

## I ATTEMPT TO BREAK THE JUNIOR TRANSCONTINENTAL RECORD—by Gerald Nettleton



The author photographed with his plane just before leaving Newark.

WHEN one flies from a fog bank at 9,000 feet into a sleet storm at 10,000 feet, with vision limited by the wing tips of one's plane, knowing that somewhere in the immediate vicinity are mountain tops ready to snag a lost aviator, then suddenly finds the plane going into a power dive, what does one do? My answer to the question, on Thanksgiving Day, 1930, was to bail out.

There was no hint of the excitement in store for me as I made my uneventful takeoff in my Warner powered Monocoupe from Newark, N. J., Wednesday, Nov. 19 on an attempt to break the junior transcontinental record. My route took me to East Saint Louis and then to El Paso, Tex., with stops along the way. Everything was running smoothly.

I left El Paso at 8:45 A. M. on a Monday morning, intending to fly the remaining approximately 600 miles that day to San Diego. But I barely reached Benson, Ariz., about 200 miles west of El Paso, when I had to land because of a broken rocker arm box. This was unimportant in itself, but proved to be the beginning of my troubles with the eventual sudden end to my flight.

The parts needed for the motor were ordered from Phoenix, Ariz. They arrived in time for me to get away from Benson the next day, Tuesday. Upon reaching Tucson, Ariz., I found the repaired parts not working properly, so I landed to wait until new parts were sent by air from Los Angeles.

I got away from Tucson on Wednesday, flying 310 miles to Imperial, Calif., in two hours and 20 minutes. Not being satisfied during this flight with the action of spark plugs put in at Tucson, I decided to stay overnight at Imperial while having the plugs changed.

Before leaving Imperial, 100 miles east of San Diego, on Thanksgiving Day, I receive word that the sky was clear at San Diego. My Warner engine was functioning perfectly and everything seemed ideal for a speedy finish for my nine-day flight. My

elapsed time from Newark was 22 hours, 17 minutes. I had only 100 miles to go to beat Stanley Boynton's transcontinental time of 24 hours and three minutes. I felt sure of success and figured I could beat Boynton's record by at least an hour. So I took off from Imperial and headed over the last range of mountains that separated me from San Diego and a new junior record.

It was at 6,000 feet that the clouds became thicker and larger. Going to 7,000 feet I found myself flying blind. Flying conditions became worse, but I continued to climb, hoping to get above the clouds. It still was thick at 9,000 feet. At 10,000 feet I ran into rain, snow and sleet.

I had been flying blind for some minutes, the plane riding the storm nicely, when I started into a power dive. I throttled back the engine and managed to straighten out the plane. It was about this time that I discovered that the ship was headed east instead of west. So busy had I been with the controls, I had not watched the compass and noted my change in direction. Flying entirely blind now, it was a slow job swinging the plane around on its course again westward through the storm.

Sleet and snow continued to pelt the plane and visibility remained as bad as before. I knew that I was off my course, but had no idea how far nor in what direction. To add to my troubles, the turn and bank indicator had gone out of commission. The total of these difficulties resulted in my decision to bail out. A short distance westward, I knew, was San Diego and the goal of my flight which had taken me 2,650 miles. But I also knew that somewhere in my enshrouded vicinity were mountain tops which had no respect for ambitious young aviators.

Putting the ship in a normal glide and cutting the switch, I unhooked my safety belt, pushed the door open and leaped out head first into the storm.

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kimo, with the result that he was a mental and physical wreck. His dogs also were sick and could not have taken him much further. He would have perished half way through the pass.

It was growing dark. The marshal looked at his watch and saw that the time was already up. He hurriedly turned the prisoner's dogs loose and helped him on a sled. Any moment now he expected to see the great monoplane soaring overhead. He was not keen on being left behind in this wild land. He knew there might not be another clear day for weeks and he doubted if Wien could ever find the place again. He motioned to the drivers to hurry up their teams. They lashed the struggling dogs onward.

