

Chet Decker taking off in his Albatross

TO those who recall the forceful uplift that suddenly jolted the motorless flight movement in this country last year out of the confines of airport gliding, and carried it aloft to the high stata of soaring flight, it will seem only natural to hear that New York glider fans have at last found themselves a soaring site at Ellenville in the Catskill Mountains within easy reach of the Metropolis. It is certainly no coincidence that in the same year which recorded one of the most successful national contests with mass soaring flights that taxed the capacity of the take-off sites in Elmira, and saw an intense new interest aroused for high-performance sailplanes, local airports experienced a general exodus of glider pilots determined to find and develop new soaring sites. Some were found in the Rocky Mountains of the far west, others among the dunes on the shores of Lake Michigan and in the hills looming over the horizon of New York. It was a big step ahead in the slow but steady progress of the movement and the realization of a goal toward which the founders of the Soaring Society started to work years ago.

Following the example set in other sections of the country a number of soaring fans gathered in New York last spring and founded the Metropolitan Soaring Association to advance soaring in the area of greater New York by coordinating the efforts of clubs and individuals interested in the sport. An exploratory expedition to test soaring facilities at Ellenville was decided upon at the first meeting of the new association, and the expedition was such a complete success that subsequent meets were held before and after the Elmira contests. More extensive plans for numerous soaring meets at the Ellenville site are already under way for the coming season of cloud-hopping.

To Lewin Barringer goes full credit for discovering Ellenville and demonstrating its suitability as a soaring site by his flight in 1935. Realizing the great soaring possibilities offered by a long mountain range extending from the Catskills in New York through the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, Lew made a systematic aerial search for a take-off site near the northern end of the mountain chain. His choice fell upon a field on the ridge about 1400 feet above Ellenville, and, after making a most thorough study of weather conditions in that region, he had himself launched into space on a flight that carried him for a distance of 155 miles and close to a new national record. It was the lingering story

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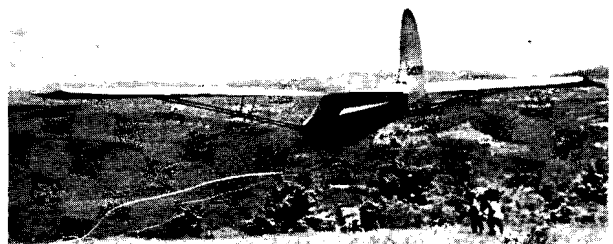
by Hans Groenhoff

of Lew's accomplishment that lured those strange winged monsters out of their haunts on airports in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut last Decoration Day and brought them to Ellenville with their entourage of pilots, helpers and spectators.

The adaptability of the new site for ridge soaring was proved by Emil Lehecka on the first day of the meet when he soared in a Prueffling for 3 hours and 21 minutes and covered a distance of over twenty miles. He was followed by E. D. Clark, who soared his Mead Challenger for 2 hours and 35 minutes, and by George Casey in a converted Zoegling, whose time was 1 hour and 40 minutes. Chet Decker's Albatross sailplane unfortunately was put out of commission on the first flight, but he deserves much credit for a most skillful landing on the sloping green of a golf course after squeezing the slender wings of his ship in between two very solid trees with a clearance of only a couple of feet on each side.

On the following day, Emil Lehecka once again demonstrated his soaring skill when he took off in the Zoegling "Special", as the Airhoppers boastfully call their ship, or the "Bathtub" as it is more fittingly classified by all non-members of the Airhoppers club, and stayed up for 40 minutes while all other attempts at soaring found a premature end after a brief struggle in a weak slope current. All in all there were 11 take-offs during the first meet and the total flying time amounted to a little more than 10 hours.

The new impetus imparted to soaring by the success of the Elmira contest brought an even greater number of glider fans and soaring craft to the second meet at Ellenville in August. These included Henry Wightman who, a short time previously, had soared over the Ellenville territory on his famous flight from Elmira to Middletown. The outstanding performance of the meet was a thermal flight by William Placek in his gull-wing Franklin. After a brief stay in the slope current of the ridge, Willy had descended to a bare 200 feet over the valley and was completely absorbed in the delicate task of locating a suitable landing spot when a powerful thermal



Take-off from Mt. Meenagha