



The Gunther Groenhoff

Hans Groenhoff

Elmira to Richland—109½ Miles in 5½ Hours

by Emil A. Lehecka

ON Monday, July 5th, at 12 o'clock I took off by airplane tow in my Rhönsperber sailplane, the "Gunther Groenhoff," on a goal flight to Watertown, N. Y. Dr. Karl Lange predicted for that day thunder storms to the northwest, and said that a distance and return flight should be easy to make by cloud hopping to Rochester and making the return flight with the storm. As I wanted to go out for distance, I chose Watertown for my goal, as this would give me the farthest straight line distance flight without mixing up with any storms. While still on the towline I went through what appeared to me to be several good lifts, but not having sufficient altitude I decided to hang on until the next one and then cut loose. At 1700 ft., according to my altimeter, which I had set at zero reading on Harris Hill, I released, but here luck seemed to abandon me for I proceeded to lose all my altitude and was seriously considering landing on the American Airways Airport, when I hit a strong thermal over a plowed field between the Airport and the hill. In this thermal I rose rapidly to an altitude of 3500 ft., my variometer registering a rate of climb of 2½ to 3 meters per second. This altitude proved to be a godsend for it enabled me to reach some big cumulus clouds which were 5 miles to the north and directly on my course.

Halfway between Horseheads and Watkins Glen I caught sight of a Minimoa, which I took to be Dick du Pont's, circling in the clouds. I approached at 4000 ft. and for a moment considered following him, but caution getting the better of me I decided that one ship in the clouds was sufficient, and headed north towards Watkins Glen. A few miles further I saw another Minimoa, probably Lewin Barringer's "Ibis", flying south also into the clouds. Deciding not to stay too long in this vicinity I flew on towards my destination, changing my course to the northeast, a few miles south of Watkins Glen.

From there on until Cayuga Lake the going was pretty slow; I had to circle carefully in the few existing thermals, which were very weak, to be able to maintain my altitude. As I flew towards Cayuga Lake at a point 5 miles north of Ithaca I started to lose altitude, due to a northeast wind blowing off the lake and preventing thermals from forming. For a moment I considered going with the wind towards Buffalo, but finally decided to stick it out and keep toward my destination. Once my mind was made up, I flew around the south portion of the lake and turned west toward a high mountain near Ithaca, over which a good cloud condition seemed to exist. While flying over the Ithaca airport at an altitude of 1200 feet I caught a slight lift of 2 feet per second. Circling over Ithaca for 35 minutes I finally reached an altitude of 3400 feet. Later on I was told that people on the airport shouted to me through the loud speaking system, but I did not hear them as the windows on my enclosure were shut. Earlier in the flight a bug had flown right through one of the openings and almost put my eye out, so to prevent further occurrences of this sort I kept the windows closed.

After acquiring all this altitude I headed east toward a nice formation of cumulus clouds. I gained an additional 1000 feet under them, and then deciding that they were almost due to break up I went back to my course. Flying by my variometer, I noticed that I could gain altitude without any clouds being present and would take advantage of these upcurrents until my variometer would stop registering climb, then I would head back on my course until the next lift was encountered. In this way I flew on until I neared the southern tip of Lake Owasco, where cumulus clouds were plentiful, and soon crossed Skaneateles Lake. At its northern tip I gained the highest altitude of my entire flight, close to 6000 ft., in a very large cumulus cloud. I circled twice in it and