

NOTHING VENTURED . . . !

by BOB URBAN

This is the story of a rookie who made a storm front flight.

I had no "C" license or rating and had never made a cross country flight. In fact, I had begun to wonder what the fascination of gliding was when I hadn't been able to get other than a three-minute flight.

The tale begins with my late arrival at the Wright Memorial Meet in Dayton, Ohio. The meet had been in progress two days when I and my crew man, Don Renner, arrived. Being ill prepared I had no barograph or parachute. The latter I did borrow from an Air Force man who came to my rescue. Saturday, the third day of the meet, was a day of poor soaring conditions. The sky was overcast with no lift conditions present. The wind was moderate. Since I was two days behind, I decided to be among the first on the flight line. The more experienced pilots were less hasty with an eye to possible improvement of weather conditions during the day.

Taking our turns in rotation, I and several other pilots began taking tows to compete in paper strafing, bomb drop and spot landing. Thus I spent my first two tows. The third tow was it. As my turn came up the dark blue clouds to our west began moving closer. A few drops of rain fell as most pilots began scurrying for the tie-down area. Not being as cautious as they, I stuck.

As I tightened my safety belt, and signaled preparedness with the rudder, my courage sank a little. I knew at best a drenching would be my penalty for a tow at such a time. In seconds we were off. The first two tows of the day had been in rough air, but to my surprise, all was calm on this third tow. As we neared 2000 feet, Bob Bowers of Toledo, the tow pilot, headed over the field directly into the storm. It was an awesome view, completely dark ahead, hazy to our rear. Exactly at 2000 feet Bowers signaled to release, which I did.

After leveling out and reducing speed to an indicated 42 mph, I was astonished to find my altimeter holding steady with no sink. Slowly, slowly, I began to climb. That was it! Bursting with joy and shrinking with fear I headed toward Dayton parallel with the storm front. Despite increasing the air speed to 60 mph the 1-20 rose steadily to 2500 feet. As I cross-

ed Wright Field, a decision had to be made. Which way to go? North or south? Fearing to go further, I turned about to return to Vandalia.

Here if anywhere, I made my mistake. Banking to the right, I entered the storm. Within seconds I was being sucked up into the clouds. No instruments, no instrument rating! At any price, this must not happen to me. With a sickening feeling I pushed the stick forward. Wispy clouds began to black out my vision; 2700, 2800, 2900 feet and still climbing. Fantastic lift! Fear gripped me knowing the ship was experimental, that the fabric was glued, not rib stitched to the wings. There was only one choice—force the ship down, dive out and away from the storm.

Freedom, exhilaration, and relief. A left turn to parallel the storm and back to Vandalia. Far below and away, the drenched field passed swiftly from view. The last chance to return home.

All the hours of talk about cross countries had finally come to pass. I was free and clear and safe and this was it.

Holding a steady 2700 feet at 60 mph, the 1-20 raced effortlessly before the storm over fields and towns.

Lacking a map I knew not whence I was going. For the first time I was in a glider able to look upon the earth as a scenic thing of beauty not able to draw me to it. Gradually the front began to get ragged. Closer and closer I edged toward it to maintain my altitude. Now softly it began to rain.

Holding steady near 3000 feet, I flew between two monstrous clouds and down I plunged. Rudely my luck had run out. Away, away from the storm with my remaining 1800 feet, I dashed for safety and the earth. Sighting a main highway, I followed it carefully past a small town; 600 feet and last choice of a field. Racing downwind past a cemetery, over to a cornfield, leaped a fence and settled a scant few feet from the highway in a weed patch 80 miles from Vandalia. Joyfully I leaped from the ship, wheeled it to a fence and tied it down ably assisted by the caretaker of the cemetery. Seconds later, yes, you guessed it, the storm arrived and I got drenched.

UNUSUAL GLIDERS

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project did not undergo extensive development.

The DFS-230, built by the Deutsches Forschungsinstitut für Segelflug, which produced such well-known prewar sailplanes as the Habicht, Kranich, Olympia, Weihe and Reiher, was the only tactical Service Glider of World War II that could qualify for the title of sailplane. It was a beautiful machine when compared to such boxcar types as the Gotha GO-242 and the Waco CG-4. In the normal troop-carrying configuration, it carried a crew of two, plus eight fully armed troops and six hundred pounds of military equipment. Span of the wooden wing was 21.89 meters, approximately 72 feet, and the length of the steel-tube fuselage was 11.25 meters, or 37 feet. Take off was generally made from a droppable two-wheel dolly, with the landing being made on the skid. The glider unit of the MISTAL composite used a modified landing gear of much stronger construction, and included a tail wheel to improve the take-off characteristics.

To the DFS-230 goes the distinction of being the World's first operational military glider, having made its appearance during the capture of some of the fortifications in Belgium in May, 1940.

DOUGLAS CLUB

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there is room for many more members. Anyone can join, provided he meets with the Board's approval, the only restriction being that club officers must be Douglas employees.

The main objective of the club is to provide soaring equipment for its members on a partnership basis. Some maintenance work is expected on the part of all members, under the guidance of experienced mechanics if experience is lacking.

A monthly club publication was begun in 1954, called the Douglas Dust Devil. However, it has recently been discontinued for an indeterminate length of time until activity and contributions again warrant the effort.

Further growth in membership is expected in the near future when both Pratt-Reads will be simultaneously airworthy. The club should then be one of the healthiest and strongest on the West Coast.