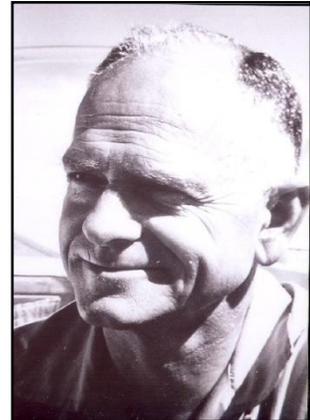


HENRY G. COMBS (1988) (1917-2016)

Henry Combs loves flying straight out – go as far as you can. See new places, explore what is unknown to you, learn new things, inspire others. He did all this and much more.

Let us quote Henry G. Combs at his induction into the Soaring Hall of Fame: *“I started flying a Taylorcraft airplane in 1941. I don't think there was ever a time in my life that I wasn't going to be involved in aviation one way or other.”*



Along with his great love of soaring, Henry contributed to our world in other ways. He chose engineering and was closely associated with Lockheed Aircraft's famous “Skunk Works” having worked on the U-2, the F-104, and the SR-71 Blackbird projects. For details on these projects, you will have to search elsewhere.

As Henry says, *“Power planes are really good to go someplace in but if you really want the thrill of flying, there's nothing like the business of competing with the eagles . . . it's like comparing it to a double martini, the first time you go up without an engine!”*

When he is asked if he flies in competition, Combs replies quickly, *“I get my kicks flying against the environment, not against my friends.”*

Henry Combs earned “C” Badge #2792 in August of 1962 flying a Schweizer 2-22C. In April of 1963 he bought Dick Lyons' L-K, N53619. The following year (1964) he earned Silver #813 and Gold #195. He bought his Libelle H-301, N301Q, in 1967. In May 1968 he soared 336 miles from Pearblossom, CA to Deer Valley Airport near Phoenix, AZ in a seven hour 22 minute flight to claim the California open/goal state record. This flight also completed his Diamond badge #90 (International #609). Perhaps more importantly, it was his **Diamond Distance Flight #1**. Flash forward 31 years to August 21, 1999. Henry flew 326 miles from Crystallaire, CA to Yerrington, NV in a seven hour 15 minute flight in his trusty and faithful Libelle H-301: **Diamond Distance Flight #205!** Later that year he sold the Libelle.

Henry Combs (Zero-One-Quebec) is a pioneering soaring pilot who has been an inspiration and mentor to many other pilots. He flew mostly from Crystallaire (Pearblossom) but also from El Mirage and Tehachapi. He was the first to fly straight out each Saturday on a regular basis. His philosophy: *“I already paid for the tow, so I might as well stay up.”* Also, *“When I release the tow rope, I know I am going to have a forced landing. The question is how long can I put it off and how far away can I go?”*

His longer flights include Elko, NV (458 mi) and 30 miles north of Winnemucca, NV (484 miles). Other pilots flying will always remember his crew reports – “zero one quebec, my next alternate is . . .” Henry was always good to his crews. He wanted to make the entire experience fun by involving his crew in activities like fishing, scenic drives and visiting points of interest during the drive home. There was competition to crew for him.



Henry Combs
Artist: Mary Soarborough

By 1986 Henry Combs had 104 straight-out 500K diamonds and had attracted a core group of other straight-out pilots. These “pathfinders” were very important to the later pilots joining what became the Crystal Squadron. They found alternate landing spots and knew the various routes and weather patterns. These were the days of no GPS, no satellite imagery, no weather models, no flight computers, no flight records and no cell phones.



The Henry Combs Perpetual Trophy was founded April 16, 1986 by members of the Crystal Squadron to honor Henry Combs, his love of cross-country soaring and the type of flying he inspired in other pilots. Henry repeatedly stressed that going straight out as far as possible was always his primary objective while achieving diamond distance was secondary.

In 2000 the Henry Trophy became an SSA recognized national award. It is awarded annually by the Soaring Society of America to the person or persons completing the greatest number of straight-out, diamond distance, non-motorized glider flights during the previous year in each of three zones – East, Central and West.

The trophy founders hope that this award will carry forth the tradition of flying straight out as far as possible and serve to encourage glider pilots and ground crews everywhere to become active, safety-conscious participants in the sport of straight-out, cross country soaring.

Henry Combs gave the Barnaby Lecture in 1997, was awarded the Exceptional Achievement Award in 1985, 1994, 1998 and declared an NAA Elder Statesman in 1983. He received the World Distance Award in 1997.

Trophy and Crystal Squadron information gathered from the Crystal Squadron report: *2014 Straight-Out Cross-Country Soaring Results*.