

# Local Pilots Have Fearful Time With Fog

## Womack and Cravens Miss Death by Inches In Hazardous Trip

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### OIL DERRICKS LOOM

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### Flier Forced To Slip Sidewise Past Tall Structures

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A tale of terrifying aerial adventures which nearly cost them their lives was brought back to Iola early today by Pilots Francis Womack and Jack Cravens who this morning set their "Jennies" down on the local airport after a seek end of thrills which they will neither forget nor want to experience again.

A week ago the two Iolans drove their wives and Pilot Womack's two children, Jack, 14 months old and John, 5 years old, to Cassidy, Kans, for a visit with relatives. Saturday afternoon the men decided to fly their Jenny biplanes to Cassidy to bring the visitors back home.

#### Cravens Off First

Pilot Cravens, who has had but 15 hours flying training, took off from the local airport at about 1 p.m. Before reaching Cassidy, some 70 miles west of here, he ran into foggy weather and was forced to fly extremely low because of poor visibility. It taxed all his flying ability

and luck to get over the Flint Hills at that altitude at which he was forced to fly. A strong tail wind and exceedingly rough weather added to the difficulty of flying through the ever thickening fog.

Immediately upon reaching Cassidy he telephoned Pilot Womack that flying conditions were "tough;" that he better "think twice" before setting out; that the fog was closing in momentarily.

#### Fog Closes In

The fog had indeed "closed in." In the neighborhood of Teeterville he had the first of what was to be a series of adventures which today still had him wondering how he came through them alive.

Flying at a rate of about 80 miles an hour, barely skimming the ground because of the low-hanging fog, Womack suddenly saw a huge oil derrick rear itself through the mists directly in front of his rushing plane.

There seemed to be no chance of avoiding a crash. An attempt to zoom over the derrick would have resulted in flattening the plane against it.

### **He Thinks Fast**

How rapidly thought travels only the professors can say, but Womack's thinking required less time than the telling of it does. In his own words he "hailed the stick into the corner, kicked full ruder, laid over on my wing tips and just barely scraped by." He couldn't have missed the derrick by more than a few feet.

This maneuver the pilot was forced to repeat four times in the space of about seven minutes. Flying virtually blind, not daring to try to gain altitude not knowing what minute would find him wrapped around a derrick or flattened against a hill, Womack managed somehow to thread through the dangerous maze without accident.

### **Forced to Zoom**

More times than he can accurately remember he was forced to "haul back on the stick" and zoom over the brow of a hill suddenly sticking its face through the fog. The Jenny famed far and wide as the ship which always "just barely clears" whatever obstacles are in its path, performed nobly.

Both Womack and Cravens, are inclined to give their planes the greater share of the credit for getting them through the "soup" safely.

"I love the old Jenny more than ever," Womack said with feeling today.

### **Couldn't Seek Altitude**

Old pilots will understand why the Iolans did not seek safety in altitude. Few flyers travel long in (unreadable).

Saturday Pilot Womack flew once in a great circle, passing the same derrick field twice, thinking all the while he was flying straight. A newly installed compass prevented him from repeating his error.

On one occasion he was forced to fly between two derricks, his wing tips on either side missing the structures by inches.

"I didn't know they planted them so close," he said.

### **Yesterday Still "Soupy"**

Yesterday the Iolans attempted to return to Iola with their families aboard. They took off but found the air still too "soupy" to make the trip possible. They waited until early today when they were able to make the flight without incident.

The poorness of the flying conditions over the week end was attested by the routes taken by airmail and transport planes over Iola. The N.A.T. Curtiss Falcon airmail ship yesterday sailed over Iola barely a hundred feet up, following closely the Santa Fe tracks. Airfast Express planes too off several times from the Chanute airport only to return for new starts because of the low-hanging fog.

The fog Saturday afternoon, according to both Womack and Cravens, was the thickest they ever observed in these parts. The ten-day siege of last fall was

“pie,” they said, compared to that of Saturday.