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SUMMARY

Instruments for measuring altitude and rate of change
of altitude in blind flying and landing of aircraft and
their performance are discussed. Of those indicating the
altitude above ground level, the sonic altimeter is the
most promising. Its present bulk, intermittent operation,
and more or less unsatisfactory means of indication are
serious drawbacks to its use.

The sensitive type aneroid altimeter is now quite
generally used. Dividing the errors incident to its use
into those due to the instrument and those inherent in the
barometric method of measuring altitude, it is shown that
the instrumental errors, except the error arising from
changes in instrument temperature, do not ordinarily ex-
ceed 0.75 percent of its range (20,000 feet) when using
the instrument to fly at a definite pressure level. These
can be reduced to an uncertainty of 40 feet in landing at
an airport if corrections are applied.

Of the other errors, that due to variation in air
temperature from the temperature of the standard atmos-
phere gives rise to errors as high as 10 percent, but ig-
noring this error does not usually cause a serious loss in
safety since at any particular time it is very nearly a
constant percentage of the altitude. The error introduced
by change in the barometric pressure at the ground level
with time and place may be as much as ±300 feet in summer
and ±1,000 feet in winter, and can be corrected for only
at the time of landing by obtaining data on the air pres-
sure at the ground level from an airport. The instrument
can be used in clearing obstacles only when their eleva-
tion and location are known.

The errors in flying at a pressure level and in land-
ing are discussed in detail.

INTRODUCTION

When flying under conditions of low or zero visibil-ity, an indication of the altitude of the airplane is es-sential to safe and proper navigation. Thus,

(a) A safe altitude above the ground level must be maintained. For this purpose a knowledge of the altitude above the ground level, or absolute altitude, is required. Several organizations (reference 1) have carried on devel-opment work with some success on instruments designed to indicate the absolute altitude, but no instrument of this type is as yet quite out of the experimental stage. For this reason the aneroid altimeter, together with a knowl-edge of the topography of the country flown over, is util-ized in maintaining a safe altitude above the ground level.

(b) In making "blind" landings with the aid of one of the blind landing systems (references 2,3,4 and 5), a con-tinuous indication of the altitude above the ground level is desirable, if not absolutely essential. This need is the chief reason for the development of absolute altime-ters. The aneroid altimeter when adjusted and corrected as hereinafter discussed, must at present be generally re-lied upon for indicating the altitude above the landing field.

(c) Level flight, within reasonable tolerances, is essential in blind flying, not with reference to the dis-tance above the earth's surface, but at a level of con-stant air pressure, that is, along an isobar. Flight at a constant altitude above the earth's surface, following the changing contours, is obviously undesirable. To main-tain level flight as ordinarily understood, the actual pressure level is indicated in terms of altitude by the sensitive aneroid altimeter. The rate of change from this pressure level may be indicated either by a rate-of-climb indicator or by the sensitive altimeter and the change in attitude by the altimeter.

Neither the absolute nor aneroid altimeter indicate obstacles in the line of flight. In cross-country flying these obstacles are most generally a mountain peak or mountain side. In making landings, chimneys, towers, buildings, and power lines are the principal obstacles. No indicator of obstacles in the line of flight has as yet

been developed nor, to the knowledge of the writer, is any serious development work in progress. This is due primarily to the lack of possible methods of attack.

In cross-country flying pilots should have but little difficulty in flying at a safe altitude above peaks, relying upon the indications of the aneroid altimeter if the elevation of the highest peaks along the line of flight are known and if allowance for the variation in ground-level pressure is made. This is the only method at present available and while ordinarily sufficient in the hands of properly trained pilots on familiar air lines, is far from being as satisfactory as an indication of obstacles. Accidents from time to time in which airplanes have been flown into mountain sides are evidence of the need of a distinct means of indicating their presence ahead. The pilot should be spared the necessity of making even the simplest computation and of securing any information from the ground. It should be remarked that an absolute altimeter is not primarily useful in clearing steep mountain peaks and sides.

It appears that obstacles surrounding a landing field may be cleared by making the landing by one of the methods which have been developed (references 2, 3, 4, and 5). The removal of the obstacles in so far as possible is essential.

ABSOLUTE ALTIMETERS

Most of the development work on absolute altimeters has been on three types, commonly called the sonic, radio, and capacity altimeters.

Sonic Altimeters

Of the absolute altimeters, the sonic type appears the most promising in the present stage of development. The principal defect is that of intermittent indication and perhaps of excessive weight and bulk.

In all its forms the sonic altimeter consists of (a) a source of sound and (b) apparatus for measuring the time interval between the emission of a sound and the arrival of an echo from the ground. In one design this time interval is estimated by ear. Since the principal utility is at low altitudes and the velocity of sound is about 1,080

feet per second, time intervals of less than one second
must ordinarily be measured. One of the primary difficul-
ties is to avoid interference from the noise of the air-
craft engine and propeller.

The velocity of sound varies with temperature at a
rate of 0.19 percent per degree Centigrade. It is practi-
cally independent of barometric pressure. Both the air
speed of the airplane and the horizontal distance between
the point of sound emission and the point at which the
echo is received influence the amount of the time inter-
val, but, with proper calibration of the timer, to a neg-
ligible extent. (See reference 6.)

The characteristics of the echo vary with the ter-
rain under the aircraft to a sufficient degree so as to
give considerable information on its character, whether
forest, water, or open field.

Behm sonic altimeter.- The Behm altimeter consists
essentially of a detonating mechanism for producing the
sound, two microphones and megaphones, and a time-interval
indicator graduated in altitude units. A schematic dia-
gram is shown in figure 1. A gun, automatically fired in
the latest design, is used as the source of sound. The
time-interval indicator consists of a small flywheel A,
a projection of which is held pressed against a plate
spring B by means of an electromagnet C and armature
Q. A sector D, operated by a pinion E on the flywheel
shaft, carries a small mirror F from which a beam of
light from electric lamp G is reflected to a scale H.
The light is focused by means of a short-focus lens J
which is supported upon a plate spring which in turn is
acted upon by an electromagnet K. When the gun L is
fired, current in the electromagnet C momentarily is re-
duced by the action of the sound on the microphone M.
This releases the flywheel A and thus rotates the mirror
F. When the echo is received by the microphone N, the
electromagnet K moves the spring upon which the lens J
is mounted so that the image of the light on the scale is
deflected at right angles to the line of its motion. At
the point of oscillation of the light beam P the scale
is read. The usual range of the instrument is 100 meters
(328 feet).

Flight tests made by the D.V.L. (references 6 and 7)
show that the instrument has a mean error of ±3-1/2 meters
in the range from 20 to 100 meters, and from 1 to 2 meters

in the range below 20 meters. These tests were made with
the engine running at 1,200 to 1,250 r.p.m. The weight of
the instrument in the form described above is about 25
pounds.

G.E. sonic altimeter.- The earlier model of the in-
strument (reference 8) is shown schematically in figure 2.
The sound from a whistle W is directed downward by a meg-
aphone S and its echo is received by megaphone R. At
the instant the sound is emitted, a spring-driven timer T
is started by means of a solenoid. The indication of this
timer is observed at the instant the echo is heard through
the stethoscope ST. At low altitudes the timer is not or-
dinarily used and the altitude is based on an estimate by
the observer of the interval of time between the emission
of the sound and the arrival of the echo.

As air compressors are not ordinarily installed on
aircraft, gas is bled from the exhaust of an engine cylin-
der (EC in fig. 2) through a check valve and stored at a
pressure of about 50 pounds per square inch in the tank PT.
The whistle has a frequency of 3,000 cycles per second and
is operated every two seconds by means of a motor-controlled
valve. The control apparatus is indicated at CA. The
bleeder line BL increases the strength of the direct sig-
nal from the whistle in the stethoscope and the acoustic
filter AF filters out low-frequency components due main-
ly to the engine and propeller.

In the above design the range was made as great as
possible. With the engine running at cruising speed, indi-
cations up to 800 feet were obtained; with the engine
idling, up to 1,400 feet. The weight of the instrument is
about 30 pounds.

The above-described instrument has been lately modi-
fied to have a lower range, about 100 feet, which is all
that appears to be essential in landing blind. A metal
diaphragm periodically operated by electrical means to
produce a sound of 3,000 c.p.s., is used instead of the
whistle, thus eliminating the bleeding of one of the en-
gine cylinders. The sound received after reflection from
the earth's surface is passed through a two-stage ampli-
fier. The incident and reflected sounds are transmitted
to the radiotelephone in the headgear, giving rise to a
sound superimposed upon the radio signals.

Dubois-Laboureur sonic altimeter.- This instrument
has a unique method of indication which eliminates the use
of relays with contacts. (See references 9 and 10.) At
the instant of emission of the sound a neon lamp is light-
ed by means of a slight addition to the voltage across it.
During the time the neon lamp is lighted an electric con-
denser, the negative side of which is connected to the
grid of a vacuum tube, is being charged. At the instant
of reception of the reflected sound a control is operated
so that the neon lamp is put out. The maximum change in
the plate current, measured by a milliammeter, is an indi-
cation of this time interval and thus of the altitude.

The sound is made automatically at intervals of either
two or four seconds by a membrane vibrated by means of com-
pressed air at a frequency of 1,200 c.p.s. The echo is re-
ceived by an electromagnetic microphone.

The instrument has two ranges, 5 to 60 and 20 to 500
meters, the latter of which is obtained by adding a resist-
ance to the capacity circuit. The weight of an instrument
is stated to be 40 pounds, and 48 pounds with an air com-
pressor.

Delsasso sonic altimeter.- Delsasso (reference 11)
has developed a sonic altimeter which flight measurements
show to have a range from 4 to 700 feet. No details are
available as this is written prior to the issue of his
paper.

