

Wurtsboro Wave

First Successful Wave Flight

BY TED PFEIFFER

ON Saturday, April 9, 1949, the gang gathered as usual at the Wurtsboro Airport for a week-end of soaring. We all had hopes that last year's luck would hold for this year and that Wurtsboro's famous thermals would maintain their consistent habits. Little did we expect the surprise that was in store. There, sitting above us, was the object of many nights of hangar soaring and theorizing—*The Standing Wave*.

The cooler-than-usual air, a strong Northwest wind of 25 mph and a long row of strato-cumulus roll clouds above the ridge provided the clue.

Alex Dawydoff and Dave Malkemus took off first in their Pratt-Read, but were unable to make proper contact. After 55 minutes they landed, reporting considerable turbulence.

At 1:30 PM I strapped on my parachute, climbed into the cockpit of my LK sailplane and was towed aloft by Don Lawrence. The air was very rough and after release I played the ridge, staying between 1800 and 2800 feet. After about an hour of this I noticed a roll cloud forming North along the ridge. Gliding toward it I started rising at 500 feet per minute until I reached its base at 3500 feet. I was reluctant to enter the cloud because the strong drift would force me into a cross-country trip for which I was not prepared. Instead I decided to fly in front of the roll cloud, and sure enough the air became smooth as glass, with a consistent lift of 500 ft/min.

After a 12 mile flight North in front of the cloud I rose in the glassy smoothness of the wave to an altitude of 7300 feet. Here, for the first time in my life, I found myself silently sailing above the clouds. For two and a half hours I flew back and forth, my altitude above the roll clouds staying a constant 2500 feet. The wind at this height must have been between 45 and 50 mph as every time I turned into it my LK stood motionless in the air.

There was a secondary wave in the lee of the mountains some five miles away, higher than the one I was in, and beyond that was the real thing sloping up to about 15,000 feet. As far as I could see the clouds extended from North to South. Looking North towards the Catskills I noticed high lenticular clouds extending approximately to 20,000 feet.

When I finally decided to land the air was violently rough below 2500 feet. Touching down at 5 PM I noticed that the wind had considerably increased in strength while surface temperature had dropped.

Two other people shared my first experience in wave soaring. Don Lawrence and Ruth Petry were up there with me in their Pratt-Read and they too were highly enthusiastic. The incredible smoothness of the wave lift must be experienced to be fully appreciated. It has a property that cancels all feeling of motion.

True, we may not have reached Bishop altitudes here at Wurtsboro, and may never look down at the valley

from 30,000 feet, nevertheless we too are proud of our "Standing Wave." Just give us time and watch our con-trails!

Silver "C" Duration on the Wave

BY ALLEN VAN NAME

I was towed off at Wurtsboro airport in my LK at about 11:40 AM on April 10, 1949, determined to make the five hour duration for my Silver "C". The wind was Northwest, about 10 mph. The tow was quite bumpy and showed signs of strong thermal activity. At 11:45 I released at 2000 feet and almost immediately hooked my first thermal. The rate of climb was 600 to 800 ft/min., maximum altitude 5400 feet above the valley. The valley floor is 567 feet above sea level.

In the early afternoon the thermals became more turbulent with momentary surges of lift to 1500 ft/min., but maximum attainable ceiling remained at 5400 feet. Many times during this flight I flew through large areas of 1000 ft/min. downdrafts, which I believe were caused by the phenomena I encountered later.

At about 3:00 PM, after spiralling up to 5000 feet, I was flying in a northeasterly direction, parallel to the ridge and about a mile downwind from it, when I noticed that I was climbing at the rate of 100 ft/min. and that the air had suddenly become so smooth that there was not the slightest quiver in the ship. I suspected that I was flying in a wave and by tacking back and forth found a maximum lift of 300 ft/min. I continued Northeast, keeping about the same distance from the ridge as before, until the lift gradually disappeared about 10 miles from where I had first found it.

My altitude was now 6400 feet. Making a 180° turn I flew the rising current back to the starting point. This brought me up to 7300 feet and I decided to fly further on the same heading despite diminishing lift. About a mile down the line I ran into some slight down, but immediately hit a bouncy "up" of 500 ft/min. into which I promptly spiralled. This bit of lift took me to 7800 feet above the valley (this was the maximum altitude of the flight, and incidentally the highest altitude ever attained at Wurtsboro). It was hard to believe, but this lift seemed to be coming from a small brush fire slightly upwind from my position.

When I could not go any higher I flew again towards the smooth lift of the wave. It must have grown weaker in the meantime as at 7000 feet I could no longer climb. I therefore flew back to the approximate location of the brush fire and, sure enough, the "up" was still there. I spent the next one-and-a-half hours above 7000 ft. circling and zig-zagging in this small area of lift.

When I was sure my five hours were completed I flew again towards the area of the wave. It was definitely weaker and I did not get zero sink until I reached the 6500 foot level. I flew 10 miles up the ridge again and back, finding it easy to maintain 6000 feet.

Having satisfied my curiosity that the lift remained in the same general location, I decided to land as I was quite cold and stiff. During the descent I found that there was still plenty of thermal activity. The landing was made at 5:15 PM.