

A DREAM that Became A REALITY

A Story About Gliders That Is
Different — by Bob Morse as told
to Don Stevens.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We print this story not to advocate the flying of hang gliders, but to show how the pioneer spirit is still with us. We hope that its author will soon be flying sailplanes and experiencing real soaring flight, which may not give him quite the same physical thrill but is sure to provide a far deeper satisfaction in the knowledge that he is helping to advance the twin sciences of aeronautics and meteorology.

Several times I have had a wonderful dream that I was flying with my own wings and, afterwards, thought how nice it would be really to fly in that manner. After taking my first airplane ride in an old "Jenny", I compared the difference between the two, and the airplane was found wanting. That was many years ago. About six years ago, I got the notion to bring that delightful dream to earth, and make it a reality.

My first idea was a balloon with just enough gas to counteract my weight so that, by running and jumping, I could go quite a way before landing. It is done abroad and is called "balloon hopping". It is lots of fun, but very expensive, so I gave up that idea.

I read up on heavier than air machines, reading such books as "Sky High" and Weiss' "Gliding and Soaring Flight".

Then I read Teale's "Book of Gliders" and I came across Lillienthal's description of his flights. "Six or seven meters velocity of wind suffice to enable the sailing surface of eighteen square meters to carry me almost horizontally against the wind from the top of my hill without any starting jump. If the wind is stronger, I allow myself simply to be lifted from the point of the hill and sail slowly toward the wind. The direction of the flight has, in strong winds, a strong upward tendency. I often reach positions in the air which are much higher than the starting point."

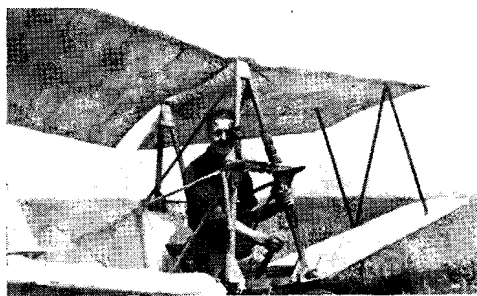
There was the answer to my dreams, so I started to design a ship that would be constructed in the modern way, with controls and a landing gear, but still enable me to take off on my feet, as did the pioneers. I had a ship built by a technician to my general design. It was made of wood and was very flimsy, but it flew. I got it up 15 feet off a 35 foot hill and flew 150 yards with many smaller hops.

The ship worked well enough to let me know that the thrill I had been seeking was there, but I needed a better and lighter one.

I designed a smaller ship, trying to keep the weight around 70 pounds. I finally talked another builder, Franklin Wolcott, who built fine gliders, into constructing it. I paid for the materials and we both owned it.

It weighed 90 pounds when finished, had two controls instead of three, using the rudder and elevators with the controls fastened on my back. I carried it on my hips by a harness, with no landing gear, although I am no "Tarzan". I made a newsreel, which was a dandy. I got about four feet off the ground and about ten feet forward.

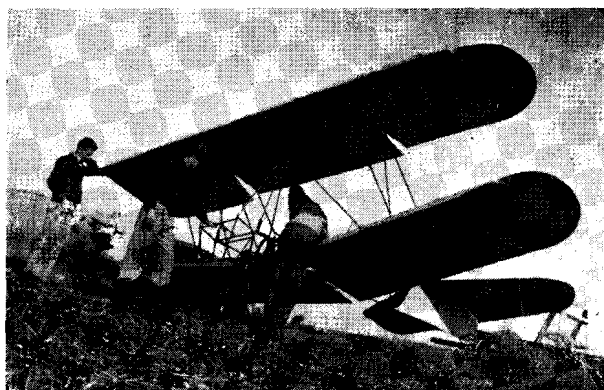
The First
Ship, 1932



The Second
Ship



Below: The
Third Ship



Frank admitted the thrill was there, but said I would never get it in that type of ship, so I designed a real "hang glider", with no controls. I talked another builder of fine gliders, Stanley A. Hall, into going in with me.

Dr. Klemperer, the noted glider pilot and Vice President of the Soaring Society of America, stopped me in my tracks with one question and explanation about that type of ship. He pointed out that, to keep the nose up in flying down a hill, one would have to force his weight back against the pull of gravity all during the flight, which would be very uncomfortable to say the least, so I went back to my original idea of a light ship, with a landing gear and controls.

I designed my new ship as a biplane. I was to run for a take-off, but auto tow was to do the actual pulling. I had two controls: elevators and ailerons, instead of rudder, as I wanted the wing to respond more quickly and surely. The same idea is carried out in the Stearman-Hammond airplane. The controls were fastened to a "joy stick", which was connected to a harness on my back, as this would leave both hands free to push the plane along the ground. Stanley Hall agreed to build it for me to my general design and his technical one. It was finished in about five months and he did a splendid job, giving me not only what I asked for, but more.

Sunday, January 16th, Don Stevens and I took the ship up on the Palos Verdes Hills and I ran down the side of the hill. I rose 10 feet and sailed forward for

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