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Harold E. Morehouse Flying Pioneers Biographies Collection - Fowler, Robert G.

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picture machine" throughout the trip. Four times Fowler was forced down in areas where he could not possibly get out except by taking the plane to the nearest railroad and loading it onto a flat ~~hand-~~ tool ~~hand car~~ to make his take-off run down the tracks. On one of these occasions he saw a train coming just as he was ready to take off. The engineer saw a queer sight ahead and applied the brakes. Fowler hurried to take off, ~~and just cleared~~ the approaching locomotive, and as a result earned the title of "Hand Car Bob." This was undoubtedly the first time this resourceful method was ever used to get an aeroplane into the air. He also made exhibition flights at many of the major towns along the route.

Fowler reached Jacksonville, Florida on February 8th, 1912 and landed on the Moncrief Race Track at 4:30 P.M. Max Lillie and Harold Kantner, who were flying an exhibition date there, greeted him in the air and escorted him into the field. On February 17th he flew on to Pablo Beach, Florida, a coast resort, to land in the actual surf, 112 days and 2,520 miles from his start in California. His actual flying time was 72 hours on 45 days. The remaining days were spent making repairs and waiting on weather. Reportedly the same engine was used for the entire trip except about the last 140 miles. On the average, every third landing was a forced one, engine valves and spark plugs being the most serious problem. 96 spark plugs were used on the trip. In Louisiana he carried needed serum to people when all the roads were under water.

While Rodgers succeeded in crossing the continent first, ~~and in somewhat less time,~~ ~~Fowler's feat of crossing the southern section of the country at that time of year certainly deserves at least equal credit for sheer determination and flying skill.~~ For some 350 miles between western Louisiana and Mobile, Alabama there were no possible landing places enroute except dense timber, cane stubble, rice fields, marsh lands and Gulf waters. He was forced down in deep soft sand, and at other places in water as much as 12 to 15 inches deep, neither of which he could possibly take off from, and he was plagued by incessant rains over much of the route.

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