Radio Altimeters

A number of electrical circuits have been proposed
(references 1, 12, 13) for utilizing the interference ef-
fects of radio waves received after reflection from the
earth's surface in order to measure the altitude of air-
craft. The reflected waves are received by the oscillator
and affect to a measurable extent both its amplitude and
frequency. This has led to experiments on methods of in-
dication depending on beat frequencies and on phase differ-
ences. According to Green (reference 13) the radio altime-
ter functions accurately at altitudes above 650 feet and
is of no value below 350 feet, which is a distinct limita-
tion.

No instrument of this type thus far developed has a
satisfactory performance. The weight and bulk of the radio
altimeter are likely to be excessive for general use.

Capacity Altimeters

Considerable work on this type of altimeter has been done by Gunn (reference 14) in this country. It depends for its indication upon the change with proximity of the ground in the electrical capacitance of two plates mounted on the aircraft. The maximum range in indication attained is of the order of 100 feet, which is too low for most purposes.

Theremin has proposed a circuit in which a visual and continuous means of indication is provided. No details are available.

BAROMETRIC ALTIMETERS

The barometric type altimeter is an aneroid barometer graduated to indicate altitude in accordance with the altitude-pressure-temperature relation which defines the standard atmosphere. A single standard known as the United States Standard Atmosphere is now used for aeronautic purposes (reference 15).

Altimeters may be divided into two classes, solely on the basis of their sensitivity, into ordinary instruments and sensitive altimeters. In ordinary altimeters the sensitivity in general does not exceed one revolution of the pointer for each 10,000 feet. In the sensitive type the pointer makes one revolution per 1,000 feet.

The sensitive altimeter is relatively more useful in blind flying since it can also be used to fly level, that is, to indicate slight changes in altitude. Only the sensitive altimeter will be discussed in this report although much of the discussion will apply equally well to the older type instrument.

The use of the aneroid altimeter to measure altitude above the ground level is subject to a number of inherent disadvantages, which in certain cases may be offset by suitable corrections. The disadvantages are as follows:

(a) The instrument does not measure altitude. It measures pressure, but is calibrated in altitude units in accordance with the altitude-pressure relation of the standard atmosphere. A given reading, therefore, corresponds to a definite pressure level and not, in general, to an altitude level.

(b) The instrument indicates the altitude above a fixed
level on the earth, such as sea level, only at the time of
take-off. The indication is adjusted, usually at the time
of take-off, so that the altimeter reads zero, and then in-
dicates in standard altitude the height above the level de-
termined solely by the air pressure of the field at the time
of adjustment. But the altitude above sea level correspond-
ing to this reference pressure varies with respect to both
time and place. Thus under average summer conditions in
the United States the variation in air pressure at the
ground level introduces an uncertainty of about ±100 feet
in standard altitude at the terminus of a cross-country
flight of about five hours. Unusual conditions increase
this up to ±300 feet. In winter, the average uncertainty
is ±300 feet and may be as much as ±1,000 feet under unu-
sual conditions.

(c) The barometric method of measuring the absolute
altitude above any base depends on measurements of both
the air pressure and temperature, and on measurements of
other quantities which may be neglected here. If the alti-
tude above the ground level is desired, the indications of
the altimeter must be corrected for deviation of the tem-
perature of the air column from that assumed in the stand-
ard atmosphere used as the altimeter calibration standard.

An approximate method of computing this correction,
which is sufficiently accurate in most cases, merely in-
volves measuring two air temperatures, one at the ground
level and the other at the flight level. The average of
these two temperatures gives approximately the mean temper-
ature of the air column. The correction can then be ob-
tained from published tables, or as is often preferred, the
entire computation can be made on a computer such as has
been designed for the purpose.

(d) As a corollary of (b), the altimeter is not "self-
contained" when used in making a landing. It is necessary
to obtain knowledge, by radio or other means, of the atmos-
pheric pressure at the level of the landing field just pre-
vious to landing. This offers little trouble when a land-
ing is made at an airport with the proper facilities for
this service.

Sensitive Altimeter

History.- A brief statement on the development of
sensitive altimeters may be of interest. The first instru-
ment was built about 1923 by the Engineering Division of
the Army Air Service at McCook Field, Dayton, Ohio. The
development was continued by Julien P. Friez and Sons, and
by the Taylor Instrument Companies, both organizations
having constructed instruments for the Army Air Corps.
Although the design of the multiplying mechanism of these
various instruments differed somewhat, all were of the
same size, with the main dial six inches in diameter. The
instruments had two pointers with the axis of one of them
offset like the second hand of a watch. The range was
20,000 feet with the main pointer making one revolution
for each 1,000 feet. The other pointer was used to indi-
cate the number of revolutions of the main pointer. The
smallest scale division corresponded to a change in alti-
tude of 10 feet, the scale being evenly divided.

The Kollsman instrument was originally built to comply
with specifications issued by the Bureau of Aeronautics of
the Navy Department. It differs from the earlier instru-
ments in that the dial is 2-3/4 inches in diameter, the same
as that of the standard-service altimeter, and that the
smallest scale division corresponds to a change in alti-
tude of 20 feet. Further, the two pointers are concentric,
a change which increases the convenience in reading.

Description.- The mechanism is shown diagrammatical-
ly in figure 3. The pressure-sensitive element consists
of three evacuated diaphragm capsules D. These are free
to expand along their principal axis as the air pressure
is reduced. The element is attached to a mounting plate
at the center of the rear capsule and to a multiplying
mechanism at the center of the front capsule. As the cap-
sules deflect with change in pressure, a lever connected
to the center of the capsules rotates bell crank B and
sector S. Through gears G1, G2, and G3, pointer shaft
P_1 is rotated at a rate of one revolution for each 1,000
feet change in altitude. Pointer shaft P_2, on which a
shorter pointer is mounted, is rotated through an addition-
al gear train at a rate of one revolution for each 10,000
feet. A third and smaller pointer (not shown in the fig-
ure) which indicates the full range of the instrument in
one revolution is placed on shaft P_3. Backlash is taken
up by hairspring H. A weight M is used to balance the
mechanism for the effect of changes in orientation of the

instrument.   The spring R adds stiffness to the pressure
element.

The bimetallic bar T changes its curvature with tem-
perature and thus causes a deflection in the same way as
the pressure element. This deflection is so chosen as to
compensate at one pressure (760 mm or 29.92 inches of mer-
cury) for changes in the reading which would otherwise oc-
cur due to changes in the temperature of the instrument.

Due to the extreme sensitivity of the instrument, ac-
curacy and smooth operation is obtained only by the use of
gears cut to extremely fine tolerances and by close adjust-
ment of the mechanism.

The instrument mechanism is installed in a standard
bakelite case of the 2-3/4-inch dial size. The depth of
the case proper is about 3-5/8 inches.

The air pressure in the cockpit or cabin of an air-
plane may deviate from the static air pressure by as much
as an equivalent altitude of 100 feet under the conditions
of flight, which introduces an uncertainty of the same
amount in the indications of altimeters. This is avoided
by connecting the case of the altimeter to a static tube
mounted on a strut, usually that of the pitot-static air-
speed meter. It is obvious that the case of the altimeter
must be airtight against this small differential pressure.

Adjustments.- Altimeters are constructed with adjust-
ments which greatly facilitate their usefulness. These
adjustments have taken various forms in an effort to meet
the various conditions of operation, and it is not evident
that any one adjustment is universally accepted as satis-
factory. Four of these are briefly described.

(a) One type as shown in figure 4, is equipped
with a knob K for simultaneously rotating the pointers
and the small triangular markers or indices M in oppo-
site directions. Assuming no instrumental errors, the
pointers will indicate the altitude above the particular
pressure level corresponding to the indication of the mark-
ers. If the markers are adjusted to read zero (fig. 4A),
the pointers will indicate zero when the instrument is sub-
jected to an air pressure of 760 mm (29.92 inches) of mer-
cury (zero altitude), and also will indicate altitudes
above (or below) this reference level at other air pres-

sures.   If the markers are adjusted to indicate 210 feet, as shown in figure 4B, the pointers will indicate zero when the air pressure has the value corresponding to an altitude of 210 feet.

It is thus apparent that if it is possible to adjust the altimeter markers to the altitude corresponding to the pressure at the airport ground level just previous to making a landing, the pointers will indicate, except for instrumental error, the altitude above the landing field.

(b) In another type of adjustment the altitude dial only is rotatable and is provided with an index for indicating pressures on a sub-dial as shown in figure 5. The direction of increasing values is clockwise for both dials.

Assuming no instrumental errors, the pointers indicate the altitude above the level at which the air pressure is that indicated on the pressure dial.   Thus, in figure 5 the pressure dial is set to read a pressure of 30.22 inches of mercury.   The pointers will theoretically read zero when the instrument is subjected to this pressure.

It is seen that except for adjusting to a pressure instead of to an altitude, this arrangement is equivalent to that described under (a).   It has one advantage in that there is no necessity for attention to plus and minus values as is the case in adjusting to a reference altitude. A disadvantage is that some provision must be made so that the pressure scale has an adequate range and, in order to hold to a simple mechanical design, does not exceed one revolution.   This can be done by having both the pressure and altitude dials rotatable simultaneously in the same direction, the altitude dial rotating at the more rapid rate. Such is the case in the instrument shown in figure 5, where the pressure scale is only one third as open as the altitude scale and consequently the ratio of the rates is 3 to 2.   This scheme has obvious limits, since it reduces the sensitivity of the adjustment and thus fails to utilize the full sensitivity of the altimeter.

(c) An adjustment which is equivalent to type (b) is that in which the altitude dial is fixed and the pressure dial and pointers are rotatable, as also illustrated by figure 5.   If the pressure and altitude scales increase both in a clockwise direction, as in figure 5, the pointers and dial rotate in opposite directions.   As

for case (b) it is necessary to compress the pressure scale
so as not to exceed one revolution, which is accomplished
by rotating the pressure dial at a slower rate than the
pointers. In figure 5 this rate is 3 to 1. The comments
made under (b) on the limitations apply with equal force
to this type.

