

18,000 FEET AND UNEVENTFUL

by GLENN H. ROGERS

September 3, dawned warm and clear in Sacramento and Jean, my wife, and my two boys, Doug and Mark, were yelling at me to get up and get rolling. This was the weekend we were to spend in the Carson Valley in Nevada. Actually I was excited myself as Victor Swierkowski had promised I could borrow his barograph and possibly get a leg or two on my Silver "C". We jumped in the Packard and headed for Minden. We arrived at about 11:30 AM and immediately started to assemble the "ol dog" as I refer affectionately to my PR which is no RJ-5 by any stretch of the imagination. With much help, both physical and verbal, we got it looking like a glider in about an hour. Now all I had to do was install the barograph, get the glider to the end of the runway, get a tow and I would be on my way.

There were some scattered cu's floating by so I decided to try for my duration and altitude legs. It was now almost 1:00 and one of the other gliders took off. This was sort of a triggering action and I was getting impatient to be off myself, but was being kept on the ground by my wife who said I must have something to eat if I was going to be in the air for five hours. She was right, as I had had nothing to eat since very early in the morning; consequently, it was 2:00 before I was ready to go.

The glider that took off before had made three unsuccessful attempts to stay aloft and was just landing as I fastened my safety belt before take off. Deciding then that conditions were not as good as they appeared I didn't turn on the barograph. O.K. let's go! The Timm roared and labored down the runway, and finally we were airborne. Ten minutes later at 6,200 ft. ASL and 1,500 ft. above the terrain we ran into an area of good lift so I released. It was now 2:10.

The thermal in which I released proved to be a good one and approximately fifteen minutes later I was soaring effortlessly at 15,000 ft. I took time out to survey the countryside, which is surrounded by moun-

tains; the Sierra Nevada Mts. on the west, which rise almost vertically out of the valley to an altitude of over 10,000 ft.; the Nightengale Mts. on the North, and the Pine Nut Range on the south and east, all of which rise to 9,000 or 10,000 ft. I had just begun to congratulate myself on my accomplishment when I blundered under one of those beautiful white cu's. Now the altimeter began to twirl rapidly upwards as I made a lazy circle under the cloud. At 18,000 ft. and having no oxygen I decided to leave my elevator behind.

Flying back over the airport I called myself many unsavory names for not having turned on the barograph. Now it was too late so I might as well face it, and enjoy myself. Lake Tahoe was a beautiful emerald and blue shimmering in the sunlight so the PR headed in that direction and we made a trip over the lake just to see what it was like. Flying north along the shoreline Washoe Lake appeared on our right so we crossed back over the mountains to Carson City and back to the airport. By this time we were down to almost 12,000 ft. and had been up for about two and one half hours. Now I began to think those guys on the ground would not believe me if I said I had been to 18,000 ft. so I decided that the only thing to do would be to descend to about 2,000 ft. and turn on the barograph, then regain the altitude. I thought I could still make my duration if there were reliable witnesses to the time. The problem now was to descend to the desired altitude. I flew large circles in the sky until I found an area of good sink, pulled full spoilers and spiraled in the down until I had reached 2,000 ft. Now I started the barograph and began the search for another thermal. A few apprehensive minutes later I stumbled into a good one. At this point I must tell you that the reason for no quotes as to how good the thermals were, is that the PR is equipped with only a variometer, altimeter, airspeed and turn and bank indicator. To further complicate matters I had no watch so I had to estimate the time.

This thermal was terrific and I

stayed with it until I reached 18,000 ft. and there I estimated that cloud base was an additional 2,000 ft. up, but rather than invite disaster with a lack of oxygen I dived the PR at 85 knots with half spoilers. This resulted in a gain of 300 ft. before I got out of the lift. Now I was happy. I had the proof of altitude gained and I guessed at over three hours of time in the air. Now all I had to do was fly the remaining two hours. To make the time go faster I made another tour of Lake Tahoe and the surrounding mountains. Then I saw another glider only slightly below me at approximately 14,000 ft. so we flew a little formation. Well it wasn't exactly a formation, more like two gliders flying in the same general direction in the same general area. It was Jim Hutton and the Ames Club ship and he said later that he was on the way down. It crossed my mind as the TG-3 flew away that how could anything appear so ungainly on the ground yet be so free and graceful in the air as those TG3s. I watched for many minutes as the ship flew in graceful circles on its way back to earth.

The sun was beginning to get low on the mountains and the air was very still so I began to concentrate on flying the "ol dog" as efficiently as possible. My goal was to remain aloft until sundown and then I could be fairly certain that I had flown the required time. The variometer had broken, or at least ceased to function the last time I went to 15,000 ft. so I could not rely on it. (The green ball was stuck in the top of the tube and refused to drop despite the fact that I beat on it until my knuckles bled.) Now when I needed it most it was not available so I may have missed some weak thermals, nevertheless at 8,000 ft. I felt a bump and made a turn in it. After a full turn the altimeter registered no sink so I thought I could circle in this area until the sun set, but after a few turns a little lift developed and I gained an additional 2,000 ft. From this point on it was a continual glide around the valley until the sun went behind the mountain and the airport beacon light went on.

I landed on the taxiway next to the ramp and when I stopped I was greeted with many congratulations and hand shakes. I had stayed aloft five hours and twenty-three minutes after release. I was very tired and cold but happy.

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