

Soaring SITES VI

Warren E. Eaton Gliding Fields
Elmira, New York

by Earl R. Southee

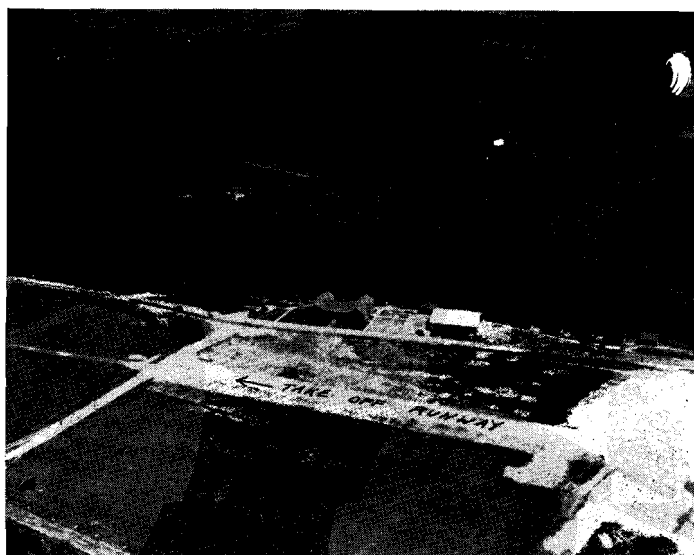
When Dr. Wolfgang Klemperer decided in 1930 that the terrain near the city of Elmira was the closest approach he had seen in America to the Wasserkuppe, little did he realize what would later develop here. That year, Jack O'Meara made the first soaring flight over South Mountain, which also became the site of the first thermal flight in the world made by Wolf Hirth.

Late in September and early in October of 1930, the National Glider Association joined with the Elmira Association of Commerce to stage here the First National Gliding and Soaring Contest. Emphasis was given to the choice of this region when Wolf Hirth made the following statement: "In comparing Elmira with Germany's famed Wasserkuppe, it is noticeable that Elmira is never hampered by fog. This condition usually spoils four or five days of the annual two-weeks German national contest."

As a result of Jack O'Meara's pioneering flight from South Mountain, the actual operations of the 1930 contest were centered on this site although gliding activities were also carried on at the now abandoned Caton Avenue Airport, situated at the base of South Mountain between the City of Elmira and the ridge. The location of this ridge results in favorable thermal upcurrents on days of north wind, from the heat generated by the many industries of Elmira. This combination of thermals and slope current makes it possible to soar with almost any type of glider.

The late Warren E. Eaton, beloved founder of the S.S.A.

Fred T. Loomis



Pilot—Earl R. Southee

Photographer—Wells Crandell

Air View of Warren E. Eaton Soaring
Camp—Looking N.E.

Soon the limitations of a site for one wind direction became evident and again Dr. Klemperer, aided by amateur meteorologists, conducted experiments resulting in additional ridges being opened up for launchings. Some of these sites were used only once, but at least an attempt was made to provide take-off areas for all possible wind directions. Mention will be made only of the three principal sites developed and used in subsequent years.

One of three, Sullivan's Monument Hill, was used only once or twice and the last time we almost lost our good friend, Commander Barnaby. This was in 1931 and Ralph had brought to the contest the famous "Humming Bird" two-place Alfaro glider, braced with plenty of wires. Every time Ralph took to the air, the whistling of the wires set up a melodious tune. This particular day the weather had been very poor for soaring elsewhere, so Ralph was elected to test the possibilities of Sullivan's Monument Hill. The author was delegated to go along as official for the day.

With a faint heart, and, as it turned out afterwards, a fainter wind, I finally gave the signal for the auto tow to start. The regular highway was being used and down this curved road came an overzealous tow-car driver. Too late I tried to signal the car driver to stop and, as good old Ralph went by me with the many wires screaming, I tried in vain to get him to release. But all I was doing was talking to myself for, in the meantime, the tow line had snagged one of the highway posts and bedlam ensued. However, Ralph managed to release the Alfaro and away soared the glider to a bumpy landing at the foot of the hill.

East Hill is the name of the second site and, when the wind has been from the west, this is where the action has taken place. Many cross-country flights have started from here. Although this particular ridge has not been so popular with the pilots, due to bad landing facilities, it still possesses possibilities for slope soaring, if the launching area could be moved about half a mile further north. Then both landings and take-offs could be effected with greater ease and safety.

The third of our original sites, "Old Number Six", is still used occasionally, but primarily for landings when