued on Page 10)