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Hattie Meyers Junkin Papers - Newspaper articles, 1939 - 1941

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Stanley Soars Plane To 16,300 Ft. Mark To Set New Record

While a crowd of 6,000 gathered on Harris Hill, soaring pilots were making history at points beyond the range of vision of the spectators Tuesday afternoon.

The American altitude record for motorless craft was broken for the second time within a week by Aviation Cadet Robert M. Stanley when he piloted his sailplane 16,300 feet above his point of release while flying over Richford, N. Y. He bettered by 2,900 feet the record he set last Wednesday in a flight over Harris Hill in a thunderhead.

Stanley's performance was the outstanding of many spectacular experiences Tuesday, including that of the Udo Fischer who abandoned his sailplane several thousand feet in the air and took to his parachute after being sucked into a turbulent thunderhead.

Stanley's flight was the more remarkable because he started from the Big Flats airport. Early in the afternoon he was towed aloft behind an airplane from Harris Hill but made a forced landing in the valley. He took his ship apart and went to the airport where he was launched a second time from winch tow.

AFTER CUTTING loose at about 700 feet, he found ideal soaring conditions over the valley and headed his ship in a northwesterly direction. Conditions improved steadily and over Ithaca he gained 8,000 feet.

Continuing on his course he reached Richford and found a mountainous cloud before him. He turned his ship into the center of the cloud and was carried up rapidly to the 16,300-foot level.

The climb was in contrast to his flight of last Wednesday when his ship was strained and buffeted by violent currents in the thunderhead.

On his way up through the cloud Tuesday Stanley passed through a light hail which coated his wings and entered through the cowl, piling hailstones a half inch deep on the floor of his cockpit. He stopped his climb only when his instruments froze and he could no longer navigate in the dense fog. He flew out with the cloud extending another 5,000 feet above him.

From his great altitude Stanley made a two-hour glide of nearly 100 miles to East Worcester. He fell short of Watertown, his destination, because he could find no thermals in the cloudless sky he encountered. The sun was sinking rapidly.

JOHN ROBINSON, San Diego ace who with his flying companion Woody Brown, dominated the Southwest Soaring Meet at Wichita Falls earlier this summer, probably missed becoming the second "Golden C" pilot in America by a few feet Tuesday.

He soared to 9,600 feet above his point of release from an airplane tow off Harris Hill only 220 less than the 9,820 needed to qualify him for the altitude rating.



To gain the international award which Robert Stanley won last week, a pilot must soar at least 9,820 feet above his point of release and must make a distance flight of at least 186.4 miles. Robinson flew 205 miles from Wichita Falls, Tex., to Buffalo, Okla.

His flight Tuesday carried him about 13,000 feet above sea level. He was 1,300 feet above Harris Hill when he cut loose and during his one and three-quarters hour flight to gain altitude drifted approximately 20 miles north of Elmira.

He cut loose in a clear sky but gained a 30-foot-a-second lift in a forming cloud. He left this cloud and flew to another and higher cumulus cloud, circling steadily upward until he struck a light hail which forced him out. Two altimeters on his ship showed more than 11,000 feet above Harris Hill he cut through the cloud to descend.

HIS ENCLOSURE fogged over shortly after he entered the cloud and he was unable to see until shortly before he landed. He flew from near 90 degree temperature on the hill to 30 degrees at his highest point.

In other outstanding flights of the day Chester Decker of Glen Rock, N.J., in five hours flew 166 miles to Schenectady. His thermals gave out 23 miles from Albany and he coasted the rest of the way. He had set Utica as his goal.

Emil Lehecka, Long Island City veteran, soared 94 miles to Loomis Corners near Palermo, N.Y. He gained his best altitude, 5,200 feet over Seneca Lake but found the going "very rough and the thermals very choppy."

Warren Merboth, who for his flight to Roosevelt Field is credited with the longest goal flight ever made by an American from Elmira, Tuesday flew 87 miles to Cicero, N.Y.

Lewin Barringer of Orange, N.J., whose pen has equaled his flights in making soaring popular, flew a two seated plane 45 miles to Hartford, N.Y., after a takeoff from the airport.

Parker Leonard of Osterville, Mass., flew 35 miles to Ithaca and William Putnam of the ABC Soaring Club of Detroit soared 15 miles to a point two miles north of Millport.