(d) The methods of adjustment thus far described
are particularly useful in measuring altitude in landing.
In level flight it is desirable to have the pointer hori-
zontal so that its movement upward indicates climb, and
downward, descent. This requires in general that the en-
tire mechanism, including the pointers and the dial, be
rotatable.

In one experimental design the altimeter has only a
sensitive pointer, thus necessitating another altimeter
for indicating the altitude. In this design the entire
mechanism, including the pointer, but usually excepting
the dial, is rotatable by means of a knob. When the alti-
tude is reached at which flight is to be maintained, the
mechanism is rotated so that the pointer is opposite a
fixed index.

It has been common practice to include a means for
making only one adjustment on altimeters so that up to the
present a choice must be made between an adjustment for
landing such as described under (a), (b), or (c), or for
level flying. The instrument adjustable for utility in
landing is usually preferred. If it were found feasible
by means of a simple mechanism to incorporate in a single
instrument the adjustment useful in making a landing, ei-
ther (a), (b), or (c) as described, and that for flying
level, as stated under (d), the possibilities of the aner-
oid altimeter could be exploited to the maximum.

Errors of altimeters.- In considering the errors of
sensitive altimeters, it should be recalled that the small-
est scale division on the dial equals 10 feet of altitude
and that the instrument can be read to a precision of 2
feet in the laboratory and not less than 5 feet in flight.
The accuracy of engineering instruments is usually ex-
pressed as a percentage of the maximum range. For these
altimeters the accuracy is 0.05 percent if the errors do
not exceed the smallest scale division of 10 feet. When
it is remembered that most engineering instruments with an
accuracy of one percent are satisfactory, it is obvious
that in considering a higher accuracy many sources of er-

ror must be considered which may ordinarily be neglected.
A thorough consideration of possible errors and their eval-
uation in the laboratory is the more important since a num-
ber of the errors are indeterminate under the conditions
of flight.

The errors of altimeters are considered in detail in
a report now in preparation on altitude instruments and
therefore will not be given here. It is necessary, how-
ever, to define briefly the various errors and to include
some data.

Scale error is the amount by which the instrument at
a temperature of +20°C. fails to indicate the altitude in
the standard atmosphere when subjected to the pressure
corresponding to this altitude. It is a measure of the
accuracy with which the mechanism of the instrument has
been adjusted to indicate altitude in accordance with the
standard altitude-pressure relation. The test is ordina-
rily made with the markers of the altimeter set to zero
or the pressure scale to 760 mm (29.92 inches) of mercury.
The scale errors for small deviations from these settings
(1,000 feet) do not differ substantially.

The scale errors of a representative instrument are
given in figure 6, in which curve A shows the errors
while the instrument was subjected to decreasing pressures,
and curve B, the errors for pressures increasing back to
atmospheric.

The results of three scale error tests made on suc-
cessive days on an altimeter in the altitude range -1,000
to +400 feet are shown in figure 7. It is seen that the
deviation of the individual errors from the best curve
through all of the points does not exceed 15 feet. This
value is representative of average acceptable instruments.

Temperature errors are changes in the indication of
the instrument due solely to changes in instrument temper-
ature. These are mainly due to the effect of temperature
on the elastic moduli of the pressure element. Altimeters
are usually compensated for the effect of temperature at
zero altitude. For use in landing, the temperature error
at the landing level should be relatively small, which is
not necessarily the case when compensated only at zero al-
titude. It should be noted that altimeters have been con-
structed which have been compensated for the effect of tem-
perature, not only at zero altitude, but at all altitudes
in the range of indication.

The scale errors at a number of temperatures are given in table I for an instrument typical of the performance of those now available and for an earlier model with complete temperature compensation. It is seen that the differences in error at all altitudes is, on the whole, much less for the instrument with complete temperature compensation but that the temperature compensation at zero altitude is better for the typical instrument.

TABLE I

Scale Errors of Two Sensitive Altimeters
at Various Temperatures

Reading feet	Typical instrument				Temperature compensated altimeter	
	Scale error in feet at					
	45°C.	26°C.	−15°C.	−35°C.	24°C.	−35°C.
0	+24.	+4	+16	0	−15	+25
5,000	0	−24	−40	−48	−50	+30
10,000	+47	+22	−40	−84	−80	+10
15,000	+148	+99	−22	−72	−100	+5
20,000	+268	+180	−16	−88	−10	+85
25,000	+424	+308	+56	−60	−	−

Hysteresis and after effect.- When the scale errors for both altitude increasing and altitude decreasing are plotted against altitude, the difference in error given by the two curves at a given altitude is defined as the hysteresis, or perhaps more correctly, the lag of an altimeter. This difference at zero altitude, or for all practical purposes at atmospheric pressure, is usually called the after effect. The after effect in good instruments practically disappears after the instrument has been rested for 12 to 24 hours.

At 10,000 feet the hysteresis of the instrument for which the scale errors are given in figure 6 is 30 feet, which is the gap between the curves A and B. Similarly the after effect (at an altitude of 300 feet) is 40 feet. Ordinarily the difference in the scale corrections given by curves such as A and B is a maximum at about the middle altitude and for most instruments slightly exceeds that for curves A and B.

Drift and recovery.- It is well known that the deflection of instruments depending upon an elastic system changes with time. In the case of altimeters this change is evaluated by subjecting them to a definite change in pressure and observing the subsequent indications. The increase in indication after the first reading, which is taken as soon as possible after the pressure change has been completed, is usually known as the drift. When the instrument is again subjected to the original pressure after the drift has been obtained, drift again occurs which for convenience is called recovery. A definite time elapses before the instrument again indicates the original reading.

Drift curves are shown for two different altimeters in figures 8 and 9. In obtaining the data in figure 8 the altimeter was subjected to a decrease in pressure from 756 to 524 millimeters of mercury (9,800 feet) in 35 seconds. After 1-1/2 minutes and at subsequent intervals of time, the altimeter and a mercurial barometer, the latter measuring the pressure to which the altimeter was being subjected, were read. The change in the reading of the altimeter is plotted as the drift, zero time being taken as the instant at which the pressure reduction was completed.

The data in figure 9 were obtained similarly except that the pressure was reduced from 768 to 430 millimeters of mercury (15,300 feet) in 30 seconds, and the first reading was obtained 2-1/2 minutes after the pressure reduction was completed. In both figures the drift is given both in feet and in equivalent pressure units.

It is obvious that the drift commences at the instant the pressure change commences and that a great deal of drift has occurred in the time interval between the instant at which the pressure reduction ceased and the first reading was taken. The drift is most rapid initially.

Recovery curves are also shown in figures 8 and 9. The recovery is obtained from readings taken at the conclusion of the drift test and after the instruments are again subjected to atmospheric pressure. The altimeter and mercurial barometer are read at intervals of time immediately following the increase to atmospheric pressure. The change in reading subsequent to the first reading is called the recovery. In general, after the drift test, altimeters read higher at a given pressure and gradually approach their original reading. The recovery may be said to be complete when the altimeter regains its original reading. The difference between the error at complete

recovery and the recovery at a given instant of time is of-
ten called the after effect. Although the experimental
procedure appears to be different, the after effect follow-
ing drift and that following a scale-error test are caused
by the same property of the elastic system; namely, that
a deformation depends upon time as well as the load.

In obtaining the recovery curve shown in figure 8,
the pressure was increased after the one hour-drift test
from 530 to 755 millimeters of mercury in about 20 seconds.
The first reading was taken one minute later and is plot-
ted as zero recovery at the time of one minute. The sub-
sequent changes in the reading of the altimeter are plot-
ted as the recovery. A reading taken 17 hours later showed
the recovery to be complete, that is, the reading of the
instrument was then the same as before the drift test, af-
ter correcting for the difference in air pressure.

The recovery curve shown in figure 9 was obtained
similarly, except that the pressure was increased from 430
to 766 millimeters of mercury in about 10 seconds and the
first reading obtained 50 seconds after the increase in
pressure was complete. After 16 hours the instrument had
failed to return to its reading before the drift test by
18 feet. This failure to regain the original reading is
not a time effect, but probably due to a mechanical imper-
fection.

It has been shown by a number of investigators that
if the drift has continued until the drift-time curve is
practically asymptotic, the recovery and drift curves are
practically identical if the drift and recovery are ex-
pressed in terms of pressure units rather than altitude
units. The relation is evident, in a measure, by inspec-
tion of figures 8 and 9, but experimental difficulties
prevent observations at the precise instant at which drift
and recovery commence, so that the direct comparison is
measurably imperfect. The equivalence of drift and recov-
ery is of value in estimating the amount of recovery at
ground level which will occur following a flight of some
hours at a given altitude.

A further aid in estimating recovery is the fact that
for the same time duration the ratio of the drift in pres-
sure units to the pressure difference producing it is a
constant independent of the pressure difference (or alti-
tude). This statement must be considered as approximate
and subject to the errors attendant upon the difficulty
with which drift is measured during its commencement.

Vibration and friction.- The instruments are subject-
ed in the laboratory to a circular vibration 1/32 inch in
diameter, varying in frequency from 1,000 to 2,000 cycles
per minute. The plane of the vibration is 45° from the
horizontal. Laboratory tests on the best of the sensitive
altimeters have shown that:

(a) The natural frequency of the mechanism as a
whole is not between 1,000 and 3,000 c.p.m. The extreme
motion of the pointer with reference to the dial varies
from 5 to 10 feet in the above frequency range, and is not
more than 20 feet in the range from 2,000 to 2,500 c.p.m.
Ordinarily if the vibration has a frequency near the natu-
ral frequency of the altimeter, readings are difficult to
make on account of the excessive amplitude of the pointer
vibration, and in addition, the resultant wear and strain
in the mechanism usually causes early failure of the instru-
ment.

