



Hans Groenhof

## LYLE ALLAN MAXEY

**J**ULY 1, 1941, and it is my day in the X Y Z Club's Midwest Intermediate. After "sweating out" eight winch tows from Harris Hill, I finally get away (with the help of Bill Putnam, who painted one green for me). Whizzing upward at 1 m/s, I arrive at cloudbase of 4000 feet (on a Friday, I believe).

After this inauspicious start, things begin to happen—fast. I head for the darkest part of the cloud. Nearing it, the variometer starts winding. 1, 3, 5 m/s, then blooie, into the soup. I start to turn immediately, instead of waiting until the acceleration ceases. As a result, the thermal is not centered, and my flight path begins to resemble a 45° loop. The airspeed is varying from 20 to 70 m/h, and I wish I were home helping Mom can tomatoes.

At about 7500 feet, I pop out the side of the cloud into the clear blue sky. A short breather, then back in for Round Two. Again there is a terrific vertical acceleration lasting for seconds. As it lessens, a 1½ needle-width turn to the right is started. The air is turbulent, and at first it is all I can do to keep the turn constant, the ball centered, and the airspeed at 50 m/h.

Soon I can relax enough to glance at the other instruments. The variometer is pegged at 8½ m/s or about 28 f/s! The altimeter is winding past 10, 11, 12000 feet. Rain pelts the ship with a roar.

Every time around I hit a sinker that hangs me on the belt for two or three seconds. The strut fittings clunk down, then up again. That is the only complaint the Midwest made on the entire flight. The variometer never reads below 5 m/s in this down, so I don't bother to

move over to keep centered in the updraft.

The altimeter passes 16000 feet, and I begin to cover the thought of setting a new record. Comes 18200 feet, and the lift drops to zero. I center the needle and begin to congratulate myself. Then like a bucket of cold water comes the realization that my barograph is not calibrated to go that high! I later learn that it ran off the top of the drum at 14400 feet above release, still the best contest altitude.

So intent have I been on flying the ship, I realize only now that I am panting like a half-miler. On leaving the cloud I see for the first time the half inch of ice on the windshield, leading edge, and *venturi*. Kicking loose the now frozen rudder, I find the turn indicator completely dead within a couple of minutes after leaving the cloud!

Having set a compass course downwind, I can now enjoy the scenery for a while. The ground is hidden by stratus clouds hanging at about 10000 feet. I glide down a long, curving avenue between rows of towering cumulonimbi. Many tower thousands of feet higher than the one I have just left. Oh, for an electric turn indicator, oxygen, and a good barograph.

The ice starts melting at 14000 and is all gone by the time the ground appears. I recognize Binghamton to the north. I bear a little more south to use all my altitude without going out over the Catskills, and squeak into Lanesboro, Pa., 69 miles from Harris Hill in 1 hr. 32 min.

Cloud soaring is the most fascinating sport in the world, without a doubt. But remember, boys, tackle one your own size!