



TSA'er Del Lewis in his recently refurbished TG-2.

Saturday, August 14, dawned in Texas with all of the appropriate indications of another excellent soaring day. The three previous days had produced good cumulus build-up in the Grand Prairie area. Larry Gehrlein, having stopped here on his return from the Nationals, had been flying to such places as Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Vernon and Childress, Texas, and on Friday Doc Deginder had a nice ride in the T.S.A. TG-2 to Pauls Valley, Oklahoma, for a flight of 136 miles. These week-day events were encouraging and sparked my enthusiasm for an attempted cross country Saturday.

Since El Reno, Oklahoma is just beyond the required 186 miles for a Diamond "C" Goal Flight, I chose the Airport there as my goal. The weather bureau indicated that a cold front that had been hanging in the vicinity of the Oklahoma-Kansas border, had moved back in a northerly direction, so no radical change in weather was anticipated and the temperature was predicted to rise to 100° to 105° in the afternoon.

After Wally Wiberg had installed E. J. Reeves' Peravia in the back seat, I took off via aero tow at 12:20 and released over Grand Prairie Airport at 2,000 feet. The TG-2 climbed nicely in the first thermal to about 5,500 feet. Setting a northerly heading, I cruised at 50 mph I.A.S. which at this stage of the flight seemed like a practical speed between thermals. Even at this speed, I encountered several areas of 0 sink. During this first hour of the flight thermals were plentiful but not of sufficient strength to reach cloud base (estimated at 8,500 feet at this time) in a reasonable time, therefore, my cruising altitude varied from 7,000 feet down to 4,000 feet.

With an estimated 10 mph tail wind, the Texas countryside was slipping

COLLECTING GOLD AND DIAMONDS

By DEL LEWIS (TSA)

away at an average 35 mph during this period. After 1:30 P.M., the thermals were noticeably stronger making it possible to gain a little more altitude and enabling me to cruise at 65 mph between thermals without losing altitude too rapidly.

My average ground speed picked up to somewhat over 40 mph and at 2:00 p.m. I passed just west of Gainesville at 8,000 feet. As I cruised on north toward the Red River, I thought of all the fellows who have encountered difficulty in crossing the valley. Why should anyone lose out with all of these good soaring conditions? Suddenly, I realized that I was below 5,000 feet and had not encountered any lift for some time in spite of numerous clouds. I immediately reduced the air speed to obtain a more reasonable rate of sink for the TG-2. The terrain ahead looked extremely uninviting, being mostly wooded, and there were no towns or highways of any significance in sight. There was enough open country for a landing, however, so I proceeded on course cautiously.

At 3,000 feet above the valley, any lift what-so-ever was most welcome. I worked one thermal for six minutes gaining only about 500 feet. Realizing this to be a losing battle, I looked around frantically for any sign of better lift. A short distance to the west was one cumulus that seemed to be building much higher than the surrounding ones. This fact, coupled with the fact that there was an inhabited cross roads within gliding distance of the cloud, prompted me to try for lift in that area. I arrived under the cloud with little more than 2,000 feet of altitude left and much to my relief found 500 feet per minute climb back to 7,000 feet.

Once across the Red River, conditions again improved. The TG-2 was able to climb at 1,000 f.p.m. periodically and altitudes of over 9,000 feet were attained. The cloud base was gradually rising as the afternoon progressed and was now at 9,500 feet.

At 3:17 p.m., I passed over Wilson, Oklahoma. The cumulus seemed to be aligned in cloud streets that were running somewhat east of north, these streets being roughly four or five

miles apart. Following these cloud streets, it was possible to fly a straight line for several minutes without appreciable loss of altitude. Although this technique was gradually leading me east of my course, it seemed more practical, since cloud formations appeared to be much more favorable in that direction.

The cloud base was still climbing and the maximum altitude (10,000 feet) for the flight was reached at 4:55 p.m. over Purcett, Oklahoma. By this time, however, the clouds were dissipating rapidly and I was over 20 miles east of my course with no clouds in sight to the west. There remained only a line of small scattered cumulus continuing on to the east of Oklahoma City. Following these clouds at 45 mph I.A.S. for approximately 20 minutes, I arrived under the last cloud of any magnitude at 2,500 feet. Here I encountered another nice thermal and worked it back to 9,300 feet. My location at this time (5:45 p.m.) was just S.W. of Tinker A.F.B. which is S.E. of Oklahoma City and 33 miles E.S.E. of my goal, El Reno Airport.

Peering to the west, there were no cumulus remaining, just a 33-mile glide crosswind from 9,300 feet. Determined to land as close as possible to my goal, I pointed the nose toward El Reno, trying all the while to nurse RJ-5 performance out of the old TG-2. At the half-way mark, it was reasonably obvious that I would not make it due to stronger cross winds at the lower elevations. It appeared that I would fall about five miles short of my goal.

Then the impossible happened. At 6:03 p.m. I entered a dry thermal about 10 miles east of Oklahoma City and climbed back to 8,000 feet. Setting up a 55 mph glide and encountering no more lift, I arrived over El Reno Airport with about 1,200 feet of altitude and landed at 7:40 p.m. after 6 hours and 20 minutes in the air and a distance of exactly 200 miles covered at an average ground speed of 31.6 mph.

My ground crew consisting of Bob Morrison and Joe Reynolds arrived shortly to help me wrap up the most enjoyable flight of my career.