(b) The change in error at atmospheric pressure
for first-class altimeters after vibration for three hours
was practically zero.

(c) It was also found that the reading changed
from 5 to 10 feet while the instrument was being vibrated.

The above results are not conclusive, because service
conditions in general deviate from the test conditions.

Friction, if not excessive, causes little error or un-
certainty in the reading of sensitive altimeters if they
are subjected to a vibration with an amplitude of at least
0.005 inch, which is ordinarily present under service con-
ditions. When the amplitude of vibration is less, as may
be the case on instrument boards when the engine is throt-
tled down, the error due to friction is usually excessive.

The friction is measured during a scale-error test by
noting the difference in reading at various points on the
scale before and after tapping or vibrating the instrument
lightly. Differences greater than 60 feet are excessive.

Secular errors.- It has been found that the error at
atmospheric pressure, that is zero altitude, changes with
time and further, tests show that the entire scale-error
curve is shifted by the amount of the change. This pro-
gressive change in error has been called the secular error
or zero shift. It is in the main caused by a combination

of the release of internal stresses and a drift in the di-
aphragm capsules, and can be avoided in large part by ar-
tificial seasoning and heat treatment. Short-time tests
on sensitive altimeters during which they were subjected
to atmospheric pressure only showed a progressive change
in the scale errors of the order of 10 feet in 100 days.
The deviation of individual observations from the smoothed
curve was ±10 feet. The deviations from the curve for a
few days following scale-error tests were much greater,
roughly +20 feet. The secular error is such that for most
altimeters the reading at a given pressure decreases with
time.

Position error.- This error is the change in reading
due to the effect of statically unbalanced parts when the
instrument is oriented about its principal horizontal axes.
The maximum change in reading between any two positions
for a well-balanced instrument does not exceed 5 to 10
feet.

Installation error.- The instrument case must be con-
nected to a static head such as that of the pitot-static
tube, in order to eliminate the effect of variations in
the air pressure in the cockpit.

Lag in reading.- At high rates of climb or descent an
appreciable time lag in indication may occur due to a dif-
ference between the pressure within the case of the indi-
cator and that at the static tube. This difference in
pressure or lag ΔP, is given by

$$\Delta P = \lambda R \tag{1}$$

where λ is the lag constant in seconds, and R is the
rate of change of pressure per second of the atmospheric
pressure. The lag constant λ varies with the particular
installation and can be computed by the formula:

$$\lambda = \frac{8 \mu l C}{\pi r^4 P} \tag{2}$$

where μ is the coefficient of viscosity of air
             (173×10^{-6} poises at $0^\circ C$).

          l is the length in centimeters of the line
             connecting the static tube with the in-
             dicator.

C   is the volume in cubic centimeters of the
    air chamber, that is of all of the indi-
    cator cases, altimeters, and air-speed in-
    dicators, connected to the static tube.
    (226 cc for sensitive altimeter cases and
    157 cc for air-speed indicator cases).

r   is the radius of the bore in centimeters
    of the connecting line (0.147 cm for 3/16-
    inch line and 0.225 cm for 1/4-inch line).

P   is the atmospheric pressure in dynes per
    square centimeter (assumed 25 inches of
    mercury or 0.84×10^6 dynes per square
    centimeter).

With these units, λ is obtained in seconds.

The constant λ can be directly measured for a partic-
ular installation, consisting of one or more instruments,
by a simple method. It is the time required for the pres-
sure (not speed) difference to become 1/e or 37 percent of
the initial pressure difference. The case and lines must
be leaktight. A suction is applied to the static tube suf-
ficient to deflect the pointer of an air-speed indicator,
if it is part of the installation, to 100 miles per hour
or knots. The static tube is suddenly opened to the at-
mosphere and the time interval observed for the pointer to
change its reading from 100 to 61 miles per hour or knots.
This time is the lag constant.

If the lag constant is small, the time may be meas-
ured for the speed to fall from 100 to 37 miles per hour
or knots, in which case the lag constant is one half of
the observed time. The latter is the time required for
the pressure difference to become $1/e^2$ or 13.5 percent
of its initial value.

If no air-speed indicator forms part of the installa-
tion, apply a suction to the static tube sufficient to
change the altimeter reading 2,000 feet and then suddenly
release the suction. The lag constant is the time for the
reading to decrease 1,280 feet or to a reading of 720 feet.
One half of the time for a decrease of 1,740 feet (read-
ing of 260 feet) also equals the lag constant.

For an error due to lag equal to 10 feet at an alti-
tude of 5,000 feet, ΔP is found to equal approximately

0.15 inch of water. Values of the lag constant for this
value of ΔP for various rates of climb and descent, com-
puted by equation (1), are given in table II. The maximum
lengths of tubing which can be used, as computed by equa-
tion (2) and verified experimentally, based on the above
values of the lag constant and the values of the constants
pertaining to the installed instruments, are also given in
table II. At altitudes below 5,000 feet the lag in indica-
tion will be less than 10 feet and above 5,000 feet greater,
for the given lengths of line. For lags in excess of 10
feet, the length of line will be proportionally longer.

TABLE II

Static Pressure Lag

Maximum length of line which can be used if the lag
due to climb or descent is not to exceed 10 feet at an al-
titude of 5,000 feet.

Instruments	Rate of climb or descent ft./min. at 5000 feet	Lag constant seconds	Length of 3/16-inch line feet	Length of 1/4-inch line feet
1 altimeter	500	1.32	135	740
do.	1000	.66	67.5	370
do.	2000	.33	34.0	185
do.	5000	.13	13.5	75
1 air-speed indicator 1 altimeter	500	1.32	79	408
do.	1000	.66	39.5	204
do.	2000	.33	20.0	102
do.	5000	.13	7.9	41
2 air-speed indicators 2 altimeters	500	1.32	39.5	204
do.	1000	.66	19.5	102
do.	2000	.33	9.8	51
do.	5000	.13	4.0	20.5
3 air-speed indicators 3 altimeters	500	1.32	26	144
do.	1000	.66	13	72
do.	2000	.33	6.5	36
do.	5000	.13	2.6	14.5

Volume of sensitive altimeter assumed 226 cc; of air-speed
indicator, 157 cc.

Accuracy in Measuring Altitude

The instrumental errors of an altimeter when used to measure the altitude of the aircraft above the earth's surface in a cross-country flight, are as follows:

(a)   Scale errors.
(b)   Friction and vibration errors.
(c)   Secular errors.
(d)   Position errors.
(e)   Temperature errors.
(f)   Drift.
(g)   Hysteresis.

In addition to the instrumental errors, the accuracy is affected by the following more serious errors inherent in the barometric method.

(h)   Deviation of the temperature of the air column from that assumed in the standard atmosphere.

(k)   Change in the atmospheric pressure at the reference level or base.

(m)   Variations in the elevation of the surface of the earth.

It will be seen that the errors (a) to (d) inclusive are readily determinable for each instrument, and that corrections for these errors can easily be applied in flight. Of the remaining errors, the temperature error (e) is indeterminate owing to the added inconvenience of measuring the temperature of the instrument, but the construction of instruments compensated for temperature at all altitudes offers no practical difficulties other than that of increased cost. The drift and hysteresis effects (f) and (g) are indeterminate since they both depend on time and the previous elastic history of the instrument.

The errors (h), (k), and (m) can be eliminated only by obtaining information from the ground. To correct for error (h) requires a knowledge of the temperature of the air column and the computation of a correction to be applied to the altitude obtained after correcting the altimeter reading for instrumental errors. To correct for error (k) requires a knowledge of the barometric pressure at the reference level at the position immediately below the airplane and the consequent readjustment of the dial of the

altimeter, or its equivalent, to indicate zero at this
reference level. It is obvious that a knowledge of the
elevation above sea level of the earth's surface immedi-
ately beneath the aircraft is required to correct for er-
ror (m).

The magnitude of the instrumental errors can be eval-
uated with considerable precision for particular cases
when using a first-class instrument. Thus, assuming the
instrument in a rested condition for at least 12 hours,
the errors in the indication will be about as given in ta-
ble III for a flight from 5 to 10 hours, at either 5,000,
10,000, or 15,000 feet. The magnitudes of errors inherent
in the barometric method, (h), (k), and (m) are also given
in table III. It is seen that corrections must be applied
for the latter errors if a performance consistent with the
smaller instrumental errors is to be realized.

TABLE III

Errors in Indication of Altimeter in Cross-Country Flight

Description	Error in feet
(a) Scale errors, up to	±50
(b) Friction and vibration errors, up to . . .	±15
(c) Secular errors in 50 days	−10
(d) Position error, up to	±10
(e) Temperature error, feet per °C., up to . .	±2
(f) Drift in 5 hours at 5,000 feet	+25
" 10,000 "	+50
" 15,000 "	+75
(g) Hysteresis, not exceeding	+50
Hysteresis, for small deviations from a given altitude	10
(h) Correction for deviation at start of flight from standard temperature of the air column, up to 10 percent of the indicated altitude. Error due to change in temperature of air column during flight of about 5 hours, up to about 4 percent of the indicated altitude.	

(k)   Effect of change in atmospheric pressure in
       flight of 5 hours:

In winter, up to	±1,000
In summer, up to	±300

(m)   Errors due to changes in elevation of earth's
       surface are extremely variable.

