



## THREE DIAMONDS IN A 1-26

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Three Diamonds in a 1-26? Not too tough really, provided you have not only the desire but an absolute conviction you are going to do it, a patient wife and family who are willing to lose you for a good many weekends, and a considerable amount of luck. The goal Diamond, sometimes known disdainfully as the easy one, came a year ago last summer on a 200-mile flight from Guthrie, Oklahoma, to Salina, Kansas. At the time I had no badges at all and, in fact, didn't have any until I completed my third Diamond flight. The trip came after a couple of dismal attempts when I found out about a primary airman's rule which states, "Never be photographed in full regalia before a mission of any kind."

Take off on the first attempt was about 10:00 A.M. with the cu's beginning to pop at 3,500 feet. The initial landing was at 10:14, eight miles north of Guthrie in a pasture which I shared with three sleeping cows, two startled horses, a flock of chickens and, eventually a rather elderly farm lady who kept telling me how much she wished her grandson had been there to see the airplane crash. The most spectacular part of that venture was the tow out, as it was uphill and over the chicken coop nestled between some trees and the farmhouse. My part of the maneuver worked out quite nicely, but the tow pilot, Don Terrill, used up some bad language, a couple of prayers and finally two notches of flap in the last instant to keep from removing shingles from the chicken coop.

The next attempt, with no photographs and a good deal less gear, covered a full 15 miles and on the third attempt, a couple of weeks later, I successfully negotiated the 200 miles to Salina.

I didn't attempt any more long-distance flights that summer but spent a good deal of time working on flying techniques including a number of minimum altitude (400 to 500 feet) releases to practice working thermals where they are weak and sharp. I tried a good deal of light-air soaring at Guthrie during the fall and winter and made several unsuccessful jaunts to Colorado Springs to visit Dave Johnson and Mark Wild at their Black Forest Gliderport which is perhaps the finest soaring facility in the country.

On one of these treks a fellow Oklahoma Citian, Marion Cruce, released around 15,000 feet behind Pikes Peak and then whistled up to above 22,000 feet in good lift. Back at the Gliderport we called Denver Center at 3:30 P.M. for a clearance in the glider area above 24,000 feet and were told that the clearance would be forthcoming at 4:00 P.M. We so advised Marion who in the meantime had banged up to 23,500 feet where he was indicating somewhere around 80 mph trying to stay out of the FAA's never-never land. The previous week a pilot had ventured into the awesome area without clearance and was suddenly awakened by three blurs that later turned out to be T-38's which, at the time, were reporting a stationary UFO at their altitude to Denver Center.

By the time the clearance came through the wave fizzled and Marion staggered up to 23,900 feet. He finally came home with cold feet but without a Gold badge or Diamonds. All of these trips netted an altitude gain of around 5,000 feet which was a little more than half of what my eleven-year-old daughter and I have done in good thermal conditions back at Guthrie in the 2-22.