

RED RIVER ROULETTE

by GEORGE E. CODER, JR.

Philip Wills has said, "there's nothing like a good old-fashioned, vulgar downwind dash on a corking day." How right he is.

A soaring pilot's eyes surely open to the greatest realization in his adopted sport as he swiftly and silently picks his way across the earth's conglomeration of life and living. He may feel as if his sectional chart has suddenly come alive and is turning beneath him on a giant scroll; or, that the fat, wind-filled cheeks of an enthusiastic nymph are blowing him on, earnestly trying to help add those much needed miles. Blowing hard enough to do some good, yet staying temperate enough to allow nature's thermal percolaters to produce their bubbles, doughnuts or fountains — whichever the case may be.

Of such were several of my cross-country flights, more especially so the one that earned me my #2 diamond, which in my case was for distance. I pretend no wisdom of planning or meteorology on this flight. It was not begun like the others, after a careful and critical evaluation of all of the data and prognostications of Uncle Sam's finest weathermen, surrounded by the latest and most expensive equipment. This time I made no study of their charts carefully outlining pressure systems, lapse rates, wind flows and stability indices. What difference could it have made? I had planned to com-

pete in the 28th National Soaring Championships being held in Wichita, Kansas, and I was leaving the day prior to the start of the contest because I couldn't finish my new trailer any earlier. Simply, I could either fly my Ka-6 as far as the weather allowed, or, I could carry it to Wichita in its box. Either way, we must leave at approximately the same time.

The TV weatherman did promise a "nice" day from a system dominated by the usual Bermuda "high," and its prevailing 25 to 35 knot southerly flow. Almost too strong to allow thermals to form properly, but, Wichita being to the north and a confident crew of sons, wife and brother-in-law standing by, I certainly would have been as popular as the proverbial skunk at a lawn party had I not given it "that old college try."

This would be my first serious flying since the previous year's event in Odessa, where I was privileged to fly Len Niemi's Sisu, I had to admit my enthusiasm was dampened considerably by having to step down from the incomparable Sisu to a mere Ka-6. Regardless, I sorely needed the practice and the weak link in the chain of events did not prove to be the Ka-6, as I would like to have suspected.

Our club President, Len Pratt, having bid for the use of the TSA K-7, and won its use in the contest, sug-

gested we try to "buddy" fly from our Gliderport to as far as we could get. We set an early hour to be ready, so we could launch at the first sign of a cu'.

I don't know how Len reacted, but I'm inclined to spend a restless night prior to a holiday of such magnitude. Instead of this, I decided to spend it gathering and packing the bits and pieces so necessary for the next two weeks of contest participation. Boning-up on the sectional charts for the next day's trip, I reminisced on the days of my early youth when a favorite Uncle and I would plan a fishing trip and I would lie awake all night hearing his Granddaddy clock strike the hours and halves.

I already knew a flight from the Gliderport to Wichita Municipal would set a new national goal flight record, but I also knew that this was not to be. After summing up the drastic action that was promised for violaters of the "foul line" (wisely established to segregate contest activity from simultaneous airline and commercial operations) with the specific, but curt instructions that no-one, but NO-ONE, would be allowed to fly sailplanes at the municipal airport prior to the contest, I adopted what I thought to be the best judgment: "Don't agitate anyone, anyplace, anytime." I seem to have a knack of it anyway and contests may become difficult enough without putting one's hosts in a compromising position. Anyway, the weather didn't appear to have that much promise. What to do?

Since I still needed my distance diamond, I struck off a 310.7-mile arc on the maps. Arkansas City, Kansas', Strother Field, the practice field for the early arriving contestants, was the number one choice. It lay 315 miles straight up the 97° 02' meridian from home base. Simple arithmetic subtraction of latitudes verified the nautical mile distance and was easily converted to statute miles.

Next, an arbitrary goal must be set. This too required little skill since it had to be as far as Wichita, and my maps went very little farther. Wirt Navy was elected. I spent the next ten days in this area and never did learn if there was such a place, it seems my maps dated around 1956. Everything was ready: barograph, charts, maps, chamois, water and a roll of toilet tissues (to keep the canopy clean, of course!).

Morning came after that fitful

George Coder, in cockpit of TSA's K-7 sailplane, receives congratulations of crewman Chick LaJudice, right, for his performance in Labor Day Meet last year. Sons, Don, left, and Gary hold hardware awarded to George.

Photo by Byron Scott