Consider now the case when corrections are applied
for the errors as presented in table III. The residual
of errors (a), (b), (c), and (d) as a whole will be about
±10 feet, and is unlikely to be as much as ±20 feet. As-
suming that a rough estimate (within 10°C.) of the average
temperature of the instrument during flight be made while
on the ground and a correction based on this be applied,
the residual uncertainty in the temperature error (e) will
be about ±20 feet. The exact correction to be applied for
the drift and hysteresis, (f) and (g), cannot be easily
determined. Since most of the drift at a given indication
occurs within the first half-hour, an approximate correc-
tion can be applied on this basis. Hysteresis will be
avoided by not flying much above the average altitude
at which the flight is to be made. This procedure should
reduce the uncertainty due to both drift and hysteresis to
about 20, 30, and 50 feet at 5,000, 10,000, and 15,000
feet, respectively.

When the altimeter is adjusted for the change in air
pressure at the ground level, the residual uncertainty in
the error listed as (k), should not exceed ±20 feet under
favorable weather conditions, and with proper equipment
for securing the data.

When the approximate method of determining the mean
temperature of the air column is used in finding the tem-
perature correction (h), the uncertainty in the corrected
altitude ordinarily does not exceed one percent of the al-
titude, but may be as much as four percent. It should be
emphasized that this error is proportional to the altitude
in contrast to the fact that many of the other errors are
independent of altitude.

A correction cannot be applied for the deviation of
the mean temperature of the air column (h), in table III,
unless the temperature of the air at the ground level be-
low the airplane is known. In flights reasonably close to
the base, knowledge of the air temperature at this point

will be sufficient, in which case the residual uncertain-
ty due to the change in temperature is practically zero.
However, the uncertainty in the temperature correction
considered in the preceding paragraph still remains.

Summarizing, after applying all corrections, the over-
all uncertainty in the altitude due to instrumental er-
rors may be as much as about 50 feet in a flight at 10,000
feet for 5 to 10 hours. This means that flight at a def-
inite pressure level can be maintained with errors not ex-
ceeding 0.5 percent. When corrections are also applied
for the remaining errors, which are listed as (h) and (k)
in table III, there remains an average uncertainty of about
one percent in the true altitude above the base or refer-
ence level. To this must be added whatever uncertainty
exists in error (m).

Performance in Flying Level

When poor visibility or fog is encountered, the air-
plane is flown level mainly for the purpose of maintaining
the normal flying attitude. The actual value of the alti-
tude is not required with an accuracy greater than the in-
strumental errors which, therefore, can be neglected. The
other errors may have to be considered.

The error caused by variation of the air pressure at
the reference level can be corrected in flight by shifting
the zero of the instrument, but information as to its value
must be received from a ground station.

A rough calculation on the ground before the flight
will give, with sufficient accuracy, the correction for
the effect of the deviation of the air temperature from
that assumed in the standard atmosphere. The indicated
flying altitude should be such as to include this correc-
tion and also as to be at an altitude high enough to clear
the ground at all points of the course.

Pitching of the airplane is measured in terms of
change from the chosen altitude which is indicated by a
sensitive altimeter with a sensitivity of at least 10 feet,
or perhaps 5 feet.

Use of Sensitive Altimeter in Landing

The factors affecting the accuracy of the indication
of an altimeter in landing are given below:

(a)   Scale errors.
(b)   Friction and vibration.errors.
(c)   Secular errors.
(d)   Position error.
(e)   Temperature errors.
(f)   After effect.
(g)   It is always necessary to reset the altimeter to correspond with the atmospheric pressure at the ground level of the landing field.

Of these errors it is only necessary to consider (g) the methods and error of resetting the altimeter in flight. The types of adjustment on the altimeter have been considered previously. There are four forms in which data may be given the pilot.

(A) At present it is the practice on many air lines to radio the sea-level pressure to the pilot who then sets the altimeter so that this pressure is indicated upon the pressure dial. Allowing for instrumental errors, the altimeter will indicate altitude above sea level and read upon landing the elevation of the landing field above sea level. To be of use, it is obvious that the pilot must know the elevation above sea level of the landing field.

The reduction to sea level must in general be made by using the standard atmosphere to which the altimeter is calibrated, in contrast to the method used in determining the sea-level pressure for meteorological purposes. The difference in the two sea-level pressures, one obtained for meteorological use and the other for resetting the altimeter, is very marked at mountain or plateau stations. Even at low-elevation stations the difference in method of reduction may give significant differences in the sea-level pressure. The reduction to sea-level pressure for meteorological purposes involves the use of a mean temperature of the hypothetical air column below the landing-field level to sea level which varies with the observed air temperature, and in high-elevation stations, involves the application of a "station" correction.

To determine the sea-level pressure for resetting the altimeter, the atmospheric pressure at the landing-field level is measured and the elevation of the landing field must be known. The altitude of the landing field is subtracted from the altitude in the standard atmosphere (reference 14) corresponding to the atmospheric pressure. The pressure in the standard atmosphere corresponding to this

difference in altitude is the sea-level pressure. In the
method now used on some air lines, a sensitive altimeter
with a pressure scale (fig. 5) is installed on the ground
at the landing level. The indication on the pressure scale
when the pointers are adjusted to indicate the elevation
of the landing field is the desired sea-level pressure,
neglecting instrumental errors.

As an example of the method of computing the pressure
to be broadcast, assume the elevation above sea level of
the landing field to be 4,200 feet and the observed baro-
metric pressure to be 25.34 inches (643.6 millimeters) of
mercury. In the standard atmosphere 25.34 inches of mer-
cury is equivalent to 4,525 feet. Subtracting 4,200 feet
from 4,525 gives 325 feet. The altitude of 325 feet in the
standard atmosphere is equivalent to 29.57 inches (751.1
millimeters) of mercury. The latter pressure is broadcast.
If the sensitive altimeter is used on the ground, its alti-
tude indication is set to 4,200 feet, whereupon the pres-
sure reading should be 29.57 inches of mercury.

(B) The air pressure at the landing-field level may be
broadcast to the pilot.

In this case the aircraft altimeter is set so that the
pressure dial indicates this pressure. Altitudes above the
landing-field level are then indicated and a zero indication
is obtained upon landing, if the instrumental errors are al-
lowed for. As in the previous case this procedure has the
possibility of confusion with the sea-level pressures which
may be broadcast.

Referring to the example considered in case (A), the
observed barometric pressure, 25.34 inches of mercury, is
broadcast.

(C) Two alternative procedures in which altitude, in-
stead of air pressure, is broadcast are believed to be more
convenient. In the first of these the altitude correspond-
ing to the sea-level pressure is broadcast.

The markers of the altimeter are set to the broadcast
altitude whereupon altitudes above sea level are indicated
and upon landing the altimeter will indicate the elevation
above sea level of the landing field. Obviously this ele-
vation must be known to the pilot if the resetting is to be
of any value.

As an example, assume the elevation and sea-level
pressure given in case (A). As before, 25.34 inches of
mercury is equivalent to 4,525 feet in the standard atmos-
phere. Subtracting 4,200 feet, the landing-field eleva-
tion, from 4,525 feet gives 325 feet, the altitude which
is to be broadcast. It should be emphasized that the al-
titude should not be that corresponding to the sea-level
pressure determined for meteorological purposes.

(D) In the second procedure the altitude in the stand-
ard atmosphere corresponding to the air pressure at the
landing level is broadcast.

The markers of the altimeter are set to this altitude
following which altitudes above the landing field are in-
dicated and a zero indication is obtained upon landing.

If, as before assumed, the barometric pressure at the
landing level is 25.34 inches of mercury, the altitude
broadcasted is 4,525 feet.

It is understood that pilots on air lines prefer the
indication of altitude above sea level obtained as out-
lined under (A) and (C) since the altimeter indication is
used not only in landing but also to clear mountains and
hills enroute. The equipment is available on air lines
only for using broadcasts in accordance with procedure (A)
(or (B)) while the altimeters for the air services are de-
signed only for procedure (C) (or (D)).

From many points of view the mercurial barometer is
unsatisfactory for measuring the pressure to be used in
setting altimeters just before landing. The Fortin type
barometer requires considerable time to read; all barome-
ters require the application of a number of corrections
which, however, can be grouped into one table for use at
any one station; uncertainty exists as to the degree of
vacuum above the mercury column; and the mercury in the
cistern and often in the tube, gets dirty with time, lead-
ing to additional error. Designs of mercurial barometers
eliminating some of these uncertainties and difficulties
are available, but at rather high cost.

An aneroid barometer offers considerable possibilities
for use at airports. The scale can be calibrated in alti-
tude units if altitude is to be broadcast, in which case
it will not differ essentially from the airplane altimeter.
The dial in either case should be fixed to the case. The

pointer can be set once for all so that the indications at
any given station are sea-level pressure or the equivalent
altitude, or landing-field pressure or the equivalent al-
titude. The instrument is simple to read and should be of
such quality that the application of one correction only
is required, that for scale error. Unfortunately, the in-
struments now available including the sensitive altimeter,
have a zero shift with time, or secular error, which re-
quires that they be checked from time to time against a
standard mercurial barometer. This shift can be practical-
ly eliminated by the instrument maker since it has been
done in isolated instances. Applying the principles of de-
sign used in the sensitive altimeter but substantially re-
ducing the sensitivity, which can be done without sacri-
fice of accuracy, should lead to a successful development.

The amounts of these errors for the best quality in-
struments now available are given in table IV. It is as-
sumed in (g) that the altimeter has been reset.

TABLE IV

Errors in Indication of Altimeter in Landing

Description	Error in feet
(a) Scale error at zero altitude, up to . . .	±30
(b) Friction and vibration, errors, up to . . .	±15
(c) Secular error in 50 days	−10
(d) Position error, up to	±10
(e) Temperature error, feet per $^\circ$C., up to	0.8
(f) After effect after 5 hours at 3,000 feet	+15
" 5,000 "	+25
" 10,000 "	+50
(g) Resetting uncertainty	±20

For a particular altimeter and definite conditions of
flight, these errors can be evaluated as a single over-all
error by a relatively simple flight test. This consists
simply in reading the altimeter when landing and comparing
this reading after a flight which is at the altitude and

of the length for which the correction is desired, with
data on the air pressure at the ground level, or its cor-
responding standard altitude. The difference is the total
correction to be applied.