Other flights were made by Floyd J. Sweet of Elmira, Robert J. Auburn of Buffalo, Alcide Santillio of Plymouth, Mich., Robert L. Buell of Omaha, Neb., Dr. Wolfgang Klemperer, Donald M. Hamilton of Washington, Dana Darling of Greenfield, Mass., Donald M. Lawrence of Newark, N.J., Youston Sekella of Elmira, Stanley Smith of Tonawanda and Lyman Wiard of Detroit.

WIARD, TAKING off from the airport in his Franklin utility glider (a low performance ship which usually does not soar above its point of release) soared for about an hour, reaching an altitude of 2,180 feet above release and landing in a hay field on the John Denson Farm, 10 miles north of the airport. Mr. Denson treated him to a chicken dinner and drove him back to the airport.

Bruce L. Smith of Endicott, a member of the Tri-Cities Glider Club suffered a forehead cut and bruised right knee when his plane while landing at the airport struck an automobile.

Pilot Smith was completing a 360 degree turn in tests for his private glider pilots rating certificate and was losing altitude rapidly from about 200 feet. He was almost on the ground when he saw the car and realized he could not fly over it without striking a ship it was towing. The right front and nose of the ship struck the front left wheel of the car.

Soaring Pilot Uses 'Chute As Upcurrent Seizes Plane

The Caterpillar Club has a new member today.

Udo Fischer of Ithaca and Philadelphia now is numbered among aviators who saved their lives by taking to a parachute.

Sucked into a cloud Tuesday afternoon high above Harris Hill, Fischer was forced to abandon his ship and trust to his parachute.

After "bailing out" Fischer dropped 1,500 feet before pulling his rip cord that opened the 'chute because he feared being struck by the careening craft or drawn higher into the cloud by the violent updraft.

Strangest part of the entire experience was that the ship landed within 75 feet of him after his safe landing. The craft was not damaged extensively.

FISCHER WAS flying back for a landing atop Harris Hill after soaring over the valley for some time. As he passed near the base of the cloud, described as an incipient cumulo-nimbus cloud and lying 2,500 feet above the hilltop, he was caught in a violent updraft and carried into the structure of the cloud. His air speed increased to more than 100 miles an hour and he was carried steadily upward, finally at a rate of 40 feet a second.

His plane was not equipped with proper blind flying instruments and the 22-year-old pilot has not had blind flying experience.

"I TRIED to hold the plane straight, keeping a compass course, and fly out of the cloud, but somehow I seemed to go in circles rising continually," he said. "The drafts became steadily more violent until the whole ship vibrated and my cowl (the glasswork covering over the cockpit) was blown off. I let go of the controls entirely hoping the ship would fly itself out as good ships sometimes do, but she kept circling and being drawn upward.

"Finally when I had been carried further conditions became more turbulent and the plane bucked violently. I realized I wouldn't be able to fly out and I loosened my safety belt.

"I didn't have to jump - the force of the wind pulled me out and I fell a

long while before I could pull my ripcord. I was afraid the ship would get tangled in the parachute or that I would be sucked upward.

"MY CHUTE must have opened on the lower fringes of the cloud because I made an easy descent. It wasn't very long before I saw my plane circling above me and then I was worried that it might strike me on the way down. I was lucky to land in the very center of the field because it was rather small and was bounded on all sides by trees.

In about five minutes, the ship, in a series of "flat spins which reversed themselves," came toward the field, nearly leveled off before it struck the ground, but hit on its nose and tailskid. The nose of the \$800 German sailplane, the "Goppingen I," was damaged badly but the tail and wings were unscratched.

Fischer, anxious to shoulder the blame, said he realized and had been warned by officials that only pilots experienced in instrument flight should attempt to soar in the clouds.

WOLF HIRTH, famous German soaring pilot, at several of the morning flights discussions has told stories of pilots who have "bailed out" in the cumulo-nimbus clouds and been drawn upward until they suffocated or froze to death.

Fischer is carefully guarding his barograph which landed apparently undamaged with the plane and which may contain a graphic chart of the flight.

It was Udo's first parachute jump and "I hope," he says, "it will be the last."

Will he fly again?

He will as soon as his ship can be repaired which may not be before the close of the contest.

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