

What A Great Day!

by Paul E. Remde

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It was the day after the conclusion of the Region 7 Soaring Contest in Albert Lea, Minnesota. I had been working all week as the scorer of the contest and I was intrigued by the fantastic flights all the pilots made during the contest. Many pilots had ventured more than 150 miles every day. I was thinking how someday I hoped to make some cross country flights to be proud of.

At breakfast a friend who had competed in the contest (Tim Taylor) suggested that I should try to get use of the Red Wing Soaring Association's Pilatus so that we could do some cross country soaring together. I was excited because this would be a perfect way for me to learn from a more experienced pilot, and the day looked like another fantastic soaring day!

The Pilatus became available at about 1:30 thanks the wonderful generosity of my fellow soaring club members. By then I was prepared with maps, final glide tables, barograph, and a camera to photograph Stanton Airfield if I was lucky enough to make it there. I planned to fly from Albert Lea to Stanton and then back to Albert Lea for a total distance of 115 statute miles and two legs of my Silver C Badge. I hoped to use Stanton as a remote starting point for the distance leg of the badge. I also hoped to get the altitude leg of the badge if the day was as good as it looked. I planned to fly straight up Highway 35 past Owatonna and Faribault (which both have airports) then up to Northfield and Stanton if my luck held out. Then, if things were going well I would try to make it back to Albert Lea. If not I would land at Stanton.

Unfortunately Tim was unable to fly with me because he was working towards getting his auto-tow rating, but I decided that this was as good a day as I would ever get for my first real cross country flight so I hopped in and took a tow behind Lee Bradshaw's Husky with Bob Lynn at the controls.

I released from tow at 3,000 feet AGL at 2:00. After notching the barograph by diving 300 feet and zooming back up I started searching for lift. I flew back to a thermal I had felt while on tow and found weak lift that brought me slowly up to about 4,000 feet. So far it didn't look like the day was going to be as good as the previous ones. I then saw Jim Faragher in the Blanik circling over the airport and flew over in the hopes that I could climb a bit higher and build some confidence that there was at least a slight chance that I could make it to Stanton. Over the airport I found more weak lift that finally brought me to 6,000 feet AGL. I was at this point very excited to be at 6,000 feet, but disappointed in the lift I found, and in the long distance to the next cumulus cloud to the North.

After a few seconds of indecision as to whether I had the nerve to punch out to the North I decided that it would be a long time until I got into a situation this good again, so I had better take advantage of it while I can. So I banked to a Northerly heading and put the nose down in hopes that there was a thermal ahead with my name on it. I comforted myself with the thought that there was an airport 30 miles to the North at Owatonna, and many beautiful fields to land in all the way there.

This first leg of the flight was to be the most nervous one because I didn't find another thermal

for nearly ten miles. By then I was down to 3,000 feet and nervous because the cloud I was headed for was the only one within gliding distance. As I finally got to it I was extremely delighted to find strong lift (nearly 800 feet/min. near the top of the thermal) which quickly brought this giggling pilot to 8,000 feet AGL (9,000 feet MSL) which is my personal record altitude in a glider. From my new vantage point I could easily see Owatonna and Faribault to the North and I knew that now I could at the very least make it to Owatonna. Cool!

I can't prove it but I swear that for the next leg of the flight the thermals that appeared in front of me were kicked off by sunlight reflecting off my teeth as I grinned from ear to ear.

As I streaked Northward I was pleased to find strong thermals over Owatonna and Faribault. Upon reaching Faribault I realized that I was within gliding distance of Stanton. Extremely Cool! I was going to make it at least to Stanton and maybe even further. Wow!

As I continued on towards Stanton I imagined how fun it was going to be to step out of the glider at Stanton if I ended up landing there. I was proud and happy and I knew that the warm glider folks at Stanton would congratulate me and make me feel at home. Little did I know that the fun was just beginning. As I passed Northfield and tried to find the airfield I got a big surprise.

What was that bright orange streak that just went by me at my altitude of 6,000 feet? Was it a bird? No.... A large gourd?..... No, the thermals weren't that strong! It was in fact the greatest welcoming committee a glider pilot could have. It was Roger Gomoll flying the open-cockpit Schweizer 1-20 that he calls the "Pumpkin". It was great to circle with him for a while in strong lift. I thought that was really great.

But the day was far from over. I quickly spotted Stanton Airfield and flew over to it to take a picture or two of it to verify that I had been there as planned (hoped). The airfield is even more beautiful from 6,000 feet than it is from the ground! I then looked South to see if there was a chance that I could make it back to Albert Lea. There seemed to be more haze and fewer clouds than before, but I was on a roll and I figured that if I didn't make it all the way back I'd have fun trying.

I cruised back to Faribault at 70 knots and hooked another great big giggle producing thermal that rocketed me up to 8,000 feet AGL again in a matter of minutes. About then I started to think that I might actually make it back to Albert Lea! But I wasn't there yet. The next cloud was within gliding distance (over Owatonna), but beyond that the sky was way too blue.

Over the next hour I must have looked at my final glide table a hundred times. It kept telling me that if the cloud over Owatonna carried me back up to 8,000 feet I should be able to glide back to Albert Lea. I couldn't believe it, but I sure hoped I'd find out.

The cloud at Owatonna got me a little bit nervous because it provided only weak lift to only 6,000 feet (I never thought I would ever say "only 6,000 feet", but that wasn't enough to assure me that I'd make it back through the sink I knew would be ahead). As I headed South I found small pockets of lift that I slowed down in but nothing very strong so I kept on heading home before the lift completely quit. At about 5:15 I finally found a thermal that brought me up to 4,000 feet which I was confident would carry me the remaining 15 miles. I was one very happy

pilot as I shot home at 100 knots!

As I got close to the airport I noticed that the pattern was clear so I decided to do a high-speed finish like some of the competition pilots had done the whole preceding week (a victory roll if you will) with the exception that I would do it at closer to 1,000 feet than the 30 feet some of those guys did it.

I raced across the North end of the runway at about 600 feet and 100 knots! What a thrill! I made it! I actually made it!

I pulled back and climbed rapidly up to 1,100 feet and entered the pattern for landing.

When the glider came to a stop I jumped out and screamed with joy at the top of my lungs like a proud Indian warrior who had conquered the day.

I am the first to admit that it was a fantastic day and that anyone could have made the flight without any trouble, but I was happy and I was proud. I had just flown 115 miles in 3 1/2 hours with a gorgeous sailplane as my steed.

I also successfully completed both the distance and altitude gain legs of my Silver C Badge.

What a great day! What a wonderful sport!