The importance of testing the altimeter in this way
should be emphasized. If an instrument is repeatedly
checked in good weather, a good average value of its er-
rors, or more exactly, dependable data on the accuracy of
the method, will be obtained. Such tests give the pilot
confidence when the altimeter must be relied upon.

It is estimated that the residual error in the alti-
tude reading at landing will not exceed 40 feet if the al-
timeter correction to be applied is determined by flight
tests as just described. This assumes an instrument in
the airplane with an even better performance than that given
in table IV, and considerable improvement in the ground
technique and equipment. The scale errors must be uniform
over an appreciable altitude interval near zero altitude
and the temperature errors smaller.

The over-all error can also be determined in the lab-
oratory by subjecting the instrument as nearly as possible
to flight conditions. The uncertainty is greater than in
flight tests owing to the difficulty in reproducing flight
conditions.

It is evident that the over-all error will vary in
amount (a) (table IV) due to lack of uniformity of the
scale error in the altitude interval in which landings may
be made (see fig. 6), (c) due to the secular error, (e)
due to variation in the instrument temperature, (f) due
to variation in the after effect, and (g) due to friction.
Not all of these variations are appreciable. Thus, the in-
struments can be made with constant scale errors in the de-
sired altitude range and are now very closely compensated
for temperature at zero altitude. Further, the secular
error should merely require the test to be repeated at in-
tervals of 30 to 50 days. This leaves the after effect
and friction effect to be considered. Their amount is de-
pendent upon both the duration and altitude of the flight.
However, comparatively large variations in both duration
and altitude cause small changes in the after effect. On
commercial flights between two points the altitude and du-
ration ordinarily change so little that the after effect
is practically constant. The lack of vibration of the in-
strument as the engine is throttled down just before land-

ing may require that the instrument be tapped in order to
eliminate the effect of friction.

An important point to note is that the mercurial ba-
rometers used in obtaining the data for resetting the al-
timeter, require standardizing. The resetting error given
in table IV is largely due to differences in the results
which were obtained from a comparison of six of these in-
struments, four of which were at airports.

RATE-OF-CLIMB INDICATOR

The rate-of-climb indicator is actuated during a climb
or descent by the differential pressure obtained in a vol-
ume which is connected to the atmosphere through a capil-
lary tube. A common design is shown schematically in fig-
ure 10. The air chamber consists of the internal volume
of the Dewar flask A and the interior of the diaphragm
capsule D. This is connected to the inside of the instru-
ment case, which is maintained at atmospheric pressure
by means of vent V, through the capillary tube CT. The
differential pressure developed in a climb or descent
causes a deflection of the sensitive diaphragm capsule D
which is transmitted to the pointer P by a multiplying
mechanism, as shown schematically.

When the air pressure is changing, pressure in the
air chamber lags behind that in the instrument case due to
the restriction interposed by the capillary tube. This
differential pressure P is in terms of rate-of-climb V
in an isothermal standard atmosphere:

$$P = K V \qquad\qquad (3)$$

K is a constant depending upon the length and diameter
of the capillary tube, upon the volume of the air chamber,
and also upon the temperature at which the instrument is
calibrated. The United States standard atmosphere to which
altimeters are calibrated, is not used because the rate of-
climb in this atmosphere for a given differential pressure
depends also upon the altitude.

The capillary leak rate-of-climb indicator cannot be
used quantitatively because, briefly, the indications de-
pend to an important extent upon the temperature of the

air chamber and capillary tube, and upon deviations of the temperature of the free air from that assumed in the original calibration. The errors due to these sources are of minor importance when the instrument is used to fly level.

Time lag.- In addition to the lag in indication due to the inertia of the parts, a lag occurs due to the fact that time is required at a constant rate of climb for the rate of flow of air through the capillary tube, and therefore the differential pressure, to come to a constant value. This lag is so large that other sources of lag can be neglected. A constant λ, known as the lag constant, is determined by laboratory tests using the relation

$$\frac{t}{\lambda} = \log_e \frac{V_o - V}{R_t - V} \tag{4}$$

where R_t is the reading of the instrument at time t; V_o and V, respectively, the initial and final rates of climb.

In determining λ experimentally V is most conveniently made zero, and the reading is made at time t equal to λ. For this procedure, equation (4) becomes

$$R_t = \frac{V_o}{e} = \frac{V_o}{2.72} \tag{5}$$

The time t (equal to λ) is measured when the reading R_t has fallen to a value equal to 37 percent of the imposed change in the rate of climb V_o.

In making a test, the instrument is first subjected to a steady rate of climb, which is then reduced to zero by cutting off the vacuum (or pressure) supply to the chamber containing the instrument. A stop watch is started at this moment and stopped when the reading has fallen to 37 percent of its initial value. The elapsed time is equal to the lag constant λ.

The lag constant λ varies inversely with air pressure in accordance with the relation

$$\lambda = \frac{P_o}{P} \lambda_o \tag{6}$$

where P is the atmospheric pressure and P_o and λ_o the

pressure and lag constant at zero altitude. It follows therefore that λ increases with altitude.

The lag constant of representative instruments varies from 4 to 5 seconds at an altitude of 1,000 feet, and is about 10 seconds at 25,000 feet. This value represents the present status of the compromise the instrument maker must make between the differential pressure produced at a given rate of climb and the time lag. Both quantities decrease together but decreasing the differential pressure makes the instrument more delicate and increases the effect of friction. The differential pressures for a rate of climb of 2,000 feet per minute, usually selected as the maximum range, are for present designs about three inches of water.

An inspection of equation (4) shows that it can be used to calculate the time required to obtain a given reading R_t after the imposition of a steady rate of climb V. Such calculations have been made for an instrument with a lag constant of five seconds and the results are given in table V. The time required before a reading of 20 and 40 feet per minute is obtained is given since these readings are roughly the minimum changes in reading which can be detected. The value of 20 feet per minute corresponds to a deflection of the tip of the pointer of 0.05 inch in an instrument with a 2-3/4 inch dial and a range from +2,000 to -2,000 feet per minute.

TABLE V

Time Interval and Change in Altitude to
Obtain Minimum Indications of Rate of Climb

Steady rate of climb suddenly imposed ft./min.	Reading of 20 ft./min.		Reading of 40 ft./min.	
	Time required	Change in altitude	Time interval t	Change in altitude
	seconds	feet	seconds	feet
60	2.0	2.0	5.5	5.5
120	.91	1.8	2.0	4.0
240	.43	1.7	.91	3.7
480	.21	1.7	.43	3.4

The computations show that small deviations from a given altitude are indicated qualitatively for all rates of climb in excess of the least reading.

Effect of temperature.- Tests show that the change in indication with change in instrument temperature is about 0.2 percent per degree Centigrade. The rate of change of instrument temperature is kept low by use of the vacuum bottle. Ordinarily when using the rate-of-climb indicator to fly level, the effect of instrument temperature may be neglected.

