

Morning View Kentucky
7 May 1958

Hello Mr. McCarthy,

When recently you mentioned the burning of the Hindenburg, I wandered to a window and looked, unseeing, out across the drenched pond-field, reliving once more the appalling eternity of those few seconds during which I nearly sent that same Hindenburg flaming down into the middle of New York City.

Early one beautiful morning, Little Brother and I were bound for old Roosevelt Field out on Long Island, our course taking us across north Jersey and New York itself. There were many plump little cumulus clouds riding low in the blue sky, their bottoms as flat as though they had been baked on a cookie sheet, and we played a game with them as we putt'd lazily along in our butterfly. Our lack of instruments would have thrown a modern pilot into panic -- the instrument panel boasting only a tachometer, oil pressure, and altimeter, plus a wobbly little automobile compass clinging uncertainly by its rubber suction cup.

With these instruments, we were taking turns at flying into the clouds about 100 feet above their bases, and seeing who could do the best job of maintaining direction and altitude through the misty nothingness.

We emerged, at about 700 feet, from Little Brother's cloud shortly before reaching the Palisades, and I took the controls as we crossed the Hudson just above the Weehawken Ferry, both of us peering down at the always fascinating river activity. As we approached the next cloud, over New York, I was still looking downstream when my brother remarked, conversationally, "Your cloud has engines."

It had. Through the swirling edges I could distinguish engine pods, and in the same instant was aware that the silvery wall so close ahead was more than yielding mist.

We were too near to either dive under or climb over the vast object in my cloud. At such a moment there is no time for conscious thought processes, and in purely automatic reaction, I closed the throttle, at the same time throwing the little plane up on one wingtip in a wild turn. As the nose passed the 90 degree point, I slammed the throttle wide open to help pull us away -- fully expecting all the while to hear and feel the spoon of our tail skid strike the great hulk which loomed between us and the low morning sun.

Nothing happened. We flew numbly back toward the Hudson and Jersey, while behind us the mighty Hindenburg slid out of the cloud and serenely continued its flight up Broadway.

The momentum of any other aircraft would have carried it smashing into the dirigible before we could turn, but our tiny plane with wide