



# I MUSTA DONE IT WRONG

*(The Story Of My Fallin' Down)*

By WALLY WIBERG

My old, much caressed LK is no more. This is why: I arrived at the field (Irving Airport, headquarters of Texas Soaring Association, Grand Prairie) shortly after noon on September 9th and was eager to flight test the new German combined turn and bank and gyro horizon, the installation of which I had just completed. A storm was moving in from the N.W. as Monty towed off ahead of me in the TG3. Checked batteries and barograph, as the main purpose of the new instrument was to improve my cloud flying to help make the altitude leg remaining to complete a Diamond "C."

Was soon releasing from the Stearman at 2000' and a couple of miles S.E. of the field. The gyro was immediately revved up and uncaged in level flight. It was impossible to hold altitude with Monty, who was making some passes under scattered clouds ahead of the storm; and make a decent flight check of the gyro. The horizon seemed to work perfectly though the turn needle seemed not quite as sensitive as it should be. I didn't try to tumble the horizon as bench tests had indicated it would go very nearly to a vertical turn.

After more testing I encountered zero sink north of the field at 800'. This was worked for no gain for 5 or 10 minutes and Monty was seen on the ground rolling toward the hangar. The Pratt-Read and BG7 were also being put away. Now the leading edge of the storm front made itself apparent by first a gradual and then rapidly accelerating rate of climb.

The storm passed quickly over the field which was out of sight as I climbed past 3000' in front of the storm at a rate of 2,500 to 3,000 f.p.m. This rate was only estimated as my rate of climb pegs at 2,000 f.p.m. At about 5,000' the gyro was switched on again and uncaged with wings level and nose down to about 50 m.p.h.

Right here my most important mistake was accomplished. This storm seemed so terrific and an altitude opportunity like this presents itself so seldom that temptation got the best of me. The main reasons I shouldn't have tackled this particular storm was lack of adequate testing of the new instrument and the fact that the large size of the instrument temporarily prevented the installation of a compass and standby electric bank and turn.

For a trial run, I turned into the storm intending to make a 180° turn and come back out. This had to be done by control feel and gyro horizon and guessing at the turn time since there was no compass and the turn needle was not sufficiently sensitive. After the attempted 180° turn and after flying much longer than it should have taken to get in the clear, it was still very dark and I had obviously misjudged the turn.

The lift continued strong from 1,500 to 2,500 f.p.m., the gyro horizon made it very simple to hold the airspeed within a 3 or 4 m.p.h. range, and so I decided to postpone the escape problem till a higher altitude. It seemed the problem was not apt to become more complicated and I might break out the side of the storm in the process. Since leveling the horizon didn't bring me out of the storm, the gyro had obviously stabilized in a turn but, since the airspeed could be slowed to nearly normal stall speed and since vertical acceleration had not increased appreciably, it could only be a large moderately banked turn. The direction of the turn could be determined by observing the airspeed on applying right or left rudder but this was no help as a straight heading couldn't be assumed without either a good turn indicator or a compass.

Above 10,000' occasional hard rain was encountered with lift remaining steady and the gyro continuing as before to show variations from the steady turn as variations from straight and level. Just before 14,000' the lift dropped off and the usual severe turbulence was encountered. I had hoped to make another 3,000' or 4,000' which would have been good for Diamond "C" altitude.

Being unable to take a heading out it was, as I had expected, merely a matter of a few minutes until the turbulence caused the gyro horizon to tumble. Without a standby bank and turn, the only remaining alternative was to spin down through the storm. This is not usually a serious situation as cloud base is normally at 4,000' to 8,000' but on passing the 2,000' mark after having spun for about 6 minutes and finding it still very dark, conditions were obviously different.

On entering this storm, the base was seen to be very low at about 2,000' and under many storms of this type there is often a very dark column, containing mainly heavy rain, extending nearly to the ground. I was spinning in heavy rain and it was becoming increasingly apparent that this was my unlucky position. I felt that I could just as well have spun down most anywhere else.

It's really a very eerie feeling to watch the altimeter drop past 500' and note that it has a probable lag of about 200' when spinning down at nearly 2,000 f.p.m. in the dark. I pulled the hatch open and stuck my head out to make the most of the poor visibility caused by the rain on the canopy. In just a few seconds tree tops appeared rotating through the mist below. An abrupt spin recovery leveled off at about 150'. With head stuck out the side and no time to check the gauges, the reduction of airspeed with still high ground speed indicated a downwind heading. With visibility of about 800' I was too low to turn