

July 4th CLOUD FLIGHT

by Udo Fischer

It must have been about 5:15 in the afternoon, and so far, July 4th had not been an outstanding soaring day even though an American Altitude record was in the making.

Several pilots had made slides to various parts of the valley around Harris Hill. My morning flight had been to a field behind the hill on route 17 E. For this reason I hesitated to make another try, especially as the airplane tow flights then in progress were mostly of short duration. My Wolf was set up, however, and I thought I might as well make use of a free airplane tow, so when my turn came I asked to be towed up the valley past Big Flats. There were some big clouds forming in that region, so it seemed the most logical goal.

During the entire tow the air seemed very smooth and having arrived near the desired clouds, with an altitude of about 1,800 feet above Harris Hill. (All altitudes given are those above Harris Hill), I cut loose with the intention of gliding around for a while and then heading back for the Hill. I soon found that there was a little lift in this region, and by circling very slowly I got a rate of climb of about $\frac{1}{2}$ to slightly less than 1 m/s. The air was so smooth that it was possible to fly spirals at very low airspeed, and I was getting a real kick out of the way the Wolf performed. The wind drifted me down the valley towards American Airlines Airport and as I intended to land back on Harris Hill, I always flew back in that direction.

Clouds had become quite numerous and although the lift was of a small magnitude, the area it covered was larger than I expected. I gradually gained altitude and felt quite elated at having reached 3,000 feet. It must have been close to six o'clock when I turned and headed back to Harris Hill. At that time I was almost directly above American Airlines Airport. The clouds had become quite large and every so often I could see a white top towering high above me. I was flying directly under one of these clouds on my way back when I reached cloud base at about 3,500 feet. At this point my rate of climb increased to 2 and 3 m/s and I was in the cloud.

I would like to point out the following facts here. My instruments consisted of an altimeter, variometer, airspeed indicator and compass. By attempting to increase my airspeed or trying to spin, immediately as I entered the cloud, I believe I could have remained below the cloud although it is doubtful whether speed alone would have done it. I had never been in a cloud but was not averse to see what one was like, so I decided to keep normal speed and expected by holding a straight compass course to come out the side near Harris Hill. As experienced pilots know and as, I hope, novice learn by theory and not practice, the above reasoning on my part was extremely bad to say the least.

The airspeed held normal for some time but the compass would not stand still. It slowly but very decidedly kept rotating. I tried to hold it on the right course with very gentle and moderate movements of the controls, but was unsuccessful. In the meantime my variometer, (Max.

reading 5 m/s), hit the stop and stayed there. The last time I looked at the altimeter it read between 7,000 and 8,000. After about ten minutes of this kind of flying the airspeed went up and continued to increase no matter what I did. Towards the end I tried hands-off flying also with no success. Coincident with the increased speed the Wolf began to buck and vibrate in an extremely violent manner. Eventually the airspeed indicator needle went to its maximum possible reading, while the vibration was bad enough to cause the loosening and loss of the cockpit cover. The degree of bucking and vibration which occurred is hard to imagine; at any rate it was sufficient to convince me that a failure in the ship might occur at any moment. Conditions were growing steadily worse. I decided to unbuckle my safety-belt preparatory to jumping out. As soon as the belt was open I was thrown out of the ship and found myself alone in the cloud, the only sensation being that of tumbling. I waited for a short time and then pulled the rip-cord. The parachute opened with a violent jerk and soon after this I came out of the bottom of the cloud. I was above the hills back of the American Airlines Airport and since these are pretty well covered with trees, most of my attention was directed toward where I would land. Later on I did look up to see the Wolf spinning fairly high above me.

I was lucky enough to land right in the center of a hay field, the landing being hard but not otherwise serious. I got out of the chute harness and watched the Wolf which landed about 5 minutes after I did, and not 60 feet away in the same field. It was spinning quite steadily, but just before hitting it flattened out and dropped in from an almost normal flying position. The nose was broken off at the back of the pilots seat but no further damage occurred.

That ended my 4th of July flight but I would like to add the following which I hope my account has brought out. My flight serves as an example of what should not be done. Pilots without blind flying instruments or the knowledge of how to use them should stay away from large cumulus or thunder clouds. It is hard to believe that such power exists in a cloud until you have met it and then you most appreciate the chute you are sitting on.

New Design

Bob Stanley had just landed after bailing out of his crippled "Nomad," and excitement was running high on Harris Hill. Officials were trying to appear calm and to persuade the crowd that nothing untoward had happened.

Suddenly a dignified old lady, showing no trace of the confusion surrounding her, approached one of the timers. "Tell me," she said, "what was that new kind of glider swinging back and forth with the big umbrella over it?"