

THE FLYING GEHRLEINS

By FATHER

After listening to E. J. Reeves and Jon Carsey singing the laurels of flying from Grand Prairie, it was decided by the family that I was to spend a week at G.P. in a concentrated effort at trying for my 311-mile Diamond flight.

We pulled into G.P. Airport Sunday afternoon, August 8, just as T.S.A. was getting into full swing operation. To our surprise and bewilderment we witnessed the second flight of the "Flying Plank." Even after seeing it I still don't believe it. It looks good, though, and I do believe if it's handled right it might become the Model T of gliding. I believe next to the "Flying Plank" and the hospitality of the T.S.A. members, the row of 10 new T hangars impressed me most. I understand John Carsey designed them. Like all things the Texans do, these hangars are different—strong, simple and inexpensive to build. The aircraft industry would do well to look into this new Jon Carsey design.

Monday, August 9, the weather didn't look too well so we decided to rest up a bit, set up the ship and be ready for flying Tuesday. The evening was spent at The Flying W Ranch where we enjoyed hamburgers over the open grill, home-made ice-cream and all the trimmings. Wally Wyberg and his wife June sure outdid themselves in good old Texan hospitality style. Wally gave me some maps and outlined the possible diamond distance flights I could make from Grand Prairie.

Our first try at diamond distance came August 10, Tuesday. We took on another crew member—June Wyberg. As the week went by we found that June was an asset to our team. She knew all the roads and managed to do just the right thing at the right time, which is so important in a good crew. Our first goal was Amarillo, Texas. We fell short, landing at Vernon, Texas, a distance of 168 miles and 6 hours, 15 minutes from G.P. The highlight of this flight was the landing at Vernon Airport. Spot landing with a skid can be difficult at times. I had figured on landing as close as possible to the end of the runway. As I touched down, to my



Photo: June Sargent

All the Flying Gehrleins except 'Little' Larry, who is now married. This is probably the most efficient soaring outfit in the country, complete with its air-conditioned Cadillac and kennel for the dog.

surprise I found the hardtop runway was covered with very small, round gravel. This was as bad as if it had been covered with ball bearings.

I gained about ten miles per hour as I hit. It didn't take long for the end of the runway to come up. It didn't look too good beyond the end of the runway; the ground was plowed so it would catch any water during a rain. Yes, I overshot and ho, boy, what a ride! But facing my crew was worse medicine. They never did get over crewing me out of that plowed patch at the end of the runway. We arrived home at 2:00 A.M. with 418 miles under my crew's belt.

Wednesday morning, August 11, I set my goal for Wichita, Kansas. I flew from G.P. to Oklahoma City in three hours, a distance of approximately 200 miles, just a little under 70 mph. This is the fastest I ever have flown any distance. If I was feeling good with myself, the tables soon were to turn, for at Oklahoma City I had flown out of weather. By turning back to the last thermals I was able to prolong the flight another 3½ hours and landed at Tulsa, Oklahoma. This amounted to a gain of only 49 miles on the straight airline distance. The total distance was 249 miles and the elapsed time of the flight was 6 hours, 30 minutes.

It was on this trip that near disaster was met. Grayce, June Wyberg,

and the three kids and dog, were traveling along the Turner Turnpike in Oklahoma and like all glider pilots, she was doing about 75 mph. The left rear tire on the car blew out and she lost control. The car reversed directions, the trailer tongue broke and Grayce said that the trailer went sailing by her in the opposite direction. The trailer hit the center of the turnpike and took off through the air as if on a ski jump. It sailed clear across the turnpike and then another 40 feet through the air, coming to rest going in the opposite direction against a fence.

I remembered that Bill Beuby lived in Tulsa. A call to Bill and we soon had a welding torch. Back to the Turnpike and trailer, a quick repair, and back to the airport for our sailplane. By 6:30 A.M. we were all loaded and ready to travel back to G.P. to try again for that ever-elusive diamond distance. Bill Beuby sure proved himself true-blue on our never-to-be-forgotten flight to Tulsa. To date this is the longest crew trip we have ever made. The record shows 914 miles traveled by car.

We arrived back from Tulsa Thursday evening at 6:00 P.M. We all took showers and again tasted some of the Wyberg hospitality where we met and spent a pleasant evening with the Jacksons from Dearborn, Michigan, and June and Wally Wyberg.