They were nearing the village, when they heard the ominous whine and roar of the plane. The marshal jumped off his sled and floundered through the snow, wildly brandishing his arms and shouting.

Wien saw them. He had just decided to give them twenty minutes longer, when he caught sight of the long, dark dogteams winding down over a snowfield. He kept the engine going while the natives drove their teams to within a few yards of the plane, refusing to come any closer.

The prisoner was carried the rest of the way and lifted into the cabin. Then Wien taxied through the soft, deep snow. His passengers braced themselves tensely. Would he strike a hidden rock? Could he ever attain sufficient speed to rise? If it had not been down an incline, probably he never would have made it. But as it was, the ponderous monoplane took to the air readily from half way down the knoll safely bound for Fort Yukon.

## I Attempt to Break the Record

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As I fell I caught a last glimpse of my disappearing plane. I waited until I had fallen about 300 feet before I pulled the rip cord. It seemed that there was a strong wind, blowing about 30 miles per hour. It was a strange feeling, floating earthward with sleet and snow whipping about me. The storm completely obscured my vision. Being unable to see the ground, there was hardly any sensation of descending; it seemed like I was in another world. There was practically no oscillation of the parachute, so except for the intense cold I experienced no discomfort in the descent.

For six or seven minutes I descended, keeping my eyes downward looking for a rift in the storm. Suddenly the mountain top appeared under me, apparently about 300 feet below. As I came nearer to earth I was gladdened by the sight of some telephone wires. They made me feel that I was near to civilization, or at least had something to guide me to habitation. I bent my knees preparatory to landing. The impact with the earth gave me a slight bump, but I was unhurt.

The canopy of the parachute stretched itself out on the bushes and ground. I unbuckled my harness and attempted to gather up the 'chute, but it was wet and too heavy to be carried about in my hunt for a farm house or community. It is a curious affection that one forms for some inanimate object; the parachute had only a few minutes part to play in my life, but it was an important part, so I disliked leaving it there on the ground almost as much as I had disliked jumping from my plane.

Using the telephone wires as my guide, I started walking down the mountainside. Reaching presently a road, I came upon a man who asked if I was the fellow he had heard flying around in the storm. He was a welcome sight to me, doubly so when he told me that about a quarter of a mile away was a ranch. I had landed in Pine Valley, he said, and there were a group of houses and stores, forming a mountain resort, six miles away.

The ranch turned out to be the home of Mr. Garretson Dulin. He invited me in for Thanksgiving dinner with his family. After a hot bath and a change to dry clothes, loaned me by Mr. Dulin, I enjoyed the dinner no less for my experience. That was a Thanksgiving Day dinner that had real significance for me.

Mr. Dulin drove me to Lindbergh Field in San Diego, where I was told that when I failed to show up on schedule time Doug Kelley, Superintendent of Airtech School of Aviation, flew to the mountains to look for me. But he was turned back by the same storm that I had suddenly found surrounding me over the Lagunas.

We retrieved my parachute the next day, but it was three days before my wrecked plane was sighted by an Airtech student who had tramped over the mountains in his search. The plane fell about two miles from the place where I had reached ground safely with my parachute. It was a total loss. I removed the altimeter from the shattered instrument board, to take back to Toledo as a souvenir.

I am disappointed—no one knows how much—in the outcome of my flight. My regrets are increased because of the nearness of my goal when I bailed out. But I never will feel that the possible honors of a transcontinental flight are worth ignoring the rule of safety. I carried a parachute to use in an emergency; the emergency arose, so I used it. That is all there is to it. I would do it again, should a similar occasion occur, and be glad of the chance to live to tell the tale.

### Readers!

Why not sit down now and write us about that interesting flying experience you had last summer?

The editor is always interested in receiving yarns, photos, sketches, descriptions of flights or planes—in fact, anything connected with aviation.