

mountain range. So I had to leave the nice plains inviting to an easy landing, and dare the hop over the forests with a chance to glide back for a landing in the plains, in case I should not hit an upcurrent right away.

I got as much altitude as possible by using carefully every upcurrent, and then I turned the nose of the ship south toward the clouds. I left the last upcurrent at 14,000 feet above sea level. Now came several minutes of tense nerves. Even though I had expected a belt of downcurrents just around the clouds as a natural reaction against so much concentration of upcurrents, still I was astonished to find such a long lasting period of continuous downdrafts. The rate of climb indicator went menacingly down below zero, sometimes to 15 feet per second sinking speed. At the same time the mountains rose up in the direction in which I was flying. Those were uncomfortable minutes. With every second the clouds rose higher and higher, seemingly inaccessible.

Fortunately, I saw a lumber cutting factory two miles away with some open places around, so at least I did not risk the ship, if I did not succeed in finding the upcurrents of the clouds before being too close to the ground. I could already distinguish easily every tree and other singularities of the landscape. My altimeter had dropped in a discouraging way.

Just now the first edge of the clouds was above my ship. For seconds I believed all chances lost, for the rate of climbing did not recover even when irregular bumps of air proved some upcurrents to be in the vicinity. I no longer had altitude enough to search around a long time. I estimated the distance and gliding angle to the open fields around the lumber factory and then I started to make a wide circle under the next big cloud which could end in a landing on these fields. I knew that if I did not hit a strong upcurrent during the next minute, everything was lost.

Soaring and good luck belong together to make success. Thirty seconds later a heavy bump started to lift the Kranich, and a feeling of being lifted more and more in a very steady way proved to me that I was through the danger. In steep banks, I circled this first cloud upcurrent. The rate of climb showed record indications: 12 to 15 feet per second climbing speed all the time, sometimes even more. Too, I could release a little bit and draw larger circles. The altimeter rose with my good humor, which is always created by seeing the earth dropping down from a strong upcurrent.

After a while, I looked through my plane's glass cockpit to the cloud base. Boy—to my surprise the clouds were still far above, although I had 13,000 feet altitude again. But now since I had decided to go on farther, I had to go through with it. It was getting freezingly cold, and I started to feel again the effect of lack of oxygen. A few minutes more, and for the first time in my life the altimeter of my soaring plane was standing between 16,000 and 17,000 feet above sea level. I had a wonderful view all around over the dark mountains covered with forests to the south, east, and west, and over the lone plains of the plateau in the north.

I looked on my auto map. Highway 60 was going more or less the same way to the east, which I figured ought to be the best to fly along. But right now, I did not see any highways. In the plains I had seen here and there a tiny little house with a corral for cattle not far away, obviously ranches or houses for cowboys. In the forests there seemed to be quite a number of open spots to bring the ship down without a crackup, but the lone trails which I could see here and there seemed to be far

from being used every day by automobiles or even horse-back riders.

But on the other hand, I found upcurrents nearly everywhere under these clouds. Sometimes they were too strong for my taste, trying to take me up higher than I intended to go. I did not like the idea of blind-flying in this enormous altitude, because I expected icing conditions which might ice up the turn and bank, or the speed indicator. If I should have had to bail out with the parachute over such lone country, the situation would have become critical. And at the same time, the longer I was flying in these altitudes between 16,000 and 18,000 feet the less I was inclined to do anything daring, for being frozen, hungry, and lacking enough oxygen, my great enthusiasm was slowly diminishing. I started to watch myself to prevent, in time, any signs of becoming unconscious, which might happen in such a situation. I found out that it was a good thing to talk to myself loudly and energetically, using some strong expressions to pep myself up again. I tried to sing but found that it was not at all advisable because one has to breathe very regularly, often, and deeply at such altitudes.

The whole flight for more than five hours in these altitudes is now concentrated in my memory into a very short experience, more similar to a dream. I hardly remember what I felt and thought all this time. Only once, around 4:30, I was losing altitude quite rapidly and continuously, going down to nearly 12,000 feet. That made me recover, I felt warmer, breathing was easier, and even after having lost so much altitude, I enjoyed this part of the flight more than the hours before.

However, just there the Rocky Mountains rise up to 10,000 feet, so I had to get together all energies in order to win back my lost high altitude. That was the only danger I experienced, i.e., becoming indifferent because of the influence of the high altitude. By telling myself very loudly and energetically what should be done, I succeeded in going up again.

The reward was worth the effort. When I crossed over the continental divide, above the northern part of the Apache Indian Reservation, the sun, approaching the horizon, painted all country to the east in promising colors. It was not far from 6 o'clock M. S. T., and I could not yet see any settlements or highways, so I could only use every upcurrent again and again, going up as high as possible to fly farther east, where the Rio Grande could no longer be very far. At that time of the day I reached my highest altitude, 17,600 feet, not through ambition but by necessity.

At last I saw a plain valley just ahead and—cheer up, fellow—a straight line running through it. "That has been made by human hands!" was my first thought. A road, obviously an automobile road. With hands stiff from cold I unfolded my automap and compared the road with the few roads shown on the paper. After a while, approaching the plain valley by gliding along under a big cloud, I figured out that it was a road leading to Highway 60, perhaps 20 miles from Magdalena, New Mexico.

The sun approached the horizon rapidly. I did not want to risk a night landing, perhaps damaging my ship, for the price of 10 or 20 miles more, so for the first time of my soaring practice, I gave up good, strong upcurrents under clouds which seemed to stand at nearly 18,000 feet

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