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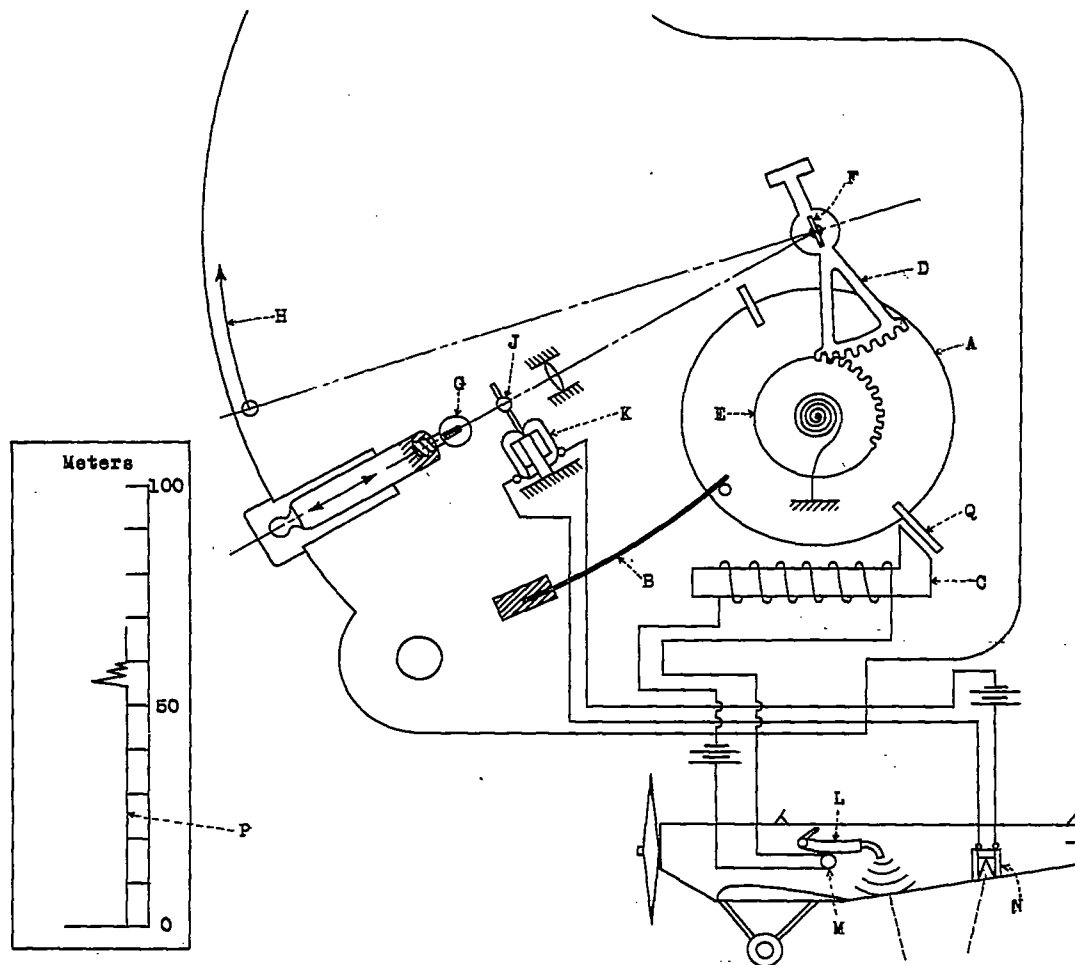
Figure 1.- Schematic diagram of Behm sonic altimeter.
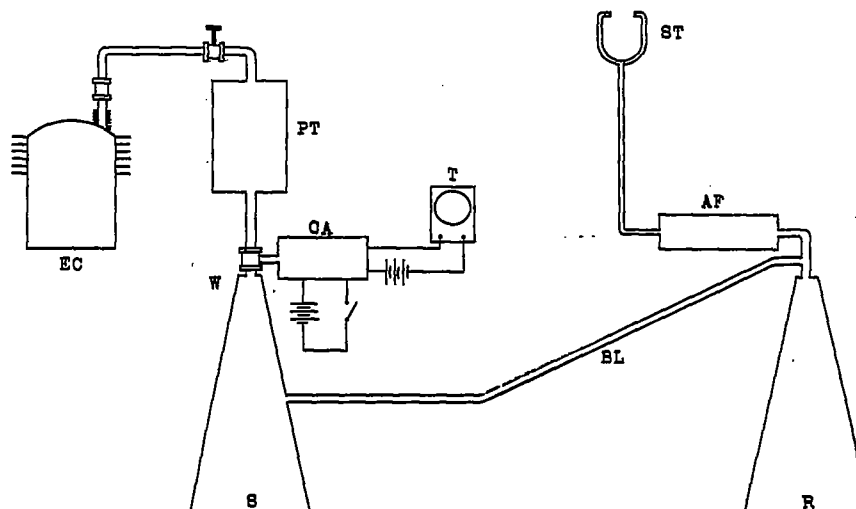
Figure 2.- Schematic diagram of GE sonic altimeter.
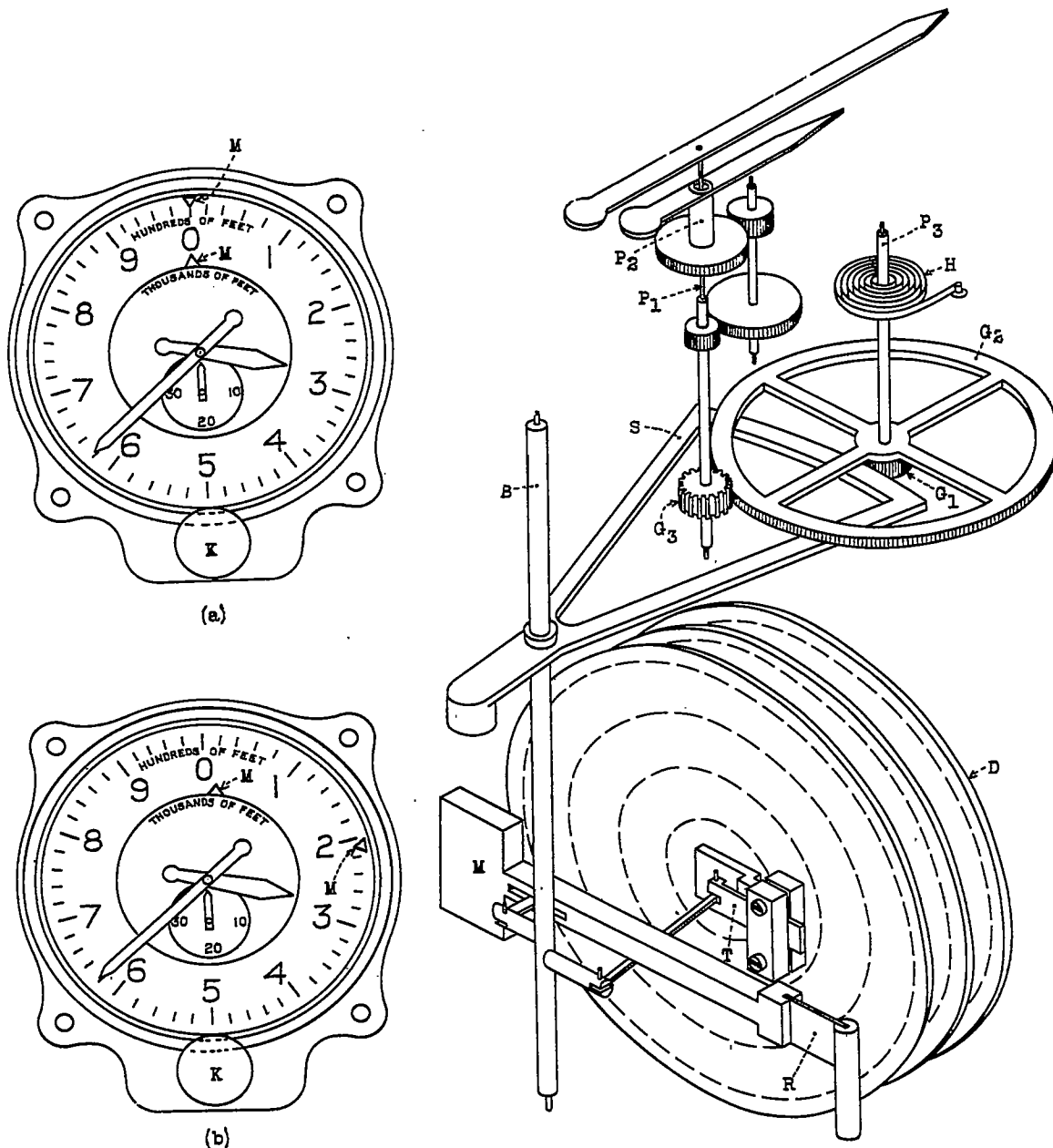
(a)

(b)

Figure 4.- Dial of sensitive
            altimeter. Knob K
controls adjustment of
pointers and markers M.

Figure 3.- Diagram of Kollsman sensitive
            altimeter.
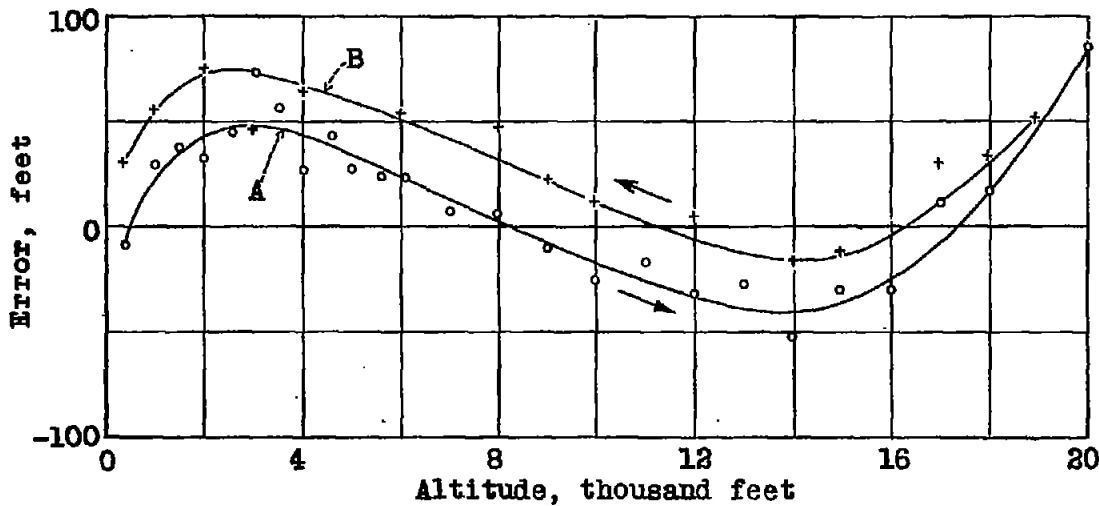
Figure 5.- Sensitive altimeter.

Figure 6.— Results of scale error test on a sensitive altimeter. Curve A is for pressure decreasing and curve B for pressures increasing.
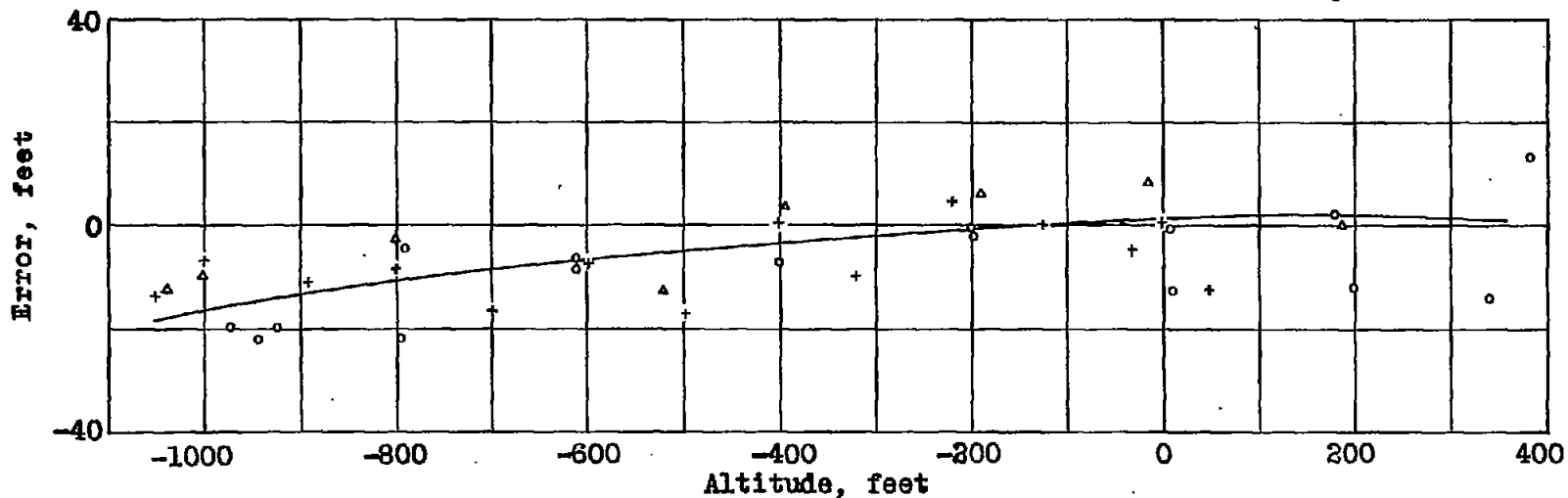

