



Taking off for the 135-mile distance flight

135 Miles in a Utility Glider

by Henry Wightman

(Condensed from THE GLIDING AND SOARING BULLETIN, December, 1936)

THE story of my flight will not be a new one to those with long experience in soaring and a wide knowledge of meteorology, but to me and many of my fellow-experimentalists it proved to be a most revealing and instructive flight. The entire flight was made on thermals. Only one poorly defined cloud street put in an appearance during the trip.

I took off from Harris Hill into an almost west wind before the thermals could be considered strong. In the company of most of the other ships in the air I found eight or ten thermals at intervals of ten to fifteen minutes, but never reached an altitude of more than 1500 feet. Then I noticed that four ships had gained about 2000 feet above the landing field, and since soaring is clearly a game of "monkey see, monkey do," I returned to the field at 300 feet and found a thermal still there. I began to climb. It was difficult to keep within the bounds of the thermal, but by making smaller circles, I began to gain on the other ships. At 4000 feet, I broke through the group of four to an altitude of 5000 feet. One of the others, Merboth, followed me there, but when I entered a small cloud 200 feet above, I lost sight of him.

When I came out, I headed down wind, judging my direction by the motion of the cloud shadows on the ground, which moved fast enough for me to determine this direction almost instantly. I reached the nearest cloud

at 4000 feet and there found enough lift to take me up to 5000 feet. After repeating this performance several times, I passed under six clouds without finding any lift. By this time, I was above a small town near Binghamton, on the river, and was turning back to a fine ridge I had just passed when I caught another thermal, this one the strongest of my entire flight. From then on, everything was smooth sailing. My highest altitude was 5980 feet. On one occasion when I found myself about to enter a cloud, I shoved the nose down and flew for fifteen minutes at what was probably more than 75 mph. At another point, I was climbing more than 10 feet per second. I could quite often fly in a straight line under four or five clouds without appreciably losing altitude.

I had no idea where I was except for the general direction, until just before I landed. Suddenly, dead ahead, I spotted Storm King Mountain on the Hudson River. I knew that if I could reach that, I would not only have the American distance record, but would be in some of the best soaring country that this section affords. It was approximately 40 miles distant. As I continued, I saw directly under me, the ridge that passes through Ellenville and extends southwest. At this time, I had an altitude of 4,500 feet.

Before me was a cloudless area which I tried to cross. In my anxiety to reach Storm King, caution was thrown