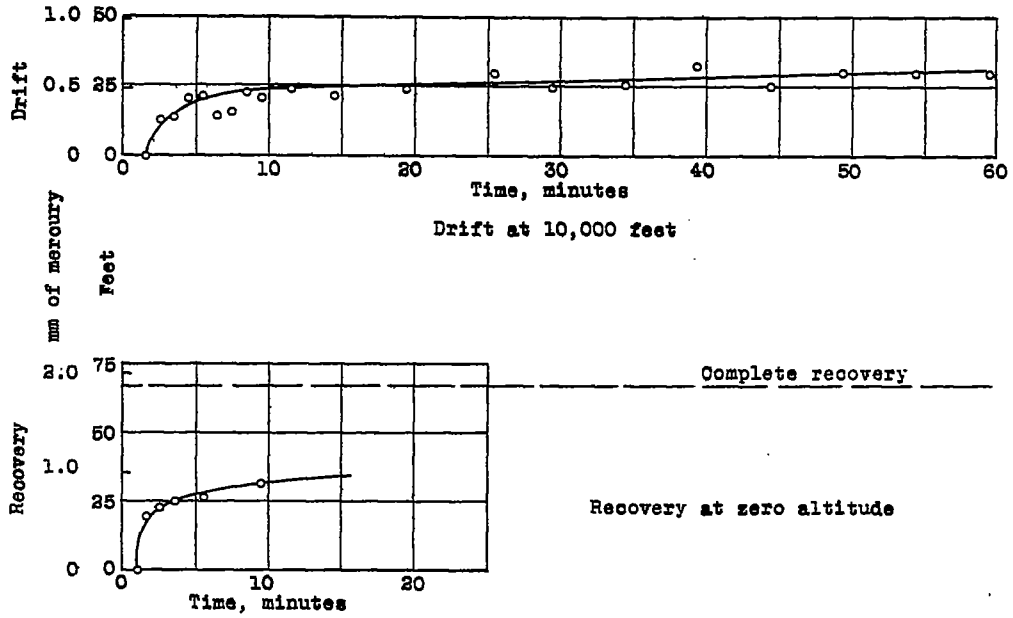Figure 7.— Results of three scale error tests at a low range of altitude made on successive days.

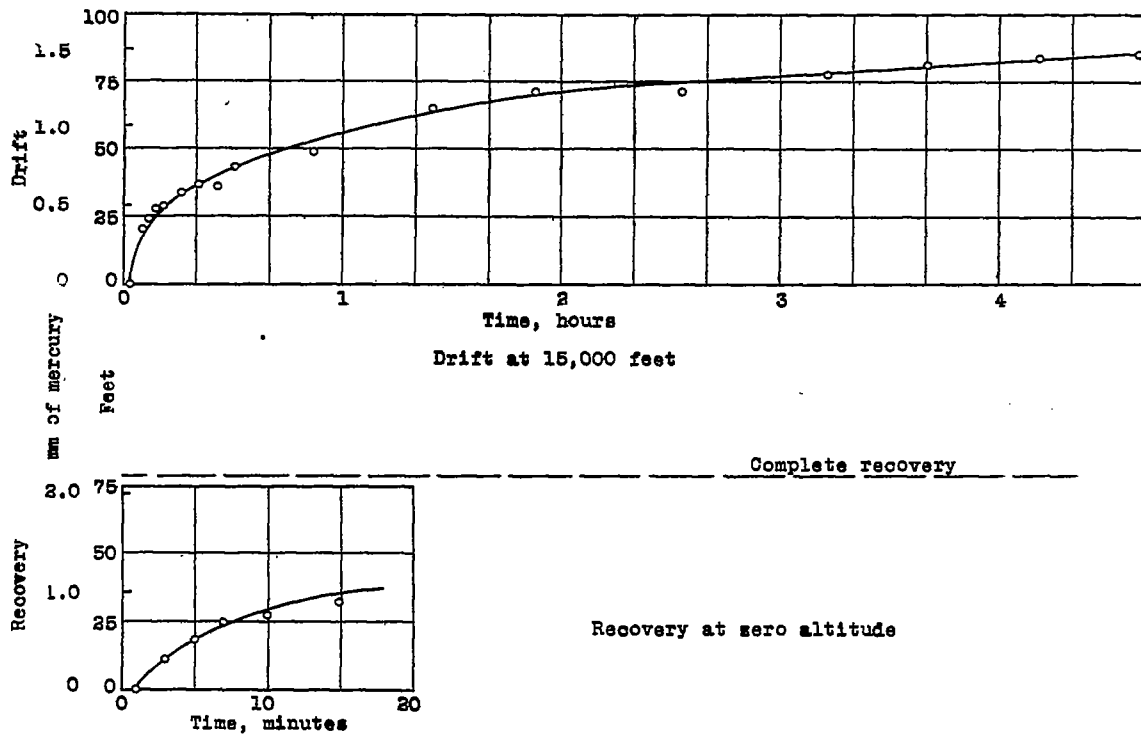Figure 8.- Drift and recovery curves for a sensitive altimeter.
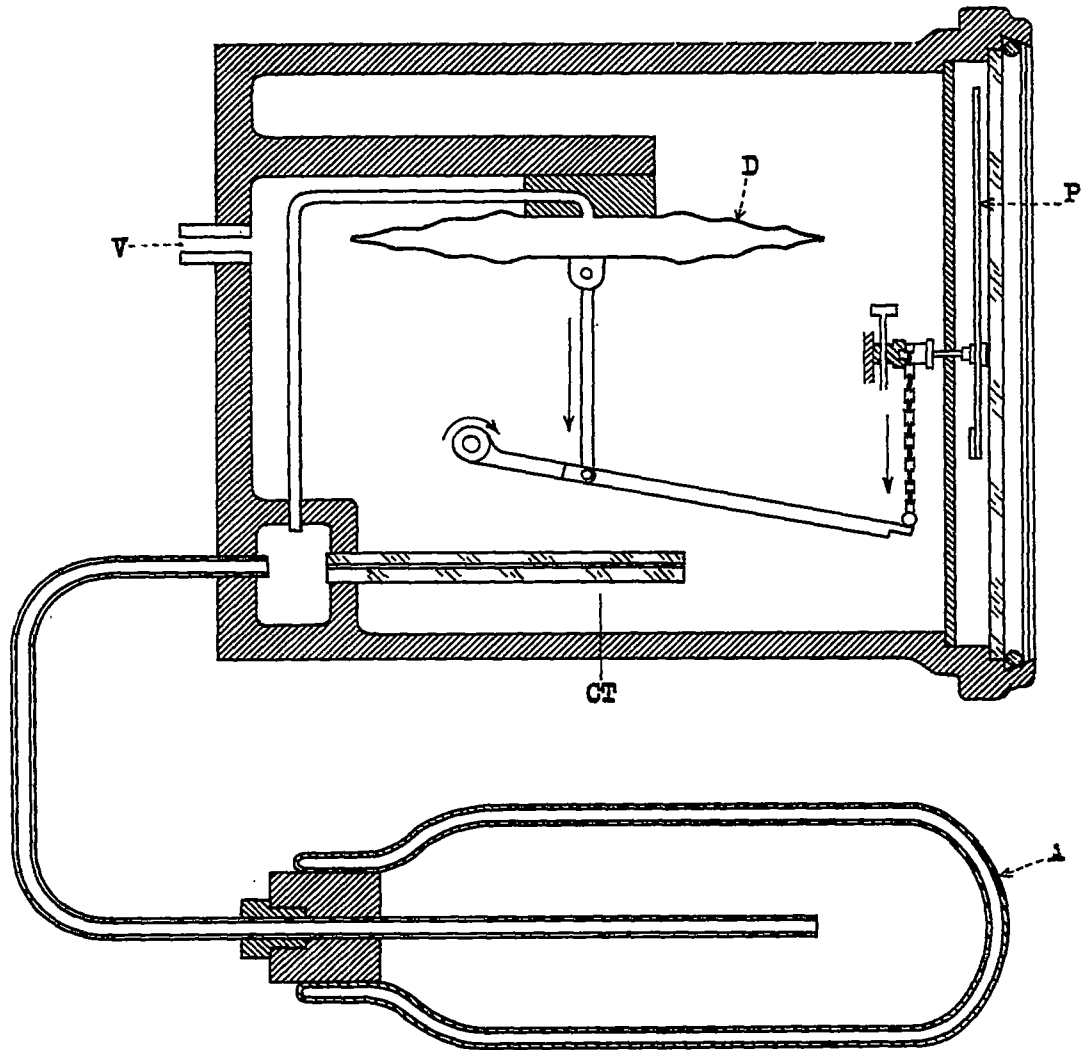

Figure 9.- Drift and recovery curves for a sensitive altimeter.

Figure 10.- Diagram of a rate-of-climb indicator.